

Article

Mapping the Complexities of Effective Leadership for Social Justice Praxis in Urban Auckland Primary Schools

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Academic Editor: James Albright

Received: 30 October 2015; Accepted: 8 March 2016; Published: 17 March 2016

Abstract: This empirical research is about strengths-based leadership practices that seek to explore leadership for social justice and equity in New Zealand's culturally and linguistically diverse educational and social landscape. Similar to the diversity in other countries, where leaders demonstrate culturally responsive leadership practices in their quest to educate diverse democracies. This inquiry examines the characteristics and behaviours of effective leadership for social justice and equity for student academic achievement in urban Auckland primary schools. A qualitative, comparative case study, combined with the theoretical framework of applied critical leadership from theories of transformational leadership, critical pedagogy and critical race theory (perspective lens) guided the research methods. The research findings presented several applied critical leadership characteristics that highlighted the complexities of leading for social justice in urban Auckland primary schools. A distinct phenomenon was leader's axiological philosophy (values, beliefs and morals) underpinning their leadership that was culturally responsive to the diversity in their educational contexts. These findings suggest the need for research and scholarship yet to be done in this largely unexplored educational leadership academic space.

Keywords: educational leadership; social justice and equity; applied critical leadership; culturally responsive leadership; student achievement and cultural and linguistic diversity

1. Introduction

Statistics New Zealand (NZ) [1] revealed dynamic growth in demographics in the largely populated city of Auckland. This strength-based study was designed to examine (1) effective leadership; (2) social justice and equity; and (3) improved academic achievement within public primary schools. Often these concepts are investigated separately, however, my research is distinct as it considers ways to bridge leadership theories that support an inclusive leadership practice for social justice and equity for student achievement. To make this point, this strength-based inquiry examined the characteristics and behaviours of culturally responsive leadership practices in schools with culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Therefore, this empirical research supports the relevance of my research questions:

- (1). What are the characteristics and behaviours of effective leadership for social justice and equity for academic achievement?
- (2). How do effective leaders for social justice and equity lead in schools with highly diverse student population in urban Auckland primary schools?

McNaughton and Lai explain often schools have the "capacity to change practices but needed support to identify the locus of change and test their theories about raising achievement. Given

the close collaboration with researchers . . . this also confirms the importance of external support in particular research–practice–policy collaborations” [2] (p. 70). This highlights the value and relevance of research undertaken in my chosen field and can be applied in the New Zealand context and in similar countries. This study will further contribute to the understanding and improvement of educational leadership that is culturally responsive to the diversity in schools. A consideration of effective leadership to this end is thus warranted.

1.1. *Effective Leadership*

To clarify the nature of this study, effective leadership is not defined by leadership style but rather by leadership practice. Leadership styles are “abstract concepts that tell us little about the behaviours involved and how to learn them . . . leadership practice moves leadership away from categorization of leaders [and focuses] on identifying the effects of broad sets of leadership practices” [3] (p. 3). This study seeks to discover the characteristics, qualities and behaviours of effective leadership practice for social justice and equity within an educational context.

The literature is rife with definitions of effective leadership [4–8]. Effective leaders can be described as those who take “responsibility for their learning, share a vision for what can be, assess their own assumptions and beliefs, and understand the structural and organic nature of schools, . . . [and] carefully craft authentic experiences aimed at developing such skills” [4] (p. 78). Conversely, leadership is also referred to in terms of styles such as transformational, authentic, and servant leadership, which all “recognize the importance of a positive moral perspective and a focus on the follower’s development . . . servant leader’s behavior moves beyond transforming leadership and developing the followers; rather it has the objective of aligning the leaders’ and followers’ motives” [9] (p. 2).

It is clear that leaders need followers and followers need leaders. Scholarly literature defines “a leader [as] someone who has followers. Without followers there is no leadership act. The leader usually helps others attain goals of the group. The leader guides them to where they wish to go. If no one is going anywhere, there is no need for a leader” [10] (p. 4). This reinforces the power and influence a leader has in their educational environment. Nevertheless, “leadership cannot exist without change” [10] (p. 3). Thus, for leadership to be effective, a shared vision is necessary to support alignment of leaders and followers; a shared vision is a catalyst for future change [4].

Some scholars claim leadership is asserting influence over the group of followers by changing group values; while others debate that leadership is shared values and trust where the leader is seen as a role model for the group of followers [4,10,11]. The latter definition of leadership can be elaborated as “two functions: providing direction and exercising influence . . . Effective educational leaders help their schools to develop visions that embody the best thinking about teaching and learning” [11] (p. 2). These leadership practices mobilise schools to become a professional learning community where shared purpose and direction ultimately takes effect on student learning and achievements. Transformational leaders, however, “inspire followers to transcend their own self interests for the good of the group or organisation. As a result, followers become motivated to expend greater effort than they would otherwise as vested members of the community” [7] (p. 336). Leadership that partners with followers as an integrated component in leading becomes a powerful force for change.

In some countries it is the principal who is “regarded as a key educational leader and the one person in a school who has the most opportunity to exercise leadership” [12] (p. 371). However, there is considerable debate concerning the impact that principals alone have on schools [13,14]. An alternate perspective is to view leadership as a “function more than a role. Although leadership is often invested in—or expected of—persons in positions of formal authority, leadership encompasses a set of functions that may be performed by many different persons in different roles” [11] (p. 2). “Leadership is often resident in many actors in the school. Certainly, in its most basic form, leadership can be defined as ‘influence’” [15] (p. 4). This study proposes to identify and understand the various characteristics, behaviours and leadership practices that enact social justice and equity in a school context.

1.2. Effective Leadership for Social Justice and Equity

The term social justice, can be described as the “full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs, including an equitable distribution of resources where all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure, self-determining [and] interdependent” [16] (p. 71). Therefore, establishing a “sense of their own agency and social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole” [17] (p. 3). Educational leaders who lead for social justice and equity respond by valuing, identifying, taking responsibility, acting to correct injustices and implement new processes that embody social justice and equity for all in their educational context.

Educational leaders in urban Auckland primary schools are not only faced with complex challenges in leading and creating an ethos that values cultural and often linguistically diverse students, but also contend with extending beyond the surface in promoting “justice in a group-differentiated society demands social equality of groups, and mutual recognition and affirmation of group equality and provides the recognition that undermines cultural imperialism” [18] (p. 161). Social justice includes elements of respect, recognition, the redistribution of power, and correcting injustices within their context. The social responsibility begins with the active voice of a leader, which gives cause to explore and investigate the characteristics, behaviours and practices of effective leaders for social justice and equity.

To enact social justice and equity in highly diverse Auckland primary schools, it is essential to explore other types of resources such as social capital. Social capital includes positive elements of linguistic, racial, religious, or cultural diversity. By building stronger communities and relationships, students’ social capital becomes an educational asset holding potential for influencing learning. The relationship between education and social capital is important in social cohesion by creating a sense of belonging and a shared set of values [11,19].

Therefore, school leadership practices demonstrate leadership effectiveness when:

Successful leaders in schools serving highly diverse student populations enact practices to promote school quality, equity and social justice through: building powerful forms of teaching and learning; creating strong communities in school; nurturing the development of educational cultures in families; expanding the amount of students’ social capital valued by the schools. [12] (p. 372)

Applying a critical lens theory in leadership suggests that a “strengths-based model of leadership considers the social context of their educational communities and empower[s] ... members of these communities ... ” [20] (p. 5). Thus, in valuing differences, it now becomes the basis for change as leaders learn new ways of practice [21]. Juxtaposed with the challenge that educational change is not simply reliant upon social, cultural or organisational changes for reform, political and economic factors make this process complex [22]. Education should “prevent or avoid ... reproducing inequalities between social classes, or a channel of social differentiation through which highly unequal opportunities are provided” [23] (p. 211). Bridging leadership and social justice by identifying inherent complexities within the contextual environment, espouses the view that social justice “cannot be separated from the practices of educational leadership” [24] (p. 223) in empirical research for reform.

Furthermore, “school leaders can promote equity and justice for all students by establishing school climates where patterns of discrimination are challenged and negated” [11] (p. 6). This means that principals, teachers, students and the wider school communities of dominant cultures need to understand and value the diversity of others, while building the self-esteem of systemically underserved groups in order to foster a school environment that empowers and promotes social responsibility, bringing success to all students. The definition of leadership for social justice in this study was informed by the work of Santamaría and Santamaría, Theoharis, as well as Vogel, who collectively focus on the inclusivity of all students by seeking to value differences concerning issues central to social justice and equity.

The impact of effective leadership for social justice and equity in successful educational change requires a shared vision and commitment to transform schools in the face of changing demographics. Principals who show understanding, place value, demonstrate equity, and those that are aware of the powerful influence they exert as role models, forge ahead to transform their sphere of influence [8,24]. Transformational leaders are ones who “challenge the status quo, inspire shared vision by believing they can make a difference and persuading others they can too . . . by setting examples for others to follow and encouraging the hearth by keeping hope and determination alive” [7] (p. 337). As a result, leadership influence gathers greater momentum when all members are on board to bring forth educational change.

1.3. Improved Outcomes for all Students

The quest for equitable outcomes for all students in school academic achievement is a national priority as “overall improvement has been inconsistent, with significant groups missing out” [25]. The implementation of National Standards in all schools was introduced in 2010 with Years 1 to 8 students. The Ministry of Education (MOE) [26] highlights that Māori and Pasifika students are over-represented in the “below” and “well-below” standard groups. Furthermore, the Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) handbook provides a model with clear guidelines for leaders to develop expertise within their schools, and deepen and broaden their teachers’ capacity through professional development to improve outcomes for all students [27]. This emphasises the need for a rigorous educational system that targets the improvement of all students’ academic outcomes.

It is suggested educational leaders must begin by transforming the school culture “into a healthy school culture that inspires life-long learning” [28] (p. 6) and raises academic achievement. To change the existing school culture, leaders need “clear personal and collective vision [that] are crucial for this enterprise” [28] (p. 8) of a school-wide transformation. In addition, prioritising and promoting teacher learning and development as a key influencer that has “twice the impact on student outcomes of any other leadership focus . . . [therefore], school leaders . . . deepen their own pedagogical knowledge and . . . develop the understandings necessary to create and sustain the conditions for improved practice in their schools” [27] (p. 306).

Some positive results from the MOE report [26] revealed leadership capabilities that helped raise student achievement were found in whole-school plans that focused on targeting and supporting specific students. Principals and teachers were supported by professional development to design programmes for students to accelerate progress. Increased parental engagement was encouraged so students had support at home, and the school Board of Trustees monitored the resourcing provided to improve student achievement across the entire school. These initiatives were driven by innovative approaches to ensure equitable education for all students. Sustaining these initiatives is the on-going challenge, but positive shifts were evident in the transformation of school culture for the improvement of student achievement. Educational leaders who lead for social justice in CLD schools prioritise educational equity as an intrinsic part of school reformation.

1.4. Theoretical Framework—Applied Critical Leadership

The evolution of applied critical leadership (ACL) research is derived from principles of critical pedagogy [29], critical race theory [30] and transformational leadership practices [31,32]. Educational leaders who propose an ACL model in education “consider the social context of their educational communities and empower individual members of these communities based on the educational leaders’ identities (*i.e.*, subjectivity, biases, assumptions, race, class, gender, and traditions) as perceived through a CRT lens” [20] (p. 5).

ACL approaches (refer to Figure 1) are undergirded by critical pedagogy practices “responsive to social contexts and the notion of redistributed power via collaboration based on the particular needs of the community” [20] (p. 4). Critical pedagogy views education as empowerment and encourages leaders to reflect on their daily interactions with stakeholders, school structures, cultures and practices

that serve the interests of others. A critical standpoint frames this discussion by highlighting the need to address social issues of opportunities, power and privileges. “It recognizes and advocates for the social change role and responsibility of educational leaders” [4] (p. 78).

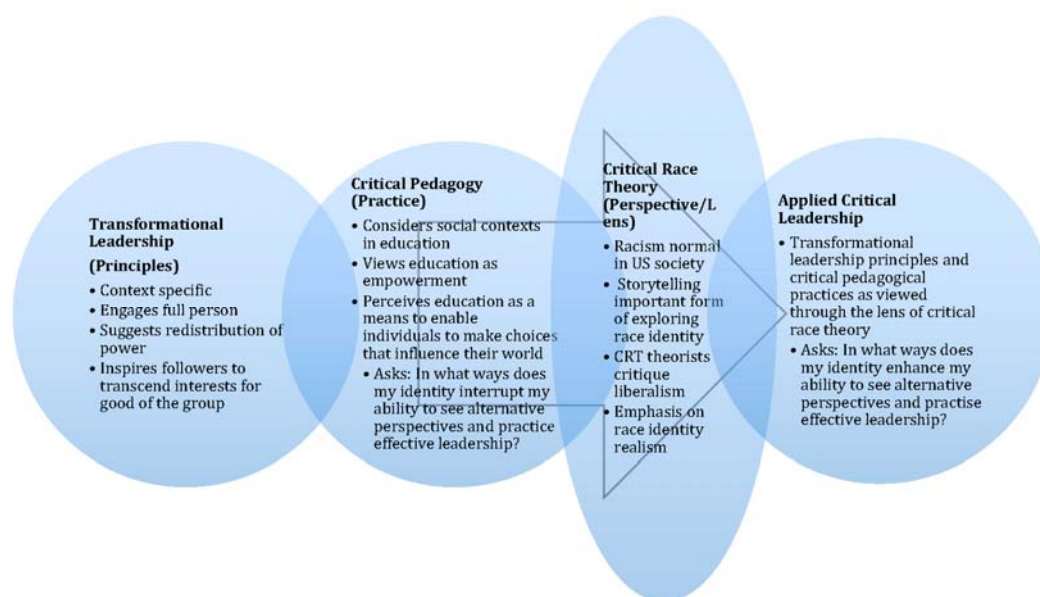


Figure 1. Theoretical framework underlying applied critical leadership [20] (p. 8).

Couched within ACL are the principles of transformational leadership theory emphasising the role to engage individuals within an organisation through intrinsic motivation, values and long-term goals [32]. In addition, transformational leaders inspire stakeholders, instill pride, and collaborate by redistributing power within a specific educational context [31]. Scholars suggest the “more transformational that a principal is perceived, the more ‘leadership’ that is distributed or shared among the many other actors in the school who yield influence” [15] (p. 4). Thus, the composition of transformational leaders, the redistribution of power supported by critical pedagogy and CRT lens embedded within ACL synergises educational change.

The CRT lens [30] enables educational leaders to look at multidimensional and often intersecting oppressions such as socio-economic class, national origin, gender identity or race, which may influence or raise questions about ethical considerations for effective leadership. Addressing these issues of social justice and educational equity allows leaders to find answers to challenges associated with “educational inequalities and create feasible equity agendas in multiple educational settings” [20] (p. 5). Furthermore, and not unlike axiology, the use of a CRT lens encourages individual leaders to reflect and examine their personal identity and experiences, and to see multiple perspectives of others. This informs and influences their values and ultimately their leadership practice. Effective leaders transform their educational contexts through influence—the greater the influence, the greater the change. These reflections are necessary in finding ways to improve and respond to social justice by paving the way for equitable education for all.

In this inquiry the axiological exploration (perspective lens) to understand effective leadership for social justice and equity unravels the intricate theory of values behind practice. Philosophers in the past focused on metaphysical, ontological and epistemological theories and only in recent times is axiology recognised as a separate discipline in research [32–34]. Nevertheless, values have always existed “as the history of philosophy shows how deeply man has been preoccupied with the nature of values” [33] (p. 29). According to philosopher Ehrenfel’s values are contingent upon desire: “we desire things not because we comprehend some ineffable quality ‘value’ in them but we ascribe value to them because we desire them” (quoted in [33] (pp. 30–31)). Translating Ehrenfel’s values philosophy to my

research topic espouses effective leaders who lead for social justice, must ascribe value to social justice and equity because they desire it. To elaborate further, Reinharz, Bowles and Duelli-Klein [35] assert it is essential to understand the participant's epistemological transformations by translating personal experiences into social construct that may sometimes remain hidden to the participant. To investigate a participant's axiological philosophy, the process involved face-to-face interviews using semi-structured interview questions to explore how participants constructed their own meaning of leadership for social justice and equity through their own epistemology for social justice and educational equity in CLD schools promoting student achievement.

The characteristics, behaviours and practices of effective leadership for social justice and equity rest on the values held by the individual leader. Leadership is the enactment of values, therefore it is anticipated that leaders (principals) will promote a school culture that values the diversity of each of its members, including teaching staff, students and the wider school community [2]. Hart highlights that "behind our passions, interests, purposive actions is the belief that they are worthwhile. We attach to them different degrees of importance or value" [33] (p. 29). Subsequently, social justice leaders actively engage in the world around them, which requires the examination of "ontological and epistemological assumptions, values [axiology] and beliefs, context and experience, and competing worldviews . . . and guide others in translating the perspectives, perceptions, and goals into agendas for social change" [4] (p. 87).

Furthermore, "if the leadership is accepted as an influence processes, the relationship between values and leadership is emerging with leader's impact on followers' values" [36] (p. 1376). The leader's impact on followers becomes a point of influence for change. This intersection highlights the paramount responsibility and trust placed in the hands of a leader. Consequently, "the interests of the organisation and its members need to be aligned" [4] (p. 9) to herald change. Social scientists believe values have always existed, "their nature is timeless, superhistorical. But the consciousness of them evolves" (Hartmann, 1926 cited in [33] (p. 32)). Therefore, values are not only attached to everything that we do but also in everything that we do not do. Values, beliefs, morals and attitudes regarding issues of diversity, are embedded in leadership for social justice and equity, hence the purposeful exploration of axiology in this study.

Social justice leaders in this study transformed their educational contexts through influence, the greater the influence—the greater the change. These reflections are necessary in finding ways to improve and respond to social justice by paving the way for equitable education in NZ and globally.

2. Experimental Section

2.1. Research Design and Rationale

In order to frame and support a constructivist philosophical approach, a qualitative methods design was applied [37] to inquire into the characteristics, behaviours and practices of effective leadership for social justice and equity in schools with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. Social constructivists believe in understanding the world around them by creating meaning that is often subjective to individual interpretation formed through interactions with others [37,38]. Employing a constructivist worldview complements the axiological exploration of varying degrees of intrinsic and extrinsic values that are inherent in each individual and their social structures. Furthermore, constructivism allows researchers to shape their interpretations through their personal beliefs, and cultural and historical experiences. The researcher's intent is to "make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world. Rather than starting with a theory . . . inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning" [37] (p. 8) to bring change within a social context.

2.2. Setting and Participants

As New Zealand's demographics diversify, a timely exploration on leadership for social justice and educational equity is relevant in our CLD urban Auckland primary schools. Auckland is the most populated city in New Zealand, boasting a population of 1.42 million people, which is just over one quarter of the entire population of this country of 4,242,048 residents [1]. Auckland is located in the North Island of New Zealand and has experienced the largest population growth than any other city in New Zealand. Its population has risen by over 110,000 people since the 2006 Census, largely as a result of immigration [1].

The selected sample of schools reflected those with high numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students to investigate the characteristics and behaviours of leadership practices of principals who lead for social justice and equity in urban Auckland primary schools. The schools were of similar decile (socio-economic status) and performing at high levels of student achievement based on information publicly available on the internet. The five principals in this study were from four urban Auckland primary schools, two of the principals represented one school where the principal of the school was on leave of absence due to a special contract with the Ministry of Education this year, resulting in the participation of the school principal and the current acting principal. It was important to hear both of their perspectives as they each represented two different ethnic groups. The five principals were specifically selected as they lead in schools with a high population of culturally and linguistically diverse students, with a public profile of their active involvement in their school and community addressing issues of social justice and equity.

2.3. Methods

This qualitative comparative-case study includes descriptive data that provides an in-depth analysis of the case studies [39,40]. The detailed collection of data was gathered by an individual semi-structured interview conducted with each principal from the four participating schools, that enabled a deeper exploration of the characteristics and behaviours of an effective leader for social justice [1,6,12,20]. Drever claims, "semi-structured interviews are well-suited to such case studies . . . [where] the researcher does not aim to cover the whole population and extract common factors, but to provide an in-depth picture of a particular area of the educational world" [41] (p. 7).

2.4. Data Collection

The methods of inquiry used in this research were document analysis and indicative interview questions with each of the five primary school principals. The interviews were based on twelve pre-designed indicative questions, allowing the participant to elaborate on a point or be probed for clarifications resulting in high quality data void of ambiguities. The interviews were conducted on the school site, were digitally recorded, transcribed and entered into NVivo software for coding and analysis to identify emergent and prevalent themes from data in relation to interview findings.

In this study triangulation provided a range of perspectives and depth in the one research topic discussed bolstering the validity and reliability of the methods in this research that can be used in future studies (refer to Figure 2).

The term triangulation is the convergence of different sources of data to check for congruencies and discrepancies [37]. Triangulation is supported by social constructivists' perspective as human beings construct meaning from interactions with participants in their specific contexts. Often these interactions are based on their historical and social perspectives generating meaning and value to their epistemology. The technical term of validity in qualitative research can be defined as accuracy, credibility and trustworthiness [37,42,43]. The term reliability is often in regard to consistency in measurement [37,43]. The integrity of this research relied upon data being represented accurately and consistently throughout the entire process. Interviewing five principals from four separate schools

provided their independent views on effective leadership that demonstrated social justice and equity in their school context.

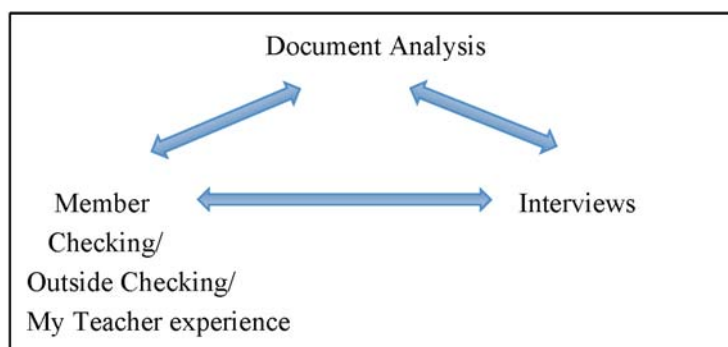


Figure 2. Triangulation bolstered the validity and reliability of this research.

The second point of check was through document analysis, which included literature gathered from various sources that had high degree of validity and reliability. My own experience as a primary school teacher was used as an additional check or kind of triangulation, which “maximized the probability that the emergent assertions were consistent with a variety of data” [38] (p. 325). To maintain accuracy, the research focus questions were kept as a focal point consistently throughout the process while validating themes and coding data. Furthermore, discussing data with a senior academic within my area of research served as an external check of the Coding Summary by Node Report. Having a peer debrief was essential in crosschecking for meaning and interpretations [44].

Commonalities and differences between each interview and their interview questions were identified and variables were cross-referenced. Triangulation was employed sequentially to further bolster the validity and reliability of this empirical research.

2.5. Data Sources

The data collection methods used in this research was document analysis and indicative interview questions with each of the five school principals. Individual qualitative public documents of each school was sourced from their school website (e.g., strategic plans, school policies, recent Education Review Office reports and newsletters). Statistical data on school demographic information was gained from the Ministry of Education and Education Counts websites. Principals also completed a short demographic questionnaire in order to better understand the study sample.

2.6. Interviews

Five individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with five principals from the four participating schools [37,41]. All five principals served at schools with CLD students. The nature of face-to-face interviews allowed for deep exploration of the research topic. Purposeful sampling increased the utility of information obtained from a small sample and yielded in-depth insights on my topic [38].

The interview was based on 12 predesigned indicative questions, adjusted based on school documents, which were piloted to ensure the wording of the questions was clear. To maintain the integrity of the questions and responses from participant to participant, only slight adjustments were made to the predesigned indicative questions. Piloting enabled a trial run of the interview and helped gain the interviewee’s interpretation and reaction to the questions [41,43]. Each interview with the principal took approximately 45 min. The questions were structured around the characteristics, behaviours and practices of their leadership for social justice and equity for student achievement. The semi-structured interview questions were carefully selected to maintain sufficient structure to retain the focus of the research question and were flexible enough to allow clarification of any ambiguous

meanings. Additional questions were asked when clarifications were needed or to elaborate on significant points.

2.7. Document Analysis

Individual qualitative public documents from the four schools were collected, such as school strategic plans, school policies, recent Education Review Office (ERO) reports and newsletters from the school website. In addition, public documents related to individual school achievements and published work of participants on their leadership practices were gathered. Statistical data on school demographic information (e.g., student diversity and school decile) was gained from the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Education Counts websites [45]. This aided to obtain specific objectives, goals and plans unique to each school, from which I drew language and words to adjust the indicative interview questions for each of the five interviews.

The semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded as this method offers the advantage of being able to maintain eye contact with the participant and by being fully attentive, resulting in a better rapport with the interviewee. The position as an active listener allowed for adequate time to pause and wait for answers from the participant. Followed by personal transcriptions of the interview material using verbatim with dialect [46]. It is important to note audio transcriptions hold two levels of abstraction: “that lost in the recording process and that subsequently lost in the process of transcription” [43]. In addition, directly after each interview and on leaving the site, field notes from the interview were recorded while the conversation was still fresh. As a constructivist, these notes were helpful in being self-analytical in gaining multiple perspectives on the same topic. These notes further bolstered the validity and reliability of data [43].

The first stage in organising the data involved listening to each digital recording multiple times and studying the transcripts to develop a preliminary coding frame. The interview data were coded using words or small chunks of data, which had meaning attached to the piece of data, creating categories unfolding patterns and relationships between categories, which developed into themes. The coding process was time efficient and an effective tool in data labelling and data retrieval [47]. Simultaneous memoing during the coding process helped peel back more layers, revealing deeper concepts, patterns, connections and disconfirming data from the existing coded data [48]. Punch cautions closure on final coding needs to be “delayed until substantial coding has been done, and until the analyst has a stable view of what is central in the data” [42] (p. 207). Four themes were initially identified from the coded data. These categories were (1) The Leader’s Moral Purpose; (2) The Leaders, Teachers and Community Working Together; (3) Leadership’s Impact on Student Achievements; (4) Communication as a Fluid Gel. These central themes impinged on the conceptualisation of a constructivist philosophical approach to the participants’ axiology.

The interview transcripts were uploaded into the computer data analysis software NVivo and excerpts related to the preliminary categories were organised into thematic nodes. The Miles and Huberman Framework for qualitative data analysis was used in an “inductive analysis”, involving initial coding and categorisation of data. The purpose of “interim analysis” during data collection was to keep track of changes in data collection decisions and to identify reoccurring topics, which evolved into themes [47]. When themes were clustered together, this provided a higher level of theoretical conceptualisation [42]. It was vital to keep extensive interview data intact of their context. Punch highlights in qualitative analysis “an additional important component of not losing information is not to strip the data from their context” [42] (p. 198). The themes clarified the characteristics, behaviours, values, expectations and individual historical and cultural experiences of effective leadership practices for social justice and equity within their educational context.

3. Results

Interview findings from the data analysis were grounded in the principles of the applied critical leadership (ACL) framework that guided this inquiry [20]. The findings suggested that a distinctive

phenomenon arising from participants' identity was the axiological philosophy underpinning the participants' expressions of leadership for social justice praxes. The constructivist philosophical approach engaged with the axiological exploration unveiled the intricate theory of values behind practices of effective leaders for social justice and equity. The descriptive data in this qualitative comparative case study gave insights into the context and complexities of the case [38–40] There were common ACL characteristics and qualities that emerged from the analysis and the frequency of these characteristics and qualities suggested shared principles of ACL. A summary of these principles is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Applied critical leadership characteristics across cases.

Leader, Position, Identity	Characteristics of Applied Critical Leadership; Transformational Leadership (TL), Critical Pedagogy (CP), Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Perspective Lens—Axiology (PLA)
Sally (K-6 Principal), NZ European, female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> —Going beyond the call of duty, doing whatever it takes to make it work for the student (PLA, TL) —Deliberate and purposeful acts of leadership that demonstrate social justice and equity (TL) —Ensured there is equal distribution of staff strengths across all year levels (CP) —Identified cultural groups that were overrepresented in raising student academic achievement (CRT) —Ongoing professional development; Sally did her PhD, reinforcing her role as a positive female role model (TL) —Local community engagement vital in sustaining relationships and forming alliances (CP) —Reflective and self-analytical in her actions, behaviours and practices (PLA) —Engaged in research about her community in Auckland where she grew up, by supporting local initiatives and reinforcing the cycle of giving back to your community (CP, CRT)
Bob (K-6 Deputy Principal), NZ European, male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> —Served as a positive male role model for students, staff and wider school community (TL) —Mentored beginning teachers and teacher aids as a critical aspect of his leadership role (CP) —Shared new knowledge from professional development courses in staff meetings and provided training (TL) —Identified systemically underserved groups with regard to ethnicity, language and achievement and initiated meetings to address, collaborate and work towards inclusion (TL, PLA) —Acutely aware of racial prejudices and bias in Auckland, not prevalent from his place of origin—the South Island of NZ, where he experienced no racism. Therefore he overtly demonstrates and strives for social justice and equity in Auckland (CRT, PLA) —Practiced transparency in leadership (TL) —Deep belief in fairness and inclusiveness of all people (PLA)
Mary (K-6 Principal), NZ European, female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> —Identified mentoring first-time principals as critical for her sustainability in educational and leadership roles (CP) —Beliefs and values about inclusiveness and openness were strongly shaped and influenced by her mother (PLA, CRT) —Engaged in research about her community to increase knowledge about Māori culture and other ethnic communities (CRT) —Created alliances with external stakeholders to address issues on environmental sustainability, social justice and equity (TL, CRT) —Sought transparency and collaborative practices (TL) —Re-examined the concept of justice and equity in light of reality which is contrary to her belief in regard to justice for the common good (CP, PLA)
Jill (K-6 Acting Principal), NZ European, female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> —Identified issues at school with regard to race, ethnicity, languages, customs and student achievement and sought to bring about equitable outcomes for all (TL, CRT) —Beliefs and values about inclusiveness and charity were strongly shaped and influenced by her Catholic upbringing (PLA, CRT) —Although she originated from the North Island of NZ, she was raised in a provincial city that was predominantly NZ European and therefore sought to develop an awareness and understanding of various cultures, languages, especially Māori traditions, language and customs (TL, CP) —Demonstrated deliberate acts of social justice and equity to increase achievement of the underserved demographic of the school population (TL, CRT) —Community engagement was integrated in their school subculture and supported by biculturalism (CRT, TL)
Helen (K-6 Principal), Māori, Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> —Beliefs and values about identity were strongly shaped and influenced by her Māori heritage, upbringing and culture (CRT, PLA) —Acute awareness of systemically underserved groups, including Māori, and passionate to shift unequal cultural norms (CRT, CP) —Going beyond the call of duty, doing whatever it takes to make it work for the student, staff and community (PLA, TL) —Shared new knowledge from professional development as she believes that knowledge and power distributed is multiplied (TL, CP) —Consensus gained through critical conversations with the community, staff, parents and students (TL)

The eight emergent ACL characteristics from the data analysis were self-awareness, including cultural awareness and social awareness as leaders for social justice and equity, followed by moral purpose encompassing of values and belief systems that shaped their identity, and trust at all levels consisting of relational trust with staff, students, parents and wider school community. Other characteristics included courageous conversations as critical leaders, group consensus,

transformational leadership, and creating a socially just environment through social responsibility. The list of characteristics concluded with transcending interests for the greater good—the student. The extracts of participants' responses from the interview are reflected in these ACL characteristics that illustrated leadership for social justice and equity. In this qualitative comparative case study all participants were asked the same questions and provided evidence across the study as social justice leaders. Their responses are distributed evenly throughout all ACL characteristics.

The table shows all participants shared a common thread of values and beliefs that influenced and shaped their actions for social justice and equity. Trust with stakeholders was repeatedly highlighted as a fundamental value amongst all participants.

3.1. ACL Characteristic 1: Self-Awareness

One of the common characteristics shared by all five principals was awareness: self-awareness, cultural awareness and social awareness. Principals could identify ways in which their personal beliefs, values and identities impacted their perceptions and leadership actions. Two out of the five principals were originally from the South Island. One from another city from the North Island and one was born and raised in Auckland. All four principals identified as New Zealand European and the fifth participant identified as Māori.

When asked about how their identify impacts their leadership practice, Principal Mary who is originally from the South Island shared the crucial importance of firstly understanding Self:

I am aware of it. I've probably been influenced by my mum, in that "considering everybody", that part. I am aware of marginalising people and trying to think about how they can feel part of our place . . . I have attended . . . women in educational leadership papers [courses], probably people who made me think in a way or about my behaviours. So before, the behaviours were there possibly and I hadn't thought about them.

Principal Mary's self-awareness grew as a result of a combination of people who influenced her life and through the engagement of professional development where academics and peers challenged deficit thinking. Her reflections and critical self-analysis increased her self-awareness of how her understanding contributed to social justice, initiating a desire to create change in her school.

Principals also recalled poignant times when their self-awareness was challenged, making epistemological shifts in their mindsets. Principal Sally from Auckland, expressed how her identity had evolved over time.

As I've got older I have been, I guess, made more aware that your identity, your cultural identity is very much linked to who you are, where you are from and the values of the place you grow up in and things like that. So more and more as I've gone along I have become explicit . . . it's grown, you know that sense of identity.

Although Principal Jill was from the North Island she was astutely aware of her initial lack of understanding and awareness of cultures. She shared,

I was a middle class woman, Pākehā [Caucasian], New Zealander, very little awareness of Māori in terms of when I was at school . . . I lived in the North Island of New Zealand, which has more contact with Māori and Māori in major cities than in the South Island but yet I was still very provincial in my understanding.

As a leader for social justice, Principal Jill sought to gain understanding in deliberately choosing courses at university that would challenge her worldviews and cause her to think critically.

I wanted to have more understanding of things . . . you learn so much from the past and that knowledge you carry forward.

Principal Helen's perspective added value to this inquiry as a Māori principal who shared:

I suppose one of the advantages I have is that coming from such a mixed pathway . . . I am a fighter for social justice. Part of that was because I open my eyes to see things differently and wasn't going to just accept what people accepted as normal . . . I think the advantage of somebody that comes from a different pathway into this, is that I have a real sense of—I know what life is like and I know what the education system is capable of in terms of putting individuals or groups of people in boxes and saying that's where you belong.

Her self-awareness derived from combined cultural, social, historical and political awareness of systemically underserved groups in society, giving her a powerful voice in understanding firsthand the challenge in fostering a school environment that empowers and promotes social responsibility, in bringing success to all students.

Principal Bob, a male participant in this study, added that the self-awareness, cultural and social awareness of having males within the school is paramount in cultivating positive role models for students. He said, "being a male, I have other males combined to do that, we are one of the lucky schools where we have made a conscious effort to make sure that we bring more males . . . we have about five of them." This school is aware of having an inclusive and balanced staff, and is enhanced by the presence of male educational leaders, who work collaboratively to support and lead by example within the primary school context.

3.2. ACL Characteristic 2: Moral Purpose—Values and Belief System (Align with ACL CRT lens)

According to the data analysed, participants acknowledged that educational situations were not morally neutral and in every situation where leadership decisions were made their axiological underpinning motivated their actions. Anecdotes described in each interview had an underlying value or belief behind the action. Participants were conscious of their epistemological assumptions and axiology, which was apparent in the descriptive anecdotes shared during the interviews. Axiological philosophies motivated principals like Helen and Sally to critically lead to transform an organisation or a school culture that served all its members. Each participant was aware and critically reflected on assumptions or biases that may disempower systemically underserved groups, in order to provide equitable opportunities for all. Principal Sally expressed,

Key thing about behaviour of effective leaders is, it's easy to say but they actually do walk the talk, and you actually show what you value by what you do, and when you do it, and how you do it, and how you make what you do explicit.

Her critical reflections and purposive actions are driven by her values and beliefs in what she ascribes to as worthwhile in her practice.

Another illustration is of Principal Helen's axiology for social justice. She is of Māori descent and articulates,

I am a Māori principal. I am not a principal who happens to be Māori. So the way that I am, everything I am influences the way that I lead, and the way that I work, and the way that I impact, and my expectations.

Her values are fully entrenched in her cultural beliefs and her actions are an offspring of her values. She further elaborates,

I suppose that it's hard to separate characteristics and behaviours from values. Values of manaaki: which is to care for, nurture, embrace kind of, to look after, to care to. Aki: to lift the mana of others and so that everything that you are doing is looking at the individual's mana and dignity, so that those things are always there—being truthful, being a role model, walking the talk, being somebody who is themselves honest and open and is just true to who they are . . . particularly when you are dealing with diverse communities and you are dealing with a community where the majority of people have been not necessarily well catered by a system.

In these examples, axiological philosophies motivated principals like Helen and Sally to critically lead to transform an organisation or a school culture that served all its members. Each participant was aware and critically reflected on assumptions or biases that may disempower systemically underserved groups, in order to provide equitable opportunities for all.

3.3. Characteristic 3: Trust at All Levels

A prevailing element shared by all participants in this inquiry was the need for trust: relational trust with staff, students, parents and the wider school community. A ruling characteristic embedded in principals' epistemic outlook was the overlapping characteristic of trust. Principal Bob elaborated on his epistemological view on effective leadership for social justice:

I think the first thing is trust. The trust between everyone in the culture of the school, trusting for each other to fulfill our roles but having the trust between each of us with confidentiality of what happens within the school and trusting that. Yeah, I think trust is the biggest thing, the gel that holds everything together.

Principal Jill mirrors his sentiments by adding, "having trust and faith in the people that you have supporting you that you have employed often, that they are the best that they can be in their job, in their profession and their qualifications and competent."

Principal Bob's advocacy for trust at all levels of school, particularly with parents, is found in the daily everyday interactions. He adds,

The trust of the parents, having them on board within the culture of the school, involving them in things we do. Trusting the children, just as trust with the parents, because we have a big thing about having them around us for about five hours a day. So I believe trust is something that makes the school.

Another aspect is the mutual trust between the school and the parents is that it ultimately benefits the child. Principal Mary's example was,

One of the things when they come to school is parents hide their ethnicity and their culture because they want to learn English. Some don't acknowledge it. We get funding, we get good funding for English as second language learners. So we want to get as much money as we can because we can put programmes in place. We have good programmes to help children learn English. So we have to get over this barrier where parents don't want to shut the door on their culture.

A ruling characteristic embedded in principals' epistemic outlook was the overlapping characteristic of trust. Principals invested time in building trust, goodwill and commitment to relationships by being transparent. As Principal Bob said, trust is "showing everyone. No hidden agendas, no hidden agendas, we all know where we are" and the example he gave was on "knowing your teachers and letting them try something new and also being there to pick up the pieces if things go wrong." Creating a culture of trust is vital in the daily function of a school, and demonstrating behaviours that foster trust reinforces leaders' epistemology and practice. It is in modelling what you believe and want.

3.4. ACL Characteristic 4: Courageous Conversations

A common thread among leaders for social justice and equity is the belief in initiating and engaging in courageous conversations with individuals and with groups. The conversations varied from formal to informal in nature and all participants expressed trust as an underlying ACL characteristic in having the conversation. According to Principal Sally,

The whole thing about a courageous conversation is actually about, if you keep linking everything back to what's best for the students, why you are having the conversations, if

you see something is not going to be impacting not so well on students? So always the basis is why are you having the conversation? If the moral purpose is right, then it's fine to have it. Then it's about not making assumptions, that's actually being really strongly evidence-based, and making sure you do have as much information as you can, and you are not jumping to conclusions or you are really understanding what it is that is happening to cause this dilemma.

Principal Bob shared it was crucial his staff were on board with school-wide decisions through dialogue. These were often discussed in meetings with teachers about "moving the school forward and in which way we want because we feel that if we are not all there, it would be a ship with just a captain sailing, it might be a mutiny! ... So all decisions are talked about."

He added that it was important to give teachers a voice and allow them to reflect, inquire and engage in their learning:

If you don't allow them [teachers] a chance to grow, you are going to have a stagnant lot. So in these conversations you have, you've got to allow them to grow, not impinge your views or to tell them this is got to be done . . . but you might say, what do you think of this? Let them think about it.

Sometimes these critical conversations were with students who felt they needed to have their voice heard. Having the student's voice heard led Principal Jill to review and reflect on existing systems within her school. She shared,

It's been predominantly staff and sometimes students and we've sometimes had kids upset. So I went through a review process, by creating systems and . . . processes and articulating that to people. Then they know the methods or the ways of putting things together, that I do listen. So this is my way of response—I am going to investigate or find out about it, and we'll go through this process . . . So all these are requiring us to have tricky conversations, but we are trying to keep it in the positive and steer it forward.

Data highlighted that part of navigating courageous conversations required risk-taking, especially if the relationship could be at stake. An element associated with risk is uncertainty of an outcome, and uncertainty in the perceived probability of its outcome value. The data from this study indicated the responses on courageous conversations naturally existed within a relationship of trust and a safe environment.

3.5. ACL Characteristic 5: Group Consensus

All participants advocated that consultation with as many stakeholders as possible, such as the teachers, parents, the wider school community and students, was imperative in ensuring all voices were heard. Principal Jill said in her school "people are given the opportunity to express and share their view. I want their collective voice and I'm only going to be effective if everyone is on board and actually engaged and voluntary to it." She added, often gaining group consensus could be a slow and time-consuming task that involved surveying and consultation with teachers, parents or the wider community.

This is mirrored in Principal Helen's view on group consensus where time was taken to consult, gain clarifications, probe for further information, so everyone has had the opportunity to input and engage in the decision-making process.

So we don't make decisions by vote, we make decisions by consensus. That, to me, means it's about a learning community because if you need more information before you can make a decision that supports something, that is about social justice or equity or equality, then if you need more information, then that is what we do.

Principal Sally added that time played a significant factor in gaining group consensus especially when changing a school culture. She said if the,

School vision and core values are to pull down into every layer of the school then you can't do it quickly. It's not a quick thing! You can do it quickly at a superficial level but how we do things here is much more. It takes longer to establish, and it takes longer to establish at the different levels of the school, but again they are quite deliberate acts of how that plays out.

Principal Helen concluded a fundamental aspect of social justice and equity is, "if you don't say, 'actually, I don't agree with that' . . . then it just gets perpetuated. So that comes back to the voice, and silence is power too! You can either use your voice to create change or to perpetuate."

Evidence from this inquiry suggested leaders for social justice worked towards creating environments that advocated for group consensus in decision-making. Principals strived to provide time and opportunity to have all voices heard to create positive change, so that outcomes would benefit both the underserved groups and the mainstream.

3.6. ACL Characteristic 6: Transformational Leadership

Overall findings revealed all participants exemplified characteristics of transformational leadership in their practice. Their moral purpose was an underlying foundation, consisting of their values and beliefs that influenced their behaviours and leadership practices. Principal Sally said when it came to effective leadership it was the "qualities of the person, not the position, that you really admire."

She expressed it is in modelling the behaviours that you desire and value. This is demonstrated in:

What you do and how you deliver and how you say things, is also modelling all the time for people what you perhaps want to see others do. So you are constantly having very deliberate acts of leadership every day. It's not casual. It looks casual, but it's really purposeful.

Principals reported that in addition to modelling the behaviours you wanted to see in others, it was vital to check in with stakeholders (e.g., teachers, students and parents) for their feedback and input throughout the process. The transformational leadership act is two-way in decision-making as described by Principal Jill,

I will ask their opinion rather than I make a decision. I kind of check maybe what is the current feeling and I will then decide actually is this what we want or other people might say, "actually, have you thought of this?"

Another indicator of transformational leadership was in collaborative practices and consultation with staff, the community and students. This collective process was a normal practice in their schools. Principal Jill asserted,

So there's lots of things like consultation, collaboration, it's time and patience, and not being too rigid and saying "this is the way it has to be" or saying you don't know or "this is what I think, [but] what do you think?"

Principal Helen recommended surrounding yourself with likeminded people with the same vision and passion in transforming a school culture for social justice and equity.

So what I am doing is working with a coalition of the willing who want to be able to do it . . . but are a bit scared. So I am taking their hand. It's like they are in the dark and I've put my hand out, to grasp the hand and they are letting me lead. When you've got credibility because you've done it, that's a powerful tool. I guess the thing is walking with those people that want to be led to change their thinking and their hearts and minds.

Data revealed building a school community with like-minded people required followers who were dedicated and committed to accomplish social change that was equitable to all. Leaders did not impose goals on followers but worked hard to create a sense of purpose and a shared vision. When principals led for social justice, the process took time to ensure all their voices were heard and each person was on board. Principal Mary said, "It's a very slow process but . . . if you can bring the people with you or it can become their idea, then you have more ownership and more grunt to the way forward than if it is imposed. Principal Sally added that it is also in "constantly challenging people to [ask]: what are you doing, and how is that working for the students, and how do you know?" Prompting these questions was to encourage followers to self-reflect, engage and be intrinsically motivated to generate social change through inspiration.

Principals embodied the characteristics and behaviours of a transformational leader by creating a school environment that promoted shared responsibilities amongst staff. School leaders expressed how social justice and equity was in the redistribution of power. Principal Helen stated,

I am in a position of influence and power but you know my belief is if you share power it is multiplied, rather than it's halved. People hold onto the sense of power because I want this now but actually, share it, it's then multiplied.

The redistribution of power also resonated in Principal Sally's response in taking collective responsibility and pride in leaders' achievements.

When anyone gets a promotion, we all take a collective pride and pleasure in [that]. Last year we had two of our aspiring principals get jobs. This year we had three. I guess that is part of the whole collective input, that we have growing leaders.

Principal Bob shared how in his school inclusivity was practiced in the distribution of knowledge, resources, opportunities and privileges.

We believe in inclusiveness; that everyone has a chance to learn maybe at a teaching level or at a student level or even bringing people in to help us out ourselves. To be better at something that we can do or to increase our ability by doing our own learning and calling out to others if we want to, so that everyone has a chance to be part of the learning situation.

These principals had a strong moral purpose that guided their practice. Their examples advocated for shared knowledge through the redistribution of power and collaborative practice through consultation. This was coupled with instilling values and inspiring others by modelling the behaviours of transformational leadership that was socially just and equitable.

3.7. ACL Characteristic 7: Creating a Socially Just Environment through Social Responsibility

According to the data, each participant had a clear understanding and perception of the term social justice. Again, their axiological philosophy governed their actions, behaviours and practices. When asked for the definition of social justice, Principal Jill shared,

Social justice is about connection to social organisation and social grouping and about the commonalities of what we need to survive and live on this earth and live together in communities. So social justice is about how we as people work together, so no one is dictating or managing resources or the dominance of a culture or a custom or one particular thing pertaining to another community or society. So social justice is where there's a system of allowing people the right and access to and responsibility to be part of the organisation and therefore know that they are duly heard and responded to and outcomes happen. That they haven't be slighted, that they can actually have a system where the society that will honour that, that's the agreement.

Principal Sally expressed how social justice is extended into all areas of the school including parents, students and the wider school community. She firmly believed, “we don’t enroll a student, we enroll a family.” Some of the ways social justice is validated in the school environment is in the ethos.

Principal Sally said social justice is about:

Equity and about making education and making learning work for every student. So part of that is pushing teachers’ thinking past the definition or the way they might interpret their role as a teacher, to a person who is in that child’s life for a year and who needs to do whatever it takes to make it work.

Principal Helen, who is a Māori principal, espoused social justice as:

The right of all to fairness, the right to be, the right to make choices, the right to have access to knowledge, power and influence, vision making, to have a voice, to be agents for their own determination. That the system isn’t socially just because it advantages particular groups in society, part of the role for social justice is challenging that.

I suppose for me, if I think about social justice it’s about looking at the world and seeing what is unjust, then working to make it just. So that giving voice to everybody, so that it’s not just the world is created just for some people.

Although all participants believed social justice constitutes fairness, equitable access to resources, having all voices heard and equitable opportunities for both systemically underserved groups and mainstream, Principal Mary viewed social justice through an alternate lens.

I read something the other day about “fair”. It’s got to be fair! And I thought, well it actually isn’t. It’s got to be unfair at times just to give other people a step up. It’s never going to be the same, it’s not about being all equal, it’s about who needs an extra hand at a particular time and just acknowledging difference, so that the difference isn’t the problem.

She added, “I would say we have good, fair practice” but she also recognised that in order to work towards equitable outcomes for both underserved groups and mainstream, sometimes the emphasis of “needs” may vary from group to group. Some groups may need more resourcing, funding, alternate systems to promote equity and justice for all students.

3.8. ACL Characteristics 8: Transcending Interests for the Greater Good—The Student

All participants expressed that they had a duty and moral obligation to raise the achievement of all their students, in particular CLD students. Principals advocated for student voice and the active participation in engaging students in the learning process. Principal Sally’s example of student engagement is of a conversation she had with a student regarding an online national assessment tool, where the student had conveyed:

So some of the items around the e-asTTle test this time haven’t been relevant because they haven’t been changed into metrics and I was asked to do something in yards. So that item I got wrong, but in actual fact it is not a reflection of my ability.

To this quote Principal Sally said, “So they can come at you with quite detailed analysis of how things go ... So part of it with the student achievement piece is about getting the pedagogy right. Principal Sally shared that as a result of the students’ voice and engagement in their learning process, students in her school had developed a deep understanding of their learning and were able to articulate their knowledge and strategies to their peers, teachers and parents.

Principal Bob also expressed that the national assessment systems were not always a true indicator of student achievement.

We test the children on PAT [Progressive Achievement Test], we report that to the Board, we report that to the Ministry results. We realised that our ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages], children make them dive, that's only because everything is written in English.

Their school recognised the challenges of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students and employed a staff member who spoke several languages to supplement their exiting programmes, including Māori, in raising the achievement levels of CLD students. Further ways his school exemplified inclusivity was in the school's formal reporting procedure, which involved the student in the goal-setting process. Taking ownership of their learning heightened the students' awareness of their own progression, and students were able to monitor their next steps in achieving their goals. Thus, reinforcing the students' responsibility and engagement in their own learning, which extended further in reporting to parents. This involved a three-way process referred to as "child-based chats" where the student reported their progress to their parents jointly with their teacher. Principal Bob said, as a result students "realise they are a key person" in their learning.

Another essential factor in raising student achievement was in teachers' and senior leaders' pedagogical knowledge. Principals held high expectations of teachers' knowledge, skills and responsibility in knowing their students well, which informed them in raising student outcomes. Principal Sally expressed,

In our school every teacher has to be good at teaching ESOL kids, so part of the skill set here is not just being an EFL [English as a Foreign Language] teacher, it's not just about knowing blended language and digital technology. They actually need to know how students acquire language, specifically how to support students on how to develop oral language, to develop English on the English language progressions and everyone has to know that. That links back to what's best for the child. At the end of the day it has to come back to that.

So I expect teachers to work really hard to develop in-depth knowledge of every student's context.

Principal Jill shared how one place where the student voice is present is in "topics of work that teachers do and, I suppose, it's that collective voice when staff are putting topics together and getting a range" that reflected the students' interests in their classroom. These actions typified social justice practices that promoted equity and justice for all students by giving them opportunities to have their voices heard.

Another aspect in transcending interests for the greater good is in building relationships to improve outcomes for all students. Principal Helen expressed it this way:

What needs to happen in this country in terms of changing the system itself to respond to the needs of the diverse communities, it's not going to happen by more reading, writing and maths and professional development. It's going to change through changing relationships, and in particular across cultures. So that means we can't walk on our own to find the solutions, we have to walk together to do it.

According to the data, building positive relationships extended beyond the parameters of student achievement and was visible in students' overall school behaviour. Principal Bob affirmed in his school that when it came to students' behaviour, "we talk to the children a lot, we don't have very many big behaviour issues at school ... I think what we are doing is we are more proactive in being out there with the children", building positive relationships.

Findings from this qualitative comparative case study indicated several ACL characteristics enacted by leaders for social justice and equity. The Principal's axiological philosophy underpinned their actions in the quest for social justice in their school environments and beyond.

4. Discussions

The four major findings and themes that emerged from data analysis lend support to the research questions, revealing the characteristics and behaviours of effective leadership for social justice and educational equity for student achievement, particularly in schools with CLD students. These findings were explored through the following four themes and referenced in Figure 3:

- Finding 1: Leaders' self-awareness transpires into altering mindsets. Includes axiological philosophy, vision and passions that form the "why" of the model;
- Finding 2: Leaders demonstrate transformational leadership behaviours to influence others. Includes how values and beliefs inform behaviours, and collaborative practices form the "how";
- Finding 3: Leaders raising student academic outcomes through alternate avenues. Includes social capital, and community outcomes form the "what";
- Finding 4: Leaders building and establishing trust as the foundational principle of characteristics, behaviours and student outcomes.

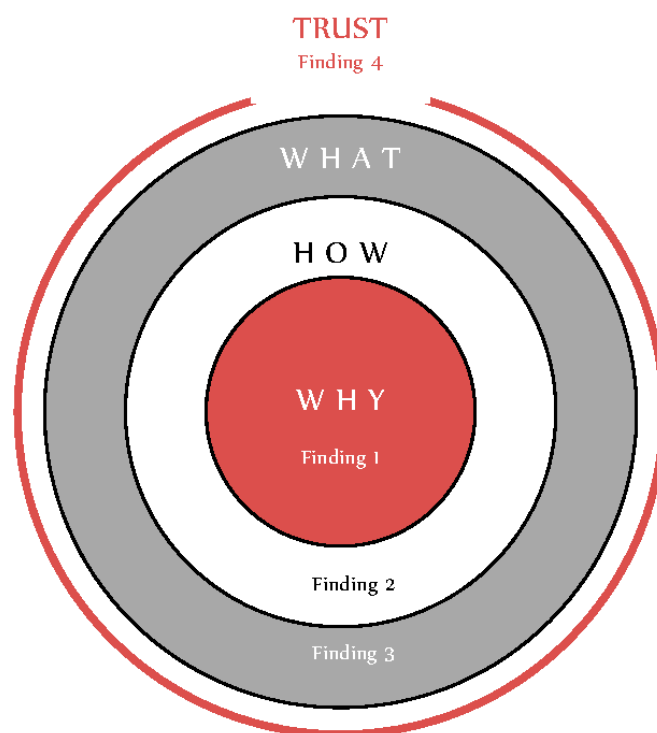


Figure 3. The "Why", "How" and "What" of effective leadership for social justice and equity for student achievement. Adapted from Sinek's book *Start with why: How great leaders inspire everyone to take action* [49].

The classification of "why", "how" and "what" guides in illuminating and thematically organising data findings that bolster this evidence-based inquiry. While these themes are interwoven and complementary, the relationship of "why", "how" and "what" is encompassed by building and establishing trust, completing the model shown in Figure 3.

The "Why" behind The "What"

Here the characteristics of participants' self-awareness leading to mind shifts in their epistemology, including values and belief systems, their motivations and passions and their call for social justice are discussed [32–34]. The focus in "Finding 1" is mainly on the individual's internal axiological philosophy towards effective leadership for social justice and equity.

4.1. Finding 1: Leaders Self-Awareness Transpired into Altering Mindsets (Include Axiological Philosophy, Vision and Passions form the “Why”)

Data suggested social justice leaders lead from a moral platform. West-Burnham states, educational leadership is, at its most fundamental level, “a moral activity” [50] (p. 5) and their actions were an outward reflection of their internal values and belief system. Mind shifts transpired from self-awareness of identity and having a moral purpose that negated existing assumptions, prejudices and biases.

The phenomenon of shifts in mindsets was an intriguing finding that espoused leaders reflected critically on their own behaviours, values and then changed how they act. Argyris coined this term as “single loop” and “double loop” learning to explain this crucial distinction. Applying a single loop learning theory meant leaders adopted an automated response without attention to their motivations or values [51]. Contrastingly, critical leaders featured in this study ascribed to double loop learning, grounded in reflective practice by seeking the “why” behind the “how” and “what” of effective leadership for social justice and educational equity for student achievement. Argyris asserts, “effective double-loop learning is not simply a function of how people feel. It is a reflection of how they think—that is, the cognitive rules or reasoning they used to design and implement their actions” [51] (p. 4). This ongoing double loop learning supports positive shifts in mindsets described by critical leaders featured in this study.

The “How” behind The “What”

The leaders’ focus shifts from internal axiological philosophy to external actions as a natural extension of the individual. These transformational leaders [31,32,52] share many similarities in their behaviours and practices towards transforming educational environments through culturally responsive leadership in CLD schools [7,13]. These include courageous conversations [51–54], seeking group consensus in decision-making [30,55,56] capacity building through distributed leadership [57], and leading by example.

4.2. Finding 2: Leaders Demonstrated Transformational Leadership Behaviours to Influence Others (Includes How Values and Beliefs Inform Behaviours and Collaborative Practices the “How”)

Leaders for social justice strived to create environments that provided equitable privileges for all people by giving everyone a voice so that the benefits explicitly addressed both underserved groups as well as the mainstream [30]. Group consensus highlighted social interaction was paramount in the learning environment. An integral behaviour of transformational leadership was building capacity in others so knowledge, skills and power was distributed. Transformational leaders featured in this study inspired followers to transcend their own interests for the good of the group.

The “What”

The characteristics and behaviours of effective leadership for social justice and equity have improved student academic achievement. Data findings provoke consideration of alternate methods and systems in data collection that is culturally responsive to diverse students in Auckland urban schools.

4.3. Finding 3: Leaders Raised Student Academic Outcomes through Alternate Avenues (Included Social Capital and Community Outcomes Formed the “What”)

Findings indicated a need for raising student achievement challenged ACL leaders to continually consult other sources of data and seek alternate ways to make it work for the student. Considering this as a preferred strategy, the espoused theory is multiple types of data should be used in alignment to extract accurate information of students’ academic achievements. An examination on current educational policies and systems falls short in addressing tikanga (customary system of Māori values

and practices or protocols), cultural, social and emotional dimensions of a student. Hohepa and Robinson attest it is “imperative that considerations of culture and ethnicity are included in the identification of leadership dimension that are effective in improving learning outcomes of diverse students” [58] (pp. 27–28). Critical leaders such as the ones in this inquiry advocated for a holistic approach towards bridging educational policies and systems that considered alternate avenues in raising student achievement.

4.4. Finding 4: Leaders Built and Established Trust, as the Foundational Principle of Characteristics, Behaviours and Student Outcomes

Trust, completed the “why”, “how” and “what” of effective leadership for social justice and equity for student achievement.

The relational trust between the principal and teachers was an essential glue in effective decision-making by having followers onboard with the school vision and values. According to Wahlstrom and Louis “teachers’ views of trustworthy principals tend to be based on the leadership characteristics” [60] (p. 462) the “why” (values, beliefs, passions and visions) impinged on the trust followers placed in their leader. This foundational principle determined “how” and “what” outcomes rose from such a relationship. Trust is something that is established over time and is “built through the quality of daily interactions more than through special events or activities” [53] (p. 228). Establishing a safe environment with high levels of trust in the way individuals work together at all levels, allowed all members of the school community to make a significant difference in student academic progress [61].

5. Conclusions

The cornerstone of effective leadership for social justice is a concept of central influence in relation to educational equity. This empirical study was centered on the characteristics and behaviours of effective leadership for social justice and equity for student achievement, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) schools in the Auckland urban area of New Zealand. Unpacking the ACL framework [20] revealed leaders embodied several ACL characteristics by choosing to practice transformational leadership and critical pedagogy through a critical race theory lens or a perspective lens (their axiological perspective) in their leadership practice [32–34]. Critical leaders featured in this study each demonstrated effective leadership skills, knowledge and experiences birthed from their axiological philosophy and life experiences that precepts their leadership practice. Critical leaders each expressed a moral purpose rooted in value-centered leadership, as leaders whose “values can be apprehended intuitively by . . . [their] developed value consciousness” [33] (p. 33). All participants reported their self-awareness transpired into mind shifts through value consciousness in their call for social justice and educational equity.

This empirical study suggested leaders from underserved groups (Māori principal) might lead differently to the hegemonic mainstream. Similar studies and the ACL theoretical framework can be applied in NZ and in the context of similar countries. The emphasis on the relational dimension of leaders from historically, politically and socially disenfranchised groups is distinctive in their leadership for social justice and equity underscored by findings here.

Critical leaders featured in this study share a common moral imperative of raising student achievement. Leaders steadily challenge the educational system by abating the alarming disparities in opportunities and educational outcomes among all students, particularly CLD students. Furman claims, “these persistent inequalities demand new approaches to transformative action in schools and, thus, new approaches to educational leadership” [5] (p. 212). Arguably, the most significant challenge in the fight for social justice and educational equity is the diversity of educational contexts in which these principals operate. Emergent Ministry backed efforts like that of the Māori Achievement Collaborative (MACs) provide more evidence of ways leaders from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds can build on positive aspects of their identity to lead in diverse contexts in New Zealand [62,63]. Current national studies in principals’ approach to leadership in New Zealand’s

diversified nation will expound understanding and propose change in the educational systems that will better serve our students [63].

In the future, increased opportunities and representation of culturally and linguistically diverse principals would be a more accurate reflection of New Zealand's demographics. The New Zealand Census 2013 proclaims that the nation has burgeoned into a multicultural society. "The number of New Zealanders who were born overseas had reached more than a million . . . this increase has led to more diversity in our ethnic, religious, and linguistic make-up" [1]. From this viewpoint, I concur:

Qualified educational leaders with alternate experiences who can relate to their diverse communities in culture, language, and experience are greatly desired, finding strength in leaders' identities to draw from all the while. From this alternate perspective, diverse identities and experiences are viewed as commodities rather than liabilities in regard to effective leadership practice. [20] (p. 9)

This nationwide increase of CLD students is evident in Auckland primary schools and this trend should be mirrored in educational leadership roles, such as a principal. Furthermore, research findings indicate that having role models they can relate to positively impacts students' aspirations and raises academic achievement [20] giving further cause to recruit leaders who are both qualified and culturally and linguistically diverse in leadership roles.

This strengths-based study has provided insights into the characteristics and behaviours of effective leadership for social justice and equity for student achievement, particularly in CLD schools. Applied critical leaders featured in this study led from their axiological philosophy of values-driven, moral leadership in their culturally responsive approach to social justice and equity in their schools. Their pursuit for "societal change" displaced social inequalities through social cohesion of cultural values, linguistic, gender perceptions and religious beliefs. Change can be described as "multi-dimensional in nature . . . especially moral, political and emotional ones" [19] (p. 3). In this study leaders reported cognitive shifts in mindsets highlighting the "transformation of society and education is not possible without the transformation of how we see and imagine our futures" [64] (p. 13).

Therefore, the challenge that lies ahead in New Zealand's culturally and linguistically diverse nation is taking on a 'multi-dimensional' approach. By forming alliances between effective leadership for social justice and equity for student achievement, including both mainstream and underserved groups, displacing social divisions, by creating greater opportunities and empowering leaders in cultivating a culturally responsive approach to leadership in this country we call Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Acknowledgments: Special thanks and gratitude to my academic advisors, Lorri J. Santamaría and Andrés P. Santamaría for their collaborative teamwork in patiently guiding and encouraging me, and providing feedback that has challenged me to think beyond my initial ideas and extend my conceptual thinking. The growth I have experienced has been invaluable. I sincerely thank the principals who invested their time by participating in this research in such an honest and meaningful way. May their call in leadership for social justice and educational equity powerfully resonate beyond their sphere of influence. Let their examples of applied critical leadership add to the emerging empirical research in the New Zealand contextual arena.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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