“LEADERSHIP IS SOCIAL JUSTICE”:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE-ORIENTED LEADERSHIP COURSES

By

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ABSTRACT

Addressing social inequalities and injustice is a critical and ongoing pursuit that remains a significant challenge in society as of 2025, prompting a call to arms in leadership education to develop social justice-oriented leaders; however, although many leadership educators believe in this call to action, they remain uncertain about what and how to incorporate social justice elements in their respective curricula. To address this gap, the following research question guided the study: What factors determine how instructors design and facilitate social justice-oriented leadership courses? I used the nine elements of the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) to identify the key concepts and variables relevant to the study. After interviewing 14 instructors who taught socially just leadership courses, numerous themes emerged under four major categories: beliefs and values, attributes, knowledge, and skills. The findings suggested participants believed leadership is social justice work; subsequently, the instructors designed and facilitated their courses using current theories and best practices to support learning. Based on the findings, I developed a new exploratory conceptual map to represent and highlight how leadership instructors are the driving force for creating these social justice-oriented leadership courses.

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Darnell.
You found me in Bed, Bath, & Beyond. Folding towels.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Addressing social inequalities and injustice is a critical and ongoing pursuit that remains a significant societal challenge as of 2025. The waves of national protests sparked by the murder of George Floyd in 2020 by police exemplified this cry for action; however, these waves of protest are nothing new. In the decade before George Floyd's death, social movements included Occupy Wall Street, the #BlackLivesMatter, and the #MeToo movements. Before these movements, labor movements; the Civil Rights Movement; and women's, LBGTQ+, disability, and other social movements emerged as frequent manifestations of the same social ills from previous generations (Museus et al., 2015). Donald Trump's reelection as president of the United States in 2024 resulted immediately in executive orders to end birthright citizenship, limit gender expression, and scrap equal opportunity initiatives in the federal government. The subsequent rollback of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and practices by Fortune 500 companies have also prompted a new wave of social inequalities and injustices and amplified these concerns.

One response to the call to action to address these social inequalities and injustices is increasing and improving the development of leaders. For over 2 decades, scholars, government officials, and business leaders recognized leadership as the "key to transforming institutions, our students, and our society to reflect the values" (Astin & Astin, 2000, p. v) of a diverse and democratic society (Dugan & Leonette, 2021). This recognition led to the development of new leadership models and programs driven by the idea that leadership is a process rather than a position (Rost, 1993; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). In response, those in charge of models and programs

shifted their focus to leaders' values, ethical behaviors, and social change practices (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Owen, 2012) rather than their personality traits and styles.

At first glance, leadership education that centers values, ethical behaviors, and social change might seem enough to produce leaders willing and able to address social inequalities and injustices. As early as 1996, many of these leadership models and programs focused on "equity, social justice, self-knowledge, personal empowerment, collaboration, citizenship, and service" (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996, p. 207), along with the common good, as the building blocks of their models or programs; however, these same models and programs have failed to explicitly name or discuss issues such as power, privilege, or systemic oppression in their curricula (Chunoo et al., 2020; Dugan & Leonette, 2021; Osteen et al., 2016). Instead, some leadership models and programs commodified diversity for pop culture consumption (Scarritt, 2019). These models and programs provided generic objectives such as the appreciation of cultural diversity to "understand the achievements of diverse peoples, be sensitive to cultural differences, and comfortable with alternative world views and diverse ethical principles" (Schuhmann, 2010, p. 65). These leadership models and programs have also claimed the values of social justice are embedded in their models; however, there are no explicit mentions nor representations of those values in the respective model or program (Dugan & Leonette, 2021).

Moreover, these existing leadership models and programs have historically viewed participants as a "homogeneous group where what they do matters more than who they are" (Lumby & Morrison, 2010, p. 5). Such a view underestimates the power of culture and context on leadership (Ospina & Foldy, 2009) and how culture and context influence who is viewed, treated, and has the privilege of acting as a leader. In essence, these models and programs have treated leadership as a neutral and objective process that anyone can do and be successful if they

practice certain principles or steps outlined by the respective model or program (Alvesson & Spicer, 2014; Quantz et al., 2017; Rost, 1993).

Unfortunately, these practices have failed to explicitly acknowledge how power, privilege, and oppression play a part in the context of leadership (Dugan, 2017; Dugan & Leonette, 2021; Jones et al., 2016). Issues related to social inequities and injustices result directly from leaders using their power to provide privileges to some people while oppressing others. Instead, leadership models and programs have perpetuated dominant narratives with generic approaches or "colorblind" perspectives to engage in cultural differences (Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Osteen et al., 2016). This approach has led to a gap in leaders' awareness, knowledge, and actions regarding how to deal with social inequities and injustices.

In the last 8 years, scholars and practitioners have created leadership models that center power, privilege, and oppression. These models included the culturally relevant leadership learning (CRLL) model (Jones et al., 2016); the social action, leadership, and transformation (SALT) model (Museus et al., 2017); and an expansion of the social change model (Harper & Kezar, 2021). Still, these models were more conceptual in nature and have remained in the infancy stages of operationalizing for practice. Subsequently, there is a need to understand how social justice knowledge, skills, and values are enacted in a leadership course.

Unless leadership education program personnel change how they develop leaders, they will miss opportunities to demonstrate how potential leadership education addresses intersecting educational, economic, and racial inequities (Dugan & Leonette, 2021). Higher education leadership educators have a newfound recognition, understanding, and yearning to incorporate social justice in their curriculum. In 2020, the National Leadership Education Research Agenda 2020–2025 listed social justice and critical theory as the second priority for the field (Chunoo et

al., 2020); however, herein lies the problem. Due to the limited number of social justice leadership-oriented curricula and programs in higher education, many leadership educators are uncertain about what social justice elements to include or how to incorporate them into their curricula.

Purpose of the Study

As society continues to become more diverse and global, leaders need to address social inequalities and lead equitable institutions, communities, and cultures. Many college student leadership programs have expressed interest in developing social justice-oriented leaders; however, these same programs may be unsure of how to design the curriculum. The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how course instructors designed and facilitated social justice-oriented leadership courses offered on college campuses.

Research Questions

Based on the purpose of this study, I developed the following research question, which guided this dissertation study:

- Research Question: What factors determine how instructors design and facilitate social justice-oriented leadership courses?

This research question helped achieve the study's purpose through two main objectives. First, the question focused on identifying "what happens" throughout a leadership course that aims to develop social justice-oriented leaders. Using this research question, I analyzed elements of the curriculum (e.g., purpose, content, pedagogical techniques) such as those identified by Nelson Laird (2010) and Lattuca and Stark (2009). Second, the research question helped examine the factors that influenced the design of the curriculum. Amid a number of existing theories and practices regarding leadership development and social justice literacy, I sought to learn more

about how leadership educators made decisions regarding the curriculum for their respective student leadership courses.

Significance of the Study

This study was important in discovering the curricular elements essential for college student leadership programs to develop social justice-oriented leaders. The research provided preliminary data and ideas for advancing theories and practices on this topic. The findings can inform leadership educators seeking curricular design that leads to the formation of socially just leaders.

First, this study furthered the knowledge base of leadership education. Social justice and leadership education in higher education remain underexplored in the literature. This study provided empirical data on the curricular elements of social justice-oriented leadership programs. The findings also provide a starting point for further research on leadership programs focused on social justice. Second, I used a diversity framework, the diversity inclusivity model (described later), as a tool to study diversity in the curriculum. A few studies, all quantitative, used this framework (Nelson Laird, 2011; Nelson Laird & Engberg, 2011). In this qualitative study, I expanded the use of this framework. In addition, the diversity inclusivity model validated its usefulness for future research and evaluation.

Third, the study benefits educators and practitioners of leadership education by equipping them with a guide to design and implement socially just leadership programs. In addition, the findings illustrated the use of the diversity inclusivity model as a rubric for evaluating the extent to which a leadership program can be designed to promote the development of social justice-oriented leaders.

Conceptual Framework

To answer my research question and guide this study, I used the diversity inclusivity model as a conceptual framework. Developed by Nelson Laird (2010), this framework integrates the work of academic planning (Lattuca & Stark, 2009), multicultural education (Banks, 2006, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 2009, as cited by Nelson Laird, 2010), and feminist theory and pedagogy (Maher & Tetrault, 2001; McIntosh, 1983, as cited by Nelson Laird, 2010) into a set of nine elements that provide a more comprehensive understanding of where diversity-related content and practices occur across college curriculum, whether as a single course or a sequence of courses (Nelson Laird, 2011). Aligning with the purpose of this study, this framework provided a schema of variables to guide the exploration and examination of these curricula.

Nelson Laird (2010) developed the diversity inclusivity model in response to the rise in research on the benefits of diversity in higher education. Although many scholars have suggested diversity courses impact students' attitudes toward diversity positively (Engberg, 2004), what counts as a diversity course varied among these studies (Nelson Laird, 2011). In these studies, it was unclear which characteristics made these courses diversity courses besides a categorical name (e.g., women's studies, ethnic studies). In addition, there were limited details on the course characteristics that made them effective (Nelson Laird & Engberg, 2011).

In 2000, Humphreys identified 62% of college campuses offered or required a diversity course. With so many college campuses across the United States offering a breadth of courses focused on diversity and multiculturalism, it was imperative to gain a greater understanding of the landscape of these courses. The diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) emerged as a comprehensive tool for doing such work. The model takes a more nuanced approach to

understand “how much” a course is inclusive of diversity rather than trying to determine “whether” a course qualifies as a diversity course (Nelson Laird, 2010).

The diversity inclusivity model was created from the review of various models that described aspects of multicultural education, phases of multicultural curricular change, or diversity education (Nelson Laird, 2014). In addition, Lattuca and Stark’s (2009) academic plans in context framework (i.e., a general curriculum planning model) provided structure to organize the elements (Nelson Laird, 2014). Based on this body of literature, instructors and scholars should consider elements of a course other than content and pedagogy when developing, designing, and implementing a course (Nelson Laird, 2010). Identifying these elements is vital because they are critical decision points that “enhance the academic experience of students” (Lattuca & Stark, 2009, p. 4).

Framework Description

The diversity inclusivity model (see Table 1) identifies nine elements essential in defining diversity courses (Nelson Laird, 2010). These elements include purpose and goals, content, foundations and perspectives, learners, instructors, pedagogy, environment, assessment and evaluation, and adjustment (Nelson Laird, 2011). These elements emerged from several models that identified aspects of multicultural education or diversity coursework. All elements should receive attention when developing, designing, or adjusting a course (Nelson Laird, 2010).

Table 1

Nine Elements of the Diversity Model

Elements	Description
Purpose	The knowledge, skills, and attitudes learned. Aimed toward participation in actions aimed at equality and justice.
Content	The information selected by the instructor to convey specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Diverse courses cover information ignored in "traditional" courses or material on traditional subjects but viewed from an alternative perspective.
Foundations and perspectives	The theories, philosophies, or perspectives that help explain how race, class, or gender, for example, influence our understanding of a course topic.
Learners	The specific participants in a course. It is important to consider their students' skill levels and developmental needs.
Instructors	The specific individuals who are charged with planning and facilitating a course. Instructors must investigate their identity, biases, and values and how these may influence how they operate in the classroom.
Pedagogy	The instructional activities by which learning may be achieved. Includes the theories and scholarship used to inform the activities.
Classroom environment	Space where a course occurs and the interactions that occur within that space. It comprises a course's values, norms, ethos, and experiences.
Assessment and evaluation	The methods, both formal and informal, are used to assess and evaluate student learning within a course. Diversity courses should encourage the use of various methods and be aware of the potential biases of each technique.
Adjustment	Things happen in a course that force instructors to change the plan.

In addition, this model illustrates how each element can vary from "not inclusive of diversity" to "fully inclusive of diversity" (Nelson Laird, 2010, p. 22). Figure 1 presents the complete visual of the model. To the right of each element is a continuum that illustrates this progression (Nelson Laird, 2014). For example, courses on the noninclusive end of the continuum have a frame of reference that remains mainstream centric (Banks, 2010) and fail to incorporate the voices from minoritized populations within the nine elements. As courses shift

toward the right on the continuum, they incorporate more voices from minoritized populations while questioning mainstream norms, assumptions, and perspectives and providing alternatives (Nelson Laird, 2014). Courses on the fully inclusive end of the continuum explore the complex dynamics of diversity in a pluralistic society (Nelson Laird, 2014). The continuum provides a rubric to evaluate how a course or curriculum incorporates diversity in each identified element.

Figure 1

Diversity Inclusivity Model

Element	Inclusivity Continuum				
Purpose/ goals	Prepare students	→	Prepare students for diverse experiences	→	Prepare students to actively engage in a diverse society
Content	Monocultural	→	Additive	→	Multicultural
Foundations/ perspectives	Unexplored	→	Exposed	→	Multiple foundations/perspectives examined
Learners	Passive acceptors	→	Participants with some learning needs	→	Collaborators with diverse learning needs
Instructor(s)	Unexplored views, biases, values	→	Exploring own views, biases, values	→	Understands own views, biases, values
Pedagogy	Filling students with knowledge	→	Transitional—using varied techniques	→	Critical/equity oriented
Environment	Ignored	→	Inclusive	→	Empowering
Assessment/ evaluation	"Standard"	→	Mixed methods	→	Methods suited to student diversity
Adjustment	Adjustment to cover material	→	Adjustment to some needs of students	→	Adjustment to diverse needs of students

Note. Reprinted from "Reconsidering the inclusion of diversity in the curriculum" by T. F. Nelson Laird, 2014. Diversity and Democracy, 27(4), 12–14.

The target audience for this framework are scholars who "study various aspects of how diversity is incorporated into college curricula and the effects of that on inclusion" (Nelson Laird, 2010, p. 5) and college and university instructors who are "seeking their own ways of including diversity in their courses" (Nelson Laird, 2014, p. 12). The framework is a valuable aid that maps out the elements of a course and identifies elements that are inclusive of diversity. The

diversity inclusivity model also investigates the elements that can include more diversity without being a generic, prescribed, step-by-step method for designing a diversity course (Nelson Laird, 2010). Such a framework provides instructors with a conceptual guide to shift their course toward greater inclusivity. Instructors are empowered to make and justify their own choices and determinations regarding how much their course is inclusive of diversity and where this inclusion of diversity happens (Nelson Laird, 2010).

Framework in the Literature

Literature on the diversity inclusivity model is scant, as it is a relatively unknown framework. The framework's creator, Nelson Laird, published two empirical studies: one public scholarship article and a paper presentation at a national conference based on the framework. The two empirical studies (Nelson Laird, 2011; Nelson Laird & Engberg, 2011) used the framework's nine elements to develop quantitative survey items to measure diversity in a curriculum. In the first study, Nelson Laird (2011) investigated how much diversity is included in college courses and the factors that predicted diversity inclusivity. In the second study, Nelson Laird and Engberg (2011) compared courses that met institutional or departmental diversity requirements with those that did not. The public scholarship piece (Nelson Laird, 2014) was a conceptual article that described the creation, purpose, and components of the framework. The article advocated for using the framework by faculty seeking to incorporate diversity into their curricula. Finally, the presented paper (Nelson Laird et al., 2018) provided an update on the first study by Nelson Laird (2011), validating the results from the earlier study. Overall, the diversity inclusivity model fit the purpose as the framework for this study.

Framework Benefits

The diversity inclusivity model provides several benefits to examine the inclusion of diversity in a curriculum. First, instructors and scholars can define diversity within a curriculum in a more comprehensive and nuanced manner instead of "trying to make simple determinations about what is and what is not a diversity course" (Nelson Laird & Engberg, 2011, p. 121). The framework challenges the notion that all "so-called" diversity courses are identical and highlights to "what degree" and "where" a course is inclusive of diversity rather than trying to determine "whether" a course qualifies as a diversity course (Nelson Laird, 2010). Such a distinction allows for multiple definitions of diversity based on the course, discipline, and institution (Nelson Laird, 2010).

Second, instructors and scholars can define how diversity manifests within a curriculum beyond just content. Instead, the model centers on nine elements, or what Lattuca and Stark (2009) called decision-making points, that are critical to the development and design of a course. These elements allow instructors and scholars to expand their thinking about diversity beyond only content. For example, instructors and scholars in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) have commonly stated their courses cannot include diversity; instead, these courses are potential spaces to expose students to "multicultural practices" (Nelson Laird & Engberg, 2011, p. 121) in various ways. More specifically, in organic chemistry classes, instructors can connect the Flint, Michigan water crisis to the chemical reactions that led to the disaster. In math courses, instructors can use different pedagogical and evaluation methods to transform the classroom environments. These practices help diverse learners feel welcomed, included, and supported in achieving in the course instead of being a weed-out course.

Third, instructors and scholars can define where and to what degree diversity is included within a curriculum. The model undermines common assumptions of what is and is not a diversity course. For example, general statements like "all women's studies courses are diversity courses" are commonplace (Nelson Laird, 2011); however, this assertion is often taken for granted. Instead, instructors can use the diversity inclusivity model to demonstrate how they are inclusive of diversity and to what degree. With this framework, academic and instructional leaders can achieve a "more comprehensive understanding of where inclusion of diversity is actually occurring across the entire college undergraduate curriculum" (Nelson Laird & Engberg, 2011, p. 121) and in graduate education. These three reasons made the diversity inclusivity model an appropriate conceptual framework for this study.

Overview of the Research Design

I conducted a qualitative inquiry to explore the curricular elements of social justice-oriented leadership courses. This approach allowed me to understand "how" leadership development programs develop social justice-oriented leaders and the "why" behind the factors influencing leadership instructors' choices in determining the curriculum. The study examined the curriculum of 14 U.S. social justice-oriented student leadership courses. Purposeful sampling identified suitable student leadership courses, and I contacted the instructors who had recently taught such a leadership course. Participants shared their experiences and insights through interviews. I conducted data analysis in two ways. First, I analyzed the interviews with the instructors and identified themes for each of the nine elements described in the diversity inclusivity model. Second, I analyzed data and identified common themes related to factors influencing the instructors' curriculum designs. Chapter 3 provides additional details on the study's methods.

Scope of the Study

Various leadership development courses and programs exist. Many are designed for postcollege adults, usually in an organization, work, or professional setting; however, these courses and programs were not the context for this study. Instead, I focused on leadership courses in the context of higher education for three main reasons.

First, higher education has always been in the "business" of developing leaders, implicitly and explicitly (Brungardt et al., 1997). Societal elites sent their sons to the first colleges in the British Colonies in North America to gain an education and knowledge that set them apart from the "common man." Such separation gave them the "right" to lead the "common" man (Brungardt et al., 1997). It is no longer feasible nor practical for a select few to solve societal issues and problems that are more complex and challenging (Day et al., 2008, as cited by Haber, 2012). Now, leadership narratives posit that everyone can be a leader, and leadership is no longer only for the elites.

This narrative led to the second reason for this study. Leadership development is an explicit educational outcome of colleges and universities (Dugan & Komives, 2007; National Leadership Council for Liberal Education & America's Promise, 2007). In the last 50 years, scholars have recognized that colleges and universities have a strong influence on student development. The college years are a natural and opportune time to develop the next generation of leaders (Guthrie et al., 2013). Most public officials are college graduates, whether elected or appointed (Chunoo & Osteen, 2016); therefore, college is a prime time to develop leadership skills for social change in future leaders (Riggio et al., 2003). This leadership education mandate catalyzed an explosion in the growth of student leadership programs on campuses (Schwartz et

al., 1998). As of 2024, over 1,110 academic leadership programs were on college campuses (International Leadership Association, n.d.).

Third, many leadership educators in higher education have routinely expressed diversity, inclusion, and social justice as their core values (Chunoo et al., 2020; Harper & Kezar, 2021; Jones et al., 2016; Museus et al., 2017). Scholars and practitioners have often spoken about social justice at conferences, placed it on syllabi, and promoted it through programs across campus (Dupree, 2016). For example, the Inter-Association Leadership Education Collaborative (2016) published a report that listed building inclusive leadership learning communities as a priority area of inquiry and practice. Furthermore, the report declared that "leadership education must create and model conditions for equity, justice, and sustainability across diverse contexts" (Inter-Association Leadership Education Collaborative, 2016, p. 6). As mentioned earlier, the 2020–2025 National Leadership Education Research Agenda highlighted the need to center social justice and critical theory in leadership education (Chunoo et al., 2020). Although some would argue these proclamations are only symbolic, they demonstrate the awareness of these issues in the profession and make the field fertile for study.

Lastly, I had to define social justice. Similar to leadership, there are many terms used to identify social justice outcomes, such as "equity leadership," "culturally relevant leadership," "inclusive leadership," or "leaders for positive social change." Though there is not a universal definition of social justice in leadership education, I used the framing presented in the 2020–2025 National Leadership Education Research Agenda to define social justice. Chunoo et al. (2020) framed social justice as a process and goal that "requires bringing issues of power, privilege, and oppression as well as notions of social location, identity, and intersectionality to

the fore of leadership learning" (p. 46). Therefore, the scope of this study examined leadership courses that explicitly mentioned social justice, equity, power, privilege, or oppression.

Conclusion

Leaders who address social justice are necessary for a thriving democracy; however, many previous and current leadership models and programs have failed to address critical issues related to social justice (e.g., privilege, power, oppression). Despite an eagerness to address these issues, many leadership educators are unsure how to incorporate them in their curricula. In this study, I used a qualitative design to understand how instructors taught, designed, and facilitated their social justice-oriented leadership courses. In this chapter, I identified the need to understand social justice-oriented leader development, especially during the formative college development years. This gap led to the following research question: What factors determine how instructors design and facilitate social justice-oriented leadership courses?

This research question guided me in identifying course curricular elements and understanding the factors influencing curriculum design. Nelson Laird's (2010) diversity inclusivity model provided the conceptual framework to investigate social justice-oriented leadership programs systematically, adding to the limited research on these curricula. The findings serve multiple stakeholders, such as leadership educators, college administrators, and students, on the best ways to develop social justice-oriented leaders.

I outline the four chapters that follow Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, I reviewed existing literature on leadership education based on the nine elements of the study's conceptual framework, the diversity inclusivity model. The literature review demonstrated the gap related to understanding the curricular elements of social justice-oriented leadership courses and clarified how this study filled this gap in the literature. Chapter 3 describes the study's methods, including

the methodology, research design, participants, data collection, and data analysis. In Chapter 4, I share the findings of the data collected in detail. Chapter 5 offers an in-depth discussion of the findings, provides implications for practice and the field, and outlines recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the relevant literature on leadership education. This qualitative study examined how instructors designed and facilitated social justice-oriented leadership courses. The following research question guided this study: What factors determine how instructors design and facilitate social justice-oriented leadership courses? To answer this question, I present existing research on the topic and build upon the collective understanding of it. Leadership and leadership education literature is broad, multifaceted, and unwieldy; therefore, I used the nine curricular elements of the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) and reviewed existing leadership education literature. This approach allowed for a more focused understanding of nine curricular elements in the literature and were the variables examined in this study. The first curricular element explored was purpose.

Leadership Education and Purpose

The first element of the diversity inclusivity model is purpose and goals. According to the diversity inclusivity model, purpose refers to a course or curriculum's learning objectives, goals, or outcomes (Nelson Laird, 2014). At the fundamental level, purpose reflects the knowledge, skills, and attitudes learned during the course or curriculum (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). A course's purpose is supposed to function as a touchstone for every decision made regarding a course. Though curriculum development can start with any of the nine framework elements, the purpose is often the starting point (Lattuca & Stark, 2009).

The purpose of the course plays a vital part in determining the direction of the course or curriculum. In the following sections, I review literature on the purpose of leadership education. Six major themes in the literature emerged regarding the purpose of leadership education.

Leadership Competencies

Developing leadership knowledge, skills, and values was the first theme in the literature. Northouse (2009) shared the consensus among the leadership education field that leadership education and training is a combination of traits, abilities, skills, and behaviors. Seemiller and Murray (2013) summarized these factors as leadership competencies. Seemiller (2013) later defined competencies as the "knowledge, values, abilities, and behaviors that help an individual contribute to or successfully engage in a role or task" (p. xv). This definition aligned with the general definition of purpose: knowledge, skills, and attitudes learned during the curriculum. The purpose of leadership education is determined by the leadership competencies of the respective program.

In their groundbreaking work, Seemiller and Murray (2013) examined the accreditation manuals of 522 academic programs. Seemiller and Murray discovered over 18,000 learning outcomes, which they narrowed down into 60 leadership competencies and divided into eight broad categories: learning and reasoning, self-awareness and development, interpersonal interaction, group dynamics, civic responsibility, communication, strategic planning, and personal behavior. In addition, each category lists the competency's knowledge, ability, value, and behavioral component (Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Seemiller & Murray, 2013).

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking was the second theme. Leadership education programs focus on developing the skills and actions of individuals (Spendlove, 2007). However, leadership extends beyond competencies or what an individual can do. Gardner (1990, as cited in Wren, 1994) stated, "The first step is not action; the first step is understanding. The first question is how to

think about leadership" (p. 78). The goal of leadership training is to develop the critical thinking capacity of learners.

Leaders need to develop the ability to think deeply and critically about leadership because leadership is a social phenomenon (Billsberry, 2009; Eich, 2008; Jenkins, 2013; Perruci, 2014) based on relationships (Rost, 1993; Rost & Barker, 2000). Critical thinking is necessary for the decision-making process (Jenkins, & Andenoro, 2016) and for making ethical and socially responsible decisions (Ciulla, 1996). Critical thinking is a common purpose of liberal arts leadership education (Riggio et al., 2003). In this approach, students learn and think about leadership from various disciplinary perspectives. Ricketts (2005) found a positive correlation between critical thinking and leadership training.

Social Change

Social change was the third theme. For the past 20 years, social change served as an overwhelming purpose for leadership education; as an example, Astin and Astin (2000) argued poor leadership leads to social ills that plague U.S. society. The researchers believed higher education could empower students to be "effective change agents" (Astin & Astin, 2000, p. 2). It is not enough for students to develop leadership knowledge, skills, and values—leadership requires a shared or common goal between the leader and collaborators (Rost & Barker, 2000). As such, leadership competencies and critical thinking skills that students develop should promote social change (Astin & Astin, 2000; HERI, 1996).

The social change model (SCM; HERI, 1996) is the standard bearer of developing socially responsible leaders. SCM is regarded as the most widely used model of student leadership development in higher education (Haber & Komives, 2008). Kezar et al. (2006) stated, "The social change model of leadership development and seven C's of social change have

played a prominent role in shaping the curricula and formats of undergraduate leadership education initiatives in colleges and universities throughout the country" (p. 142).

Leadership Identity

The fourth theme in the literature revolved around forming a leadership identity (Komives & Sowcik, 2020) and the "process of understanding themselves, others, and the world around them" (Eich, 2008, p. 186). Many leadership models tend to focus on the personal development of oneself (Haber & Komives, 2008). Personal development is considered foundational to leadership development because it allows individuals to become aware of their attitudes, motivations, and values and lead others effectively (Odom et al., 2012). Therefore, leadership education's goal is to develop the learner's leadership identity. Having a strong sense of self leads to greater leadership capacity, self-efficacy, and motivation (Correia-Harker & Dugan, 2020).

The leadership identity development (LID) model emerged from a groundbreaking study (Komives et al., 2005). Grounded in human development, this model outlined the six stages students experience in their conceptualization of leadership. Student understanding of leadership is complex and relational and moves from hierarchical to collaborative (Komives et al., 2005) as students move from lower to higher stages. LID provides educators a framework to design the learning objectives, goals, or outcomes of their course.

Social Justice

Social justice was the fifth theme. Pairing leadership and social justice is a fairly new area of study (Noble, 2015). Amid calls for social justice in medical education (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009), outdoor education (Warren, 2002), and arts education (Dewhurst, 2010), K–12 educational leaders have advocated for social justice for decades (Teig, 2018). Despite past

efforts, there has emerged a rejuvenated effort to center social justice and equity-mindedness at the heart of leadership learning and research (Chunoo & Guthrie, 2023) instead of treating it as an add on or a niche market (Celik, 2012). According to the 2020–2025 National Leadership Education Research Agenda, social justice and critical theory is the second most critical priority for the field (Chunoo et al., 2020). Leadership education's purpose should subsequently point toward social justice to address social injustices and inequalities (Chunoo & Guthrie, 2023).

No Standard Purpose

The sixth theme found in the literature was that leadership education has no uniform purpose (Huber, 2002; Rosch & Kusel, 2010). This theme appears counterintuitive based on the previous themes. Yes, there is a general understanding among scholars that the purpose of leadership education is to understand and participate in the leadership process (Brungardt et al., 1997; Wren, 1994); however, this statement is broad and vague. Defining leadership and the leadership process is necessary (Brungardt et al., 1997; Riggio et al., 2003; Rosch & Kusel, 2010).

There are two main reasons for the lack of uniform purpose. First, a standard definition of leadership does not exist (Huber, 2002; Rost & Barker, 2000). Without a definition of what leadership is and does, it is difficult to define what constitutes the knowledge, behaviors, and values associated with it (Huber, 2002; Rosch & Kusel, 2010). Matters become more complicated because teaching "soft skills," such as critical thinking and oral communication, is often interchangeable with leadership (Peck, 2018; Seemiller, 2016). Second, some scholars have argued a lack of uniformity is necessary to provide leadership education programs with the flexibility necessary to adapt to changing times (Chunoo & Osteen, 2016; Huber, 2002). Many leadership programs are institutional and mission-driven and require flexibility in determining

the purpose of their respective leadership programs (Brungardt et al., 2006; Chunoo & Osteen, 2016; Seemiller, 2016). Although contemporary scholars have coalesced around the idea that leadership is a learnable skill (Wren, 1994), defining leadership is challenging.

Summary of Leadership Education's Purpose

Identifying the purpose of leadership education is vital to successfully designing and implementing a course or curriculum. In leadership education literature, I identified six main themes related to purpose. First, leadership education develops the knowledge, skills, and values, or competencies, of leadership. Second, models of leadership development must focus on developing critical thinking skills. Third, social change is the goal that leaders are trying to achieve. Fourth, it is important to develop students' identities as leaders so they can put leadership into practice. Fifth, leadership is important for achieving social justice; as such, leadership development strives for that goal. Sixth, leadership educators and scholars have not created a common purpose for leadership education due to the lack of a definition of what leadership is and does.

No matter the purpose of leadership education, there remains a gap in the literature. Specifically, research on the purposes of leadership education as social justice has emerged in recent years and is still developing. This study addressed this gap in the literature and provided necessary purposes in developing social justice-oriented leaders according to leadership instructors.

Leadership Education and Content

Content is the second element of the diversity inclusivity model and is the "subject matter selected to convey specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Nelson Laird, 2010, p. 13). Content is the primary way in which instructors make sense of their courses and design their courses.

When conceptualizing the diversity inclusivity model, Nelson Laird (2010) noticed how various curriculum models included content as an essential element and asserted that this inclusion reflected the idea that content is usually the starting point of most courses for instructors (Nelson Laird, 2010). In addition, content includes the instructional materials and sequence of the content. Sequence refers to how instructors arrange or organize content in a curriculum, whereas instructional materials refer to media such as textbooks, videos, or visual aids used to present the content of the curriculum (Nelson Laird, 2010). All three items—content, sequence, and instructional materials—communicate ideas, impart knowledge, and shape learning.

Similar to purpose, content plays a vital role in curriculum development. In the following section, I present three main themes from literature relating to content in leadership education curricula. Afterward, I review literature regarding instructional materials and course sequencing.

Content as Broad Categories

Identifying broad categories was the first way in which scholars conceptualized content. The first study to investigate content in leadership program actions was Brungardt et al. (2006). Brungardt et al. examined 15 leadership programs in public and private sectors and concluded that programs' curriculum focused on leadership theory and history, skills and behaviors, context, issues, practicum and internships, and elective courses outside the program. In 2013, Gerhardt and Diallo used Brungardt et al.'s framework identified to investigate the current state of 26 undergraduate organizational leadership programs. Gerhardt and Diallo concluded there was a slow but steady move toward standardization based on Brungardt et al.'s model. In addition, requirements for leadership minors demonstrated this same trend (Diallo & Gerhardt, 2017). Most recently, Sowcik and Komives (2020) outlined three main categories that guide

leadership education content: leadership theory, leadership competency and skills, and ethical leadership.

Content as Specific Topics

The second way in which scholars conceptualized content was by identifying specific topics to teach in a leadership curriculum. Wagner and Cilente (2011) listed contemporary and up-and-coming leadership topics such as civic and community engagement, emotional intelligence, ethics, global leadership, integrative and interdisciplinary learning, positive psychology, and spirituality. Rice (2011) highlighted that student-centered leadership curriculums focused on more personal, everyday leadership topics such as careers, personal finance, character development, health and wellness, and life skills. Lastly, Odom (2015) presented leadership topics that were important to students based on a class discussion on a *New York Times* article. Topics included gender and leadership; authenticity and leadership; race and leadership; the role of values, vision, and mission in leadership; negotiation and leadership; communication and leadership; the effect of leadership styles; entrepreneurial leadership; credibility as a leader; the role of culture in leading others; establishing trust as a leader, and the effect of experience or pedigree on leadership ability. Based on these lists, there is plenty of content to develop a leadership education program. Despite these endless lists of potential leadership topics, scholars have exhibited considerable knowledge on the descriptive nature of content in leadership education, though they have not examined the content analysis and outcomes of this content.

Content as Specific Leadership Models

Scholars have long written about content using models for the curriculum, as it is common for a leadership educator to use specific leadership models as content for a course. In

higher education, popular leadership models include: (a) the SCM for leadership development, (b) the leadership challenge, (c) the relational leadership model, and (d) emotionally intelligent leadership for college students (Barnes, 2020; Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Rosch & Anthony, 2012). However, hardly any literature has verified the usage of these leadership models in this way from the content perspective.

Instructional Materials

After course content, instructional materials are an essential and often overlooked component of instruction. Instructional materials can potentially improve the quality of engagement or motivation for learning; however, very little has been written about instructional materials related to leadership education. Most leadership education literature has focused on pedagogical techniques rather than actual instructional materials. Based on discussions in the literature, there are three common instructional materials: textbooks, films, and case studies. In the following subsections, I review existing literature on each medium.

Textbooks

First, the text is the most common instructional material used in leadership education (Harris et al., 2011). Text takes many forms, such as academic textbooks, popular books, course packs, and journal articles. Historically, leadership education courses depended on text (Harris et al., 2011); however, they are not all created equal. Harris et al. (2011) revealed academic textbooks often use a more formal writing style than popular textbooks. Popular books use storytelling techniques and are more accessible to readers. In addition, academic textbooks have nearly always included formal leadership theory and critical contemporary topics such as diversity in leadership. In contrast, popular have focused focus more on the individual endeavor of leadership rather than the collective process of leadership highlighted in academic textbooks.

Films, Movies, or Video Clips

Second, films, movies, or video clips are popular instructional materials used in leadership education curricula. Billsberry (2009) highlighted the 20 years of literature that advocated for using films in leadership programs. Scholars stated over and over again that film and video are powerful materials, bring scenarios alive, and spark viewers' interest (Graham et al., 2003; Oliver & Reynolds, 2010; Torock, 2008). Oliver and Reynolds (2010) stated films teach "complex leadership concepts through the experience of visually witnessing leadership scenarios and analyzing behavior as observers" (p. 123). Moreover, films give "life to theories and realistic examples of representative models of practice" (Cummins, 2007, p. 143). Lastly, Graham et al. (2003) boldly proclaimed that using movies in leadership education is a winning strategy, noting the feedback in their courses was "overwhelmingly positive" (p. 38). However, similar to other instructional materials, scholars have conducted very little content analysis or empirical research to understand the use of films as instructional material in leadership education programs.

Case Studies

Third, case studies are a popular instructional material used in leadership education programs (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). Case studies are studied more than any other instructional materials, primarily as a pedagogical tool instead of content analysis. For the most part, case studies positively impact learning and critical thinking skills (Burbach et al., 2004; Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Jenkins & Andenoro, 2016; Powley & Taylor, 2014). Jenkins and Andenoro (2016) strongly advocated using case studies to develop critical leadership skills, though criticisms of case studies have included excluding student experiences (Cova et al., 1993; McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006 as cited by Jenkins & Andenoro, 2016), competing voices in the

narrative (Cunliffe, 2002 as cited by Jenkins & Andenoro, 2016), and being nonrealistic (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006 as cited by Jenkins & Andenoro, 2016) or inaccessible to students due to the lack experience with the topic (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018).

Course Sequencing

Finally, course sequencing relates to "determining exactly what should be included in a single leadership course or a sequence of courses can be a daunting task" (Komives et al., 2009, p. 34). This quote accounts for the scant research in leadership education on course sequencing. Only two studies hinted at course sequencing. The first came from Brungardt et al. (2006), who examined the curriculum of 15 leadership education programs. Brungardt et al. found programs followed a similar logical sequencing of introductory foundation courses, followed by a selection of skill, context, or issues course, and then capped off with a practicum, independent study, or internship. The second study by Seemiller and Whitney (2020) used the Delphi process to create a taxonomy of student leadership competencies. The idea was to provide a sequence and hierarchy for these competencies; however, Seemiller and Whitney did not focus on the sequencing courses within a program. In addition, both studies did not examine the sequencing of content in a single course.

Summary of Leadership Education's Content

For most instructors, content is usually the starting point of curriculum development (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). Content is where instructors are most familiar because they know what they want to teach; however, content is more than just what to teach. According to the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010), content includes sequencing content and using instructional materials. In leadership education literature, content or subject matter have often been conceptualized as covering broad categories within a curriculum, discussing specific topics,

or following specific leadership models. Common instructional materials include textbooks, films, and case studies. Lastly, leadership education programs follow a similar course sequence: foundational, skill-based, and capstone courses.

However, content remains an under-researched area in leadership education. Yes, there are lists of suggested content, but very few empirical studies have analyzed the content or examined the impact of the content, sequence, or materials on learning. In addition, none of the available literature specified the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in leadership education. Subsequently, in this study, I addressed this gap in the literature by providing data on content in leadership education programs and insight into the content, sequence, or materials instructors considered necessary to develop social justice-oriented leaders.

Leadership Education and Perspectives

The third element of the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) is foundations and perspectives. A course's foundations and perspectives refer to how knowledge is viewed, interpreted, and understood (Nelson Laird, 2014). In the literature, this element has used many different names, including theoretical traditions, underpinnings, orientations, paradigms, epistemology, theoretical perspective, philosophical stance, worldview, belief system, points of view, or frame of reference (Merriam, 2009).

Despite these many names, the instructor's philosophical foundations and perspectives shape a course or curriculum. Foundations and perspectives are necessary because they are the lens through which individuals understand and interpret the world and their experiences, organize their ideas and thoughts, and develop actions that align with those beliefs (Crossman, 2020). In education, foundations and perspectives determine what is taught and not taught within

a curriculum. The foundations and perspectives of a course explicitly and implicitly shape all the other elements of curriculum development.

The diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) calls educators to consider how their philosophical foundations and perspectives influence the curriculum they create. Due to leadership's broad, vague, and abstract nature, there are many philosophical foundations and perspectives in leadership education. However, an extensive literature review of all the perspectives taught in leadership education curriculums was beyond the scope of this section. Instead, in the following section I present three main themes from the literature related to the philosophical foundations and perspectives shaping leadership education.

Paradigm Wars

The first theme related to the two distinct paradigms shaping the leadership education landscape. First conceptualized by Rost (1991), the two prevalent paradigms are industrial and postindustrial leadership models. The industrial leadership paradigm is the dominant, mainstream definition of leadership throughout the 20th century (Rost, 1997). This paradigm characterizes a leader who is rational, unemotional, and decisive (Rogers, 1992; Rost, 1997; Rost & Barker, 2000). Leaders accomplish goals using a top-down approach to command, control, and influence their followers to complete necessary tasks (Rogers, 1992; Rost, 1997; Rost & Barker, 2000). This leadership paradigm is perpetuated and taught in leadership education programs and media (Rost, 1997).

In contrast to industrial theories, the postindustrial paradigm focuses on relationships that foster change and meet goals (Rost, 1997). The postindustrial leadership paradigm focuses on transformation, values, collaboration, and empowerment (Dugan, 2006; Rogers, 1992; Rost, 1993). Therefore, the postindustrial paradigm of leadership emphasizes the relationships leaders

create in partnership with followers (Rosch & Anthony, 2012; Rost, 1993). Since the 1970s, scholars, educators, and leaders have championed the postindustrial paradigm of leadership (Rogers, 1992); however, many curriculums and programs have continued to perpetuate the industrial paradigm of leadership (Haber, 2012; Lunsford & Brown, 2017).

Leadership as a Learnable Skill

The perspective of leadership as a learnable skill was the second theme. Before the 1970s, a common belief was leaders are born and not made (Marcketti et al., 2011; Riggio et al., 2003) and that leaders hold positions of power due to innate traits, physical characteristics, birthright, or the will of God (Dugan, 2017). Although scholars have searched, there is no consensus on what those leadership traits or abilities are (Dugan, 2017; Rost, 1993). In the postindustrial paradigm, those in leadership education circles did not believe the idea of the great leader born to lead (Brungardt et al., 1997; Dugan, 2017; Marcketti et al., 2011; Rost, 1993; Seemiller & Murray, 2013). Instead, an emerging perspective is that leadership is not based on a position (Dust & Gerhardt, 2020) and can be taught and learned (Hashem, 1997). The prevalence of this perspective has been most evident in the development of leadership programs across the United States. According to Jenkins (2018), over 2,000 academic and nonacademic leadership programs exist. Such an increase in leadership programs opened leadership opportunities from a few select men to all students on college campuses.

Leadership Education Approaches

The final theme related to how scholars and educators implement foundations and perspectives into a curriculum. Though many philosophical foundations and perspectives drive leadership education programs, scholars have identified three main philosophical approaches to teaching leadership (Riggio et al., 2003; Rost & Barker, 2000). Riggio et al. (2003) identified

leadership as being taught from the approach of management, citizenship, and the liberal arts. The management approach prepares students for organizational leadership with a curriculum that drew heavily on management and organizational psychology research (Riggio et al., 2003). Developing the skills or competencies of the individual is crucial in the industrial paradigm. The citizenship approach emphasizes democratic engagement, social responsibility, and social action through an interdisciplinary awareness of leadership principles (Riggio et al., 2003; Welch, 2000). This approach usually happens in student affairs programs or civic education and reflects the postindustrial paradigm, which focuses on community aspects and the leadership process. Liberal arts leadership education expands upon the traditional liberal arts model, exposing students to leadership from disciplinary lenses such as political science, sociology, and psychology. The goal is building knowledge to provide a well-rounded understanding of leadership (Riggio et al., 2003). Despite this specialization, many programs focus equally on skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Brungardt et al., 1997).

Summary of Leadership Education's Foundations

The foundations and perspectives shaping a course or curriculum are essential to the planning process; however, many times, these perspectives are overlooked. In leadership education, three main perspectives shape leadership education. First, there is a paradigm war between the industrial and postindustrial paradigms of leadership. The second perspective is that leadership is a learnable skill and is not an innate set of characteristics with which individuals are born or not based on a position. Leadership is accessible to all individuals in this perspective. Third, there are three main perspectives for implementing leadership education. These perspectives focus on the management, citizenship, or liberal arts views of leadership development.

Regardless of the foundations and perspectives of leadership education, there is a gap in the literature. In the last decade, a growing call for social justice has emerged as one of the philosophical pillars of leadership education. Yes, there is a call for social change in some leadership models and theories (Harper & Kezar, 2021; Wiborg, 2022); however, privileged perspectives ignore societal inequities and oppression in leadership education (Dugan, 2011; Wiborg, 2022). This study addressed this gap in the literature by providing data on the foundations and perspectives instructors believe are necessary for leadership programs to develop social justice-oriented leaders.

Leadership Education and Learners

The learner is the fourth element of the diversity inclusivity model. This model defines learners as individuals participating in the course (Nelson Laird, 2010). Learning is a human process (Adams et al., 2023) that requires interaction between the instructor and learner. Moreover, learners are the primary audience and experiencer of the educational experience.

However, learners are different from the other elements in the diversity inclusivity model. Other elements can be adjusted or changed based on the goals and needs of the course (Nelson Laird, 2010), whereas learners cannot be altered, as they come as they are. Subsequently, instructors need to consider the skill levels and developmental needs of students and the learners' various racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Nelson Laird, 2010). In addition, many learners do not consider themselves "leaders" (Arminio et al., 2000) despite conventional leadership literature and leadership program marketing information. Nevertheless, developing students' leadership skills is vital to their future careers and implementing social change (Riggio et al., 2003).

Learners are the reason a course is developed and taught. Therefore, it is important to know more about learners. In the following section, I review literature on learners in leadership education. Three major themes in the literature emerged regarding learners.

Learners' Demographics

First, the literature tells the story of learners participating in leadership education programs on college campuses. Dugan and Leonette (2021) found 32% of college students participated in leadership education programs as of 2020. Most students attended large public research universities, with 47.8% at extensive research institutions, 57.4% at a public institution, and 51.4% at an institution with an enrollment above 10,000 (Dugan & Komives, 2006). Women made up 61.5% of the learners; additionally, the learners' racial and ethnic breakdown was 71.8% White, 5.2% African American or Black, 7.9% Asian/Asian American, 4.4% Latino, 0.3% American Indian, and 8.2% multiracial (Dugan & Komives, 2006). Sexual orientation representation was heterosexual (94.12%); gay, lesbian, or bisexual (3.4%); and rather not say (2.5%). Lastly, among the students who participated in formal leadership programs, 4.2% were in a leadership minor, 4.0% were in a leadership major, and 11.9% were in a leadership certificate program. However, these demographics provided a partial picture. Most of this demographic information came from a 2006 multi-institutional study of leadership (MSL) survey. Current literature has not explicitly discussed the demographics of the leadership education landscape. Nonetheless, many individual leadership education studies have reflected this similar participation pattern in leadership programs (Brungardt, 2011; Buschlen & Johnson, 2014; Dugan & Komives, 2007, 2010; Dugan et al., 2009; Kodama & Dugan, 2013).

Learners' Developmental Preparedness

Next, the literature discussed necessary developmental and skill levels for leadership skill development. Although leader development has often been cited as a primary goal in many organizations, there are no validated general frameworks or theories of leader development, nor is there a way to determine who is developmentally ready to participate in such training (Keating et al., 2014). However, leadership studies have supported an overarching theory that leadership capacity, self-efficacy, and motivation are positively related (Correia-Harker & Dugan, 2020). Furthermore, a wealth of literature has outlined the cognitive, moral, and psychosocial developmental transformations students experience while in college (Engbers, 2006). These transformations affect the readiness of student engagement in developmental leadership experiences (Avolio & Hannah, 2008). Lastly, a body of literature has developed around student leadership identity development (Keating et al., 2014). Established by Komives et al. (2005), the leadership identity development (LID) model describes six stages of change in students' understanding of leadership and their own leadership goals and actions. The LID model connects how students conceptualize leadership practice to human development (Komives et al., 2006). Research on student leadership identities has suggested that students' understandings of leadership shift from a hierarchical to a collaborative mindset over time (Komives et al., 2005).

Learners' Understanding of Leadership

Lastly, I examined factors influencing learners' understanding and enactment of leadership the leadership literature. First, there are preexisting beliefs about what it means to be a leader. Societal norms and media representations lead students to hierarchical and leader-centric views of leadership instead of collaborative views (Haber, 2012). Through poor examples, learners often learn the opposite behaviors of good leadership (Rice, 2011). In addition, many

student leaders of color do not see themselves as leaders due to societal norms and past experiences (Arminio et al., 2000; Balón, 2005). Second, research has suggested the gender, race, age, and combination of identities of the students influence the way in which they understand leadership (Haber, 2012). Over the past decades, research has demonstrated the importance of both race and gender to a student's engagement in leadership processes, particularly in terms of leadership capacity and self-efficacy (Arminio et al., 2000; Cress et al., 2001; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Rosch et al., 2015). Across a broader literature base, women and people of color tend to use more collaborative approaches to leadership (Haber, 2012). Similar to race, many nonheterosexual students prefer leadership development in their identity communities and not campus programming (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). Despite these differences, students often think about leadership similarly regardless of race (Harber, 2012) and have capacity for socially responsible leadership (Dugan & Komives, 2007).

Summary of Leadership Education's Learners

Studies about learners have increased steadily in leadership education literature. Currently, these studies have focused on three main themes. First, the demographics of learners enrolling in leadership courses suggest one third of learners participate in leadership courses and are primarily white, straight women. The second is that the learner's psychosocial development affects their motivation to engage in leadership practices despite the inability to determine who is developmentally ready to participate in such training. Third, learners tend to have misconceptions about leadership, such as leadership only being hierarchical and leader-centric instead of collaborative.

However, literature on social justice-oriented leader development is scant. This study addressed this gap in the literature by providing data on the developmental level necessary to participate in these programs and the factors influencing learner engagement in these practices.

Leadership Education and Instructors

The instructor is the fifth element of the diversity inclusivity model. According to the model, instructors are responsible for planning and facilitating class (Nelson Laird, 2010). Historically, many classrooms operated under the old industrial paradigm where the instructor is a sage on the stage (King, 1993). In this context, instructors are viewed as neutral and arbiters of truth and knowledge. However, in multicultural education, each instructor brings their own identity, biases, beliefs, and values to the classroom (Nelson Laird, 2010), influencing the learning in a course. Leadership education literature has recognized the importance of the instructor in the leadership development process, and in the last 10 years, there has been increased scholarship on the "leadership educator." In the following section, I review three prominent themes on leadership educator literature.

Instructors' Demographics

First, the literature defined a leadership educator and surveyed the population's demographics. Leadership educators are "individuals in higher education instructional and/or programmatic roles who teach leadership in credit or non-credit based programs" (Seemiller & Priest, 2015, p. 133). Leadership educators are essential, with students expressing the importance of teachers, facilitators, administrators, and staff members in their development as leaders (Eich, 2008). Unlike other fields, leadership education typically finds educators in academic and student affairs, though student affairs offices generally house most of these programs (Dunn et al., 2019; Rost & Barker, 2000). Men tend to make up the instructors on the academic side,

whereas women most often teach in student affairs. In addition, over 85% of the leadership educators were white as of 2026 (Jenkins & Owens, 2016), even though it is not unusual for marginalized members of the academy, such as external consultants, lecturers, and adjunct faculty, to deliver leadership training (Snook et al., 2012, as cited by Jenkins & Owens, 2016). This practice aligns with the narrative that leadership education is a "game for amateurs" (Kellerman, 2018, as cited by Komives & Sowcik, 2020, p. 7) or "a loosely coupled collection of wildly diverse, well-intentioned, but poorly organized gaggle of scholars and practitioners" (Snook et al., 2012, as cited by Jenkins & Owens, 2016, p. xiv).

Instructors' Education and Training

Second, the literature discussed leadership educators' education and training. The background and preparation of collegiate leadership educators has received little attention (Dunn et al., 2019). Many leadership educators have master's or doctoral degrees, and most have completed coursework beyond their undergraduate education (Jenkins & Owens, 2016). Nevertheless, in Seemiller and Priest's (2017) study, many participants noted they received little to no training in leadership education, yet they worked as leadership educators very early in their careers. Unfortunately, due to the vast array of disciplinary backgrounds, individuals may not have had sufficient expertise to develop future leaders (Owen, 2012).

Leadership Educators' Identities

Third, a body of literature has developed around the leadership educator professional identity model. Developed by Seemiller and Priest (2015), leadership educator identity examines development through the four development spaces of professional identity and exploration, experimentation, validation, and confirmation. In the exploration space, a person explores leadership education and learn more about the profession. In the experimentation space, a person

participates in leadership education to determine if it fits their values, skills, and style. During the validation space, a person receives validation regarding their leadership identity. Finally, the confirmation space confirms a person as a member of the leadership education community. Through this work, scholars have recognized that leadership educators embody the dual roles of teacher and leader and the tension it creates (Seemiller & Priest, 2015). Therefore, there needs to be a greater understanding of how individuals view themselves as a leader, which can affect how one views themselves as a leadership educator (Seemiller & Priest, 2015).

Summary of Leadership Education's Instructors

The instructor plays a vital role in the learning process. In my review of leadership education literature, I identified central themes regarding leadership educators. First, a leadership educator is defined as one who teaches leadership. Demographic data suggest these educators are primarily white, housed in student affairs, and likely adjunct faculty. Second, the literature revealed that leadership instructors enter the field with little training or experience. Third, scholars developed the leadership educators professional identity model (Seemiller & Priest, 2015) to understand leadership instructors' professional development.

Although studies about instructors have increased in leadership education, there remains much more to learn about how instructors develop social justice-oriented leaders. This study addressed this gap in the literature. I provided data regarding a leadership program instructor's role, training, and behaviors in a leadership course aimed at developing social justice-oriented leaders.

Leadership Education and Pedagogy

The sixth element of the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) is pedagogy. Pedagogy is the second most referred element behind the element of content (Nelson Laird,

2010). Lattuca and Stark (2009) defined pedagogy as the process through which faculty teach and students learn. The term is also known as instructional processes, classroom processes, teaching methods, teaching strategies, or teaching activities. Pedagogy is not limited to just the strategies used to teach but also the theories or philosophies that inform the strategies (Nelson Laird, 2010). In leadership education, Jenkins (2012) noted most literature has focused on leadership studies programs as a whole and not so much on teaching methods, instructional strategies, or curriculum design.

Despite these challenges, leadership education has produced a lot of research over the years exploring the merits and challenges of specific pedagogies and practices (Jenkins, 2018). However, outlining these merits and challenges of these individual pedagogical strategies in an exhaustive list or a literature review was not the focus of this section. Instead, I explored four main themes in leadership education literature concerning pedagogy.

Pedagogical Frameworks

First, pedagogical frameworks are the "unseen leadership program architecture" (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018, p. 57). These frameworks are important because they shape how the educator designs, and the learner experiences, the curriculum. Creating better learning environments requires the use of effective pedagogical frameworks.

One of the first leadership education frameworks developed was the training, education, and development (TED) model (Roberts, 1981). Roberts differentiated between these three types of leadership and learned these types provided leadership educators a framework "to help in planning and delivering broad-based programs that meet the needs of all student leaders" (Roberts & Ullom, 1989, p. 67). Guthrie and Osteen (2012) expanded on this model and added engagement to the triad.

Conger (1992) developed a different framework after determining leadership development was accomplished in four main ways: (a) personal growth experiences, (b) feedback on performance, (c) conceptual understanding, and (d) skill-building experiences. Considered groundbreaking work, Conger categorized the approaches to leadership development (Hunt, 1996; Northouse, 2009, as cited by Allen & Harman, 2009; Yukl, 2002). Jenkins (2013) expanded upon this model and added three more categories, resulting the following framework: (a) skill building, (b) personal growth, (c) conceptual understanding and feedback, (d) traditional assessment, (e) research/observation conceptual understanding, (f) interactive conceptual understanding, and (g) class discussion.

Over the years, leadership educators have coalesced around the educational classification of educational goals and cognitive, affective, and psychomotor objectives. Northouse (2009) first outlined this consensus of leadership as traits, abilities, skills, and behaviors, with "Knowing, Doing, and Being" becoming a top catchphrase. Subsequently, leadership programs focused on developing students' knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes (Rosch & Anthony, 2012). Several years later, Allen et al. (2014) developed the know, see, plan, do model for leadership development. Allen et al. observed that "knowing" is not enough; learners must observe the conceptual knowledge in practice to connect theory to practice. In addition, Allen et al. contended that "doing" required learners to plan for the action or behavior. This process again allowed them to connect conceptual knowledge to the appropriate response.

In the last few years, a new pedagogical framework emerged in leadership education that built upon the work of the TED model and the "Knowing, Doing, and Being" triad. This model was called the leadership learning framework (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). The leadership learning framework comprises six leadership development aspects: knowledge, development, training,

observation, engagement, and metacognition. Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) provided leadership educators with a framework to center the student learning process.

Empirical studies on these frameworks and their effectiveness remain limited; however, no matter the preferred framework, the earlier scholars focused on making sure leadership educators were able to create effective learning environments where students could apply their learning outside the classroom.

Experiential and Active Learning

The second major pedagogical component of leadership education programs is experiential and active learning. Active learning is "involving students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing" (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, as cited by Jenkins, 2013, p. 59). Active learning pedagogical strategies include games, role play, and simulations (Jenkins, 2013). Experiential learning is the "process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill, and value from direct experience (Luckmann, 1996, p. 6). Pedagogical activities include internships, community service projects, mentoring, and individual leadership projects (Ayman et al., 2003). Experiential and active learning are essential because leadership is an applied discipline; leaders learn from experience and gain experience from doing. Such an understanding is the essence of experiential and active learning. Experiential learning allows students to connect their learning to their personal experiences, engaging them on emotional, physical, and cognitive levels. This connection makes experiential and active learning one of the hallmarks of leadership education pedagogical practices.

Sources of Learning

The third theme was the sources of learning. Sources of learning refer to the strategies, techniques, or activities used by instructors to foster student learning (Allen & Hartman, 2008).

Sources of learning are essential because the success or failure of learning is contingent on the strategies, techniques, and activities implemented by instructors (Allen & Hartman, 2009). As such, identifying the sources and their effectiveness is vital to leadership education. Allen and Hartman (2009) identified sources of learning that aligned with the four approaches of leadership education. The researchers built upon the work of Conger (1992), who identified the four main approaches to developing leaders: (a) personal growth, (b) conceptual understanding, (c) feedback, and (d) skill building. Allen and Hartman created a series of scholarly works and provided leadership educators with the tools that enhanced their leadership education programs. Overall, Allen and Hartman identified 40 sources of learning commonly used in leadership education programs, including service learning, journal reflection, films, case studies, 360-degree feedback, personality questionnaires, icebreakers, and role playing. Jenkins (2013) expanded on Allen and Hartman's work and investigated how often leadership educators used specific sources of learning. Instructors favored strategies and activities that emphasized class discussion, forms of conceptual understanding, and personal growth and rarely used skill-building instructional strategies (Jenkins, 2013).

Signature Pedagogy

Finally, though instructors use many sources of learning in leadership education programs, specific pedagogies are ubiquitous in the field (i.e., signature pedagogies). Jenkins (2012) defined signature pedagogies as "forms of instruction that leap to mind when we first think about the preparation of members of particular professions" (p. 6). Signature pedagogies are important because they codify "what counts as knowledge in a field, how things become known, and how knowledge is analyzed, criticized, accepted, or discarded" (Jenkins, 2012, p. 6). In undergraduate and graduate leadership education programs, the class discussion and its

variations are the signature pedagogy (Jenkins 2012, 2018; Odom, 2015). For leadership education, class-based discussions allow learners to practice leadership skills such as listening, speaking, and meaning-making (Eich, 2008) while undergoing the leadership process (Jenkins, 2013). Additional signature pedagogies for undergraduate leadership programs include projects and presentations, self-assessments and instruments, and critical reflection (Jenkins, 2012).

Summary of Leadership Education's Pedagogy

Regarding curriculum development, instructors must consider pedagogy elements. In leadership education, there are four main themes related to pedagogy. One way in which scholars have discussed pedagogy is as a philosophical approach or framework. The second theme in the literature focused on the importance of experimental and active learning. Next, the literature focused on the sources of learning, or, in other words, the strategies, techniques, or activities used to teach learners. Finally, the literature highlighted the signature pedagogy of leadership education: the class discussion.

However, there are gaps in the literature. Very few studies have explored the pedagogy required to develop social justice-oriented leaders. I addressed this gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence regarding pedagogical approaches, sources of learning, and signature pedagogy in leadership education programs focused on developing social justice-oriented leaders.

Leadership Education and Classroom Environments

The seventh element of the diversity inclusivity model is the classroom environment. The classroom environment is both the physical space in which a course is held and the interaction that occurs in that space, including the values, norms, ethos, and experiences of the course (Nelson Laird, 2010). Other names have included classroom dynamics, management,

community, interaction, and learning environment. No matter the name, student understanding is primarily driven by what happens in the classroom (Oberg & Andenoro, 2019). Therefore, how students and instructors react to the content and process that content in a class shapes their environment.

Leadership education literature regarding the classroom environment defined by this framework is scarce; however, the few studies that do exist examined other variables, and the classroom environment played a part in shaping those variables. Based on the existing literature, four significant themes shape the classroom environment.

The Role of the Instructor

First, the role of the instructor shapes the classroom environment. Webb and Barrett (2014) reviewed literature on various instructor behaviors associated with positive classroom outcomes, such as humor, fairness, and rapport building. Eich (2008) revealed students in leadership programs appreciated when instructors modeled leadership qualities such as reducing status differences, asking thought-provoking questions, sharing their stories and experiences, and mentoring outside the program. In contrast, a lack of instructors' presence negatively impacted student experience and lowered motivation, satisfaction, and perceived levels of learning (Richardson & Swan, 2003, as cited by Downing, 2016). Therefore, instructors who have a relationship with students often help students feel more confident and motivated to succeed (Oberg & Andenoro, 2019).

Supportive Yet Challenging Environment

Second, a supportive yet challenging environment is essential. According to Eich (2008), this type of culture was crucial in a student leadership program, and this culture developed from the program participants themselves. As part of the environment, students felt courageous,

stepped outside their comfort zone, and took risks (Eich, 2008). Students also established trust with themselves and others by confronting crucial issues, being vulnerable, and being honest, (Eich, 2008).

Role of the Learners

Third, there is the role of learners in creating the classroom environment, especially the diversity of learners. The literature is clear: Students who report spending time with diverse peers are more open to listening to diverse perspectives and challenging their beliefs (Pascarella et al., 1996, as cited by Hurtado, 2001). In addition, students participating in racially or ethnically diverse learning groups have reported cross-racial friendships outside these groups (Slavin, 1995, as cited by Hurtado, 2001). Therefore, it is important that students have the opportunity to engage with others and discuss topics from multiple perspectives (Priest & de Campos Paula, 2016).

Classroom Environment Challenges

Although the classroom environment is integral to the success of learning, there are challenges in creating a positive learning environment. First, in leadership education literature, scholars have recognized that most development regarding leadership happens in what Day et al. (2014) called “white space” (p. 80), or the events and situations outside the classroom (Allen & Hartman, 2009; Brungardt, 1996; Day et al., 2014; Hartman et al., 2015; Huber, 2002; Rost & Barker, 2000). Second, class logistics such as room size, number of students, and course duration affect the classroom environment (Odom, 2015). Lastly, the presence of diverse backgrounds in a classroom is an essential but insufficient component of a positive learning environment (Hurtado, 2001). It is more important that the instructor has the skills to capitalize on the

strengths of the diverse learners (Hurtado, 2001) and handle complex and sometimes controversial conversations that arise in these classrooms (Jenkins, 2012; Wilson, 2013).

Summary of Leadership Education's Classroom Environment

The classroom environment is vital to the learning process. There are four main themes related to the classroom environment in leadership education. First, the instructor plays a vital role in producing a positive learning environment. Second, a challenging and supportive culture fosters personal growth and development for students. Third, a class with a diverse student enrollment leads to more cross-racial friendships, greater acceptance of diverse ideas, and an ability to challenge their beliefs (Hurtado, 2001). Fourth, outside classroom learning, classroom logistics, and a diverse classroom population challenge positive classroom environments.

However, there are gaps in the literature. Very few studies in leadership education have examined the classroom environment required to develop social justice-oriented leaders. This study addressed this gap in the literature. I provided empirical evidence about essential classroom environment elements in leadership education programs focused on developing social justice-oriented leaders.

Leadership Education and Assessment

The eighth element of the diversity inclusivity model is assessment. Some scholars have argued that "true education cannot be measured" (Barr & Tagg, 1995, as cited by Owen, 2011, p. 18); however, assessment is an integral part of the education accountability landscape. In the diversity inclusivity model, assessment refers to the formal and informal methods used to determine student learning (Nelson Laird, 2010). Assessments should reveal what students have learned rather than memorized (National Research Council, 2000, as cited by Oberg & Andenoro, 2019). Educators can use effective assessments to determine how well students

understand the course content (Oberg & Andenoro, 2019). Not a single evaluation method eliminates all potential biases; therefore, instructors are encouraged to use various methods and be aware of the potential biases in the methods they use (Banks, 2006, as cited by Nelson Laird, 2010). Students' various backgrounds and the diverse ways in which they demonstrate understanding are considered in diverse evaluation methods (Nelson Laird, 2010).

There is a growing body of literature on assessment in leadership education. Assessment happens at individual, program, or institutional levels (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018), but the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) focuses specifically on individual-level assessment. The leadership education literature identified three main types of individual-level assessment: direct, indirect, and competency-based. The following section contains synthesized literature on these three types of assessment.

Direct Assessment

The first type of individual-level assessment is direct assessment, which is the observable use of the ability under consideration (Ewell, 2002, as cited by Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). Direct assessments of the learner focus on the cognitive and behavioral domains of learning. Common activities for direct assessment include tests, oral presentations, demonstrations, case studies, simulations, and feedback (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). These activities are viewed as more credible but lack the authenticity of real-world scenarios (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018).

Jenkins (2018, 2020) examined undergraduate and graduate level leadership educators' assessment strategy choices. In these studies, direct assessment was the most used assessment in leadership education. The top five direct assessment strategies included research projects and presentations, short papers, term papers, student peer assessments, group projects and presentations. However, graduate and undergraduate strategies varied. Graduate-level leadership

courses preferred term papers, group projects and presentations, and research projects and presentations, whereas undergraduate leadership courses preferred group projects, presentations, exams, and term papers. Simulations and quizzes were not commonly used at either level (Jenkins, 2018, 2020).

Indirect Assessment

The second level of individual assessment is indirect assessment. This type of assessment is usually student-derived and focuses on the student's feelings and perceptions (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). Typical activities include reflections, interviews, portfolios, personality inventories, and self-evaluation (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). These assessments also focus on the affective domain of learning and are valuable for assessing leadership efficacy. Literature has highlighted the importance of leadership efficacy in leadership development (Ardoin & Guthrie, 2021; Correia-Harker & Dugan, 2020; Day & O'Connor, 2003; Keating et al., 2014; Kodama & Dugan, 2013).

Again, Jenkins's (2018, 2020) studies provided insight into the prevalence of indirect assessments in leadership education courses. Indirect assessments tend to be used less frequently than direct assessments. Out of the 16 assessments identified by Jenkins (2018), indirect assessments occupied the bottom half of the list except for self-assessment strategies. Exams and quizzes were the only two direct assessments that scored below all the indirect assessment strategies. Indirect assessments were more commonly used in undergraduate leadership courses than graduate courses. These undergraduate-level leadership courses included class participation, attendance, and reflective journals in grading more frequently than graduate leadership programs, whereas graduate-level leadership courses valued individual leadership development plans. Neither undergraduate nor graduate level leadership courses valued video creation.

Leadership Competencies

Leadership competencies are the third level of individual assessment. Seemiller (2016) defined leadership competencies as the "knowledge, values, abilities (skills or motivations), and behaviors that contribute to one's effectiveness in a role or task" (p. 94). Competencies measure students' developed leadership skills and are used as benchmarks across individuals and programs (McDaniel, 2002, as cited by Seemiller, 2016). Seemiller's (2013) model tapped into the cognitive, behavioral, and affective learning domains. Competency models are a comprehensive method that use indirect assessment strategies and assess them in a direct assessment fashion. This assessment is executed through rubrics, checklists, or expert panels to assess indirect assessments such as reflection papers, interviews, or group discussions (Allen & Shehane, 2016; Preston & Peck, 2016). Accordingly, literature has continued to emerge regarding the use of leadership competencies.

Summary of Leadership Education's Assessment

Assessment and evaluation are important in the educational accountability landscape. Although there are various types and levels of assessment and evaluation, the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) focuses on the individual level of assessment. In leadership education literature, there are three central themes regarding this level of assessment: direct, indirect, and leadership competencies. Direct assessments are common assessments such as tests, papers, and other graded assignments. Indirect assessments include reflection papers and portfolios, which focus more on learners' thoughts, feelings, and creativity. Leadership competencies assess knowledge, values, and abilities through indirect strategies in a standardized way, such as rubrics.

Although studies about assessment have increased in leadership education, there is more to learn about the types and uses of assessment strategies, especially regarding developing social justice-oriented leaders. This study addressed this gap in the literature by providing data on the types of assessment strategies used in leadership programs to develop social justice-oriented leaders.

Leadership Education and Adjustment

The ninth and final element of the diversity inclusivity model is adjustment. Adjustment entails altering plans during a course (Nelson Laird, 2010). This element is vital because it is common for instructors to adjust their course plans after the course begins (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). During these situations, adjustment calls for reevaluating the course design and making adjustments that address the moment and meet learning goals (Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Nelson Laird, 2010). As instructors become more responsive to the classroom environment and adjust the curriculum, the course should become more inclusive, and the curriculum should be better equipped to accomplish the course objectives (Nelson Laird, 2010).

However, very little is written in leadership education literature about adjustments. Instead, literature in other fields provided glimpses into the events that may cause instructors to adjust their courses. In the following section, I review the three prominent themes on leadership educators in the literature.

Challenge, Dissent, and Resistance

First, in the communication studies literature, I found a few studies that examined the primary causes of dissent in a classroom, the types of dissent (Goodboy, 2011), how students challenge instructors in classrooms (Simonds, 1997), and five types of disruptive classroom incidents according to students (Chesebro & Lyon, 2020). Goodboy (2011) identified the

primary causes for student dissent as instructors' bad grading and teaching practices (e.g., unfair grading, poor teaching style, violation of the syllabus, lack of feedback). Next, Simonds (1997) revealed (a) how students challenged instructors regarding testing procedures and grading (i.e., evaluation), (b) the relevance of the course or assignments (i.e., practical), (c) the classroom rules and norms (i.e., procedural), and (d) the behavior of the instructor or other learners (i.e., power). In addition, Goodboy (2011) uncovered three types of student dissent: expressive dissent, or the venting of feelings; rhetorical dissent, or the persuasive argument to change behavior; and vengeful dissent, or the infliction of harm. Chesebro and Lyon (2020) identified using phones, disrupting class, cheating, responding to student challenges, and managing heated and controversial discussions as five types of disruptive incidents, according to students.

Dissent happens through resistance, and leadership education studies published in the last 3 years have focused on student resistance to the learning experience in the classroom (Taylor & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Wiborg, 2022; Wiborg et al., 2024). Resistance is defined as the "verbal, cognitive, or physical, which is in opposition to either someone or something" (Wiborg et al., 2024, p. 141). Although resistance can be an uncomfortable experience, it is an opportunity for deeper learning and engagement of both the learners and instructors (Wiborg et al., 2024).

No matter the cause of the adjustment, how the instructor handles it is essential. Students expect instructors to handle these adjustments and not express negative reactions to them (Chesebro & Lyon, 2020). Wiborg et al. (2024) provided strategies to deal with resistance in the classroom, such as teachable moments.

Teachable Moments

The second type of event is the teachable moment. Mills (2009) defined a teachable moment as "a moment in class when an instructor perceives that a student has made a connection between the content of a particular class session and something outside the instructor's original plans for the class" (p. 6). In addition to defining teachable moments, Mills determined the elements of a teachable moment and identified the factors that contribute or interfere with these moments. Sun (2015) examined teaching moments in K–12 math classrooms and noticed years of experience did not increase the chances of teachable moments in the classroom. Instead, teachable moments tended to be more frequent when the teacher pursued student thinking, an approach where the teacher asks the student questions to understand what the student meant. Lastly, Willingham and Darby (2003) examined the ways faculty and community partners viewed and used teaching moments in service learning. Faculty members used teachable moments to challenge student thinking, whereas community partners used these moments to inform students about the profession.

Transitions as Adjustments

The third type of event that leads to adjustments include transitions, such as transitioning a course from an in-person to online format (Sousa, 2021) or teaching during the COVID-19 global pandemic (Ogletree & Diaz Beltran, 2021). Another form of this type of adjustment may involve compressing a course from a full semester to a compressed or summer term (Kretovics et al., 2005). Again, very little is known about these types of adjustments in the literature.

Using Adjustments in Decision Making

Very little is known about how instructors use these moments to make adjustments. Most of the literature on "critical incidents" or "critical moments" has ranged from active shooter drills

to student dissent in the classroom. In these cases, the studies focused more on creating teachable moments and responding to them versus exploring how instructors make adjustments in the future. In leadership education literature, critical incidents must deal with the learner or instructors in their self-discovery as leaders (Seemiller & Priest, 2015) rather than the classroom moments when instructors change their practices. None of the literature I found focused on how instructors use this information to make adjustments.

Summary of Leadership Education's Adjustments

Instructors adjust their courses all the time, as events happen in the classroom that require the instructors to alter their plans. Three types of events cause course adjustments, starting with the theme of challenges, dissent, and resistance. An example includes learners complaining about grading or withdrawing from discussions on polarizing topics, such as racism or abortion. Next, teachable moments are the moments when the stars align and learners make connections to the content. The third theme deals with significant transitions, such as the COVID-19 global pandemic. This theme has received the least attention in the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010); therefore, scholars know little about how instructors make these adjustments.

Existing literature has yet to provide insight into how instructors use critical incidents to make adjustments or influence their decisions for the future. This study addressed this gap in the literature. Student dissent is common due to the controversial nature of social justice, and critical incidents occur in this environment. Therefore, this study provided empirical evidence regarding how instructors use these incidents to adjust the course in their attempts to improve the development of social justice-oriented leaders.

Conclusion

Limited research has examined how instructors design and facilitate student leadership courses that develop social justice-oriented leaders. K–12 educational leadership literature is burgeoning with multiple frameworks and models for developing social justice-oriented leaders. This study filled the knowledge gap about social justice-oriented leaders' development in higher education. I identified the factors that determined how instructors design and facilitate social justice-oriented leadership courses.

In this chapter, I situated this study in literature on leadership education. Using the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) as a guide, I delved into literature based on the nine elements of the model. The nine elements provided a schema of variables and guided my exploration and examination of these curricula. The literature confirmed that very little research has explored this topic. Therefore, this study addressed the gaps in literature. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodological approach and design.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology for this qualitative study about how instructors designed and facilitated social justice-oriented leadership courses. The following sections first outline the research question and my positionality. Next, I provide an overview of the methodology, research design, and participants. The chapter concludes with sections on data collection and analysis. By the end of the chapter, I demonstrate how my research method was appropriate for studying the curriculum of college leadership courses designed to develop social justice-oriented leaders.

Research Question

As stated in Chapter 1, this study improved understandings of how social justice-oriented leadership course instructors develop their curricula. I was guided by the following research question:

- What factors determine how instructors design and facilitate social justice-oriented leadership courses?

This research question explored the existing and emergent worlds of social justice-oriented student leadership programs by focusing on "how do" instructors design their courses and "what" influences their decisions. The diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) discussed in Chapter 1 provided the framework to examine course curriculum from a diversity perspective and determined which factors to examine. Social justice is increasingly important within leadership education (Chunoo et al., 2020; Harper & Kezar, 2021; Jones et al., 2016; Museus et al., 2017), this research question explored the experiences and reasons why instructors felt motivated to include certain curricular elements in their social justice leadership courses.

Positionality

This positionality statement reflects the interplay between my personal background and professional motivations, which have shaped my research interests and approach to leadership education. As an African American, gay, cisgender man from an upper middle-class family with an elite college education, I understand the challenges of holding both identities of privilege and marginalization. I became aware of this sort of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1994) during my master's studies and continued this exploration during my doctoral studies. During this time, I developed a critical consciousness that allowed me to see the evident systems of privilege and oppression. Such a new awareness made me cognizant of the tensions and navigational challenges involved in addressing privilege and marginalization in society, and this revelation sparked my interest in social justice work. I became acutely aware that my rights, well-being, and humanity depended on the viewpoints and actions of those in leadership positions.

I became interested in exploring this research topic after teaching my first student leadership course during my doctoral studies. It was the first fall term after Donald Trump was elected president in 2016. Emotions were raw and tensions high. I wanted to use the course as an opportunity for students to expand their thinking; wrestle with; and navigate the challenges, nuances, and gravitas of leadership. The goal was to infuse social justice principles, topics, and activities into the course; however, achieving this goal was easier said than done. At the time, I was not aware of leadership guidebooks or research. My limited training and understanding of leadership education led me to bumble, stumble, and tumble during the semester. There were great moments when I facilitated a values exercise to demonstrate completing values. Other times, I made mistakes, especially when conversations around race, privilege, and systems of power arose.

After that semester, I reflected on my under preparedness for the course. It would have been helpful to have a roadmap to understand how other instructors designed and facilitated their social justice-oriented leadership course. These challenges taught me the importance of being both a facilitator and a learner in the classroom, emphasizing the need for continuous self-education and adaptability in leadership education.

I was motivated to conduct this research because I desire to live in an equitable and inclusive society. Consequently, I want to do my part to create this society, and one way to achieve this goal is to educate the next generation of leaders. I believe in the transformative power of education. Education has long been important in my life, and I want to pass this feeling along to the next generation. I firmly believe college students are the future leaders of society. College students should be exposed to these concepts and principles during their collegiate years and foster them in their personal and professional lives.

By acknowledging and reflecting on my positionality, I aimed to conduct research that was ethical, authentic, and respectful of diverse perspectives. I was aware that my perspective could introduce biases inadvertently, particularly when focusing on issues that reflected my identity or notions of social justice rather than a broader array of perspectives. I mitigated potential bias by engaging in regular self-reflection and data triangulation. My goal was to contribute meaningfully to the field of leadership education.

Methodology

A qualitative study is appropriate when the research goal is "finding out what people do, know, think, and feel" (Patton, 2002, p. 145) about the phenomenon of interest. In qualitative inquiry, individuals describe their thoughts, opinions, and convictions about real-world phenomena based on their experiences (Patton, 2002). Qualitative studies answer why and how a

particular phenomenon may occur and identify themes, patterns, and insights into the human experience (Bhattacharya, 2017; Patton, 2002). Qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or experience and collects all the relevant information to understand that experience (Bhattacharya, 2017). A qualitative approach was the most appropriate because the purpose of this study was to explore and understand the choices leadership educators made when designing and facilitating social justice-oriented leadership courses.

Research Design

This qualitative study was performed using a basic exploratory qualitative study design. First, the design was exploratory because I examined a topic with relatively little literature. Due to the lack of literature, the goal was to familiarize myself with the basic facts, settings, and contexts of social justice-oriented courses to paint an accurate picture of the current landscape (Neuman, 2006). To accomplish this goal, "what" was the focus of exploratory research (Neuman, 2006). This study's "what" question was: What factors determine how instructors design and facilitate a social justice-oriented leadership course? An exploratory design was fitting based on the goals and focus of this study.

Second, this qualitative study was "basic" because its structure did not adhere to the dimensions of the five common approaches used in qualitative research—case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology (Merriam, 2009). However, the use of the word "basic" is misleading. Merriam (2009) believed basic was the best word to describe a type of study rooted in constructionism, where interpreting meaning is the fundamental purpose. Basic qualitative design is commonplace in applied research fields such as education, health, and business (Merriam, 2009). In this study, I explored how instructors

interpreted what it meant to be a social justice-oriented leader and how they constructed a course to develop these leaders. A basic design was applicable based on the goals and focus of this study.

Participants

Population

This study's population consisted of instructors who taught courses in student leadership programs in higher education. The purpose was to understand how these instructors designed and facilitated their courses using the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010). According to the International Leadership Association's (ILA, n.d.) online directory, there were over 1,110 student leadership programs as of 2024. These programs included academic majors and minors, a single course, a series of workshops, off-campus retreats, and more (Komives et al., 2011). ILA also included undergraduate and graduate programs and students, though at the time of the study, there were no estimates of how many instructors taught these courses.

Sample Technique

From the instructor population of student leadership programs, I targeted instructors who taught courses that aimed to develop social justice-oriented leaders. Not all student leadership courses or programs had this purpose; therefore, I used nonrandom purposive and snowball sampling for this study. Nonrandom purposive sampling is a common choice for qualitative studies because it allows for selecting cases that are "information rich and illuminative" (Patton, 2002, p. 230) and provides insight into the phenomenon of interest. My phenomenon of interest was student leadership course curriculum that trains a specific type of leader; therefore, a nonrandom purposive sampling was appropriate for this study.

Sample Criteria

The five criteria when sampling instructors of student leadership courses for this study included the following.

A. The course had to be a leadership course. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of leadership, it is not uncommon for academic leadership programs to list courses from other departments that met the academic requirements. Regardless of the department or discipline, the instructor's course had to focus on leadership as the topic of inquiry.
B. The course had to be an undergraduate course.
C. The course had to be a semester long, for-credit leadership course.
D. The course had to have been taught within the 2021–2023 academic years.
E. The course had to focus on developing social justice-oriented leaders. The title or course description determined if a course met this criterion. The 2020–2025 National Leadership Education Research Agenda defined social justice as a process and goal that "required bringing issues of power, privilege, and oppression as well as notions of social location, identity, and intersectionality to the fore of leadership learning" (Chunoo et al., 2000, p. 46). Therefore, the title or course description had to explicitly mention social justice, equity, power, privilege, or oppression.

There were three reasons that limited my search to undergraduate-level courses. First, these courses were usually listed on a public website. Such information made it easier to find these courses, their descriptions, and their instructors. Second, undergraduate-level academic courses tended to meet the first sample criteria of being a semester-long, for-credit course. I sought experiences that were conducted over a sustained period rather than being a one-time experience, such as a 1-day workshop. Third, most leadership education literature focused on

undergraduate leadership programs. Subsequently, my focus on undergraduate academic leadership programs was the best option to find course instructors with similar experiences who could provide insights into the phenomena I studied.

Sample Identification

I first identified instructors using ILA's (n.d.) leadership education program directory. The ILA directory contains a search function to filter programs by specific criteria such as degree level or delivery method. I searched for undergraduate-level programs in leadership with keywords such as social justice, equity, and inclusion. After I had the search results, I reviewed the respective course catalog for each program. I looked for courses that explicitly used social justice or any related keywords in the course title or description, according to the fifth sample criterion. I also identified courses through a simple Google search, where I searched for academic majors and minors in leadership. After I had the Google search results, I reviewed the course catalog for courses that explicitly used social justice in the course title or description.

I then identified participants through snowball sampling (Patton, 2002). If any potential participant stated they could not participate, I followed up by asking them for a list of potential participants. Several participants provided me a list of instructors to contact. In addition, at the end of every interview, I sent a follow-up email asking them for potential participants. Lastly, I solicited participants on the National Leadership Clearinghouse listserv to identify these courses. This community is dedicated to leadership learning, development initiatives, and advancing scholarship and opportunities for leadership educators. Once potential participants contacted me with their interest, I confirmed their course met the criteria, especially the fifth sample criterion. In addition, I requested their syllabus to review.

There were three main challenges identifying sample courses and participants. First, though the websites listed the course, some academic programs listed courses that were no longer offered because they had not updated their website within the last 2 academic years. Second, I only examined leadership courses that aimed to develop social justice-oriented leaders. Academic programs listed sociology, psychology, or education courses related to social justice, yet if those courses fell outside the context of leadership, they did not meet the sample criteria. Third, the backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives swept across the nation when I began my study. At the start of my study in 2023, many states introduced legislation to ban DEI efforts on college campuses. As such, I could no longer find certain leadership program that had populated in the original ILA search when I went to their website. In addition, leadership educators have marginalized identities, and it is not uncommon for them to teach social justice-oriented leadership courses. The aforementioned changes in the sociopolitical landscape may have influenced participants' willingness to respond or participate in the study.

Sample Recruitment and Size

The final sample size was 14 instructors for this study. My initial search on the ILA (n.d.) database and subsequent Google search returned 16 potential undergraduate-level courses focused on developing social justice-oriented leaders. After reviewing their respective websites, I identified and contacted 19 instructors. I emailed the instructors and invited them to participate in the study. If I did not receive a response, I followed up with the potential participants twice. Once the instructors agreed to participate in the study, I confirmed with them that their course met the sample criteria. Five participants participated in my study using this recruitment method. One of the original instructors whom I contacted did not have time to participate, but they gave me a list of potential participants. After contacting these individuals, I received three more

participants. One of those participants provided a list of names, and one additional person joined my study. Finally, another five participants joined the study after advertising my study on the National Leadership Clearinghouse email group.

Sample Description

The demographic breakdown of the participants followed: Eight of the 14 participants identified as men, six as women, and none as nonbinary. The participants' racial and ethnic breakdown was 11 White, one African American/Black, one Asian/Asian American, and two Hispanic/Latino. Representation of sexual orientation, ability, or other identity statuses were not collected for this study. Most participants had attained high levels of education and experience; ten had doctoral degrees and the other four had master's degrees. Seven of the 14 participants had 11 or more years of experience and only three had 4 or fewer years. The remaining four participants had between 5 and 10 years of experience.

The sample included a broad selection of programs and course types. Five courses were offered as a single course in a leadership major or minor academic program, four as a single leadership course in a nonleadership academic program, and five as part of a leadership cohort or learning community program. Courses ranged from 1–3 credits in both semester and quarter systems. Two of the courses offered an online-only section. The leadership courses' home departments and institutional settings were also vast. In all, 11 participants taught leadership courses in academic departments, two taught in a joint venture between academic and student affairs units, and the final participant taught in an institute. Most participants taught at public universities, six at extensive research institutions, and three at public regional institutions. Five of the participants taught at private institutions, and only one of the institutions had a religious affiliation. A good mix of leadership courses was also represented in this study. Though some

institutional types, such as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and community colleges, were missing, this sample represented the demographics of leadership education instructors according to previous studies (Dunn et al., 2019; Jenkins & Owens, 2016).

Data Collection

Patton (2002) asserted qualitative inquiry springs from three data types: interviews, observations, and documents. For this study, interviews were the primary data type. I considered this study's purpose and research questions to determine which data to gather. Interviews provided the most detailed and explicit information about the curriculum of student leadership courses.

Interviewing aimed to understand a phenomenon and provided descriptive and interpretive information to uncover what could not be observed directly (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Interviews revealed "what's in a person's mind," such as experiences, feelings, intentions, and thoughts (Patton, 2002). Interviewing allows interviewers to learn another person's perspective with the assumption that this perspective was "meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Research interviews are often viewed as "professional conversations" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 2) between interviewer and interviewee, focused on themes the interviewer chose, but with the assumption that the interviewee would also find the themes interesting. Even though interviewers might have sought basic facts, explanations, and statistics, they are often more interested in nuanced descriptions of phenomena (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Understanding the perspectives of instructors who taught these courses was vital because I sought to identify and understand various programs' student leadership curricula that developed social justice-oriented leaders.

This study used semistructured qualitative interviews and allowed follow-up questions to discover the nuances of the experiences revealed during the conversations. Though the interviews were semistructured, I used an interview question protocol as a guide, which I developed based on the nine curricular elements of the diversity inclusivity model. The interview protocol is in the appendix and provided a guide to ensure all interviews had the same line of questions between all interviewees (Patton, 2002).

All interviewees volunteered to participate in the study. I conducted interviews using video-call software (i.e., Zoom). Each instructor was interviewed once. The names used in Chapter 4 are pseudonyms chosen by the participants. To honor their time and effort, participants received a $50 gift card.

Data Analysis

This study used deductive analysis, which, in qualitative research, refers to building themes, categories, and ideas from preexisting frameworks or using predetermined categories (Patton, 2002). Because I used the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) as the framework, the nine curricular elements served as predetermined categories to bundle the themes, categories, and ideas. Therefore, the nine curricular elements were the unit of analysis and completed the deductive analysis.

There were five steps in this process that were adapted from the outline provided by Bhattacharya (2017). First, I read the transcripts and documents collected and became familiar with the data. During this time, I wrote research memos to reflect on my hunches, questions, and subjectivities that arose. Second, I pulled words, phrases, and paragraphs that stood out during the first coding round. Third, I categorized these words, phrases, and paragraphs based on descriptive, theoretical, or conceptual similarities and themes. Fourth, I compared these codes

with existing literature on diversity education. After comparing the codes, I identified commonalities and differences between the previous literature and new ideas that emerged from these data. In the fifth step of the process, I shared these codes and findings with a peer to confirm the ideas and discuss new possibilities about the data revealed.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the study's methods and research design that I used to answer the following research question: What factors determine how instructors design and facilitate social justice-oriented leadership courses? This study used a basic exploratory qualitative study design to identify and understand the curricula of leadership courses that developed social justice-oriented leaders. Purposeful and snowball sampling identified 14 student leadership course instructors who met the aforementioned criteria. Next, there were 1–2-hour long interviews with each course instructor. After transcribing the interviews, I analyzed the data and discovered the themes for each of the nine elements described in the diversity inclusivity model. I also identified the themes related to factors influencing the curriculum design. This study gave a greater understanding of how leadership educators developed social justice-oriented courses.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings of my study, which aimed to understand how instructors design and facilitate social justice-oriented leadership courses. The following research question guided my study: What factors determine how instructors design and facilitate social justice-oriented leadership courses? I used the diversity inclusivity framework (Nelson Laird, 2010) to answer the research question. The framework identifies nine elements to examine where diversity occurs in a course. These elements include purpose and goals, content, foundations and perspectives, learners, instructors, pedagogy, environment, assessment and evaluation, and adjustment (Nelson Laird, 2010). For each of these elements, I report the thematic analysis to identify common themes articulated by participants during their interviews.

This chapter is not exhaustive in describing all the themes that emerged from the data. Instead, I draw attention to the themes that answered the research question because they related specifically to the social justice-orientation aspect of the course. The social justice descriptor differentiated the course focus from other types of leadership. Across the nine curricular elements, my findings revealed four primary factors determining how instructors designed and facilitated their social justice-oriented leadership courses: (a) beliefs and values, (b) knowledge, (c) skills, and (d) attributes. The various themes identified within each of the nine curricular elements coalesced into these four factors. In the following sections, I discuss the themes under each category in more detail.

Factor 1: Beliefs and Values

One determining factor was the instructors' beliefs and values. The guiding belief was that leadership is social justice, and social justice is leadership. Several identified themes

corroborated this belief when participants discussed the diversity inclusivity model's curricular element of purpose and perspective (Nelson Laird, 2010). Additional themes included (a) the intersection of leadership and social justice, (b) the postindustrial leadership perspective, (c) social justice education pedagogy, and (d) critical thinking and critical theory. I discuss each theme in the following sections.

Leadership = Social Justice = Leadership

Most participants shared an interesting overarching philosophy that guided and influenced the design of their social justice-oriented leadership courses. Participants believed leadership is social justice, and social justice is leadership—they are one and the same. This theme emerged when participants discussed the curricular element of foundations and perspectives. Will articulated this principle as follows:

> I think in terms of philosophies or beliefs that those two are the same, that leadership and equity work are not things that we combine because they're the same. . . . It's paramount that we define leadership, that social justice is a part of that. It is not something extra that we do.

Januaryone expanded upon this idea. He argued leadership is the pathway toward social justice when he stated:

> Social justice is both an outcome and a process. The outcome is a democratically participatory society in which all members feel protected by the rules that we coconstruct. The process, then, is everything we do in service to get to that place.

These two quotes underscored the connection between social justice and leadership according to participants, who stressed that social justice is not an add-on. It is essential to leadership because leadership is the process of achieving equitable outcomes.

The Intersection of Social Justice and Leadership

Because participants had an overarching belief that leadership is social justice, they believed the purpose of a social justice-oriented leadership course was to discuss the intersection of social justice and leadership. This theme was different from the overarching belief that leadership is social justice. Though participants had the belief that leadership is social justice, participants shared they did not impose this belief on learners. Instead, this theme described how participants presented the belief to learners, naturally implementing the belief that leadership is social justice.

Discussing social justice topics and leadership concepts separately is easy common; however, this approach is incomplete, especially if the core belief is that leadership is social justice and social justice is leadership. A few participants expressed that there is an explicit, direct connection between social justice and leadership for learners. It cannot be assumed learners will automatically make that connection. Januaryone stated this intersection superbly, noting:

> It's a course in social justice leadership, so there must be some intersection between the two things that we just described. So, if they are designed to intersect, where do those intersection points exist? What do they consist of? How do we identify them? What role can leaders play in social justice processes? But then, how does social injustice or the social dynamics of justice impact how leaders grow, develop, and practice their craft? Whenever I teach this course or courses like it, that's the minimum guarantee I make to students. You'll understand what social justice is and have the language behind it. You'll understand leadership and the ideas behind it, and we will find for you where your leadership intersects with your understanding of social justice and social change.

Januaryone's statement demonstrated the importance of the intersection of social justice and leadership. However, it might not be evident to some leaders how they contribute to social injustices. Subsequently, a social justice-oriented course examines how social justice and leadership are connected, intertwined, and synonymous.

Postindustrial Leadership Perspective

The core belief that leadership is social justice reflected a postindustrial perspective on leadership. Participants rejected the industrial paradigm of leadership that focuses on, as Suzann said, "power centric, masculine centric, white centric, western centric, all of the things that are normalized in our current societies." Instead, participants expressed this postindustrial perspective as "leadership is something that everyone can do," beyond "people in chosen roles or official roles," or specific "characteristics and traits." Participants also discussed "leadership as process" or "shared responsibility." One participant spoke about rejecting the worldview that leadership is about "economic productivity" or the "overarching idea that Christianity covers all stuff." Although most participants did not have a single theory of leadership they espoused, participants mentioned leadership theories such as adaptive leadership, chaos leadership, authentic leadership, and the social change model that shaped their perspective.

Participants highlighted why a postindustrial leadership perspective is important for a social justice-oriented leadership course. The postindustrial leadership paradigm recognizes leadership as one participant stated, "as an element of your identity as a human" and another participant stated it allows learners to "seeing [themselves] in leadership." This paradigm, according to another participant, acknowledges that "leadership is socially constructed" and "a phenomenon between people." Therefore, a participant noted leadership is "how we interact with humans and become better humans to make a better world." Lastly, one participant shared that

leadership provides a lens for "critically looking at different ways of leading." Myles Freire provided this explanation, noting:

> I would say we really approach leadership as more of a verb than a noun. So, in other words, we're not focused on characteristics and traits of leaders so much as the operation of power in relationship between people, between people and organizations, between organizations and purpose.

Myles Freire's statement emphasized that leadership is more about the actions than the actual leader—it is about the process and relationships. The postindustrial leadership perspective reshapes the understanding of leadership by highlighting the human aspect of leadership that aligns with social justice's goals.

Social Justice Education Pedagogy

In addition to the postindustrial leadership worldview, social justice education pedagogy emerged as an important worldview for instructors of social justice-oriented leadership courses. Participants conveyed their social justice education pedagogy worldview through the theories and models used; they mentioned theories and models such as critical feminist pedagogy, culturally responsive leadership, the culturally relevant leadership learning model, and transformative leadership, to name a few. In addition, participants spoke about "anti-racist frameworks," "critical social theory," "deconstruction and reconstruction" of leadership models, and "liberatory pedagogy."

Another significant way in which participants expressed social justice education pedagogy was through the writings of other authors. Every participant except for one mentioned reading either *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire or *Teaching to Transgress* by bell hooks, if not both. Rose mentioned how *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* "introduced [her] to critical

pedagogy," and said, "Pedagogically, I loved reading bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress*. I think that shaped a lot of myself and a lot of this class." Max stated, "I draw that a lot from bell hooks." He even claimed hooks' works should be regarded as leadership texts, stating:

> A lot more of my personal thinking around social justice and where I see myself sitting within it is largely influenced by bell hook's work, particularly in *Teaching to Transgress*. My dissertation more or less made the argument that that's a leadership text, and it can also be an effective leadership text for student affairs professionals, particularly around prompting folks to examine their relationship to privileged and dominant systems and how it challenges them to think about it, disrupts some of that thinking in leadership, or challenges folks to disrupt dominant ideologies within leadership thinking, and how they conceptualize leadership and put it into practice.

Max's quote underscored the overarching philosophy that leadership is social justice, and that the texts by bell hooks and Paulo Freire should be considered and used in leadership education as leadership texts. Their works provided the social justice education pedagogy foundations to prepare instructors to teach social justice-oriented leadership courses. The impact these two authors had on participants and their worldviews cannot be understated.

Critical Thinking and Critical Theory

Participants identified critical thinking using a critical theory as the primary purpose of a social justice-oriented leadership course and engaged learners in the postindustrial leadership perspective, or social justice pedagogy. Participants' ways of naming critical thinking and critical theory were flexible, not fixed. They identified this idea with different names, such as critical perspectives, cultural competence, or deconstruction and reconstruction. Despite the various names, all 14 participants stated the importance of this purpose during their interviews.

Two quotes highlighted this theme. First, Charles spoke about metacognition and the importance of thinking deeply and differently when he said, "It all gets back at thinking and thinking about your thinking. So, the purpose is really to challenge our thoughts that we've sort of married. The goals are really to think differently." Taylor added the critical theory approach and commented:

> I'm teaching [students] critical social theory or understanding having critical lenses. That's something you can apply to your 9 to 5. You can apply to your parenting style. You can apply to all these things, right? So, if we're doing that well, they still have to have the foundation to know what can be wrong with something before we just fully recraft it. So that's also part of what we're thinking about, too, is you have to know when something is not okay and be able to identify that yourself what's not okay with it before we can do good, good critical work.

Both Charles's and Taylor's comments spotlighted how participants wanted their learners to think deeply and differently by examining their assumptions and beliefs, asking critical questions, and considering different points of views. Critical thinking and theory not only applied to the course material but applied to the participants' daily lives.

Factor 2: Knowledge

The next determining factor was the instructors' knowledge. Participants mentioned knowledge when discussing the diversity inclusivity model's (Nelson Laird, 2010) curricular element of content, learners, instructor, and adjustments. Mastery of content was the overarching theme. In addition, there emerged two categories of knowledge instructors needed to master. First, knowledge regarding learners and their experiences included (a) learners' psychosocial development, (b) learners' misconceptions, (c) teachable moments, and (d) critical incidents.

Second, knowledge about the subject matter included (a) systems of power, (b) social identity, (c) social action and movements, and (d) the textbook–*Leadership Theories: Cultivating Critical Perspectives*. I discuss each theme in the following subsections.

Mastery of Content

Instructors having a mastery over their course content was important for participants. This mastery meant educators could not rely solely on their PowerPoint slides or notes, as Stace noted, requiring "a certain amount of confidence or efficacy" in their subject matter. Participants identified social justice and leadership as two primary topics requiring mastery. Januaryone expressed:

> Number one, something I refer to as content mastery. I have to know my stuff. I have to know what's in my course. I have to know what comes next, what came before. I have a colleague . . . who says, one of the hallmarks of bad teaching is that the instructor is surprised to see the thing that comes up on the next slide. It's like, if I am surprised by the question or the topic or the image or whatever, that's probably a hallmark of bad teaching. I have to know what I'm doing most of the time. That means I have to know my social justice stuff. I have to know my leadership stuff, and I have to be flexible enough in my own thinking to have thought through. . . . It doesn't mean I have to have a deep answer for all of them, but I have to understand how they might interact from the perspective of a student.

Januaryone's statement highlighted the importance of mastery of content, specifically leadership and social justice. Participants felt when they were well-versed in their content, they could immerse themselves "in the experience as the learners," allowing them to "teach in a way that is more facilitative" and engaging.

Interestingly, participants highlighted a third, less obvious category: student development theory. Although this topic was less about the content of the course, it focused on understanding learners' developmental and learning cycles. This knowledge equipped instructors to, as Max noted, be "able to recognize where [learners] are developmentally to try in that moment, to home in on what it might be that they're grappling with" when addressing challenging topics.

Learners' Psychosocial Development

Instructors should make some assumptions about the psychosocial developmental needs of learners. Several participants mentioned these assumptions as a necessary step. Julia shared, "Emotionally, developmentally, I and my instructors try to do our best to figure out where our students are in the [stretch] zone." In addition, Leo expressed why knowing the psychosocial developmental needs of learners was important, noting, "I wanna make sure that I'm setting up my classroom in a way that I can meet those students where they're at and then try to pull them into that like, next developmental stage." Both quotes revealed instructors' willingness to meet the psychosocial developmental needs of their learners and assist them in their development.

However, making assumptions was not that simple for some participants. When asked how they accounted for those different psychosocial developmental needs of learners, Januaryone responded, "I'm not really sure." In addition, instructors must recognize when learners are not developmentally ready for the course's content. Again, Julia shared her experience with learners, noting:

> Really pushed back on a lot of our content because, developmentally, they're not ready to absorb it. And so, we've had some students who have dropped out and said, this is too much for me. I can't deal with this yet. And I look at it as being developmental process.

Julia's comment revealed sometimes, students are not developmentally ready for the course's content. Instructors need to recognize psychosocial developmental needs and take the appropriate steps to support the learner, even if it means the learner leaves the course. One way to address this challenge is through content scaffolding, a theme under the pedagogy element.

Learners' Misconceptions

It might seem obvious that most learners take college classes with limited knowledge of the content taught in the course; however, the diversity inclusivity framework (Nelson Laird, 2010) posits that instructors make assumptions about learners before the course and should align these assumptions with reality once the instructors know the learners.

Participants mentioned learners tend to have misconceptions about the meaning of diversity and social justice. Elizabeth noticed many learners "have been trained long enough to recognize that diversity is the thing that they should be wanting to talk about." Will echoed this sentiment, sharing, "Students now come to campus and have been asked to think about identities that hold and the way that impacts the way they see the world." Other participants mentioned some learners believe racial discrimination is "a thing of the past," "privilege is not real," or "higher education is this liberal indoctrination." On the other hand, participants noted some learners believe they know everything. Julia recalled an 18-year-old student who told her, "I know everything about intersectionality . . . so this class doesn't mean anything to me, so I don't have to pay attention." Similarly, Loretta mentioned, "A lot of white students come in already with some knowledge of social justice. And I think that has a tendency to then come off as we're the experts or we're controlling." These quotes highlighted misconceptions about social justice. Instructors should be prepared to realign learners' understanding.

Teachable Moments

Due to the nature of social justice-oriented leadership courses, teachable moments were an ever-present opportunity in each class. Suzann's narrative provided an example of how a teachable moment unfolded; she noted:

> I had noticed the last time we met, and we met twice a week for this class. So, we saw each other pretty frequently. I had noticed that it felt like the men were speaking a whole lot more, but then we were doing an activity and other things. And so, I was like, I'm just gonna file that to: is that today? Is it just like something? And it happened again in the class discussion that we were having in the next class. And so, I just paused our discussion and, and just was like, "Hey, I just wanna bring up something to the group here because I think y'all need to be aware of it. And I've noticed it twice now, so I don't think it's a just random occurrence here. You know, we have less men than women in this group as a whole, yet every single person that's spoken for the last six people has been a man. What do y'all think about that?" And so, then we took the conversation in that direction, and you could, oh my goodness, you could feel it.

Suzann's quote demonstrated a teachable moment. After observing the aforementioned dynamic, Suzann decided to address it and bring it to the learners' attention, which led to a deeper conversation and reflection. Instructors need to observe and be prepared for these teachable moments.

Critical Incidents

Student resistance or pushback was a common form of critical incidents experienced by participants. Examples of critical incidents identified by participants included a learner "dominat[ing] the conversation;" a learner debating with the instructor, usually around a

controversial topic; a learner trying to catch an instructor saying the wrong thing to report them; or the threat of physical or psychological safety of the instructor and/or learners. In addition, it was common for learners to have a negative reaction, resist, or lash out when they believed contrary to what was taught or explained. For example, Julia refused to teach a social justice topic because of the critical incidents she experienced, recalling:

> There's been some concepts that we've taught that we're not teaching anymore. Well, I'm not teaching it—religious oppression. I don't teach that anymore. I don't have the thick skin to teach that anymore, but my colleague does. So, I'm like, have at it, teach it. I get attacked sometimes because we talk about religious groups and cults and organized religion and how it can be very oppressive to some folks. And a lot of our students come from highly Catholic families, highly Muslim families, highly other organized religious families. And they're like uh-huh. And the pushback can be very dramatic.

Julia's reflection highlighted the critical incidents instructors can anticipate when teaching a social justice-oriented leadership course. Critical incidents in these courses usually stemmed from discussing social justice topics and concepts and less from leadership topics and concepts.

Social Identity

Numerous participants indicated the necessity of social identity as a topic in social justice-oriented leadership courses. In these courses, learners identify, discuss, and reflect on their social identities and how they connect to theories and practices. Participants expressed this theme in many different ways. They mentioned activities in which learners engaged, such as the social identity wheel. Some participants discussed specific concepts such as social construction, socialization, social location, and intersectionality. Others touched upon the phenomena of in-groups and out-groups in class. Elizabeth mentioned social identity should go beyond race and

sexual orientation. Despite the various ways in which participants revealed this theme, participants agreed that social identity exploration must be done after several weeks in the course. For example, Rose discussed receiving "feedback that [it] was actually a little too soon. The students weren't comfortable yet in the course talking about their identities;" subsequently, she adjusted her syllabus for specific topics to happen later in the semester after more community building. Learners needed time to build community and trust before they were willing to explore social identity publicly.

Systems of Power

Conversations about social identity are important, but it is only the beginning. Quite a few participants spoke about the necessity of including systems of power as a topic in social justice-oriented leadership courses. Examples of terms and concepts identified by participants included cycles of socialization and liberation; the history of exclusion, hegemony or dominance; and social capital in addition to "identity," "power," "privilege," and "systems of oppression." Max articulated this theme as follows:

> I want [learners] to understand how power, oppression, dominance, the variety of isms manifest in these situations, which might not always be obvious or might not always be the headline of the issue, but if we can understand how those things inform what we're seeing.

Not only did Max identify specific concepts such as power and oppression, but Max tapped into the importance of learning these concepts. Through discussion, learners are able to recognize these concepts when they manifest in everyday life. Most importantly, these concepts are not always obvious; talking about them makes them more obvious to learners.

Other participants focused on the different aspects of power. They mentioned the "different types of power and sources of power," the "ways that folks accumulate power," "the way power gets reproduced," and how power dynamics interact with social identities. As Myles Freire put it:

> That's really central to our analysis. And so, trying to think about, how do you build power in a community? How do you build power in a movement? How do you do it organizationally, institutionally, and even culturally beyond institutions? We try to give them a grounding in a lot of theory around power.

Myles Freire's comment is significant because it illuminated the importance of discussing systems of power. Important questions are raised that must be answered to enact social justice-oriented leadership. Understanding power must be central to these discussions.

In addition to Myles Freire's observations, participants identified several reasons why systems of power are an important content topic. First, the participants provided "an introduction to worldviews," as these worldviews "make sure we're on the same page" because "some students hadn't been exposed" to this information. Second, participants shared students understand that "these are all theories" and "this isn't stuff that we just bring from the sky." Third, participants noted systems of power influence "the way [they] think about leadership constantly," and it is essential to understand "ways that folks accumulate power and what it looks like when they use it" in various leadership settings. Regardless of how the participants identified systems of power, the topic is necessary for recognizing and addressing power imbalances in society.

Social justice concepts are often new, misunderstood, or rejected by learners; therefore, providing foundation knowledge on social justice is essential for this type of course. Leo

disclosed, “If we’re not being explicit about the social justice framework, it’s easy for students to generalize away from it.” Will expressed the same sentiment as Leo, noting:

> [Students] are coming to college, having had conversations about identity. They’re not having conversations about systems of oppression or seeing ways in which they’re complicit or ways that that’s benefited them. And so we start to introduce some of those, but it’s a very different learning curve for students based on some of those identities that they have.

Both quotes demonstrated the need to be explicit about social justice concepts, as this knowledge cannot be taken for granted. It cannot be assumed learners have learned, understood, or connected these concepts with their own experiences. Not being explicit prevents learners from learning the language of social justice and engaging in these topics.

Social Action and Movements

When discussing systems of power, a few participants mentioned social action and social movements as relevant topics to cover in social justice-oriented leadership courses. Social action and movements are important topics because they provide a counter-narrative regarding systems of power. Participants demonstrated the other ways in which power can be harnessed and distributed without power “ossify[ing] and lead[ing] to oligarchy where power becomes concentrated at the top.” Again, as Myles Freire put it:

> We look at social movement organizations that have four other characteristics that try to preserve the dynamism of the movement and how those things can be intention[al] with each other in a way that can preserve some of the energy of the movement but prevent some of the concentration of power that typically happens in an organization.

Myles Freire's comments highlighted how social movements can be pivotal in social justice-oriented leadership courses. The concept of power is a central topic in leadership, and many preconceived beliefs about it exist. It may be hard for learners to reimagine the uses of power; therefore, discussing social actions and movements is an excellent way to help learners understand and conceptualize power in a more socially justice-oriented leadership context.

The Textbook *Leadership Theories: Cultivating Critical Perspectives*

Although there may not be a unifying list of topics, theories, or practices for this type of course, several participants mentioned the textbook, *Leadership Theories: Cultivating Critical Perspectives*, by John Dugan a few times. Published in 2017, the text is popular in leadership education circles. Participants discussed using the book because it provides a comprehensive overview of the history and tenets of the central leadership theories. At the same time, participants appreciated how the book infused critical perspectives when discussing theories and engaging in the deconstruction and reconstruction process for each theory. Talking about this textbook, Januaryone said:

> I actually use a lot of what John Dugan has developed in terms of his critical approaches to leadership studies because I want my students to be critical consumers of leadership information as early as we start talking about the theories of it. So, in that regard, helping them develop things like the tools of deconstruction and reconstruction allows them to see any leadership theory through that lens.

Januaryone's remarks revealed instructors' desires to develop "critical consumers of leadership information." These participants believed the textbook did a good job of walking learners through the deconstruction and reconstruction process. Therefore, this textbook is useful for developing this skill in learners.

Factor 3: Skills

Another determining factor for how instructors design and facilitate social justice-oriented leadership courses was the instructors' skills, which emerged when participants discussed the diversity inclusivity model's (Nelson Laird, 2010) instructor, pedagogy, classroom environment, assessment and evaluation, and adjustments curricular elements. The prominent skill necessary was facilitation, which is broken down into seven themes: (a) creating safe yet brave spaces, (b) building trust, (c) disrupting power dynamics, (d) scaffolding learning, (e) observations, (f) ungrading, and (g) philosophical reevaluation. I discuss each theme in the following subsections.

Facilitation Skills

Participants identified facilitation skills as the only specific skill instructors of social justice-oriented leadership courses should be able to do. Having facilitation skills allowed instructors to navigate, as Loretta noted, "a conversation if it's getting a little sticky, a little dicey." According to participants, learners may say "really hurtful things," and the conversation can become "really contentious." Suzann summed up this sentiment this way, noting:

> I think the other thing, too, is strong facilitation skills. The ability to hold space for complexity that is going to come up in a difficult conversation. And at the same time, be noticing what's happening on other people's faces and really processing what's being said, but also what's not being said. Who is speaking as well as who is not speaking. Being really brave. To own up whenever you make a mistake, recognize it for yourself or create space so that students feel like they can bring that into [the space] and notice it about you. But in a way that is productive.

Suzann's statement highlighted the importance of facilitation skills. Facilitation is more than regulating what people say or stopping the conversation—it entails being in tune with the classroom environment and reading the room. Facilitation skills create space for meaningful and productive learning.

Although facilitation skills are vital for a social justice-oriented leadership course, there is a problem: None of the participants had any formal facilitation training. All participants cited learning through "trial by fire," "self-discovery or self-learning," or "watching other people facilitate" to learn "what's worked" and "what doesn't work." Charles mentioned he had "four degrees specifically in education fields. None of them taught me how to do that, how to differentiate, how to respond." Loretta echoed this sentiment, stating, "I don't think we as a field [higher education] really teach people to be facilitators ever." Mila found the "lacking in the practical training" to be a "huge problem." Overall, participants revealed a significant gap in formal facilitation training.

Creating a Safe Yet Brave Space

Creating a safe yet brave space was one of the most important considerations participants mentioned when they discussed challenging topics in a social justice-oriented course. A safe space allows learners to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences without judgment or criticism. A brave space is one in which learners must be willing to be vulnerable and courageous to discuss difficult and sensitive topics. Myles Freire described this space as "creating space for them to really show up as whole people."

Participants mentioned physical space is important in creating a safe yet brave space. Physical space includes aspects such as furniture, technology, and the design and layout of the room. Participants spoke about adjusting, changing, or adopting the physical environment to be

more comfortable and conducive to learning. Charles noted, “If the space is comfortable, you’re more likely be able to think about and grapple with hard concepts.” Therefore, the physical environment was not merely a backdrop but a crucial element that significantly influenced participants’ abilities to engage deeply with challenging material.

Though the topics of conversation were challenging, all participants mentioned the importance of engaging in these difficult conversations. For many learners, this course is the first time where they question their beliefs, feelings, and experiences; however, through these difficult conversations, students develop and grow. Therefore, learners cannot be passive observers; not engaging is not acceptable to instructors. Loretta laid out the idea nicely as follows, noting:

> So again, that vulnerability piece, I think so many people talk about, especially in a social justice class, I feel like I’m walking on eggshells. Or I feel like I can’t say anything without getting called out. And it’s like, we’re not doing that here. We can all screw up, and we can still not cancel each other and talk about it and give each other grace and recognize that our beliefs are coming from our backgrounds and society and so many other things. And we’re not firm people who don’t have growth or the opportunity for growth.

Loretta’s remarks demonstrated how this safe yet brave space occurs in social justice-oriented courses. Difficult conversations are expected, and mistakes will be made; however, this experience is not to be feared. Instead, these conversations are necessary for personal development and learning. Creating a safe yet brave space allowed participants to have this opportunity for growth.

Building Trust

Instructors created a safe yet brave space by building trust among the learners. Participants built trust in many different ways, such as icebreakers, community-building activities, and storytelling. Many participants cocreated community rules, agreements, or norms for the class. Another participant mentioned not policing learners' behaviors, such as not requiring them to put away cell phones or electronics. Others allowed class time to inquire about how the students were doing outside the course, as Loretta noted, to "see the humanity in each other." These practices helped produce a trusting environment where learners felt safe enough to be brave.

Regardless of how the instructor created the environment, many stated they spent several weeks building trust among learners. This time was necessary for learners to feel comfortable. Charles shared, "There's a lot of community building that I have to do so they can get comfortable sharing openly things that they've never examined before." Another great example came from Januaryone, who shared:

> And when I first started teaching this course, I would do the same reading assignment I would give to a student. And as I was reading, I would pull out questions for discussions. I thought naively that I could just put the class in a big circle and that I would put a question out into the room, and they would interact with people. And what I learned pretty quickly from my very first group of students was that many of them did not feel safe enough in the room. Many of them did not feel safe enough in their own ideas to verbally express in front of a group of 18 to 25 strangers what they believed to be true. So, when I put a question out into the audience and nobody would say anything, my

> presumption as an instructor is, oh, they've never thought about this before. But the reality was they didn't feel safe talking about what they already knew.

Januaryone's story demonstrated the importance of building trust to create a safe space in social justice-oriented leadership courses. Without building trust, learners were less likely to engage in the content, which was vital for this type of course. The instructors took great care to create an environment that allowed learners to engage in the learning process.

Disrupting Power Dynamics

The ability to disrupt power dynamics was an interesting facilitation skill. Participants expressed how they "think about power and how powers show up in this space," especially as it related to the traditional instructor learner power dynamics. Instead, participants expressed being interested in "cultivating a colearning space" where instructors are "colearners," and "sit with [the learners]" and "talk through [the] information together." In a nutshell, instructors must be willing to give up control. Stace expressed this idea superbly, noting:

> I think for any instructor teaching a social justice-oriented leadership course is you gotta stop thinking of yourself as the teacher or the instructor that you are a facilitator of an experience. You are only one of the knowers in the room. That everyone in the room is a knower. Everyone is a teacher. Everyone is a learner. That kind of a thing in the space. So that notion of deconstructing traditional classroom power dynamics, I think you've gotta be okay with that. Teaching in that way I think is tougher. It's more challenging because you're giving up control. And when you give up control, it means that you have no power over what is said in the space. You are gonna get challenged. Things are gonna go rogue in ways that you maybe didn't anticipate that they would. And you have to be ready for that.

Stace's remarks spoke to the essence of how instructors tried to disrupt power dynamics in these courses. Many participants recognized the importance of addressing power in a social justice-oriented leadership course and creating a coconstructed learning environment as one way to dismantle power dynamics in a classroom. However, it requires the instructor to give up control, which is easier said than done.

A critical aspect of the disruption power dynamics was the arrangement of classroom furniture. All participants who taught in-person courses shared they had learners adjust the furniture to sit in a circle, presenting moveable furniture as essential. Participants shared that this arrangement allowed learners to "see each other's faces," "talk to one another," and did not "feel like a lecture." Most importantly, sitting in a circle "deconstruct[ed] the power dynamics that are at play." Consistent with this idea, the instructor sat in the circle with the students and disrupted the power dynamic between instructor and learner in the space. Leo said, "If I'm gonna talk about social justice, you're all gonna be in like rows and listen to me. Like, am I really talking about social justice?" Ultimately, arranging the furniture flexibly and inclusively was vital in fostering an environment where learners and instructors engaged in equitable and meaningful discussions.

Scaffolding Learning

All participants mentioned scaffolding learning to account for the different developmental needs of the learners. As Julia stated, "It's a progression" of learning. However, none of the participants explicitly defined scaffolding. Instead, participants just stated mentioned scaffolding, its importance, and how they achieved it.

Participants believed scaffolding was important because it allowed learners to gain a "foundation" of knowledge. Scaffolding also allowed all learners, as Rose noted, to be "on the

same page." Loretta believed scaffolding was especially important for a social justice-oriented course, noting, "We're just going to even the playing field in this classroom itself and make sure that we're all operating on the same information." According to Max, scaffolding "connects to the learning [learners are] doing about the bigger picture in the course." Lastly, scaffolding provided the building blocks for "deeper discussions" later in the course.

Participants provided different ways in which they scaffolded content in their social justice-oriented leadership course. The typical pattern involved storytelling or personal reflection; activities and games; group discussions or critical questions; and finally, an assignment. Of course, there were variations to this pattern, but these elements were present. Myles Freire shared:

> I think there's an arc to the course that starts with some personal reflection, kind of easing them into some of the harder topics. I use a little bit of a game theory or gamification approach. . . . And it might be two or three weeks later, but they [say], "Oh, yeah, I can kind of see now." So, we're kind of leading them into deeper and deeper discussions and more theoretical approaches, even as we're going to turn a corner at some point to try to apply them all.

Myles Freire's remarks highlighted scaffolding content and its benefits, which occurred via personal reflection, games and activities, and then deeper conversation. This scaffolding sequencing produced benefits at the end, when learners had deeper discussions on the topic and made connections to the theories already learned in the course.

Observations

The use of observation, a surprising form of assessment and evaluation, emerged from several participants. As an evaluation method, observations assess student learning by

documenting what is seen and heard in the classroom environment. Participants observed student learning when learners spoke more than instructors during discussions, used relevant vocabulary words, wrote more clearly and with more nuance regarding the content, arrived early or stayed after class to discuss with the instructor, shifted behaviors during simulations, and took the lead in their learning. Januaryone explained:

> It is really the quality of the discussion that we're having. One of the things I'm really proud of is that over the course of a semester, the conversation does become deeper. It does become richer. It does become more nuanced as we learn to become more comfortable with words . . . I see people develop more confidence, more capability, and more accuracy in their writing and their speaking, which leads me to believe it creates more accuracy in their thinking.

Januaryone's statement articulated the ways in which instructors observed student learning. As the internal learning process happened for learners, it manifested in the way they spoke, wrote, and participated in learning processes. When this process happened, participants found it led to robust conversations, allowing learners to "feel the tension and the complexity" of the topic according to Stace. Instructors were, as Rose said, "seeing some growth happening in real time."

Ungrading

Participants mentioned an approach to assessment and evaluation called ungrading. Only a few participants mentioned ungrading by name, yet many of them believed in the philosophical approach of ungrading, which, according to Loretta, is "making sure that students are reflecting on what they're learning and actually processing it." Using this approach, there are still assignments, surveys, and observations, but the way in which instructors approach and use these methods differs from traditional assessment. Instead, several participants identified ways in

which they "push the expectations" around grading, which is considered an ungrading technique. For example, Suzann mentioned not being "hard and fast on deadlines." Other participants spoke about having students complete a self-assessment of their learning or engagement in the course. This assessment was either in a survey or a one-on-one conversation with the instructor. Participants also engaged in ungrading through written feedback regarding student assignments. Stace noted:

> I try not to use an evaluative approach in courses. I take more of a feedback approach. My role as the facilitator of that educational experience is to provide ongoing feedback in lots of different ways. And so, I do that through the activities or any kind of written reflections.

Stace's comment reflected the standpoint that many participants believed their roles in these courses should be that of a facilitator or guide; therefore, the assessment methods should match that viewpoint. Ungrading provided participants with an assessment approach that aligned with their philosophical beliefs regarding the role of the instructor.

Although ungrading has gained popularity over the past several years, there has emerged a reluctance to change assessment and evaluation methods. First, participants realized they must learn more about upgrading to implement it effectively. Second, the current grading system made change difficult. For instance, colleges require grading, so students expected grading to be done in a certain way. Subsequently, participants felt stuck when trying to make changes. Rose stated, "It's hard, especially when students are so used to this system. And then I try to change the system not working, but they're not used to that." Rose's statement was pivotal because instructors discussed receiving a lot of pushback from students who would benefit from the improved system but were resistant to the change. After all, the system was different than they

were used to experiencing. The cycle also continued: participants shared the status quo made it hard for instructors to innovate better student learning and outcome measures. However, participants believed in the potential of ungrading as a counterpoint to the current grading system.

Philosophical Reevaluation

Numerous participants conveyed the need to make personal philosophical reevaluations in their courses. I define philosophical reevaluation as the changes in a person's belief system that govern how they view or operate in the world. For example, if an instructor believed attending class in person was necessary, then the instructor did not accept late assignments from students without penalty. Changing perspectives on the importance of deadlines and deciding it was more important for the student to learn the material without punitive consequences demonstrated a philosophical reevaluation among participants. Taylor provided a great example of this type of adjustment. She discussed the importance of attending and participating in class, and shared:

> Sometimes, it's a finding what's the adjustment that's serving students because of their needs in this moment and what is still serving the course and the outcome I know they can have by engaging in this space. So sometimes it's being able to have that negotiation myself of like, okay, I know I need them to be in person for a majority of our classes, but also acknowledge that if there's something that goes on the world, like I was in a state that had hurricanes before, right? There are ways that I can adapt this curriculum and know things that work and will still serve this, serve the broader purpose of the course and the students at the same time.

Taylor's statement demonstrated where philosophical reevaluation tends to happen, particularly when there is a misalignment in the instructor's educational values and their practices in the course. Participants wrestled with holding on to cultural norms and practices without questioning and reevaluating them. Instructors like Taylor subsequently renegotiated their beliefs and made personal philosophical adjustments to live out the essence of what they are teaching in their social justice-leadership courses.

Factor 4: Attributes

The final determining factor was the instructors' attributes. It is one thing for an instructor to have certain beliefs and values—it is another thing to have the ability or motivation to put those beliefs and values into action. Participants understood teaching a social justice-oriented leadership course without certain attributes was challenging. Five main attributes emerged when discussing the diversity inclusivity model's (Nelson Laird, 2010) curricular element of instructor: (a) cognitive flexibility, (b) cultural humility and vulnerability, (c) lifelong learning, (d) socially conscious, and (e) care and empathy for learners. I discuss each theme in the following subsections.

Cognitive Flexibility

A few participants discussed how instructors needed to be flexible in their thinking, including Charles, who shared instructors who are "pretty rigid, that is not going to work very well." The participants' descriptions included "highly ideological people," instructors with a "positivistic view of the world," or instructors who "believe in the system as it is." Because critical thinking and critical theory are essential aspects of these courses, participants felt

instructors who are not flexible in their thinking are not be able to apply critical theory and unearth the invisible nature of privilege, power, and oppression.

Cultural Humility and Vulnerability

Several participants mentioned needing instructors to demonstrate cultural humility and vulnerability. Instructors must understand they do not have all the answers, and cultural humility allows instructors to be okay with not knowing all the answers. Cultural humility also enables instructors to understand how their identities show up in different spaces. Myles Freire discussed having this lens when he shows up at a "Black Lives Matter or an immigration rally or in an organization that's across boundaries of identity and community" as a person with "the dominant characteristics of a dominating society." Cultural humility includes instructors displaying vulnerability. Instructors demonstrate vulnerability when they share with learners how they too struggled to get it right, made mistakes, and continued to learn and grow. Sharing experiences allowed learners to learn from instructor role models and as Loretta noted, "see [them] in a personal way too."

Lifelong Learning

Demonstrating humility and vulnerability allowed participants to understand the importance of lifelong learning; instructors must continue to self-reflect, learn, and improve. All participants talked about their lifelong learning journey. Mila stated, "Being open to making things better, improving them, tweaking as you get feedback, and being open to feedback." Charles mentioned, "First you need to read and when you finish reading, read some more, right? There's a lot of content out there." These two quotes highlighted how instructors continued to learn and "evolve" as educators.

Socially Conscious

Instructors need to be socially conscious, which requires doing social identity work. Participants highlighted the importance of instructors "doing the work." Stace described this effort as "understanding of who you are and your own identities and how you move through the world and the systems in the world that work for you and against you." This work is crucial because it allows instructors to be more "cognizant" of how they show up in a space, primarily when the course is geared toward learners with marginalized identities. For example, Myles Freire stated, "My identity gets in the way of being able to best represent some of the voices and movements and communities that we're talking about." Myles Freire's quote demonstrated the recognition of the importance of social identity work.

In addition, participants mentioned how doing the work had made them better educators. Mila expressed, "I think having done quite a bit of identity work themselves and social justice work is super important. Being comfortable talking about these topics or comfortable with the uncomfortableness of talking about these topics" made them a better facilitator. Stace mentioned, "My growth as a leadership educator has paralleled, like almost gone in tandem, with my increasing my increasing salience around my identity as a social justice educator, truthfully." Stace's quote highlighted how her growth as an educator is due to her doing the work and becoming more socially conscious.

Care and Empathy

Several participants articulated the significance of care and empathy for learners in these types of courses. Instructors found having empathy made the course content better because "you care a lot more." Empathy allowed instructors, especially those with privileged identities, to be

better at "supporting students, knowing [they] won't always know the experiences [students] have." Rose explained the sentiment eloquently as follows:

> It's just so hard being a lot of these students are in classes being often not always taught by faculty who just, that's not their priority. And so, I think that would disqualify many professors from teaching a class like this. I think a class like this needs that in person, human to human connection with someone who really cares. And I think that just disqualifies a lot of people. And that's probably why it's not done a lot, is because you need someone who cares, who doesn't have ulterior motives, who has the time and the mental capacity to dedicate themselves to being vulnerable and being open every time they teach.

Rose's reflection emphasized the importance of care and empathy in these courses. These courses need human connection, need vulnerability, and need dedication. Although most of the participants did not express these terms directly, all 14 participants demonstrated care and empathy in their courses.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an extensive overview of my findings and answered the research question: What factors determine how instructors design and facilitate social justice-oriented leadership courses? I used the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) as my conceptual framework to hone on the curricular elements important for creating an inclusive course. Using a qualitative research design, I interviewed 14 participants who represented a diverse range of gender and racial identities, institutional types, academic program affiliations, and course delivery methods. I captured their perspectives on the diversity inclusivity model's nine curricular elements within their social justice-oriented leadership courses.

Through this process, I identified four factors guiding the instructors: beliefs and values, knowledge, skills, and attributes. I discussed each theme that corroborated these findings for each of the four factors, which not only illuminated the participants' varied experiences but also highlighted important patterns and insights that contribute to advancing social justice-oriented leadership courses. In Chapter 5, I discuss these findings and provide a deeper, richer understanding of their connection and importance.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I discuss the findings presented in Chapter 4, suggest implications for practice and the field, and make recommendations for future research. This qualitative study aimed to understand how instructors who taught social justice-oriented leadership courses designed and facilitated their courses. I was guided by the following research question: What factors determine how instructors design and facilitate social justice-oriented leadership courses?

I used the nine elements of the diversity inclusivity framework (Nelson Laird, 2010) and identified key concepts and variables relevant to the study. The nine elements are purpose and goals, content, foundations and perspectives, learners, instructors, pedagogy, environment, assessment and evaluation, and adjustment. Then, I interviewed 14 instructors who taught socially just leadership courses and analyzed their interviews. The themes that emerged fell under four main categories: (a) beliefs and values, (b) knowledge, (c) skills, and (d) attributes.

During data analysis, the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) helped conceptualize, collect, and organize the variables and data; however, the framework was insufficient for the analysis that emerged from the data. Therefore, I created a new exploratory conceptual map and captured these important aspects of the elements. I discuss the four factors within my new exploratory conceptual map and connect them to relevant literature. Next, I share implications for practice, especially for practitioners and the leadership education field. Then, I review the study's limitations and make recommendations for future research. Finally, I conclude with a summary of the entire study.

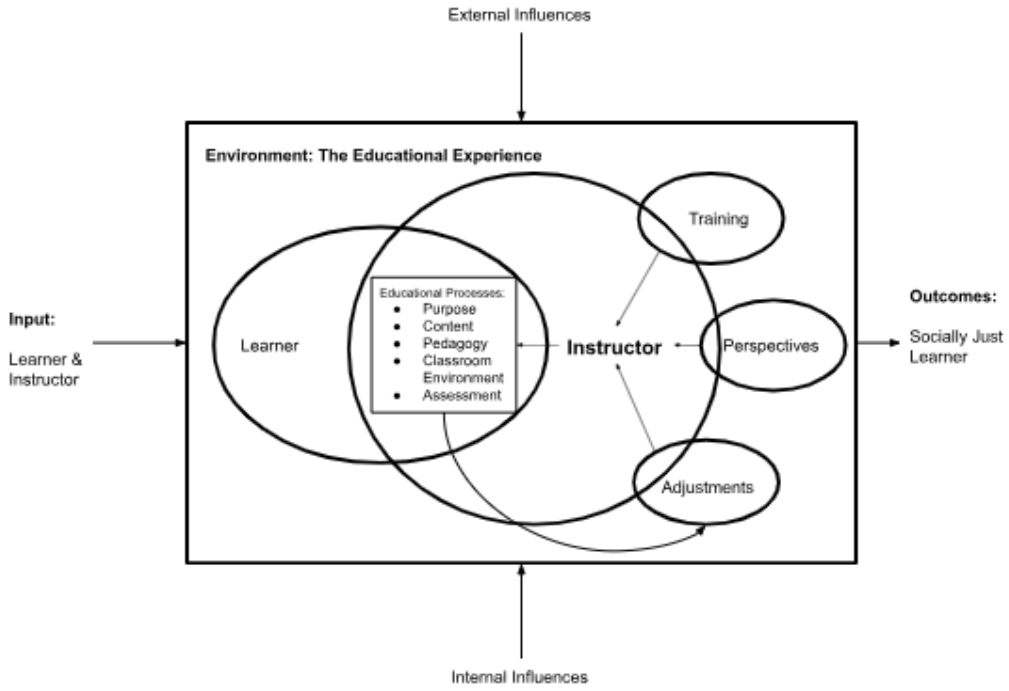
A New Exploratory Conceptual Map

During data analysis, I noticed the curricular elements were more than simple descriptions of the instructors' experiences; participants made connections and interactions between the elements. In addition, certain elements drove participants' decisions related to enacting other elements. For example, the participants' foundations and perspectives appeared to have a strong influence on curricular elements such as purpose, learners, or classroom environment; however, this influence was not uniform across participants. For example, a participant may experience a critical incident such as student resistance to a specific topic in the classroom which caused the participant to make certain adjustments in the course that affect the experience of the learners. Julia's experience exemplified this situation. However, another participant may not experience a critical incident in the classroom and do not make any adjustments to the course. The influence of the curricular elements on one another are predicated on the experience of the instructor. Instructors act as a conduit for these curricular elements.

The diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) does not account for the predominance of particular elements nor how the elements connect and interact with one another. The original intention of the framework was to understand "how much" diversity was included in a course. The framework presents the elements equally, and recognizes some elements are more essential than others and interact with other elements. Inspired by Astin's (1993) input-environment-output (I-E-O) model and Lattuca and Stark's (2009) academic plan model, this new exploratory conceptual map lays out and bundles the nine elements of the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) and demonstrates their affinity, interactions, and significance (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Instructor Course Interaction Exploratory Conceptual Map



The new framework is based on educational experience. Learners and instructors come together in the environment where intentional learning happens. To begin, learners and instructors are inputs and enter this educational experience. When learners enter the educational experience space, they collide and interact with the instructor during the educational process. The educational processes comprise the tangible parts of the courses that make learning happen. The framework includes the course's purpose, content, pedagogy, classroom environment, and assessment. Themes from the findings included mastery of content, scaffolded learning, building trust, and ungrading. The educational processes are created by the instructor, who plays a vital and active role in the educational experience, as represented by the larger circle. Themes from the findings included cognitive flexibility, demonstrated cultural humility, vulnerability, caring,

and empathy for learners. The instructors' training, foundations and perspectives, and prior adjustment experiences influenced their decision making regarding the educational process. The findings included the themes of facilitation skills, social justice pedagogy, and philosophical reevaluation. At the same time, learners provided real-time feedback to the instructor for implementing ad-hoc and long-term adjustments to the educational processes. Examples of these findings included teachable moments and critical incidents.

There are a few variations from the original nine curricular elements of the diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010). First, training is a new curricular element in this conceptual model not mentioned in previous frameworks or models. Second, external influences (e.g., accreditation, government), internal influences (e.g., institutional mission, discipline), and educational outcomes were additional elements in the conceptual model. These influences were beyond the scope of this study, but the model included them to highlight their importance in educational experiences.

This discussion focused on the four factors revealed in Chapter 4. Based on my results, I explain how the four factors were reflected in my new exploratory conceptual map and placed them in current leadership education literature. In addition, I highlight how the themes were connected to the other curricular elements in the framework.

Factor 1: Beliefs and Values

My findings suggested participants held five main beliefs and values regarding their social justice-oriented leadership courses. The first overarching guiding belief was that leadership is social justice, and social justice is leadership. Additional beliefs and values included (a) the intersection of leadership and social justice, (b) the postindustrial leadership perspective, (c) social justice education pedagogy, and (d) critical thinking and critical theory. It

appeared these beliefs and values contributed to designing a course that challenges traditional leadership paradigms and centers on social justice praxis.

Connection to the New Exploratory Conceptual Map

In my new exploratory conceptual map, beliefs and values corresponded closely to the foundations and perspectives curricular element. Knowledge, perspectives, and theories shape how the course is viewed, interpreted, and understood (Nelson Laird, 2014). The definition could easily include beliefs and values about the course; however, participants also expressed beliefs and values when discussing the purpose curricular element, which is the course learning objectives, goals, or outcomes (Nelson Laird, 2014). Hence, the broad category of beliefs and values encompasses more than just the foundations and perspectives curricular element. It includes enacting these beliefs and values during the educational processes portion of the educational experience.

My findings demonstrated this manifestation. The themes of leadership of social justice, the postindustrial leadership perspective, and social justice education pedagogy emerged during discussions about the foundations and perspectives curricular element. However, the intersection of leadership, social justice, critical thinking, and critical theory emerged when discussing the purpose curricular element. These themes came from two curricular elements; there is a connection between the foundations and perspectives of an instructor and what they identify as the purpose or goal of a social justice-oriented leadership course. This connection makes sense. If an instructor believes leadership is social justice, it is reasonable to believe an instructor would identify understanding the intersection of social justice and leadership as a purpose or goal of their course. Therefore, I positioned foundations and perspectives as elements influencing an instructor's design and facilitation of a social justice-oriented leadership course.

Connection to the Literature

There is a growing consensus among leadership education scholars that "leadership is social justice" should be the core belief and value of leadership courses (Chunoo et al., 2020; Chunoo & Guthrie, 2023; Dugan & Leonette, 2021). In addition, literature has affirmed that the postindustrial leadership perspective (Rogers, 1992; Rost & Barker, 2000), social justice education pedagogy (Adams et al., 2023; Kaak, 2011; Watt, 2016; Wiborg et al., 2023), and critical thinking (Burbach et al., 2004; Jenkins & Andenoro, 2016; Ricketts, 2005; Stedman, 2008) are essential beliefs and values of leadership or social justice-oriented courses. This study built upon the limited body of research linking critical social theory (Dugan, 2017; Kezar & Carducci, 2007; Museus et al., 2017) to the essential purposes of leadership education.

This study contributed to existing literature by finding the intersection of leadership and social justice should be a core objective of a socially just leadership course. Traditionally, leadership and social justice concepts are presented as distinct, separate entities. It is common for programs to have a separate social justice leadership course, which differs from a general leadership course. However, my findings highlighted the necessity of connecting the two topics intentionally. Participants stated instructors need to make a direct and explicit connection between leadership and social justice to learners. The intersection of leadership and social justice is not an add-on to either one of the concepts, but serves as a distinct concept deserving of its own study.

Factor 2: Knowledge

My findings revealed nine critical areas of knowledge are necessary to teach a social justice-oriented leadership course effectively. The overarching theme was mastery of content. Then, knowledge regarding learners and their experience included (a) learners' psychosocial

development, (b) learners' misconceptions, (c) teachable moments, and (d) critical incidents. In addition, knowledge about the subject matter included (a) systems of power, (b) social identity, (c) social action and movements, and (d) the textbook, *Leadership Theories: Cultivating Critical Perspectives*. It appeared that mastery of these areas allowed instructors to design an educational experience geared toward learners engaging in challenging social justice issues.

Connection to the New Exploratory Conceptual Map

My findings suggested a connection among the curricular elements of content, learners, instructors, and adjustments. Although knowledge centered around the content curricular element within the educational processes of my new exploratory conceptual map, such knowledge was not just the content that course instructors need to know. My findings revealed knowledge expanded to the curricular elements of learner, instructor, and adjustment.

All three of these elements interacted within the educational processes of an educational experience. Learners entered the educational experience with specific misconceptions and psychosocial developmental needs. Knowledge of these misconceptions and developmental needs provided instructors with guided learning based on the learners' needs. Knowledge about teachable moments and critical incidents provide instructors with ways to respond and maximize learning. In addition, instructors can adjust and incorporate lessons from teachable moments and critical incidents into future courses. Lastly, instructors who master these knowledge topics are positioned to handle the challenges of teaching a social justice-oriented leadership course.

Connection to the Literature

The literature confirmed participants' experiences regarding knowledge. Content mastery is pertinent for socially just leadership educators (Cianciolo et al., 2011; Irwin, 2021; Priest & Jenkins, 2019). Learners enter the classroom with many misconceptions and myths about

leadership (Mitchell et al., 2023; Souba & Souba, 2018) and social justice (Banks, 2008, as cited by Celik, 2012; Rios & Stanton, 2011, as cited by Celik, 2012). Learners experience cognitive, moral, and psychosocial developmental transformations during this time of their lives (Engbers, 2006; Komives et al., 2006), and they must be ready to engage in developmental leadership experiences (Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Keating et al., 2014). Instructors may need to usher learners in these growth and learning opportunities (Taylor & Manning-Ouellette, 2022). Teachable moments (Mills, 2009) and critical incidents (Cooper & Gause, 2007; Garner, 2008) are common sources of adjustment. Social identity (Adams et al., 2023; Chunoo & Torres, 2023; Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001), systems of power (Adams et al., 2023; Chunoo & Guthrie, 2023; Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001), and social action (Adams et al., 2023; Astin & Astin, 2000; Chunoo & Torres, 2023) are essential subjects for these courses. This study expanded upon the limited research linking social movements (Anthony, 2018; Bruce & McKee, 2023; Reger, 2007) to leadership education content.

Participants mentioning the textbook, *Leadership Theories: Cultivating Critical Perspectives* by Dugan (2017), also contributed to existing literature. It is not uncommon to use entire textbooks in leadership courses to guide the content of a course (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018); however, little literature exists on the practice (Haber & Komives, 2008). Several books were common in the literature, but *Leadership Theories: Cultivating Critical Perspectives* was not one of them; however, this book provides a comprehensive overview of leadership theories and history, grounds its analysis in critical social theory, and engages in the deconstruction and reconstruction practice. Only instructors in the student affairs or college student leadership education field suggested the book, raising important questions about how much the academic

field influences course materials and highlights the need for more research on selecting textbooks in leadership education.

Factor 3: Skills

Participants identified facilitation as the overarching skill necessary for instructors of social justice-oriented leadership courses. Seven behaviors were associated with facilitation skills: (a) creating safe yet brave spaces, (b) building trust, (c) disrupting power dynamics, (d) scaffolding learning, (e) observations, (f) ungrading, and (g) philosophical reevaluation. My findings suggested an instructor's facilitation skills are vital to creating a transformative experience for learners.

Connection to the New Exploratory Conceptual Map

In my new exploratory conceptual map, skills corresponded close to the training curricular element. Training is the only new curricular element in this framework. The diversity inclusivity model (Nelson Laird, 2010) and curriculum models such as Lattuca and Stark's (2009) academic plan model do not explicitly mention the importance of training in the academic setting; however, the instructor's training is extremely important, as this training shapes how the instructor shows up in the classroom similarly to how an instructor's foundations and perspective or use of adjustments shape the instructor's behavior. The instructor uses this information to make certain choices regarding the educational processes, such as content, pedagogy, and assessment. In addition, facilitation and teaching are distinct skill sets (Edwards & Taylor, 2024) that should be valued for the complexities, intricacies, and effort required to do it well (Komives et al., 2011). For these reasons, training should stand as a separate element.

My findings revealed skills are not limited to the training curricular element. The new model expands on the curricular elements of pedagogy, classroom environment, assessment and

evaluation, and adjustments. Training shapes how instructors approach the suite of curricular elements under educational processes, which includes pedagogy, classroom environment, assessment and evaluation. The model also introduces effective practices regarding determining the purpose of the course, choosing the content, selecting and implementing the appropriate pedagogical strategies, creating a supportive learning environment, and assessing learning. Training provides the opportunity to learn about best practices and how to implement them.

Regarding adjustments, I identified that instructors understood the common misconceptions learners have about leadership and social justice, and they should be prepared to assess the psychosocial development of learners. This way, instructors can address resistance or critical incidents in the classroom. Instructors of socially just leadership courses can expect resistance (Cooper & Gause, 2007; Wiborg et al., 2024) and unkind and unemphatic responses from learners (Garner, 2008). This study highlighted the role critical incidents have on the adjustments instructors make in the course. These experiences were shocking and push instructors, especially those with marginalized identities, from discussing important topics such as religion or wanting to teach the course in the future (Garner, 2008). At the same time, the instructor's response to learners' misconceptions, resistance, and blatant disrespect affects how learners develop and grow a new mindset or resist and harden their prejudicial beliefs (Cooper & Gause, 2007).

Without formal training, participants expressed learning through experience. However, some participants reflected on the mistakes they made when learning by experience. My mom once told me, "You don't have to learn everything the hard way." The same aphorism can be applied to training. Training reduces these mistakes or prepares instructors to deal with these

mistakes; therefore, training must be taken seriously as a critical, separate curricular element within this new exploratory conceptual map.

Connection to the Literature

This study highlighted a persistent gap in the literature regarding facilitation training. Many leadership educators receive little to no training in leadership education (Dugan & Osteen, 2016; Kroll & Guvendiren, 2021; Owen, 2012; Seemiller & Priest, 2017; Wilson, 2013). Scholars have called for more formalized training in leadership education (Edwards & Taylor, 2024; Friesen et al., 2024; Kroll & Guvendiren, 2021). However, there has not been enough interest or commitment in providing this training (Edwards & Taylor, 2024), which is a shame. Kroll et al. (2024) declared the "most impactful student leadership trainers have the training and facilitation skills to design and deliver high-impact, high-engagement, and high-enjoyment trainings" (p. 12). Providing more formalized training is worth the investment.

In line with previous studies, creating a safe yet brave space (Eich, 2008; Maia, 2022; Noble & New, 2024; Watt, 2016) and building trust (Eich, 2008; Oberg & Andenoro, 2019; Webb and Barrett, 2014) are essential skills for creating a positive classroom environment. Disrupting power dynamics is common in social justice education (Adams et al., 2023). In addition, scaffolded learning (Correia-Harker, 2023; Mendizabal & Young, 2024; Werner et al., 2016) is a common teaching strategy for leadership and social justice education.

Observation is an untapped assessment method. Observation usually refers to learners observing a leader in action (Jenkins, 2018). In this study, the instructors observed learners and assessed their behaviors throughout the course. This type of assessment is common in fields such as medicine or teaching (Kogan et al., 2009; Washer, 2006). It is an appropriate assessment method for leadership education. Instructors document learners' growth and development

through real-time behaviors or responses and an authentic setting throughout the course. The instructor does not have to rely on assignments or exams to determine learning. Similar to the way instructors use games or simulations to assess learning, instructors observe learners' behaviors during the activity. The challenge is for instructors to figure out a systematic way to observe learners while facilitating the course.

Ungrading emerged as another potential assessment and evaluation technique to address the critiques of traditional methods. Ungrading is "grading for growth" and "eliminates or greatly minimizes the use of assigned points or letter grades in a course, focusing instead on providing frequent and detailed feedback to students on their work" (Kenyon, 2022, para. 2). Students are invited to focus on growth and ownership of their learning rather than a grade (Gansemer-Topf et al., 2024).

Participants avoided or minimized traditional assessment methods because they wanted students to focus on learning; therefore, many participants practice some form of ungrading even though they may not call it. Ungrading complements the principles outlined in social justice pedagogy foundations (Adams et al., 2023). However, participants realized ungrading effectively in a course requires much learning. Again, instructors need to figure out a systematic way to implement ungrading in their course and thoroughly explain it to learners.

This study added to literature through the unanticipated and surprising result of philosophical reevaluation as a source of adjustments. For example, Taylor discussed how she viewed class attendance and participation as an important part of the course; however, she also recognized that learners have lives outside the classroom. She reevaluated her beliefs about class attendance and adapted the curriculum to meet the needs of learners and the educational experience. Such an experience seems rather intuitive. It makes sense Taylor would do some

self-reflection and make adjustments; however, Taylor could have decided to stay the course and not make the adjustment. The fact that Taylor and other participants made these types of adjustments after reevaluating their beliefs reinforced the importance of making adjustments to the educational experience.

Factor 4: Attributes

The evidence from my study pointed to five main attributes that characterized effective instructors of social justice-oriented leadership courses. These attributes included (a) cognitive flexibility, (b) cultural humility and vulnerability, (c) lifelong learning, (d) social consciousness, and (e) care and empathy for learners. My study suggested these attributes allow instructors to design and facilitate a learning environment that engages students with social justice issues.

Connection to the New Exploratory Conceptual Map

In my new exploratory conceptual map, attributes corresponded closely to the instructor curricular element. Often, instructors have been described as the "hidden who" of leadership education (Seemiller & Priest, 2015). Such language paints a picture of someone waiting in the shadows like a puppet master secretly guiding classroom events. My analysis highlighted instructors engaged and instrumental in the educational experience; however, they are highly visible. Who they are, how they show up, and why they show up matters (Cooper & Gause, 2007; Mahoney, 2017), especially in a social justice-oriented leadership course—instructors are not so "hidden" in these contexts.

My new exploratory conceptual map centers around this premise. Instructors are the story's main characters or the band's lead singer. This role does not diminish the work or contributions of others—instead, it demonstrates they are the center of attention. Although the course purpose, content, pedagogy, and assessment are the same across several sections of the

same course, the experience changes based on the instructor. The instructor makes a difference, as they are the catalysts of change.

This point of view may not be popular in social justice circles where the emphasis is on coconstructing space and partnering with learners. The instructor is a "guide on the side" instead of a "sage on the stage" (King, 1993), and such a notion is understandable and necessary, preventing the belief that learners come into the classroom as blank slates per the "banking" model of education warned against by Paulo Freire (Adams et al., 2023). At the same time, this notion undermines, devalues, and deemphasizes instructors' influence on the educational experience. Although many scholars have agreed that instructors are not neutral, objective arbiters of knowledge (Pierre et al., 2020), the classroom is not a space of true democracy, either (Cooper & Gause, 2007). Instructors have professorial authority (Knight & Pearl, 2000; Obidah, 2000); therefore, they must wield that authority and promote critical, liberatory, and democratic practices.

My new exploratory conceptual map provides a way to reconsider the instructor's relationship with learners and the educational experience. Instructors bring their training, worldview, and previous classroom experiences into the course. It shapes how they formulate the educational processes learners experience as learning. The role of the instructor should not be underestimated or pushed to the side—instead, it should be valued, elevated, and celebrated. Instructors of social justice-oriented courses need to be developed and groomed with the appropriate beliefs, knowledge, and strategies through training, the next curricular element discussed.

Connection to the Literature

Prior scholars have noted the importance of leadership educators (Downing, 2016; Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Mahoney, 2017; Priest & Pierre, 2023; Seemiller & Priest, 2015). However, much of the literature focused on leadership educators' demographics and professional identity development (Irwin, 2021) and less on the characteristics and attributes of leadership educators. Nevertheless, my findings were consistent with this literature. Identity work (Beatty et al., 2020; Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Irwin, 2021; Museus et al., 2017; Priest & Jenkins, 2019), lifelong learning (Cianciolo et al., 2011; Garner, 2008), flexible thinking (Cianciolo et al., 2011; Seemiller & Priest, 2017), cultural humility and vulnerability (Lovette-Colyer & Lovette-Colyer, 2017; Maia, 2022), and care and empathy for learners (Downing, 2016; Harding 2011; Priest & Seemiller, 2018) are pertinent characteristics and attributes for socially just leadership educators.

My findings highlighted an intriguing connection about instructors, aligning with Jenkins' (2019) phenomenological study on the lived experiences of becoming and being a leadership educator. In this study, Jenkins (2019) identified six subthemes: (a) a helping field, (b) trial and error, (c) creating a "safe" space, (d) modeling the way, (e) I'm loving it, and (f) agitators. These six themes were not a part of the instructor curricular element but were present throughout the other curricular elements. The helping field subtheme connected to the broader care and empathy theme for learners in the instructor's element. The trial-and-error subtheme was found in the training curricular element because it related to instructors having no formal training and learning instead by trial and error. Additionally, the creating a "safe" space theme was found within the classroom environment element. Under the adjustments element, instructors demonstrated the modeling the way theme. The agitators' theme fell under the purpose element. The overall feeling from my interviews with participants indicated they felt

passionate and dedicated to the work, which reflected the "I'm loving it" theme. All in all, my findings corroborated Jenkins' (2019) findings and were consistent with the literature.

Implications for Practice and Field

The first implication for practice relates to the role of instructor. This study provides leadership, program leaders, and administrators with characteristics and values necessary to teach social justice-oriented leadership courses. These characteristics and values are viewed as competencies. Based on these competencies, program leaders and administrators can search, interview, hire, and evaluate current and potential leadership educators. Program leaders and administrators can also ensure instructors do more good than harm. The new model provides guardrails to prevent the placement of instructors solely based on identity. In addition, it tampers the belief that anyone can teach these types of courses. These competencies can provide guides to help program leaders and administrators choose the best person to teach these courses.

The second implication for practice is creating a training program for leadership educators interested in teaching social justice-oriented courses. The results of this study showed the content of such training. Participants learned how to teach these courses by examining their characteristics and values; by reading texts by Paulo Freire and bell hooks to gain new perspectives on social justice; and by learning best practices for developing course purpose, content, pedagogy, environment, and assessment. They learned about learners' psychosocial development and misconceptions about leadership and social justice. Accordingly, participants can use this information to deal with student resistance and adjust. This study provided the foundation to train social justice-oriented leadership educators.

The third implication for practice is the need for a stronger command of assessment, evaluation techniques, and practice. Participants mentioned their disinterest in assessment due to

philosophical concerns. This study provided two assessment strategies to address these concerns, with the first strategy being the act of ungrading. Many participants discussed practicing ungrading; however, participants did not feel comfortable calling their practice ungrading explicitly. Subsequently, practitioners should learn more about ungrading to incorporate it into their courses. The second strategy was observation. Educators can use observation to assess learners' growth and development without requiring formal assignments. For instance, they can assess improvement in writing or speaking about a topic in class. Accordingly, practitioners should figure out a systematic observation method.

The fourth implication for the leadership education field involves creating a framework or "a la carte buffet" of a social justice-oriented leadership curriculum. Educators can choose from the "buffet" based on their course, learners, or other considerations. In addition, they can go back to the "buffet" and choose another offering when making necessary adjustments. This framework provides a consistent pathway for educators of social justice-oriented leadership courses. For example, regarding the curricular element of content, a "buffet" framework would provide practitioners with a library of topics to cover, course materials to use, and the appropriate sequence to cover the topics. The field should consider the benefits of creating such a framework to benefit the consistent delivery of social justice-oriented leadership courses for educators who have demonstrated the characteristics and values of social justice rather than focusing on the unintended consequences of bad actors.

Limitations and Future Research

The first limitation of this study was it focused on the instructors' experiences and their points of view. Therefore, my findings present only one side of the educational experience. Although the instructor does have a crucial role in shaping the educational experience, it is only

half of the experience. The learners are the other half. My study did not account for learners' experiences with the nine elements. As such, future research should explore how learners experience the nine elements manifesting in the course. It would be interesting to know if learners corroborate these same themes or are able to recognize these curricular elements from their experience.

This study also did not connect the themes of the nine elements to learner outcomes, limiting this study. Having a caring and empathetic instructor leads to better learning outcomes; however, it is difficult to determine if these findings are necessary for a social justice-oriented course. For example, a course may struggle to succeed if the instructor does not care and empathize with learners, raising the question of how much care and empathy were necessary. In addition, determining student outcomes is tricky due to the cumulative and continuous nature of growth and development, especially during college. Such growth does not always happen after one or two lectures. Subsequently, future researchers should explore how these themes connect to learner outcomes. One way to explore this connection would be to examine learners' experience. For example, learners could outline the outcomes of a course they experienced and connect it back to an element or theme identified in this study.

The third limitation of this study was its qualitative nature. By design, this study was qualitative and exploratory, intended to learn how instructors designed these courses and what actions they took in these courses. Therefore, I used a relatively small, purposive sample, and the findings cannot be generalized. A follow-up observational or quantitative study may provide additional information about these courses.

An observational study could also provide insight into real-time classroom experiences, as this type of study would not rely solely on the experiences of the instructor or learner as they

go through them or reflect on them in hindsight. Researchers can collect detailed data on behaviors and interactions naturally occurring during the educational experience. Triangulating their data with self-reported data from instructors and learners creates a robust picture of the educational experience.

A future quantitative study could measure the scale and scope of these themes in social justice-oriented leadership courses and examine them in adjacent fields, such as K–12 education, social work, and intergroup dialogue. Researchers could ask: Is there a consensus on the themes? Are additional themes missing? Do specific themes vary by field of study? Learning more about the curricular elements within different types of social justice-oriented courses can expand the literature on the development of future social justice leaders.

Conclusion

Social justice is under attack. Policies, practices, and ideas that recognize historical legacies of exclusion and systematic oppression and promote ways to correct societal inequalities and injustices have been continuously dismantled continuously. Developing social justice-oriented leaders addresses this issue, however, there is a gap in the leadership education literature on the best ways to achieve this goal. This qualitative study posed the question: What factors determine how instructors design and facilitate social justice-oriented leadership courses? In these five chapters, I successfully answered this question. This study provided a foundation for future research and practical implementation in developing socially just leaders who can continue to lead the U.S. experiment to create a more perfect union.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW #1 PROTOCOL

INTRODUCTION

- Tell me about your journey into leadership education. How did you end up teaching leadership courses?
- What compelled you to teach this specific social justice-oriented leadership course?

CURRICULAR ELEMENTS

1. **Purpose**
    - What is the purpose, goal(s), or objectives of your leadership course?
        - In other words, what do you hope learners will be able to know, feel/value, or do after taking your course?
2. **Philosophical perspectives**
    - What theories, philosophical viewpoints, or conceptual frameworks shape your leadership course?
        - In other words, what are some beliefs you have about leadership and social justice that shape how you think about your course?
3. **Content**
    - What content do you include in your leadership course?
        - In other words, what topics, concepts, or ideas do you cover in your course?
        - What about the sequencing of the content? What do you think about when sequencing the course content?
        - What about instructional materials used in the course? What do you use?

4. **Pedagogy**
    - What instructional activities or techniques do you use in your leadership course?
5. **Assessment**
    - What assessment and evaluation techniques do you use in your leadership course?
6. **Instructor**
    - What characteristics, skills, or dispositions do you or other instructors have that allow you to teach this leadership course?
    - What characteristics, skills, or dispositions would make an instructor ineffective in teaching your leadership course?
7. **Learners**
    - Who are the learners in this course? What are their demographics generally?
    - How did your learners select the course?
    - How do you account for the different developmental needs of the learners in your leadership course?
8. **Classroom Environment**
    - What type of classroom environment do you cultivate in your leadership course?
    - How do you create this environment?
9. **Adjustments**
    - What adjustments have you made to improve your leadership course?
    - What influenced you to make those adjustments?

INFLUENCES

- After discussing all these elements, what has influenced your thinking and practices within your leadership course?

    - In other words, what are the reasons you made your decision?

CONCLUSION

- Is there anything that would be useful for me to know?
- Is there anyone you recommend that I interview for this study?