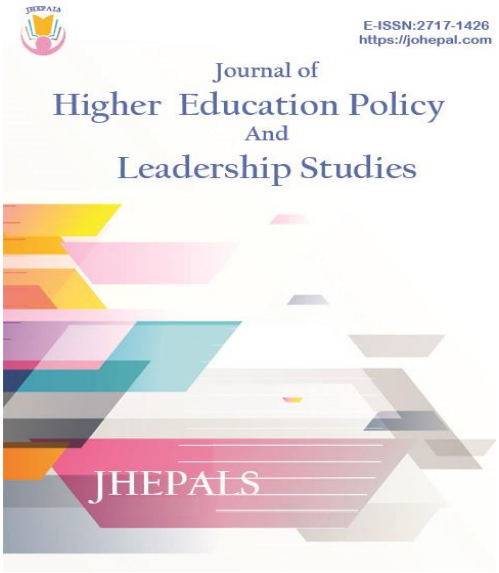
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Intermixing Social Justice and Race-Neutral Leadership Approaches: A Critical Content Analysis of Doctoral Students' Literature Reviews



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Abstract

Researchers acknowledge the challenge educational doctoral programs face to prepare their candidates for social justice leadership in our increasingly racially diverse society and schools. The problem is that students are often exposed to competing, race-neutral leadership approaches and discourse, professional bureaucratic and colorblind managerialism, that undermine social justice goals. Through critical content analysis, the purpose of this study was to map patterns of social justice discourse as evidenced across two cohorts of doctoral students' dissertation literature reviews (N=19) by examining the degree to which they challenge inequity, embrace social justice, or uphold the status quo. The doctoral students unintentionally intermixed bureaucratic, colorblind, and liberal discourses with social justice. We believe this is a reflection of their racial/ethnic background, their uncritical consumption of the literature, as well as their choice of framework. Limited research exists at the cross-section of how doctoral students' scholarship and their social justice leadership identity emerge within the context of their dissertation development. The mixing terminology finding is symbolic of the process of writing the literature review itself as students begin to develop their identities as social justice scholars before researchers.

Keywords: Social Justice Leaders; Graduate Education; Dissertation Development; Critical Theory; Content Analysis

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Introduction

Researchers increasingly acknowledge the challenge educational doctoral programs face to prepare their candidates for social justice leadership in our increasingly racially diverse society and schools (Buss et al., 2014; Capper & Young, 2014; Furman, 2012; Hernandez & McKenzie, 2010; Radd et al., 2021; Turner, 2020; Zambo et al., 2015). The expectation is for social justice leaders to challenge "racist and otherwise inequitable policies and practices in schools and beyond" by raising their own and others racial consciousness and intentionally creating greater access to educational opportunities for historically marginalized students of color through social justice reform (Turner, p. 23). As faculty members within a doctoral program that is designed to prepare candidates for a terminal degree (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership for Diverse Learning Communities, achieving the goal of preparing social justice leaders is of particular interest to us. Therefore, we designed a content analysis study that mapped Ed.D. students' thinking about social justice topics at a point in time when they began developing their literature review chapters for their future dissertation studies.

Given the fact that classrooms and schools are often tools for reproducing, instead of disrupting, social inequities found in society (Collins, 2009), the purpose of our Ed.D. program is to prepare teachers, school administrators, related educational professionals and future professors for instructional leadership roles that embrace diversity, social justice and equity. Yet, we have found that a challenge in developing students' social justice leadership identities is their prior exposure to two other competing, race-neutral leadership approaches in the media, academic literature, and in their own PK-12 and higher education experiences (Yosso, 2006). As Turner (2020) explained, the first approach is a more traditional leadership style called "professional bureaucratic" that is accompanied by top-down leadership and an assimilation viewpoint that is based on the assumption that students of color must adopt and fit in with the dominant, white, middle class group's cultural norms and expectations to succeed in school. Meanwhile, the second, more contemporary approach that undermines social justice leadership is called "colorblind managerialism" (Turner, 2020). In this approach, leaders profess a commitment to "equity," but avoid race by refusing to alter the taken for granted racialized structures or policies that continue to benefit White and/or high-income students and further marginalize low-income and/or students of color (Turner, 2020). These color-evasive[*] leaders often focus on raising standardized test scores for student sub-groups without acknowledging that what is tested is not equally accessible to all.

This article is based on a co-taught doctoral course in which students fully develop their literature reviews during the spring semester of their second year of core coursework. The literature review course is designed to undergird the program philosophy of becoming social justice *scholars before researchers* (Boote & Beile, 2005); therefore, we believe the course is a particularly rich site for exploring the topic of social justice researcher identity development. The purpose of the literature review assignment is to have students

[*] We switched out Turner's (2020) use of "colorblind" with "color-evasive" because the former can have ableist connotations (Annamma et al., 2017).

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develop a framework for their research questions, provide an empirical grounding for their problem of study, and identify the scholarly significance for their future dissertation.

As we will show, the 19 doctoral students whose work is analyzed in this study unintentionally intermixed bureaucratic, color-evasive, and liberal content with social justice narratives. We believe this is a reflection of their racial/ethnic backgrounds, their uncritical consumption of the literature, as well as their choice of framework. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated, "many people live locked into our 'taken for granted' worlds, oblivious to the details of our environment and to the assumptions under which we operate" (p. 5). The literature review course is an important turning point in the Ed.D. students' social justice leadership journey because it is the first time in the program that they are asked to identify a problem of practice, grapple with their prior and current experiences in schools, and review the literature on their social justice topics.

Limited research focuses directly on the development of social justice narratives within the development of doctoral students' literature reviews (Mehra, 2021), particularly in the context of a program focused specifically on social justice leadership. In addition, few studies exist at the cross-section of how doctoral students' scholarship and their social justice identity emerge within the context of their dissertation development (Choi et al, 2021). Therefore, the overarching goal of this study was to explore the content student participants included in their literature reviews through the lens of the three school district leadership approaches: social justice, bureaucratic, and color-evasive. In particular, through content analysis, the purpose of this study was to improve our teaching in the literature review course by mapping patterns of social justice narratives as evidenced across two cohorts of doctoral students' literature reviews and examining the degree to which they challenge inequity, embrace social justice, or uphold the inequitable status quo. The following research question guided our analysis:

- What types of narratives in the doctoral students' literature reviews contributed to creating their leadership identities as emerging social justice scholars for diverse learning communities, and what narratives undermined that goal?

For the purpose of this study, the Ed.D. student chapters included the following diverse student populations: race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomics, dis/abilities, citizenship status, and gender roles/identity.

Literature and Framework

Many researchers have argued that educators and educational leaders must develop racial and cultural literacies to work with diverse student populations, maximize learning experiences, and provide an equitable education (Au and Kawakami, 1994; Erickson, 1987; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sealey-Ruiz, 2011). Since bureaucratic and color-evasive (Annamma et al., 2017) ideologies continue to permeate "U.S. society, and both schools and those who work in schools mirror these beliefs" (Yosso, 2006, p. 23), our doctoral students are encouraged to engage in research that challenges the traditional leadership paradigms and become social justice leaders committed to transforming diverse learners' educational experiences.

In this article, we analyze students' literature reviews through the lens of Radd et al.'s (2021) approach to social justice leadership, which postulates the need for educators to

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work toward overcoming the pathologies of silence and engage in conversations and actions that lead to transformative, equity-oriented reform. Failing to do so may lead to unintentionally reproducing bureaucratic and color-evasive views that attempt to fit historically marginalized students of color into the dominant White group and then blame them when there are uneven opportunities and outcomes:

> We hear stories told by well-meaning people that say problems in the neighborhood, the family structure, the child's self-esteem, the child's motivation, the child's resilience ("grit"), the parenting, and so on result in certain students' (children living in poverty, children of color, children with disabilities, Els, and so on) difficulties in school. This is what we call a deficit orientation …when people blame students, their families, their circumstances, and their communities for the symptoms and results of their inequities rather than identify and correct the systemic causes of inequality and inequity (Radd et al., 2021, pp. 18-19).

Common in the bureaucratic approach to leadership, the term equity involves "abstract equality" (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), or "treating all students the same, despite their differing starting points, and without recognizing that racism and class inequality already permeates the values and structures in schools and society" (Turner, p. 23). Liberal ideology and decision-making is also common in the bureaucratic approach; interfering with social justice leadership goals.

Liberalism includes the belief in "integrated, inclusive schooling," that simultaneously also "supports segregated and stratified school structures that mainly benefit students from the middle class" (Brantlinger et al., 1993, p. 371). Fozdor (2008) also noted that within liberal ideology "the use of discursive strategies is often used to perpetuate a status quo" (p. 20). These findings challenge social justice educators to increase criticality of sociopolitical issues, personal ideology and positionality, as well as the notion of othering as a means toward building capacity for critical discourse.

Othering in the bureaucratic tradition promotes superior and inferior positions related to power, including race, class, and gender (Vaught, 2011). In terms of racial othering, Vaught explained, "Whiteness defines others in antithetical and mutually exclusive terms" (p. 36). Capper and Young (2014) pointed out that unless the goal of social justice leadership is centered around inclusivity, the narratives will continue to marginalize people of color. They argued for an increase in explicit training for educators in social justice leadership programs as a necessary component in building the capacity to recognize liberal vs. critical narratives.

Empirical research also revealed that although educators and leaders may display a concern about inequities, they rely on color-evasiveness to disengage from naming systemic inequities related to race directly and display an inability to increase their racial literacy (Guinier, 2004; Sealey-Ruiz, 2011; Shields, 2004; Zambo et al., 2015). Reflecting color-evasive leadership, institutional and structural barriers that exist in schools are absolved from responsibility because the cause of the problem is placed on the students and their families instead (Delgado-Gaitán, 2001; Milner IV, 2007). For example, Lewis and Diamond (2018) found that White students, parents, and school staff embrace diversity in the abstract, but avoid truly addressing the problems of access and opportunity or admitting

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their role in perpetuating them because of outdated and ahistorical explanations that avoid race:

> Our typical narratives, for example, about why things are the way they are in schools, why the AP and honors tracks are almost all white or why detention is filled with too many black and brown youth, point us away from the larger history and context of such realities and instead provide local and narrow explanations embedded in the bodies, minds, and intentions of individual youth, their families, or their immediate community. (p. 174)

Barriers to achieving equity in racially diverse school contexts included beliefs in meritocracy and achievement ideology, e.g., students who work hard get rewarded for their efforts (Lewis & Diamond). Therefore, the authors' main argument was that schools must shift away from these types of "moral, cultural, or socioeconomic" color-evasive explanations that blame individuals or cultural groups to a "focus on structural competency and racial transparency [which] would instead encourage us to examine how the structures within which we operate developed and evolved and, in doing so, force us to reframe how we understand them today" (Lewis & Diamond, p. 174).

Social justice educators and leaders must interrogate their own personal narratives about race and racial equity, as well as policies and practices that result in disparate racial outcomes to see how race benefits certain groups over others (Souto-Manning, 2014). This reflexive process is particularly challenging for White students and faculty, like the authors of this article, who likely benefited from the inequitable educational structures in place, tend to rely on color-evasive explanations for gaps in opportunity and outcomes, and may have had minimal opportunities for critical conversations within diverse learning communities. Students of color have also been found to internalize racialized structures and policies because of growing up and attending schools in U.S. society (Leonardo, 2013).

Process of Developing Social Justice Leadership Identities

Social justice leadership identity requires a critical praxis; it includes ongoing reflection and deep dialogue to bring about pervasive action (Attia & Edge, 2017; Furman, 2012; Mehra, 2021). In their review of empirical literature within educational sciences, Choi et al. (2021) described doctoral student identity development as a process occurring at the intersection of many and varied sociocultural contexts. They suggested that students engage in reflection and dialogue to further efforts toward developing their scholar identity.

Mehra (2021) explored "themes countering hegemonic knowledge representation in both the course-based learning space and the preparation of the dissertation" (p. 186). The author noted that the responsibility lies with both the individual and the program facilitators and even institutions. Mehra suggested programs further integrate diversity of discourse and social justice to stay relevant in the contemporary social, cultural, political, and economic landscape as a way of supporting criticality in social justice leadership.

However, when educational leaders adopt a social justice stance appreciating diverse students' *funds of identity and knowledge*, educators move towards a more culturally responsive education in which the role of families and out-of-school experiences are valued instead of seen as different (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Our students are encouraged to design research that accounts for historical, political, and

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contextual factors that does not discount how and why institutional policies and practices consistently lead to racial or cultural differences in access to opportunities and uneven outcomes (Lewis & Diamond, 2018).

Research Methodology

In the tradition of social constructivism, we employed content analysis in this study to examine the underlying "communication of meaning" in students' literature review chapters (Merriam, 2009, p. 205). We found Fairclough's (1995) concept of intertextuality—how an individual text draws on elements of other texts—particularly fitting for analyzing the content of doctoral students' writing. Fairclough further proposed "that analysis of texts should not be artificially isolated from the analysis of institutional and discursive practices within which texts are embedded" (p. 9).

Context of the Study

The study took place within a doctoral program that is housed in a private, suburban liberal arts university grounded in the Catholic faith and tradition. Although the university is attended by 56 percent White, middle-class students, both student and faculty diversity has substantially increased over the past decade, especially within the doctoral program. In Fall of 2021, it was reported that 44% of the general student body identified as Black, Latinx, or Asian, and over 51% of the doctoral students did so.

The Long Island, suburban region where this university is located contains over 100 school districts in a small geographic area, and is racially and socio-economically diverse overall. Yet, the communities and schools within the region are considered to be among the most segregated regions in the U.S. (Erase Racism, 2022). This highly fragmented and segregated context sets the backdrop for the students' dissertation topics and sites for their future dissertation research.

Students take the literature review course in the spring semester of their second year in the program. Prior content courses that students take include Change Leadership for Equity, Advocacy, and Excellence; Ethical, Moral, and Legal Issues in Educational Leadership; Learning, Cognition, and Diversity; and Critical Issues in Education—all of which expose students to social justice leadership approaches for their scholarship and writing. The Literature Review course is considered an important turning point in the development of their future dissertation research studies because students are asked to choose their topics and narrow down their ideas.

Data Sources

Two separate groups of doctoral students' literature reviews in a cohort-based program provided the data for this study. Nineteen total students who were enrolled in the two literature review classes were co-taught (by two of the authors) in the program during the spring of 2017 and 2018. As shown in Table 1, 13 students identified as White or White Latina along with three Black, one Latina, and two Asian students. Seven students worked full-time as K-12 school or district administrators, seven worked as K-12 teachers, two were employed as college adjunct faculty, one was a college administrator, and two students were former K-12 educators.

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Table 1.
Data Table

Data Source	Race/ Ethnicity	Position	Topic	Theoretical Frameworks	Number of Mixing Terminology Codes
White and White Latina Students (n=13)					
Adriana	White, Multilingual Latina	K-12 school admin.	Teachers Implicit Attitudes	Critical	7
Ashley	White, Multilingual Latina	K-12 district admin.	Coteaching in integrated ENL classes	Non-Critical	8
Brianna	White, Multilingual	K-12 teacher	Peace education and CRP	Humanizing	9
Jillian	White	K-12 school admin.	Food insecurity	Non-Critical	5
Linda	White	K-12 school admin.	Drama Therapy ELLs	Non-Critical	5
Sonia	White	K-12 teacher	Dialogic Pedagogy and Tracking	Non-Critical	9
Samantha	White	K-12 teacher	Standardized testing	Non-Critical	8
Dierdre	White	College adjunct faculty	Suicide Prevention Trainings	Non-Critical	11
Austin	White	College adjunct faculty	Academic Procrastination College	Non-Critical	10
Matthew	White	Retired school admin.	Preparing Global Citizens	Non-Critical	6
Molly	White	K-12 teacher	Religious Sister Educational Leaders	Critical/Non-Critical	9
Meredith	White	K-12 district admin.	Teachers in Co-taught Inclusive Settings	Critical	0
Laurie	White	K-12 educator	Writing in Detracked ELA class	Humanizing/ Non- Critical	2
Students of Color (n=6)					
Antonia	Latina, Multilingual	K-12 school admin.	Family Separation due to Deportation	Humanizing/ Non-Critical	4
Chantal	Black	Un-employed	Critical Thinking in Teacher Preparation	Critical	1
Bianca	Black	K-12 teacher	Mentoring programs for novice teachers	Critical	0
Priya	Asian	K-12 teacher	Students with Intellectual Disabilities	Critical	0
Rich	Black	K-12 admin.	Black Male Teachers	Critical/ Humanizing	2
Salma	Asian	College admin.	Students of Color and Academic Support	Critical	1

Each student's chapter included a theoretical framework(s) and 3-4 major themes the students critically analyzed and synthesized from the literature. In Table 1, we labeled the

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framework as a critical theory, humanizing theory, or non-critical theory. Critical theories included the following, critical race, critical disability, stereotype threat, critical pedagogy, and feminist theory. We labeled it as a humanizing theory if it values and affirms students of color, which included CRP and ethics of care. Many students chose non-critical frameworks, such as social learning theory or self-efficacy theory, and a few paired them with critical or humanizing theories. Student topics ranged from uncovering White women teachers' implicit bias to implementing dialogic pedagogy in a low-track high school class to exploring co-teaching roles in an integrated English as a New Language classroom. The literature reviews ranged from 30 to 65 pages.

Data Analysis

We analyzed patterns of language use in and across the statements within each paper and across all papers, with the ultimate goal of identifying different narrative representations of reality in the students' papers. As content analysts and insiders to the setting, we had to distance ourselves from the chapters; instead, we established inductive analytical codes to search across the data. As Merriam (2009) wrote, the content analysis process entails "simultaneous coding of raw data and the construction of categories that capture relevant characteristics of the document's content" (p. 205).

Digital copies of the literature reviews were imported into the qualitative data analysis software Dedoose for coding and analysis. After reviewing each literature review paper, we developed a coding list that incorporated a combination of theory-driven and in-vivo codes (Saldana, 2009). We included parent, or broad, codes like "social justice," "bureaucratic" and "color-evasive" as well as detailed codes, or child codes, like "agency, caring, racial equity, cultural inequities, and systemic inequities unchallenged." The data analysis process for this study included five steps. Step 1 consisted of initial open coding of all data which included coming up with agreed upon codes. In Step 2 we identified two literature review chapters to each code separately in Dedoose and then compared the coded excerpts across the three researchers to determine intercoder reliability. In Step 3 we divided up the remaining chapters and coded them independently. During Step 4 was when we identified patterns and themes across excerpts.

Each of us wrote memos and we met regularly to discuss how we were conceptualizing codes and identifying emerging themes. Topics developed in memos assisted us in creating and revising the coding list prior to open coding, in identifying themes, and later in theorizing about the broad patterns in the data.

Positionality

Our positionalities as social justice leaders, researchers, educators, Ed.D. professors, and student informed this work and our approach to teaching and learning in the literature review course. It came from our belief that "inequity results from oppressive power relationships that create structural and systemic barriers and belief systems that justify the underlying inequality" (Bertrand et al., 2015, p. 5). We also reminded ourselves that content analysis is simultaneously concerned with what is written and the meaning behind the words.

We must also acknowledge that as three White researchers, we undoubtedly had blind spots in how we analyzed the literature reviews. By drawing on our own positionalities and

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educational experiences, we fully understand that we benefited from the types of inequitable structures and systems explored in this research. Our research agendas, however, focus on providing students with equitable, racially conscious, and diverse learning environments. We strive to use critical, social justice narratives and we want the doctoral students to do the same.

Throughout the research, we engaged in different strategies to ensure trustworthiness by reflecting on our racial and cultural privileges and consciousness, and addressing these dynamics as we engaged in the different phases of the research (Milner IV, 2007). Our qualitative interpretations were established through the intercoder reliability process and analyst triangulation (three researchers coded the data). We also employed member checking by sharing emerging findings with two student participants to uncover any bias or missing themes in our analysis. We also asked a scholar of color with expertise in social justice leadership to review our draft article.

Findings

Using content analysis, we viewed the student papers as reflecting ways the students consumed (selected and interpreted) text, the way they produced new text (their literature reviews), as well as how their narratives contributed to creating their emerging identities of social justice leaders.

Overarching findings from our analysis indicate that all of the literature reviews included social justice narratives, albeit to varied degrees.

All students engaged in what we called "mixing terminology," consisting of narratives that either maintained or challenged hierarchical relationships and racial/ethnic inequities in schools and society (Fozdar, 2008) and indicated varied levels of readiness to embrace their social justice leadership identity.

When the mixing terminology code was broken down by the student's race/ethnicity, we found that most of the excerpts came from the 13 White or White Latina students in our sample. We believe this pattern emerged because of their racial/ethnic backgrounds and experiences with diverse student populations, their chosen topics that often focused on intervention-type policies or programs that maintained the inequitable structures, and the uncritical frameworks chosen. In comparison, the remaining six students, three Black, two Asian, and one White student, exhibited many more social justice stances in their writing and most framed their studies using critical theories. For example, Priya, an Asian K-12 special educator, who used critical disability theory in her chapter, wrote this statement:

> I resist the use of entrenched language relating to students with varying abilities or neurodiversity since they may be connected to inherent perspectives and understandings. I attempt to avoid re-voicing of deeply-rooted terms and jargons that may harbor and propagate stereotypes and misunderstandings of students with varying abilities and those who work with them.

While we did find some instances of bureaucratic and color-evasive narratives, as a group, they were much less prevalent compared to the other group of White and White Latina students.

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Therefore, we argue that without explicit instruction on how to avoid deficit-oriented narratives and/or allow what is expressed in the literature to go unchallenged, doctoral students tend to rely on outdated research narratives and their own experiences concerning "diverse" student populations when writing their literature review chapters on social justice-related research topics. The majority of the doctoral students writing their literature reviews had an emerging intention to focus on social justice narratives that recognizes both individual agency and shared responsibility to create an equitable context for learning. These notions were either embodied and represented in the research studies they analyzed and synthesized, or they were articulated in relation to their positionalities and proposed research. Indeed, most doctoral students consider themselves as racially-conscious advocates and hope to leverage their research for school improvement initiatives.

Yet, students also included literature that unintentionally reproduced deficit narratives based on race/ethnicity, language, or gender. In the sections below, we provide examples from the students' papers that illuminate the mixing terminology finding, which includes the pairing of social justice narratives with 1) color-evasiveness and assimilation, 2) diversity discourse, and 3) liberal ideology.

Color-Evasiveness and Assimilation

The analysis of the codes revealed that while arguing for equity-oriented policies and practices, students simultaneously used assimilation, color-evasive discourse that positioned and implicitly compared white, English-speaking students as superior over ELLs, immigrant youth, and students of color. Adriana, a White Latina K-12 administrator, intermixed terminology in her proposed study that she described as, "explor[ing] educator's implicit attitudes towards minority students' perceived ability in a racially, socio-economically, and ethnically diverse public high school." In addition to using the term "minority student" throughout her literature review, which has deficit-connotations, Adriana also referred to students of color as "disadvantaged" and "vulnerable." These labels imply othering and racial hierarchies with the dominant group of White students, which fail to acknowledge the cultural, educational, and social funds of knowledge that all students bring to school.

Ashley, a White, Latina K-12 administrator, wrote her chapter on the topic of co-teaching roles in an integrated English as a New Language (ENL) classroom. She explained that historically schools would segregate English language learner (ELL) students from their general education peers using remedial pull-outs for English language instruction. The growing population of ELLs coupled with research showing the benefits of integrated instruction (Gándara, 2017) has created the conditions for some schools to develop integrated co-taught classrooms.

However, as Ashley pointed out, the problem is that general education and ENL teachers are not always working collaboratively to "differentiate instruction for diverse learners." Hierarchical positioning and differential power and status roles can emerge, with the general education teacher taking the lead role and the ENL teacher taking a subordinate position. In the excerpt below, Ashley critiqued this dominant narrative by citing recent literature that shows ENL teachers using their agency to push back against the inequitable structures within integrated classroom spaces:

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> Research has also revealed the possibility of marginalized ENL teachers repositioning themselves as agents of change (Fogel & Moser, 2017). Teachers in a Mississippi school district who found themselves "positioned against dominant ideologies and educational policies" (Fogel & Moser, p. 65) redefined their professional positions and identities to advocate for policy change. Using discursive interactions in this manner was a strategy that increased the perceived power and authority possessed by the ESL teachers and led to greater collaboration with their colleagues (Haneda & Nespor, 2013).

As shown above, while Ashley displayed many instances of social justice narratives (e.g. "repositioning themselves as agents of change"), she combined that with color-evasiveness and silence around race and racism within co-taught ENL classrooms. When we cross-checked the Fogel and Moser (2017) study that she cited, we found that the authors discussed how contextual factors such as racial, cultural, and linguistic differences between teachers and students can lead to ESL teachers having to contend with discriminatory comments and behaviors from their general education colleagues and students. However, Ashley did not include any mention of race or discrimination in her chapter. We theorize that this is the case because of her chosen framework on positioning theory, which speaks to the power and status hierarchies in the co-taught classroom, but does not directly address race, racism, or systemic inequities inside or outside of school. We would advise future students studying co-teaching and ENL instruction to include critical theories about power and status related to race, class, immigration, and language to avoid color-evasive, uncritical stances in their review of the literature.

Many other mixing terminology examples from the students' literature reviews were associated with research regarding students whose first language was other than English, e.g., conflating lack of English-language skills with lack of knowing. For example, when doctoral students wrote about the benefits of multilingualism, but positioned the proficiency of English as more valuable, they unintentionally undervalue children and families' native language thus revealing assimilationist thinking that social justice leaders seek to push against.

In an excerpt by Lori, a White K-12 educator studying multiliteracies, we noted this theme when she wrote:

> These high numbers of ELLs present both philosophical and theoretical challenges for classroom instruction. These students arrive in the U.S. with their own unique histories of language and culture and face linguistic and cultural challenges that interfere with their academic development and progress, especially in the secondary classroom where they are expected to learn content-specific information in a language that is foreign to them.

This excerpt implies that the diversity a student brings to a learning space is something that needs fixing rather than fostered and built upon. Further, the burden of diversity reproduces and perpetuates deficit thinking about students who do not match those of their teacher.

Antonia, a Latina K-12 administrator in an urban-suburban school district with mostly low-income students of color, took a social justice approach to her topic on students'

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experiences with family deportation when she chose to center the study on identifying the funds of knowledge immigrant families possess and funds of identity they tap into when experiencing a traumatic event (Moll et al., 1992). This framing was significant because most of the literature on this topic focuses solely on the challenges that families face. A theme in her literature review was the desire to keep immigrant families intact through changes to policy.

Yet, while she included social justice narratives regarding "humanizing approaches" to combat "assimilationist and antidemocratic" policies, she also reproduced deficit labeling using the phrase, "undocumented adults and their families." She consistently used undocumented and illegal which have assimilationist connotations. However, her committee later encouraged her to use more nuanced and academically more appropriate phrasing that removed criminality-laden and politically divisive language. In her final dissertation, she switched to the terms, "unauthorized" or simply "immigrant," which are considered more acceptable terms because no person is illegal (Gambino, 2015).

Diversity Discourse

Several students displayed evidence of color-evasive discourse, particularly when using the generic terms regarding "diverse students" or diversity. They would use diversity to refer to culture, ethnicity, and socio-economics without bringing up the concept of race or being specific about who they were referring to. As Berrey (2015) claimed diversity is "an enigma." The very meaning of the word is contested; It has become a capacious concept that obscures which educational and community stakeholders are meant to benefit from its initiatives. Berrey contended that diversity discourse is largely the result of White property interest in diversity where White stakeholders maintain hegemonic control over the process and terms, as well as articulate acceptable forms of diversity.

For example, Brianna is a White, K-12 educator who wrote about the topic of culturally relevant peace education and the power of educators to "eliminate intercultural conflict and ensure a positive school culture" in a racially diverse school setting. She used the terms, diverse and diversity 23 times in her chapter, but never defined these terms. Meanwhile, "race" is only used twice when referring to Dewey's writings, when she wrote, "learning to understand and appreciate all students' backgrounds in terms of race, ethnicity, and culture."

Brianna used diversity discourse to implicitly refer to Black, Latinx, and Asian students, meaning every racial background except the dominant White group, which reflects race neutral and otherizing discourse. Instead of diversity referring to a mix of students from different racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, it was used as a label that excluded White students and reflected bureaucratic and color-evasive leadership approaches: "acceptance of diversity," "ethnically diverse students."

Diverse and diversity referred to culture and ethnicity, but not race. Brianna relies on this diversity discourse throughout her chapter, as shown in the following excerpt:

> Gloria Ladson-Billings in her seminal article on culturally relevant pedagogy reverted the deficit of diversity and turned it into an asset approach that produced new generations of educators willing to appreciate their students' cultural heritage.

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In this quote, she wrote about culturally relevant pedagogy and "educators willing to appreciate their students' cultural heritage," implying that most teachers come from a different cultural heritage and must be "willing" and learn how to "appreciate" the other.

Another example of race-neutral discourse was found in Matthew's chapter. He is a White K-12 administrator, who wrote about developing students' global awareness levels by stressing the importance of teachers' and students' "acceptance of diversity and tolerance of others' differences." The phrase "to tolerate" when referring to an individual or group that comes from a different racial or ethnic background than yourself implies otherness, and has a very different meaning compared to acceptance or respect. Similar to Brianna, he used diversity and diverse students 10 times throughout his chapter to refer to everything except race: "The purpose of this mixed-methods case study will be to determine how a socially, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse group of middle school students perceive their global awareness levels evolving as a result of participating in a global-learning directed curriculum program." Indeed, race is only mentioned one time in a quote by Suárez-Orozco (2005) when stating that students must learn from others who differ by race, religion, and national origin.

We found that diversity discourse enables students to use "labeling" and "othering" language, implicitly comparing "diverse students," meaning students of color, with White students. In this way, students reinforce assimilationist language that serves to keep the school community internally divided (us vs. them) instead of promoting inclusive policies and practices.

Liberal Ideology

When framing the problem of opportunity gaps and inequitable outcomes among different sub-groups, some students placed the blame on external factors in society that educators cannot control. The implication was that society must change (e.g., solve poverty, etc.) before the educational system can change, or the idea that school is a reflection of the larger society because of policies and practices that uphold racial hierarchies. Yet, another implication was that teachers and students lack agency and are simply doing what is expected of them, given the inequitable conditions both internal and external to the school.

Instead of designing studies about "disruptive practices" that would change the status quo (Radd et al., 2021) or including these types of studies in their literature reviews, some students sought to examine intervention-type programs that maintained deficit-oriented student labels and segregation by conforming to school structures rather than restructuring them. In all of these ways, students relied on liberal rather than social justice discourse.

For example, Sonia, a White K-12 teacher, wrote her literature review on "low-track" students of color being exposed to monologic pedagogy (rote memorization and worksheets) in a high school English class. While she admitted that the "system has labeled them inferior," through her use of the term "low-track" student, Sonia was reproducing the deficit-based, inferior labeling that automatically compares the low categorical group to superior "high-track" students who are disproportionately White and middle class. To address the stated problem of teachers in low-track classes using monologic teaching instead of dialogic, discussion-based methods, she argued that dialogic teaching has the power to "foster [student] engagement, awaken academic self-concept, promote democratic citizenship, and provide a lever for social change."

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Sonia relied on liberal instead of social justice narratives as there is no mention of changing the inequitable structures and outcomes via detracking the curriculum. Instead she made a "separate but equal" argument of offering dialogic teaching as an intervention to more "low-track" students in separate hierarchical classes. She noted that "A central purpose of this study will be to identify curriculum that can, in fact, have a democratizing influence on schools by introducing dialogic pedagogy to low track students." In this way, systemic inequities go unchallenged. While she cited the literature on the negative outcomes associated with racialized tracking within diverse schools, she does not review the literature on the benefits of detracking. Reflecting back, we also wondered whether choosing to frame the study primarily around critical pedagogy that centers race, class, and social constructions of ability, instead of her chosen framework of situated learning (Lave, 1988), would have resulted in a lesser degree of deficit-based, liberal narratives.

Another student who unintentionally mixed social justice and liberal narratives was Linda, a White K-12 educator studying the effects of drama therapy on ELLs' language acquisition and self-efficacy in school. Linda wrote about her proposed study in a student-centered way: "This study is designed to enhance students' self-efficacy, as students with higher self-efficacy tend to have a greater motivation to participate and learn in school (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1984)." At the same time, Linda used racial hierarchy narratives when framing the problem of ELLs' perceived lack of success in school:

> Addressing the needs of ELLs is of the utmost importance in school districts, as many ELLs are still not succeeding in their classrooms (LeClair et al., 2009). There are multiple factors for the lack of ELL success, such as the external factors of poverty and cultural discontinuity (Gándara, 2017; LeClair et al., 2009; Tyler et al., 2008)...They are challenged to not only acquire a new language, but also to learn grade-appropriate core content material that they will be assessed on in relation to their native English speaking classmates.

By pointing to poverty and cultural reasons for the general "lack of ELL success," Linda implied that ELLs come from low-income families with different cultural values of education than the school system. She infers that agency is not with the student, but with society's perceptions and expectations of Latinx students in U.S. schools. Linda also implied that ELLs are inferior when compared to "native English speaking" students who seemingly come from higher income families and score higher on "grade-appropriate core content." In this way, she was unintentionally promoting the bureaucratic leadership approach, or a Eurocentric, monolingual view of education that leaves little room for multilingual learners.

Throughout the chapter, Linda wrote that ELLs are in need of some type of intervention to help improve their success in school, in this case through the implementation of an after-school drama therapy program. What was missing is any mention of a drama program that would integrate ELLs with their English-proficient or multilingual peers, even though she cited the literature by Gándara (2017), who has found that ELLs learn important language and socialization skills in mixed-ability general education or dual-language settings. There is also no mention of the unique abilities and strengths that ELLs bring to the classroom or to a drama after school program that would benefit their peers.

Similar to Sonia, this liberal ideology is applied because of the way in which Linda chose to frame the study and her literature review in culturally deficient ways for one sub-group

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of students who are "challenged" in school, painted as unsuccessful, and lacking self-efficacy to improve their English-language skills. The norms and structures went unchallenged, and the proposed solution was an intervention based on separation instead of inclusion. Again, we believe the choice of a critical or asset-based theory instead of self-efficacy, such as Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth theory or critical literacy pedagogy (Morrell, 2008), would have resulted in a higher degree of social justice narratives about ELLs' strengths and abilities and how to leverage research for social change and integration.

Discussion and Implications

Our work has important implications for refining the practice of teaching the literature review in doctoral dissertations. It also provides important lessons for how other doctoral programs educate students about social justice approaches for inclusion in all writings and presentations. More broadly, this research has implications for conducting research with diverse student populations who are often marginalized because of racial/ethnic and other categories of perceived difference. Further, our study raises questions about the taken for granted ways that students of color from historically marginalized and/or disenfranchised backgrounds are viewed in deficit-based ways compared to the White, middle-class, English-dominant group.

Our findings speak to the trajectory of student experience during their social justice leadership identity journey. In particular, our work extends what is known in the literature by suggesting that racialized student identities may impact the extent to which students displayed an emerging social justice leadership identity or held onto prior race-neutral leadership ideologies in their writing. We also illustrated a possible connection between the students' inclusion of a critical theoretical framework in their literature reviews and more engagement with social justice narratives.

Our study has shown how Ed.D. students unintentionally include bureaucratic/assimilation and color-evasive/liberal narratives with social justice in their literature review chapters, which reflected their exposure to social justice and race-neutral leadership approaches. The mixing terminology theme is symbolic of the process of writing the literature review itself as they begin to develop their identities as social justice scholars and researchers. As representatives of both faculty and students in the program, we know that the construction of social justice narratives evolves as students' progress through the program, refine their topics and critical frameworks, and work with their dissertation committees. For example, instead of only studying "low track" students, Sonia ended up studying a detracked English Language Arts high school class for her final dissertation study and included the literature on detracking and critical pedagogy when analyzing her results. Documenting this evolving social justice leadership identity could be an area for future longitudinal research.

We can learn much from the examples of social justice narratives that we identified across the literature review papers in our sample. All students displayed the intention for "equity" as evidenced in their choice of topics and review of the literature. However, as we have shown, this intention was often accompanied by contradictory bureaucratic, color-evasive, and liberal narratives, such as providing excuses for how structures and policies curtail teacher and leader agency, the benefits of multilingualism but positioning of English

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as more valuable, or diversity narratives when referring to students of color as the other, e.g. mixing terminology. We believe if faculty and students recognized the common issues we identified while analyzing their literature reviews, they could avoid problems with intermixing social justice and race-neutral narratives in their writing.

Several practical implications emerged in this study that would assist doctoral faculty and students (as well as master's level students and faculty) when constructing literature reviews that avoid uncritical and anti-social justice narratives. First, faculty must teach doctoral students to attend to the debate in the literature, as we found that students tended to only focus on a one-sided view of their topics which often led to liberal, color-evasive, or assimilationist narratives in the form of systemic inequities unchallenged, labeling, race-neutral, and fixing. Relatedly, there is a need for a "multivocal" view of literature that would include different stakeholder perspectives, as well as critiques in the literature and chosen theories (Patton, 1991).

Second, we found that White and White Latina students who planned to study *the other* in terms of race, class, and language often used otherizing and race-neutral language. Students must interrogate their own positionalities related to the topic and selected population of interest by including research and theory that centers the focal student and family perspectives and experiences. When doctoral students propose to study students who are historically marginalized by racist and inequitable systems they often relied on us vs. them, dichotomous, and hierarchical language that is not only deficit-based but also seemed to naturally compare *the other* to some normalized base of White, middle class, English-dominant students.

Third, faculty should advise students to question whether their main theoretical framework is critical and social justice-based. We found emerging evidence of non-critical theory contributing to the mixing terminology use. For example, we found instances when students used self-efficacy or positioning theory to frame their studies with ELLs, which resulted in many instances of assimilationist and color-evasive narratives.

From the use of outdated and race-neutral narratives to how they approach generalizable terms like "diverse," through this study we have learned that doctoral students who aspire to be social justice leaders must be explicitly taught how to continually reflect on their racial/ethnic positionalities, critique what the literature says, develop racial literacy, and challenge racist policies and practices when embarking on the literature review writing process. In the current context of racial and political polarization, and an increasingly diverse, multiracial public school system in the U.S. and abroad, faculty in educational leadership programs have the responsibility to teach their students to move past race-neutral leadership approaches and discourse to fully embrace social justice leadership identities.

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