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# How Principals Exercise Transformative Leadership in Urban Schools in Disadvantaged Areas in Montréal, Canada

**Jean Archambault and Roseline Garon**

**Abstract:** *This study aims at understanding how elementary school principals in disadvantaged areas implement transformative leadership for social justice. Our previous studies showed that social justice is rarely present in principals' discourse. Using a transformative leadership framework, we analysed data from the observation of these school principals. Data failed to show evidence of transformative behaviour on the part of principals. Because of some concerns and questions that arose from these findings, we found and interviewed three outstanding elementary school principals who are implementing transformative leadership in their schools. In contrast with our previous data, our present data shows that these principals have a rich view of social justice, that they see instances of inequities in their schools, that they identify situations in which they can implement transformative leadership, and that they report intervening to fight inequities. We also discuss the implications of these results in the follow-up of our research programme.*

## Context

With a population of 1.85 million people, Montréal is the second largest city in Canada behind Toronto. It is the largest urban area in Québec, the only French province in Canada. Montréal is an island surrounded by two other major cities. Together, they account for a population of 4 million, which represents about 55% of the total population of the province (7.5 million). In terms of language, 83% of the population speak French, whereas 17% speak English or other languages.

In Canada, education is the responsibility of the provinces. In Québec, the provincial ministry of education, or the *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* (MELS), is in charge of the educational and administrative management of the school system. At the elementary and secondary levels, French is the language of instruction for everyone, and only students whose parents are Canadian citizens and who have been educated in English in Canada may receive instruction in English.

Canada is one of the richest nations in the world, and its education systems are considered 'low' in terms of creating social inequalities in student performance (Duru-Bellat, Mons & Suchaut 2004). Nevertheless, poverty does exist in Canada's urban areas (Levin 2009). In Québec, it is concentrated in the Montréal urban area; 30% of Montréal families are considered to be low-income, in that they dedicate 20% more income than the average family to food, shelter and clothing (the 2008 low income cut-off (LICO) was C\$21,359 for a single person, or C\$29,013 for a family of four living in an urban area between 30,000 and 99,999 people). Two thirds of Montréalers have an income that

is under the mean of C\$34,300 (Statistics Canada 2010). And of course, earning an income just over the LICO, or even over the mean income, does not mean that you should be considered well off.

The poorest children are overrepresented in Montréal schools. In fact, whereas the population of elementary and secondary students on the Island of Montréal accounts for 21.5 per cent of the students in Québec, it accounts for 70 per cent of the poorest 20 per cent of students in the province. This means that there are over three times as many Montréal students in the lowest level of poverty than their numbers would predict.

Several poverty factors are specific to the Island of Montréal: a higher unemployment rate; a concentration of immigrant families, numerous single-parent families; two main language communities (Francophone and Anglophone); and a significant network of funded private schools. Students living in poverty can be described as having particular characteristics: a wide range of academic success rate; a wide range of graduation rates; a noticeable academic delay; and a significant number who experience greater learning difficulties, who lag farther behind their peers, and who are not as successful at building learning skills. Fewer of these students obtain a diploma and they often drop out of school earlier, meaning that they can find themselves without any qualifications and with fewer job opportunities (Gouvernement du Québec 2009). These observations on the academic performance of these students are similar to those made in comparable urban areas elsewhere in Canada and the USA (Berliner 2006; Levin 2009). This fact was recognised in 1997 by the MELS, which launched a programme to support Montréal schools as part of its educational reform (Gouvernement du Québec 1997). The Supporting Montréal Schools Program (SMS Program), now in its 16th year, receives yearly funding of C\$12–14 million to support 184 elementary schools identified as the poorest neighbourhood schools in Montréal. These schools have a total population of 57,000 elementary students.

The SMS Program allocates 90% of funds to schools to help them implement seven strategies that are ‘...considered to have a positive impact on the educational paths, learning and motivation of students from disadvantaged neighbourhoods’ (Gouvernement du Québec 2009: 39): 1) adapted action and instructional interventions that promote learning and success for all; 2) development of the reading competency; 3) a guidance-oriented approach; 4) professional development for school administrators and school teams; 5) access to cultural resources; 6) collaboration with the family; and 7) partnership networks. A recent review of the literature confirmed the importance of implementing these strategies in schools in disadvantaged areas (Archambault, Garon, Harnois & Ouellet 2011). A professional 10-member team supports schools in implementing these strategies.

Among these strategies, the professional development of school administrators became of interest to both us and the professional team, and we implemented a collaborative research programme with the SMS Program.

## **A Collaborative Research Programme with the SMS Program**

To create training for school principals in disadvantaged areas, the professional team of the SMS Program had to delineate their needs. Some professional questions arose: What do school principals in disadvantaged areas need as professional training? What are their main challenges? What is their current job? Is it different from managing a school in more well off areas? These questions were also of interest to us from a research standpoint, and we combined the SMS Program’s professional goals with our research goals. The research programme is collaborative in that we, as researchers, conduct research ‘with’ the professional team and the principals instead of research ‘on’ the professionals (Lieberman 1986; Desgagné, Bednarz, Couture, Poirier & Lebuis

2001). As a result, educational practitioners are fully integrated into the research team. The goals of the research programme were 1) to describe and document the characteristics of directing a school in a disadvantaged area, and 2) to discover and describe school principals' professional needs. At the time, not much had been written in the scientific literature about managing schools in disadvantaged areas (Archambault & Harnois 2008). For this reason, we turned to the literature on high-performing schools in disadvantaged areas, and from there we found useful information for a basis for working with school principals (Archambault & Harnois 2006; Archambault et al. 2011).

## **Leadership for Social Justice**

Leadership for social justice emerged as a factor in high-performing schools in disadvantaged areas (Normore & Bianco 2006; Flessa 2007; Portelli, Shields & Vibert 2007; Gorski 2008), as principals who implement it in their schools are thought to contribute to more equitable instructional services and better learning for students (Frattura & Capper 2007; Marshall & Oliva 2009). We therefore decided to make leadership for social justice the main focus of our research programme, and began by conducting a literature review on this topic (Archambault & Harnois 2009a).

Always with the aim of describing and better understanding school principals' work as a way to inform training and professional development, we identified Ayers, Quinn & Stoval's (2009: iv) description of social justice as being particularly useful, in that it sets out principles and guidelines that can be followed by school principals:

1. Equity, the principle of fairness, equal access to the most challenging and nourishing educational experiences [...].
2. Activism, the principle of agency, full participation, preparing youngsters to see and understand and, when necessary, to change all that is before them [...].
3. Social literacy, the principle of relevance, resisting the flattening effects of materialism and consumerism [...].

This description became our working definition of social justice, and we later used it in our studies with school principals (see Data Collection in the Methodology section of this paper). We will now take a brief look at our previous studies that gave us clues about school principals' leadership for implementing social justice in their schools and that laid the groundwork for this study.

## **Previous Studies**

The study presented below was a follow-up to two previous studies that gave rise to unexpected findings. The first one addressed principals' discourse and the second one included observational data on their behaviour.

### **Discourse Study**

To meet our goals of describing school principals' jobs in disadvantaged areas, we first conducted two rounds of interviews with 45 school principals, in focus groups of 5 or 6 people. At the first meeting, we asked them about their jobs and the particular skills needed to manage schools in disadvantaged areas. At the second meeting, we provided them with the characteristics of high-performing schools in disadvantaged areas (Archambault & Harnois 2006) and asked them to react to these characteristics. We also asked them why they had not talked about social justice at the first meeting, and then asked them about bias and prejudice in their school (bias and prejudice being themes that the SMS Program was already working on).

At first, the principals answered that there was no bias or prejudice in their schools, and hence no social injustice, because their staff members were fully familiar with the school, the students, the parents and the neighbourhood. Of course, we should consider bias and prejudice to be only a part of social injustice. As Shields (2013) puts it, we should first recognise that the material realities of the wider community, an unequal playing field for rich and poor students, and dominant cultural norms should all be taken into account in the school. It is clear from the principals' answers that they had not reached this level of awareness.

Nevertheless, these answers from the principals were surprising to us. Upon further questioning, the principals finally acknowledged that bias and prejudice did exist, mainly with respect to poor students and their families, and went on to say that they would have to fight this bias and prejudice in their schools. They also demonstrated their own prejudices in discussing these issues (Archambault & Harnois 2009b).

Based on these findings, we came to the conclusion that social justice was not a concern of principals and that it was our questioning that made them aware of the bias and prejudice present in their schools. We therefore wanted to learn more about whether they had implemented transformative leadership in their schools. Having looked at studies in which school principals' actual behaviours were described (Shields 2010; Theoharis 2010), we decided to explore the possibility of using transformative leadership to guide our subsequent studies. Because it advocates both social justice and democracy, along with the need to lead actions to transform the school for better equity and learning, we see transformative leadership as a framework for principals and school teams to apply critical reflection and analysis, to acknowledge the use of power, and to develop a rich framework on learning and teaching as a way to fight prejudice, redress wrongs, provide equal opportunities and ensure that all students can achieve academic success (Shields 2010). In our collaborative research with the SMS Program, we work with typical school principals, many of whom do not seem to be aware of social justice issues. As an action theory, transformative leadership seems to be more relevant to the SMS Program's initiatives and training for school principals.

However, not much empirical work has been done on typical school principals. Shields (2003, 2010) developed conceptual thinking about transformative leadership. Shields (2010) and Theoharis (2010) have worked with outstanding principals who had made broad changes in their schools, but again research with typical school principals (the majority of school principals) is lacking. This is why we decided to observe the actual behaviour of typical school principals. Transformative leadership helped us frame our observations.

### **Observation Study**

In the second study, we visited schools to observe 12 principals who had participated in the first study. We shadowed each of them for three full days and analysed the observation data with codes we found in the literature on transformative leadership (Archambault & Garon 2011; Shields 2010) and on leadership for social justice (Theoharis 2010). The data was easy to code and analyse, as we found almost no instances of transformative leadership behaviour among the principals studied. In fact, we noted a total of 6 instances of such behaviour during all 36 observation days (12 principals × 3 days). This number is very small given that each principal may exhibit from 150 to 200 separate instances of behaviour per day. We saw one principal encouraging a teacher to communicate with parents and another talking to her staff about lowering expectations, and we also saw principals exhibiting bias and prejudice, mainly with respect to parents and students.

Again, our findings surprised us. The literature on leadership for social justice is abundant, and instances of transformative leadership are described by researchers. Often, principals in these studies are outstanding principals who turned their schools around. But what about typical school principals, such as the ones we were working with? Given the findings of our two studies, one might ask if principals indeed know about and understand the issues of social justice, dominant culture, inequity and poverty (Archambault & Garon 2011). At the same time, we questioned our research tools. Did we ask the right questions? Did we look in the right places? We wanted to delve further and decided first to construct an investigational framework to study transformative leadership, and then obtain data from outstanding principals who know about social justice.

## An Investigational Framework to Operationalise Transformative Leadership

To investigate and thus operationalise transformative leadership, we first looked at the literature that describes transformative leadership implemented by school principals. Essentially we found what we were looking for in Shields (2010) and Theoharis (2010), who give five aspects that principals have to consider when implementing transformative leadership in their schools. These factors represent the components on which principals base their actions:

1. The elements of the dominant culture
2. The reality of students from disadvantaged environments
3. Staff members' and students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours linked to social justice
4. Strategies to promote change and social justice
5. Barriers to the promotion of change and social justice and means to overcome them

**Table 1:** Investigational framework to study school principals' transformative leadership behaviours

	Knowledge	Attitudes, beliefs, values	Reported behaviours	Actual behaviours and skills
1- Elements of dominant culture				
2- Background of students from disadvantaged environments				
3 - Staff members' and students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours linked to social justice				
4- Strategies to promote change and social justice				
5- Barriers to the promotion of change and social justice and means to overcome them				

Source: Archambault & Garon 2011.

We then looked at the literature on change and behavioural change to determine four categories that we could use to classify the many forms of principals' behaviour that are amenable to research: knowledge; attitudes/values/beliefs; reported behaviour; and actual behaviour and skills. We combined the transformative leadership component and these behaviour categories so that each category could be applied to each transformative leadership component (for a more detailed description, see Archambault & Garon 2011). The result is presented in Table 1, which constitutes an investigational framework for studying transformative leadership.

This framework helped us determine which types of principals' behaviour we should look for in our subsequent studies. It also encompasses a wide range of behaviours and components so that it could be useful in training school principals to implement transformative leadership and help reach a major goal of our research partner, the SMS Program. We now look at the present study and discuss the usefulness of this framework in the context of our findings.

## **The Present Study: Principals who Implement Transformative Leadership**

The goal of this study was to interview principals who are aware of social justice and who implement transformative leadership, so that we could discover the exact nature of this leadership along with when and how it is applied.

### **Methodology**

The methodology used is simple, as the goal was to quickly obtain data that could be easily analysed as a basis for larger-scale research projects.

### **Participants**

We selected three elementary school principals who had already worked with us as professional resources, principal trainers or research participants and who were leading a school at the time of this research project. We knew that they were aware of social justice because they had either read our professional papers on the subject or helped us to write them, and we knew that they were conducting transformative work in their schools.

The three principals were women (Charlene, Iris and Vanessa) aged between 40 and 52, with 6 to 14 years' experience as principals or interim superintendents and prior experience of 10 to 14 years of teaching in elementary schools. Charlene and Vanessa had been in their schools for three years and Iris had been in her school for five years. Charlene's school is in downtown Montréal (School C: 524 students), Iris's is in the central-west part of the city (School I: 360 students) and Vanessa's is in the northeast sector of the city (School V: 662 students). All three schools are in disadvantaged areas, with Iris's and Vanessa's schools being in the most disadvantaged areas of Montréal. There is a high degree of immigration in Montréal, and only 9.5 per cent of students at School I speak French as a first language, whereas 51 per cent of students speak French as a first language in School C and School V. The difference lies in the facts that (1) immigration is more concentrated in some neighbourhoods and school I is one of those schools where there are more immigrant students; and (2) immigrants in school I come mainly from countries where people do not speak French.



## Data Collection

**Table 2:** Structure for school principal interviews

School Principals' Social Justice Behaviours in Education Interview Structure	
1.	How do you conceive of social justice in your school?
2.	Having read Ayers, Quinn & Stoval's (2009) definition <sup>1</sup> , what would you change or add to your definition?
3.	Are there instances of injustice, discriminatory behaviours, bias or prejudices in your school? If so, please describe (by whom, against whom, with respect to what)? If not, how come and how do you explain this?
4.	Are there particular occasions, places, situations and events that are most suitable for you to implement transformative leadership for social justice?
5.	Which actions have you taken to implement transformative leadership in order to fight injustice, discriminatory behaviour, bias or prejudice?

<sup>1</sup> Ayers, Quinn and Stoval (2009) offer a definition of social justice in education that:

"[...] rests on three pillars or principles:

1) Equity, the principle of fairness, equal access to the most challenging and nourishing educational experiences, the demand that what the most privileged and enlightened are able to provide their children must be the standard for what is made available to all children. This must also account for equitable outcomes, and somehow for redressing and repairing historical and embedded injustices.

2) Activism, the principle of agency, full participation, preparing youngsters to see and understand and, when necessary, to change all that is before them. This is a move away from passivity, cynicism and despair. [...]

3) Social literacy, the principle of relevance, resisting the flattening effects of materialism and consumerism and the power of the abiding social evils of white supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia–nourishing awareness of our own identities and our connection with others, reminding us of the powerful commitment, persistence, bravery, and triumphs of our justice-seeking forebears–economic condition, historical flow, cultural surround–within which our lives are negotiated." (p. iv)

Social justice rests upon equity in systems and in political, economic and social structures, particularly with respect to the exercise of power, wealth and resource sharing and the acknowledgement of diversity of all kinds.

Social justice emphasizes moral values of equality, justice, democracy, equity and respect, and on full participation of every individual (diversity of representation).

Acknowledgement of a lack of social justice leads to the questioning of systems and of political, economic and social structures that are supposedly neutral and objective but that reproduce the dominant culture and maintain their power and resources to the detriment of other people.

Inclusive, equitable and socially just practices aim at exposing, objecting to, and overthrowing structures that bring about exclusion, iniquity and injustice (Ryan, 2010).

In the scientific literature, social justice is often defined by its contrary, social injustice. In schools, injustice and exclusionary practices are often based on deficit thinking and bear upon:

Ethnic background (racism)	Learning difficulties or behaviour problems
Ways of living, customs	Sexual orientation (homophobia)
Religion	Gender (sexism)
Social class	Age
Handicap	Individual or group opinions
Physical appearance	

We collected data by interviewing each school principal individually. The interview structure we used is presented in Table 2. It consisted of five general questions about 1) the principal's concept of social justice (beliefs, attitudes); 2) a comparison with Ayers, Quinn and Stovall's (2009) definition; 3) instances of injustice or inequity in their schools; 4) occasions, events and situations that are more suitable for implementing transformative leadership; and 5) actions they had taken to counter these inequities (incorporation of transformative leadership into daily school operations; occasions, places, events and situations in which they have implemented or could implement transformative leadership; etc.). The interviews lasted 1.5 hours and were conducted by the first author at each principal's school. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed in a Microsoft Word file.

### **Data Analysis**

The transcribed interviews were then read and colour-coded (with markers) according to four major categories: 1) attitudes and beliefs; 2) areas of injustice or inequity and ways of creating injustice; 3) occasions, events and situations, and 4) actions. The principals' answers associated with each code were subsequently collated, and categories were created to derive new meaning from their answers. These categories therefore constitute the results.

### **Results**

Below is an overview of each category of results with some comparisons between the principals' answers.

#### **Attitudes and Beliefs**

All three principals had something to say about social justice and were therefore cognisant of this concept. However, each has a different perspective about the issue, which can be seen in Table 3. For Charlene, social justice is evident in results ('Social justice is present when everyone can be who he/she wants to be') and for these results to be achieved, she sees equity as a major goal within the context of diversity. Equity means educational and instructional services that are not offered on an equal basis but rather tailored to every student's needs. She also promotes equity in learning by offering diverse and differentiated services to students who themselves are diverse. Empowerment is another goal for teaching with equity: teachers will teach content in a way that empowers students and opens them to the world. This is where a school can make a difference for children living in poverty. She values justice, respect and the belief in every student's capacity to learn, and she warns that both she and the school team have to guard against any injustice that they themselves could create in the school. At the same time, she would like her school team to be more critical and open to, and interested in, the social movements happening outside the school, such as the Occupy Montréal movement or the six months of student demonstrations in Québec to protest against tuition fee increases.

Iris sees herself as a caretaker. She is the one who ensures that the school team pursues justice and equity values in the school. She wants members of her team to be knowledgeable of injustice and act to fight against it. She insists on focusing on diversity, particularly ethnic diversity. This is not surprising given that in her school, students speak approximately 25 different first languages and only 9.5 per cent of students speak French as a first language. One of her major goals is to convince her school team that children who do not speak French are in the process of learning it and that, contrary to what some may believe due to ethnic bias, these students are still able to learn. She advocates equal opportunities and believes in the need to maintain high expectations of every student's ability to learn.

**Table 3: School principals' answers (interviews): Beliefs and attitudes (why?)**

Charlene	Iris	Vanessa
<p>Social justice is present when: everyone can be who he/ she wants to be, differences are respected</p> <p>Services not equal but according to needs</p> <p>Equity in learning = offering diversity of services</p> <p>School makes a difference: teach content that empowers and opens students to the world</p> <p>The Values: justice, respect, open mind, equity, democracy, belief in every students' ability to learn</p> <p>Being critical about our own injustice in the school; being interested in what happens outside (Occupy Montréal, student demonstrations); being critical of politics</p> <p>Activism is a characteristic of the definition that is less present here</p>	<p>Caretaker: she ensures that the school team implements things so that there is justice and equity for students (knowledge and action)</p> <p>Taking (ethnic) diversity into account</p> <p>Offering equal chances in the school</p> <p>The need to maintain high expectations</p> <p>Prevention</p>	<p>Leading diversity and otherness</p> <p>Mission as a leader: change things and make a difference with modesty</p> <p>Her decisions are based on experience and on research findings</p> <p>Looks more at injustice: unfair treatment (because of difference)</p> <p>School has to be seen as a social stepping stone, otherwise it could widen gap and reproduce social inequities</p> <p>Equity in learning: helping students and supporting learning</p>

Vanessa considers that, as a leader, her mission is to change things and make a difference, but with modesty. She bases her decisions on her experience but also uses research to guide these decisions. She too is a proponent of diversity and the acceptance of otherness. In her work, she thinks it is easier to see injustice and inequity than it is to see justice and equity, and she stays alert to unfair treatment due to difference. She sees the school as an essential means of social advancement. If it does not play this role, the school could increase the gap between poor and rich and reproduce social inequities. She advocates equity in learning as help and support given to students by teachers.

### ***Areas of Injustice or Inequity and Ways of Creating Injustice***

Not surprisingly, all three principals identified ethnic background/country of origin and poverty as areas of bias, injustice or inequity. As explained above, Montréal is an urban area with a concentration of poverty, and most immigrants who come to Québec stay in Montréal. Ethnic background and poverty are therefore two prominent areas of recognised bias, perhaps because principals and school teams are more aware of these issues.

As we can see in Table 4, all principals identified homophobia and sexual choice, language (linked to ethnic background), religion, opinions of a group, learning difficulties and ways of living as being susceptible to bias. Vanessa contended that handicap was not a possible area of bias, whereas Iris thought that it was. Gender was only cited as an area of bias by Vanessa, but knowing the three female principals, we believe that they are all aware of the possibility of gender bias even though it is now less frequent given all of the work that has been done in schools over the years.

All three principals stated that bias and prejudice were ways of creating injustice. This includes bias and prejudice from teachers, daycare staff, lunch monitors and parents against children and other parents, from teachers against teachers, or from parents against parents, but never from children against other people. Iris even stated that students did not exhibit any prejudice against others. This is a surprising result, given that there was a clear sub-question about who had prejudices and against whom, and it stands to reason that if parents and teachers exhibit bias and prejudice, as the principals themselves say they do, then the children around them will undoubtedly exhibit some bias and prejudice as well. This belief of the principals therefore requires further investigation. Both Charlene and Vanessa talked about their own prejudices against teachers, students and parents. Vanessa reflected on the difficulty of distinguishing a conflict in values from prejudice.

Other ways of creating injustice were described by Vanessa. She talked about overgeneralisation as a mechanism that often engendered biased judgments and unfair treatment in the face of difference. Homework can be a source of inequity when requirements are the same for every student. Charlene talked about the school's participatory framework for teachers and students. Exclusion of participation is inequitable and creates a school climate of mistrust and suspicion. She also pointed out that there are broader ways of creating injustice; for example, she discussed the concept of new public management, with its sole focus on measurable results as a practice that marginalises children who live in poverty. In Québec schools, this management style is applied through the management agreement between each school and the school board. The problem is that the better the results, the more resources the school has. This means that schools that do not reach goals have fewer resources even though they obviously have more needs. Finally, consumerism on the part of schools and parents, and students' choice of special services such as English immersion, lead to exclusion, usually to the detriment of poorer students.

**Table 4:** School principals' answers (interviews): Areas and sources of injustice (what and about what?)

Charlene	Iris	Vanessa
<p>Homosexuality and sexual choices</p> <p>Language</p> <p>Poverty</p> <p>Ethnic background, country of origin</p> <p>Prejudices, bias against family and home environment and ethnic background</p> <p>Prejudices, bias from teachers, daycare staff, parents against each other</p> <p>My own bias against teachers</p> <p>Injustice in new public management based on results; school consumerism</p> <p>Management agreement: inequities = fewer resources when goals not met (more needs)</p> <p>Exercise of power (a few have power)</p> <p>School structures (school team and parent participation)</p> <p>Student selection for special services</p>	<p>Country of origin</p> <p>Language</p> <p>Language learning</p> <p>Family and home environment</p> <p>Families' ways of living</p> <p>Religion</p> <p>Opinions of a group</p> <p>Handicap</p> <p>Learning difficulties</p> <p>Poverty</p> <p>Prejudices, bias (not from students), from teachers against parents, between parents</p>	<p>Ethnic background, race</p> <p>Learning difficulties because of school difficulty taking diversity into account</p> <p>Not handicap</p> <p>Gender</p> <p>Poverty, social class</p> <p>Ways of living</p> <p>Religion</p> <p>Opinions of a group</p> <p>Homophobia</p> <p>Difference as deficit, fatalism</p> <p>Prejudices, bias by daycare staff, lunch monitors, teachers</p> <p>Overgeneralisation</p> <p>Unfair treatment (because of difference)</p> <p>Homework: same for every student, one best way</p> <p>My own bias: values conflict or prejudices?</p>

### **Occasions, Events and Situations**

Charlene, Iris and Vanessa identified particular occasions, events and situations in which transformative leadership could be implemented (see Table 5). They talked about the beginning-of-year speech to staff as an occasion to present and explain the vision and values that guide their decisions and that will orient the school's actions. Regular staff meetings and school council meetings were places to remind everyone of the school's vision and values. They also gave orientation sessions on teamwork, individualised education program (IEP) meetings, or other professional meetings for children with impairments or handicaps. Vanessa explained how going back to university to get a master's degree helped enrich her vision, particularly of social justice. Charlene added that her school's planning and management tools, such as the educational project, success plan and management agreement, all provide occasions to put forward her vision and orientations. She uses school board professional development days and world events as reminder occasions and she sees learning materials, readers, teaching practices and the range of services offered in the school as tools to educate about social justice.

### **Actions**

The three principals described many instances of what they called 'one-shot interventions', in which they would spontaneously seize an opportunity to intervene, sometimes without planning. These interventions include seeking out bias or prejudice and reacting to them as they occur (responding to the person, asking questions, etc.), meeting with staff to discuss an inequitable action in a particular situation, putting copies of an article they had just read in teachers' mail slots, sharing and discussing the article, and so on. Table 6 presents many other examples of these one-shot interventions. In addition, the principals plan other interventions, some of which occurred on a regular basis: writing a brief article every week in the school newsletter, giving a reminder speech at monthly staff meetings, and conducting planned reflection exercises four times a year during professional development days. Furthermore, Charlene and Vanessa talked about vision building, which includes developing a vision, asking the school team to reflect on this vision, and using the vision to guide all decisions. Vanessa also discussed the three-year orientations presented and shared during the beginning-of-year speech. Iris described herself as a model for her school team, particularly with respect to giving support to students.

All of these interventions are aimed at changing the school team's perceptions about the social justice orientations for decisions and interventions in the school. But the principals also work to modify parts of the school's administrative or educational structure to create more equity for students. For example, Iris uses community organisations to train and inform teachers about ethnic backgrounds, and Charlene implemented a participation structure for the school team (everyone works on a planning and decision committee) and a student council to ensure that everyone has a voice. Iris organises a weekly diversity, sharing and prevention activity in which all K-6 students are mixed so that there are students from every grade in every classroom. Vanessa ensures that diversity is evident in the space (rooms) allocated to groups: all school classes are mixed so that there are no 'ghettos' in the school. She is also preparing a school team reflection process on homework, teachers' requirements, and teachers' and parents' mutual expectations as possible areas of inequity. Finally, Charlene abolished the selection process for English immersion (French is the language of instruction) in Grades 5 and 6 to ensure that all students could take English immersion if they wanted.

**Table 5:** School principals' answers (interviews): Occasions, events and situations (where and when?)

Charlene	Iris	Vanessa
<p>School Educational Project</p> <p>Success Plan</p> <p>Management Agreement: inequities = fewer resources when goals not met (more needs)</p> <p>Learning materials, readers</p> <p>Beginning-of-year speech</p> <p>School council meeting</p> <p>School board professional development days</p> <p>Team work</p> <p>Staff meetings</p> <p>IEP meetings</p> <p>Teaching practices (language)</p> <p>World events (global Occupy movement)</p> <p>Range of services offered</p>	<p>Staff meetings</p> <p>Professional meetings for children with impairment or handicap</p>	<p>Went back to study (MA), helped to enhance vision</p> <p>Beginning-of-year speech</p>

## Discussion

With respect to the investigational framework for studying transformative leadership, we looked at the classes of behaviours to see if principals exhibited any of these behaviours in relation to the identified content. In this case, we of course did not categorise observed behaviours as we interviewed the three principals and their behaviour was therefore self-reported. As a result, our data only includes knowledge, attitudes and self-reported strategies to implement transformative leadership.

The three principals interviewed were aware of social justice. They were not surprised by the potential areas of injustice that we presented to them during the interview (see Table 2) and they acknowledged the areas even if not all were present in their particular school. They did not discuss the dominant culture's characteristics at length, but they demonstrated a clear understanding of the context of their schools from the standpoint of disadvantage and multi-ethnicity. For example, Iris's discourse was centered on ethnic background, country of origin and the fact that many staff members wrongly considered not knowing French as a learning difficulty.

The principals did not talk much about power and who wielded this power. When she arrived at her school, Charlene was aware of the power imbalance, in that the power to influence school decisions was in the hands of a few, and she wanted to change this dynamic. Her attitude and beliefs were in the direction of inducing change to increase social justice, and she reported bringing about a new participation structure to ensure that everyone could have a say in decisions. Apart from this example, notions of power and privilege were not directly addressed by the principals. Whether these concepts do not form part of their concerns or whether our questions did not prompt them to address these issues is not clear, but we should include more specific questions on power and privilege in our subsequent research projects.

Although the three principals contended that their actions were more confined to their schools and that activism was not present in their practice, all three of them were intrigued by the idea of activism in the school. Charlene even opened the door to curriculum and teaching materials that would 'open the school to the world' and deplored that teachers did not take advantage of the social and political movements in Montréal and the rest of the world to help students reflect on issues of social justice.

Other aspects of knowledge or attitudes and beliefs were also not addressed spontaneously by the principals, such as their awareness of staff and student knowledge, beliefs and attitudes about poverty and social justice, the school team's reactions to induced change, and their knowledge of barriers to social justice and change and ways to overcome these barriers. Again, we should address these issues more directly in a subsequent study.

All three principals reported intervening to fight bias and prejudice. In fact, most of their interventions are centered on bias and prejudice. Some training was offered by each of them to increase their school team's awareness of student realities, and they used regular events (monthly staff meetings) and particular opportunities (the school's educational plan) to reinforce their vision. However, only a few actions were directed towards structures or the organisation itself. Vanessa worked on the layout of classrooms in the school to avoid ghettos and is currently conducting a review of homework for her school team. Charlene implemented a participation structure for her team and for her students and she abolished the process for selecting (and excluding) students for a particular programme. She also talked about the importance of diverse educational delivery to ensure equity. Finally, Charlene also pointed to managerial orientations and tools imposed by the school board and the MELS as sources of inequity in schools.



**Table 6: School principals' answers (interviews): Actions (how?)**

Charlene	Iris	Vanessa
<p>One-shot interventions: seek out bias and act on it (responding to the person, asking questions, etc.)</p> <p>Writing a brief article every week in the school newsletter</p> <p>Giving a speech at the school council meeting</p> <p>parents' general meeting</p> <p>Reminders (vision, values, bias) at staff meetings</p> <p>No activism; advocating change stays in school and school board</p> <p>Vision building (social justice), having school team reflect on that vision and always having to make decisions and guide interventions</p> <p>School team talks about prejudices and biases instead of denying them</p> <p>Implemented a participation structure so that everyone participates in work groups (inclusion)</p> <p>Implemented a student council (participation)</p> <p>Abolished the selection process for English immersion in Grades 5 and 6 (students accepted if they do not have learning problems in French and Math), added choices (Project CyberKnowledge)</p>	<p>Says something to the person when she sees prejudice</p> <p>Reminders at staff meetings (vision)</p> <p>Inform and train teachers</p> <p>Use community organisations to train teachers</p> <p>Being a model of support to students</p> <p>Prevention: once a week, activity where all students are mixed so that there are students from every grade in every classroom (diversity, sharing)</p>	<p>One-shot interventions: invites teachers to watch a TV show on poverty; meets lunch monitor to discuss inequitable interventions they make during lunch; intervenes privately with a teacher who expresses a bias or prejudice; takes every opportunity to question or invite reflection on a bias or prejudice; gives teachers an article to read; writes comments every week in the school newsletter</p> <p>Planned reflection exercises: 3-4 times a year: movie, article, discussion speech</p> <p>Vision building: 3-year orientations presented at the beginning-of-year speech; vision shared and used to make decisions</p> <p>Works with space so that diversity shows in the school; no ghettos in the school</p> <p>Prepares a reflection process on homework</p> <p>Is alert and brings a vision that goes beyond elementary school</p> <p>Fights bias at school council meetings</p>

By and large, the principals exhibited knowledge, attitudes and beliefs regarding social justice and reported behaviour of implementing change in some areas of our framework. Although some elements are missing, further investigation with more specific questions should help us gain a better picture of what principals know, what they believe, and what they say they do about social justice.

One more point concerns the principals' scope of action to implement transformative leadership. For example, we observed that Charlene seemed to have a vision that she implemented everywhere in the life of her school. This could be seen in her initiatives to counteract bias and prejudice, in her interactions with staff and students, in her reflection processes and actions, in the school team's reflection processes and actions, in the training provided to the school team, and in the school's structure and operations. In fact, it could be said that Charlene's work as a principal is to infuse her environment with a culture of transformation and social justice.

As a final comment on our investigational framework, we also found that the four major categories that emerged from our data analysis (attitudes and beliefs; areas of injustice or inequity and ways of creating injustice; occasions, events and situations; and actions) not only were helpful in understanding school principals' behaviour, but could also be combined into a framework to gain a richer understanding of the current implementation of transformative leadership.

## Conclusion

While our two previous research studies did not generate extensive data on how principals implement transformative leadership, this study presented extensive information on the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, and reported behaviours of transformative leaders. We met our goal to learn about transformative leadership as implemented by these three principals. We also learned that our framework was useful and that it could be enhanced and complemented with the addition of very specific questions in our next round of interviews with principals.

This framework is a vital tool to gain scientific knowledge about the work of school principals in disadvantaged areas and to frame principals' needs for professional development, which is a goal pursued by the SMS Program. For instance, professional development could be enhanced with the development of a 'social justice culture' as a vision for implementing transformative leadership. This framework is also important because most principals are typical principals and as such, they are virtually absent from the scientific literature. Knowing what they do and what they need is essential if we are to offer them the best professional training possible.

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