

Change Desired, Change Required: Inclusive Leadership Practice

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Abstract

The purpose of this literature review is to explore James Ryan's Inclusive Leadership framework as it applies to school leadership, as well as identify barriers to promoting inclusion, and strategies to overcome those barriers. In 2019, societies, and consequently learning environments, are becoming increasingly diverse. Therefore, inclusive leadership is a significant framework to examine because it can help current - and future - leaders identify barriers to inclusion in their own practice and educational environments and develop strategies to promote social justice. Literature was selected to include important facets of inclusive leadership, including: the key elements of James Ryan's inclusive leadership framework; the strategies and roadblocks to practice inclusive leadership and to answer the question: why should leaders practice inclusive leadership? This literature review hopes to illuminate that while inclusive leadership has its challenges, the steps to implement it are not out-of-reach. The literature review concludes with some reflections on personal experiences, areas for future focus, some words of caution and a concluding remark about how inclusive leadership will become more vital in the future.

Key words: inclusive leadership; leadership; social justice; barriers; strategies; policy

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Chapter 1

Introduction

My professional education career has been varied. Over the last decade, I been a teacher-on-call in several British Columbia school districts; a full-time classroom instructor in the public, private and off-shore school systems of British Columbia; program designer and recruitment officer for an international education company; student recruitment officer for a post-secondary, and currently employed as the sole instructor in a publicly-traded, for-profit, trend-setting business, based out of Vancouver, British Columbia. My current employer views this role as an experiment because they have never had an in-house instructor. The company's board determined that in order to develop its business and retain employees they required a full-time instructor, with classroom experience and strong communication skills. I inherited the role from a part-time instructor with no classroom experience, but plenty of job experience.

In this role, I have the privilege of working with a diverse set of learners. These are working professionals and post-secondary students, entering a highly-competitive, skill-based role. All-in-all, the program lasts approximately one month, and in that time the students are expected to learn a multitude of skills from a curriculum designed by the instructor and refined by the company's directors, including: effective verbal and non-verbal communication; industry-specific jargon; the organizational culture; technology-based systems training, and general knowledge of the role itself. These skills are vital to the role; therefore the instructor is vital to the company. Marion Bowl (2017) identifies adult education in our current time as neoliberalism, with a prioritization of skill-development for employability and human capital development, so it is fair to say that my current role is quite neoliberal. Through this explicit

emphasis on skill development and role-specific curriculum, this unique learning environment places more focus on ensuring what new students learn and what they can produce.

With that, every month I receive a new influx of students – who range in age from 18-55 - and range in professional experience from brand new, to experienced. For ten days, the students and I work together in a classroom, and then there is an additional ten days of experiential learning as the students transition into the new role. What's more, I am at the whim of the board of directors of the company, and should they determine that specific training is required, I develop *a la carte* curriculum and lessons for various topics. As an example: the board decided our newest professionals needed to communicate more effectively; now there is a bi-weekly course that develops effective listening skills and thoughtful communication skills. This example not only demonstrates the unique role of the instructor in this environment, it also further exemplifies the neoliberal characteristics of the classroom: a curriculum designed to produce a more effective and efficient student. There is little-to-no room for anything other than the demands of the business.

It is no exaggeration to say that my current role is varied. Some of my tasks include: administrator; curriculum designer; program planner; orientation leader and even graduation coordinator. My role is multi-faceted, but that is not the only unique aspect of my role. To further illuminate the unique nature of my role, here are two snapshots of my class composition that I have had during my tenure. My first ever class consisted of twelve (12) students: they were all within an age range of 20-33; three (3) females and nine (9) males; eleven (11) were Canadian and one (1) was Mexican; six (6) diverse ethnic backgrounds; seven (7) individuals had some form of post-secondary education, and one student had a law degree. One year later, my class consisted of: a man from Syria, aged 42; a female from the Dominican Republic, raised

in British Columbia; a man from Taiwan, with a family to raise and a man from Quebec, aged 22.

Due to the characteristics of my learning environment, the constant variance in student body and the relentless pursuit of growth and expectations from leadership, I recognize that as the instructor, there is little time to improve on my pedagogical practice. My current leadership and instruction style is much more about achieving performance indicators. These students need to achieve targets so they can demonstrate they are able to perform in a specific type of environment; they are more of a reflection of the demands of the market in which they will be employed. What's more, the class is a lecture-style environment, where my voice and my content are ever-present and dominating; it's less about ensuring students feel equal, heard and respected. With the diversity of student experience, age, background, orientation, ability and more, it pains me to recognize that my focus has become purely about performance. While there is nothing wrong with skill development and achievement, I have become increasingly concerned that my voice and my perspective are becoming too prevalent. More than that, it is simply becoming exhausting and far too routine to constantly lecture and only hear my own voice. It is here in this humble reflection of my role, that my journey towards understanding and implementing inclusive leadership and social justice has taken root.

Significance of study

In life, people have moments of transformation: the moment that shakes them, and they realize something about themselves that they took for granted. My moment of transformation came to me during my master's program, during a frank discussion pertaining to the reconciliation of Indigenous people of Canada. I believe the exact moment occurred when I – in

a moment of weakness – frustratingly exclaimed: *I haven't done anything wrong, so why should I feel bad?* I was appropriately corrected with the explanation that my comforts as a member of the dominant culture are a result of the mistreatment of Indigenous people before me. Initially, I was defensive, and I did not want to believe that it was true. Several scholars, including Carr and Lund (2015), discuss how people from the dominant culture believe they are 'colourblind' or not responsible for societal racial ills, while living and operating in a society that was founded on these racialized dichotomies and privileges. With time, I have come to realize that my own bias, perspective and background have come to sway my interpretation of things. More importantly, I now recognize that there are others who do not share my perspectives, my experiences and my background, and therefore they view things differently. This is what Jack Mezirow (2006) would describe as being placed in a moment of discomfort for true transformative learning to take place. As I began to reflect on my own identity and my own voice, I considered how to create an environment that can promote inclusion amidst all this variance.

From an instructional perspective my voice is the dominant one: I am the instructor and I deliver the curriculum. However, my voice also fits that of the dominant culture, which is: Caucasian, heterosexual, western, able-bodied and male (Rottman 2007, Rottman & Ryan 2007). While the curriculum – which is curated by the instructor and the company's directors - is largely focused on skill acquisition, there are also cultural and communicative aspects which are greatly influenced by Eurocentric and western ideals, including: jargon, cultural nuances of etiquette and communication, various interpretations of interpersonal skills, confidence, as well as contextual factors such as North American locations, professional conduct and an exclusively North American clientele.

Furthermore, in the classes that I teach, each student has a voice – so far as everyone can participate. Yet, the dominant culture – which happens to be my culture - prevails and is the overarching voice in the classroom. Unintentionally, the classroom has become exclusive. Thankfully, my educational practice and my master’s journey are running concurrently, so I am constantly improving my practice by becoming more aware of dominant voices within education and trying to incorporate various perspectives and experiences into classroom interactions. The more I reflect on my educational practices, the more I begin to truly understand the importance of inclusive leadership practices both as a leader and as an instructor. Most importantly though: I recognize that repeatedly teaching the same content in the same manner will not generate change. If I do not make a change to my pedagogical practice, I will continue to be create barriers to inclusion and equity for those who are not from the dominant culture.

The Problem

Upon realizing that change was required, I became bombarded with questions about inclusion and social justice: How can my voice be the only one? How can I improve my own leadership and instructional practice to include the voices and perspectives of others? How can I enhance the curriculum to involve multiple ways of knowing? How can I, as an educator from the dominant culture promote equity and an inclusive learning environment to ensure students feel welcomed, validated, respected and equal?

What quickly became apparent was that if change is desired, then change is required. To put it another way: to never change is to maintain the status quo. Like a habit, the status quo can quickly become embedded in an educational environment, even one as unique as the one I find myself in. Owens (2011) describes how culture is transmitted from generation to generation and

that doing things a certain way – in my case, promoting the dominant narrative – has been made manifest through stories, rituals and practice. One issue with this is that in organizations culture may resist change because change is often misconstrued as something is wrong and change can be a very discomfoting act. Buller (2015) in his discussion of change within education, states that: “[t]hey view the status quo as a key ingredient in their own identities” (p.19). In my specific context: the way I lead my educational environment perpetuates a dominance that has been engrained in this organization. There is an inherent fear that by changing the way I lead and instruct, the company’s successful identity will be altered because it will impact the newest additions in the organization. Perhaps, if I change the focus of my lessons from performance to a more inclusion and social justice-based curriculum, the identity of the company may be compromised. This tug-of-war between change and remain the same poses a great challenge.

Since education often serves the interest of the dominant group, those who fall outside of the dominant become excluded, and in some cases oppressed. Education has been a tool of division, oppression and power-politics. From a Canadian perspective, education has stripped Indigenous people of their culture, language and ways of knowing; the LGBTQ2+ community has been isolated and excluded; people of different gender or gender identities have been ignored; people from different racialized groups have been mistreated or ignored; those who have disabilities have been forcibly isolated from the able and more. Countless marginalized people have faced an education that has propagated bias and privilege in a system that values human capital, over human need. Therefore, change is required, for as McGregor (2009) states: “to do nothing is to side with the powerful” (p. 348).

Purpose of Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to identify the many facets of inclusive leadership so that a leader from the dominant culture, in an educational environment that values performance over most else, can work toward breaking down the barriers to inclusion and promote social justice and equity. This literature review has been organized in such a way that it allows the reader to first be introduced to the key aspects of inclusive leadership and then identifies barriers and strategies to promote inclusion and social justice.

More specifically, there is a discussion of James Ryan's Inclusive Leadership, as a conceptual framework. Ryan's Inclusive Leadership framework exemplifies the ways in which a leader can practice inclusive leadership and promote social justice. Leaders can accomplish this through focusing on dialogue; the development of a critical consciousness; the development of a whole-school approach that is focused on student achievement and collective decision-making, and most importantly, understanding the rationale behind promoting inclusion and social justice as a worthwhile endeavour.

Next, barriers and constraints to inclusive leadership will be discussed. Focus will be placed upon the educational status quo, including structural constraints such as hierarchy, the hegemony of western ways of knowing, as well as specific professional challenges. While there are countless challenges to inclusive leadership, these barriers will be discussed to shed light on whether these barriers exist in a learning environment, and whether changes can be made.

Once barriers have been identified, the literature review will focus on strategies to address these barriers and allow for inclusive leadership practices to manifest. These strategies

align with Ryan's framework and include reflection, creating enabling structures, welcoming other ways of knowing, as well as some political leadership skills.

Ultimately, this literature review hopes to answer the following questions:

1. What are some of the more common barriers to practicing inclusive leadership?
2. What are some strategies a leader can implement to overcome said barriers, and lead inclusively, to promote social justice?
3. What are the characteristics of Ryan's Inclusive Leadership framework and are they applicable in a for-profit, skill-based, professional learning environment?

Chapter 2

Methods

The resources used in this literature review are peer-reviewed articles from many journals, as well as chapters from full-length books. Research was not limited to any specific terms, but several key terms generated exciting results including combinations of: inclusion, inclusive, leadership, practice, social justice and policy. Several journals were utilized extensively, including the *International Journal of Inclusive Leadership*; *International Journal of Leadership in Schools* and *Educational Administration Quarterly*. Further phrases and key terms were used to synthesize impactful articles, including: various forms of leadership; Indigenous issues; exclusion and more. These searches produced some fine articles and e-books, from which many references and quotations were cited.

It would be remiss to not include two scholars whose work is cited often throughout this literature: James Ryan and George Theoharis. As will be discussed in detail in the following sections, James Ryan's inclusive leadership discussion is foundational to this literature review. Of note are his contributions to the discussions of the constraints and barriers towards inclusion; the strategies to overcome said barriers, and the rationale behind inclusive leadership practices. Interestingly, in his more recent work Ryan also provides some further insight into new strategies, including strategic activism and utilizing political tactics. Moreover, George Theoharis also provides some wonderful insight and engaging firsthand accounts of principals attempting to practice inclusive leadership in the pursuit of inclusion and the promotion of social justice.

There was an attempt to use articles written within the last few decades. The reason for this is 21st-century Canada, like much of the world, is a changing place. Canada is more diverse than ever. While there is tremendous value in the works of the pioneers of inclusivity in education, articles written between 1999 – 2019 are more likely to represent the current climate of diversity, technology and other issues that are constantly at play in our modern society. Moreover, the articles that were selected provide various perspectives on specific issues pertaining to inclusion, including: political strategies; Indigenous issues and reconciliation; western hegemony; enabling and hindering organizations; organizational culture and more.

Briefly, it is also worth discussing some shortcomings in the literature and research. By limiting searches to the keywords mentioned, and focusing on those terms throughout, there was perhaps some missed opportunities to discover and uncover other articles and authors. Terms such as *feminist; international; global; comparative* and *methodologies* could have produced a more robust and diverse interpretation of inclusive leadership practices, only strengthening the literature review. Moreover, by placing much of the focus on the works of James Ryan and George Theoharis, other scholars of inclusive leadership were potentially ignored. There was no purposeful exclusion of terms, but as the focus was largely placed on Canadian inclusive practices and barriers, much of the literature used does have a distinct North American perspective. Therein lies an opportunity for further research in the future.

Organization

As briefly mentioned before, the literature review is organized in such a way that it leaves the reader with a sense of hope. It is discomfoting to know that your own pedagogical practices can in fact be exclusive rather than inclusive. The literature review begins by discussing the

framework of inclusive leadership. With inclusive leadership explained, the reader can then identify the numerous barriers to inclusion. If the paper ended there, a reader may become dismayed thinking there is no hope to practice inclusive leadership. However, the literature review then focuses on strategies to promote inclusion and social justice, and even discusses potential future opportunities for further research for inclusive leadership. The reader is then left hopeful that leaders can practice inclusion in any environment.

The next section will provide some brief definitions of several key terms that will be discussed at great length throughout the literature review: inclusion, inclusive leadership and social justice. Inclusion is vital to Ryan's inclusive leadership framework, for it is a goal to provide equity to all students. An introduction to inclusive leadership will be provided, since greater explanation of inclusive leadership will follow in the framework section. Lastly, a more applicable definition of social justice will be defined. Social justice is a term wrapped in vagueness: is it a verb, an action, a social club? This following section will now attempt to shed light on these three important terms as they relate to inclusive leadership.

Chapter 3

Definitions

If the purpose of inclusive leadership is to promote social justice and equity in educational environments, then starting with inclusion is important. Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis (2008) frame inclusion as: "...really about social justice and creating equity for all students" (p.237). Sapon-Shevin (2003) echoes this sentiment by stating: "...by embracing inclusion as a model of social justice, we can create a world fit for us all" (p. 28). Therefore, inclusion is about creating equality for any individual regardless of identity, ability, ethnicity or any other distinguishing attribute.

Inclusive leadership, as defined by Ryan (2003, 2006a, 2006b, 2010), Theoharis (2007), and Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis (2008) deals with the marginalized, or those who are not from the dominant culture. Ryan (2006a) goes so far as to argue that inclusive leadership works along the axes of the advantaged and disadvantaged by promoting student achievement, creating spaces for dialogue and critical consciousness, and reflection. While Blessinger and Stefani (2017) further argue that inclusive leadership is an act that is founded on democratic principles (p. 8).

Rife within inclusive leadership is social justice. As an action, social justice may connote tropes such as feeding the homeless or building a hospital in an impoverished nation. For the purposes of this discussion, social justice in an educational context is the idea of creating full and equal learning environments. To quote a principal in Katz and Ryan's (2007) study on social justice and inclusive leadership practices: "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (p. 51). Social justice is a cornerstone of inclusion

and is manifest in numerous ways, including a shift in hierarchical structures and creating mindful and enabling structures that create spaces where social justice can flourish. These will be discussed in the following sections.

Now that several of the terms tantamount to the overall effort of this paper have been laid out, the next section will discuss the James Ryan's inclusive leadership framework.

Framework Introduction

For this literature review, James Ryan's (2003, 2006a, 2006b) inclusive leadership framework will be used. Inclusive leadership is a worthwhile consideration because it can empower leaders to identify barriers towards inclusion and help them overcome them. Inclusive leadership also has social justice and equity at its core, which makes it a noble practice, worth fighting for in the quest for equity and equality.

While it is never easy to implement strategies that promote inclusion, Ryan proposes several strategies that can aid in promoting inclusion. What is exciting about James Ryan's inclusive leadership framework is that the strategies are clear. The main strategies of Ryan's inclusive leadership will be introduced in the following paragraphs, and there will be some brief critiques of inclusive leadership practice in the concluding section.

Leadership: Reasons and rationalizations. The first aspect of the inclusive leadership framework is very practical since it stems from critical reflection. It pertains to the why, and begs the question: why lead inclusively? A leader should reflect on what leadership means to them and why they may want to practice inclusive leadership. One area of reflection could be: *what kind of leader do I want to be?* This question may force a leader to reflect on whether they

wish to be a sole leader, or as a collective leader, sharing responsibility and giving other people a voice? As the adage states: if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.

Moreover, a leader must be an advocate and be willing to promote change. Naturally, change is met with resistance, since people like what they like and typically there is a sentiment: it has worked this far, why change now? By advocating for change a leader can promote inclusion and be willing to fight for it. Advocacy can manifest in a variety of ways, including a willingness to promote strategies for inclusion and a leader can embody these strategies to demonstrate how inclusive leadership practices can permeate a learning environment. These strategies will be discussed in detail in the strategies chapter.

Dialogue. Ryan suggests that dialogue is a critical component of inclusive leadership practices, but he is not referring to idle chit-chat to pass time. Ryan (2003a) suggests that dialogue should pertain to conversations about diversity, respect and reciprocity. Moreover, there should be a fluidity to the dialogue, where anybody in a learning environment can engage in critical dialogue. Lastly, Ryan (2006a) strongly advocates for active and respectful listening as a key component of dialogue. To listen actively demonstrates respect, creates an atmosphere of trust and creates an environment where multiple voices can be heard to further promote inclusion.

Develop critical consciousness. Another characteristic of Ryan's inclusive leadership framework is the notion of developing a critical consciousness. In order to develop a critical consciousness, inclusive leaders must first reflect. In the case of diverse learning environments, leaders must take into consideration their biases, privileges, systemic oppressions and other things that they take-for-granted. Ryan (2003a) states: "for leaders to ensure that all students

acquire the best possible education in their institutions, they must recognize, acknowledge, understand and learn about these forms of life, and they must also teach others about them. They must be open to hearing about these things and be willing to spread the word about them” (p. 175). Furthermore, by reflecting, leaders can come to discover more subtle inequalities and unequal power relationships in their organizations, in the hopes of shedding further light on these issues. It begs the question: *how can one change, unless they know what requires change?* If critical consciousness becomes a cultural practice, inclusion will not only become a strategy used by the leadership team, it can also be embodied and practiced in the larger community of students, families and other stakeholders.

Whole-school approach/Student achievement/ Shared policy creation. The next feature of Ryan’s inclusive leadership framework is the idea of whole-school approach. This idea manifests itself as a school culture of inclusivity. In the inclusive leadership conceptualization, the whole school approach also refers to the ability of a leader to give everyone a voice and to be heard. This is manifest in collective policy procedures, and the idea of leaders sharing some of their decision-making responsibilities. Beyond simply opening the floor for more shared decision-making, it also speaks to the idea of formal and informal relationship taken hold of the inclusion mantra and ensuring that all stakeholders promote inclusion.

Building off the idea of the whole-school approach, Ryan goes on to discuss the importance of student achievement as a manifestation of effective inclusive leadership practice. Students can achieve more if they can demonstrate what they know. Sometimes, in order to do that, leaders and instructors need to validate and value other ways of knowing. Welcoming other ways of knowing may look like a learner bringing their own previous experiences into the

classroom to understand a topic or demonstrate understanding. Another meaningful example of welcoming other ways of knowing is not forcing a learner to conform to certain codes of conduct or performance. By allowing a learner to lean on previous ways of knowing that they have from other experiences, and not trying to force a learner into a performance-based box, leaders can create inclusive learning environments. If a learning environment welcomes other ways of knowing, students can achieve up to their potential, and then they can dedicate more time to self-improvement and developing critical consciousness.

These facets of inclusive leadership provide leaders with tangible action-items and areas of focus, yet also provide challenges by encouraging the development of critical consciousness and reflecting on their own leadership. It would be naïve to think that inclusive leadership is an easy road to travel down; the journey to inclusive leadership is not a simple one, but it is a worthwhile one. The following section will discuss the barriers to inclusion. Barriers, while presenting a challenge to inclusion, can also be used as learning opportunities to successfully transform a learning environment into a place where inclusivity and social justice can be promoted.

Chapter 4

Introduction to Barriers

Change is difficult because it often connotes that what was happening beforehand was not working. Moreover, to improve a situation is to forge an unknown future. That is not to say that change is a reckless endeavor; quite the opposite: it can be thoughtful, methodical and careful. However, the outcomes will be an unknown. Therefore, inclusive leadership and social justice are worthwhile, yet challenging endeavours. So, the question is: *why aren't more leaders practicing inclusive leadership?* Even if an educator endeavours to practice inclusive leadership, there are many barriers and constraints to doing so. The following section will discuss several of those constraints, including organizational culture, the many iterations of the status quo in organizations, including hierarchy, western and neoliberalism ideals and hegemony, as well as professional challenges and more.

Organizational culture. According to Ryan (2003a), a leader or an instructor that wishes to make a change must first recognize that change is required. A leader may or may not even know that change is required (p. 160-162). This could be for a multitude of reasons; however, one could argue that a leader is unable to recognize these inequalities because they are in plain sight. Leaders may not recognize that there is an issue, or that issues of exclusion exist. Some of these issues can be overt such as overt racism or sexism, whereas others can be quite subtle (Ryan, 2006a). In environments that promote exclusion instead of inclusion, there is an insistence that it is just "...the way we do things around here" (Owens, 2011, p. 138). The values, belief systems, norms and assumptions are commonplace because they have always been there.

Culture can become deeply engrained into the essence of an organization and it can be passed down from leader to leader. Lugg and Toom (2010) also discuss the importance of organizational culture. They argue that if an administration has a certain belief-set, it can permeate throughout an organization: "...what is honoured and valued by the administration tends to be honoured and valued by the school or school system" (p.85). So, if a leader espouses the same principals of a culture that has been passed down through generations of leadership, it can be hard to change. Take for example the views towards different sexual identities. Perhaps an organization is not well-versed in the multitude of sexual identities that exist and refuses to acknowledge anything other than heterosexual relationships. This organization demonstrates a culture that does not respect diversity and with that, excludes those of differing sexual identities. Therefore, a lack of knowledge of diverse communities is also a barrier to inclusion. So, if an educational leader wishes to make a change, they need to recognize that change is necessary. This is sometimes easier said than done since organization can be prone to institutional inertia.

The term institutional inertia is used in Blessinger and Stefani's (2017) discussion of inclusive leadership. Institutional inertia describes the constant tug-of-war between the willingness to change, and the desire to stay the same. Some organizations may have a culture that is elitist, exclusionary, or maybe even so traditional that there is still only one clear leader. An organization may not want to change for a variety of reasons, including the concept that: *it has worked this far, why won't it continue to work?* Starr (2011) summarizes the challenge facing leaders who encounter an organizational culture that is stuck in this inclusive tug-of-war: "...major change requires people to give up feelings of comfort, long-held values and beliefs, and established routines...thus protecting the status quo" (p. 647). According to Ryan (2006b), inclusive leadership requires that leaders develop a critical consciousness for themselves and for

their organization. This is to recognize that there are issues and to attempt to make change.

Change can only occur when the issues of an organization are identified.

Even if a leader were to develop a critical consciousness about their role, or their organizational practices, they may face an organization that would rather maintain the status quo and ignore the need to make a change. The status quo is an ambiguous term, and the next section will identify how the status quo is a major roadblock for inclusive leadership practice.

Introduction to the status quo. There are many interpretations of the status quo in educational organizations and many scholars have various definitions. In synthesizing down these many examples, the status quo in educational organizations is: top-down, bureaucratic, male, western, able-bodied, Eurocentric, neoliberal and Caucasian (Ryan 2005, Battiste 2005, Klinger 2007, Rottmann 2007, Naraiian 2013, Ringo 2013, Fallon & Paquette 2014, Bowl 2017, Brooks, 2018). Helena Liu (2017) even goes so far as to say that the ubiquity and obsession with the conceptualization of leadership is the legacy of our, “romance with white elite class masculinity” (p. 1). The barriers presented by the status quo are a barrier to inclusive leadership because they can prevent dialogue; they stymie whole school approaches; they focus only on student’s performance. The following section will discuss how the various manifestations of the status quo prevent inclusive leadership.

Hierarchy. Beginning with the constraints of a top-down, hierarchical, vertical leadership approach, there is a connotation of a sole-leader, bravely facing all forms of administrative and educational challenges. It is hard to ignore this romantic idealism of leadership, since it is ever-present in our daily-lives through political leadership, wildly successful CEOs and other exaggerations of leadership. To truly lead inclusively, a leader needs to break the status quo of

the vertical hierarchy and extend leadership horizontally, to include more in the decision-making process.

Strategies on how to challenge the status quo of top-down leadership will be discussed in subsequent sections, but first it is worth noting that several scholars, including (Hoy 2002, Ryan 2006a, 2015, Starr 2011) recognize that while a leader may have ambitions to promote inclusion and challenge the status quo, they are also a product of the same hierarchy and power structure. Additionally, hierarchy provides shape to an organization, as well as stability. Educational leaders find themselves in a catch-22: to attempt to change the hierarchical structures is to risk their own position of power, yet to do nothing is to be complicit.

Ryan (2003a, 2003b, 2006a, 2006b) argues that in order to practice inclusive leadership, responsibility must be shared amongst many. In some cases, decision-making should be shared amongst leaders, as well as teachers. In other situations, the entire learning organization should be involved with policy-creation, including students. However, if a leader consolidates power and refuses to include others in leadership tasks, then hierarchy reigns, and exclusive practices persist. As Ryan (2006a) states "...those who are not in management positions will be excluded from decision-making processes because they supposedly do not merit this inclusion. Vesting the power that comes from formal leadership in single individuals also excludes others who are not in these positions" (p.10).

What's more, Hoy (2002) argues: "...the problem is more complicated. The argument is not again hierarchy *per se*, but rather against a specific kind of centralization – hierarchy that hinders" (p.90). Ryan (2006a) states that all leadership is about power. If an organization's culture reflects the views of one leader, then one leader will always be enough. He argues: "[i]f

the prevailing view is that leadership resides within individuals, then it will be individual people who exercise their power” (Ryan, 2006a, p.22). If inclusive leadership and social justice are the ambition, then leadership cannot solely be the responsibility of one person, but should be shared (Ryan 2006, Aveling 2007, Rottmann, 2007).

The traditional top-down, or vertical hierarchical structures that lead to power consolidation and the maintenance of the status quo also have glacial-paced bureaucratic processes. By their very nature, organizations are slow-moving processes. Rottmann (2007) dissects the ways in which bureaucracy slows down decision making through a series of checks-and-balances, decision making procedures and more. So, while an inclusive leader may wish to change an aspect of an organization’s culture or practice, bureaucratic procedures can slow down the change, which can lead to frustration and institutional inertia. What’s more, Fitzgerald (2006) discusses how bureaucracy is a masculine tool, further promoting the status quo of male leadership practices.

Again, Ryan (2006a) discusses how inclusive leadership advocates, “distrust hierarchies that accompany bureaucratic forms of organization” (p.8) because they reinforce inequities, since not everyone is at the decision-making table. Leaders should, as Ryan (2006a) argues, share power and not consolidate it under one person; it should be “...a variety of people working together in many ways and roles...[l]eadership is best not seen in terms of individuals, but as a collective process” (p. 10).

By removing the traditional top-down, vertical leadership structures of an organization, there is an opportunity to extend leadership opportunities to those of different gender identities, abilities, orientations, ethnicities and ways of knowing. To briefly conclude this section, top-

down hierarchy and the consolidation of power in the stereotype of the sole leader, is one manifestation of the status quo that hinders inclusive leadership.

Hegemony. Another aspect of the status quo is the hegemonic nature of educational organizations. Hegemony, for the purpose of this paper, can be summarized as a dominance of western, neoliberal ideals and an ignorance of other ways of knowing. Apple (1980) discusses how schools are mirrors of society and reflect the needs of society at the time. This point is further corroborated by Osborne (2008) by stating that learning environments are hegemonic in how they mirror the dominant culture in curriculum social reproduction. Moreover, schools are a battleground of social reproduction and consequently the dominant culture is legitimizing and spread through the language and content of school curriculum and instruction (Jay, 2003).

According to the inclusive leadership framework, "...[i]nclusion is best served in schools that emphasize student learning...it has been found that students are generally included when the school honours different ways of knowing and sources of knowledge, allows students to write and speak in their own vernacular and employs culturally compatible communication styles" (Ryan, 2006a, p. 12). So to enforce one way of knowing, or one perspective on what is deemed as good, correct, right or wrong, is to exclude others who do not have similar perspectives.

Battiste (2005), speaking from the perspective of an Indigenous woman, states that education has not been benign. The dominant narrative in education can have a lasting impact on those who are not from the dominant status quo. Ryan (2006a) asks several very important questions when it comes to the hegemonic nature of curriculum: *What is happening here? What do we know about this? Who says this is the way things should be? What overall purposes are being served? Whose needs are being met? Whose voices are being silenced, excluded or*

denied? How come some viewpoints always get heard? In asking these sorts of questions, leaders can further develop their critical consciousness, identify the curricular constraints students face and look to enact change for social justice by welcoming other ways of knowing. This can then lend itself to meaningful dialogue amongst individuals within a learning environment and permeate into the communities at large.

For a specific example, the hegemonic dominance of the western ways of knowing is exemplified in the former - and ongoing - treatment of Indigenous people in Canada. Fallon and Paquette (2014) cite the “hegemonic mainstream system” (p. 195) as a way in which the Eurocentric and western ways of knowing delegitimized and stripped the indigenous peoples of Canada from their culture. Additionally, in her discussion of the malignant nature of education in Canada, Battiste (2005) states: “...it [schooling] has been used to perpetuate damaging myths about Aboriginal culture, languages, beliefs and ways of life. It has also established western knowledge and sciences as dominant modes of thought and distrusts diversity and jeopardizes us all as we move into the next century” (p.9). It pushes Indigenous ways of knowing to the margins and promotes only certain ways of knowing (Battiste 2005, Kanu 2007, Regan 2010). The status quo is thusly maintained through the promotion of western ways of knowing and dominant ideals.

The dominant culture is also maintained through neoliberalism, which has penetrated modern education. In summary, this neoliberal paradigm values the development of human capital over social development. This neoliberal approach has become the dominant narrative, speaking to skill development, employability and human capital; shunting other ways of knowing or efforts to lead with social justice ambitions (Bowl, 2017). Furthermore, it is worth

referring to Grimaldi's (2012) analysis of neoliberal practices in Italy. Social justice initiatives are set aside in educational organizations in order to pursue human capital; "...the marginalized effects of dominant pedagogies [neoliberalism] are not challenged or even questioned (p.1146). In the relentless pursuit of skill development and human capital development, there is no time or space to reflect on the current state, and thus the status quo is maintained.

These examples of hegemonic western ideals in education demonstrate exclusive practice, particularly in diverse learning environments. The next section will discuss the professional challenges to inclusion and inclusive leadership.

Professional challenges. There is another barrier to inclusive leadership, and that falls squarely on the shoulders and on the mental well-being of the leaders and teachers themselves. Ryan admits that being a leader is a tough job: "...[i]t is little wonder, then, that issues like inclusion can easily get lost in the press of the job" (Ryan, 2003a, p.169). With the multitude of tasks, including performance-targets, personnel issues and more, leaders and instructors are faced with a crisis: is there a balance between performance standards, job security and inclusion?

Lingard, Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013) argue that this neoliberal approach to education strengthens vertical, top-down leadership, which is a barrier to inclusion. This happens through the way organizations identify competitive performance measures and impose restrictive and reductive efforts on leaders and teachers. This neoliberal effort is also manifest in performance measures and a relentless drive for performance and economic performance through human capital development (Grimaldi 2012, Bowl 2017). Grimaldi (2012) discusses how the drive for neoliberalism and skill development has pushed social justice initiatives to the side, and this point is further corroborated by Dale and Robertson (2013) as they identify that the

neoliberal approach creates issues of access for the poor, those of different gender identities and creates more exclusion, rather than inclusion. These facets of the neoliberal paradigm reinforce the dominant narrative and bring additional pressure to the role, further restricting inclusion.

Participating in social justice work can also jeopardize leaders' career trajectories, impact their health and even threaten their employment status. Wang (2016) cites pressures on principals to improve school performance as a hindrance to organizational change and to leading inclusively. McGregor (2009) discusses the pressure to deliver and asks: how does an educational leader have the bandwidth to pursue social justice matters, when stated: "those who suggest alternative models are silenced by the sheer weight of neo-liberal rhetoric emanating from both sides of the political spectrum" (p.351). Performance-based educational environments often restrict timetables and mental capacity to make meaningful change.

Moreover, Ryan (2017) cites numerous realistic barriers facing educational leaders. He laments that leaders are so well immersed in the system they are seeking to change that they may find it difficult, or even risky, to make those changes. More evidence for challenges in creating inclusive practices is the idea that a job may be on the line. Dimito and Schneider (2008) discuss numerous hesitations for leaders or teachers to either support LGBTQ2+ students or reveal themselves to be part of this community for fear of losing their jobs. For many, job insecurity is a hindrance to inclusive leadership.

To conclude this subsection, there are risks to inclusive leadership. While Ryan advocates that a leader must first and foremost recognize the need for change, if there are professional restrictions to doing so - such as threat to job security or the nature of the role itself - this can prevent inclusion.

Miscellaneous barriers. It is also worth noting that inclusion is often conceptualized in ‘western’ and North American contexts. It can also be politically-based. Interestingly, Ainscrow and Sandill (2010) discuss how in certain cultures, particularly in developing countries, gender or caste systems may hinder integration, and moreover state that distributed leadership, one of the main tenants of breaking the vertical hierarchy and disrupting the status quo, are harder to do since hierarchies are more well established, in what they refer to as the “south” (p.405). So, while a leader may be inclined to lead inclusive leadership practices and social justice endeavours, societal constraints can also be a barrier to do so.

To conclude this discussion of the barriers facing educational leaders and their inclusive leadership agenda, it is worth referring to Theoharis (2007) and the discussion of apathy, lethargy and will. Theoharis (2007) states a lack of communal drive as a major deterrent to lead inclusively. If staff, administration, the students and the community are not all driving towards a similar goal, burnout, fatigue and a defeatist-attitude can germinate. The toll it can take on a leader can be real.

Constraints such as cultural issues and the status quo – manifested in organizational structures, ways of knowing, neoliberalism and more – can make it very challenging to lead inclusively. It is important to be brave, strategic and relentless to lead inclusively. The following chapter will discuss strategies leaders can employ to practice inclusive leadership and promote inclusion, including: challenging the status quo; changing organizational culture to be more enabling, creating a culture of dialogue and reflection; welcoming and validating other ways of knowing and leadership approaches. All these strategies can help a leader practice inclusive leadership.

Chapter 5

Introduction to Strategies

In the previous section there was much discussion of barriers to inclusive leadership. Barriers exclude those who do not fit the dominant culture or dominant ways of thinking. Barriers can also prevent other voices from participating in decision-making or from speaking out. Moreover, barriers can also threaten job security. Therefore, if a leader is to practice inclusive leadership, they must summon courage to challenge these barriers in a variety of ways. Using Ryan's inclusive leadership framework, it becomes quite clear that one way to challenge the status quo is to identify, first and foremost, what needs to be changed. This can come from a desire to change oneself to practice inclusive leadership. It could also be a challenge to create an organization that is open and tolerant of other voices, other ways of knowing and other people taking a leadership role. The following sections will discuss the ways in which a leader can advocate for inclusive leadership, social justice and change.

The need to change and the desire to change. In order to have that *a-ha* moment, a leader must be challenged to become conscious of what they know to be true and how things have been done (Mezirow, 2006). Shields (2010) goes on to state that: “[t]ransformative concepts and social justice are closely connected through the shared goals of identifying and restricting frameworks that generate inequity and disadvantaged” (p. 566). Therefore, it is vitally important for a leader to understand their practice and that of their organization, too. One great way to do this is to reflect on their current circumstances.

Reflection. For a leader to practice inclusivity and promote social justice, they must question all facets of education. Ryan (2003a) argues: “[s]o it is up to administrators to critically

reflect on their own and others' taken for granted views of different others, to understand them in ways that both honour and work in the latter's interests, and to take action" (p.125). Reflection is important and one interesting way to reflect is for an organization to complete an equity audit to begin to truly understand their organizational practices (Capper & Young, 2015).

An equity audit is a series of reflective questions that can be curated by a leadership team or by an entire organization, if shared responsibility and collaborative policy making practices already exist. The rationale behind an equity audit is discussed in Scanlan and Theoharis' (2015) book, *Leadership for Increasingly Diverse Schools* to determine whether an organization is practicing inclusivity. Capper and Young (2015) point the finger at leaders, and state that leaders play a significant role in creating an inclusive culture, therefore they empower leaders to complete an audit to educate their organization. Finally, Brooks (2018), in his discussion of equitable leadership practices, also supports the idea of an equity audit to ensure that the status quo is disrupted by identifying what needs to be changed. With that, it is not only important to reflect on one's own role and take stock of it, but it is also vital to do a thorough audit of an organization and identify whether it is equitable or not.

Moreover, reflection is a tool that can allow an organization to suspend assumptions. Ainscrow and Sandill (2010) state: "...[reflection] is seen as making a positive contribution to the creation of responsive educational settings" (p.407) Lugg and Toom (2010) discuss that it is crucial to look inwards first, reflect on one's own belief system, and then engage in difficult – and even uncomfortable – conversations about equity, equality and social justice. While Regan (2010) concludes that only through critical self-reflection can leaders and educators struggle for dignity and human freedom.

Therefore, reflection is an important aspect of inclusive leadership. For as Shields (2010) argues: “[c]ritique lays the groundwork for the promise of schooling that is more inclusive, democratic and equitable...and responsive” (p.570) While not directly stated as a key pillar in Ryan’s inclusive leadership framework, he hints at the importance of reflection as a way to check personal biases and determine behaviours in an educational organization. Most importantly, it can identify gaps that will allow for leaders to effectively impact change. Reflection is good, but action is required (Brown, 2004, Rexhepi & Torres 2011, Ledwith, 2018). The following section will discuss how focusing on the creation of a critical consciousness is the next step to promoting inclusion in an educational organization.

Critical consciousness. Reflection is a vital skill in determining if an organization is promoting inclusion. Once change has been deemed as necessary, it is crucial to develop critical consciousness throughout the organization. It involves a critical way of looking at the world and can involve leaders viewing their biases, privileges and ways of knowing with a critical eye. Ryan (2003a, 2006a, 2006b) stresses the importance of educating the entire organization for the purpose of inclusion. Moreover, a leader – or leadership team – must understand the reasons for, and barriers to, inclusion so they can understand how they may apply to their own learning environment.

In contrast to reflection, the development of critical consciousness takes the form of educating the learning community. The rationale for this, as stated by Ryan (2006a) is: “[i]n order for individuals to break out of their usual patterns of thinking that obscure exclusion, they need to engage others – particularly different others – in critical conversations. These critical conversations can help school communities acknowledge, recognize, critique and change those invisible practices that impede inclusion” (p. 11).

So, to develop a critical consciousness is vital, but unless an organization allows for dialogue to exist then it is all-for-not. The next section will stress the importance of creating enabling structures that promote dialogue, horizontal hierarchy and collaboration.

Enabling structures/ Whole school approach/ Shared policy creation. In creating enabling and mindful structures, leaders subvert existing inequalities caused by vertical, top-down hierarchy where one voice is leading, and it can promote collaboration amongst staff, in order to challenge hierarchical structures. In doing so, a leader can bring new voices to the leadership table and perhaps change the status quo. These enabling organizations also promote mindfulness through ongoing scrutiny of practice, performance and ways of knowing (Hoy, 2002). Thus, by creating a culture of reflection, leaders are in fact creating an environment for critique and change, too.

Enabling structures can also spread out decision-making and in doing so, brings a sense of democracy and shared responsibility throughout an organization. Ryan (2006a) issues a warning as to the consequences of hindering structures when he states: “[v]esting the power that comes from formal leadership in single individuals also excludes many other who are not in these position,” yet in the same argument is hopeful that enabling structures can also help disrupt the slow and often damaging effects that bureaucracy can have on change (p.8). Hoy (2002), Aveling (2007) and Rottmann (2007) conclude that in order to bring about socially-just change in an educational organization, responsibilities and decision-making must be shared. Rottmann (2007) states: “leadership...attributes influence to the dynamic and relational interactions of members brought together by an organizational structure, identity and purpose” (p.55). Importantly, this harkens to the inclusive leadership framework, particularly when Ryan discusses the creation of a whole school approach to make inclusion a part of the entire

organization's day-to-day. In other words, everyone participates and embodies the notions of inclusion (Ryan, 2006b). This can also be manifest in an organization's effort to share decision-making and rule creation (Ryan, 2006a), especially when it creates a 'level playing field' and can allow more individuals to be included.

Furthermore, an organization becomes enabling if it is a place where everybody, not only leaders, are empowered to lead. Within this conceptualization, teacher leadership can allow for educators to share in the decision-making process and help maintain order. Nolan and Palazollo (2011) discuss how a teacher can have a huge impact in the informal sector within an educational organization. They go on to state: "...the status quo was to ignore the situation, and in turn, teachers who took action to lead activities to counter homophobia drive bullying, could be seen as radical and not in line with school and district practice" (p.311).

At this point, it was worth briefly describing informal roles. These pertain to relations that organically arise within a learning organization, and they develop from intrapersonal relationships between colleagues, students and leaders (Strati, 2000). It is here where leaders can make a massive impact on organizational culture to promote change, by disrupting traditional power structures and creating enabling organizations (Duke & York-Barr, 2004, Nolan & Palazollo, 2011).

So, this discussion of enabling structures speaks to Ryan's inclusive leadership framework, especially in the ways it creates arenas for shared responsibility and fluid movement throughout a traditionally rigid organization. To conclude this section, it's worth revisiting Ryan (2006a): "[l]eadership is best seen not in terms of individuals, but as a collective process" (p.10). By spreading out leadership responsibilities, the vertical hierarchy becomes more horizontal, and

the status quo begins to become disrupted. The following section will briefly discuss the role dialogue plays in an inclusive organization.

Dialogue. Dialogue is one of the bedrocks of the inclusive leadership framework. Ryan (2006a) states: “[f]or school communities, they need to nurture dialogue. In order for everyone to be meaningfully included, schools need to provide opportunities for people to be able to communicate effectively with one another” (p. 11). Hoy (2002) discusses that by scrutinizing the ways things are done, is to create enabling structures, unbound by the rigidity of rules. What’s more, Shields (2004) argues that by opening organizations to dialogue, equality can manifest as it breaks down walls of silence and creates mutual understanding and recognition that differences are a part of life. Moreover, by scrutinizing and opening all facets of an organization up for reflection, organizational mindfulness can develop.

With mindfulness comes a keen sense of what is going on, and with practice, critique of organizational culture and practice can lead to action and a change for social justice. There is also a push to include inclusive listening into a leadership practice. To listen inclusively, is to listen attentively and “...include others as contributors to the educational spaces we share with them” (Veck, 2009, p. 148). Therefore, by creating a mindful and enabling structure that speaks critically and listens, changes can be made to existing structures and the pursuit of social justice can begin in earnest.

Once dialogue has been established to promote equality, inclusive leaders can focus on the curriculum and student learning as another way to create more inclusive spaces.

Student achievement/ Other ways of knowing. As previously discussed in the barriers, allowing students to achieve by demonstrating their knowledge in other ways is inclusive

practice. Ryan (2006a) speaks to about inclusion as manifest in a leader or instructor's ability to welcome other ways of knowing. Moreover, student achievement also correlates to critical consciousness: "...critical conversations...in an inclusive spirit, teachers and supervisors need to interrogate ways of delivering the curriculum in diverse contexts that will include and empower all students....this includes honouring other ways of knowing and sources of knowledge" (Ryan, 2003a, p. 182). Therefore, leaders need to encourage other ways of knowing and a critical inclusive leader may ask: *What is being taught, and why? Who planned this curriculum? What is right?*

As an example: the indigenous ways of knowing that were replaced by western ways of knowing creating an imbalance of knowledge and an eradication of "other" ways of knowing (Battiste, 2005; Regan, 2010; Ahenakew, 2016). By reconsidering the value of indigenous knowledge, there is a way to welcome new ways of learning, disrupting the status quo of western, neoliberal educational practices, and make a push for reconciliation; to mend the ills caused by the dominant European culture on indigenous peoples (Regan, 2010). Another brief example is how schools cater to the able, and view anybody who was not part of the dominant status, to be removed and outcast. Harry and Klinger (2007), as well as Ringo (2013) discuss how disability – whether cognitive, physical or otherwise – should not be viewed as a deficit, but rather to educate others to create more equitable learning environments (Harry & Klinger, 2007, Narayan, 2013). Narayan (2013) discusses the importance of including those that are disabled, while Theoharis (2010) states the importance of inclusion of all: "...to connect with diverse students, staff, families and community members...within this work, they brought to life social justice leadership" (p. 369).

If other ways of knowing are an example of inclusive leadership, then perhaps it is worth briefly examining leadership perspectives, too. Fallon and Paquette (2014) discuss how Indigenous leaders lead in Eurocentric ways, due to western-style education. According to Fallon and Paquette (2014), new ways of leading (from an Indigenous perspective) disrupt existing power structures and allow for indigenous leadership change hindering power structures. Additionally, Fitzgerald (2006) speaks of both gendered, as well as indigenous leadership efforts; Lugg and Toom (2010) take an approach that highlight ways in which queer leadership can benefit the marginalized; Shields (2005) discusses how female leadership can not only disrupt the status quo, but furthermore, can be an enabling and emancipatory endeavor; while Adapa and Sheridan (2017) and Jean-Marie and Kingsberry (2018) discuss the resiliency and barrier overcome by minority women in leadership positions; and lastly, Nolan and Palazollo (2011) discuss the teacher leadership approach;. There are many ways of knowing and different approaches to leadership. By reflecting on current educational practices and recognizing the value in other ways of knowing, inclusion can be strived for and social justice and equity achieved.

Other strategies. There are other strategies to promote inclusive leadership, and a great question to ask would be: “*Where do I currently work?*” and “*What can I currently change?*” In a lot of ways, learning organizations and environments are like political environments. Therefore, it only makes sense that a leader should also adopt some political acumen in their pursuit of social justice. Wang (2016) posits that leadership can be a subversive act, in whether a leader should enact certain legislations that could potentially hinder inclusion. Ryan (2003a, 2015, 2017) argues how leaders need to enable their political skill and will to enact change, through what is described as discreet advocacy, or being selective. As Ryan and Tures (2017)

discuss: leaders need to be strategic in how they attack social justice issues and need to be discreet and selective. To use their phrasing, leaders need to “pick the right hill to die on”. Once a leader has reflected on what is worth pursuing and how to do so, they can enact change.

To conclude the discussion on strategies to fight exclusion and promote inclusion and social justice, it appears that there are some ways to break the existing power structures and make real change. While change is never easy, it gives an educational leader hope to recognize that change starts with questions, critiques and reflections. By reflecting on the current state of an organization, a leader can find out if there are practices of apparent inequity and become an advocate for change. Some of the main areas to focus on are strategically and thoughtfully selecting which issue to tackle first; try to create a mindful and enabling organization by promoting critique and sharing decision-making; and reflecting on whose voice is most prevalent in the material that is being taught, or leadership practices that are being enacted. By welcoming other voices to the decision-making table and other voices into the classroom, leaders can push for social justice in educational organizations.

Chapter 6

Personal Reflection

As previously discussed, my personal journey with inclusive leadership has been impactful. One of the questions this literature review sought to answer was whether inclusive leadership could work in a unique educational environment, and in the role that I have. To be frank: yes, but it will be quite a difficult journey.

The barriers to inclusive leadership are paramount in my learning environment. These include the relentless pursuit of skill development, which very much aligns with neoliberalism. There is also the constraint of one curriculum which needs to be delivered. This curriculum reflects the cultural values of the company I am employed with, and the legacy of those I inherited the program from. There is a lot of status quo at my company, since the status quo has made us successful, so why would that want to be changed? What's more, there is a clear chain of command that vests much of the power within the board of directors and my manager. If all of these aspect were written down it looks like an exclusive learning environment. Yet, I remain optimistic. That optimism stems from the strategies and purpose behind inclusive leadership.

First, I recognize that my educational organization is not inclusive. While it may put forth platitudes of inclusion, my classroom is not an inclusive place. However, I am the one that can begin the change and I do benefit from a board of directors that does allow dialogue and is enabling. Since I am currently the leader of this department, I can create a space for dialogue in my own classroom, and also with the decision-makers. Perhaps it is here, where I can establish an environment that creates inclusive practices throughout my company of 200-employees.

What's more, I can complete an equity audit on my own and then create a critical consciousness within my board of directors that could potentially create a culture of inclusion.

The strategies I have encountered throughout my inclusive leadership journey have also armed me with some tangible strategies that can aid me in my pursuit of equity and social justice. Being strategic in my approach is vital; as Ryan and Tures (2017) remind me, I need to pick the correct hill to die on. Another fantastic strategy is keeping track of these reflections and discoveries, to accurately recount and be able to appropriately share them with fellow leaders, colleagues and staff. Therefore, it may be prudent to promote an active reflection journal. With the advent of technology, there are many convenient and affordable ways to complete this, but just because it is a simple act, does not mean it is impactful. Margaret Ledwith (2018) discusses the importance of keeping track of these thoughts and reflections, to create a clear and logical action plan:

“writing in a journal can raise questions in the process of becoming critical....Each week, on the left hand page record critical incidents and on the right hand side link these experiences with theories and statistical evidence....In these ways, we begin to understand power in order to denounce it, and by denouncing it we create an interruption of the status quo, a space in which to build counter-narratives of human flourishing, annunciation as Freire would term it. Because, if stories go unchallenged, they silently seep into the public mind” (p.40).

By thoughtfully keeping track of one's actions, reflections and new courses of actions, a leader can create meaningful and lasting inclusive goals.

What I know to be true more than anything is I am always looking for a new challenge and inclusive leadership is that new challenge. It is a challenge because it is not easy to implement in my current role, but more importantly it is a challenge for me to become an educator that can apply inclusive leadership in any learning environment. If current trends

persist, I will be one day look for employment in a new learning environment. As an educator I strive to impart skills to my students which will make them successful in this role and in future role. The same can be said for my own pedagogical development: despite the challenges and barriers in my current role, perhaps I can strive to promotion inclusion today and in the future.

Areas of Future Focus

There are fields that could potentially benefit from some further study in the future, such as the impact of inclusive leadership on current and future environmental concerns. Since inclusive leadership has an empowering quality to it, perhaps a more inclusive learning environment can encourage individuals to tackle larger issues like environmental concerns. Another area of future focus could be inclusive leadership practices within the world of e-learning and artificial intelligence. There is likely a lot of room for future research in the digital-space, particularly in the sense that technology does give people a voice, but is that voice truly heard? Or, what is the role of inclusive leadership in an environment where there are no students physically present? Is inclusion a feeling or simply a sense?

One more area of focus could be the co-existence between profit and inclusivity. While a business' bottom line is profit and growth, it may also prove to be beneficial from an economic standpoint to promote inclusivity in an organization, particularly how it manifests itself in employee and student satisfaction, retention and future growth. Since the economy, our climate and technology are three of the more common concerns for politicians, educators, economists and everyday individuals, these could produce some worthwhile discussions and areas for reflection.

Words of Caution

We have to be cautious about tokenism when discussing/examining inclusive leadership. Nairain (2013) identifies that to say one is leading inclusively can be a mere token of effort, while the actual practice of inclusion is ignored. This is also discussed by Jay (2003) who argues that by stating an organization will practice tolerance, or multicultural education, further perpetuates power imbalances by positioning the leader as the 'fixer' and ignoring the voices of others. Moreover, when it comes to developing critical consciousness and utilizing equity audits, an educational leader must ensure that the equity audit is meaningful and not simply a choreographed act, designed to look like inclusive practices are occurring. This may be done by having a group – or council – of leaders, educators and students peer-review the audit so that there is a collective ownership and legitimate implementation.

What's more, a leader also must come to terms with the idea that the very structures they are fighting against, are often the same structures that put them in that position of authority. Therefore, strategy and political acumen are also vital for the cause. Another word of caution: an inclusive leader needs to think of their legacy. So, while they may have their focus on their present, they must also have their eye on the future. Nothing would be more disheartening than to work so hard to promote inclusion and then when their tenure is up, the next leader comes in and dismantles all that hard work. Perhaps one way to do this would be to empower all members of a learning environment—educators, students and others - to continue the inclusive legacy of the leader once he or she has left. The legacy could manifest itself in behaviour and codes of conduct, or it could also be found in a mission statement, events or celebrations. No matter how it is maintained, it is vital that it persists.

Inclusive leadership is a worthwhile endeavour, but it is not perfect. While Ryan's framework is meaningful and the strategies clear, it requires a tremendous amount of self-dedication, bravery, cooperation and access. It is naïve of leaders to think that they can simply decide to lead inclusively and it will all fall into place. Bias, prejudice and human nature all play a significant role in learning environments and more so in the way leaders lead. If a school is resistant to the notions of inclusive leadership practices, a leader may burn out or be ousted before they can make a lasting impact. So, while it is great to promote dialogue, critical consciousness, student learning and more, a leader must be equal parts ambitious and realistic to ensure that inclusive leadership practices take firm hold in a learning environment.

Concluding Thoughts

As an educator who fits the exact description of the dominant culture, there are many facets of my life that I take for granted: education, job security, privilege, social status and more. Inclusive leadership forces an educator to reflect on their current position and understand that differences are vital and should be valued; they should be fought for. While there has been some discussion of the antiquated leader, standing along fighting for the cause, it is now abundantly clear that to practice inclusive leadership is to dismantle that old, romantic ideal, and create equity when it comes to leadership. Admittedly, this understanding was not easy to come to terms with because I personally feel that I have the qualities to make a good a leader including: courage, decisiveness and relentlessness. Yet, one cannot battle alone.

Inclusive leadership is a vital educational practice. In Canada, diversity is on the rise and it is emblematic of our national identity. Therefore, inclusive leadership is a vital practice because as a nation we are constantly welcoming new people into our country, recognizing the

validity of other ways of knowing and practicing acceptance. Yet in these optimistic times, there are still issues of sexual discrimination, racial inequalities, growing socioeconomic dichotomy, political uncertainty, looming transnational conflict, technological advancements that have never been seen before, and climate crises. So, while there is some good, there is still much more to be done and this task needs to be undertaken by leaders educators, students and the community.

Inclusive leadership is not a scorched-earth policy. Inclusive leaders cannot leave destruction in their wake as it pursues social justice. Inclusive leaders need to blend political skill with impenetrable will to lead their social justice causes into the future. As our world becomes smaller with technology, more diverse with population growth and more delicate with economic, environmental and geopolitical uncertainties, inclusive leadership can develop cooperative, understanding and inclusive future leaders, educators, students and communities. It can raise all people to a level of equity, deserved of all people. It can make education a tool for good.

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