Strategic Leadership Policy Strategies to Optimize Justice and Equity for Children of Child-Headed Households

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ABSTRACT

Systemic inequalities pervade our education systems worldwide. No time, like the present, is more apt for school principals to thwart inequalities and ensure that quality is infused in all classrooms and permeates the entire schooling system. This article contributes to the paper on how school principals may utilize their strategic leadership role to enhance the socially just experiences of learners in child-headed households (CHHs). The aim is to investigate and counter justice and equity violations of learners in CHHs, from the perspective of social action leadership theory (SALT) with the help of deconstruction of texts in the Children's Act, Policy on the South African Standard for Principals, and Revised White Paper on Families. The findings call attention to the human agency role of the principal to resist oppression in schools and promote equity and achieve justice and equity for learners in CHHs. Implications for a just strategic leadership plan to advance anti-oppressive practices for CHHs are shared. This article recommends that principals consider the recommended strategies to advance equity, enact human agency, and perform social justice to counter justice violations and prevent inequalities in school systems in their quest to realize equitable societies.

KEYWORDS

Child-headed households; principals; social justice; strategic leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations guidelines for the alternative care of children, define child-headed households (CHHs) as living arrangements with two or more relatives in one household who have lost their parents or other caregivers and where no adults are present (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2009, Paragraph 37). We consider research done in sub-Saharan Africa because there are few statistics on CHHs in European countries and the United States of America (USA). In all nine provinces of South Africa, CHHs are prevalent in both urban and rural informal areas (Pillay, 2016). Esau (2020) mentions that 0.26% of South African children are living in CHHs, which translates to an estimated 122 000 children living in 60 000 families, or 0.67% of South African children. The problem that exists is that children in South African CHHs experience abuse, exploitation, lack of attainable long-term goals, disciplinary issues between the child in charge of the household and his siblings, psycho-social difficulties, and limited educational opportunities, just like their counterparts on the larger African continent (South African Child Gauge, 2013). Thus, school principals' leadership practices matter where it is most required in South African schools, which primarily serve learners from impoverished backgrounds. In addition to acting *in loco parentis* (in the place of the parent), principals also play a crucial role in ensuring that children should enjoy justice and equity (Marongwe et al., 2016).

In terms of school principals' strategic leadership, Meredith (2020) conceives of social justice as an enactment of a strategic leadership goal (widen access and inclusion), a process (develop critical consciousness), and an engagement in transformative social change. Considering Meredith's (2020) views, this paper contributes to the cultivation of a more equitable society against the background of principals' ability to enact strategic leadership so that children from CHHs can enjoy equal opportunities. The rationale for this project is that principals' strategic leadership abilities may be enhanced to empower them to advance social justice, an indispensable tool in nurturing children from CHHs so that they may experience an equitable life. It is imperative, therefore, that principals "support children's education and overall well-being" (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2015, p. 19). In supporting children from CHHs, we contend that principals can use policy directives to innovate change and encourage others to reach their goals while planning transformative activities to optimize justice and equity in schools. A recent paper on principals' potential contribution to social justice found that they should provide learners with equal opportunities (Shaked, 2019). The findings of Ezzani's (2021) paper indicate that principals should utilize strategies in schools to propel a paradigm shift in how learners are served. Significantly, Warner (2020) notes that preventing inequalities in school systems constitutes a key mandate for principals in their quest to realize equitable societies where social justice violations against CHHs are counterbalanced and trust is instilled in principals (Akman, 2020). We maintain that principals who enact transformative social justice, especially, may facilitate harmonious relations among learners so that they ultimately experience a sense of living through social solidarity and experience respect for diversity. This

paper, therefore, asks the following question: *What strategic leadership policy strategies can be proposed to assist school principals to optimize justice and equity for children of child-headed households*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A glance at child-headed households

According to the *Revised White Paper on Families,* a child-headed household (CHH) refers to a "household without an adult caregiver, which is headed by the eldest or most responsible child who assumes parental responsibility" (RSA, 2021, p. 180). Childhood is observed as a timeframe in which children acquire information, engage in character-building, obtain essential technical and social skills, and how eventually develop into mature human beings (Phillips, 2015). Even though being helpful to families and carrying out housework may be regarded as fundamental to childhood, the tasks of children as heads of their households are knowingly further reaching: children that head families are in control of making decisions regarding household issues on a daily basis (Phillips, 2015). A further alarming issue is that educational institutions will experience absenteeism and an increase in school dropouts because children of CHHs need to take care of other household duties and their younger siblings (Bhengu, 2021). This has a significant impact on justice and equity for children of CHHs because these children usually face, amongst others, domestic and financial challenges as well as stigmatization (Simuforosa & Wiseman, 2016). The challenges reflect their social disempowerment and devastating experiences which, in turn, affect their academic progress. Drawing on the brief literature provided, this paper will regard children of CHHs as children whose childhood has been replaced with parenthood and who do not enjoy justice and equity in terms of their development and educational opportunities.

Strategic and transformative social justice leadership of principals

The South African personnel administrative measures (PAM) declares that school principals should "ensure that the education of the learners is promoted in a proper manner and accordance with approved policies" (RSA, 2022, p. 43). In this regard, principals play an important role in ensuring that learners develop optimally and that the required circumstances conducive to learner improvement are established in schools (Mestry, 2017). However, dealing with children of CHHs in schools is not easy because these children "come to school troubled, shabby, lacking basic things and emotionally and psychologically depressed" (Marongwe et al., 2016, p. 41). This implies that principals need support on how to ensure that children from CHHs are not deprived of educational opportunities – thus enacting social justice to assist such children. In light of school principals' critical part in ensuring quality learning, and their biggest encouragement being identified mainly in schools with the highest need, it is necessary to find innovative ways to optimally fulfil their potential for offering equivalent chances in school learning (Shaked, 2019). Drawing from Shaked (2019), we are of the opinion that school

principals should be involved in a search to find solutions for problems that may create social injustices, whilst enacting transformative social justice leadership.

Transformative leadership encompasses two prime and corresponding philosophical intentions (Shields, 2016). Firstly, individual and private good (Labaree, 1997) signifies that when the natural learning environment is inclusive, considerate, and reasonable (Capper & Young, 2014), learners can improve their academic achievement. The second proposition outlines the role of educational institutions in addressing public good issues including fairness, public existence, and social responsibility while building and strengthening a democratic society through the involvement of informed and helpful people. Thus, when transformative leadership is enacted, social justice is enacted in schools. Furman (2012) emphasizes the action element contained in social justice leadership as it identifies and unravels unjust and oppressive practices and replaces them with more fair, socially applicable ones. When principals would thus enact transformative leadership, they should do it in a socially just way by harmonizing promise and critique; generating innovative information models; concentrating on freedom, fairness, and justice, whilst demonstrating ethical bravery and engagement (Shields, 2010). Drawing on Shields (2010), we hold the view that a combination of transformative leadership and social justice leadership may result in transformative social justice leadership in that principals should take action to redress injustices in schools. In this instance, principals are well-positioned to ensure educational access, and support to promote equity to achieve social justice for learners in CHHs.

Ezzani (2021) agrees that principals should advance anti-oppressive practices in schools to counter individuals' beliefs and attitudes toward learners. The findings of Ezzani's (2021) paper indicate that principals should utilize strategies in schools to propel a paradigm shift in how learners are served. A recent paper on principals' potential contribution to social justice found that they should provide learners with equal opportunities (Shaked, 2019). Significantly, Warner (2020) notes that preventing inequalities in school systems constitutes a key mandate for principals in their quest to realize equitable societies where social justice violations against CHHs are counterbalanced and trust is instilled in principals (Akman, 2020). We maintain that principals who enact transformative social justice, especially in the context of our paper, may facilitate harmonious relations among learners so that they ultimately experience a sense of living through social solidarity and social justice experiences.

Social justice experiences of learners in child-headed households

Social justice is characterized by fairness, acknowledgment of diversity, and mutual obligation amongst all people as well as ensuring the impartial division of resources (Patel, 2015). Considering the circumstances children face in CHHs and their access to resources (Esau, 2020), it can be derived that they experience little fairness in life as they are vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, inability to access social services, lack of achievable long-term objectives, reduced opportunities for education, reduced self-value and reduced inner locus of control (Pillay, 2016). CHHs are located in the poorest 20% of all households and are, therefore, far worse than

households consisting of a mix of generations (Meintjes et al., 2010). The financial difficulties children from CHHs face are an obvious indication of their unfortunate economic circumstances, indicating that they live in a socially unjust society (Patel, 2015) as they would not have access to regular nutritious food, often resulting in them performing poorly at school as their below-average levels of cognitive capacity reflects in their academic results. Evidence hereof is provided through a paper done in Zimbabwe (Maushe & Mugumbate, 2015), showing that CHHs face a massive struggle in supplying their everyday essentials including clothing, food, and education. There is also an absence of psycho-social support such as protection, assistance, devotion, protection, and belonging. The children note that, while they were still carelessly incorporated into an extended family system, they were mostly on their own when it came to fending for the family (Maushe & Mugumbate, 2015).
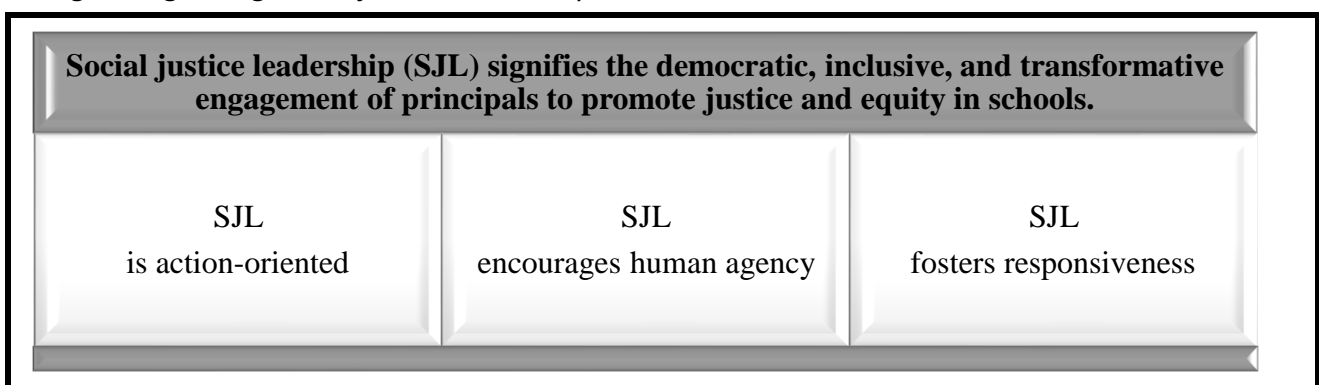
A paper by Diago (2020) on children who act as headers of CHHs found that headers were financially weak because of a lack of a secure income, albeit the fact that they were in charge of their households. Significantly, headers of CCHs are sometimes unconscious of their constitutional rights or any options available to them, and of social services that could have been rendered to them (Diago, 2020). Further, CHHs often face the emotional burden of losing a parent for whom they receive little emotional support (Kwatubana & Ebrahim, 2020) which could be increasing their absenteeism from school (Marongwe et al., 2016). Persistent emotional distress could become an academic barrier (Kwatubana & Ebrahim, 2020), resulting in children from CHHs facing an uncertain future. Therefore, policies should make provisions for the protection of the right to social justice (Patel, 2015) because the provisions made for CHHs in the Children's Act of 38 of 2005, as amended (Act 41 of 2007) are not implemented in reality (Diago, 2020). Arguably, school principals should take the circumstances of learners from CHHs into consideration, whilst taking on a more responsive role in ensuring equitable and just treatment of these vulnerable learners.

Socially just and equity insights gained from the literature

Considering the literature review provided in this article, we derived the following insights (Figure 1):

Figure 1

Insights regarding social justice leadership

Social justice leadership (SJL) signifies the democratic, inclusive, and transformative engagement of principals to promote justice and equity in schools.		
SJL is action-oriented	SJL encourages human agency	SJL fosters responsiveness

It is evident from the literature that principals should take action by disrupting inequitable cultures and engaging in critical reflection, discussion, trust, and collaboration as the principal media of their leadership practices. Through analytical reflection and dialogic leadership, principals would devote themselves to creating circumstances that may enable disadvantaged groups to have rightful access to opportunities and information (Wang, 2018). The human agency describes how principals can act as agents of influence toward achieving socially just societies (Schlosser, 2015). We regard human agency as the principal's active engagement in a process of goal formulation, and translating such goals into feasible action plans (Goller & Harteis, 2017), whilst being persistent regarding challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and health matters that children from CHHs may face. Thirdly, principals should be responsive in a transformative manner in that they should develop critical thinking and reflection skills to understand unequal circumstances, whilst showing courage to enact socially just practices and drive transformation (Skousen, 2022) on behalf of children from CHHs.

Social Action, Leadership and Transformation Theory (SALT)

Schools must prepare children and communities for participation in a multicultural and multinational society and to be globally competitive (Warner, 2020). To this end, principals' strategic abilities to lead for justice and equity in schools need to be placed under the microscope. In so doing, principals' strategic leadership may be improved so that they may be in a position to advance justice and equity for learners from CHHs.

Museus et al.'s (2017) social action, leadership and transformation (SALT) model denote a clear emphasis on leadership that is collectively aware and who accelerates transformation to achieve justice. The assumption is that a focus on principals' strategic leadership abilities is indispensable to nurturing the ability of individuals (children from CHHs), to experience a more just and equitable life. An application of SALT outlines seven indicators that place emphasis on equity and justice, which should be borne in mind. The model is explicit about leaders' ability and capacity for empathy toward others so that they have an elevated ability to understand other individuals' situations, experiences, and perspectives (Museus et al., 2017). It is imperative that leaders should apply critical consciousness so that they understand their own positionality within the bigger picture of the school and society (Museus et al., 2017). Furthermore, leaders must be committed to justice so that they would know how to prioritize attempts to achieve a more fair society, where all groups are uniformly appreciated, supported, and encouraged (Museus et al., 2017). Fourthly, leaders should be cognizant of equity in purpose, factoring in the diversity of significant opinions and ensuring that the distinctive concerns of diverse groups are evenly represented (Museus et al., 2017). Moreover, leaders should be aware of the value of collective action because they have to work with different groups to jointly resist numerous forms of oppression and advance justice for all previously underserved and disregarded communities (Museus et al., 2017). Sixthly, leaders should be knowledgeable about the controversy with the courage to engage in disagreement fearlessly by embracing anxiety, recognizing oppression and privilege, and participating in dialogues about important social

challenges (Museus et al., 2017). Leaders should use coalescence as a method by which people and groups develop a mutual perception that universal justice or reasonableness is favourable for all groups and coalesce around this objective (Museus et al., 2017). Knowledge about these indicators may assist principals in optimizing equity and justice because the goal would be to foster, full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. The process of attaining the goal of social justice should also be democratic and participatory, respectful of human diversity and group differences, and inclusive and affirming of human agency and capacity for working collaboratively with others to create change (Bell, 2016, p. 3).

In terms of principal's strategic leadership, Meredith (2020) conceives of social justice as an enactment of a strategic leadership goal (widen access and inclusion), a process (develop critical consciousness), and an engagement in transformative social change. As a goal, process, and engagement, it makes sense that the principle of SALT can serve as the foundation for leadership behaviour and practices. This aligns very well with Meredith's (2020) paper where the aim was to explore how leadership practice promotes social justice in spite of structural constraints and barriers related to gender, race, class, ability, sexual positioning, and other magnitudes of social difference which serve to privilege some while marginalizing others. The paper indicated that justice implies active work that is grounded in an unwavering ethic of care, informed by personal and professional values.

South African Policies to Be Analyzed

Ball (2015) contends that policy text is complemented by a thought of policy as discourse, mainly to explain what policy text contains with reference to "what can be said, and thought, but also who can speak, where and with what authority" (Ball, 1993, p. 14). Given the significance of policies, this paper explores how principals are visualized as individuals who can act deliberately to optimize justice for CHHs. Policies speak to broader social developments of leadership (Foucault, 1997), therefore, we analyzed selected stipulations in three South African policies to expose principals' strategic leadership abilities in promoting equity and justice for learners in CHHs.

The *Children's Act* (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2005) was promulgated to protect children and to ensure that their rights are respected. According to the Children's Act, CHHs exist,

where parents, guardians, or caregivers of such households are terminally ill, have died, or have abandoned the children in the household; no adult family member is available to care for children in the household; or a child older than 16 has assumed the role of caregiver to children in the household (RSA, 2005, Section 137).

The Children Act (RSA, 2005) is in congruence with the conventions on the rights of the child (United Nations [UN], 1989) which proclaimed that children should be abundantly equipped to live an individual life in society, and particularly in the spirit of harmony, self-respect, acceptance, autonomy, equity, and unity. The *Policy on the South African Standard for Principals* (RSA, 2015) was drafted by the South African Department of Basic Education (SADBE)

to outline the roles of principals as well as significant aspects of competence, professionalism, and image that are required to lead schools. Notwithstanding this fact, principals as transformative agents should portray, "effective leadership and management, supported by a well-conceived, needs-driven development of leadership and management" (RSA, 2015, p. 3). Principals, therefore have a moral obligation to foster the welfare of all learners (RSA, 2015). Additionally, the *Revised White Paper on Families* (RSA, 2021), describes CHHs as, "a household without an adult caregiver, which is headed by the eldest or most responsible child who assumes parental responsibility" (p. 143). In this regard, the policy aims to promote, social justice, a minimum standard of living, equitable access and equal opportunity to services and benefits, and a commitment to meeting the needs of all South Africans, with a special emphasis on the needs of the most disadvantaged in society (RSA, 2021, p. 168).

Achieving justice presupposes an active engagement with schools and their communities so that individuals' physical, emotional, and psychological development may be advanced. Drawing on the *Revised White Paper on Families* (RSA, 2021), and, in optimizing justice, this paper provides an analysis of stipulations from these policies as principals are ideally placed to afford school communities new opportunities for promoting equity and achieving social justice, particularly for learners in CHHs. Our view is that the aforementioned policies are directive in terms of principals' strategic leadership abilities to optimize justice for children from CHHS. Education policy implementation is not an easy task because "there is broad agreement that implementation is a decidedly complex endeavour, more complex than the policies, programs, procedures, techniques, or technologies that are the subject of the implementation efforts" (Fixsen et al., 2005, p. 2). In fact, the regulatory function of education policy should be seen as broad expressions of the dynamics of several foundations which inspire social practices at specific points in time (Olssen et al., 2004). Therefore, education policy is hardly a way of understanding its informative context or reading it as declarations of policymakers, but it should rather be understood that: "the discursive formations they contain… await decoding" (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 2). We, therefore, argue that an analysis of stipulations in the three indicated policies may assist us in gaining innovative perspectives regarding principals' strategic leadership abilities to optimize justice for children from CHHs.

METHOD

Deconstruction is used as a method of analysis in this paper. Developed by French philosopher Jacques Derrida, deconstruction was originally applied to philosophical analysis (Derrida, 1978). Postmodernist philosophers suggest that different ways of thinking be exercised where general realities about (education policy) contents, dialogues, and interpretations of meaning are examined (Larner, 1994). Arguably, deconstruction can be regarded as "a method to undo or take apart a text or narrative, followed by the reconstitution of a text into an entirely new story or meaning" (De Klerk, 2014, p. 15). Derrida's (1978) statement on deconstruction implies a change in epistemology: from a view of final realities to a view of multiple meanings (Kaye et

al., 1992). In the context of this paper, this implies that the prevailing meaning of discourse in education policies may be debunked, uncovered, and pushed apart in favour of innovative perspectives regarding principals' strategic leadership to optimize justice for children of CHHs. We found validation of the aforementioned viewpoint in Lather (2001) who explains that "one cannot define, finish or close" (p. 184), and Atkinson (2002) who emphasizes that there should be a "standing against the fantasies of grand narratives" (pp. 73-74). As such, deconstruction provides analysts with opportunities to examine various relationships and meanings of significant discourses in policy texts to show how texts reveal. Deconstruction of a text does not continue by arbitrary skepticism or uninformed subversion but by the cautious teasing out of opposing influences of significance within the text itself. This, as asserted by Derrida (1978), is a signal that to analyze a text: "is not to oppose or subvert it, but to reveal what it intends to exclude and suppress, and to examine its conceptual and ideological schema" (Derrida, 1988, p. 87). Evidently, deconstruction compels analysts to oppose objective realities, the so-called real and true meaning of texts. Interpreting Derrida (1988), we realized that the search for meaning in relation to principals' strategic leadership to optimize justice for children from CHHs would not be to repeat and conserve meaning (Caputo, 1997), but to be determined to go outside the margins of meaning, to disturb the existing meaning in texts and to allow alternative meanings to emerge.

In applying deconstruction, we consider language as it exists (Derrida, 1978) in the *Children's Act* (RSA, 2005), *Policy on the South African Standard for Principals* (RSA, 2015), and the *Revised White Paper on Families* (RSA, 2021). These three policies were purposively selected by the four authors because they are familiar with legislation regarding leadership, social work, and psycho-social education. Notably, the authors were aware of the content of the policies and why it was appropriate to analyze stipulations from the aforementioned policies. Consequently, stipulations were extracted from these policies concerning principals' strategic leadership and issues of justice. Thirdly, the selected stipulations were dissected and interpreted to disturb its tranquillity and find meanings (Derrida & Caputo, 1997) about strategic leadership and social justice. Fourthly, in search of meaning, we interpreted the stipulations to find more meaning in what they may denote (Khafaga, 2016). Such meanings have relevance to how principals may use their strategic leadership abilities to optimize justice for children of CHHs. In this regard, three themes relevant to our analysis were considered: advancing equity; enacting human agency, and performing social justice. It is important to mention that we requested the insights of other academics specializing in leadership, policy studies, social work, and psycho-social education to review our analysis of the policy stipulations. In so doing, we ensured the validity and reliability of our interpretation of the selected policy stipulations.

Ethical Considerations

This is a conceptual paper and ethical issues were, therefore, restricted to appropriate citation of policy stipulations as well as the literature sources consulted. Citations have been indicated in both the text as well as a reference list. Although the policies for analysis are already in the

public domain, we were cognisant of ethical guidelines provided by Stevens et al. (2015) which stipulate that while researchers may be aware that their online contributions are published in public online areas, they may not expect their contributions to be used for research. Additionally, document details were suitably cited in the text as well as in the reference list as we ensured that the content of documents, such as the policies for analysis, for which no consent was necessary, was cited adequately in the text as well as in the reference list. We were also aware of our own biases about the analysis of stipulations in the three indicated policies. In an attempt to counterbalance potential bias, we searched for sources including articles, dissertations, and reviews to support our interpretations, thus ensuring that the meanings constructed through deconstruction may be legitimate (Shah, 2019). Furthermore, we asked colleagues who specialized in education policy and philosophy to make sure that our analysis and understanding of stipulations in the three indicated policies were dependable (Berger, 2015).

LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES TO OPTIMIZE JUSTICE

Ekpiken and Ifere (2015) assert that education policy implementation is the "process of carrying out educational objectives or plans of action (p. 40)". It represents the stage of the policy development process where policy directives are implemented. As indicated previously in this paper, stipulations in the *Children's Act* (RSA, 2005), *Policy on the South African Standard for Principals* (RSA, 2015), and the *Revised White Paper on Families* (RSA, 2021) will be analyzed to search for principals' strategic leadership abilities to promote equity and to achieve justice and equity for learners in CHHs. Given our endeavour to deconstruct stipulations in the aforementioned three policies, we were cognizant that deconstruction is not a matter of a set of guidelines, rules, or prescriptions which can be applied to remedy whatever ails education (Derrida, 1978). Rather, we were aware that Derrida's (1978) deconstruction in the context of education calls for an engagement with the reasoning in analyzing educational issues and strategic leadership to optimize justice for children in CHHs. Such an engagement needs to be an attentive and respectful reading "through work which requires time, discipline, and patience, work that requires several readings, new types of reading, too, in a variety of fields" (Derrida, 1995, p. 401). Stipulations pertinent to strategic leadership were analyzed by coding to derive meanings and, after several rounds of sorting, organizing, renaming, merging, and deleting, three themes (strategies) emerged: advancing equity; enacting human agency, and performing social justice.

Figure 2

Leadership strategies to optimize justice and equity
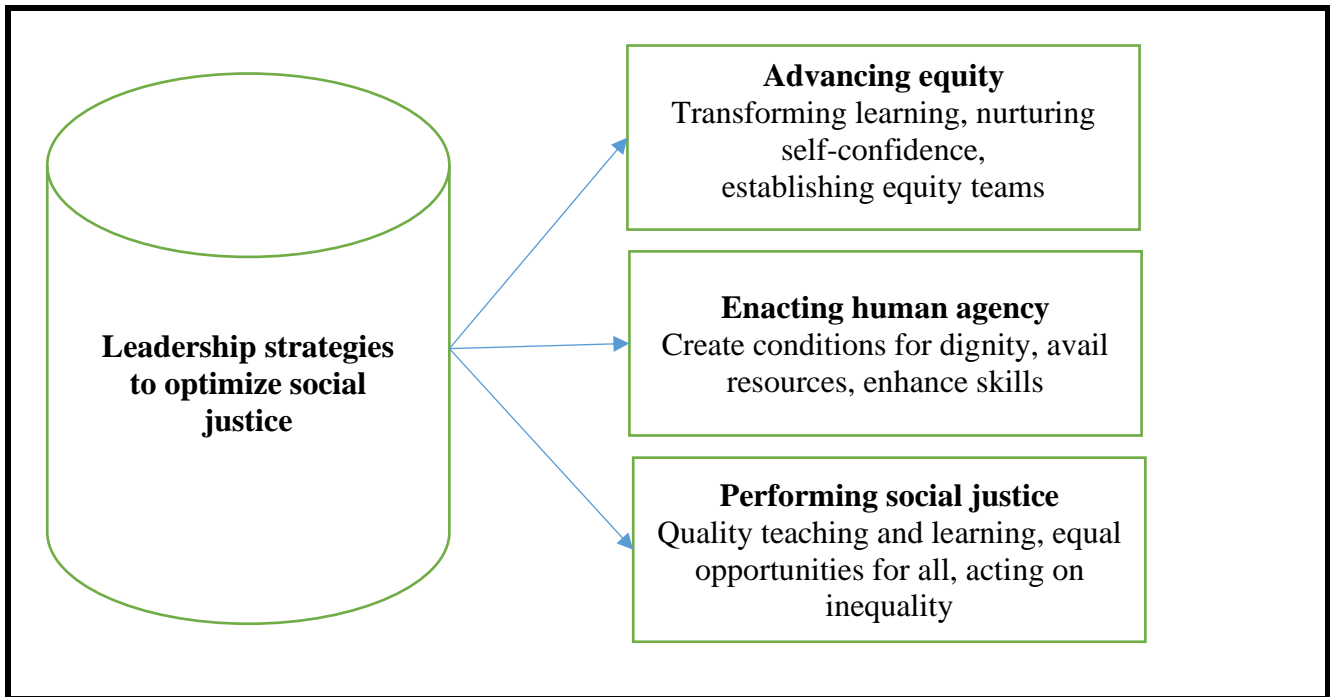
In a policy brief by the OECD (2008), social justice should be geared towards fairness, implying that principals should ensure that children's social circumstances are not obstacles to achieving their educational potential. As such, social justice should also be advanced to address school failure to overcome the effects of social deprivation. We propose that principals consider "advancing equity", "enacting human agency" and "performing social justice" as strategies to optimize equity and justice for children of CHHs. The strategic leadership policy strategies by which this may be achieved, are outlined.

Strategy 1: Advancing equity

Ainscow (2020) purports that the advancement of equity presupposes a transformation in educational learning environments to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individuals, together with a commitment to remove the barriers that impede that possibility. In this regard, South African policies are adamant that principals should

"create an environment resembling as closely as possible a caring family environment" (RSA, 2005, p. 208),

and, "nurture self-confidence, maturity, and courage in decision-making and action demonstrating resourcefulness,

initiative, and determination in seeking solutions to problems" (RSA, 2015, p. 4),

whilst, " ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all" (RSA, 2021, p. 52).

Words like "create" (RSA, 2005), "nurture" (RSA, 2015), and "ensuring" (RSA, 2021) put principals in a powerful position to advance social justice. Considering the aforementioned

action words, we propose that principals should adopt an equity-oriented approach to lessen the impact of inequity (poverty, unemployment, health issues) as indicated in the literature review in this article. For instance, principals can establish equity teams who would work actively to promote an inclusive culture that engages and draws on the assets of children, community members, and local government authorities. Equity teams would also collaborate around issues such as additional food provision, assistance with stationery, and the fostering of a safe and healthy school environment. Having said this, we regard it important to indicate that we are aware of the *National School Nutrition Programme* (RSA, 1994) which sets out regulations for the provision of one healthy meal to children at schools, aiming to improve punctuality, regular school attendance, and well-being. This programme, however, is sometimes not enough, and, therefore, the establishment of equity teams would be to ensure a more sustainable way of making provision for a resource bank to assist children of CHHs.

According to Summit Learning (2022), a resource bank can be regarded as a library for educational and food supplies which can be used to serve the additional needs of children from CHHs. Furthermore, phrases like "a caring family environment" (RSA, 2005), "demonstrating resourcefulness, initiative, and determination (RSA, 2015), and "inclusive and equitable quality education" (RSA, 2021) are representative of transformative learning as a second action which can be employed by principals to optimize justice for children of CHHs. When applying this strategy, it is advised that principals facilitate regular dialogue spaces where children can conveniently share their experiences, whilst co-creating and preparing innovative interventions to improve their situation at home. The very idea of transformative learning is to create learning and knowledge spaces where challenges are identified and new knowledge is developed to solve them (Mezirow, 2000). The suggestions relevant to advancing equity align with the indicators of the SALT in that the idea would not be to avoid difficult conversations or circumstances, but that principals would be in a position to better understand how inequities impact real lives and thereby develop anti-deficit perspectives (Museus et al., 2017) that will allow them to empower children of CHHs.

Strategy 2: Enacting human agency

Parsell et al. (2017) contend that human agency signifies individuals' capacity to determine and make meaning from their environment through purposive consciousness and reflective and creative action. Drawing on South African policies, principals can enact human agency by

"providing the child with conditions that ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate active participation in the community" (RSA, 2005, p. 34),

because they should be cognizant that

"all learners have the right to have access to relevant and meaningful learning experiences and opportunities" (RSA, 2015, p. 9),

whilst empowering children from CHHs

"about what their rights are, what services and resources are available to them to enable them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities and enhance their skills to access and advocate for access to such services and resources" (RSA, 2021, p. 27).

Phrases like "ensure dignity" and "promote self-reliance" (RSA, 2005); "access to relevant and meaningful experiences" (RSA, 2015), and "fulfil their roles" and "enhance their skills" (RSA, 2021) provide direction as to how principals can strengthen the human agency. In this regard, human agency requires principals to recognize the good in creating equal opportunities for all, whilst acting against any form of inequality (Williams et al., 2021). This implies that principals should employ vicarious reinforcement because to recognize and act in terms of the good, they (principals) will be able to realize that all individuals are competent and capable of being successful, provided that they have the opportunities to pursue their goals (Lopez-Garrido, 2023). Furthermore, principals should

At their very best, they are energetic and inspired, striving to learn, extend themselves, master new skills, and apply their talents responsibly…[they must] show considerable effort, agency, and commitment in their lives appears to be more normative than exceptional…(p. 68). , suggesting some very positive and persistent features of human nature (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68).

When principals would thus enact human agency to contribute to social justice, they intentionally strive to effect change (LePelley, 2020) so that children from CHHs can have better educational experiences. This is confirmed by a seminal thought of Bandura (2001) when he writes that "actions that produce positive outcomes are readily adopted and used" (p. 27). Arguably, when children from CHHs would experience better educational opportunities, they may be in a position to take agency for their development, experience a sense of empowerment and develop a capacity to resist the difficult circumstances that they may experience as heads of their households. This strategy aligns with a commitment to justice as an indicator of SALT because motivation can contribute to the advancement of the well-being of children from CHHs.

Strategy 3: Performing social justice

Rawls (1971) asserts that when individuals have the relevant capacity to be fully cooperating members of society, they would be equal and the society can be regarded as just. Drawing on Rawls (1971), principals should work actively to ensure that children from CHHs are supported adequately, that is, that they are capacitated in such a manner that they will be able to live as worthy citizens of society. In this regard, South African policies indicate that principals should "create conditions that will prepare learners for the future" (RSA, 2005, p. 8),

and, in so doing, put mechanisms in place to

"support and promote the best quality teaching and learning, the purpose of which is to enable learners to attain the highest levels of achievement for their good, the good of their community, and the good of the country as a whole" (RSA, 2015, p. 3),

and be willing to

"promote social change, problem-solving in human relationships, resilience of people and the empowerment and liberation of individuals…in order to enhance their social functioning and social well-being" (RSA, 2021, p. 45).

Phrases like "create conditions", (RSA, 2005) "support and promote" (RSA, 2015) as well as "empowerment and liberation of individuals" (RSA, 2021) place principals in a position to perform social justice through action. To promote principals' ability to perform social justice, we propose that they implement a framework for social justice in education with a renewed focus on equal opportunities for all. Drawing on the seminal author, Gee (1999), such a framework should be based on the ways of acting, interacting, feeling, believing, valuing, together with other people and with various sorts of characteristic objects, symbols, tools and technologies – to recognize yourself and others as meaning and meaningful in certain ways. In turn, you produce, reproduce, sustain, and transform a given form of life (p. 7).

Thus, to assist children from CHHs to transform their circumstances and see themselves in a different light, we are of the opinion that a social justice programme for equal opportunities should consist of three acts of performance. The first performance, reconciliation of their vision, would reveal how principals use a vision of a socially just world and worked to reconcile this vision with the realities of inequality that they saw in the lives of children from CHHs. This performance would represent their thoughts of the world and how they envision their role as social justice activists. The second performance, cultivating a sense of liberation, can be applied when principals would develop healthy relationships and self-governing spaces, by delivering culturally relevant and community-responsive pedagogies that may assist children from CHHs to develop their understanding of inequality and the skills to take action to address such inequalities. The third performance, acting against oppression, is significant in that principals should engage in constant and cooperative action to rally against the ways that schooling reproduces existing inequalities and maintains the status quo. The suggested performance activities for social justice through educational equality align with the literature in this article in that principals may be in a position to facilitate healthy relations among children from CHHs so that they can experience a sense of living through social solidarity. Our views also align with the third and fifth indicators of SALT which emphasize that the cultivation of agency and a sense of empowerment may contribute to a stronger realization of equity and social justice.

The proposed strategies have implications for principals' ability to apply strategic leadership to optimize social justice for children from CHHs. Firstly, principals should be re-sensitized about their imperative role in optimizing social justice for children from CHHs. Secondly, principals should be trained on how to create liberatory spaces while standing up to injustice – gaining a sense that they can do something about it. Also, when principals would be willing to influence the lives of children from CHHs, they should get the necessary support from the education department as well as the community. Our proposed strategies are supported by the notion that leaders [principals] should advance the community through strategies underpinned by respect, integrity, democracy, and a commitment to equity and justice.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND VALUABLE TAKEAWAYS

This paper continued the debate on justice and equity related to children from CHHs from a strategic leadership policy perspective. CHHs remain at risk because children have to cope without a regular income or parental support, while they also have to navigate challenges such as poverty and health problems. We argue that school principals can make a valuable contribution by assisting children from CHHs to experience life more positively. We argue that, when principals would adopt transformative social justice leadership, they may be in a position to break the barriers that prohibit children from CHHs to live meaningful lives. Having employed SALT as a theory, we proposed three strategies that principals can employ to optimize equity and justice for children from CHHs. Principals may establish equity teams and create dialogue spaces to allow for possibilities of learning. Such opportunities are geared toward augmenting existing perspectives with new perspectives about equity and justice. By enacting human agency, principals may encourage children from CHHs to engage in vicarious learning to imitate positive development so that they (children from CHHs) would acquire a capacity to act independently and make choices regarding their circumstances. It is worth considering that when principals perform social justice, they would regard their role as revolutionary change agents and not act as reformers of injustices. Principals should, therefore, be activists who constantly create opportunities for liberation, cooperation, and relationship building so that children from CHHs would regard themselves as serving community members.

It was first necessary to broaden the scope of thinking regarding leadership strategies for children from CHHs because "conceptual papers typically focus on proposing new relationships among constructs; the purpose is thus to develop logical and complete arguments about these associations rather than testing them empirically" (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015, p. 127). In our next article, the proposed strategies will be tested using an empirical paper related to children from CHH and leadership in schools. Another future endeavor would be to elicit the voices of children from CHHs about their experiences of justice and equity in schools.

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