

Leading Schools for Peace and Social Justice: Learning from the Peace Education Short Training (PEST)

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Abstract

In a time where violence is rife and there is frequently a lack of acknowledgment of diversity, and the existence of drug abuse, gangsterism, and bullying, schools struggle to achieve success. Conscientious and transformative leaders as well as their followers strive for progress undergirded by peace and social justice. The question of how members in organizations actively entrench ethical policies has become crucial in organizations that seek peace and social justice. Using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) the participants used their experiences to make meaning out of the Peace Education Short Training (PEST) model. Eight participants were purposely selected in an urban setting. Six of these were school principals in historically black schools. Their schools were beset with challenges of poor achievement and violent behavior from learners. Two of the eight participants were district directors from two district offices. The facilitators and the participants unpacked the PEST model to understand how they could tap into their experiences to make use of the model to entrench peace and social justice. The findings demonstrate that any useful model will elicit critical thinking among group members to reveal strategies amenable to building peace and social justice. The findings imply that if institutions seek to witness peace and social justice, they will need to be undergirded by liberatory, critical, and transformative thinking. The application of models that provoke creativity and innovation will need to make sense for their institutions.

Keywords

Collaboration, School Success, Social Justice Leadership, Peace Education, Transformative Leadership

1. Introduction

Countless studies on peace and social justice in organizations have highlighted the need for collaboration to oppose disorder and violence in society (Collins & Watson, 2018; Akande, Kaye, & Rukuni, 2021). This study was provoked by a study which examined the possibility of establishing peaceable schools. By the end of that study, I developed the Peace Education Short Training (PEST) which was to be used by facilitators who were intent on training staff, learners, and other school role-players to entrench peace and social justice, especially in underperforming schools that were always hindered by many ills which included alcohol and drug abuse, gang wars, bullying and disobeying teachers. The training also addressed fear among learners and teachers related to corporal punishment meted out by teachers, violence linked to gangsterism as well as bullying. As I observed the facilitation on how to create and sustain peace in these schools a model developed. The PEST model was vital in transforming the eight schools into that original study. The model examines ways in which individuals can use their experiences to ensure there is fairness between individuals as well as peace. It uses flux pedagogy which is pivotal in that it addresses lived problems as a form of radical learning towards informed learning (Ravitch, 2022). Ravitch adds that people may have to create a contextualized self-reflection as they engage in deeper learning to create the necessary education mindset. The PEST model, as it integrates group discussion, seeks to transform conflict, engender peace, and entrench social justice (Msila, 2024). The model is also for fostering liberation, crucial consciousness, diversity, and the transformative perspective. The nature of the model is emancipatory, and it engenders a spirit of ethical and safe living. It is reflective and enables Africans to look at their circumstances as they try to transform the culture of conflict and domination. The PEST model promotes the idea of collaboration and justice. In the model, the transformative leadership perspective reveals the imperative for people to depend on one another. *Ubuntu* philosophy is based on an old African practice summarized in the maxim, “I am because you are”. It is a humanist notion based on acknowledging that they are part of other people’s lives, and it is a philosophy that humanizes society (Mbigi, 2005; Broodryk, 2008; Msila, 2008; Msila, 2015).

Many of the participants in the initial study pointed out that PEST ought to be based on *Ubuntu* principles which include solidarity, dependability, respect, honesty and safety. In fact, the entire idea of PEST is premised on these principles. PEST is an attempt to form an Africa-centred training that uses inclusion rather than exclusion. It seeks to oppose negative cultures and climates. Based on ethical living the model reveals ways in which an ethical belief system can be used as a guide to organizations. The four modules in PEST entail the following:

- a) Upholding peace education.
- b) Overcoming violence.
- c) Societal transformation.
- d) Sustaining peaceable school climates.

Each of these modules was led by what the study guide referred to as critical questions.

2. The Four Modules

2.1. Module 1. Upholding Peace

- Whose responsibility is peace and social justice?
- Can schools lead peace initiatives?
- Can peace education improve learner success?
- What can be the role of peers in peace education?

2.2. Module 2. Overcoming Violence

- What leadership values can school managers instill?
- How do drugs oppose social justice?
- Which institutions can work with schools to build a better citizen?
- Whose values should schools consider?

2.3. Module 3. Societal Transformation

- How can school managers empower people for peace?
- Why is school leadership crucial in school transformation and social justice?
- How will empowered learners change their societies?

2.4. Module 4. Sustaining Peaceable School Climates and Cultures

- How can school leaders initiate and sustain relevant school climates?
- How can school cultures permeate through to society?
- Why should school leaders concentrate on cultures and climates?
- Which other role-players are crucial in building positive peace?

In this present case study, PEST was used in a workshop to facilitate peace and social justice among six school leaders and two education district directors. The participants were all from schools that struggled in the absence of peace and social justice. Facilitators used the four PEST modules to stimulate critical thinking to solve the challenges rife in the participants' schools. The questions posed in the study were:

- How can a peace education training model help leaders transform their schools?
- How best can school leaders use their personal experience to transform their schools whilst utilizing a peace and social justice framework?

3. Aims and Objectives

3.1. Aim

The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate to what extent participants can use their lived experience to enrich a peace and social justice short program.

3.2. Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Examine how participants can use their experience to enrich a peace and social justice learning program.
- Investigate how a short learning program can meaningfully stimulate critical thinking and liberatory consciousness.
- Develop theory from a short learning program on peace and social justice.

4. Definition of Terms

Transformative perspective—Mezirow (1991) states that the transformative perspective is about significant change in one's meaning perspectives or those interpretive frameworks used to make meaning of our experiences. Mezirow adds that this includes consciousness which enables individuals to question their beliefs. Similarly, Deats (2017) argues that this is a process that enables individuals to re-evaluate their beliefs, values and experiences.

Peace education—Harris and Morrison (2013) point out that peace education is a system that tries to protect learners against the evil of violence by teaching skills to manage conflicts. Additionally, Harris and Morrison state that peace education seeks to create in the human consciousness a commitment to ways of peace. Peace Insight (n.d.) points out that peace education promotes the knowledge skills and attitudes to help create conditions for peace. The Peace Insight also affirms that peace education can be delivered in both formal and informal settings.

Social justice leadership—This is leadership that supports the idea that all learners can be successful and should have equal access to educational resources. Other researchers argue how social justice leadership seeks to address the marginalization of learners (Theoharis, 2007). In fact, Theoharis adds that social justice leadership refers to principals making the issues of race, class, gender, disability, and other marginalizing conditions central to their advocacy and vision. Tackett (2022) posits that social justice leadership is leadership that promotes equity of rights, voice, access, and participation within organizations. Social justice leadership fights oppression because it supports fairness.

Ubuntu—In several African states it is difficult to speak about social justice without mentioning the concept of *Ubuntu*. There are several beliefs as to what *Ubuntu* philosophy can attain in society. Some authors have maintained its potential in building societies (Mbigi, 2005; Broodryk, 2008; Msila, 2015), while many others have shown its applicability to education and education leadership (Msila, 2008) as well as organizations (Mbigi, 1997; Mbigi, 2005; Khoza, 2012; Msila, 2022). In this study, the concept refers to an African philosophy built upon Africa's old-age philosophy that reflects that people depend upon one another to build the general society.

5. Relevant Social Justice and Peace Models

The PEST framework is one among several models that were developed to guide peace and social justice programs in schools. PEST is an attempt to develop facilitators who are intent on bringing effective peace education training to schools

where violence is rife (Msila, in press). Used within the context of South Africa, PEST also includes short training for trainers who are opposing drug abuse, bullying, gangsterism and other ills that hinder effective learning in schools. There are several of these models around the world that seek to solve the challenges associated with peace and social justice (Baker, McKenzie, & McCormick, 2022). Baker et al. (2022) write about how the Catholic Institute of Education developed the Building Peaceful Schools (BPS) program which started in 2013. This used an iterative process which included three workshops: Peace Building, Conflict Management and Restorative Justice. At the end of this program, a school climate survey was added. Among others, the BPS sought to reduce the use of damaging corporal punishment. The BPS program recommended that schools provide training on alternative methods of discipline. The researchers also discovered that restorative practices are critical in a conflicted society such as South Africa where people are divided in several ways including race, gender and socio-economic status (Baker et al., 2022).

In another similar study, Msila's (2014) case study used a model that was divided into five streams under which teachers, learners and parents were trained:

Facilitator A. *Ubuntu*, gender and peace.

Facilitator B. (African) culture and society.

Facilitator C. Growing up in a healthy and peaceful environment.

Facilitator D. *Ubuntu*, the society and peace.

Facilitator E. Conflict in the society.

These strategies were vital in raising awareness about peace and social justice and these also underscored how important it is for schools to support broader and positive community values. The facilitators in this training emphasized that some values from culture can be included in formal education. It was also found that schools can be vehicles and catalysts for transformation in society. In this research and program, the facilitators showed the importance of *Ubuntu* in a time of violence and conflict. The philosophy would be useful in schools that seek heightened respect among role-players, mutual understanding, and the appreciation of diversity. *Ubuntu* philosophy was also perceived as part of building democracy and if schools had a peace education curriculum, they would glean much from *Ubuntu*.

Msila (2014: p. 202) states:

Rukuni (2013) emphasizes that values in any peace education curriculum should include values such as democracy, human rights, cooperation, and solidarity. All these are part of *Ubuntu*. It is crucial in a society such as South Africa to reflect democracy on which education policy is built. Rukuni adds that if the peace curriculum is to be relevant it should reflect and serve the social and cultural needs of society. In this study the facilitators were always trying to address the needs of the society. They were looking at the gaps in education and trying to use the potential of the young people in bringing about a peaceful society. *Ubuntu* model that the facilitators were using was trying by all means to bring about democracy among the school community.

This model contends that in a time of violence, conflict and lack of peace and social justice in institutions such as schools the society needs formal training programs to highlight the major challenges for all. These programs should benefit all societies.

Juma (2019) maintains that, in addition to the above, the peace club models in schools. can solve many problems in schools. The important aspect in this model is that volunteers meet to discuss conflicts at their schools as they use role-playing to manage such conflicts. Juma adds that these peace clubs have been used effectively in Zambia (they were first established in Africa), Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo Kenya and Nigeria. Muluka (2021) supports the idea of using peace clubs because he says they enhance peace and harmony among communities. Muluka affirms that it is important for schools to have peace champions amongst the learners and peace is instrumental in maintaining order in schools where learners come from diverse cultural backgrounds. In Tanzania, the peace model is perceived as engendering learner empowerment. The peace clubs are specifically helping young girls to learn skills, exchange experiences and apply peace knowledge in their everyday lives (Rockflower, 2023). With the rise of gender violence in some communities, peace clubs can play a very important role in empowering young people. API (2019) has set up ten peace clubs since 2018. Their clubs are beneficial in resolving conflicts within and outside schools. These clubs have brought positive changes in learners who have changed not only their peers but their teachers as well. The clubs have also raised school success rate and changed learner behavior for the better (API, 2019).

What is important in the few models cited above is that several models such as these formulate frameworks that provoke debate about the purpose of peace and social justice in schools and in society. Like the above examples, many training programs use evidence-based data as they promote critical thinking and creativity in promoting peace and social justice. Instructional leaders in schools should take it upon themselves to create and sustain such programs for all role-players. Formalized models are invaluable to the creation of lasting peace in and outside schools. Furthermore, empowered learners will be drum majors for peace in their communities.

6. Research Methodology

This qualitative study used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) which is a method designed to comprehend people's lived experience. In this study, the aim was not to generalize but to examine and focus on the personal and social contexts of an individual (Smith, 2007; Gill, 2014). This qualitative form of research emanates from psychology and has roots in phenomenology as well as hermeneutics (Smith, 2007). IPA is usually applied to a small group of participants, hence in this study there were eight participants. All were selected through purposeful sampling because the researcher believed that they had a lot to offer to the study's focus. The researchers used this method to examine common experiences

among the participants; the researcher sought to examine the extent of shared perspective among the participants, and how they understood peace and social justice. Purposeful sampling is a technique used by qualitative researchers to select participants who have specific qualities relevant to the study (Brink, 2002). The eight participants were familiar with the PEST, having attended its workshops. This form of sampling enabled the researcher to gain in-depth insights and comprehension of the complex phenomena (Struwig & Stead, 2004). The researcher interviewed the participants three times over a period of three months; the first interviews were individual interviews followed by two focus group interviews. The IPA study designs draw samples that offer multiple perspectives on a shared experience. Individual interviews and focus group interviews were used to collect data and the interviewer, as is tradition with IPA method, was more facilitative in the way that he asked questions. Some participants had notes that they shared with the researcher voluntarily and these were useful in the end.

7. Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the researcher used the traditional ways used in qualitative research. Harding and Whitehead (2013) state that qualitative studies deal with huge amounts of data, hence one must be careful when writing up data analysis. With phenomenology, for example, writing and rewriting are considered essential for the reading and reflection needed for thematic analysis (Harding & Whitehead, 2013). Additionally, these authors point out that during the writing there may be the need for further refinement of categorization which is evident or further interpretive insight may emerge. Writing helps provide additional clarity until meaning is saturated. There are various stages to be followed for effective analysis and the critical aspects before writing down, are the various stages to be followed for effective analysis is one that is rigorous and methodical.

Lester, Cho and Lochmiller (2020: p. 96) citing Miles and Huberman (1994) who state that the following six steps are common in qualitative research analysis:

- Affixing codes to a set of field notes drawn from observations or interviews;
- Noting reflections or other remarks in the margins;
- Sorting and sifting through these materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences;
- Isolating these patterns and processes, commonalities and differences, and taking them out to the field in the next wave of data collection;
- Gradually elaborating on a small set of generalizations that cover the consistencies discerned in the data;
- Confronting those generalizations with a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories.

All these were used to analyze data in this study.

7.1. The Study

In this study, the PEST model was used as a guiding program to prepare education

managers and leaders for ability to instill good values that embrace peace and social justice in schools. The two facilitators (they were referred to as coaches by the participants), supported the school leaders' use of their experiences as they delved deeper into the four PEST modules highlighted above, namely:

- a) Upholding peace education.
- b) Overcoming violence.
- c) Societal transformation.
- d) Sustaining peaceable school climates.

As pointed out earlier, the PEST program (PEST being an acronym that stands for Peace Education, Short Training) was used in my earlier study where I used four municipal districts for teachers in violence ridden schools in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa (Msila, in press). Two teachers who are school leaders who were present in the formulation of the PEST were responsible for the training of teachers from one district in the present study. The additional two attendees were district officials from the district office situated in the Eastern Cape Province. The original study which introduced PEST was an attempt to bring solutions in schools where learners had lost the amenable values and teachers were daunted in classrooms where violence was rife and threatened their mental states. The principals sought to instill peace values that would not only support learner achievement and whole school success but also build a school climate that supports social justice in communities. The assumption of the program was that the society has lost good ethics, peaceful living, and moral values and hence this impacted negatively on schools which were experiencing gangsterism and various forms of violence. The program assumed that bad schools reflect an ailing society and vice versa. It is difficult for schools to detach themselves from what is happening in the society. Currently, many schools in South Africa reflect the violence of society and whilst society speaks of the need for a humanizing education, the acts of cruelty continue to undermine and dehumanize human life. Ideally, all institutions in society should reflect the justice and peace that will positively build humanity and sustain progress.

The PEST sessions were interactive, and groups presented short presentations after intense group discussions. The role of the two facilitators was to start critical debate. Over five days the participants discussed the four modules using the above questions. The idea was for them to use their experience to develop a course that will be a blueprint for teachers and schools. The participants discussed the dangers of violence highlighting why schools needed lasting peace. In individual interviews and two focus group interviews they underscored the need for schools to embrace peace and pointed out that when schools are peaceful, learner success can be achieved for learners are threatened in schools where violence is rife as well as the use of drugs and alcohol by both learners and teachers. They also concurred that peaceful schools promote harmony and good relations among all role-players including communities, parents, and religious organizations. The participants reiterated that successful schools should teach peace throughout the curriculum and that community members and parents should be part of peace initiatives. The par-

ticipants also stated that all role-players should play a critical role in building social justice and peace. They concurred that some role-players were not visible in opposing violence in schools. The participants stated that traditional leaders, district officials, communities and parents were among the role-players who were said not to be adequately supporting schools in instilling social justice and peace. Furthermore, the participants also pointed out that even the schools that tried to instill peace felt frequently daunted because role-players outside the schools tended to be less committed in upholding peace and social justice. The participants talked about the difficulties they encountered in initiating peace and sustaining social justice initiatives. They also pointed out that without peace and social justice schools cannot support the communities in which they are built. Others talked about the “violence of apartheid” in South Africa’s past. They agreed that apartheid in the past divided learners and schools according to race. The curriculum itself was divisive in that black learners and white learners were in different schools where the black children were stuck in disadvantaged schools with no adequate facilities and less qualified human resources.

Furthermore, they stated that black learners tended to be opposed to not only to the previous apartheid government but were also against teachers, especially school leaders who were frequently seen as “collaborators” with the system. The participants stated that the campaigns against apartheid education were a search for free, fair, and socially just education. However, they were sometimes misdirected at teachers who the learners felt were conspicuously silent and hence they were referred to as collaborators. Yet, the opposition to apartheid education was a search for a peaceful system of education that would also be instrumental in politically liberating the country. Below, the discussions demonstrate the various topics that were teased out by the participants during the actual short training. There were four prominent themes that came out from the participants’ discussions, and these were: social justice and learner success, collaboration amongst role-players, leadership for social justice and supporting teachers and learners’ leadership. Much of the training was dependent on the participants’ sharing of experiences from their schools.

7.1.1. Social Justice and Peace: The Basis of Learner Success

The district directors raised the idea of peace and social justice as critical to learner success. One of them stated:

Our district officials are quickly learning that amongst others, the absence of peace is detrimental to learner success. It is obvious that when learners are threatened by others through bullying and humiliation, they will hardly learn. Furthermore, schools that threaten the learners’ well-being would be thwarting learner achievement. In the past as education officials, we have examined all other reasons for learner failure but social justice.

The other participants concurred that learners are hindered by various acts of bullying, violence linked to gangs, and drug abuse inside and outside school

grounds. They pointed out that it is difficult for learners to concentrate in classrooms when they are in a climate of fear and a culture of suspicion. They also voiced out that even teachers do not perform well in schools where they see that the welfare of the learners is compromised by violent acts and when they do not get support from other role-players such as communities. Participant a(A) pointed out:

The sad part with communities or schools is that everyone can be scared. In schools the absence of peace makes numerous teachers to be demotivated and not teach to their best. They would prepare well but when they get to the classrooms they may find gang members who dominate in the classrooms. Furthermore, it is usually clear that various learners are under the influence of drugs including alcohol. This demotivates. Just look at the results of many schools where violence is rife. It is because learners cannot concentrate. There is virtually no peace.

Another principal (D) also added to the above:

The question in many of our schools is how do teachers plough love when there is no social justice and no respect for one another? We still find many teachers who use corporal punishment as they bully the learners. Peace needs to be planted by all involved, from government to homes, from communities to schools, from South Africa to the world. Our schools lack caring and I still maintain that we need to magnify social justice leadership.

In all the eight schools of the participants there were various incidents of violence and minimal peace. The participants argued that problems emanated from bigger problems from outside the schools. The teachers argued that the violent communities created huge problems within the schools, hence one (F) stated, healthy communities make healthy schools which give rise to achieving learners. Of all the participants, five (A, G, H, J and L) reiterated and emphasized the relationship between absence of peace and failure rate in high schools specifically. They linked the low pass rate in grade 12 (final school year in South Africa) to drug abuse and violence. Participant L stated that the society is falling short when diagnosing challenges in all schools. She said that whilst the language of teaching and learning, socio-economic status and social capital of learners and lack of resources are largely responsible for learner failure, “the absence of peace in schools is under researched as a cause of learners’ failure”.

Participant (C) concurred by stating that the major problem in “our schools, is that as school leaders we do not want to talk about drugs and violence. We want families to register their children in our schools, but we refuse to speak about bigger problems that let down our learners.” All participants reiterated the need for strong collaboration ties among the role-players.

7.1.2. Collaboration as Fundamental to Social Justice

For the participants fairness, social justice and peace can only be attained when

there is much collaboration among role-players. The principals in the study highlighted two flaws when it comes to parental involvement. On the one hand, they stated that parents appear not interested in collaborating with school leaders whilst, on the other, they point out that the school leaders are not doing enough to attract parents. The participants added that in many historically black schools the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) are not effective, hence teachers always feel the void. The participants maintained that peace cannot be fully guaranteed when parents do not participate in school programs. One of the participants (B), pointed out how in their attempt to minimize gang related incidents, they called upon parents:

In my school we struggled as we realized the learners did not respect one another. As gang incidents rose we witnessed stabbings, bullying as well as intimidation by the use of guns. One of our teachers was pointed with a gun by an alleged gang leader in our school. She is still traumatized today, months after that incident. One teacher's car was burnt by a group of gang members. We called the parents to intervene. We did not achieve 100 per cent peace but the incidents lessened when the learners saw their parents in the school premises. I wished that the parents would be there forever.

One of the two district officials concurred:

Parents play a critical role. In one school we called the police to come and help searching the learners for weapons in the mornings. Some community members were up in arms with us stating that we were acting against the learners' human rights. But we were in a catch 22 situation for whilst many talked about these human rights the children were maiming one another in school grounds. We then invited the parents and they collaborated closely with the police. There were more pockets of success and safety of the learners and teachers. Parental involvement has huge positive implications in schools. As district officials we have always posited that schools with visible parental involvement are likely to be effective in a number of ways.

The participants highlighted that crime, violence, bullying and unjust practices can be overcome by collaboration amongst role-players. The participants added that schools need to expand their networks by including police, business, religious organizations, and communities at large. Many stated that the growing vandalism of schools and other buildings can be minimized if collaborations can develop across all institutions. They were saying peace like social justice should be a collective effort.

Participant A raised an idea around peace projects that can be led by learners in attempts to build and sustain peace by all role-players. The participant pointed out:

As teachers, as officials and as parents we tend to undermine the role of learners in initiating projects such as peace initiatives. If we look at the past under

apartheid learners played a critical role in liberating their schools. They worked closely with parent-teacher organizations. That was collaboration. We need to let the learners assume a voice. Why can't we assist them informing Learner Peace Clubs (LPCs) that would ensure they lead in the struggle for peaceable schools? Amongst others we need to make sure that they lead the agenda for peace. This concept has worked in a few African states. Imagine the benefits if learners themselves can lead fruitful collaborations.

The idea of LPCs was supported by all the participants who maintained that the PEST program should be seriously considered not only for learner leaders but also for all learners so that they could see the necessity to embrace peace in the schools. They also stated that the learners are an important sector in a collaboration for peace in schools. Several participants pointed out that in most cases school climate in schools determined by learners' behavior, and thus it is learners who will be able to know more about ending drug abuse and bullying and obliterating violence. Participant (G) for example, was adamant that many peace initiatives fail in schools because teachers and other role-players want to set rules without learner involvement. They also pointed out that effective learner leaders would bring lasting peace in schools.

7.1.3. Leadership for Social Justice

It was interesting to hear participants pointing out that all schools should make sure that all school leaders are prepared for and have competence in social justice leadership. In fact, six participants maintained that school principals need eclectic approaches in leading their schools for peace and social justice. In addition to social justice leadership, school principals need shared leadership, participative leadership, caring leadership, and servant leadership. The participants shared the sentiment that peace and social justice in schools can be created and sustained by effective leadership. This district official averred:

In building effective leadership in our schools, especially the historically disadvantaged schools, we have from time-to-time supported leadership training in schools. For example, in 2007, we introduced the Advanced Certificate in Education—School Management and Leadership. With that program we planned to prepare all school leaders with relevant skills. We still maintain that skilled school leaders will protect our schools. Without the right skills, principals will be daunted in the absence of peace in their schools.

Another participant (J) affirmed:

Our leadership usually focuses on improving aspects such as instructional leadership because we want to see our learner results improve. Those with grade 12 want the country to see the graduation rates improve in the last year of schooling. However, when there is no peace these results will not improve. Schools need leaders with skills in leadership for peace and social justice.

Concurring with the above, participant (H) affirmed:

As we talked about various forms of leadership styles during training, I thought about ways in which we can use various philosophies including African philosophies. With some of us, a philosophy such as *Ubuntu* becomes useful. It is premised on the maxim; I am because you are. This is necessary for leadership that depends on dependability and humanism. Social justice leadership is about bringing the human in leadership.

7.1.4. Supporting Teacher and Learner Leadership

In addition to the emphasis on the principals' need for social justice leadership, all the participants underscored the need for teacher leadership and learner leadership. Teacher leadership was explained as part of shared leadership. The participants pointed out that diversity has become critical in education and that all schools should develop the idea of having teacher leaders and student leaders who understand other people's cultures, values, and traditions. The participants maintained that to understand other aspects of building peace and social justice all role-players ought to understand one another at that level. Furthermore, it is this understanding that would enable role-players to be adept at problem solving and cultural awareness. The participants repeatedly stated that there are several things that would never happen in schools if teachers were mature enough to be leaders. The participants described the danger in schools but when it comes to the creation of peace is that many teachers think maintaining peace is the work of the school leaders and not ordinary teachers. Participant (L) averred:

The problem with many schools is that when things are tough teachers refuse shared leadership. They maintain that trouble in schools should be solved by school leaders. Yet, teachers should understand the concept of teachers' leadership. This largely depends on the style of the school leader. It will always help to include teachers in school leadership. Teacher leadership is about empowerment which enables the school leader's vision to be interpreted well by all her staff. Effective leaders will train their teachers well.

When the participants discussed Learner Peace Clubs, they emphasized the need to create learner leaders who will work closely with school leaders. Participant (J) summarized this when she stated:

Schools should think about developing learner leaders because these can be good ambassadors for the schools in the communities. When schools train learners for leadership, they are investing in the communities. Learner leaders are critical for a working community. Building peaceable schools and non-violent institutions need empowered learner leaders who will guide the entire student body thus assisting teachers and parents.

A few participants stated that now is the time to expand the role of learners in schools. They should be seen not only as imbibers of knowledge but should also be seen as creators of knowledge with teachers and other role-players. The participants believe that until teachers include learners in the broader problems of the

schools they would always flounder when it comes to transformation.

8. Discussion

8.1. Teaching for Social Justice and Peace

One of the recurring themes in the study was using peace education to ameliorate violence and teach for social justice and peace. Furthermore, teachers were more concerned about using peace studies for learner achievement as proven in Msila's (2024) study. In that study Msila showed that learner achievement highly improved when teachers taught critical pedagogy based on social justice and peace. Magro (2015) draws parallels between peace education, social justice education and transformative learning as pivotal in enhancing social justice awareness. Magro (2015: p. 130) contends:

Teachers can assist their students in developing the creative, analytical, and intellectual skills to clarify, justify, and realize a more positive vision of the future. Dei further observes that a school system that fails "to tap into youth myriad identities...is shortchanging learning. Identity is an important site of knowing. Identity has in effect become a lens of reading one's world." The role and importance of diversity in knowledge production is to challenge and subvert the dominance of ways of knowing." He emphasizes that a "pedagogy of language liberation" would empower learners to tell their stories and learn about their heritage, history, and culture in interconnected ways. For Dei, spirituality "is about a material and metaphysical existence that speaks to an interconnection of self, community, body, mind, and soul."

The participants maintained that social justice in education is not only about academics. Whilst it benefits individual identity it also enhances the well-being of society. The GGI (2024) lists several benefits of this social justice education as including improved student engagement and performance as well as fostering empathy and global citizenship. In fact, the PEST program promotes and reveals how similar programs should create an empowering environment as it operates on the premise of creating an inclusive environment that combines various sectors of society. Furthermore, teaching effective social justice whether in schools or communities enables societies to learn about equity and social change. Schools are well placed institutions to instill values that can help lead society. Schools need the critical pedagogy to transform conflicts and engender peace and social justice.

When teachers use transformative pedagogy they would not only be instilling education for academic success, but they should also think about political consciousness that the participants talked about. Through teaching, learners should understand that their achievement must include an ability to address social issues such as drug abuse, social injustices resulting from bullying, humiliation and violence as discussed by the participants above. When learners feel their experiences and identities are valued and respected, they are more likely to positively engage in learning (GGI, 2024). The participants highlighted citizenship education which

teachers cannot skip because citizenship awareness that schools help learners benefit society as they successfully participate in efforts to achieve peace and justice (Wong, 2022). Education's role-players including learners will also be deemed successful if they are able to engender social justice and peace and if they are able to work closely with various other groups including government, civil society and religious groups.

8.2. School Governance as the Crux for Peace

School governors in schools can and should be agents of sustainable peace and social justice. The School Governing Bodies (SGBs) must take up the challenge to bring together the various role-players to enhance effectiveness in schools. The school governors are supposed to be a link between civil society, government institutions and communities. Peace education in schools should be one major project of SGBs especially in schools thwarted by the absence of peace and the occurrence of violence. However, in many schools the SGBs are not effective and thus do not support school leaders in this regard. The parent element in SGBs tends to be less effective because parents avoid meaningful participation. Research has shown that in historically black schools the parent element of the SGB tends to be absent. Yet, parents can play a huge role in social justice and in entrenching certain cultures and values. The parent element in SGBs is critical because social justice requires genuine collaboration among school leaders and marginalized learners and families (Van Lac & Fernandez, 2023). School leaders in SGBs should hear the parental voice and seek out the parents.

Kosar, Kosar and Beycioglu (2020) show the importance of family engagement in schools and how this leads to improvement in school programs and school climate. Furthermore, Kosar et al. (2020) argue that involved parents help enhance the success of learners not only at school but also in their lives outside the school. However, the major hurdle with parents who are school governors is that the majority were never trained in governing schools and thus they use their experience as community leaders, religious leaders, and household managers. To make matters worse in some schools, meetings are held in English rather than the indigenous languages of many parents in former black schools. It is for this reason that parents need a program such as PEST to improve their skills in governing schools for social justice and peace.

8.3. Nurturing a Mindset for Peace

The PEST model acknowledges the need to foster social justice and the peace mindset. It is pertinent that all role-players should be exposed to facilitation that demonstrates this new mindset. Peace and social justice are about fairness and equal sharing of resources and opportunities in society. There can be no equal economic, political, and social opportunities when there is no peace and social justice. Entrenching the mindset for peace is a responsibility of peace and justice educators who seek to build peace and create safe classroom spaces (Concannon

& Scoggin, 2020). The participants reiterated the need to nurture the mindset for social justice and peace. Schools with no justice will not have peace and hence this will have an impact on liberatory education and school success. All the participants talked about the demand for stable schools. This stability requires a transformative leadership committed to social justice as highlighted above. However, this leadership also begins with mindset change within the leaders themselves. Ravitch underscores the role of what she refers to as Flux Leadership which is defined as a critical inquiry framework that supports learning agility, self-awareness and cultivation of a radical growth mindset. Ravitch (2020: p. 4) adds:

Flux leadership creates the conditions for flux pedagogy through an equity-focused leadership approach. The primary dimensions of flux leadership are: 1) Radical Growth Mindset; 2) Distributed Wisdom Approach; 3) Leading from an Inquiry Stance; 4) Trauma-informed Leadership; 5) Radical Compassion and Radical Self-Care; 6) Responsive and Humanizing Leadership; 7) Leader Critical Pedagogy; 8) Racial Literacy; 9) Brave Space Leadership; and 10) Emotional Imagination and Inner-Resource Cultivation. Each dimension is discussed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and growing movement for racial equality, justice, and peace in the United States. Flux leadership is a heuristic for equitable, responsive, and agile leadership in this moment of radical flux. After each concept framing are suggested practices for transforming teams, classrooms, and schools into brave space communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991)—including online—during this extending time of suffering, loss, and confusion, a time in which we all need more affirming and justice-generating learning spaces.

Flux leaders are vital for leading for justice and are ideal in ensuring that there is the inculcation of a new peace and social justice mindset. Effective school leaders will work with various role-players to create the new mindset including the school governing bodies discussed above.

In schools where there is no peace and social justice the staff will experience various kinds of oppression and trauma that may be linked with violence. School leaders who are transformative would be able to include trauma-informed leadership which will help staff deal with traumatic environments. These leaders must be “knowledgeable about and attuned to trauma as a necessary foundation for co-creating an affirming school community” (Ravitch 2020: p. 6). Simpson (2017) writes of the need to move teachers from a charity mentality towards a social justice mentality. Additionally, Simpson states that the social justice perspective should impact on teachers’ approach to their practice as they seek equitable responses to issues outside the school premises. The charity mentality refers to the state of helplessness that people may adopt; it refers to the dependency of the recipient and the unjust patronising of the giver (Simpson, 2017). Additionally, the social justice mentality or mindset is considered as a commitment to equality which results in ethical action. Flux leaders would constantly try to instill this social justice mindset. In fact, the shift from charity mentality to social justice men-

tality is an important aspect of PEST.

Changing the mindset should be a continuous mission of leadership that seeks change. In fact, leadership should make certain practices part of the culture of the school. [Beycioglu and Kandace \(2021: p. 807\)](#) contend:

Leadership is still very critical in bringing about continuous change in that leaders have a critical role, first, in creating a culture nurturing continuous change and, second in capitalizing on small-scale changes to make these parts emerging repertoires of practice.

[Mezirow \(1991\)](#) states that over time adults' perceptions are transformed by learning as a framework for establishing educational theory and practice. Mezirow theory relies on critical theory and contributes to elements such as emancipatory learning, critical reflection as well as the discourse of communicative action. In the study learning ensured that the participants learn new ways as they reflected on their experiences whilst learning about the PEST.

Finally, the philosophy of *Ubuntu* mentioned earlier is one critical aspect in building peace and even enhancing pedagogy. The participants were drawn to the dependability of *Ubuntu*; I am because you are. This can be used to build positive qualities based on elements such as solidarity, respect and dependability. Furthermore, *Ubuntu* engenders the skills of compassion, tolerance, humanness and love ([Broodryk, 2008](#)). All these are crucial for survival, freedom and human freedom and these are all necessary for peaceful schools ([Mbigi, 1997](#); [Mbigi, 2005](#); [Msila, 2015](#)). [Broodryk \(2008\)](#) adds that peace is among the skills that build the *Ubuntu* personality, and this goes with togetherness, brotherhood, equality, sharing, sympathy and harmony. The *Ubuntu* personality built by these qualities enables individuals to transform their mindsets to become amenable to peace and social justice.

9. Limitations of the Study

As is characteristic with all qualitative studies, the research method used sought to understand the context under study. Therefore, the study's results cannot be generalized to all school leaders in the same or different contexts. Yet, the study was useful in understanding the experiences of leaders in certain academically struggling historically black schools in South Africa. Two factors are critical for future research. On the one hand, districts may have to spread PEST to include more schools given some of the strong small pockets of success highlighted by the participants from the six districts. On the other hand, a quantitative study with a larger sample can assist in understanding how PEST would fare in many schools across the districts in various South African provinces. From the small sample under study, it was clear that there are a variety of characteristics that would influence the effectiveness of PEST, and these include teacher maturity, professional disposition and readiness to transform their schools. The participants consented that PEST was effective because it offered them a plausible template that would

help them address some of the challenges in their schools.

However, the researcher found that models do not work uniformly in all schools. Schools and teachers differ, and leaders are exposed to varying challenges so what works in one school might not work in another. Generally, the participants found the theory uplifting and empowering because it addressed several of their dilemmas and questions.

10. Conclusion

This study was critical in looking at how teachers conceptualize the shaping of schools for peace education and transformation of society using a model for building social justice. As highlighted in the literature above, this study demonstrates that institutions can use formalized training programs to instill peace and social justice. Schools are critical in upholding critical pedagogy and ways to transform society. At a time when violence and drugs are rife in many schools around many African schools and in schools around the world, leaders must tap into their experience as they try to use social justice principles. In this study, the experience of the teachers was pivotal in recommending the best practices for building peace and social justice in schools. As one participant stated, “We cannot speak about pedagogy for liberation without talking deeply about social justice and peace.” The PEST model opens a whole new world about transforming institutions and society. The study also demonstrates in a Freirean sense that citizens can use activist pedagogical practices to transform oppressive conditions in society. Furthermore, PEST clearly magnifies the role of empowerment models in changing society. Finally, the PEST model demonstrates that citizenship education is critical for the achievement of social justice and, most importantly, peace and social justice classrooms should reflect communities.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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