Editorial:
Educational Leadership and Social Justice
[1]Sousan Arafeh, Ph.D., Editor, JELPS Special Issue
on Educational Leadership and Social Justice

"Social justice" is a contested uncontestable construct. It is contested because what social justice "is" and how it is operationalized is different for different people in different contexts. Social justice is uncontestable because underlying it are real, material conditions of power and privilege that result in inequity and injustice. Within individual people, social justice is both an orientation and an action. As an orientation, social justice is a person's conceptual and moral/ethical commitment to the unequivocal importance and value of all human beings. As an action, social justice is the concerted effort to implement this conceptual and moral/ethical commitment in one's daily life. The goals of social justice are access, opportunity, inclusion, validation, respect, support, self-determination, and success for all; not just for some.

In her 2015 acceptance speech for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Social Justice in Education Award, Ladson-Billings (2015) asked why equity efforts bearing the name "social justice" even need the qualifier "social." Aren't we seeking "just justice?" she pointedly queried—a "just justice" in both senses of the term. We need "just justice," meaning "only justice—" "justice alone." We also need "just justice," meaning justice that is fair and right – but not only in Western, theoretical terms. Justice needs to be construed so as to embrace Eastern notions and action-oriented praxis. The numerous examples of stark injustice that she shared in her speech and that exist daily right in front us, and because of us, are real and need addressing. The devil is in the details, however. What, exactly, do we mean by justice? Who benefits? And what does social justice or just justice look like when the rubber hits the road? It is vitally important because inequity based on race, but also class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, etc. in U.S. and other educational systems and societies is both rampant and flagrant. Such inequity is unacceptable; yet, we perpetuate it.

There are many ways to advance social justice action, but "education" has been a primary approach. Education systems, and the people and policies from which they are constructed, have long been called upon to serve the equity/equality/justice mandate. Whether right or wrong, effective or not, education has been this goal's primary foot soldier with schools typically where the diversity of a country is most deeply encountered and experienced. In the U.S., education has played a central role in the battle for civil rights through court cases like *Brown v. Board of Education* or *Sheff v. O'Neill* in Connecticut. These battles are still raging in current court cases such as those from multiple states charging that inequitable, insufficient education funding is discriminatory and/or unconstitutional and cases like *Latino Action Network v. New Jersey* and *Cruz Guzman v. Minnesota* that argue states are still engaging in formal and *de facto* school segregation based on race/ethnicity and social class.

School is also where a nation's children learn who they themselves, and others, are. They learn this though history, social studies, literature, and STEM content and, if they have the "correct" skin color or zip code, they might also learn it through language, arts, music, and sports. None of these subjects are value or culture neutral. The sad reality is that there are too many students who experience covert microaggressions and overt macroaggressions through curriculum and pedagogy. These small and larger acts block students' opportunities to learn and flourish and undermine their confidence and sense of self (Arafeh & Marchant-Shapiro, 2015). As the articles in this issue, and research in

disciplines well beyond education, attest; inequity and inequality are active processes. They are created from individual thoughts and actions that combine to result in persistent, insidious violence that is interpersonal, intrapersonal, and structural.

Education systems have massive institutional and cultural footprints that affect civic, civil, and economic sectors substantially. In addition to responsibility for an enormous client base of students, families, communities, and partners; education systems are significant employers where microaggressions and macroaggressions also take place. Whether public or private, education systems have substantial social and cultural influence, in part, because of their economic power and position. Education systems are the knowledge industry that provides the foundations upon which all other work is based and; where formal education is mandatory; schools, colleges, and universities shoulder cultural work that is paradoxical. It is work that is necessary because it transmits culture in support of society, but it is contested because such cultural transmission favors dominant, too often mono-vocal and oppressive, culture(s).

According to Magno and McDaniels (2015), "Social justice concepts are not a priority in many leadership preparation programs….Leaders are not versed in constructs such as (in)equity, (in)equality, identity, power, privilege, multi-culturalism, critical pedagogy, social/cultural capital, human/civil rights and institutional/structural violence—all of which are at the center of the social justice framework in the twenty first century" (pp. 61-62). This Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (JELPS) Special Issue on Educational Leadership and Social Justice is the first of three issues that offers research intended specifically for education leaders so they may deepen their understanding of social justice to support their advocacy of socially just outcomes.

Engaging education leaders in social justice work is crucial. Education leaders have a disproportionate influence on society because of the size and impact of the "education system" broadly. They also have a disproportionate influence on society because of their roles as the ones tasked to advance the visions, missions, and people in their particular institutions. To get a gross sense of the influence of educational leaders in the U.S., a total of 76.5 million students attended elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools in the U.S. in 2018 according to the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES); about 23% of the U.S.'s population of approximately 326 million people. In 2015-2016, the U.S. boasted roughly 98,000 K-12 public schools, 35,000 K-12 private schools, and 4600 postsecondary degree-granting institutions. In Canada, 20% of the nation's 37 million residents attended all levels of schooling in 2016-2017; approximately 7 million students. There are roughly 15,500 elementary and secondary schools and 96 universities among Canada's 10 provinces and three territories. This means that there are upwards 83.5 million students and 151,000 schools and colleges/universities in the U.S. and Canada that educational leaders of all kinds touch and influence. We can further extrapolate that influence to families, staff, and communities. While the influence is not only, or always, direct, these numbers are staggering.

Based on these back-of-the-envelope numbers, if even one quarter of education leaders today actively embraced a social justice agenda that 1) draws attention to various levels and types of inequity in society and in schools, 2) exposes school communities—students, teaching and operations staff, families, and community governors and partners—to information regarding how they themselves may be contributing to such inequity, and 3) supports convening and personal and professional development opportunities to help individuals connect with one another, share their experiences, and learn new ways of thinking and doing; significant change could occur. Changing demographics, heightened political partisanship, and changes in the ways that

information is gathered and shared are creating social, cultural, and economic interactions that are new and unfamiliar. At the same time, bias, misunderstanding, hatred, structural and institutional "isms," and grabs for power still can, and do, exist within these new interactions. Key social justice work involves critically interrogating such relations and parsing out better ways forward that lift all people up while not begrudging the dire need to lift some up more because of historic, and currently disproportionate, injustices.

As noted earlier, the devil is in the details, as is hope for a more just future. It is important to ask: where does the ladder lead? what is beyond the glass? can there truly be equality of access and opportunity? whose dream is the American dream? It is important to figure how access, opportunity, and equity can manifest in the current social, economic, cultural, and political climate here in the US and around the world. It is important to learn how to accept a reduction of privilege, or a change in one's way of thinking or doing, in order to ensure that those who do not have the same privilege can access and attain a better future that they themselves desire.

The research articles in the three Educational Leadership and Social Justice JELPS issues offer details of how inequity and injustice are constructed, experienced, and confronted. The hope is that the details from these accounts will encourage K-12 and postsecondary educational leaders to critically reflect on their own educational contexts and practices, to consider how inequity is being perpetuated there (because it most certainly is), and to try corrective strategies that aid in advancing a more just world.

Four articles are included in this first JELPS Special Issue on Educational Leadership and Social Justice. In the first piece, "Compound Fractures: Healing the Intersectionality of Racism, Classism and Trauma in Schools with a Trauma-Informed Approach as Part of a Social Justice Framework," Dr. Michael McIntosh states, "our most vulnerable students experience multiple and repetitive exposure to overlapping negative experiences that impact them emotionally, psychologically, and physically as a result of their intersecting identities and factors." McIntosh draws our attention to the fact that trauma is a persistent condition that exists in our educational institutions and is disproportionately prevalent for some individuals and communities (he focuses on race and class). He argues that educational leaders need to understand the presence and persistence of this fact as a core consideration in how they conceive of, and execute, their leadership work. One strategy for moving forward is a Trauma-Informed Approach to education and leadership that includes Cultural Responsiveness, Diversity & Inclusion, Educational Justice, and Trauma-Informed Care.

The second article, "A Developmental Lens on Social Justice Leadership: Exploring the Connection Between Meaning Making and Practice" focuses specifically on the different ways in which educational leaders develop and enact social justice leadership. Drs. Eleanor Drago-Severson and Jessica Blum-DeStefano look to constructive-developmental theory in their efforts to explore how different leaders' ways of knowing and sense-making can help better understand and activate their approaches to social justice. Specifically, they discuss instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transforming ways of knowing. Through these profiles they are able to show what commitments and capacities exist in each and also how they translate into helping understand "*how* educational leaders relate to and understand diversity, social justice, equity, and leadership."

The third article of this issue dovetails nicely with the second. In "Voices for Change: Social Justice Leadership Practices," Dr. Donna Kowalchuk shares details regarding five practices K-12 principals from the Canadian province of Ontario report using in their individual quests to support social justice in their schools. Hearing from the

Canadian context is important because much can be learned from Canada and its distinct history of diversity and struggles for equity among First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and immigrant populations. Through the principal and vice principal voices in her study, Kowalchuk makes the implicit, explicit. We are able to see how these educational leaders think about social justice in their specific school contexts and how they are acting to support positive change.

The issue's final article, "A Proposal for Building Social Capital to Increase College Access for Low-Income Students," authors Kayla Crawley, Christine Cheuk, Anam Mansoor, Stephanie Perez, and Elizabeth Park propose three policy alternatives that rely on building networks among students and families. In this way, low-income students and their families, many of whom are first generation college goers, can be oriented to unfamiliar admissions or academic culture or procedures. Specifically, the authors suggest that any of the three networks would benefit low-income students seeking to attend college: a high school student to high school student network, an alumni to high school student network, a parents of mentors to parents of high school student network. Preferable, they argue, would be a College Access and Readiness Community Network (CARCN) that included all three options. For each alternative, specific strategies are offered for building social capital through relationships and activities.

Although the "responsible proxy" of social justice is a contested uncontestable construct, so much of what is considered "education" greatly influences the real, uncontestable material conditions of power and privilege. And if education has a disproportionate role in the process of attaining social equity and justice, then educational leaders have a disproportionate responsibility. There are billions of educational leaders worldwide. They all have different upbringings, hold different worldviews, and have undergone different types of formal and informal leadership training. Each of these myriad leaders work in contexts that require specific, unique applications of their training and worldviews. Perhaps their formal training exposed them to critical theoretical perspectives or material conditions that engendered a desire to serve as an advocate for equity; or not. What is important is that educational leaders listen to, and learn from, one another. That is the purpose of the articles in this and the two forthcoming JELPS issues: to listen and learn from each other so we can better identify inequity, see ourselves and our institutions in its creation and perpetuation, and commit to defining and furthering multiple social justice agendas to dismantle and redirect power and privilege so that access and outcomes are attainable by all.

References

Arafeh, S., Kuszpa, M., & Weller, M. Urban tweens talk about using mobile phones for learning. In Herro, D., Arafeh, S., Holden, C., and Ling, R. (Eds.) (2018). *Mobile learning: Perspectives on practice and policy*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Arafeh, S. & Marchant-Shapiro, T. (2015). Defining "Opportunity-to-Learn" indicators and standards over time. Paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the New England Educational Research Organization*, Portsmouth, NH

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) (2019). Education in Canada: An overview [Webpage]. Retrieved from https://www.cmec.ca/299/education-in-canada-an-overview/index.html

Education Law Center. Education cases to watch in 2019 [Webpage]. Retrieved from https://edlawcenter.org/about/mission-history.html

Ladson-Billings, G. (2015). American Educational Research Association Social justice
in education award lecture [Web Video]. Retrieved from
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofB_t1oTYhI

Magno, C., & McDaniels, C. (2015). Leadership and social justice. In Haynes, Arafeh,
& McDaniels (Eds.) *Educational leadership: Perspectives on policy and
practice*. (pp. 61-79). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

National Center for Education Statistics (2018). Fast Facts: Back to school statistics.
Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372

StatsCanada (2015/2016). Elementary–Secondary education survey for Canada, the
provinces and territories. Retrieved from Elementary–Secondary Education
Survey for Canada, the provinces and territories, 2015/2016

[1]**Sousan Arafeh, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor and the Ed.D. Doctoral Program
Coordinator in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Southern
Connecticut State University (SCSU). Dr. Arafeh is known internationally for work in
education, policy, and communications; particularly in the areas of teens and technology
and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education policy. She
served as the Deputy Director of the National Center for Technology Innovation (NCTI),
supported U.S. Department of Education strategic planning, and helpled develop two of
its National Education Technology Plans. A strong advocate of social justice, Dr. Arafeh
has consistently engaged in diversity and equity work serving, for example, as the City
of Seattle's first Diversity Coordinator. In addition to teaching and research at SCSU, Dr.
Arafeh provides independent research, evaluation and strategic-planning services to
organizations, private and public educational institutions, states, and foundations.