

## STATEMENT OF RESEARCH Patricia M. Virella M.S.Ed.

My research agenda is directly influenced by my lived experiences as an Afro-Borriqueña and former elementary school principal in society. As much of the data and scholarly literature suggests, the principalship is complex and ever evolving. As a result, a majority of the educational leadership scholarship has focused on the principalship and equity-oriented leadership. However, in my research I argue the need for equity during a crisis is just as central of an issue as organizational leadership. Consequently, the overarching aim of my research agenda is to explore issues of school leadership, equity and crisis. Moreover, given the consistency of crises which effect school leadership, I explore issues that impact school leadership when responding to, preventing or seizing opportunities which are gained as a result of a crisis. Furthermore, given my research interest in oppressed communities (Freire, 1972), I use Freirean scholarship to analyze and theorize how education policies and/or school leaders actions impact schools. To achieve my goal as a scholar, my research agenda is comprised of the following five threads: (1) Examining experiences of principals who have led through a crisis; (2) Examining school principals leadership activities toward equity; (3) Exploring school leadership through a Freirean lens; (4) Investigating neoliberal education reform policies in oppressed communities; and (5) qualitative methodology for participants such as principals or other school leaders who have experienced a crisis.

### Research Agenda Strand Description

Research that examines new layers of the principal's job such as responding to crisis and the inclusion of equity in the response to crisis continues to be understudied. From my research studies to date, my participants have continuously discussed the importance including equity-oriented practices. As a result, the first thread of my research examining experiences of principals who have led through a crisis because data continuously shows that principals are responding to a variety of crises (Virella, 2020). The second strand of my research focuses on examining experiences of principals who have led through a crisis. The current COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the largest historical crises to affect all school districts across the country. Despite the extent literature on crisis response in other disciplines, there is little research which examines how principals lead through crisis, the factors that influence their decisions and sensemaking. As a result, I have begun to explore the intersection of crisis and the principalship (Virella, 2020).

The second strand of my research involves examining school principal's leadership activities toward equity. In this research strand I have explored how principals enact equity-oriented leadership despite a crisis occurring (Virella & Woulfin, 2020). One aspect of this research strand that has emerged is the necessity for practical and replicable equity-oriented leadership practices in school buildings.

The third and fourth strands of my research exploring school leadership through a Freirean lens and investigating neoliberal education reform policies in oppressed communities; is a development from my dissertation research which explores Ley 85-2018, a neoliberal education reform policy in Puerto Rico (Virella & Weiner, 2019). Most neoliberal education policy literature are discussed in a manner which addresses the commodification of education or the effects on students and teachers of the policy. My research in this area challenges this

narrative and explores how post-colonial theory must be incorporated into the analysis because of the historical background of a context. Moreover, I use Freire as a theorist to challenge the status quo of the hegemony by critiquing and analyzing neoliberal education reform policies (Virella & Weiner, 2019). As a result of my focus on school leaders and responses to crisis I have begun to develop the fifth strand of research around qualitative methods of interviewing. Despite the extant literature about interviewing victims of trauma, there is a dearth of literature which examines how to interview non-traditional crisis victims such as principals. I have begun this strand by getting accepted to the 16th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry with a paper titled, "Tell Me More About Your Trauma: A Phenomenological Study of Researchers' Interview Techniques for Ethically Understanding Participants Who Have Faced a Crisis."

#### Research Agenda Connection to Equity and Justice

My research agenda is deeply rooted in the notion of equity and justice. Over the past few years, I have found education policies to be explicitly and implicitly racist. Policies which claim to be neutral in districts such as Puerto Rico and New York that serve a large population of children of Black and Brown children, do not provide equitable and anti-racist supports for students to thrive. Instead, false narratives are placed alongside policy initiatives to improve the outcomes for children while simultaneously using discursive practices which oppress communities of color. My research agenda seeks to root out these discursive practices, taking on the call of several critical scholars to decolonize educational research towards liberation.

#### Summary of Research Productivity and Impact

Given the robustness of my research agenda and passion to impact the field, I have begun to have high research productivity. Since 2018 I have 7 publications that have either been published or are accepted/in-press which include: three peer reviewed journal articles (Cobb & Virella, 2019, Virella & Weiner, 2020, Virella, 2020), six book chapters (Virella, 2018, Virella 2019, Virella 2020a, Virella 2020b, Virella 2020c, and one Op-ed piece (Virella, 2020). Because of the interdisciplinary nature of my research agenda, I have published my work in in high impact top tier journals to the field of education such as the *Journal of School Leadership* broadly and discipline specific journals such as *Journal of Cases of Educational Leadership*. My research agenda has also been acknowledged in the field. For instance, I was named a 2019 – 2021 Jackson Scholar. This award is given to 12 emerging scholars across the country who are making an impact in their respective fields. Lastly, in 2017 I was selected to serve as the managing editor for *Educational Administration Quarterly* (EAQ) the top research journal in the field of educational leadership.

#### Ongoing and Future Research Projects

To maintain my research productivity, I currently have three peer-reviewed journal articles and three book chapters under review. Moreover, I am currently collecting data for three studies focusing on principals who have experienced leading through or after a crisis and one study focusing on qualitative scholars and how they interview participants in crises, specifically with social scientists. I hope to develop interview techniques which can be used in the field of social science when working with participants who have experienced and led through a crisis. To accomplish this line of research, I have begun collecting data from qualitative researchers around the world to better understand their interview techniques. Insights from these researchers has already gleaned exciting initial findings about the methods qualitative researchers when working

with diverse populations who have experienced a crisis such as survivors of the Holocaust, Rwandan genocide and incidents of racial harm in K – 12 schools. To support this research study, I plan to apply for a National Academy of Education/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Fall of 2021. I also plan to share my initial findings at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) annual convention in 2021.

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