Understanding Intersectionality to Promote Social Justice in Educational Leadership: Review of JCEL Cases

Ericka Roland

University of South Florida, eroland@mail.usf.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/intersections

Recommended Citation

Understanding Intersectionality to Promote Social Justice in Educational Leadership: Review of JCEL Cases

Ericka Roland
University of South Florida

Abstract
This qualitative study examined how intersectionality is treated in the Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership’s (JCEL) 2016 special issue. Guided by intersectionality and intersectional pedagogy framework, a qualitative content analysis (QCA) was conducted on all parts of six pedagogical cases. There were three major findings: (1) an additive approach was taken; (2) there was an unclear connection between theory and practice; and (3) there was minimal attention given to the role of agency in social justice leadership. Pedagogical cases rooted in the theoretical framework of intersectionality prompts social justice leadership that uncovers structural and systemic power relations to enact socially just practices and policies.

Keywords: Intersectionality, pedagogical cases, social justice leadership

Introduction
Intersectionality, as conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), is an analytical tool for exposing interlocking structural systems of dominance and subordination such as racism, classism, sexism, and ableism. It offers a way of thinking about social identities and their relationship to power, which can be applied to teaching and learning as a form of critical pedagogy. Similar to its applications in research and law, intersectional pedagogy is focused on analyzing uneven power relations as a result of interlocking oppressions. Pedagogy rooted in critical theory is focused on power as it affects knowledge, realities, and relationships (Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona 2009). Although intersectionality has various definitions and narratives attached to it, for the purpose of this study I view intersectionality as a way to expose uneven power relations associated with interlocking structural oppressions in order to support social justice. Viewed in this way, intersectionality moves beyond an additive approach and theorizing about identity development to the analyzing of inequitable power dynamics.

Educational settings serve as arenas where inequities and injustices can be produced and reproduced, for instance, by privileging some social identities while marginalizing others (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Quantz, Cambron-McCabe, Dantley, & Hachem, 2016; Santamaria, 2014; Simkins, 2005). In such settings, educational leadership can be used in the service of creating equitable and just educational systems by influencing policy, educational culture, instruction, and day-to-day operations that affect identities,
opportunities, histories, and characterizations of people and issues that further affect how they are considered and treated across contexts. As a result of the noted influence of educational leadership, there has been an increase in scholarship focused on how it can contribute to the amelioration of social and institutional inequities (Bogotch, 2000; Boske, 2015; Boske & Diem, 2012; Dantley & Tillman, 2010; Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Furman, 2012; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Young, 2015), for instance, by bridging educational leadership theory and practice with critical theory or theories (Bogotch, 2000).

Developing the capacity to understand, analyze, and resolve complex educational issues and how people are affected is essential for social justice leadership (Furman, 2012), and can be honed or heightened through pedagogical cases alluding to systems of power and how they are organized within and across structural, cultural, and interpersonal domains. To that end, intersectionality can support educational leadership, theoretically and practically, through the attainment of political skill and decision-making strategies that can be used to intervene in hegemonic systems that undermine social justice (Case, 2017). Scanlan and Theoharis (2016) argued that as the student population evolves to include more heterogeneous identities, school leadership working to promote social justice needs to address various forces of marginalization experienced by those whose identity stems from multiple, marginalized social locations. These authors co-edited the 2016 special issue of the Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership (JCEL) to address intersectionality. In doing so, they sought to advance the work of social justice leadership theory and practice by highlighting various contexts within pedagogical cases that illustrate the intersectionality of oppressions and/or would benefit from analysis using intersectionality.

The purpose of this essay is to examine how six pedagogical cases in the 2016 special issue of the JCEL used intersectionality. Namely, I sought to understand how intersectionality was being defined in relations to social justice leadership. To focus my analysis, I paid particular attention to the pedagogical aspect of each case: the narrative, teaching notes, reading list, discussion questions, and activities. Pedagogical cases can promote students’ and instructors’ understanding of how intersectionality can be used analytically in the development of social justice leadership. Opportunities to understand and use intersectionality can be integrated into complex cases to support problem solving, analytical thinking, and decision making where there is ambiguity about what constitutes inequity, equity, justice, injustice, social change and social stasis.

I begin with a brief literature review of educational leadership for social justice. This literature review provides context for how social justice is addressed in the field of educational leadership. Then, I describe the conceptual framework, based on intersectionality and intersectional pedagogy, and the qualitative content analysis (QCA) approach that led to three major findings: (1) an additive approach was taken; (2) there was an unclear connection between theory and practice; and (3) there was minimal attention given to the role of agency in social justice leadership. To conclude, I discuss and suggest how these cases can be used in understanding intersectionality in preparing educational leaders that challenge unjust structures, policies, and practice through the use of power analysis and social justice strategies. This article expands the literature on understanding how critical theory and practice through pedagogy connect to the
development of educational leaders’ ability to enact practices that challenge social inequities.

**Literature Review**

Social justice and social justice leadership within educational leadership has been conceptualized in various ways (Berkovich, 2014; Dantley & Green, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Furman, 2012; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Lewis, 2016). However, Dantley and Green (2015) contend the critical addition of social justice to the construct of educational leadership needs to be central to creating equitable educational systems for all students regardless of social identity differences. Furman (2012) and Theoharis (2007) posited social justice is often focused on the educational inequities of marginalized groups. Therefore, social justice leadership involves the recognition of inequities within educational opportunities and outcomes of marginalized groups while suggesting actions towards eliminating social injustices (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Dantley & Green, 2015; Furman, 2012; Lewis, 2016; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Theoharis, 2007).

DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) offered a conceptual framework that highlights a critical inquiry component of educational leadership. This framework includes “mak[ing] issue of, and generat[ing] solutions to social inequality and marginalization due to race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other forms of diversity” (p. 845). In a study of four principals who demonstrated a social justice orientation, Rivera-McCutchen (2014) found that the principals’ actions were rooted in critical reflection, analysis of systemic structures, collaboration of multiple voices, open, value-laden communication, and decision making. This meant these principals were able to analyze issues from various perspectives to enact anti-oppressive practices. However, Rivera-McCutchen (2014) noted the lack of impact educational leadership preparation had on the evolution of the principals’ social justice orientations. In other words, these principals were self-taught on social justice issues related to their leadership orientation.

As the United States K-12 population diversifies, and the culture of accountability continues to permeate U.S. educational systems, educational leadership programs are tasked with preparing leaders who challenge traditional schooling that enacts marginalizing practices and policies (Hernandez & McKenzie, 2010; Zembylas, 2010). Scholars have provided preparation programs with social justice centered curriculum and pedagogy that engages students in critical reflection for consciousness-raising, knowledge around unequal power relations, and capacity for critical praxis (Brown, 2004; Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian, 2006; Trujillo & Cooper, 2014). Diem and Carpenter (2012) added that to prepare educational leaders for social justice leadership, the preparation programs’ curriculum must be rigorous and critical with opportunities for graduate students to challenge their ideologies and biases around social inequality through intentional analysis of their lived experiences, social institution, and strategies for social change. Through preparation programs, educational leaders grapple with how they and the wider society contribute historically and contemporarily to the marginalization of people
Dantley and Green (2015) wrote that “we must embrace the fact that educational leadership programs are fertile ground for instilling these notions of radicalism and the prophetic” around social justice (p. 830).

The idea of social justice incorporated with educational leadership often becomes more of a catchphrase than a practice that transforms educational systems for equity (Dantley & Green, 2015; North, 2008). Educational leadership programs can adopt and employ the social justice language and miss opportunities for making meaning and disrupting power relations that result in privilege and oppression (Dantley & Green, 2015). For example, educational leadership preparation programs with a social justice orientation are committed to moving beyond neoliberal practices to a practice of deconstructing power relations that result in oppression.

In Ironies and Limitations of Educational Leadership of Social Justice, Capper and Young (2014) argued that educational leadership scholarship around social justice focuses mainly on one social identity versus the intersection of identities. These authors suggested that an intersectional approach highlights how interlocking identities cannot be addressed separately because these identities affect one another. For example, race and gender becomes racialized gender. Therefore, Capper and Young assert the need for “more work to extend thinking across student differences and their intersecting identities is needed” (p. 160).

Graduate students and instructors should be encouraged to avoid a single-dimension approach to understanding individuals and groups realities, and focus on social locations that facilitate an analysis of structural power with respect to privilege and oppression. Taking an intersectional approach to social justice leadership allows students in educational leadership preparation programs to become open to different lived experiences, the perspectives of others, intentions to create social change, and rights-based activism (Curtin, Stewart, and Cole, 2015). It is important for leaders who operate within a social justice leadership orientation to understand and be able to analyze how and to what extent challenging social inequities addresses the wide range of student differences and their intersections.

**Conceptual Framework**

Drawing from intersectionality as an analytic (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) and a pedagogical tool (Case, 2017), the *JCEL*’s 2016 special issue was analyzed on how intersectionality is being used in relation to social justice leadership. Intersectionality theory is inspired by critical race theory and Black feminism, which both challenge the power dynamics of various social locations where structural inequities are created and provide opportunities for social action (Crenshaw, 1991). In other words, intersectionality is grounded in critical inquiry and praxis that provide a platform to analyze and address social inequality. Scholars are exploring how intersectionality can be utilized as a pedagogical tool that addresses identity, as well as structural and political inequality, and provide strategies for social action through theory and practice (Case, 2016; Case & Rios, 2016; Esposito & Happel, 2012; Hall, 2016; Pliner & Banks, 2012).
Intersectionality as a pedagogical tool can be used in terms of blending theory with practice for capacity-building to enact socially just decision-making. This pedagogical approach centers on using critical pedagogy to uncover invisible intersections, understanding privilege, analyzing power, promoting reflection for instructors and students, promote social justice, and infuse intersectionality throughout the curriculum. Ultimately, an intersectional pedagogy framework invites the instructor and students to move beyond individual lived experiences to deconstructing structural identity politics that create privilege and oppression, thus providing strategies for disrupting systemic inequities (Case, 2016; Case & Rios, 2016; Pliner, Banks, & Tapscott, 2012; Naples, 2016; Rivera, 2016). Teaching strategies within an intersectional pedagogical approach incorporate counter-stories and knowledge production from marginalized voices that challenge dominant epistemology and ontology by having students explore interlocking identities and structural systems that create privilege and oppression. Additionally, these teaching strategies prompt students and instructors to critically reflect, as well as to consider their positionality in relation to privilege, oppression of interlocking identities, and social structures (Case & Rios, 2016; Hall, 2016; Grzanka, 2016; Rivera, 2016). To ground this study within intersectionality and intersectional pedagogy conceptual framework, there is a focus on the elements of complexity of identities (e.g. Black, women, and Christian), unveiling power (e.g. racism and sexism), and social justice. Thus, pedagogical cases with an intersectional theoretical framework provide learning opportunities to connect theory and practice, which I address further in the following sections.

Methodology

I conducted a qualitative content analysis guided by the conceptual framework combining intersectionality and intersectional pedagogy to answer the research question, How is intersectionality used within the pedagogical cases in the JCEL’s special issue? Due to the flexible nature of content analysis, the process of this method is open to interpretation and manipulation. Therefore, researchers should use an analytic construct through existing theories, the experience or knowledge of experts, or previous research to inference text to answer the research question (Krippendorff, 2004). According to Schreier (2012) qualitative content analysis is a flexible research method that assists with interpretation of textual data to determine patterns, frequency, and relationship of words.

Data Sources and Collection

The Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership (JCEL) is a peer-reviewed journal providing pedagogical cases that guide curriculum and pedagogy in educational leadership preparation programs. The journal provides a wide range of cases relevant to the preparation and practice of educational leadership. Cases in JCEL include case narratives, literature reviews, discussion questions, teaching notes, and activities focused on topics related to educational leadership. Within pedagogical cases, the narrative, reading list, and teaching notes, frame the questions and activities of each case. “The journal (JCEL) strives to produce cases
in the finest tradition of case studies: cases that are rich in context and complexity and that provide a good vehicle for classroom discussion by illuminating the qualities of good educational leadership” (Fossey & Crow, 2011, p. 6).

Fossey and Crow note four elements that make a good pedagogical case: context, complexity, ambiguity, and relevance. Case studies as a pedagogical tool for learning and teaching encourage students to apply curriculum context to real world situations for the development of problem solving, analytical thinking, decision-making, and ways of coping with ambiguity. *JCEL* cases can be a valuable pedagogical tool across disciplines, curricula, and levels of knowledge, which opens the possibility of educational social change to various contexts and spaces, such as policy, economics, media, and justice system.

In the first case, “The ‘Affirmative Action Hire’: Leading Inclusively in Diverse Religious Communities,” Marshall and Marsh tell the story of a new Black woman principal who wants to lead inclusively by including people of all religious and non-religious belief. Horsford and Powell guide us through a leadership challenge facing district officials receiving negative media coverage for the overrepresentation of poor, Black, and Latino males in its alternative high school in the second case. Meanwhile, in case three, Fleig offered a narrative on racial identity development of a white principal to understand his Whiteness and privilege and how his actions not only marginalized students of color but also students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and asexual/romantic (LGBTQ). Further amplifying the intersections of race, disability, and access, Theoharis and Causton’s case bring forth the role and challenges of leadership in moving a school in a more inclusive direction for students with disabilities. In the fifth case, Zisselsberger and Collins focus on the intersections of race, ethnicity, and language to describe a K-8 elementary school administration decision to transition into a fully bilingual school. In the last case in this special issue, “The Changing Colors of Maple Hills: Intersections of Culture, Race, Language, and Exceptionality in a Rural Farming Community,” Scanlan describes how one immigrant mother begins asking questions of to school leadership on their assumptions and practices regarding how student support services are delivered.

**Data Analysis**

Given that my selected conceptual framework was based on intersectionality and intersectional pedagogy, which supports critical analysis in the examination of the complexity of identities, unveiling power, and social justice, my *a priori* codes were terms indicating race, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, ethnicity, class, and other social identities. However, in order to be considered, there had to be more than one identity category together (e.g. poor white transgender boy). I searched for words such as intersectionality, intersection, complex, and interlocking that indicated the use of the theory, as well as terms suggesting the practice of unveiling power—for example, domination, oppression, and “-isms” (racism, sexism, etc.). Although such suffixes suggest power relations, further analysis of the text was needed, in order to rule out terms unrelated to social power dynamics, such as prism or mechanism. Lastly, to identify strategies for social justice, I looked for words
indicating social change, social justice, decision-making, change, and activism, as well as action words (e.g. address, conversation, act, etc.). This approach assisted me with making meaning of the narrative, teaching notes, reading list, discussion questions, and activities by assisting with paying close attention to word choices, frequency of words, word order, and structure.

In this approach, inferences were subsequently made about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), and the audience. I carried out a content analysis on the narrative, teaching notes, reading list, discussion questions, and activities of all six cases in the JCEL’s special issue. I included the case narrative, teaching notes, and reading list with the analysis because these elements frame the discussion questions and activities that helped achieve the case goals. Once the data were collected, a coding scheme was employed to identify emerging themes. During each phase of analysis, preliminary codes and sub codes were identified and examined based on the overall purpose and question guiding this study. The use of open and axial coding was used to arrange the codes and connect emergent themes to those prevalent from the conceptual framework and literature (Saldaña, 2016).

Limitations

The following limitations should be noted. This review is limited to six cases in the Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership’s (JCEL) 2016 special issue, which restricted the sample size. Although JCEL offers other pedagogical cases that reference intersectionality, I excluded these cases to focus on the special issue. A larger sample size of pedagogical cases in and out of JCEL would provide a deeper understanding of how intersectionality as pedagogy is used in the field of educational leadership to connect critical theory with engaging socially just practices. According to Agosto and Roland (2018), a small sample is not uncommon in studies with concepts recently introduced into the field of educational leadership.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to analyze how intersectionality was used in the six cases in the JCEL 2016 special issue. Through the guided and circular process of analysis using the conceptual framework of intersectionality and intersectional pedagogy three major findings emerged: (1) an additive approach was taken; (2) there was an unclear connection between theory and practice; and (3) there was minimal attention given to the role of agency in social justice leadership.

Additive Approach

An additive approach treats marginalized identities separately, causing one to be viewed as primary, while the others are treated as secondary (e.g., Black + Boy + Poor). This approach implies that people can experience their social locations or positionalities in the social structure separately and independently. The single-axis approach threatens to erase some lived experiences and limits the power analysis of privilege and oppression (Case, 2017).
Most of the six cases used an additive approach to explore intersectionality within discussion questions and activities in which authors dealt with a single identity marker. Although the narrative in case three presented the intersection of sexual orientation, race, and class, the interlocking of identities and its power relationship did not translate in other elements of the case. For example, the questions and activities in case three focused heavily on LGBTQA issues without the inclusion of social identities that intersect sexual orientation or gender expression such as class or race. One of the activities in case three included a LGBTQA equity audit with questions such as: “How and to what extent does your school’s curriculum integrate lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning (LGBTQA) history, events, and/or persons across it?” (p. 37). While some of the discussion questions did have the word “intersections,” they seem to suggest there was a primary identity that other identities intersect. For example, one of the questions in case three asked, “How can studying Critical Race Theory advance the social justice identity across all intersections?”

Similarly, case six did not offer discussion questions centering intersectionality. Instead the focused was on service delivery for students and staff management. For example, question one asked, “As this case suggests, some aspects of service delivery can be formalized whereas other aspects left informal. What are advantages and disadvantages of each?” (p. 68). Moreover, the case presented interlocking identities as identifiers rather than expose the power relationship. For instance, Aryan, the student in case six, is described as the boy from India, and the teacher’s aide, Helen, as White, native English speaking, working or middle class, and Protestant Christian. These descriptions of identity, do not promote readers’ understanding of the actors’ social locations or the power dynamics within their immediate contexts.

However, the discussion questions and activities of case one challenged the additive approach in that the authors asked participants to critically reflect on how the complexity of social identities is treated within the narrative. For example, the authors asked questions such as, “How [could] the principal...approach and/or frame a conversation that acknowledges intersectionality and interlocking systems of oppression?” (p. 13). This can prompt participants to critically think about privilege, oppression, and the ways these power relations play out in schools and communities, as well as to connect the complexity of identities to power relations that create privilege and oppression. Moreover, one of the activities in case one included an autoethnography that encouraged readers to reflect on their social identities and positionalities within their personal, social, and professional life. For example, prompts in the activity included: “How have your race, class status, gender, sexuality, religious affiliation, and ability shaped your life experiences?” and “How have your race, class status, gender, sexuality, religious affiliation, and ability informed your educational opportunities?” (p. 14). In the second activity in case one, the authors’ ability to hold together the social identities and social locations (race, gender, and religion) was lost. For instance, the authors state that the purpose of the equity audit is to “[create] a strong motive for students to engage with their schools and with each other in difficult conversations about inequities that surface around, for example, race, religion, or gender” (p. 14). A key word to take
note of is the use of “or” instead of “and” that would indicate the interlocking of social identities and oppressions.

An additive approach limited the cases to an institutionalization of intersectionality, which is a checklist that assists students in learning about intersectional work at the basic level to recognize interlocking identities, but not analyze the complexities, power relations, or appropriate action to dismantle unjust structures (Naples, 2016). Attempting to use intersectionality as an analytical tool for the development of social justice leadership through an additive approach is problematic that limits decision-making for social change through the focus on single issues of oppression. Thus, a clear understanding of intersectionality to practice could assist in avoiding an additive approach.

Unclear Connection Between Theory and Practice

The development of critical consciousness is essential for preparing leaders who have a deeper awareness of social structures, practices, and policies that result in oppression, exclusion, and marginalization in order to enact social justice practice (Collins & Bilge, 2016). The use of critical theory to inform leadership practice can support the development of critical consciousness. However, these cases did not provide a clear opportunity to understand or engage intersectionality. For example, none of the cases in the special issue provided a theoretical foundation for intersectionality. Theoretical explanations of intersectionality could have been provided in the context of the case, teaching notes, reading list, discussion questions, or activities. Meanwhile, educational leadership literature in the cases was used to frame the various elements of the cases to highlight specific practices of injustices, but did not specifically engage intersectionality. For example, case 4 included the following literature as part of the background for the extension activity focused on inclusive service delivery: “As Frattura and Capper (2007) argue, ‘Oppression in our society is perpetuated through our schools by the ‘slotting and blocking’ of students with differing needs into self-contained programs and separate schools for their perceived own good’ (p. xxvii)” (p. 47). Only case one provided a theoretical foundation for intersectionality. Citing Crenshaw (1991) in the teaching notes, Marshall and Marsh (2016) wrote,

Bringing the concept of intersectionality to prominence, Crenshaw (1991) has argued that ‘through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics’ (p. 1299). (p. 12)

Although this quote provided some context of the critical theory, this single quote from Crenshaw could cause a misreading of intersectionality as simply and singly concerned with identity politics, which can lead those new to intersectionality with the impression that analyzing of structural inequities is apart from consideration of social differences among individuals within and across groups.

None of the other cases cite seminal literature on intersectionality that would help readers (learners) to understand its historical, political, philosophical, or
theoretical foundations. Instead, the cases often referenced educational leadership literature to frame the particular issue. For example, the teaching notes in case 6 provided literature on educational leadership and equitable service delivery that frames the discussion questions. Therefore, the questions of “Why are perspectives from community-based organizations not woven into this case? What does this suggest about the patterns of communication that predominate in school communities? What are some implications of this for school leaders in areas facing dramatic demographic transformations?” becomes situated in service delivery instead of structural inequity at the intersections of oppressions (p. 68).

Meanwhile, case five offered suggested readings that “may support school administrators as they navigate the tensions between the three tenets of quality schooling of culturally and linguistically diverse students” (p. 58). None of the readings in case six included intersectionality. The lack of acknowledgment of resources around various scholarly works on intersectionality is antithetical to the purpose of the special issue to connect theory and practice. The cases did not connect the theory of intersectionality throughout the different elements of a case. Due to the various interpretations of intersectionality, understanding how the authors in this collection used intersectionality to promote social justice is crucial.

Minimal Attention Given to the Role of Agency in Social Justice Leadership

Intersectionality is a critical framework of liberation. Collins and Bilge (2016) wrote that intersectionality is “not simply to provide more complex and comprehensive analyses of how and why social inequalities persist, but also to engage questions of social justice” (p. 202). Social justice in intersectionality is the challenge of social inequities with action to create a just society. Most of the six cases dealt with social action from the perspective of the leader needing to enact new protocol, policies, and systems. For example, case five focused on opportunities for professional development practices led by the educational leader to honor the languages and identities of their students. For instance, one of the discussion questions asked, “What supports might the principal, leadership team, and the teachers need to develop effective practices that honor the languages and identities of the students and the community that the school serves?” (p. 59). This question is rooted in group recognition rather than the transformation of culture, policies, and practices that oppress some identities. In other words, social justice becomes a surface neoliberal intervention that only recognizes differences rather than an opportunity to challenge systemic and internalized oppressive practices or policies. In case 4, questions about how to resolve the situation of a Black boy in special education being shuffled around loses its critical stance with questions that center on just fixing this Black boy’s experience, but not challenging the practices of the school. For example, one of the questions asked, “What were the issues with Reynolds special education and the former service delivery? What made me uncomfortable? How did race, disability, and class intersect at Reynolds?” (p. 47). While this case draws readers to analyze power in relation to intersecting identities, it does not prompt readers to consider action beyond the student’s individual experience.
Although leaders taking responsibility for social change is positive, all of the cases neglected the agency of students and staff members whose social location and standpoints resulted in their oppression. In case two, the narrative highlights the role of the Black and Latina women teachers who performed “other mothering” to male students of color in order to counter the environment of negativity; however, none of the discussion questions asked about how these teachers’ social location could be used as a strategy of resistance to disrupt the school to prison pipeline. Instead, the discussion questions focused on what visual social identity markers should the principal possess to address the needs of the students. Thus, intersectionality is reduced to identity politics, which requires readers to only grapple with identity without considering structural manifestation of oppression.

Intersectionality centers social justice from various social locations. Without the input or understanding of resistance from the people whose experiences of injustices we seek to alleviate, we risk reproducing structures that reinforce oppression through different means. For example, in case two the community is an important stakeholder in disrupting the school to prison pipeline in the alternative school, but there is limited engagement that prompts the readers to consider a partnership with the community for social change. This presents a tension on who can practice social justice leadership that challenges social inequities. Addressing this tension not only shifts social action from within individual leadership responsibility to a collective leadership responsibility, but also takes into account the complexity of identities, power relations, and organizational structures that leaders are also subject to. In other words, leaders are not mere outsiders but are part of structures and power relations that privilege some identities while oppressing others.

**Discussion**

Pedagogical cases are one way to link theory with practice for the development of social justice leadership. The *JCEL’s* 2016 special issue centering on intersectionality examined in this review revealed that the use of intersectionality in educational leadership pedagogical cases is underdeveloped. What is glaringly evident throughout the cases is that intersectionality is situated in the institutionalization of intersectionality that limits the analytical tool to personal experiences and a surface exploration of interlocking oppressions (Naples, 2017). In other words, the cases focused action on addressing symptoms of social inequities rather than disrupting structural injustice. For instance, in case four (the poor Black boy in special education) the readers were asked to understand the student’s experience, but neglected to engage the reader in considering why poor Black boys are overrepresented in special education. This was a missed opportunity to engage readers in examining the role that the intersection of racism and classism play in special education practices. Thus, social justice leadership becomes ineffective in disrupting the status quo and avoiding neoliberal ideology of social transformation in education practice and policies. The literature indicates that social justice has become more of a catchphrase than a practice that transforms educational systems for equity (Dantley & Green, 2015; North, 2008).
Throughout the cases, intersectionality became about identity or identity politics, with the readers being asked to consider how identities are visible in various educational contexts. In this regard, Crenshaw (1991) argued that intersectionality is not “some new totalizing theory of identity,” but rather an analytical tool for making sense of structural power relations (p. 1244). The focus on individual’s interlocking identities without the analysis of uneven power relations that result in oppression minimizes the significance of the structural oppression experiences of marginalized groups. This focus is evident in the introduction to the special issue though Scanlan and Theoharis (2016) claimed that “in these cases, school leaders wrestle with how discrete dimensions of identity—including race and ethnicity, cultural and linguistic identity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, religion, exceptionality—interact within schools” (p. 4). This description of intersectionality serves as the only definition of intersectionality in the special issue. Without a clear understanding on how the authors in each case interpret intersectionality, readers could miss key concepts while engaging with the case or must rely on previous knowledge or supplementary materials. King (2010) notes that intersectionality as a framework has been flexible in academia, but has failed to acknowledge the women of color who theorized a lens to examine interlocking identities in the context of structural power relations that result in oppression and privilege.

Pedagogical cases can also connect theory to practice within educational leadership preparation programs. This approach breaks down the compartmentalization of theory and practice that leaves university curriculum and coursework disconnected from the day-to-day experiences of school leaders. Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that not only makes room for new knowledge, but demands social action that addresses power relations that result in oppression through the analysis of power and the commitment to social action (Collins & Bilge, 2016). This theoretical framework provides analytical opportunities for critical inquiry and praxis not only in practice, but also in the leadership preparation classroom. The use of pedagogical cases around intersectionality offers opportunities for community building within leadership preparation classrooms through dialogical education. In understanding the relationship between intersectionality and critical education, Collins and Bilge (2016) note, dialogical education provides space for students and instructors to talk and listen to people who have different points of view, which can assist with developing analytical skills that examine social issues from various spaces, levels, and forms. Therefore, the *JCEL*’s 2016 special issue centering on intersectionality offers the field of educational leadership an opening to considering and creating pedagogical cases using intersectionality.

**Recommendations**

The 2016 *JCEL* special issue centering on intersectionality provides a potential framework for how to use a collection of cases to blend theory and practice. Moreover, the special issue could be used to create more pedagogical cases that further intersectionality for social justice leadership. Below are recommendations for how these cases may be used in leadership preparation courses. Ultimately, how
the cases are used depends on curriculum content, as well as the knowledge that participants and instructors have on intersectionality. If these cases are an introduction to intersectionality, I would suggest only using case one to present intersectionality as a theory and educational leadership for social justice practice with supplemental readings on the critical theory. For students who are aware of intersectionality or have other curriculum content that addresses this framework, I would suggest cases one through five. The use of these cases allows students to use case one as a guide to engage with the other cases. For advanced students who have studied intersectionality from multiple perspectives and disciplines, I would suggest case six. This case treats intersectionality as a theory of difference, but could provide opportunities for students to create and expand the case elements to demonstrate their comprehensive knowledge of intersectionality beyond identity politics.

Future pedagogical cases that center intersectionality and social justice leadership should avoid an additive approach and identity politics. Such a focus on uneven power can be achieved through discussion questions and activities that include prompts for the readers to grapple with analyzing uneven power relations at the intersection of multiple social locations for social justice. For example, potential questions could be: “What are the specific identities that overlap or intersect that have shaped how you understand social injustice?” “What could be the cause of the disproportionate number of poor, Asian boys being pushed out of school?” “How might your actions be different if you were in her place, given your positionality?” These questions could engage students on the various dimensions of power dynamics. The discussion questions and activities should provoke students to consider social action on various levels and spaces. This can be achieved by asking students to think about the multiple actors involved in the educational setting and what role each person can play for a collective movement. For example, in case two, intersectionality can be used to analyze the experiences and power relations of the women teachers, school leadership, community partners, and the students. In addition, the inclusion of theoretical scholarship of intersectionality within the discussion questions and activities could provide students with a clear direction for analysis and reflection. For example, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) conceptualizes intersectionality through the “account of multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (p. 1245). This quotation invites the question: What are some of the nuances that come up in the case study around multilingualism, ethnicity, and race, and how do these ideologies impact schooling? The inclusion of theoretical scholarship can also be applied to the suggested readings and case context. The narrative, literature review, and suggested readings should include work on intersectionality and its use across disciplines. A clear understanding of how intersectionality is being defined can influence how readers use the critical theory to consider social justice leadership. Moreover, it is important for the narrative to hold the interlocking of social locations and oppressions together (e.g., girl + Muslim), to provide readers with a context to engaging with the other elements of the case. It is important to note that pedagogical cases allow for readers and instructors with varying degrees of knowledge about intersectionality to engage
with the theory to understand various educational contexts that serve as sites of structural inequities.

Conclusion

Intersectionality as an analytical tool can bring awareness to interlocking social oppressions and disrupt power relations to create a political praxis that furthers social justice (Dhamoon, 2010; King, 2015). Therefore, future pedagogical cases should include more information about intersectionality or encourage course instructors to provide the background context of this analytical framework. These cases could serve as a transformative pedagogical tool; however, participants must have foundational language and knowledge of this framework to engage in analysis that uncovers structural and systemic power relations. Although the JCEL’s 2016 special issue introduces intersectionality as a tool of social justice practice within educational leadership pedagogical cases, this important work needs to be expanded. It is critical for educators/administrators to understand intersectionality as a tool to uncover social inequality within the educational system. This approach allows educational leaders with a social justice orientation to be critical of social divisions. Without an understanding of how social inequities work together to create unjust structures, education will continue to be a site for the production and reproduction of social injustices.

References

References marked with an asterisk indicate the Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership’s (JCEL) 2016 special issue.


Educational Administration and History, 48(4), 324-341.


Author

Ericka Roland is a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership & Policy Studies department at the University of South Florida. Her research focuses on critical approaches to teaching, learning, and leadership development in educational organizations and communities. In pursuing these lines of inquiry, she considers the role of socio-politics, aspects of identity, history, socio-culture, power relations, and institutional structures influence curriculum and pedagogical outcomes and opportunities.