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Education Leadership Review

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Superintendent Leadership: Enhancing Equity and Access to Excellence for All Students

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From 2003-2011 the superintendent's goal for the large school district was to enhance equity in opportunities for college and career readiness and access to excellence in the form of high standards, effective instruction, learning resources, and expectations (Childress, Doyle, & Thomas, 2009) for all students. An anonymous survey gathered perceptions of administrators regarding the superintendent's decisions and related events and was followed with 11 interviews. Data and documents were reviewed to confirm claims of improvement in equity and access to excellence. Conclusions include that the superintendent must have clear focus and commitment to the goal, communicate the goal clearly and consistently along with steps taken and issues being addressed. Challenges identified focused on the lowest achieving 25% of the students and issues that the economically disadvantaged students bring. Recommendations for school district leaders who strive to improve equity and access to excellence were provided by participants.

INTRODUCTION

Superintendent leadership, resulting in greater equity and access to excellence for all students, is an important social justice or issue of fairness. In this research equity is defined as all students having an education that prepares them to be college and career ready and access to excellence is for all students to have the same high standards, effective instruction, learning resources, and high expectations (Childress, Doyle, & Thomas, 2009). When equity is achieved the gap in achievement among advantaged and disadvantaged populations should be reduced and when excellence is achieved overall student learning outcomes should increase.

The context of this study was a school district of 64,000 diverse students (39% economically disadvantaged and 16% English learners) that historically had two distinct geographic groups of student populations: schools in the northern section of the county with a majority economically disadvantaged students and schools in the southern area of the county with more advantaged students. The superintendent's goal was to increase equity in

educational opportunities for all students through providing access to excellence in the quality of education afforded them. Many of the decisions required great change in how the school district conducted its daily business and how, when, and where education was provided. The documentation of the large scale changes in school district operations, process for allocation of resources, and emphasis on learning led the researchers to conclude that the superintendent was engaged in second order change. Those changes were neither expected nor were incremental and resulted in new ways of work for teachers and administrators. Second order change is that which is dramatic requiring rethinking of curriculum and instruction, at times making some uncomfortable (Marzano, Waters, & Mc Nulty, 2005; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Taylor, 2010).

This article explores the perceptions of administrators related to the superintendent's leadership decisions and events over the eight-year period. While the specific decisions and events will vary in individual school district contexts, the findings and conclusions provide insight for other superintendents and school district leaders who are seeking strategies that may propel their diverse school districts forward in the quest to achieve equity and access to excellence.

BACKGROUND

The superintendent was appointed in 2003 following one who had begun academic changes to provide equity in learning opportunities and had pursued unitary status for the school district. Three years later, in 2006, the school district achieved unitary status from the US Justice Department which meant the federal courts had determined that the school district no longer discriminated among students, based upon race, and had removed all vestiges of race discrimination (Alexander, 2008). The new superintendent worked closely for a smooth transition as the goal of providing equity and access to excellence for all students was the same for both. Neither wanted anything to deter continuing improvement in learning and opportunities (Hagerty, 2011).

Purpose

In the spring of 2011, the superintendent requested a study to be conducted on the progress of the school district towards achieving equity and access to excellence. The purpose was to objectively analyze the extent to which progress had been made from 2003 through 2011.

With this context in mind, the following research questions were investigated:

1. What were the superintendent second-order change leadership decisions that were perceived to have contributed to progress in achieving equity and access to excellence in the target school district?
2. To what extent were specific events perceived to have contributed to achievement of equity and access to excellence for the target school district?
3. What were the perceived challenges and to what extent were they addressed?
4. What are recommendations for continued improvement?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Instructional Leadership

Educational leaders develop their instructional leadership practice over time which influences student learning outcomes (Hattie, 2009; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010; Marzano, Waters, & Mc Nulty, 2005). Familiar examples of instructional leadership include providing the expectation and time for teachers to engage in collaborative standards-based curriculum and instructional planning through professional learning communities, monitoring student learning data to inform curricular and instructional decisions, or personnel and resource allocation decisions (Taylor, 2010). At the school district level superintendents and their staffs have influence on student achievement if they are focused on and consistent in their focus on improving student learning outcomes (Childress, Doyle, & Thomas, 2009; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Goodman & Svyantek, 1999). Although much of a superintendent's time may be consumed with legal issues, school board members, finance, and political processes for student learning outcomes to improve, the superintendent must also focus on demonstration of instructional leadership (Orr, Byrne-Jimenez, McFarlane & Brown, 2006).

Second Order Change

Second-order change is a companion to instructional leadership when the purpose is to make dramatic changes that involve curriculum, pedagogy, or in how improvement in learning is conducted (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Marzano, R. J. & Waters, T., 2009; Taylor, 2010). This change is in contrast to first-order change which is natural and incremental and rarely would cause disruption or anxiety among those involved (Marzano, Waters, & Mc Nulty, 2005; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Taylor, 2010). First order change might be the adoption and implementation of a new mathematics or core reading text, which would require some additional effort to implement with fidelity, but most probably would not create too much anxiety on the part of those involved. In contrast, a second order change example might be adopting digital texts and resources to replace traditional bound texts for mathematics or reading, which might create anxiety and stress on the part of some teachers due to the difference in type of resource, expectation for implementation, and even lack of expertise with the hardware. Of course, there would be some teachers welcoming the digital resource and for them, the adoption would not represent second order change—hence second order change can be different for different people. An impending second order change is the implementation of the Common Core State Standards adopted by 45 states as educators rethink the curriculum, instruction, and resources needed for their students to be successful on the assessments which will reflect higher levels of thinking and cognitive complexity than previous state assessments (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010; Fiedler, 2012; Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013; Hess, Carlock, Jones, & Walkup, 2009).

Because second order change is dramatic, there is often resistance and relationships can suffer. In contrast to principals of suburban and rural schools, principals of urban schools find that they have additional challenges when implementing second-order change; that is, they focus more on professional learning, exhibit less flexibility, and are more consistent with the target goal (Kearney, 2012; Taylor & La Cava, 2011). As a result of this potential down

side leaders have to plan for more communication and transparency to provide clear direction for goal attainment (Marzano, Waters, & Mc Nulty, 2005; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Taylor, 2010). Given that school district superintendents have less frequent interaction with those in schools than do principals, the need for clarity, focus, and communication is even more important.

METHODOLOGY

The superintendent and executive leaders identified decisions and events that they believed had been critical in making progress towards the goal of improving equity and access to excellence for all students and shared them with the researchers on June 7, 2011. To assure objectivity, these school district leaders were no longer involved after this meeting except in the role of encouraging anonymous participation by administrators serving at the school and district levels.

Instrumentation

Based on the list of decisions and events deemed to be important, the researchers developed the Survey of Equity and Access to Excellence (See Appendix A). The list of decisions and events were rated on a Likert scale as extremely significant, significant, insignificant, extremely insignificant, or no knowledge. No knowledge was included since the items in the survey were generated by school district leaders and participants may not have had knowledge upon which to rate the items.

Interview of Equity and Access to Excellence

Interview items were intended to solicit richer information than provided in the survey responses. The researchers developed the interview protocol based on the research questions and initial survey responses. The key questions for the 11 volunteer interviewees were:

1. What do you perceive has led to progress in achieving equity and access to excellence for all students?
2. From 2003-2011 what challenges were encountered in achieving this goal?
3. What should school districts know that want to improve social justice?

Procedures

The survey was administered in the fall of 2011 to the sample of administrators who had worked continuously in the school district from 2003-2008 (Wilhite, 2012). Participants used an electronic link to anonymously take the survey. Anonymity was important to ensure honest responses; therefore there was no follow-up with non-respondents, except general encouragement at an administrators' meeting on September 13, 2011.

Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) support having an advocate to increase response rates. This strategy was used to increase administrative responses as the superintendent encouraged participation of the 244 administrators. Even with the advocacy and confidentiality of responses, 90 completed the survey for a 37% response rate.

Interviews were conducted with administrators between December 20, 2011 and January, 2012. Eleven administrators, five of whom were school district-based and four of whom were school-based, were interviewed. Two interviewees were retired administrators, one of whom was the former superintendent. Interviews were audio taped, transcribed, reviewed, and coded to identify common statements and themes using the constant comparison method (Elliott & Lazenbatt, 2005; Patton, 2002).

LIMITATIONS

The limitation is that the study included one school district sample only. Replication in other school districts to document the social justice journeys would strengthen the study and allow for generalizations.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1

What are the school district second-order change decisions that are perceived to have led to progress in achieving equity and access to excellence?

Findings for this research question were gathered from survey items 8-9 and 11-21. Although findings had no statistical significance, there was educational importance in ratings of the respondents' perceptions. Two items were believed to be important: Reading as the Centerpiece of High Schools (60.0% =extremely educationally significant) and International Baccalaureate Program Launch (53.9%=extremely educationally significant). Respondents were least familiar with Central Florida Public School Boards Coalition (59.1%=no knowledge).

Using mean scores for each item, rankings were computed. The top seven ranked items were academic and address stretching students to perform at higher levels (International Baccalaureate Program, Triple A Experience, and College and Career Preparation), to intervene with lower performing students (Reading in the High Schools and Summer Transition Program for at-risk students), or to improve academic experiences for all students (School Rezoning and Three Ts). Table 1 displays the rankings by item and the reader can see that establishing the International Baccalaureate Program at the traditionally low performing high school with the largest percentage of economically disadvantaged students was important, along with implementing high school reading. The five lowest ranked items were not directly related to improving learning or part of the daily work of administrators: Succession Planning, Salary Increases, Strategic Planning, Launched Virtual School, and Principals Forum.

Thirty-four provided responses to open-ended items leading to two themes related to decisions: unitary status ($f=15$) and magnet programs ($f=11$). Comments included, "Establishment of magnet programs at the north end of the county," and "The decision to pursue unitary status was the linchpin to changing culture that accepted the status quo."

Table 1
Administrators' Ranked Perceptions of Decisions Related to Equity and Access to Excellence

Rank N=89	Leadership Decisions
1	Reading the Centerpiece of High Schools
2	Established International Baccalaureate Program
3	Triple "A" (Academics, Art, Athletics) Experience Embedded in the Culture
4	School Rezoning to Equalize Student Subgroups in Schools
5	Summer Transition Program for Incoming 9th Graders Implemented, 2009
6	Three "T"s, Teamwork, Thinking, Technology Embedded into Culture
7	Focus on the Future to Prepare Students for Careers and Colleges, 2010-2011
8	Succession Planning in Process, 2008-2009
9	Highest Salary Increases Ever/schedules Restructured 2005-06
10	Strategic Plan 2.0 with new History Making Goals
11	Launched Virtual School, 2008-2009
12	Established Principals' Forum

Research Question 2

To what extent were specific events perceived to have contributed to achievement of equity and access to excellence?

Events were rated in survey items 7, 10, 22, 23, 24, and 25. The item, District Rated A, (78.7% = extremely significant) seemed most important. School District Designated Academically High-performing (71.9% = extremely significant), Unitary Status Achieved (71.3% = extremely significant), and Community College Partnership recognized as #1 in the nation were next in value (48.3% = extremely significant). Superintendent Leadership Transition (36.7% = extremely significant, 31.1% = significant, and 25.6% = no knowledge) revealed differences with two thirds of the respondents indicating it was very important and yet, one fourth (25.6%) had no knowledge of the transition. Respondents were least familiar with the event of the Florida Center for Reading Research in High Schools (42.7% = no knowledge).

The mean scores for each item were computed and then ranked. Table 2 displays the rankings in which the Reading Research and Superintendent Transition are lowest. Identified as the most significant in demonstrating progress were: High Performing School District, School District Rated A, Achieving Unitary Status, and Nationally Recognized Community College Partnership.

Table 2
Administrators' Ranked Perceptions of Events Related to Equity and Access to Excellence

Ranking N=89	Events
1	School District Rated A
2	Identified as High Performing School District
3	Achieving Unitary Status
4	Nationally Recognized Community College Partnership
5	Superintendent Transition
6	Florida Center for Reading Research High School Reading Research

Research Question 3

What were the perceived challenges and to what extent were these challenges addressed?

This research question was answered with open ended survey items and interviews. Administrators perceived that the school district had made progress, “I do believe we have made improvement with academic options for lower performing students, but we still have a long way to go” (District Administrator 4). “I think the access is there, but my biggest fear as we bring in new people, we could lose history and could go back to a black and white world,” (District Administrator 3). By far the most frequently identified challenge was intervening with the lowest achieving 25% of students, many of whom were economically disadvantaged, “No matter what, we need to take care of the lower quartile students” (High School Principal 1).

The community’s economic downturn interfered with providing academic equity and access. Open ended responses included: “Loss of funding—most notable negative effect on instructional programs” and “budget cuts.” “Poverty is still an issue, and it is difficult to deal with budget issues” (District Administrator 6) echoed in the interview.

Research Question 4

What are recommendations for continued improvement?

Administrators were consistent on the survey’s open ended items and in interview responses. They recommended focus on and communication of core values, strong leadership, and data-informed decisions. Examples of comments on the importance of core values and leaders included: “It is very critical for other school districts to keep to their core values” (District Administrator 1) and “Select a leader who is committed. Select leaders who will challenge the status quo” (District Administrator 4). District Administrator 6 captured the sentiments of others, “Know that whatever you are measuring you want to raise the mean, but also reduce the variance. Equity meant you closed the variance. Excellence said you raised the mean.”

DISCUSSION

Each of the superintendent’s decisions and representative events were important in the school district’s progress towards providing equity and access to excellence. However, others who were less familiar with the on-going decisions and events perceived their importance

differently. Unless the superintendent conscientiously maintains the focus on the target goal and communicates thus, the importance of incremental decisions and representative events may be lost. Although achieving unitary status represented second order change and generated organizational, curricular, resource allocation, and instructional modifications, after several years these ways of work became the norm and no longer were stressful nor anxiety producing.

Secondly, when an event or decision implementation is handled smoothly (superintendent transition), it may not seem impactful, unlike if it were managed in such a way as to result in controversy. Sometimes it is best to orchestrate uneventful decision implementations so they are not second order change. As a result, specific decisions may not be memorable except to those personally involved and only reflect first order change.

Economic influences that personally affect students and those that affect the ability of a school district to provide services needed by all students were perceived to be highly important. Services such as transportation to magnet programs and instructional resources were perceived to be negatively affected by the economy.

Success for all students meant focusing on the lowest achieving 25% and making decisions that may have been unpopular—rezoning, creating magnet programs, or elementary cluster schools so parents of historically underserved populations had school choice with transportation. While administrators noted that progress had been made in achieving equity and access to excellence, they offered caution that there was still much work to be done in the best interest of all students.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

A pivotal event in a school district may initiate second order change leadership. In this study, interviewees were consistent in identifying that the pivotal events were when the US Judiciary stated that the school district had to move to unitary status and when unitary status was achieved. This action began the series of decisions by the superintendent that included open access to Advanced Placement courses, development of an International Baccalaureate Program at the highest poverty school, clustering of elementary schools for parental choice, and creating magnet programs. Through these and other decisions by leaders, the school district became acknowledged as high performing by the College Board and the Florida Department of Education. Increase in equity and access to excellence is represented by the percent proficient on the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test Reading for grades three through ten increased for all student subgroups (White = 70% to 80%, Black = 37% to 51%, Hispanic = 49% to 74%, economically disadvantaged = 46% to 60%, and English language learners = 32% to 45%) (Moss, 2013). The superintendent provided second-order change leadership and the result was that the school district made strides to close the racial and economic achievement gap, as recommended by Childress, Doyle, and Thomas (2009).

The most important conclusion from the surveys, interviews, and data study is that a superintendent's core values have to be clear and leadership must be committed to the identified core values. Wilhite concluded, "The successful superintendent ensures that all administrators share a vision of equity and excellence" (2012, p.104). School districts continuing in the quest for equity and access to excellence must be vigilant in the pursuit and communication of decisions, actions, and events that represent movement towards the goal.

Reflection on the institutional history and its importance can assist in preventing backslides in progress, even in times of economic challenges and leadership transitions.

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Appendix A

Survey of Equity and Access to Excellence

Section I

Directions: Please check the appropriate box that best describes you for questions 1 through 5 and fill in the blank for question 6.

1. Ethnicity
 - Hispanic
 - African American
 - Caucasian
 - Multi-racial
 - Asian
 - American Indian
 - Other
2. Gender
 - Female
 - Male
3. Current position
 - Teacher
 - Dean
 - Assistant Principal
 - Principal
 - District Instructional Administrator
 - District Operational Administrator
4. Select the grade range that most represents the grades served in your current position.
 - Pk-2
 - Pk-5
 - 6-8
 - 6-12
 - 9-12
 - Pk-12
 - N/A.
5. Highest Degree Earned
 - Bachelor's Degree
 - Master's Degree
 - Education Specialist Degree
 - Doctoral Degree
6. What year were you first appointed as an administrator in this school district? _____

Section II

Directions: For each item, check how significant each item was in contributing to the achievement of equity and access to excellence. 1 = extremely significant, 2 = significant, 3 = insignificant, 4 = extremely insignificant and 5 = no knowledge.

	Extremely significant 1	significant 2	insignificant 3	Extremely insignificant 4	no knowledge 5
7. Superintendent leadership transition in 2003	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. “Triple A” experience embedded in the school culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Reading becomes the centerpiece in high schools, 2005	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. FCRR Reading Research High School Project	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Highest salary increases ever/schedules restructured 2005-06	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Established Principal Forum, 2004	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. CFPSBC established, 2004	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. School rezoning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Launched virtual school, 2008-2009	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Succession planning in process, 2008-2009	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Summer transition program for incoming 9 th graders implemented, 2009	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Three “T”s, teamwork, thinking, technology embedded into culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Established International Baccalaureate program at Seminole High School	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Focus on the Future to prepare students for careers and colleges, 2010-2011	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Strategic Plan 2.0 with new history making goals under construction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Unitary status achieved March 21, 2006	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. School District designated Academically high performing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. School District “A” each year of accountability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Community College/School District partnership identified as #1 in the nation, 2009	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section III

Directions: please provide any additional information for questions 26 through 29 that will assist the researcher in understanding the school district’s journey towards equity and access to excellence.

26. Please list any significant events, superintendent decisions or programs that you perceive to be significant in achieving equity and access to excellence for all students which were not included in Section II.
27. From 2003 through 2011 what challenges do you believe the superintendent or district leaders encountered related to achieving social justice of equity and access to excellence for all students?
28. What actions did the superintendent or district leaders take to address the challenges you identified in question 28?
29. What other actions or strategies would you recommend for any superintendent to take who wants his/her school district to provide equity and access to excellence for all students?

Using Poetry to Reach and Teach Future Educational Leaders for Social Justice

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the importance of teaching concepts of social justice in educational leadership preparation programs, share teaching strategies from the literature, and provide new examples of graduate student activities and products with the intention to push the field forward and invite others to join the dialogue. We describe how we have used poetry in our classrooms to better understand: the potency of self-reflection; the importance of understanding heritage; the value of unpacking privilege and power, and; the responsibility of recognizing and deactivating stereotypes in the process of reaching and teaching future leaders for social justice.

TEACHING LEADERSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: ENACTING WHAT WE ESPOUSE

While the concept of social justice is not new to society at large, incorporating concepts of social justice into teaching educational leadership is relatively new. The purpose of this paper is to explore the importance of teaching concepts of social justice in educational leadership preparation programs, share teaching strategies from the literature, and provide new examples of graduate student activities and products with the intention to push the field forward and invite others to join the dialogue. We describe how we have used poetry in our classrooms to better understand: the potency of self-reflection; the importance of understanding heritage; the value of unpacking privilege and power, and; the responsibility of recognizing and deactivating stereotypes in the process of reaching and teaching future leaders for social justice.

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First, we explore the importance of teaching for social justice in leadership preparation programs. Thereafter, we share programmatic and pedagogical considerations as well as specific teaching strategies. Next, we describe a pedagogical process for bridging theory to practice and show how this approach complements our goal of teaching educational leaders important social justice concepts. Finally, we conclude with a discussion to push the field forward and invite others to join the dialogue.

JUSTIFYING AND STRATEGIZING SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP TEACHING

We agree with Bogotch (2005) that dialogue around social justice is not separate from actual school leadership practice. For example, Theoharis (2007) found that principals who lead with a commitment to equity: (a) raise student achievement; (b) improve school structures; (c) re-center and enhance staff capacity; and (d) strengthen school culture and capacity. Furthermore, Mansfield (in press) found that principals who lead from a social justice perspective have a commitment to active resistance against deficit thinking and a drive to create a safe space in school that is relationally similar to an extended family structure. Relationships and empowered thinking undergirded the actual changes to school structures, which included opening up gifted and advanced placement courses to all students.

According to Brown (2004), educators need to "retool teaching and courses to address issues of power and privilege - to weave social justice into the fabric of educational leadership curriculum, pedagogy, programs, and policies" (p. 78). Departments of educational leadership must develop a critical mass of faculty willing to engage in the dialogue and infuse it into their individual courses and the overall leadership program (Bruner, 2008). To do so is not an easy task. First, we believe embracing social justice teaching requires a paradigm shift or personal value audit for some. Second, we have observed that discussions of social justice and equity often push faculty and students outside of their comfort zones. Singleton and Linton (2006) argued that courageous conversations rarely take shape overnight. They are the result of intentional and purposeful dialogue and scaffolding that takes time to develop. Third, it is easier to read about social justice teaching strategies than it is to actually implement them in classrooms. According to Shapiro (2010),

The work of educational leadership for social justice requires hard work, imagination, and courage. It is work that engages the heart, mind, and body in ways that are exhilarating, yet highly stressful and physically exhausting. So much needs to be accomplished to transform schools into compassionate and just learning communities. If educational leaders repress their emotions or explode with frustration and work until they are exhausted, they will suffer and in the process be less effective leaders. Those preparing educational leaders can benefit from learning more about the power of emotion and about strategies for tapping into emotion in service of social justice. (p. 242)

Unfortunately, negative views of emotion (as a demonstration of weakness) have deemed the expression of feelings in school leadership as unprofessional (Shapiro, 2010). However, it is our belief that emotions, while highly political, are important ways of knowing, as they stem from our values and beliefs. We maintain that leading without emotion is virtually impossible and that emotion cannot be separated from intellectual practice. We believe that leading with

emotion is more authentic and actually respects the human experience.

Programmatic Considerations

According to McKenzie et al. (2006), little literature exists on what a leadership program focused entirely on social justice would include. However, there is a growing understanding that educational leaders must become activist leaders with a focus on creating equitable school environments (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Kose, 2009; Lugg & Shoho, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2006) while forefronting and balancing preparation strategies that both address the complexity of schooling and focus on day-to-day practices (McKenzie et al., 2006). Following this line of thought, scholars have forwarded social justice definitions that are linked with academic achievement, critical consciousness, and inclusive practices (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006; Kose, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2006). Therefore, the goal of leaders should be to: raise achievement for all students; prepare students to live as critical citizens in society, and; structure schools to ensure that students learn in heterogeneous environments (Capper, et al., 2006; Kose, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2006).

In order to facilitate school leaders' understanding toward creating heterogeneous environments, there must be a theoretical grounding that raises students' critical awareness of multiple perspectives and realities (Black & Murtadha, 2007; Capper et al., 2006; Furman, 2012; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Race, gender, class, sexual orientation, language status and any other categories are often labels that largely contribute to the commodification (see Alexander, 2005) of students, parents, and communities and were largely created to serve state interests, such as high-stakes testing. Therefore, when educators examine issues of race, they should interrogate the social, institutional, and historical implications as well as the organizational and structural barriers for the communities they serve (Milner, 2007). In teacher education, Asher (2007) challenges classroom teachers to unpack the tensions of race, culture, and gender by actively engaging in critical dialogue and self-reflection that interrogates the intersections of these aforementioned identity labels and binaries. Educators should also encourage space for new, hybrid identities (Asher, 2002) as well as classroom dialogue on the subject of identity that is nuanced and supports difference (Asher, 2005).

Another programmatic consideration is the student admissions process. Research has shown there is still a need to train educational leadership professors on the importance of student diversity by considering who is admitted to educational leadership programs in the first place (Kezar & Carducci, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2006). Reflecting their concern that schools engage in a more collaborative and multicultural conceptions for leadership, Kezar and Carducci (2007) call for preparation programs to focus less on admitting candidates who are already in positions of leadership (or aspire to be principals) and reach out to other educators such as teachers and counselors (who do not necessarily aspire to be principals) as legitimate players in the leadership process. Regardless of their formal or informal leadership labels, McKenzie et al. (2006) recommend that educators admit students who *already have an orientation toward social justice* because not doing so requires considerable ground to be covered in the short two to three years of a leadership program.

Pedagogical Strategies

In addition to developing a programmatic orientation to social justice, preparation programs

are experimenting with a variety of concrete ideas for what Furman (2012) described as moving beyond the abstract to developing a practical “toolbox.”

Developing critical consciousness. Theoharis (2007) maintained students must develop a reflective consciousness that deepens their knowledge of self and remains open to new ways of thinking and knowing. Learning social justice means active engagement with emotional and value-laden issues (Rusch, 2004). Rusch (2004) grounded her thinking in Mezirow’s (2000) theory of transformative learning that argued students must modify personal paradigms, reject habits of mind, and reorder previously held assumptions as evidence of perspective transformation. One way to prompt this type of thinking is to require students to engage in “the plunge,” an activity that requires them to place themselves in a situation in which they are the only minority and then reflect on their feelings and perceptions of others related to their presence.

Some educational leadership professors utilize elements of popular culture to develop critical consciousness in higher education classrooms. For example, Bruner (2008) wrote about using the movie *Crash* as a critical reflection instruction tool to focus on diversity issues. After viewing the movie, students wrote papers on themes including self-reflection, privilege and power, and stereotypes. This assignment required students to grapple with their beliefs and make sense of how their values impact their leadership. According to Bruner, “The movie challenges the viewer to confront personal attitudes and ask ourselves how our preconceptions influence our everyday interactions with those who are ethnically different than ourselves...” (p. 484).

Reflective and autobiographical writing. Along similar lines, Rusch and Horsford (2008) described a writing assignment based on Theoharis’ (2007) work that required students to read his article and use it as a framework for reflection on social justice theory and action. Schmidt (2009) utilized the social justice autobiography to help students highlight ways in which they have acted for the good of others. Brett, Behling, and Brake (1998) also suggested autobiography and autovideography to help students confront beliefs and behaviors - their own prejudices and stereotypical behaviors - to develop more egalitarian attitudes and practices. Students read the life stories of others, write their own autobiographical stories, and then convert these into videos.

According to Brett and colleagues, students tended to bond together as they explored similarities and differences in their experiences and perceptions of their experiences...“the method seemed to enable students to apply to themselves the notion that contemporary -isms are often behaviors engaged in by persons who consider themselves unprejudiced and who are unaware of their discriminatory actions.” Students understood how they have been targets of discrimination and how they have contributed to discrimination themselves.

Guided reflection and journaling is also a prime example of how professors can facilitate the development of their students’ critical consciousness (Brown, 2004; Capper et al., 2006; Furman, 2012; Kezar & Carducci, 2007).

Artistic expression. Similar to Brett, et al. (1998), Boske (2009) advocated for the use of numerous artistic formats of expression to capture students' ideas about current curriculum trends and issues in education across culturally diverse communities. Students utilized artmaking (photography, short films, music) via Microsoft MovieMaker to bring social justice issues and their understandings of them to the forefront of their educational practice. According to Boske, students experienced a kind of personal transformation as they struggled to artistically address injustice and experienced emotions that included sorrow, fear,

disappointment, and, sometimes, joy.

Case studies. Since it is important for educational leaders (practicing or preservice) to focus on problems of practice and means for resolving them, problem-based learning via case studies is essential in preparation programs (cite). Many students need explicit examples of social justice action because they lack frames of understanding in regard to what this looks like in a school or for a school leader (Schmidt, 2009). When instructors present students with case studies, they are required to confront problems in a safe, simulated way, challenged to consider whether similar problems exist in their environments and then to decide how they might resolve them (Schmidt, 2009). Other scholars (please see: Brown, 2004; Capper et al., 2006; Furman, 2012; Kezar & Carducci, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2006) also advocate the use of case studies as an important tool in teaching future leaders how to translate social justice theories into the day-to-day practice in schools.

Equity audits. Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, and Nolly (2004) advocated for the use of equity audits to promote discussion and awareness of patterns of inequity in schools. The press for incorporating equity audits in leadership preparation programs has been reaffirmed by a variety of scholars (please see: Capper et al., 2006; Furman, 2012; McKenzie, et al., 2006; Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009). Equity audits rely on a set of 12 indicators divided into the categories of: teacher quality equity; programmatic equity; and achievement equity to provide students with a set of variables for which to gain data and critically analyze. Students learn lessons centered on equity as they try to gain access to data that, while public knowledge, is often difficult or impossible to obtain, while they also learn to analyze variables that are related to student achievement a critical lens. When multiple weaknesses are identified, students must prioritize and make decisions (based on personal ethics, school/district goals, available resources, etc.) about which areas to target for improvement plans.

USING POETRY AS A SOCIAL JUSTICE TEACHING STRATEGY: *I AM FROM* POEMS

Although faculty have utilized reflective writing, videography, and other tools as a social justice instructional strategy in all of our programs in the Department of Educational Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University the experience we write about here was with our first cohort of Ed.D. students. The Ed.D. program is highly focused on connecting leadership learning to practice. Coursework in this program is seamless (meaning, content is not provided in separate/individual courses; bur, rather, is provided as an ongoing two-year-long curriculum integrated with the daily practice current school leaders to make it as authentic as possible) as students learn all content in context. When students begin this doctoral program, they spend an entire semester engaged in the work of understanding who they are as people and how this impacts who they are as leaders and, in turn, how their personal and leadership identities impact their relationships with students, teachers, parents, and school communities. To facilitate this understanding and "knowing of self," we ask them to write *I am From* poems.

The Theoretical Foundations of the Activity

According to Shapiro (2010), artmaking is a tool for leaders to gain insight into their emotions and how these emotions impact the social justice work they do in schools. Shapiro noted,

"Artmaking can facilitate a personal, authentic engagement with social justice issues" and "provide expression of subjective experiences that are important in our lives as leaders" (p. 245). Furthermore, Barone (as cited in Shapiro) called for the creation of communities of "strong poets" who

...refuse to accept as useful the description of [their] lives written by others. Instead, the strong poet is a strong storyteller, continuously revising her life story in the light of her own experience and imagination...She is necessarily a social being and a moral agent, a responsible citizen in a shared community. (p. 246)

Thus, the *I am From* poem exercise, which was developed and adapted by the actor Rebecca Rice, is a way for students to examine how they can be culturally responsive to their communities and build trust with diverse stakeholders.

According to Boske (2012), John Dewey "...reminds us to consider the need to recognize the impact of prior lived experiences, to make meaning from current experiences, and to draw connections. These connections provide spaces for the way in which gained knowledge depends understanding and responses to situations that follow" (p. 118). The use of the *I am From* poem as a teaching strategy is rooted in critical theory and constructivist practice in the classroom to facilitate a power shift and sharing between students and instructors. The purpose is to create a forum for discussion of issues and diverse perspectives related to ethics and social justice in education that ultimately improves learning for all students. Art making in general, and poetry specifically, encourages learners to exercise agency and to assume responsibility for their own learning, fosters a community of learners, promotes a critical awareness of self and of others, makes the learning process personally relevant for students, and dispels traditional hierarchical teacher/student relationships. The use of the *I am From* poem is consistent with a feminist approach to teaching and learning that recognizes power in the teaching role, recognizes the diversity of all students, ensures equity for all, and includes students in engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994).

Phase I of the Teaching/Learning Process: Faculty Modeling and Oral Sensemaking

During the first few weeks of the Ed.D. program, students were asked to repeat the phrase, "I Am From," and create verbal depictions of their lives from the perspective of both pride and oppression. As an instructor for the Ed.D. program this first semester, one of the coauthors, who had utilized multiple art making teaching strategies at a previous university, provided her own *I Am From* poem to students as an example and to establish trust. She took students line by line through her poem and described and gave meaning to the metaphors she had utilized in her phrases. In essence, she led students through the "think aloud" method of teaching where she spoke aloud the thought process she went through while creating her poem and the events that shaped her prose. Students were encouraged to go home and work for a week on constructing poems that represented their pasts, cultures, and identities - without focusing or being stymied by the worry of creating perfect poems with rhyme and rhythm. They were told to come to class the following week with poems in hand, but that they would not be forced to share their poems with everyone if it made them uncomfortable.

Students are, typically, anxious about writing "poetry" and uncomfortable with exposing themselves. The following comment from a student captures this Ed.D. cohort's

overall anxiety: "Well, I went home last week after being given our assignments and told my wife that my tasks were to write a one page poem and to write a 20 page paper...and that I couldn't wait to write the 20 page paper!" While students do not revel in the thought of writing papers, writing assignments are within the scope of activities that they are "used to." They are less comfortable reflecting on themselves, particularly in creative formats. Nevertheless, students most often undertake the poetry assignment and write amazingly rich poems that help them understand who they are and where they come from as well as help them get to know others in their classes better. Almost always, students indicate that while this activity is uncomfortable for them, it is a powerful tool for reflection that they come to deeply appreciate and respect.

Phase II of the Teaching/Learning Process: Students Share Processes and Products

Students returned to class either emotionally charged or drained after writing their poems. The instructor asked for students to share their poems to one another in groups of three or four and to describe their thought processes and the experiences that brought them to what they had recorded on paper. Students were given the option not to share their poems or to share only parts of their poems with one another. Sometimes, students are uncomfortable at first, but gain courage to share their poems once they establish trust in their small groups. Students shared their *I Am From* poems with one another for approximately an hour before coming back together as a whole class (see Appendices A and B for examples). At that point, the instructor asked for volunteers who were willing to share their poems out loud to the entire class. Sharing as a large forum lasted another hour and allowed for whole group sharing and a widened establishment of trust and "knowing" of one another. As students shared and got to know one another, the instructor encouraged them to discuss how the content of the poems is relevant to their leadership practice. According to Boske (2012), as students engage in critical thinking by examining their lived experiences and those of others, they create space for alternative thinking and, as a result, reexamination of their selves to question and counter what they know as true. This learning process is transformational as students grapple with alternative points of view that force them to consolidate or question their beliefs and values.

Phase III of the Teaching/Learning Process: Exploring Emergent Themes

Though this paper is not based on an empirical study, the coauthors thought it would be helpful to provide readers with a brief glimpse of the themes that developed from the *I Am From* poems constructed by our first Ed.D. cohort. The content analysis of the poems uncovered consistent themes including: an understanding of heritage, a sense of overwhelming professional duty, an awareness of hardship (self or others), a recall of strong emotions such as fear or sadness, and recollection of childhood memories.

Student poems demonstrated an understanding of heritage in the following ways:

- *I am from European and Native American heritage - a mutt and proud of it.*
- *I am from the end of a trail of tears and immigrants working the land for years.*
- *I am from Ghanian mountains, "da bush," waterfalls. Sponsor, share, save them all. Dominican sun and sister faces. I am from world, places.*

- *I am from the African slave, the Cherokee nation, and the slave master's loins.*
- *I am from the knowledge that hundreds of millions of my African family have been enslaved both physically and mentally since the 17th century. This condition happens in a world dominated by greed, ignorance, and hate. The first opinions of my people are based solely on skin color.*

Students demonstrated a sense of the overwhelming duty of being a school leader in the following ways:

- *I am from biting off more than I can chew. My plate is overflowing with life and academia stew.*
- *I am from Krypton, take flight, giant "S." I'm invincible, ain't no Kryptonite...I come to the rescue all day and night.*

Students demonstrated an awareness of hardship in the following ways:

- *I am from a family who loves. A mother who worked 3 jobs to raise 4 boys. A dad who walked out when I was 4...3 stepfathers.*
- *I am from the long way 'round. Made my way, stood my ground.*
- *I am from the love that produces a peace, with courage to say, "through your rapes, murders, lynching, beatings and lies, I am still your sister. I still breathe the same oxygen that you do, and trillions of cells make-up my body. I cry when I am happy and when I am filled with grief, do you really see me?"*
- *I am from the Biafran war, Took my grandmother, stole and stifled childhood dreams. Our education deferred. Yes, almost denied.*

Students demonstrated a remembrance of fear and sadness in the following ways:

- *I am from bottles of liquor. Where the skeletons in the closet just keep getting sicker.*
- *I am from lost innocence, angry voices, strong words, stinging words...fear as only a child could know it.*
- *I am from poor eating habits and lots of gain, Morbidly obese nearing four hundred. Bypass surgery to save my life. Missing some food, but not the two hundred pounds.*

And students acknowledged childhood memories in the following ways:

- *I am from jump rope and Cracker Jacks. Red rover, Red rover, send me right over. The Jetsons and "Baby Boo" ... Mommy will they ever make Black baby*

dolls for us?

- *I am from Beastie Boys and Twisted Sister; Skating parties and parachute pants. Cotillion and Flash Dance.*
- *I am from musicians, educators, and entrepreneurs. From Bach and Beethoven, to the Negro spiritual sounds of "Ezekiel Saw a Wheel" and "Hold On." From the calm of a symphony orchestra to the bounce of hip-hop beats. From teachers to professors, from authors to editors.*

Phase IV of the Teaching/Learning Process: Revisiting Insights and Effects

After we engaged students in dialogue about how their past experiences influence their leadership practice as school leaders, some came to the realization that their experiences have helped them be more empathetic toward specific students while others came to the realization that "baggage" from the past has negatively impacted their leadership practice and they made commitments to transform their practice. Once this activity was completed, the instruction for the remainder of the semester focused on utilizing the knowledge learned about selves to guide their efforts to get to know students, teachers, and parents in their school communities. During the remainder of the program, students were regularly invited to return to the knowledge they gained via the *I Am From* poems and further reflect upon their insights and efforts to change practice.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In our experience as instructors teaching for social justice, it is clear that our students actively engaged with the sometimes difficult and complex emotions and attitudes that surfaced during the multiple phases of writing *I Am From* poems described above. Finding ways to promote an understanding of individual heritage awakened an awareness of hardship as well as memories of sadness and sometimes fear. Sharing childhood memories often resulted in cathartic experiences, which enabled the transformative learning experience to take place. Our experiences echo those of Brown (2004) who emphasized the potency of self-reflection. We found that incorporating the activities and projects associated with the *I Am From* poems is one way to promote social justice understandings in our students that can be translated to the communities in which they lead. Leading for social justice involves both justice and care toward those who comprise the school community when making decisions. Knowing yourself and understanding what impacts your leadership as well as understanding those that surround your school community and for which you make life altering decisions, creates a "...care orientation that focuses on identifying needs and creating a solution responsive to the needs of all involved..." (First, 2012, p. 337).

While we do not advocate for a one-size-fits-all curriculum, we hope sharing what some have done in the classroom spurs others to share their insights and specific teaching tools that can strengthen our efforts as a community of scholar-teachers. In our experiences, literary and artistic activities facilitated important student dialogue concerning the relationship between individual past experiences and current leadership practices. Moreover, these activities produced important "aha" moments when students realized their past and present

can indeed inform future practice in more positive, productive ways. Thus, we believe that these activities, and the resultant dialogue, have the potential to transform leadership practice by helping educational leaders "...operate from a reflected-on and articulated concept of social justice to guide their leadership and decision making" (First, 2012, p. 335).

However, for a truly impactful transformation to take place, we believe that faculty involved with educating leaders must have lengthy and purposeful discussions about the missions of their programs and conduct audits of all of their coursework to determine how to address the concept and practice of social justice through entire programs rather than individual courses here and there. Faculty must discuss how to introduce concepts and, most importantly, how to keep the conversation going as students move through their programs. Faculty might consider how teaching strategies such as *I Am From* poems and equity audits can be utilized across content areas and incorporated into school law and curriculum courses rather than remaining in courses titled *Leadership for Social Justice*. Finally, faculty willing to move the orientations of their programs to social justice and equity would position themselves well by providing instructors with professional development opportunities that might facilitate strong teaching for social justice as well as the use of alternative teaching strategies for adult development.

Additionally, if we are to enact our espoused beliefs, then we need to clarify what we mean by social justice and align this understanding with our classroom practice. This might mean redefining and reinventing our entire conceptualization of leadership. According to Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005), "From a social justice perspective, the greatest challenge for the educational administration field may be to shift its mental model of what it means to be a school leader rather than a school administrator" (p. 209). Prospective leaders will, in turn, need new skills and knowledge. No time is better than the present due to administrator turnover to raise questions, embrace change, repopulate the school leader population (Marshall, 2004). Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy challenged educators with the following question: "Who will lead is one of the most critical challenges and one of the most important opportunities to influence social justice" (p. 208).

In order to promote revolutionary changes in schools that challenge oppressive structures, leadership preparation programs should help educators develop the skills necessary to counter oppression and "transform silence into language and action" (Lorde, 1984, p. 43) in schools. If we are to take a critical social justice stance on leadership education, we must help students name and examine injustice...and take action for change. This requires new teaching strategies such as those embedded in this article that encourage learning beyond an understanding of self to that of the community and globe: equity audits; movie reflections; racial autobiographies; *I Am From* poems; short films; photography; and music. Through teaching strategies oriented toward social justice understanding and transformation, students learn to analyze the impact of race, gender, sex, disability, and socio-economic status on students and schools - for the purpose of creating an informed theory of practice for social justice and equity. Educational leadership faculty must raise concerns about social justice issues and make advocacy for transformation a priority. They must weave social justice learning throughout entire programs to create authentic change.

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Appendix A - Example of *I Am From* Poem

Mary Born in Bethlehem

Mary born in Bethlehem.
 But there weren't any stables
 Or fluffy farm animals
 Or angels singing too far off stars.
 Hallelujah.

Instead, there were empty gray factories
 And people who drank too much
 To cover up lost dreams and
 Feelings of nothingness.
 Cursing.

ACDC blasting on 70s stereos
 While life giving steel
 once prevalent,

Now gone from the hands that
Wished to mold it.
Damn.

Archeologist? Fraid not.
There ain't no work in that.
Have a secretary packet
and go on your way.
Child,
you didn't just aim high
did you?
We'll beat that out of you
in no time.
Literally.

Mary born in Bethlehem.
escaped
To the mountains
Where language was drawn out
And sneaky eyes looked behind
Wide smiles.

Mary from Bethlehem
in a trailer park.
Raisin breasts and crooked teeth
Praying for a miracle.
Right?

God this doesn't make sense.

So pick up the straw
Clean it up.
Nest for something great
That is brewing deep inside.
And run.
Run with it
Mary from Bethlehem

Take this great, God-given gift
And direct your own path
To salvation
Open mind, eyes, soul
And take heed
Due diligence
And speed
To move from where you are from
To that which you want to get done.
Amen.

Appendix B - Example of *I Am From* Poem

I Am Public/I Am Private

I am a child of finger-painted skies, soaring kites, snow angels and lofty ideals.

I am of private dreams and public expectations.

I play both roles well. Duplicity is survival.

I was born an old soul, whose name means a nobleman, a hero who guides with sage advice. Imagination was my best friend. My secret, it's private.

A peacekeeper on the playground, a caretaker at home, I picked up the pieces for parents who couldn't.

Not anesthetized, just not equipped. Why don't children come from manuals? Public smiles, private smiles, private tears, how will we get through the troubled years?

I retreated to movies and magic, a perfect world more like television than truth. A world where cars flew, animals talked, and people tucked you in at night.

Under the watchful eye of double-Libra parents, too busy with the straining of supernova needs of an all-American star child, I was always second. S'alright? S'alright!

I have my private word, where I happily escaped into my world of books and records, laughter, stories and songs, colored pencils and scissors and make-believe.

The "cats and the cradle" not "father knows best," raised in the 1970's disco dysfunctional decade of PMA, know-down-dragged-out, built-up self-esteem, counseling and concealing. I did survive. Private matters, not for the public.

"I'm ok. You're ok." You ok?

I was bullied but never bullied. Was beaten, but never fought back. Not ok, just expected. From a family in the public eye, we don't do that.

I stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. Superman had strength, DeBergerac the wit, J. Alfred Prufrock taught me not to conform.

I can wear a tie, and still sleep at night.

My heroes taught me self-defense from small-minds and fighting fools. Bruises heel, but irony cuts to the bone.

I am funny and clever and witty and silly. I am earnest and honest and obedient. Public and private.

Possessor of a neon-halo that shines bright, when needed, I danced as hard as I could to turn tears to laughter, sadness to sensational. In private, and in public.

I am an army brat. The military brought my family together. The military ripped my family apart. Death was swift, snuffing and smothering, the survivors became "Ordinary People," who hibernated for many years to follow, and some never truly woke up.

A "Hero's Death" in the papers, we grieved in public. My family died with him, in private. They did use the hurt for good, even though what was left was hollow.

Creativity and talent, taught me how to compose the perfect life - illuminated and elevated for all to see - I am public and private. Sharing the outside, rarely the inside.

I am passionate and principled, pragmatic and personable. A teacher who learns, a leader who follows, I let fate guide me.

True love, new love, real love, my love, life is perfect in mine eyes. I gave too much already in public, leave me this in private.

I am led by a benefactor who never showed me nothing less than kindness and love, inspiration and awe. Defender of all, because she could, standing in my corner, I am invincible. A light, where there was twilight, we learn to love those despite limitations. In public we smile, in private we laugh.

I am tested and persevere. Completing the competing demands of the great Blue and Orange, I lost my mother, my "Irish fight to win" rival. Now that she's gone, I understand her more than ever. "The Great Santorini" in pearls and pumps, no one has, or ever will push me as hard. In public, I'm ok. In private, I'm in Hell.

I am guarded. I may be a public servant, but I am not your maid. I will help you but be kind, for everyone is fighting some kind of battle. In my world, "gimme" never gets, but "please" or "may I" gets you what you need.

I dance to my own tune, and teach others to dance with me, if they so choose. Wearing my tie in public, you can hear me tap my shoes. Shh! Let's dance!

I am a noble hero, a sage and old soul: I draw out, I look in. I am here, I was there, I will help you get from here to there, or bring you from there to here.

I am fair, I am authentic, the scars, the smiles, in public and private, I am me.

Inside Our World: How Administrators Can Improve Schools by Learning from the Experiences of African American and Latino High School Students

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This case study investigates the perceptions that 24 Latino and African American students had of effective classroom instruction in their favorite teacher's class at one high school in the Southeastern United States. Six teachers were also interviewed and 147 anonymous students were surveyed (secondary data). The theoretical framework used to explore the racial context of this high school, students' counter stories, the presence of deficit thinking, and the existence of bias was Critical Race Theory. (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Marshall, 2010; and Yosso, 2006). The students' description of biased treatment by some teachers (not in their favorite teacher's class) led to an experience termed forced race consciousness. Forced race consciousness is an experience that propels people of color to think about their membership as part of a racial or ethnic group and make negative associations related to intellectual inferiority. It was posited that this awareness negatively impacts the students' school experience and detracts from their ability to become academically successful. Forced race consciousness is a term that emanated from this research and is introduced and defined by this researcher.

INTRODUCTION

While working as an Assistant Principal at Coventry Midlands High School, I received an email from a Science teacher, Mr. Gold (pseudonym) who was concerned about one of his students who was regularly late or missed his first period class. In the email, Mr. Gold requested that the student, Dulce (pseudonym), a Latina student be dropped from his first period class and moved to his third period class. Mr. Gold also requested that Dulce be placed in Physical Education first period instead. I had not received any previous emails or disciplinary referrals about this issue, so this was Mr. Gold's first communication with me about Dulce's tardy problem. Mr. Gold also sent the email to the student's counselor and the family specialist (bilingual licensed social worker). Mr. Gold expressed a concern that since Dulce was Limited English Proficient (LEP), perhaps she did not understand the concerns he had raised with her. I met with Mr. Gold and shared that the first step was to write a disciplinary referral. I also shared that dropping his class first period and adding Physical Education (PE) would send a message that PE was not as important as his class. It would also not solve the problem of Dulce's tardies. After Mr. Gold wrote the referral, I scheduled a meeting with Mr. Gold, Dulce and the family specialist. During our meeting, I asked Dulce

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why she was late to Mr. Gold's class. She explained that her older brother, a senior, drove her to school in the mornings. Since her brother did not have a first period class, they were often late. Every Coventry Midlands High School student who is not within walking distance has access to free bus transportation and so I told Dulce that she needed to take the school bus. Both the family specialist and I are bilingual so we were able to determine from talking to Dulce that her English skills were fine and she had no difficulty understanding Mr. Gold. I also assigned Dulce one day of In School Suspension (ISS) for being late and missing so many first period classes without a legitimate excuse. It did not take long for Dulce to start arriving to class on time.

Often in education we move to a solution before truly understanding the nature of the problem. Dulce's problem was not her limited English skills nor did she have a transportation crisis. Dulce was choosing to take the most convenient mode of transportation and if she had been allowed to take PE first period instead, she would have received the message that her first period class was not important. There was an assumption (not based on data) that Dulce could not get to school on time. Rather than hold her accountable and require her to come to first period on time, the proposed solution was to allow her to take a less rigorous first period class. This was clearly not an effective way of working with this Latina student. These types of teacher interactions prompted me to explore ways that school administrators can improve schools by learning from the experiences of African American and Latino students. In order to more fully understand students' experiences, a single mixed methods case study of one high school in North Carolina was conducted utilizing the theoretical lens of Critical Race Theory. Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) asserted that from slavery to the Civil Rights era, African Americans had a rich tradition of pursuing education as an act of freedom and resistance. In pre-Civil Rights segregated schools across America, academic achievement was an aspiration. Many Post-Civil Rights integrated schools have stymied these aspirations by adopting the views of mainstream American society that promoted messages of Black cultural and intellectual inferiority.

Critical Race Theory faults ineffective civil rights legislation for impacting the resegregation of schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Blacks left schools that were led by Black principals and Black teachers to be integrated into schools, where their culture was not understood, and their potential was underutilized. For many Black and Latino students, schools have become places where they are marginalized and disengaged.

Schools need to retain the promise and hope that many first generation immigrants bring who come to America searching for a better life. Room needs to be made at the table for retention of a bilingual culture and identity as well as an allegiance and pride in American culture and identity. Critical Race theorists espouse that the dominant dialogue cannot solve problems like Black and Latino underachievement. Amplifying the voices of Black and Latino students will help introduce lasting solutions. This narrative becomes not one of deficit thinking blaming Black or Latino children for their lack of success or espousing colorblind thinking, but acknowledges the larger role of racism in society that caused resegregation of schools, maintains faulty images and beliefs about the intellectual capacities of racial minority students, and holds the larger society responsible for changing the racism it has been ignoring and perpetuating. Ways of thinking and behaving in our schools have maintained and supported Black and Latino underachievement. Without reshaping our

thinking and the leadership of our institutions, Black and Latino students will continue to be unsuccessful in public schools across the United States.

Thirteen years ago, Latinos surpassed Blacks as the country's largest minority (NCES, 2007). In the United States, racial minority populations are growing with Latinos representing most of the population growth. Latinos currently represent 17% of the population and Blacks represent 12%. By 2050, assuming lower than expected immigration rates, Latinos are projected to increase to 26% of the population. Blacks are expected to increase slightly to 13% (Taylor & D'Veira, 2012).

Between the years 1990-2010, the number of Latinos in public schools in the nation increased from 12%-23%. Black enrollment decreased slightly from 17%-15%, though overall enrollment for all students in public schools in the South increased from 15.1% to 19.6% (NCES, 2012). Although African American and Latino students are a visible presence in public schools and Latinos are rapidly growing, African American and Latino students have been largely unsuccessful in public schools. While African Americans and Latinos have been overrepresented in statistics on poverty, retentions, suspensions, and drop-out rates, they have been underrepresented in Advanced Placement courses, in high performance on the SAT and as graduates from colleges and universities (NCES, 2009; AP Report to the Nation, 2009; SAT, 2009).

Overrepresentation of Racial Minorities in Statistics on Poverty, Retentions, Suspensions and Drop-Out Rates

In the United States (NCES, 2010) 18% of families with children under 18, lived in poverty in 2007. By race, 34% of those families in poverty were Black, 27% of those families were Latinos, and 10% were White.

In 2007, 21% of Black students had been retained, 12% of Latinos had been retained compared to only 9% of White students. As is also the case, a larger percentage of Latino (22%) and Black students (43%) were suspended than White students (16%). Between 1997 and 2007, Latinos led the numbers in that they had the highest drop-out rates at a staggering 21%. Blacks dropped out at a rate of 8% and the drop-out rates for Whites was 5%.

Underrepresentation of Racial Minorities in Advanced Placement Courses, in College Enrollment, and Low Performance on SATs

African Americans and Latinos have been underrepresented in Advanced Placement courses, in high performance on the SAT and as students on college campuses. High school students receiving a three or above on Advanced Placement tests are eligible to earn college credit (Diverse, 2009). In the AP Report to the Nation (2009), only 3.5% of Blacks earned a passing score on an AP exam. Only 13.8% of Latinos earned a passing score. The percentage of passing scores for White students is not listed by the College Board in the AP Report to the Nation.

The SAT (2009) tests knowledge and skills in Math, Reading, and Writing. Scores on the SAT range from 200-800. Among high school graduates in 2009, Black and Latino students scored far below White students on the SAT. White students scored about 100 points higher than Black students on all three tests. White students scored on average 57-80 points higher than Latinos on each of the three tests.

NCES (2007) reported that only 32% of Black 18-24 year olds were enrolled in colleges/universities, only 25% of Latino 18-24 year olds, compared with 42% of White 18-24 year olds enrolled in colleges/universities. Thus on several measures of performance, Advanced Placement scores, SAT test scores, and college participation rates, Blacks and Latinos are performing far below their White counterparts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The framework used in this study was Critical Race Theory (CRT). Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) developed the concept of Critical Race Theory in Education in 1995. One of the strategies of CRT is storytelling. Storytelling is used to draw attention to ways in which policies, social norms and lived experiences are affected by inequity. CRT offers counterstories to the dominant account of historical or contemporary matters of race in the U.S. CRT also focuses on moving from theory to practice. Ladson-Billings and Tate's (2006) tenets of CRT state:

- Understanding Racism as Endemic and Ingrained in American life
- Understanding Race and Property
- Reinterpreting Ineffective Civil Rights Law
- Challenging Claims of Neutrality, Objectivity, Colorblindness and Meritocracy

This article focuses on two areas of CRT analysis:

- Centering the perceptions of African American and Latino high school students to acquire knowledge about their experiences with race given that racism is endemic and ingrained in American life.
- Interrogating racism and dominant racial ideology that promotes deficit thinking, and bias (Challenging Claims of Neutrality, Objectivity, Colorblindness and Meritocracy).

Racism as Endemic and Ingrained in American Life

Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) use Wellman's definition of racism. Wellman (1977) defined racism as:

“culturally acceptable beliefs that defend social advantages that are based on race. Racism is not simply bigotry or prejudice; and it should not be confused with ethnic hostilities. Regardless of its historically specific manifestations, racism today remains essentially what it has always been: a defense of racial privilege” (p.4).

Wellman (1977) further asserted the following:

“When people speak of racism they usually mean attitudes rather than institutionally generated inequality. Given this perspective, the crucial feature of race relations in America becomes the ideas that Whites have about others; not their own superior position, the benefits following from their position, or the institutions that maintain this relationship” (p. 21).

Wellman pointed to the institutional aspects of racism and its currency in society. Racism is believed not just to be a historical issue, but a present reality. Race can be used as a lens to analyze educational inequities. This study examined the racialized experiences of African American and Latino high school students at one high school in order to center strategies for improving schools. Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) state that

LatCrit theory is similar to CRT. However, LatCrit is concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity and addresses issues often ignored by critical race theorists such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Espinoza, 1990; Garcia, 1995; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Johnson, 1997; Martinez, 1994; Montoya, 1994; Valdes, 1996). LatCrit is a theory that elucidates Latinas/Latinos' multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression.

Yosso (2006) asserted that race and racism intersect with other forms of subordination and that these other layers help to further explain the experiences of Latinos. Villalpando (2004) theorized that different parts of a Latino person's identity may be subjected to oppression at a given time. A lower middle class, newly-arrived immigrant Latina female who speaks only Spanish may be subject to oppression based class, gender, language, race or immigration status. LatCrit also validates the experiences or stories (cuentos) of people of color and views them as central to understanding racism.

Challenging Claims of Neutrality, Objectivity, Colorblindness and Meritocracy

Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) asserted that the voices of people of color are critical to opening the understanding of oppression. These stories serve as counters to the dominant society's stories about reality. Stories also serve as part of a healing process for marginalized people who can become liberated by telling their stories. Part of the storytelling involves a process of critical reflection. Critical Race Theory was utilized as a framework to analyze the students' responses. The two primary areas that were examined were deficit thinking and bias, but other themes were also allowed to emerge.

METHODOLOGY

This mixed methods study at Coventry Midlands High School (pseudonym) integrated existing secondary student survey data from the entire student body with qualitative student interviews, and teacher interviews. Interviews were completed with 24 African American and Latino students selected to represent Coventry Midlands High School's grade levels (9-12), student achievement levels (high, medium, low) and gender. The total sample size (n) used for the quantitative surveys was 1,003 surveys that named a favorite teacher. The sample size (n) for African Americans was 99 (of 207) students, and for Latinos, the sample size (n) was 47 (of 122) students. Six of the 83 teachers were interviewed. Each student was interviewed for approximately 50 minutes during a class period. Teachers were also interviewed for 50 minutes. Only pseudonyms were utilized.

Table 1
Background - Coventry Midlands High School

Facilities	Enrollment (n)	Racial Demographics	SAT Scores	College Placement	Advanced Placement courses	Teachers
85 acres	1400	66% White	1744	92%	20	83
		14.8% Black	90% participation			59% 10+ years experience
		8.1% Latino				43% Master's or higher
		7.8% Asian				
		3.3% Multi-racial				

AP: Students receiving a three or above on AP tests are eligible for college credit (Diverse, 2009). The SAT (2009) tests knowledge/skills in Math, Reading, and Writing. Scores on each SAT range from 200-800.

FINDINGS

While African American and Latino students shared about positive experiences with favorite teachers, they also shared about being treated differently than their White peers and the presence of a sometimes hostile learning environment. The GPAs of the students were included as a way of identifying the academic strength of the students interviewed.

No Bias from Favorite Teachers

"I was the only Black person in my class. He didn't make it a point to zone in on that I was the only Black student. He never called any specific race." April, 12th grade African American female student, 3.59 GPA (on a 4.0 scale) shared this statement about being isolated in an Advanced Placement Science class, but not being treated differently. Other students concurred though they referenced being the only one or one of a few in an Advanced Placement or Honors class. Kelly, 12th grade Latina, 3.28 GPA stated, "I don't feel like I've ever been discriminated against because of my race. Honestly I don't feel like anything has happened to me. They're (teachers) are hard on me like other students. They treat me the same. They want every student to do well."

One student added, that her teachers had not treated her differently, but that once she thought a Black cafeteria worker had mistaken her for a White student and given her preferential treatment. Sandra, 12th grade Latina, 2.29 GPA said, "It was weird. There was a Black guy in front of me. They (cafeteria workers) did not let him go because he didn't have his ID, but I didn't have mine and they let me go." Another student said that her favorite teachers had not treated her differently, but she had friends who stated that they had been treated differently than their White peers (by other teachers). Kaleb, a 10th grade African American male, 4.0 GPA stated, "Not in a way that offended me, but was noticeable. One of my teachers made a statement. They were talking about their favorite kind of music. They (the teacher) liked Rap music. They assumed I like Rap. I was the only African American kid (in the class). I do like Rap." Kaleb shared that an assumption was made about the type of music he liked because he was Black. Though he does like Rap music, an assumption was made by his teacher. Without elaborating, Kaleb added that he plays both football and lacrosse and among students there are stereotypes and there is a lot of racial division.

As was expected, the majority of African American and Latino students (14 of 24) reported that their favorite teachers did not treat them differently than their White peers. Ten of the 24 students experienced being treated differently from their White peers by an adult, though not by their favorite teacher.

Deficit Thinking and Bias

Deficit thinking is defined as cultural disadvantage. Deficit thinking results in the belief that students of color are incapable of achieving at the levels of White students and that family background and the race of the student inhibit performance (Marshall, C. 2010; Yosso, T. 2006). Bias can be defined as deviation from neutrality (Ferguson, 2003). The belief – deficit thinking, led to the treatment – bias. In this study, two themes that evolved from beliefs about deficit thinking were (a) Targeted for Unsolicited Help; and (b) Ignored Because Most Teachers Think that Because You Are Latino, You Won't Do as Well as Other Students.

Targeted for Unsolicited Help

For this study, Targeted for Unsolicited Help refers to extra help offered by teachers to students of color before assessments were conducted to determine which students were actually in need of assistance. The help is termed unsolicited because students of color did not indicate that they needed or desired additional assistance. "Our first test, Mr. Gold pulled all of the Black students aside. There were four students. He asked us if we wanted separate testing. The girl I sit next to is White and she asked us, what was that about? She asked, was it because we were all Black? I was so shocked. I was like, what?"

A 12th grade African American female student, April, 3.59 GPA, shared this experience about being asked if she needed separate testing. By asking if the students wanted separate setting, the teacher was implying that the students received Special Education services. Special Education teachers inform regular education teachers of the students needing services so there is no need for a teacher to ask a group of students if they needed separate testing.

India, 12th grade African American student, 2.86 GPA, stated, "When teachers see you are African American or Black, they already have ideas about how you will perform in the class or act. Kind of the way they treat you. First day of class. It's like they don't care. This kind of attitude, not very welcoming." Elisa, 10th grade Latina, with a 2.66 GPA added, I think she (Ms. Brown) expected us not to get it. Even before she could tell I was having a difficult time, she would always put it out there if I needed help." Elisa did not mention whether White students were also asked if they understood the material, instead, she pointed out that she and another Latina female were asked if they needed help.

Ignored Because Most Teachers Think that Because You are Latino, You Won't Do As Well As Other Students

In the context of this study, "ignored" refers to the treatment of African American and Latino students at Coventry Midlands High School by some of their teachers. Students reported that White students or other students who were more academically advanced received assistance instead. "Ignored" also refers to not being presented with an academic opportunity that White students were offered or being allowed to sleep in class.

A few years ago, I was in a conference with an African American 12th grade student, Nathan (pseudonym) and Ms. Cox, a White female Algebra 2 teacher. Nathan was failing Algebra 2 and in danger of not graduating. During the conference, Ms. Cox (pseudonym) told Nathan that she cared about him and wanted him to pass her class. In a calm and polite tone, but with a puzzled look, Nathan inquired if she cared about him so much why had she allowed

him to sleep in her class every day. At an earlier meeting, Nathan had disclosed to me that he had asked Ms. Cox for help before and she had not helped him so he consciously chose not to ask her for help again or to participate in class. There really was not a way to explain her actions so though Ms. Cox gave a response, she focused on how she could help Nathan from that point forward. To Ms. Cox's credit, although she was taken off guard by Nathan's remark, she let him know that he could still salvage his Algebra 2 grade. She offered him a contract and expressed a willingness to change his first semester failing grade if he would double his efforts and earn a B on tests and quizzes. Nathan accepted her offer. Though he did not pass her class, he was able to pass Algebra 2 through online credit recovery and graduate on time.

Nathan was well aware that he was sleeping in class and not completing work. He was able to articulate what a caring teacher would do and it was clear to him that caring did not include allowing him to sleep in class. Nathan was not successful because he chose not to work in his Algebra class. His teacher was reinforcing his lack of success by ignoring him and allowing him to engage in behavior that allowed him to fall further behind.

While in some cases thinking that African American or Latinos were not as capable as Whites meant teachers gave unsolicited help, in other instances, students were ignored. "Most teachers think that because you are Latino, you won't do as good as other students. They don't pay much attention to you when you need help. They ignore you. They say they will help you, there are other students who raise their hands afterwards. He'll leave you last. Sometimes the bell rings and you don't get the help you need." Adriana, 10th grade Latina, 1.58 GPA was describing an experience in which she needed help, but students who were more capable, received assistance. Students shared that they were helped last and sometimes the bell rang and they never received the help needed.

Elisa, 10th grade Latina, 2.66 GPA commented on her teacher's misguided focus on completing a unit and ignoring the learning of her students. "A lot of teachers, I guess all they want to do is get the material across and make sure people learn, but they don't dedicate themselves to the success of the students – as much."

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In addition to the teachers who are working effectively with African American students at Coventry Midlands High School, there exists a cadre of teachers who knowingly or unknowingly ascribe to beliefs about deficit thinking and as an outgrowth of this thinking these educators treat some minority students at Coventry Midlands High School in a way that is biased. It was posited that deficit thinking and bias are relevant themes raised by students that impact the performance of African American and Latino students. This biased treatment led to an experience termed forced race consciousness. Forced race consciousness is a term that emanated from this research and is introduced and defined by this researcher.

Forced Race Consciousness

Forced race consciousness is an experience that propels people of color to think about their membership as part of a racial or ethnic group. The associations made with the person's racial or ethnic group are negative, stereotypical, and assumptions are made about the person's intellectual inferiority. This awareness negatively impacts the students' school experience and

detracts from their ability to be academically successful. The tenets of Forced Race Consciousness include:

- Deficit Thinking and Bias
- Encounters that Propel People of Color into a State of Racial Group Awareness
- Impact on the School Experiences and Academic Success of Students of Color

Deficit Thinking and Bias

What was not surprising was that because of the permanence of racism in society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006), outside of their favorite teacher's class, some students reported that they were treated in a way that was biased. Bias exists at Coventry Midlands High School though not in the students' favorite classrooms. As stated, the two themes that emanated from beliefs about deficit thinking and resulted in biased treatment were: Targeted for Unsolicited Help, and Ignored Because Most Teachers Think that Because You are Latino, You Won't Do as Well as Other Students.

Encounters that Propel People of Color into a State of Racial Group Awareness

Some teachers at Coventry Midlands High School created forced race consciousness in African American and Latino students by providing students with unsolicited help. April, a 12th grade African American student, 3.59 GPA, shared about how disturbed she was by an encounter with her Science teacher, Mr. Gold when he asked her and all of the other Black students if they wanted separate setting testing. Before assessing the students' abilities, Mr. Gold made assumptions based on deficit thinking that April qualified for Special Education. April described being forced to think about her membership in her racial group and to make associations between that membership and the notion of intellectual inferiority. This interaction may have also caused April to question her ability. This was the same teacher who suggested that Dulce drop his Science class and take Physical Education first period. Assumptions were made about Dulce's language ability and her ability to get to school on time. Mr. Gold's treatment of both Dulce and April was based on Deficit thinking. In the first case, asking April and the other students about separate setting showed that he did not believe that they were capable of achieving at the levels of White students. In the case of Dulce, his actions showed that Dulce's family background and race influenced how he viewed her performance which led him to suggest changing her class schedule.

As another illustration of forced race consciousness, Elisa, 10th grade Latina, with a 2.66 GPA shared:

Ms. Law would target us as well. When she explained something, she would ask me to see if I was getting it or she would look at me. Whenever we took a test, they would stare at me to make sure I didn't cheat. In my Honors classes, there aren't many Hispanics. Last year in my Honors Geometry class, everyone else who was Black or Latino switched out. I was the only one left.

Elisa shared a poignant example of being singled out and offered help that she described as targeted and unsolicited.

For those students who were targeted for unsolicited help, in some cases, the students were already academically successful and did not need the additional help. Assessment data should be what drives the decisions about who gets additional help and that help should be offered to all. Teachers may have been trying to be helpful, but only offering help to African American or Latino students before evaluating grades sends the message that teachers believe that students of color need help because they are incapable of achieving at the levels of White students.

Impact on the School Experiences and Academic Success of Students of Color

Noguera (2008) stated that schools are important places of socialization where many students formulate their understandings about the significance of race. African American and Latino students reported that they experienced biased treatment that created forced race consciousness and negatively impacted their school experience. African American and Latino students at Coventry Midlands High School also described being ignored by some teachers and how those experiences with teachers resulted in forced race consciousness. For the students who were ignored, this treatment also could have an impact on their ability to correctly respond to class work, homework assignments and/or tests. India, a 12th grade African American student, 2.86 GPA stated, "I've seen teachers tend to focus on the kids who are already doing well. The kids who are struggling are left behind. If a White kid needs help, it's not a big deal. They willingly help them." In these interactions, India was forced to think about how her race impacted her membership in the class and her access to receiving academic assistance. India described teachers who appeared to be less willing to help African American students. For those students who described being ignored, rival explanations could point to teachers having good intentions but simply not having time to get to all of the students needing assistance. That rival explanation is based in the majoritarian perspective and dismisses the perspectives of these students.

As has been stated, "Ignored" also refers to not being presented with an academic opportunity that White students were offered. Manuel an 11th grade Latino, 3.5 GPA shared an experience of forced race consciousness, "In my Engineering class, my teacher asked all the White students if they wanted to join the Technical Honor Society. He never asked me." Manuel has a 3.5 GPA which is high enough to be eligible for the National Technical Honor Society (minimum GPA is 3.0) yet he was not invited to participate. The issue was not simply that the students missed out on receiving teacher assistance or were not told about an academic opportunity. From the students' perspective, the reason for not getting the help or being informed was because they were African American or Latino. When these students did not receive the same treatment as their White peers, they were compelled to consider how their membership in their racial or ethnic group influenced how they were treated and the notion of intellectual inferiority was raised. These actions by teachers were also related to deficit thinking in that African American and Latino students were treated as if the teachers believed that the students were incapable of achieving at the levels of White students so assistance was given consciously or unconsciously to other students or students were ignored.

School Administrators can learn from the experiences of students of color. If valued, these perspectives can be shared with teachers and influence students' future classroom experiences.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This was a case study of one school so the results may not be generalizable to other settings. The implications focus on changes school administrators can promote in classrooms to improve the experiences of African American and Latino students. The implications for practice are to avoid providing unsolicited help to African American and Latino students unless the same help is offered to other students based on transparent criteria. Teachers should, however, provide timely academic assistance when requested. Teachers should avoid behaviors that emanate from deficit thinking or bias, propel students into a state of racial group awareness and result in students experiencing forced race consciousness. Administrators can make teachers aware of these concrete ways that forced race consciousness can be identified.

It is also vital that educators are aware of the racial stories of African American and Latino students and know how to effectively engage in conversations about race so that when students experience forced race consciousness, counterstories can be introduced. It may appear contradictory to promote student discussions about bias or race while disparaging forced race consciousness. That is the majoritarian viewpoint. The merits of stories that uncover the contemporary realities of students of color cannot be equated with forcing students to make negative racial associations engendered by a deficit perspective. Denigrating forced race consciousness should also not be confused with promoting color blind thinking. Color blind thinking ignores differences at the detriment of students of color while purporting that this aversion is beneficial. This research amplifies the inherent issues with compelling students of color to view their racial membership negatively. Rather the awareness of one's race or culture is aggrandized while dispelling myths of racial intellectual inferiority. Administrators can create opportunities during faculty meetings to listen to the racial stories of students of color (preferably seniors who can speak freely without fear of retribution).

Given how poorly so many past reforms in our nation's high schools have fared with respect to delivering lasting improvements in student achievement and overall quality, it certainly could not hurt to solicit student perspectives on what they believe might be done to make their schools better from a variety of perspectives. (Noguera, 2008, p.69)

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Critical Race Theory in Action: The Freshman Educational Experience for Students of Color

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The backdrop of this study is a nation's struggle with race as related to racial consciousness raising in public schools. In the foreground is an examination of the beliefs of students of color from a ninth-grade academy in a racially diverse high school in North Carolina. Research suggests that the freshman academy experience can foster achievement outcomes for students of color in the United States. The intent of this inquiry is to explore how race and consciousness-raising factor into the educational experiences of this transitional group and to help account for their evolving identity and discrepancies in thought and action. We also discuss programs and practices that may improve the quality of educational experiences for students of color and that can potentially promote higher student achievement while reducing dropout from secondary schools. Using the theoretical framework of critical race theory (CRT) to give voice to students of color, we explore CRT in action within a ninth-grade academy, with particular attention on how social and cultural capital can work cohesively with the culture of the school to foster academic success. Implications for improved teaching and leadership for the 21st century are considered.

INTRODUCTION

... a new breed of leader must step up to do the right thing for diverse communities facing injustice or exclusion from a better life. As a result, leaders in diverse settings need new skills and greater understanding of social and organizational dynamics. (Hoyle, 2007, p. 11)

Unfortunately, many forces cause administrators and teachers to feel disconnected from students of color (Irby, Brown, Lara-Alecio, & Jackson, 2013; Neild, 2008). One such force is entrenched societal beliefs that rationalize poor-quality teaching for disadvantaged students. Neild (2008) argues that these students often do not feel appreciated; results are evident in the disproportionate achievement of nonmainstream students (to White students) in high schools.

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Further, as Noguera and Wang (2006) attest, when students are not successful in ninth grade, they are twice as likely to fail. Struggling youth find steady employment elusive and often do not reach their potential as a citizen. Such dynamics are exacerbated in inner-city school districts—with high concentrations of Latino and Black students—that are not meeting the academic requirements of federal programs like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Title I (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As Nguyen and Crow (2013) argue, districts with achievement (or rigor) gaps face closer scrutiny and potential takeover from state agencies, resulting in mandated programs.

From the future-minded perspective of English, Papa, Mullen, and Creighton (2012), even though no school of thought is a panacea, certain ideas can help practitioners connect with students of color and increase racial consciousness in their buildings. Using critical race theory (CRT) with this goal in mind, the education community can support the academic performance, and transition and socialization, of students of color by forging authentic relationships with groups historically neglected by the dominant culture (Delgado, 1995). CRT emerged in the mid-1970s when some attorneys expressed concern about the slow rate at which laws were changing to promote racial equality (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Considered a progressive way forward, CRT offers a way of viewing race relations for schools (Delgado, 1995).

Transition from eighth to ninth grade is a major factor in the socialization and success of students (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008). Looking at the freshman academy through the CRT lens can foster understanding of race dynamics at the ground level, including practical instructional strategies that may yield success with students of color. We aim to promote understanding of critical race issues vis-à-vis freshman transition within a ninth-grade academy by soliciting the views of students of color about their experiences. Our heuristic (or experience-based techniques) was guided by three research questions: (a) How do students of color experience the academy? (b) What programs and practices proved effective for students of color based on their beliefs? (c) How does race impact the experiences of ethnically diverse students?

EDUCATION RESEARCH RELATED TO NINTH-GRADE ACADEMIES

For the past few decades, an academic achievement gap between students from underrepresented groups and White groups captured the attention of education circles (Neild et al., 2008). Ample evidence of patterns of educational inequality in America's public schools comes from Darling-Hammond (2010). In her well-documented argument, this scholar guides school systems to generate opportunities for addressing factors that contribute to the gap, with emphasis on a vision of culturally-attuned school systems that are high-achieving, equitable places of learning. As we discuss, research suggests complex dynamics involving race and culture, as well as motivational issues, as possible explanations of the achievement gap.

Darling-Hammond (2010) explains that legislative changes, which are a critical part of a nationwide thrust towards school reform, have been made to lessen the achievement gap, notably through the NCLB Act. Despite this achievement gap and the historical trends of underachievement for Black and Latino students, certain organizational systems and research-based structures—e.g., professional development, leadership, mentoring, data-driven decision

making, goal setting, school climate/culture, parental involvement, elevated expectations—support gains in high-poverty urban schools with a large concentration of students of color.

The development and implementation of racialized structures and systems, as influenced constructively by issues of race, is under way in current research. We are building on the recent evidence in the literature concerning how these systems and structures are enforced, as well as the instructional practices resulting from their implementation. For example, Torff's (2013) view of the achievement gap is from a critical cultural perspective: Teachers contribute to the achievement gap among student groups—essentially, some perpetuate a socially stratified racial system by supporting a curriculum that “emphasizes higher-order skills more for high-advantage learners than low-advantage ones, introducing a systematic, seemingly unconscious, bias into the nation’s schools” (p. 259). CRT serves as a conceptual framework for analyzing racialized school structures and systems. Our contribution is a databased narration that builds on story segments depicting how students of color see their days and futures. Thus, we endeavor to present our interpretation of CRT in action and from the field.

Critical Race Theory

According to race theorist Beachum (2013), CRT “is a framework that attempts to provide unique ways to examine, analyze, and explain the roles, rules, and recognition of race and racism in society” (p. 923). As a school of thought, CRT holds to the premise that issues of race lie at the core of American society—that racism is an integral part of the culture. Understanding the existence of racism is crucial to educational discourse. CRT, as applied in organizational structures, provides a basis for researching race relative to education policies and procedures, as well as influences at local school and district levels. It offers a point of view on instruction, curriculum, assessment, school funding, and desegregation that, according to Ladson-Billings (1999), impacts the outcomes of Black students across socioeconomic levels. Importantly, Chapman, Dixson, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings (2013) emphasize that CRT spotlights the operation of White racism (also White supremacy) in daily work; they suggest a counter narrative of leadership that values “serving children and families of color” (p. 1024). A racist position might be that this action reflects a radical departure from the priorities of schools.

Dixson and Rousseau (2006) highlight eight major principles of the CRT framework: (a) criticizing the limitations of an immediate and simplistic approach to resolving racism; (b) engaging in storytelling and counter-storytelling; (c) understanding revisionists’ interpretations of American civil rights laws and programs; (d) applying insights from social science writings on race and racism; (e) learning how race, gender, and class connect; (f) examining the significance of cultural nationalism/separatism; (g) gaining knowledge of legal institutions and critical pedagogy, and (h) becoming pedagogically attuned to criticism (e.g., about the status quo) and self-criticism. For example, CRT theorists legitimize students’ educational stories to provoke racial insight (Beachum, 2013; Stovall, 2005). Counter-stories enable study of the experiences of people who may not have intimate knowledge of the dynamics of racism in their lives.

Through the theoretical lens of CRT, the stories of students of color in the freshman academy, for example, can be heard and legitimized, critiqued and expanded. Stories are a meaning making tool that add value to human life and activity; moreover, “Cognition and

action provide the beginnings and endings through stories or narratives” (Papa, Kain, & Brown, 2013, p. 970). Addressing criticisms of the CRT framework, Beachum (2013) includes the contention that storytelling lacks scholarly rigor, and he would likely agree that this critique is limiting partly because it fails to embrace possibilities for linking issues of race at macro and micro levels. As Beachum concurs, CRT is not only a framework for building knowledge of racialized structures—it also awakens the push for pursuing socially just education systems for all students.

CRT theorists contend that instructional strategies embedded within our school systems favor a deficit model for students of color (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1999). On the basis of this model, if certain strategies do not work with students of color, the assumption is that something is wrong with the child or family. This mentality encourages instructional interventions involving remediation for the student (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Nevertheless, the deficit model is slowly being rejected as research affirms the instructional integrity of teachers who effectively educate Black and Latino students (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002).

While CRT research has also been applied to teacher education programs and legal cases in education (Ladson-Billings, 1999), there is little information about the outcomes of its application in the classroom and schoolwide, as well as the probability of improved learning outcomes for students of color. Typically, researchers refer to curriculum, testing, instruction, and other areas of the education system impacted by racism (Gay, 2000; Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004).

METHODS

This study examined the experiences of ninth-grade students of color using narrative methods. As collaborators who are an assistant principal, a professor of educational leadership, and a doctoral student in cultural studies, we sought to understand the experiences of ninth-graders from the CRT viewpoint, students’ own perspectives, and our different positions.

School Site

This study was conducted from 2011 to 2012 within a small urban public high school in a mid-Atlantic state. This is the only freshman academy in that city school system and it is the most racially diverse student population. The enrollment from 2009 to 2012 was 48% Black, 25% White, 21% Latino/Latina, 5% Asian, and 1% other. The academy’s population consisted of a majority of Black students, followed by White students, with a small representation of Latinos and fewer Asians. Female students outnumbered males by 10%. The academy, originating 5 years ago, was intentionally diverse in terms of race and culture. The school had a low staff-turnover rate, in part because this academy’s staff members enjoy working exclusively with ninth graders.

The academy operated on a block schedule, and courses were taken in an annex with eight classrooms. Without enough space to accommodate the 250 students, some teachers were forced to “float.” Students were heterogeneously grouped into two teams; teachers had the same students in the fall and spring semester. If students were advanced or ahead in credits, they took courses outside the academy or enrolled in extra elective courses. Academy teachers shared a common planning time; they would attend to administrative concerns, counsel students, hold parent conferences, plan lessons, participate in staff development, and

attend to other tasks. Ninth graders took their elective classes outside the academy during this period. To be promoted to the next grade level, students had to pass six (of eight) courses. Failing students could not repeat courses in the academy and, consequently, they were shifted to the general high school.

Staff Diversity and Teaching Assignments

Twelve teachers at the academy were White and three were Black. The assistant principal and guidance counselor were also White. The academy's staff population was slightly less racially diverse than the rest of the school. The three Black teachers taught only standard-level and a few honors-level classes. Advanced placement (AP) courses, representing the highest level in academic achievement, were taught by the most seasoned White teachers. They had been at the high school before the creation of the academy, and each had at least 20 years of teaching experience. The AP classes contained slightly more White students than the other courses.

Participants of Color

Given that this study's aim was to understand the freshman educational experiences of students of color from their own perspective and relative to their enrollment in a racially diverse school, interviews with a diverse sample provided an important source of data. Assent and consent forms were explained in a freshman seminar and homeroom classes for the ninth and tenth graders; 60 students volunteered to participate. Along with grade-level specifications, interviewees ($n = 26$) were selected based on race and gender, focusing exclusively on students of color. Participants' interviews were conducted over 3 months. The lead researcher, a Black male, interviewed 14 females (7 Blacks, 4 Latinos, and 3 Asians) and 12 males (6 Blacks, 3 Latinos, and 3 Asians). Beyond race and ethnicity, additional categories of profiles based on honors, remedial, and English as a Second Language (ESL) were assigned to this population.

The introductory interview sessions consisted of four prepared and spontaneous questions, probing how the students perceived the academy and their freshman experience in it. After the first interviews, a second round was conducted with the same students; all interviews lasted from 30 to 90 minutes. To ensure the generation of rich data, two participants, a Black male and a Latina, were interviewed over an additional 6-month period on a biweekly basis.

STUDENT SNAPSHOTS

Beliefs about Schooling and Career Opportunities

Students' responses mainly indicated positive attitudes and beliefs about schooling and career opportunities stemming from involvement at this academy. The students' achievement mentality supports Perry's (2003) assertion that those from marginalized groups have a history of viewing education as a mechanism for upward economic and social mobility. Also, most participants said that they wanted to go into business for themselves after obtaining a 4-year degree. When asked if they liked attending the ninth-grade academy, they conveyed that doing well in it, completing high school, and immediately joining the workforce presented the

best route for pursuing their goals. Thus, a Latina and Black male underscored that it was important for them to maintain good grades, partly as a strategy for building networks in the present and in life. The Latina shared that “The academy builds up your knowledge from my standpoint, and when you do well in school, somebody later will recognize it and help you get into college and get a decent job.” She saw the ninth grade as a stepping stone to career opportunities and believed that doing well would enable her to develop skills for success in and beyond school.

Beliefs about the Value of Socialization Opportunities

Many (65%) of the respondents expressed that, if not for the academy’s influence and assistance, they would not be progressing academically and would even have dropped out. Other students mentioned enjoying having their own space in the academy and liking the standard mode of dress (SMOD). (Collared shirts were in white, blue, orange, and grey, and pant colors were in khaki, black, and blue.) Students affirmed smaller units (i.e., under 600 students) for supporting newcomers’ socialization with peers and staff (Gallagher, 2002) and feeling of camaraderie. An Asian male attested, “It feels good being around people you know. It makes it feel more comfortable in the learning environment.” The organization of space in the academy was modeled on this premise of easing the ninth-grade transition via interpersonal connections.

Beliefs Reflecting Discontent

Although 65% of the participants reported enjoyment of the academy, 35% felt disappointed. The concerns covered superficial topics and, of greater substance, the transition itself and preparation for the freshman academy experience rather than the academy as a program. Notably, complaints covered the required standard uniform (the SMOD): “In middle school we wore uniforms, but we didn’t have to wear the same color tops” (a Black female). They wanted to express their individuality through their own clothing choices.

Some interviewees disliked what they saw as a high volume of schoolwork. During middle school, students were promoted regardless of their academic achievement, whereas in high school they had to earn credits (a minimum of six credits for 10th-grade promotion). Students also took courses on a semester basis, whereas in the middle school their courses were year-long. In the high school, they had far less time to learn new material, complaining, “The middle school didn’t really prepare me. The lowest grade they would give you was a 70 and passed you along, so I wasn’t prepared for the work in high school” (an Asian male). Thus, as might be expected, they attributed the higher academic standards to their stress levels.

Along with the discontent around academic achievement, 35% of the students were unhappy with their ninth-grade experience, largely because of the increased accountability for infractions. An Asian male commented, “We had more freedom in middle school—we could have our electronic devices. It wasn’t that big of a deal.” For many others experiencing this transition, the rules seemed stricter in high school, and they did not understand why, as revealed by a Black female: “I thought there would be more freedom and we’d be able to experience the real world, but there are a lot of things you can’t really do.” Overall, their

concerns seemed more relevant to the general trials associated with transition to an unfamiliar academic environment.

EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES IN THE ACADEMY

Based on the participants' responses in both interviews, race did not play a role in the programs and practices affecting their beliefs and experiences. The students described programs and practices that would benefit students of any racial or cultural background, referring to personal relationships, "real-world" experiences, and quality teaching; these examples implied educational value. However, with reference to our observations of their time spent in classes, the students were not attentive to the racial aspect of their freshman experience. Many (90%) indicated that they had not encountered racial material or content and that discussion on this controversial topic had not occurred in their presence. However, we observed that teachers did in fact integrate issues of race in the curriculum. The students had not been educated with a predominately White student population, which helps to explain their "fish to water" mindset. Feelings of cultural alienation, physical isolation, and silence are reported to be common among students of color attending predominately White schools (Datnow & Cooper, 2000).

Learning Aids for Non-English Speakers

For example, various learning aids being used at the academy were geared towards non-English speakers. All English and social studies teachers provided the Latino ESL students with Spanish dictionaries and other resources. The Spanish teacher would talk with the non-native English-speaking students to improve their understanding of the content taught in class. Translators, available in classes with ESL students, functioned as a second teacher.

Steps for Fostering Racial Consciousness

Besides positive racial socialization, the staff we observed facilitated students' racial consciousness. Moreover, the academy itself revealed a commitment to being counter-hegemonic (Perry, 2003), serving primarily low-income students and students of color. While many students were from marginalized groups, the academy modeled high expectations, race-conscious curricula, and highly qualified teachers. Black and Latino students believed that the high expectations for their performance motivated them to achieve. Academy students dialogued about obstacles to success for low-income and minority students; one catalyst was Lee's (1960) *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel about a Black man charged with raping a White girl in the Deep South. Class discussion surfaced attitudes toward race, class, and the struggle for social justice, which coincided with the encouragement of a race consciousness.

Quality Classroom Instruction for Students of Color

Most participants (98%) reported that classroom instruction shaped their views, while 1% referenced their peers and another 1% referred to extracurricular activities. When 22 participants voiced the view that teachers greatly impact the freshman experience, they

specifically described an effective instructor as someone who connects well with students and is accepting.

About content, the effective instructors knew their subject/content area well enough to simplify it. For example, when prompted to discuss effective teaching in an interview, a Black female student replied, “Whenever I’m learning something, the teacher actually breaks down the idea so I can understand.” These students said that an effective teacher not only knows the material but also conveys it with good results largely because of positive teacher–student relationships: “Coach is my favorite teacher. I like his class. The subject he teaches is computer science. I’m good with that so I can really relate to what he talks about.” Like the other participants, this student judged his teacher’s effectiveness based on whether the learner liked the subject and whether the teacher helped him feel good about himself. Coach (his track coach) developed a rapport with the students outside the classroom: The students appreciated his efforts to connect, which they perceived as a caring act. Others shared that the afterschool academic tutorials helped prepare them for what they saw as the rigorous expectations of high school.

For over three decades, certain teacher characteristics have been thought to correlate with effective teaching strategies in high-poverty and culturally diverse schools (Edmonds, 1982). Effective teachers coordinate with other professionals, engage in continuous professional development, promote student engagement, and know how to present subject matter for both special education and general education needs (Edmonds, 1982). As perceived by most academy students in our study, effective teachers are attuned to the need to address students’ interests for the purpose of enhancing engagement and motivation. The classrooms we observed reflected pedagogical commitment in facilitating student-led assignments, encouraging active dialogue, and leading creative-writing activities. Further, our student participants indicated that the effective teacher plans and is willing to modify assignments based on individual needs, which, we surmise, demonstrates cultural awareness and respect for the demographics of the school.

Personal Relationship Formations for Students of Color

Two participants (from the second interview) shared that being around other students had the greatest influence on their perceptions of the academy. Being in a sheltered environment with peers whom they knew made school more approachable and less stressful. These ninth graders assisted each other and fed off one another in the academy’s more inclusive environment.

But peers also negatively influenced the perceptions of students who referenced issues of drop out, fighting, and disengagement: The Latina’s brother disliked school; he had attended the freshman academy 2 years earlier before dropping out. Elaborating, she said, “The year before I came to the academy there were five fights a day over stupid stuff. My brother would fight if you looked at him the wrong way.” She had neither attended freshman orientation nor had a mentor, and her parents could not speak English and would not meet with the teachers. These factors negatively affected her outlook on school. In contrast, a Black male with relatives who were ninth-grade academy graduates benefitted from having positive role models who liked school.

Some of the students of color revealed that while they may have struggled without the support they needed in one domain of their life (e.g., home), their schooling experience nonetheless afforded them learning connections with peers. One student explained that her

“parents aren’t involved with school. My aunt comes to school whenever there’s an issue. No one helps with my homework. I just do it all on my own.” However, the same student described upbeat and sustained learning experiences in the academy, as in: “One of the best experiences I had was when we worked on photosynthesis in teams and turned in the assignments at the end.”

“Real-World” Experience and Influence

Students of color underscored the importance of real-world learning in their freshman year: “You take everything from the academy experience you can and try to apply it to the world because you can succeed with an education.” Repeatedly, they associated learning in school with transference of learning to the outside world. Through tutoring, direct instruction, networking, and other means, they were making academic and developmental gains and, moreover, were being prepared for postsecondary education and careers. As three different students commented,

I actually want to get at least accepted to a university or somewhere because my parents are not the type to have a lot of money. I hope to get scholarships to get accepted to some kind of university.

I tend to get along with the teachers who give me the most freedom, like my first-period teacher. I like the way she teaches, and she’s very direct and to the point, and my second period teacher I don’t really like because I don’t think that what she teaches has anything to do with what we have to do in life. My third and fourth periods are okay because the teachers are very direct.

There’s no other way to get ahead in a positive way than being credentialed. There are no decent, adequate jobs out there on the job market. Doing well in school can get you a degree, and it can, if you do your networking, put you with the means and people to help you move forward in your career. You take everything from the academy you can and try to apply it to the world because you can succeed with an education.

Most of the students referenced the future. Two different students provided evidence of being first-generation secondary students who were intent on pursuing an academic or a career trajectory:

This academy has given me the opportunity to show everyone that Blacks just don’t go through high school and then say, “You know, I’ll go the next year,” and then just do plant work or street work. So this is the chance for me to go to school and make something of myself so I can look back and be proud.

I’m African American, born and raised [in North Carolina]. Everybody I knew was with me at elementary or middle school. I got cousins who are upperclassmen at this school. I play football and I’m also interested in basketball. I want to go to [a top university in the state] and become a computer engineer.

Connected to this was the theme of living with particular racial identities, augmented by a self-image that included sportspersonship and role modeling. Three different students shared that

Being a Black male is hard in society—not too many of us get the chance to do well and succeed. I’m proud to be Black. Statistics are against me but I’m determined to prove them wrong. I can’t forget who I am. It’s important to see myself as African American.

I participate in cross-country and like high school. You get to choose what you’re interested in, like electives. My goal is to graduate and attend a 4-year college. I had teachers that stood behind you and helped you get where you wanted to be.

I think it’s better for freshmen to have the freshmen academy because it will prepare them for life and what they’re going to have in the future. It’s better that we stay to ourselves. If we mingle with the upperclassmen, it might bring trouble.

A few students expressed the more elusive and perhaps profound goal of being engaged in the process of becoming as an adult, as in: “My goal is to attend college because I see too many people around me not doing anything, and I don’t want to be like them. My motivation is to become something and be a role model for others.”

One student remarked that his fondest memory of the academy was the extracurricular activities. Participating in field trips had a positive influence on him, serving as a good memory of his academy experience for which he gave a mixed review: “Even though we are treated like little kids, the teachers treat us well and we do good things. The teachers took us to the park. It sounds really childish, but we had fun.” This Asian male saw school events and activities as an opportunity to escape the rigors of testing and the burden of daily schoolwork.

With the academy’s technology grant awarded in 2011, each ninth grader was given a laptop. Most teachers required the freshmen to use the laptops in their classes. For a Black student, a highlight was the access he was given to technology, specifically a laptop computer: “I like the laptop and use it in my classes. When I go to the tenth grade, I can take it. If you graduate you get to keep it, but if you don’t you have to give it back.”

Classroom Trends and the Relevance of Race

Based on our observations, a teacher’s race influenced students’ experience, despite any responses to the contrary in the student interviews. If teachers were nurturing/caring, organized, confident, creative, and energetic, students held them in high regard, regardless of race. School staff who lacked these attributes tended to have the most difficulty connecting with the student participants, particularly if that teacher was of color.

Whenever we observed teachers interacting positively with a class, the teachers would encounter a similar experience with the other classes, regardless of classroom demographics and student abilities. On the other hand, teachers who were viewed unfavorably by participants tended to struggle with the students in all the classes observed. For example, participants who were off task for one teacher were on task for another. Participants’

responses suggested that a teacher's race was not the only factor in determining the quality of their academy experience.

Evidence of Racial Recognition and Colorblindness

Most (i.e., 98%) of the students did not feel victimized by the negative actions of others, and they exhibited self-control. Their resiliency helped them to be productive and persevere in their academics despite social stereotypes about their racial groups (Carter, 2008). Same-race teachers were not the only ones implementing pedagogical practices embedded in racial and cultural awareness—all teachers were consistent in adopting this approach.

Students noted that Black teachers and White teachers drew attention to Black and Latino achievement that affirms accomplishments to society. In an English class we observed, the teacher listed the objectives, followed the state's guidelines, and assigned extra books to be read about people of color overcoming personal and societal obstacles (e.g., *When Marian Sang*). Students read the books, did oral reports, and participated in discussion. The other English teachers similarly used literary techniques for fostering understanding of complex racial issues.

Classroom culture also contributed to an affirming environment. For example, each academy teacher had pictures of family and friends on display near their desks. Instead of decorating the classrooms, 80% of teachers posted exceptional student work. Classroom expectations were also posted, complete with students' signatures as evidence of cooperative understanding. Many (65%) teachers also served as coaches or advisors for afterschool activities.

Racially-aware role modeling is essential to the quality of the freshman educational experience of marginalized groups (Carter, 2008). In all but two of the classes observed, the teachers' willingness to be explicit with students of color about the structural barriers that can potentially impede their social and economic mobility was a sign of care. The support of caring adults—racially diverse and White alike—is a major factor in the performance of high-achieving students of color (Nieto, 2004). As teachers nurture positive racial socialization for Black and Latino students, they advocate for high achievers with strong racial self-concepts (Carter, 2008).

Race as a Factor in the Classroom and Social Grouping

Despite the feedback students provided, race was a major component in students' lives. When interviewees were asked about how race was affecting their academy experiences, most replied that it did not have an influence. However, when we observed the students' interactions with their peers in classrooms and social settings, they socialized in same-race patterns, implying that they were either not aware of their racial behavior or did not see it as such. In stark contrast, about 90% of the teachers used race and ethnicity as a focal point in their classes, drawing critical attention to dynamics of exclusion and segregation within society and student cultures. For instance, at a pizza party, participants invited friends who were the same race/ethnicity as themselves and they exclusively socialized in corners of the room. These were the same students who espoused that race was not a major factor in their freshman academy experience.

Similarly, at lunch time students routinely sat in same-race formations. Staff from the academy monitored this dynamics, sitting with them randomly in an effort to model racial integration. However, students would re-segregate the lunch tables, which they deemed a “habit,” and they would defend the racialized groups to which they gravitated and found comfort. In a few cases, they were even disparaging about the groups they avoided, without seeing or worrying about the irony of self-segregating behavior perpetuating negative stereotyping about other races. As evidenced in the words of three different students:

I sit with these guys because I’ve known them my whole life. We play football and basketball and they live near by me. I don’t get to see most of my friends during the day. Lunch is a time to relax. Lots of other students feel the same way I do.

I like hanging out with my friends because they’re cool. I take a lot of classes with them and sometimes see them afterschool. We formed our own clique shortly after school started. In the cafeteria, Hispanics, Whites, and Blacks sit with each other. There’s nothing wrong with it—it’s just been a habit.

Some people are in groups like the Blacks, who think they’re better than everyone, so they stay in one group where there is the ghetto Blacks and the cool ones. And there are the weird Mexicans and the cool ones who I hang out with.

When we observed a Black male in his science and English classes, he socialized with Black students and chatted about noncurricular concerns. Other students from different races behaved in a similar segregated manner. Whenever students worked collaboratively on an assignment, teachers randomly grouped them, the only time we witnessed racial integration.

Race Addressed in the Curriculum

Although 98% of the students responded that race was not discussed in the classroom, we observed the contrary, most conspicuously when the English honors class tackled *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Black students were present, along with White and Latino students. The White male teacher facilitated a dialogue about the content of the story. The Black males appeared uncomfortable about the sentencing of Jim, the Black character. While non-Black students aired their thoughts about the sentencing, the Black males signaled frustration, presumably over the portrayal of Jim. While most (90%) interviewees did not express discomfort reading aloud the word “nigger” from the book, we noticed that the Black students sat quietly during this lesson. Seizing this “teachable moment,” the teacher explained that White-dominant systems have a history of falsely accusing Black people of crimes and punishing them, referencing the current legal system’s negative treatment of Black citizens and other people of color. We do not know the degree to which the student groups began to understand the seriousness of race as a serious.

Another learner-centered scholarly experience helped students identify more tangibly how oppression has historically existed in society. We are referring to the world history classes in which students conducted research on a Native American civilization in pairs. They were guided to choose a pre-Columbian society (e.g., Mayans), complete the research process,

and present their findings. They created artifacts from that era and wrote about it. Through this activity, the students conveyed new information they had learned about racial dynamics.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION AND ADVOCACY

Trends in school leadership and leadership preparation programs indicate a significant shift from a professional to a technical focus based on test preparation and teaching to the test (Nguyen & Crow, 2013). The importance of leadership in school buildings and preparation programs for leaders and teachers underscores the need for emphasis on professional identity with its “attendant emphasis on values and beliefs,” not only “the acquisition of technical skills” (e.g., data use, teacher observation) (Nguyen & Crow, 2013, p. 893).

School leaders have responsibility for professional identity development and collective racial identity. This work includes building resiliency in their schools for minority students, particularly Black males who are negative targets of public education (Allen, 2006). Based on our study, the youth did not realize that they were experiencing racially-oriented, consciousness-raising content. Pedagogical mechanisms are obviously needed for checking understanding with minority youth before expanding upon curricular interventions in this direction.

CRT theories can be translated into teacher professional development strategies (for examples, see Allen, 2006); in this vein, our findings are also useful. Administrators can provide teachers with staff development and resources to identify techniques for reaching every student. Sensitivity workshops foster understanding of racial and cultural differences, and behavioral and learning differences. Guardians can be included to provide support in the academy’s endeavors. Administrators can develop (or modify) academic programs, extracurricular activities, and other support systems to remedy achievement gaps among student groups.

Administrators take the lead in fostering race relations in the freshman academy, so they must assume responsibility for their own professional development. School leaders can attend ongoing training on race and relationship building, and share their knowledge with staff on a continual basis. Also, administrators can collaborate with universities and businesses. They can invite researchers to share current trends in data, provide contextual knowledge, or help develop a constructive rapport with diverse students. Leaders can facilitate staff development sessions and visit classrooms, providing feedback to teachers and other educators when school is in session. Advocacy involves educating teachers at all stages of their careers about the importance of recognizing racial elements in pedagogy and instruction.

Our study results also indicate that students of color respond well to teachers perceived as caring/nurturing, organized, confident, creative, and energetic, regardless of race or ethnicity. Leadership will want to capitalize socially and culturally on high-quality teacher teams focused on the goal of helping students to achieve in life, which includes becoming racially aware citizens, not only high-income earners. Administrators can guide teachers to educate for racial awareness by, for instance, inviting community members to discuss their experiences with adversity, how they overcame it, and how they achieved success; students can also read about the plight of people of color, dialogue collectively, and draw lessons learned as a group. Dialogue about race is needed in school buildings. A study involving principals and district leaders centers on constructive dialogue about controversial topics, such as racial beliefs and identity, and strategies for enabling risk-taking and consciousness-raising

to occur among leaders (Mullen, Young, & Harris, in press). A goal of this work is for leaders to influence the mindset of the adults in their buildings so they can help prevent student drop out (Mullen & Schunk, 2011).

Leaders can also support a positive racial climate by providing intensive academic support to at-risk students for whom adjustment within a new school environment is challenging. They can help ensure a successful ninth-grade transition by building connections with external constituents, such as community leaders and local businesses. Administrators can support these partnerships by inviting business people to speak to students in person or via the Internet; or they can set up allocated times for students to intern at selected businesses. School principals and administrative staff should be visible in classrooms and after-school functions to ensure that all ninth graders experience the best education possible. Administrators will want to monitor students' psychological and sociological needs in conjunction with their academic needs.

Race-conscious leaders in resilient school cultures channel resources towards students in danger of dropping out of school, mentally and physically (Allen, 2006). This effort must be ongoing and diligent. Administrators in the ninth-grade academy can investigate what has been done or not done to assist these students in making education a meaningful experience, and see to it that no students fall behind. Administrators in failing and turnaround schools will need to be especially vigilant that students do not disengage from school or develop a victim mentality.

Further, administrators can communicate with policymakers so measures are taken for ensuring the success of disadvantaged students by providing more resources and by advocating for the highest qualified teachers. Courses on race relations, developed for all ninth-grade (academy) students, could involve administrators and teachers, along with community stakeholders, in assisting students with their specific developmental mindsets and needs. Administrators can work with teacher leaders to sponsor an open forum where students share their experiences and projects with constituents from inside and outside their schools. Given that the many ninth-grade academies are located in poor areas of school districts, administrative liaisons can advocate for state funding that is allocated in an equitable manner. They need to convince policymakers not to raise high property taxes in those areas of the city, and lowering property taxes in the more affluent parts, which ultimately lead to segregation and achievement gaps in districts. Ninth-grade academies need more support because many students do not have an alternative plan for their education.

Since ninth-grade academies are separate entities within the high school, administrators should set aside funds for each academy to have its own building space. Freshmen students need an area where they can interact with one another without distractions from upperclassmen. Ninth graders need an academic atmosphere where they have personalized attention from staff. For example, school leaders can hire enough ninth-grade academy staff to accommodate a teacher/ student ratio of 1:15. As students build a connection their first year in high school, they will have a better chance of achieving in the later grades. Also, administrators can take measures to ensure student success by advocating for more resources and hiring the highest qualified teachers.

Exploring their own mindset as school leaders is essential, and one such proven context for this is faculty-led instruction in higher education institutions (Mullen et al., in press). Purposefully developing a mindset about the future will be important as they imagine the future with their staff to propel the racial and global learning of students and staff in their

buildings (English et al., 2012). Administrators who understand their own cultural values and beliefs about racially stratified policies and practices can seek alternatives to segregated and inequitable schooling practices that promote human rights. A mindset dedicated to the attainment of all students builds on lessons of civic values such as equitable schooling for all and authentic dialogic engagement across races (English et al., 2012; Mullen et al., in press).

CONCLUSION

CRT in action is a vehicle for examining student engagement and achievement from an asset model. Based on the CRT framework we applied to our analysis, none of our respondents, adolescent students of color, divulged that race had a role to play in their freshman experience. From a CRT perspective, when people state that racism does not exist, colorblindness, the status quo, stereotyping, and bias are often factors, no matter how nuanced or inferred (Chapman et al., 2013; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Parker & Stovall, 2004). Ninth-grade academies nationwide, however, tend to be located in urban areas where students are mainly from racial/ethnic groups (Torres, 2004). In hindsight, it is not surprising that the students of color at this racially diverse ninth-grade academy seemed unaware of the racial component of their freshman experience, neither as a target of racism nor as a perpetrator of racism. As mentioned, they had little opportunity to interact with White students and gain socialization experiences that could cause developmental friction in fostering a racial consciousness.

Finally, leaders have an important role to play in making racial consciousness imperative to every student and adult's educational development. Racial sense-making activities and future-minded, goal-oriented activities matter increasingly and are necessary as nonmainstream minority groups become the new majority. High school students will be leaders in the future. They will need to educate for racial consciousness in a global world, which is an essential step in the call for action that promotes an emancipatory life (Beachum, 2013).

Authors' Note

This study received Institutional Review Board approvals in 2011 from a higher education institution as well as the school district in which the study was conducted.

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How Teachers Can Promote Resiliency within African American Male Students

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The limited educational success of African American males has been an elusive topic for quite some time. Many studies have been offered to explain the dismal plight of such a significant population of students. There is a dearth of research on the success and resilience of African American males as seen through the lens of teacher resiliency. However, limited research is present on resiliency and African American males in rural educational settings. How to equip or instill in minority students, specifically African American males, the process of resilience also continues to elude teachers and administrators in public schools across America. Using Henderson and Milstein's 2003 Resiliency Wheel, this study examined how relationship building among classroom teachers not only served as the premise for developing teacher leaders, but also promoted resiliency within African American males in grades 3-8 at Success Academy.

INTRODUCTION

The limited educational success of African American males has been an elusive topic for quite some time. Many studies have been offered to explain the dismal plight of such a significant population of students. There is a dearth of research on the success and resilience of African American males as seen through the lens of teacher resiliency. However, limited research is present on resiliency and African American males in rural educational settings. How to equip or instill in minority students, specifically African American males, the process of resilience also continues to elude teachers and administrators in public schools across America. Using Henderson and Milstein's 2003 Resiliency Wheel, this study examined how teachers at Success Academy promoted resiliency within African American males in grades 3-8.

Acknowledging and understanding the various backgrounds of these minority male students, and acceptance of them as they enter into the classroom have been huge challenges for many teachers. The tenets of the NCLB forces schools to re-examine subgroups or populations of children (those in low-income housing, and special needs students, many of whom are minority students). These are students who have for many years been deemed unteachable and have been allowed to fall between the educational cracks within schools (Lee, 2003).

Understanding the importance of student resiliency is valuable, but it is perhaps more important to understand how resiliency among teachers and educators provides more resiliency for academic achievement--especially for African American males. Teachers and other staff members must engage in meaningful interactions with one another while taking part in the creation of a meaningful vision and mission statement for their school according to Henderson and Milstein (2003). Becoming more active participants in the learning process of their students, establishing clear expectations, and providing consistent feedback on student progression are components of teachers' becoming able to meet expectations of success. Henderson and Milstein also noted when teachers are allowed to work together and collaborate, an emphasis on cooperation develops. In addition to the development of necessary interpersonal skills, this creates a positive culture, fostering the cultivation of effective organizational skills that are necessary for effective teaching.

Although teachers' working together collaboratively are advantageous for all schools, the benefits are perhaps more advantageous for rural schools, that have a relatively small number of teachers (Hickey & Harris, 2005). This small number of teachers promotes the development of teacher leaders, which is instrumental in developing resiliency within African American males. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) define teacher leaders as teachers who lead within and beyond the classroom. They identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice. An important dimension of the teacher leadership role is forging close relationships with individual teachers through which mutual learning takes place. The development of positive relationships is an integral factor in developing teacher and student resiliency.

According to Prince (2000), the task of closing the achievement gap between rich and poor minority students is the most complex task for school leaders. Unfortunately, rural educators, forced to attempt to close the achievement gap, have limited resources. Rural governments' smaller tax bases and lower property values typically equate to rural students not receiving the quality education needed to compete nationally or globally (Khattry, Riley, & Kane, 1997). A significant percentage of students attend schools within rural settings. Many of these schools are deemed non-proficient, due to the lack of facilities, physical plants, course offerings, educational programs, and also major problems in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers (Lee, 2003). Recruiting high quality teachers and providing high-quality professional development to support teachers working in rural settings present challenges for rural schools. These challenges often are insurmountable, and thus they become barriers that must be addressed, as stipulated by the NCLB Act (Holloway, 2002).

Resiliency

The process of resiliency refers to a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the contest of significant adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). The term "resilience" emerged from early writings about the risks of the "invulnerable." The invulnerable was the study of those who succeeded despite multiple negative risks (Anthony, 1974). The term invulnerable was deemed misleading due to the implications of the invasion of risks both absolute and unchanging. With the evolution of research, it became evident that positive adaptation instead of the exposure to adversity should be included in the developmental processes in a way that includes new vulnerabilities and strengths that may emerge with life changing circumstances (Masten & Garmezy, 1985). The term "resilient" was deemed a more

accurate description of the concept or process of success, despite multiple negative risks, replacing the term “invulnerable” (Luthar Cicchetti & Becker, 2000).

Within recent studies, the focus of research has begun to shift away from identifying and studying the risk variable to that of risk and protective mechanisms and the process of “negotiating risk situations” (Rutter, 1990). Rather than examining how these factors are developed in the resiliency process, researchers are increasingly striving to understand how a child’s family and environmental factors are involved as positive contributors and outcomes (Luthar et al., 2000).

Risk and Resilience

Risk. For many years, risk and resiliency have been conceptualized as opposite poles “of individual differences in people’s response to stress and adversity” (Rutter, 1987, p. 316), with risk representing the negative pole and resiliency the positive pole. Both concepts are strongly related by their implication for a prevention and intervention program (Doll & Lyon, 1998). Children become identified as a risk due to environmental and biological factors (Honig, 1984). Rutter (1985) argues that the study of the risk phenomena has progressed through three iterations. The first iteration encompasses studies that are concerned with demonstrating the negative life experiences that were potentially involved in the development of mental health problems (Doll & Lyon, 1998).

The second iteration of risk studies examines how various types of risk relate to different types of outcomes. Many of these studies examine single risk factors or when multiple factors were examined-treated as independent variables. The third iteration of risk studies commonly overlaps with the second iteration studies. The premise of these studies focus on the fact that even with the most severe stressors and the most glaring adversities, it is unusual for more than half of children to succumb (Rutter, 1985). The observation of these studies causes researchers to ask “Why do some individuals persevere in the face of adversity, with few if any detrimental effects in their psychosocial functioning? While investigating the impact of multiple risk and protective factors, singly and in combination, these iteration studies continue to expand upon significant indices of child and adult adjustment, for more than two decades, (Doll & Lyon, 1998).

Resilience. Resilience refers to a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Luthar et al., 2000). It is common due to its arising from the normative functions of human adaptational systems, with the greatest threats to human development being those that compromise these protective systems (Masten, 2001, p. 227). Within the resiliency process are two critical conditions: (a) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity; and (b) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the developmental process (Luthar & Zigler, 1991).

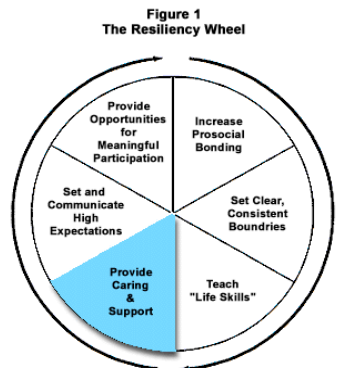
The process in itself is an inferential and contextual construct that requires two types of judgment (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). The first judgment addresses the inference of threat. Individuals are not considered resilient if there has not been a threat to their development. Past hazards are judged on their potential to cause disruption or the derailment of the developmental process (Masten, 2001). With the second judgment, the quality of adaptation or the developmental outcome is assessed as “good” or “OK.” This evaluation scale has not been without controversy. Debates exist about what standards and by whom resilience should be measured (Luthar et al, 2000).

Resiliency is conceived not as a childhood-given, but as a capacity that develops over time in the context of person- environmental interactions (Egeland, Carlson, & Stroufe, 1993). Once resilience is viewed from a transactional process, the developmental outcomes are determined by the interaction of genetic, biological, psychological, and sociological factors in the context of environmental support (Cicchetti & Schneider-Rosen, 1986). Viewed in this manner, environmental factors serve as vulnerability, protective, or risk variables, which may directly or indirectly influence behaviors. The developmental process is then characterized by a hierarchical integration or behavioral systems. Active participants begin to bring new attitudes, experiences and expectations that have been derived from previous interactions that have been influenced in such a way that environmental stimuli and cues are interpreted then organized (Egeland et al.).

Wolin (1993) has identified seven internal characteristics or resiliencies that both resilient children and adults possess. These resiliencies are: initiative, independence, insight, relationship, humor, creativity, and morality. The development of these resiliencies typically varies by age. Initiative is observed when the child takes an active interest in exploring the surroundings or environment. Independence is observed when children are able to remove themselves or separate themselves from unpleasant situations; insight is observed as the ability to sense that something is wrong with a situation. Attempting to connect to others around is considered relationship resiliency. Playing is modeled as humor and creativity in resilient children. The ability to judge right from wrong is an identifier of a child’s morality. Wolinhen noted that when a child possesses any one of these resiliencies, his ability to deal with and handle dismal situations and “bounce back” is greatly increased.

HENDRSON AND MILSTEIN’S RESILIENCY WHEEL

Henderson and Milstein (2003) developed the Resiliency Wheel, comprised of six divisions or themes for the development of a six-step strategy for fostering resiliency. The left side of the wheel (Build Resiliency in the Environment) shows the conditions that are typically present in the lives of individual who are able to bounce back from adversity. The right side of the wheel, Mitigating Risk Factors in the Environment, offers three main strategies for mitigating the impact of risk in the lives of children and youth, in effect moving them toward resiliency (Hawkins & Catalano, 1990). This research focused on the left side quadrants of Henderson and Milstein’s Resiliency Wheel.



Adapted from the book *Resiliency in Schools: Making It Happen for Students and Educators* by Nan Henderson and Mike Milstein, published by Corvin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA (1996)

METHODOLOGY

Creswell's (2003) descriptive case study approach was utilized because "it explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals." (p.15). Designed as a descriptive case study, this research sought to extract the teacher's viewpoints about practices within their classes that may or may not have promoted resiliency in the African American male students in their classes.

Observations and Small Group Interviews

Observations: On three separate occasions, the researcher observed student's interactions between each African American male student and his classroom teacher to determine if the divisions: provided caring and support, set and communicates high expectations and provides opportunities for meaningful participation could be readily viewed during normal interactions between student and their teachers.

Specific behaviors such as the ease of students asking for assistance or additional instructions were noted, in addition to, teacher's reaction when incorrect responses were offered by the male students was also observed. Actual relationships between students and their teachers were observed, specifically focusing on interactions, gestures, were noted and addressed. Teachers were commonly observed to give hugs to their students, consistently use encouraging words or praise and often provided motivation for students to continue to participate in classroom activities.

Small group interviews (Teachers): Teachers were asked a total of twelve questions extrapolated from three of the six divisions of the Resiliency Wheel, in order to ascertain what strategies to promote academic success and to promote resiliency employed by the teachers in their classroom. The three divisions used were: providing care and support, setting and communicating high expectations, and providing opportunities for meaningful participation. Upon the completion of each interview, coding of the interview took place to determine common themes or practices as to how he or she promoted resiliency in African American males in their classes.

DIVISIONS' THEMES RESULTS

Caring and Support Theme

Teacher interviews focused on the three themes: (providing caring and support, setting and communicating high expectations, and providing opportunities for meaningful participation extrapolated from Henderson and Milstein's *2004 Resiliency Wheel*. The interview questions promoted an examination of the interactions between African American male students and their teachers. The following themes were extracted from the teacher interviews:

- Students know teachers care
- The classroom environment is free from ridicule if mistakes are made
- The teachers play multiple roles to student

Students Know Teachers Care

Care and support involved providing unconditional positive regard and feedback, as these are most important when attempting to establish resiliency. This division alone was most important to resiliency in that without the presence of a caring individual, it is difficult to overcome life's adversities (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Werner (1984) stated that the bond with a caring individual is most important, if it is established during the first year of life, with active engagement continuing during middle, childhood, and adolescence. Bernard (1991) stated that a caring and supportive relationship with at least one person greatly reduces the negative factors in an adolescent's life.

One teacher said "My students know I care because I am constantly giving second chances to my students even though I know they did not deserve them. The second chance always gives them another chance to be successful and increase their self-confidence." An 8th grade teacher said, "If it is discipline, the second chance gives the student the opportunity to rectify their inappropriate behaviors prior to the punishment being implemented." Another teacher stated, "Second chances in my room go far beyond discipline." A 6th grade teacher said, "Students have second chances with homework assignments, classroom tests and just about anything I assign. I want my students to have every chance to be successful. That's what my second chances are about." Another teacher believed second chances with assignments in her class kept students motivated to participate although they had done poorly on an assignment.

Another teacher said, "I don't want their spirits broken over a particular score." Still, "Another teacher spoke of how she allowed one student to complete a homework assignment for a second time. The student had difficulties completing a homework assignment once he got home. He had gotten assistance from his father on how to complete a math assignment. But when the assignment was turned in and graded, the student received a failing grade. The student told his teacher he didn't understand the assignment once he got home and had asked his father for assistance. The student said, "I did my homework like my dad said." The father helped his son, but the information provided to his son was incorrect, resulting in a failing grade. The classroom teacher re-explained the material, to the student and said she didn't have the heart to not let the students complete the assignment, but she had him do it in class, so that if he had questions, she could offer assistance. This same teacher spoke of how she knew which of her students would have parental support at home for homework assignments. For those students who don't have help at home with assignments, this teacher and many others offered students homework time in class to complete assignments. In that way students could ask the teacher questions about their assignments and would be able to make good grades on their assignments.

When asked about the establishment and development of positive relationships, all the teachers emphasized the importance of establishing relationships with their students within the first two-four weeks of school. Many teachers stated the school year was so short that they could not afford to not establish positive bonds with their students early within the year. One teacher recalled how she had had a difficult time "breaking through" to one of her students. "He would do his work, but he acted as if he hated me," said the teacher. The teacher continued trying to bond with the student and continually told him she loved him. By January, the teacher and student had developed one of the strongest bonds in the class.

Ridicule Free Classroom

Many of Success Academy's teachers felt it is their responsibility to create an environment in which students are encouraged to respond to questions, even if their response is incorrect. One teacher stated "I give praise even for incorrect answers. For many students, it takes courage to raise their hands and attempt to answer. If I 'shoot them down' for a wrong answer, they might never respond again. That's not what I want." She went on, "Students feeling safe to respond and being free from ridicule from other students and even ridicule from the teacher helps promote a positive environment for students." Another teacher said "We learn as a group and we love one another in this class. That's why laughing at others and 'picking' when someone gives the wrong answer or doesn't know how to solve the problem is not allowed." The expression "Students need to feel free to make mistakes or know that it's ok to mess up as long as you learn from your mistakes," was a common theme observed in all of Success Academy's classrooms.

An 8th grade teacher said "Children can handle having wrong responses and needing help getting to the correct answer; it's how the positive criticism is offered that makes the difference if they continue to respond or not." Several of the teachers interviewed told their students "It's ok to make mistakes. We all make mistakes and school is for learning; you learn from your mistakes." Many classes were filled with laughter and highly engaged students. Wrong answers were affirmed with "You almost got it, try it again," or "Good start; who can help with this problem?"

Teachers Play Multiple Roles

Understanding that in order for students to be successful in school, teachers must address the needs of the whole child and not only their academic needs. Many students look to their teachers as being the absent parent, a friend or even a counselor. One teacher acknowledged, "Sometimes, I am a mom, counselor, dad, friend, sister or brother all throughout the day to different students." One teacher emphasized, "I don't know how to teach without caring for the entire student. I realize that with some students, I am the only adult that they feel really cares for them. If they can't count on me, then who can they count on?" Many teachers said, "I treat each of these students as if they were my own children. I am their mom away from home." Several teachers spoke of the importance of students knowing that "I am your teacher, but also, I am your friend and I care about you."

SET AND COMMUNICATE HIGH EXPECTATIONS THEMES

Setting and communicating high, yet realistic expectations are crucial in the development of resiliency. Bernard (1991) concluded that in order for resiliency to be developed, consistently clear, high expectations communicated to the child must be coupled with ample opportunities to participate in and contribute meaningfully to the child's social environment. Existing research has generally agreed that many children are not achieving at an appropriate level due to low educational expectations. The following themes were extracted from teacher interviews:

- Know your students and expect them to be successful

- Build student self-confidence by giving children tasks they are successful with

Know and Expect Your Students to Be Successful

Teachers commonly stated “Knowing your students include knowing them personally, knowing their abilities and their needs, because this helps a teacher to understand a student’s learning style and how materials should be differentiated.” A veteran teacher said, “I know many of my student’s parents, because I also taught them. This is itself gives me a personal bond with my students.” Typically, students experience the same difficulties their parents experience. One teacher pointed out that by knowing her students and where they are academically, it assisted her in planning her lessons and instruction for the class. Commonly, many teachers stated they began each lesson as if no one in the class has had prior knowledge on the subject. Many teachers commonly tell their students “You can do anything if you try and they know I expect them to try.”

One teacher commented that with many African American students, males especially, they need to know they are expected to be successful and sometimes, teachers must provide the motivation for them to be successful. “We can’t and don’t accept excuses for students not learning, and we have high expectations for all our students here at Success Academy,” was emphasized by a 6th grade teacher. A 7th grade teacher said that her students “know what I expect and they know what I will or will not accept as quality work. That expectation is stated within the first few days of school. Once the expectation is established and continuously stated and I stand behind my expectations, students soon follow the guidelines.” During the classroom observations, teachers typically circulated in their classrooms, giving students multiple chances to participate, while some individual instruction was conducted with the teacher’s assistant (for those classes who utilized teacher’s assistant) and “one-on-one” instruction with the teacher and group work for those without assistants.

Teachers believed that all students had positive attributes; the key was identifying them and integrating them in daily classroom instruction. One teacher said she looks for the strengths her students possess then incorporates those strengths into classroom instruction. “Once students are involved and engaged, then they can go beyond and excel, using their particular skills. I push my students to go far beyond the set goals,” said a 7th grade teacher. These are the steps many of Success Academy’s teachers utilized to get students interested in school and their success. Many teachers spoke of pushing their students to go beyond the level of expectation. One teacher spoke of an African American student in her class who did not have any expectations from his parents or anyone in his family. Many of his family members had been unsuccessful in school and many had not completed high school. The teacher took time with the student, explained the work, gave him multiple opportunities to demonstrate his skills and let him know that she expected him to do well in her class. At the end of the year, this student with little support from family members had the highest average in her class. She told the student she knew he could do well in her class, she expected him to do well, and then provided him with the support to be successful and he ended up being successful.

With the expectation of success, teachers must go “the extra mile” to help their students meet the level of expectation. One teacher said she includes the students in her plan-making for the lessons to be covered with her class. That way they know what’s coming up and they can prepare. “I teach my students to prepare in advance. Preparation is the key to

many things in life.” Several teachers spoke of telling their students the importance of school and graduating from high school and going on to college. Many teachers said they often discussed how skills addressed in class can be beneficial to students once they graduate from school. Many teachers spoke of making skills applicable to real-life situations. “My students become more interested in learning once they know how things fit into real-life situations. I use the occupations my students have told me they want to do after finishing school as scenarios for problems in my math class. This puts a more realistic perspective on the skills for students. Many of them don’t mind learning difficult math problems and equations once they know how it is used outside of class.” The teacher continued, “This works for me because my students have learned the skills, and my math objectives and skills have been met. This ends up being a win-win situation for all involved.”

Build Student Self-Confidence

Many teachers spoke of how sensitive some African American students are in their classes. An upper grade teacher stated,

That young man is the largest student in my class and is probably the most sensitive. He participates and when he does, I make sure he knows how grateful I am for contributing in my class. This particular student enjoys music. So I make sure he is praised and can share with the class via music when appropriate.

Many of the teachers spoke of the same themes for providing praise to increase self-confidence. One teacher said, “Praising a student is the best method of building a student’s self-confidence. Others stated, “Nothing else boosts a child’s self-confidence other than offering praise for their accomplishments and providing them opportunities to participate in classroom activities.” A 7th grade teacher acknowledged, “Some students might require more praise than others, but regardless of which student, you’re talking about, praise would help build self-confidence.

PROVIDING MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION

Bernard (1991), states that the opportunity for meaningful participation is one of the key protective factors found in families, schools, and communities of resilient children. The following themes were extracted from teacher and student interviews:

- Expecting all students to participate is a must
- Using various instructional strategies helps struggling students experience success

Participating Is a Must

Many teachers at Success Academy believed it is important for students to participate in class, and that participation not only made students feel part of the class, but also was a method of informal assessment for many teachers. One teacher stated, “Being a cheerleader for my students, expecting them to participate, but making sure they have the opportunities to participate are my responsibilities as a teacher.” Being the cheerleader promotes positive

criticism for students, even if their responses are incorrect. When students are corrected in non-antagonistic manners, the chances of a student feeling ridiculed is significantly reduced and students continue to want to participate in class. One upper grade teacher stated, "It is my job to challenge students and make them think. So, I don't ask too many simple questions. I want them to become critical thinkers and to develop skills that allow them to analyze situations, make predictions and make intelligent choices. When they get into high school, this will be an expectation. She added,

I encourage my students to think of multiple ways to solve problems. Many students enjoy finding different ways to solve a problem. I tell them there is no one way that is more correct. As long as they can explain how they got the answer to their problem, then it's ok with me. I just want them to think and be open to different methods for arriving at the same answer.

"Even shy students need the opportunity to participate, said one teacher. "I don't allow students to withdraw from the conversations or dialogues in class. Everyone has something meaningful they can contribute." This is something teachers must instill in each student in their classes. "I spend the first couple months of school making sure students understand they are valued in my class. Many students need this form of validation," said a lower grade teacher.

Use of Various Instructional Strategies

All Success Academy teachers seemed to understand the importance of using various instructional strategies to promote academic success for their students. "One teacher said she believed that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) forced teachers to look at minority subgroups and design instruction to assist those students in meeting academic standards. A common statement from many teachers was that with any of their students, skills had to be introduced more than once or twice, sometimes as many as four or five times, in order for students to learn a particular skill. An upper grade teacher said, "Centers are instructional strategies that many of my students enjoy. Centers provide small group instruction and at times, collaborative learning, in order for students to learn specific skills. A good teacher understands and utilizes various instructional strategies in order for students to learn skills."

The most common instructional strategy for lower and upper grade teachers was one-on-one instruction with the teacher. "I can see for myself what my students do and don't know," stated a lower grade teacher. "Some students just require the additional time with the teacher to make sure they have a firm grasp on the skills," acknowledged an upper grade teacher. "One-on-one with the teacher allows for a much slower pace of instruction rather than instruction with the entire class," suggested a lower grade teacher. She added, "I attempt to make sure that each student gets some time with me one-on-one when I introduce a new concept or skill."

It was evident that the resiliency-building factors- caring and support, setting and communicating high expectations and opportunities for meaningful opportunities had had an impact on the African American males attending Success Academy. Each of the resiliency-building factors were easily identified and well represented during classroom observations and

during the teacher interviews. However, the protective factor, the inclusion of caring and supportive adults was significantly more prevalent.

Also evident was teachers, in their role as caring and supportive adults, were the driving force behind the African American male students experiencing academic success and being identified as resilient students.

DISCUSSION

Previously conducted literature reviews stated that the resiliency-building protective factors (i.e., caring and support, setting and communicating high expectations, and providing opportunities for meaningful participation) were significant in establishing resiliency among students, but especially among African American males. A significant factor was the educational environment of the African American males had already been identified as a resiliency-building school for its teachers (Malloy & Allen, 2004). The significance of this identification was that Henderson and Milstein (2003) previously stated that in order for educators to promote resiliency among their students, educators themselves, had to be resilient.

Developing teacher leaders was a significant factor in identifying Success Academy as an effective school. Sammons et.al (2005) identified effective schools as those which have achieved a high level of consistency and coherence in values. These traits were evident during classroom observations and were ongoing themes noted in the teacher focus groups at Success Academy. Frost and Durrant (2002b) ascertained that teacher agency, or ensuring that teachers have a scope for making a difference in their professional lives fosters high teacher morale and retention rates. Both rates, high morale and retention, were apparent Success Academy.

It was evident that the resiliency-building factors—caring and support, setting and communicating high expectations and opportunities for meaningful opportunities had had an impact on the African American males attending Success Academy. Each of the resiliency-building factors were easily identified and well represented during the classroom observations and during teacher interviews. However, the protective factor, the inclusion of caring and supportive adults, was significantly more prevalent. The conversations with teachers led the researcher to believe that this protective factor alone was the *most* significant of the factors.

It is evident that the Success Academy teachers, in their role as caring and supportive adults, were the driving force behind the success of many of the programs and activities that occurred at Success Academy. It is also evident that this caring and supportive adult role of the teachers was most important for their African American male students. The success achieved by African American male students observed in the current study can be attributed to their experiencing academic success and being identified as resilient students.

The study of resiliency has begun to discontinue studying the site of risk and is beginning to focus on the factors that enable those students considered at-risk to “beat the odds” and still achieve academic success or classroom success. A common question is "Why have these students experienced success despite the identified academic gap among their counterparts?" For many years, risk and resiliency have been conceptualized as opposite poles “of individual differences in people’s response to stress and adversity” (Rutter, 1987, p.316), with risk representing the negative pole and resiliency the positive pole. Both concepts have been strongly related by their implication for a prevention and intervention

program (Doll & Lyon, 1998). Children, especially African American males, became identified as at risk due to environmental and biological factors (Honing, 1984). Recent research has begun to focus on alterable student behaviors and school-level features that are related to academic resilience as providing the additional benefit of identifying potential changes in policies and practices and promoting academic resiliency among more children placed at-risk (Borman & Rachuba, 2001).

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

The results generated from this research investigation will be useful for teachers and administrators when working with African American males. An initial implication understands that African American students can experience academic success if they are expected to be successful. Showing them they can be successful means including activities to build their self-esteem, having and articulating high expectations, coupled with using various forms of praise, and providing multiple opportunities for students to be successful are imperative in the establishment of resiliency.

Consequential in student success is the development of teacher leadership. The utilization of the diverse skills and abilities of classroom teachers provides an origin of limitless resources and intellectual capital, while also allowing the engagement of teachers' hearts and minds, resulting in genuine development for teaching and learning. Like resiliency development in African American males, possibly the most important dimension of the teacher leadership role, is forging close relationships with individual teachers through which mutual learning takes place.

An understanding of the purpose and the use of differentiation of instruction (e.g., cooperative group activities, whole group instruction, and one-on-one instruction) are well received strategies to promote academic success for African American males. Adopting the philosophy "All students can learn, just not at the same rate," is an important initial step in improving academic success for students.

Lastly, the most resounding implication emerging from the current study has been the absolute need for teachers' knowing their students and establishing a relationship with them; this has been a common theme throughout this research. Teachers indicated that most importantly, they must communicate to their students an atmosphere of caring. Teachers must know their students' abilities, learning styles, and must develop, through their strong relationships, students' confidence in their teachers. Students' must believe that their teachers have developed strategies designed to accommodate their individual abilities. Self-reflection for teachers involved knowing when strategies were and were not working. Teachers should be willing to reflect on their instructional practices and modify them as needed.

CONCLUSION

It is important to note how the resiliency-building divisions impacted the development of resiliency among African American males at Success Academy. First each division played a significant role in the development of resiliency among Success Academy's males. However, the most resoundingly effective division was the caring and supportive adult. Its importance was due to without the presence of a caring individual, it is difficult to overcome life's adversities (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Secondly, high expectations were set and

communicated to Success Academy's students. Teachers and administrators worked diligently to make sure students understood the expectations, while also working with them to achieve the expectations. Having high expectations fostered an increased sense of self-confidence and self-esteem towards academics. The finding of this research indicates that teachers in a resiliency-building school can promote resiliency within African American males.

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Educational Leaders for Social Justice Enact Critical Pedagogy

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This study continues the examination of social justice pedagogy in a doctoral program for scholar-practitioners (Collay, Lee & Winkelman, 2011; Collay & Lopez, 2009). The body of research evaluating the role and usefulness of education doctorates continues to expand (Anderson & Herr, 1999; Auerback, 2011; Goldring, D. & Schuermann, P., 2009; Levine, 2005) as program designers strive to develop pedagogy that supports scholar-practitioners leading transformation in schools. In this paper, we describe the infusion of critical social theory into the pedagogy of a doctoral program claiming to support educators to “lead for social justice.” We ask: what is the evidence that critical social theory influenced the applied research of scholar-practitioners leading for social justice? We begin with a brief review of the literature informing our theoretical foundations. We then outline how the program’s curricular design is infused with critical pedagogy. This leads to a description of our methodology and an examination of the critical pedagogy elements as evidenced in year one ‘residency inquiries.’ We conclude with a reflection on what we learn from and with our scholar-practitioner doctoral students.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Critical pedagogy (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009; Giroux, 1988; Gordon, 1995; McLaren, 2002) integrates critical social theory throughout instruction focused on disrupting hegemonic schooling practices. Critical theoretical discourse is utilized to examine cases of youth activism and democratic engagement (Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006). The praxis of the critical pedagogy is observed as youth participatory action research (YPAR) “provides young people with opportunities to study social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems” (Cammarota, & Fine, 2008, p. 2). In his presentation of the Social Justice Education Project, Cammarota (2009) describes the theoretical underpinnings, the curriculum, and the evidence of increased academic performance and attainment in students who participated. Critical pedagogy allows learners to study leading from democratic values and toward social justice and equity. In this study, graduate students use knowledge gained to take action on behalf of those historically

marginalized by mainstream society. Cammarota offers the following language:

The educational context for the problem-posing approach is what many describe as “critical pedagogy” A key aspect of critical pedagogy includes diversifying or decentralizing the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge while fostering participatory, collaborative leadership among teachers and students. Another vital element is to encourage the attainment of a critical consciousness capable of questioning or dissenting from oppressive orthodoxies. Dominant, and in many cases, institutionally sanctioned beliefs, whether they be political, social, or cultural, often suppress human agency, thereby limiting one’s ability for self-determination. (p. 64)

CURRICULUM DESIGN

The education doctorate implemented in the California State University (CSU) system in 2007 is approaching its fifth year and has three years of graduates from 12 CSUs. The program at this regional campus focuses on “Educational Leadership for Social Justice,” and recruits school, district, and agency leaders who embrace the program’s philosophy. Our initial studies focused on the program’s design, the content of the program, and the research foci of the first cohort. We focus here on infusing critical social theory into the pedagogy: its elements, the evidence of application in residency work, and ultimately, the outcomes for K-12 students.

Critical Pedagogy Elements

As we teach about the importance of critical social theory in guiding educational leaders for social justice (ELSJ), we are compelled to implement key elements of critical pedagogy in our curriculum design. Cammarota (2011) noted, “A key aspect of critical pedagogy includes diversifying or decentralizing the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge while fostering participatory, collaborative leadership among teachers and students” (p. 64). Coursework is designed with explicit attention to “decentralizing knowledge” and “attainment of critical consciousness” through systematic, applied inquiry about concerns in urban schools.

- Participants are charged to actively address concerns of social justice and equity in their districts and agencies
- Courses are structured to include several short, applied inquiries focused on concerns of social justice and equity
- Research methodologies are chosen for their potential to engage stakeholders
- Readings taken from critical social theory are central in the curriculum, rather than add-ons to the “canon” of mainstream leadership and school reform literature

The “Residency” course sequence was developed as the initial applied inquiry activity and placed mid-way through Year One of the program. Because cohort members are full time school administrators and teachers, the residency is not “in situ,” but an arrangement made by the ELSJ faculty with a mentor, colleague, or a sponsor from their own work setting or outside of it. The Residency provides the ELSJ with an opportunity to learn about a specific professional role and to develop applied inquiry skills.

The residency proposal required ELSJs to propose a research question for the two-term residency. From their roles as urban educational leaders, they chose a current social justice concern; a setting that allowed them to study beyond their own workplace; and a question narrow enough in scope that some data or information could be sought and collected. The assignment assumes ELSJs will interview their sponsors or members of the organization they are studying and consider existing documentation, but does not assume a formal research proposal with IRB level reviews and permissions (Collay & Lopez, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

The first cohort of ten ELSJs submitted a proposal and a final report about their residency. Each report contained the following sections: Background information, research question posed, relationship of the question to a social justice concern, methodology, research cited, and reflections. The tenets of critical pedagogy described by Cammarota (2011) were used to analyze the reports and determine whether and to what degree ELSJs’ actions could be linked to the program pedagogy. Because our research question focused on evidence of the influence of critical social theory on applied research, we sought specific language that reflected “attainment of critical consciousness” and evidence of that attainment via their characterization of inequity at their sites.

The following table documents the research question posed and the social justice focus articulated by each ELSJ. Residency reports were analyzed for evidence of ELSJs’ attainment of critical consciousness, the ways ELSJs sought to decentralize knowledge, and ways they engaged their stakeholders. The analysis used Cammarota’s elements of critical pedagogy to examine the ways ELSJs enacted their values as leaders, researchers, and advocates, and the alignment of those values with critical pedagogy. The chart is organized by first, presenting ELSJs’ residency inquiry questions. Columns 2 and 3 reflect researchers’ interpretations of ELSJs’ understanding of critical social theory based on residency reports. Column 4 provides excerpts of ELSJs’ reflections on the application of critical social theory to problems of practice.

Year One Residency Inquiries Critical Pedagogy Elements

ELSJ Research ers	ELSJ Problems posed (Residency Questions)	Approaches to Decentralizing Knowledge	Examples of Attaining Critical Consciousness	ELSJ students’ descriptions of Social Justice work
A	How do four urban superintendents define, create, and sustain equitable schools in their districts and what successes and challenges have they encountered as they implement their vision?	Decentralizing knowledge to include superintendents’ beliefs and values and engaging leaders through one to one interviews	Attaining critical consciousness about leaders striving to enact equity agendas	Equity is defined differently by different superintendents. Top down procedures don’t effect change. Social justice and equity are different.
B	Why is there disparity in discipline of African American and Hispanic students in our schools? Need to define the ways in which vice- principals’ beliefs and core values	Decentralizing knowledge by taking data directly to vice-principals and engaging v.p.’s in dialogue about inequitable treatment	Attaining critical consciousness concerning inequitable discipline practices for students of color	This study brought to light inequity in the discipline of African American and Hispanic students in our schools. After interviews many vice-principals were surprised at the suspension

	influence how they discipline minority students.	of students		and expulsion data especially at schools where the majority of students are African American and Hispanic.
C	How often are students suspended for “inappropriate” behavior? How often are students suspended for behaviors or comments that the teacher finds morally offensive?	Decentralizing knowledge by informing students and families about rights and inviting leaders to examine policies and families’ legal rights and choices	Attaining critical consciousness concerning the systemic instructional exclusion of students of color via suspension	Any [referred] student that is accused of and charged with violating education code has a permanent mark against their record & Ed code does not require teachers to provide homework for suspended students.
D	What are the determining factors behind the decisions to retain these students? Without a clear and defined retention policy, how were these decisions made? Who was making these decisions and what systems were in place to assist these students before the retention conversation began?	Decentralizing knowledge to include teachers, parents in decisions and engaged teachers in data review, analyzing patterns of retention relative to race, language and socio-economic status	Attaining critical consciousness concerning the grade level retention of students of color	Negative outcomes caused by retention are clearly documented, yet grade level retention is still widely used and accepted in schools across the country.
E	What initial steps have been taken to implement equity walk through observations in middle schools and what has been accomplished so far and what challenges remain?	Decentralizing knowledge to include students’ school experiences and engaging teachers through dialogue about culturally responsive pedagogy	Attaining critical consciousness through raising teachers’ skills to teach students of color more effectively	Supporting teachers to develop strategies and approaches that engage all students to make pedagogy a central area of investigation (Ladson–Billings 1995). School leaders must evaluate the correlation between use of equity checklists and what actually happens in the classrooms.
F	What factors/ characteristics emerge from the data that suggest reasons that students “voluntarily” leave comprehensive high schools and enroll in alternative programs?	Decentralizing knowledge to include student voice and engaging school leaders through interviews, data review and critique	Attaining critical consciousness concerning the experiences of students in alternative educational settings	Studied females’ referral to continuation school. The alternative school principal was interviewed about perceptions of “sending” high school practices and data about race, gender, and academic status of referred students was reviewed.
G	How will district leadership keep our students’ unacceptable failure rates and absolute need for increased achievement at the forefront of the mandate implementation process?	Decentralizing knowledge by bringing student, family, and site leader perspectives to DAIT team and engaging superintendent in dialogue about equity	Attaining critical consciousness about instructional programs provided to EL students	In this era of accountability, school leaders need to analyze whether this legislative oversight DAIT is making a difference for our students of color, our second language learners, and youth living in high poverty.

		implications of state mandate		
H	What conditions are required for a district to drastically interrupt and transform its discourse, beliefs and actions towards equity and achievement?	Decentralizing knowledge to include student voices and teachers to interrupt practices that reinforce inequitable policies and practices	Attaining critical consciousness concerning the need to disrupt hegemonic discourse and practices	The current dominant discourse in schools (how people talk about, think about and plan the work of schools and the questions that get asked regarding reform or change) is a hegemonic cultural discourse. This discourse maintains existing schooling practices and results.
I	Are school administrators facilitating the School Site Council (SSC) in ways that ensure equal access to information, equitable decision-making and fiscal spending alignment to improve achievement in three distinct schools?	Decentralizing knowledge held by a few SSC members and engaging school leaders in recognizing the ways decision-makers limit access to knowledge	Attaining critical consciousness concerning the role of principal leadership in creating access to under-represented students and families	The SSC is a powerful governing body that can be used to interrupt patterns of inequity or reproduce them. But this is dependent upon the knowledge based and facilitation skills of the principal.
J	What role will the DAIT (District Assistance Intervention Team) provider have in the reorganization of existing district structures as they introduce new systems of program monitoring, evaluation of curriculum, and instructional practices.	Decentralizing knowledge to include Latino parent leadership Latino Parents who engage as leaders to improve conditions for their children	Attaining critical consciousness concerning the need for greater school involvement by Latino parents	The leadership's reaction and response to state mandate will be critical to keep the best interest of ELLs in mind. Even more important is to identify which new systems will be supported leading to successful student outcomes.

Reflections of Critical Pedagogy in the Residency

Members of the first cohort of the program were established positional leaders in urban school districts. The relevance of their residency studies is evident in the problems they identified as worthy of further study and their stance as leaders for social justice. The critical pedagogy supported the development of a researchable problem, decentralizing knowledge, and attainment of critical consciousness. As emerging scholar-practitioners, they described their research and leadership actions through the lens of leading for social justice. Cammarota's description of critical pedagogy provides a framework to articulate the values that guide our pedagogy.

Decentralizing Acquisition and Dissemination of Knowledge

A key aspect of critical pedagogy includes diversifying or decentralizing the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge while fostering participatory, collaborative leadership among teachers and students. (Cammarota, 2011, p. 64)

ELSJ scholar-practitioners engaged members of their school and district communities (students, parents, teachers, and administrators) in the construction (or de-construction) of knowledge. In some cases the participants represent traditionally marginalized populations such as Latino parents and students in alternative schools. In other cases school “insiders” teachers, vice-principals, principals and district leaders are engaged in the inquiry to establish critical consciousness and create a deeper understanding of practices that effect students of color, students of poverty, and English Language Learners.

Challenging “dominant, institutionally sanctioned beliefs”

“Dominant, and in many cases, institutionally sanctioned beliefs, whether they be political, social, or cultural, often suppress human agency, thereby limiting one’s ability for self-determination.” (Cammarota, 2011, p. 64)

ELSJ scholar-practitioners explored concerns of students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders through examination of suspension, expulsion, student-based budgeting, retention, alternative schools, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), Equity-centered classrooms, service to English Language Learners (ELL), and Latino parent centers. Scholar-practitioners described situations in which dominant, and in many cases, institutionally sanctioned beliefs, whether they be political, social, or cultural, often suppressed human agency, thereby limiting options for self-determination.

Attainment of Critical Consciousness

“Another vital element is to encourage the attainment of a critical consciousness capable of questioning or dissenting from oppressive orthodoxies.” (Cammarota, 2011, p. 64)

ELSJ scholar-practitioners interrogated institutionally sanctioned beliefs on several levels. Left unexamined, such beliefs allow unquestioned practices to persist, resulting in inequitable outcomes for students. For example, students of color are over-represented in cases of retention, suspension, and expulsion. In conversations, vice principals recognized that teachers’ cultural “miscuing” often led to office referrals, but these administrators were unaware of their role in perpetuating exclusion from instruction by keeping students out of class. In the study of retention the absence of policy and research-based practices allowed teachers’ bias that “these students” need more time to prevail. Through their questioning of dominant orthodoxies ELSJ scholar-practitioners stirred the critical consciousness of others in their educational communities. These scholar-practitioners questioned the practices of school leaders that allowed or failed to disrupt inequitable opportunities for students and families.

Engaging Leaders in Examining Their Complicity in Sustaining “Oppressive Orthodoxies.”

“The goal of critical pedagogy is to provide students with the analytical tools to dissent from oppressive, and often widely accepted and thus hegemonic, schooling practices.” (Cammarota, 2011, p. 64)

ELSJ scholar-practitioners engaged district leaders, site leaders, and parent leader to re-examine assumptions about the treatment of their clients. Superintendents were asked to re-evaluate their beliefs about equity, principals were asked to re-evaluate retention, suspension, and “involuntary transfer” policies, and teachers were asked to re-evaluate their responsibilities to more fully educate students.

CONCLUSION

Educational Leadership for Social Justice (ELSJ) scholar practitioners posed questions about problems of equity to administrators providing education for historically marginalized populations. The stakeholders these Educational Leaders for Social Justice represented to higher-level leaders included elementary Latino students facing retention, black and brown secondary students facing transfer, suspension or removal, and urban families of color seeking access to educational services. As practitioners, doctoral students observed patterns of discrimination and exclusion, and as emergent critical pedagogues, applied critical social theory to more fully evaluate what they observed.

Reflecting the elements of the critical pedagogy, scholar practitioners engaged their inquiry within the residency by:

- Posing a problem of importance for historically marginalized populations
- Drawing from critical social theory to inform their analysis
- Decentralizing knowledge to improve outcomes for students

Critical pedagogy supported “critical inquiry” and participatory action research by scholar-practitioners enacting existing, yet newly refined, practice as leaders for social justice. Within coursework and through applied research, ELSJs enacted social justice values as leaders, advocates, and researchers. They participated in a critical pedagogy as graduate students, and as leaders they engaged their colleagues in the same cycle of problem-posing, decentralizing knowledge, attaining critical consciousness, and challenging dominant beliefs. Cammarota’s language provides a theoretical framework that portrays program elements as well as the leadership actions put forth by ELSJs. We believe this pedagogy offered a powerful convergence of program goals focused on social justice and equity, critical social theory, emphasis on participatory action research, and regular problem-posing in challenging urban school districts.

The actions taken by ELSJs in their residency settings, however, are the real critical pedagogy. They became the instructors, working tirelessly with colleagues and supervisors in their own districts and other agencies to illuminate inequities and patterns of exclusion. Whereas the critical pedagogy in the university classroom relied on a combination of readings, activities, problem posing and applied research to “teach” leadership for social justice, our students took the pedagogy into the field. They focused primarily on asking questions, showing data, and pointing out imbalances and inequitable policies within the system. As we continue our research by following up with our graduates on their observations of longer term changes, we will gain a greater understanding of the depth and breadth of our pedagogy and theirs.

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Your Decision, but My Future !!!

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The opportunity to take Algebra in the 8th grade is a mathematics equity and achievement issue. In 2000, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) released Principles and Standards for School Mathematics in which six guiding principles were created to support high-level student achievement in the schools. The first of these is the Equity Principle. According to NCTM, equity is defined as the ability to give “all students, regardless of their personal characteristics, background, or physical challenges, opportunities to study and support to learn mathematics” (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2000, p. 12). NCTM also suggests that equity involves “high expectations and strong support for all students” and “requires high expectations and worthwhile opportunities for all” (p. 12). Consequently, providing greater access to Algebra in the 8th grade is an important step toward reaching NCTM’s equity goals.

INTRODUCTION

Given the Nation’s need for more engineers, scientists, and mathematicians, it is critical that proper placement decisions be made throughout a student’s career. Moreover, gaining the proper placement in school mathematics is also an equity issue that should not go unresolved. Thus, our article will address key educational needs and concerns, and contribute to the conversation of mathematic achievement. The goal of this article is to shed light on the significant factors that determine 8th grade Academically Gifted Algebra enrollment. We will show course-taking patterns of students who qualify for Academically Gifted (AG) courses but are denied access. Furthermore, we examine factors that play a role in course-taking patterns in school mathematics.

When examining course-taken patterns for student enrollment in 8th grade Algebra and AG Algebra courses several questions come to mind that you would naturally want to explore, such as: How is course placement in 8th grade Algebra determined? Do students who have been designated as AG gain greater access than students who do not have that designation? We answer these questions and shed light on the student enrollment process.

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Sørensen's Framework for Organizational Differentiation of Students

Sørensen's Framework for Organizational Differentiation (Sorensen, 1969) of students is the division of a school's student-body into subgroups of a relatively permanent character for instructional purposes. Any educational setting where students are assigned to groups for instructional purposes has created an organizational differentiation. The focus of organizational differentiation is the structured learning environment that is created by administrators or administrative processes for instructional purposes.

Organizational differentiation is not classified by one particular form; rather, it can exist in numerous embodiments. These embodiments are often viewed as grouping structures such as age-grade groupings or ability groupings of students. Sørensen created four dimensions of differentiation to explore such forms: (a) vertical and horizontal differentiations, (b) inclusiveness, (c) assignment procedure, and (d) scope and rigidity.

Vertical differentiation is a dimension of organization differentiation that divides students into sub-groups. More specifically, it is a differentiation of a group to reduce the amount of variation in what they learn during a given period of time (Sørensen, 1969). Horizontal differentiation refers to how varied the curriculum is during the provided time for instruction. Vertical and horizontal differentiations are talked about in tandem because of the overlap that exists in these constructs.

Inclusiveness refers to the opportunities that a student has to be included in a course. Inclusiveness is defined as "the number of opportunities assumed to be available at different educational levels" (p. 9). An example of inclusiveness would be students gaining access to Algebra in the 8th grade. An LEA or a school district could be deemed inclusive or exclusive according to the opportunities available to students for course enrollment.

An assignment procedure is the process used to create a desired classroom composition. The assignment procedure dimension in Sørensen's Framework is the procedure for the placement of students into groups that determine the classroom composition relative to the composition of the cohort from which the class is drawn (p.10). An example of an assignment procedure would be selecting students from a class in a process that results in the classroom composition containing only low SES students. The assignment procedure uses two distinct criteria to make assignments: "electivity" and "selectivity." Electivity is the degree to which students' own decisions are allowed to be a determining factor in the assignment to groups (p.10). Selectivity is "the amount of homogeneity that educational authorities intend to produce by the assignment, in terms of the index of learning" (p.11).

Scope is a measure of how long a given group of students stay together as a cohort over a period of time, and rigidity refers to students' ability to transfer from one cohort to another. Scope and rigidity are often discussed together because they have an inverse relationship.

Scope is categorized as being high or low (Sørensen, 1969). For example, a group of students have high scope if they stay in the same cohort from 6th grade through 12th grade. Groups of students have low scope if members of the cohort are constantly changing.

Scope is an important construct because the characteristics of students that are assigned to that cohort may have actually influenced the achievement of the group. This influence may be positive or negative. Schools having groups of students with high scope are often seen in LEAs with relatively small populations because there are fewer combinations of students that can be created.

Rigidity (or mobility) is the “extent to which an individual student may transfer to another group other than the one originally assigned to” (p.13). Rigidity is also described as being high or low. An example of high rigidity is a group of students who have been members of the same cohort over a long period of time. An example of low rigidity is a group of students who move from general math to advanced math within the same school year. Schools frequently promote high rigidity among their students because they do not want students to frequently change tracks.

In this study we will focus on inclusiveness and assignment procedures.

METHODOLOGY

Our goal was to determine how students gain access to 8th grade Algebra. In this section we describe student data and how the student data was selected to be included in this article. The statistical methods used to analyze data are described.

Data Collection

We started our data collection by selecting a student cohort to follow as they matriculated through the selected LEA. Previous research (Stiff, Johnson, & Akos, 2011; Conger, Long, & Iatarola, 2009; Farkas, 2003; Stiff, Johnson, & Akos, 2011) indicated that 5th grade course placement has been a significant factor in student course placement in 8th grade. Therefore, we started with the 5th grade cohort (2005-2006) of the LEA and followed them until their 8th grade placement in 2008-2009.

We requested detail data files from the school district that included data from 2005-2009 school years. The data files contained 178 data records. The data files were reviewed and 86 student data files were removed because they were not complete records. For the remaining 92 (complete) data files, the researchers reorganized the data for use in this study. The data was transformed into a usable format from the raw data.

We collected 5th grade course predictions for 2005-2006, 6th grade course predictions for 2006-2007, and 7th grade course predictions for 2007-2008. In conjunction with collecting these data, we collected actual student placements in the: 6th grade (academic year 2006-2007), 7th grade (2007-2008), and 8th grade (2008-2009). Later in this chapter we describe how the course predictions were calculated for each student.

The data was stratified into two groups of students. We compared and contrasted the Academically Gifted populations versus the remaining populations. The stratification allowed us to determine if one group gains access at a higher rate than the other group for comparable academic performance.

Prediction Policy

The school district provided prediction formulas that gave estimates of students’ academic achievement levels at 8th grade based on the assumption that students had an average school experience. More specifically, the model used students’ achievement test scores from previous grades in conjunction with average test scores from across the state to make its predictions. The LEA indicated that these prediction scores formed the basis for assigning students to future courses. The school district had a policy that students are placed into

courses based on performance results according to prediction models. The models use previous test scores and current-year test scores to place students in a systematic way. Students were then assigned teachers based on the courses selected.

Data Analysis

Data files of all students (6th grade students in academic year 2006-2007) were examined to identify students who were predicted for placement in 8th grade Algebra. Once these students were identified, the researchers examined the data to determine if these students had gained actual course placement into 8th grade Algebra in school year 2008-09. For purposes of analysis, students were separated into two groups. Students were separated into advanced courses or “other maths”. Advanced courses were the highest or most challenging courses offered at a grade level; other maths were all other courses at that grade level. For example, other maths included general math and remedial math courses.

Chi-square distributions are used in this study to test hypotheses. A chi-square distribution is appropriate to use because we are interested in knowing if differences exist among the categorical variable distributions. More specifically, chi-square examines whether the frequency distribution of certain events observed in a sample are consistent with a particular theoretical distribution (Eck, 2011). The events in the sample must be mutually exclusive and have a total probability of 1. The events are usually in terms of categorical data or numerical data. Statistical significance occurs for p-values at $p < .05$.

Descriptive Statistics

The original population of 173 students was narrowed down to 92 students because of missing data entries of students who left the district. The population of students that participated in this study was diverse. The demographic analysis of the students in the study was 48.9% Black, 30.4% Hispanic, 15.2% White, and 5.4% Multiracial. The gender breakdown was 43.4% male and 56.5% female (see Table 1).

Table 1
Student Participation in the Study

Demographics	N = 92	%
Female	52	56.52%
Male	40	43.48%
Black	45	48.91%
Hispanic	28	30.43%
Multiracial	5	5.43%
White	14	15.21%

It has been observed Eley & Stiff (2012) that a significant difference between 6th grades students who were predicted to be in 8th grade Algebra and the actual number of students that were enrolled in 8th grade Algebra did exist. Specifically, of the students projected to be enrolled in 8th grade Algebra, only 27% of these students were actually enrolled in 8th grade

Algebra. Eley and Stiff also demonstrated that a significant difference existed between the number of 7th grade students who were not predicted to be enrolled in 8th grade Algebra and the actual number that were enrolled. Moreover, chi-square distributions indicated that among students predicted to be enrolled in 8th grade Algebra, only 12% of these students were actually enrolled.

It was found that all of the 6th grade, 7th grade, and 8th grade students designated as Academically Gifted gained access to advanced courses in 6th grade, Pre-Algebra in 7th grade, and Algebra in the 8th grade. Students in the 6th and 8th grades without the Academically Gifted designation did not gain access to either the advanced courses in 6th grade or Algebra in the 8th grade. However, some students in the 7th grade without the Academically Gifted designation did gain access to Pre-Algebra. Furthermore, chi-square distributions revealed that significant differences existed in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades for gaining access to high-level math between students designated as Academically Gifted and students designated as not being Academically Gifted. Results can be seen in Tables 2, 3, and 4. Note that Academically Gifted 7th grade students gained access at a 3.43 higher rate than students without the special designation; see Table 3.

Table 2
Advance Course Placement of 6th Grade Subjects (N = 92)

<i>Student Designation</i>	<i>Enrolled in 6th Grade Advanced Math</i>	<i>Enrolled in 6th Grade Other Maths</i>	<i>Relative Risk Value</i>	χ^2	<i>p-value</i>
Academically Gifted	11	0	###	92	p < .0001**
Not Academically Gifted	0	81			

*p-value < .05, **p-value < .001

Table 3
Advance Course Placement of 7th Grade Subjects (N = 92)

<i>Student Designation</i>	<i>Enrolled in Pre-Algebra</i>	<i>Enrolled in 7th Grade Other Maths</i>	<i>Relative Risk Value</i>	χ^2	<i>p-value</i>
Academically Gifted	13	0	3.43	18.58	p < .0001**
Not Academically Gifted	1	78			

*p-value < .05, **p-value < .001

Table 4
Advance Course Placement of 8th Grade Subjects (N = 92)

<i>Student Designation</i>	<i>Enrolled in 8th Grade Algebra</i>	<i>Enrolled in 8th Grade Other Maths</i>	<i>Relative Risk Value</i>	χ^2	<i>p-value</i>
Academically Gifted	11	0	###	92	p < .0001**
Not Academically Gifted	1	80			

p*-value < .05, *p*-value < .001

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine which 6th grade students designated as Academically Gifted or not gained access to 8th grade Algebra. Eley & Stiff (2012) showed that 6th and 7th grade students predicted to be placed into 8th grade Algebra did not gain access. This means that more than 60% of 6th grade students did not take 8th grade Algebra although they were predicted to be enrolled in the course.

Consistent with Kelly (2009), the results of this study indicate that Academically Gifted students rarely change groups over time; see Tables 2, 3, and 4. Hence, the school's placement behavior represents a system of high scope and low rigidity. Few students transfer from the lower track to the Academically Gifted track and fewer still transfer from the Academically Gifted track to the lower track.

The significance of students' placements into 8th grade Algebra is a critical component to students' overall success in mathematics because the research indicates that students who gain access do significantly better in high school and go to college at a higher rate (Bottoms & Cooney, 2008; Callahan, 2005; Kelly, 2007; Kelly, 2009; Stone, 1998; Schweiker-Marra & Pula, 2005). In the school district we studied, two situations affect students' course-taking patterns: qualified students are denied access to rigorous mathematics course and students with special designations nearly always gain access to the best courses. Clearly, the assignment procedures used to assign students to math courses was not based on a prediction model of previous academic performance as claimed by the LEA. Moreover, the criterion that was used for math placements were not articulated by the LEA.

In this study, students that had the Academically Gifted special designation nearly always gained access to 8th grade Algebra, a finding that is consistent with Kelly's (2007, 2009) work. This meant that students who had the Academically Gifted designation gained access even if their performance no longer warranted that designation. Although allowing students access to the rigorous math courses is a good thing, it does keep other deserving students out of these rigorous courses because of the LEA's limited resources.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Principals play a vital role in the class assignment procedures. They have the power and ability to make their courses inclusive to student that meets the objective criteria. The principals or administrative staff often set the objective criteria and therefore principals have a direct affect on students' enrollment into rigorous mathematics courses. The criteria for selecting students could include non-objective criteria such as teacher belief systems. Non-objective criteria such as teacher belief systems can harm deserving students. For example, a student may be classified as a behavior problem and as a result their academic achievement is overlooked. As a consequence, the student is denied access to the rigorous mathematics course.

Our work demonstrates the importance of principals monitoring the proper use of objective criteria while enrolling students into rigorous mathematics courses. According to Sørensen's (1969) framework, a clear assignment procedure promotes inclusiveness and balanced scope and rigidity. In turn course enrollment is achieved in a more equitable manner This will allow students to obtain the maximum benefit from course enrollment. Furthermore, Sørensen cautions us in the proper use of "selectivity" and "electivity" of students to create a composition of students in a course. Our research suggests that selectivity of students was utilized to make course enrollments decisions, therefore denying others qualified student the opportunity to enroll.

Principals have to be an advocate for policies that provide equal access to rigorous mathematics courses for all students who meet the criteria. It is the principal's decision to enforce enrollment polices and reject decisions based on non-objective criteria. It's your decision but our students' future.

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Preparing Future School Leaders to Ensure Racial, Ethnic, Linguistic, and Socio-Economic Equity in Education: The “Third Way”

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Preparing educational leadership to ensure equity in our schools has become a focus of principal preparation programs with some programs relying on a conventional approach, others using a critical approach, and some using a combination of approaches. Despite a focus on equity, students’ race and ethnicity continue to predict the educational attainment of students in our schools and their subsequent economic prosperity. As demographics in European countries and the United States change, the need to educate children of all racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds is no longer only of moral importance, it is of urgent economic significance. To ensure economic prosperity and equitable opportunity, leaders must believe in all students, and they must act accordingly so that every student thrives in our schools. Relying on conventional approaches has failed, and many believe that a pure reliance on critical theory is also failing (Gordon, 2012a; Gordon, 2012b). A theoretical model for a “third way” of preparing leaders for equity and social justice includes “awareness, care, critique, expertise, community, accountability, with relationships at the model’s center” (Gordon, 2012b, p. 3). In this paper, we apply Gordon’s theory (2012) to one strategy we use to prepare leaders to lead for equity and social justice, the Problem Based Learning (PBL) Project. This paper includes an overview of the PBL project, describes the impact of the PBL project on schools and districts, and draws conclusions about the effectiveness of the PBL Project for developing leadership to ensure equity in schools, as described by Gordon’s (2012b) model.

INTRODUCTION

As demographics in European countries and the United States change, the need to educate children of all racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds is no longer only of moral importance, it is of urgent economic significance. To ensure economic prosperity and equitable opportunity, school leaders must believe in all students, and they must act accordingly so that every student thrives in our schools. A direct relationship exists between increased poverty, unemployment, and lower educational attainment in both Europe and in the US (Elger, Kneip, & Theile, 2009; European Commission, 2011; US Department of Labor, 2013). To remedy inequities, many principal preparation institutions cling to what Gordon (2012a) calls “the conventional approach,” in which external control, technical rationality, and

maintenance of the status quo prevail. Other preparation programs rely exclusively on critical theory. Despite efforts to reduce educational disparities in schools through principal preparation programs, students' race and ethnicity continue to predict the educational attainment of students and their subsequent economic prosperity. Gordon's proposed (2012b) "third way" of preparing leaders for equity includes "awareness, care, critique, expertise, community, and accountability, with relationships at the model's center" (p. 3).

While our year-long principal preparation program incorporates all aspects of Gordon's "third way" of preparing leaders for equity, one curriculum decision in particular that supports a "third way" of preparing leaders for equity is our Problem Based Learning (PBL) Project. This paper discusses the PBL Project's a) history, purpose, and alignment with research and state standards for licensing school administrators; b) components, including team formation, equity audit features, presentation of the plan to colleagues; c) impact of the PBL project on schools' and districts' improvement plans; d) students' self-reflections on the PBL Project; and e) program evaluation by Portland State University of the PBL Project's potential to increase leadership for equity; and f) conclusions regarding the PBL providing support for Gordon's (2012) theory of preparing leaders for equity.

PBL PROJECT: HISTORY, PURPOSE, AND THE ALIGNMENT WITH RESEARCH AND STANDARDS

For seven years prior to its current structure, the PBL Project had been a simulation project in Portland State University's administrative licensure program, a program that prepares future school leaders using a year-long cohort model. The program's increasing focus on leadership for equity stimulated a realignment of the program with leadership preparation practices identified as critical to closing the achievement gap: developing a leadership vision (Childress, Doyle, & Thomas, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2007), cultural proficiency (Gay, 2010; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009), reflective practices (Goodlad, 1994), producing meaningful products (Dunbar & Monson, 2011; Spence, 2001), and is founded on evidence of effective leadership practices (Marzano et al., 2005), which involves the community in leadership (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 2003). To reflect these curricular changes, we selected new texts, including *Leading for Equity: The Pursuit of Excellence in Montgomery County Public Schools* (Childress et al., 2009) and *Culturally Responsive Teaching* (Gay, 2010), to anchor our students' understanding of effective equity practices. Next, we redesigned the PBL Project to include those components.

When redesigning the PBL Project, we also aligned it with our graduate school conceptual framework, state, and national standards. State standards include visionary leadership; instructional improvement; effective management; inclusive practice; ethical leadership; socio-political context; and practicum completion. The PBL Project is also aligned with state expectations for "School Improvement Plans" mandated by the federal law known as "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB), specifically in areas related to community engagement and reaching achievement targets for all children. The PBL also addresses equity issues raised by Childress, Doyle, and Thomas (2009) Elger, Kneip, and Theile (2009); the European Commission (2011); Frattura and Capper (2007); Gay (2010); Gordon (2012a; 2012b); Heath, Rethon, and Kilpi (2008); as well as Johnson and Avelar La Salle (2010).

COMPONENTS OF THE PBL PROJECT

Believing that hypothetical or simulated projects rarely reflect the complexities of today's schools, the PBL Project was designed to be school-based. The PBL Project required students to form teams, conduct an equity audit at the school site, identify evidence-based interventions, solicit input from stakeholders, develop and present the plan to colleagues, and engage in self-reflection. Using current data, national and local research, practicum experiences, the budget of a local school, and seeking input from teachers, the community and students, the intern team then completes the project with the permission and support of the school principal and cohort leader. These processes are aligned with "incidental learning" (Marsick & Watkins, 1990), which can occur in "social interactions, life and work experiences, trial-and-error, mistakes, problem solving and adapting to new situations" (Cahoon, 1995, as cited in Crawford & Machemer, 2008, p. 106; English, 1999; Ross-Gordon & Dowling, 1995). The scoring rubric for the project uses the terminology of the state standards and requires proficiency in all standards in order to receive the scores required for completion of the administrative licensure program.

Forming Teams

For this project, interns self-select into PBL teams, reflecting the process often used in schools. Each team is comprised of grade level or program area interns and follows the process faced by all school leaders when they write, implement, and evaluate a School Improvement Plan: determining when the team will meet, how they will divide up the work, and when they will complete their sections of the project prior to the final due date.

Equity Audit Features

Many educators are familiar with the concept and components of financial audits; few educators are familiar with *equity* audits. While school leader interns exhibit enthusiasm for the concept of an equity audit, they and their schools often have limited knowledge of the components of an equity audit and even less experience conducting one. Equity audits, however, play a critical role in the quest to understand the underlying conditions that lead to race and ethnicity predicting a student's level of academic achievement (Du Four et al., 2006; Johnson & Avelar La Salle, 2010). While the analysis of data disaggregated by race and ethnicity is a key starting point for revealing a school's inequities in student achievement, equity audits also reveal the "hidden" inequities present in schools with achievement gaps (Johnson & Avelar La Salle, 2010), which are notably absent in schools with successful youth of color (Peterson, 2011). "Hidden inequities" include data such as the participation rates of students of color in Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate classes, or the participation of students of color in high prestige clubs and student leadership.

Our student interns were given the option of using an existing district equity audit, although no current intern districts have identified the systematic use of an equity audit in their district. Therefore, we identified three potential equity audits for the PBL Project: Johnson and Avelar La Salle (2010), Skrla, Bell McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009), and Frattura and Capper (2007). Intern teams are allowed to choose the equity audit format, or they revise one of the above examples.

Each equity audit has the following common components into which data inquiry delves: a) academically rigorous program for all students; b) culturally responsive staff and programs; and c) support for students needing additional academic, behavioral, or social-emotional development. Johnson and Avelar La Salle (2010) pose extensive questions in each category of the equity audit to encourage “auditors” to reveal the specific context of inequities in a school. Conducting an equity audit reveals unexpected inequities, which point to many specific steps that schools can employ to reduce inequities and close the achievement gap. We have noticed, as did Gordon (2012a; 2012b), that sharing the equity data is transformational, if it is shared in a caring, supportive environment that allows for self critique, processing the implications of the data, and developing an action plan.

After conducting an equity audit, interns examine evidence-based practices that have influenced educational disparities in similar schools, and identify the practices they will implement for this PBL Project. Interns also speak with, email, or meet with principals from local schools about practices that have contributed to the success of increased student achievement scores in reading, writing, and math.

Based on the equity audit, review of evidence-based practices, self-reflection, and input from stakeholders, the interns create a School Improvement Plan including objectives, professional development strategies, budget, NCLB growth targets, and which is designed to address stakeholder resistance and assessment of goals. PBL Project teams are required to use the state School Improvement Planning template and write SMART Goals (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely). Using the template and writing SMART goals is often challenging for interns; however, using the tools required of school leaders provides interns with a realistic view of the complexity of writing effective action plans.

Next, the PBL Project teams develop presentations of their School Improvement Plans and describe their plans to an audience of practicing administrators who serve as a critical audience. Many of the PBL Project teams also have a representative from the team who presents to the school’s principal, superintendent, board, or other committee. Each cohort approaches the presentation portion of the plan slightly differently. Two cohorts presented their plans to experienced administrators at Continuing Professional Development events; another gave peer presentations.

IMPACT

While many school districts engage in long-term, systematic training in equity, none of the districts in which our interns work conducted systematic equity audits of their schools. Through the PBL Project, interns were able to introduce the concept of equity audits to school district and school leaders, and when responding to the intern teams’ queries for data, especially data for the equity audit, school and district leadership became interested in the PBL Project.

Though many school leaders had been unfamiliar with equity audits, they welcomed the information, much of which revealed what Johnson and Avelar La Salle (2010) refer to as “hidden” data. The equity audit uncovered data heretofore not examined or unavailable, which indicated that students of color are overrepresented in detention and discipline data, and underrepresented in honors or talented and gifted programs. Subsequently, interns were able to write implementation plans that specifically addressed these issues.

We consider that the result of inviting schools to focus on educational disparities in schools is the most important impact of our PBL Project, as we have shifted the discussion from whole school data to data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, socio-economic status and other factors. This focus on equity and social justice is critical leadership work to ensure equitable opportunities for each student.

In addition to focusing school discussions on equity, the PBL Project contributed to school improvement projects that were later adopted by individual schools. In at least four cases within one school year, teams were asked to present their data to additional school audiences at their sites; subsequently, these schools or districts adopted parts of, or the entire, PBL action plans. Adopted plans included several evidence-based plans that transformed schools and districts: a) adding a very successful college preparation program (AVID) as a strategy to close the educational achievement gap; b) conducting cost-neutral equity trainings monthly at an elementary school; c) implementing a culturally responsive middle school literacy and science plan, and d) significant revisions to English Language Learner programs.

STUDENT REFLECTION

As a result of site-based interactions, interns expressed high satisfaction with this project. In fact, exit data from students at the conclusion of 2011, indicated that 98% of students determined the PBL Project was “good” or “excellent” in preparing them for the work leadership for equity. Our students reported that this project was both demanding and extremely rewarding in preparing them for equity leadership. The redesigned PBL Project causes interns to focus directly on the issues of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and student achievement, causing them to create School Improvement Plans that challenge the status quo. As one intern said of the PBL Project:

Working collaboratively with colleagues in the [school leadership] cohort on an equity audit gave me an opportunity to work with a diverse group of experts planning to solve school based problems. From one colleague with an engineering and data background, I learned how to more effectively analyze data available through the district's administrative portal. From another I learned about literature that would be useful to my current or future school for Professional Learning Community studies. Meanwhile, I was able to share my knowledge of Bilingual and ESL methodologies and RTI reading interventions with my team. We had the experience of putting our heads together, both in class, and online to do an equity audit, looking at real data and site resources, and create a plan of action [our] school could take to close the achievement gap. (Cohort Intern, personal communication, June, 2011)

As students reported in the exit data, “The PBL has real potential to analyze and plan for a school environment.” Another student wrote, “The PBL was one of the most effective components of the program.” Despite the rigor of the project, the stress of preparing and presenting a proposal for sitting administrators, and having a limited time frame in which to complete the project, students affirmed our belief that it would prepare them to be leaders for equity and would positively impact our schools.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

The PBL Project, in its original design, was not immediately successful and was almost abandoned. After the 2009–2010 school year, the PBL Project was perceived by students and staff as being redundant to the year-long research-based Educational Leadership Project (ELP). Although we considered this information, we were not confident that the students who completed the program were prepared to focus on equity leadership. By reimagining the final PBL Project through an equity lens, we improved a project that appeared to be fading in relevance, and increased the likelihood that students were prepared to address issues of equity in their schools.

As a result of our spring 2011 cohorts' efforts and the redesign of the equity component, we decided to keep the project. The unexpected adoption of the PBL Projects by four schools was compelling as well and caused us to further emphasize data analysis and problem solving throughout the cohort. Much like Dunbar and Monson's (2011) findings from the Cahn Fellow Program, we found our students and their principals faced similar dilemmas. Dunbar and Monson (2011) wrote, "Too often principals respond to the symptom rather than the root cause of the challenge" (p. 43). Allowing our interns to struggle with inequity in schools enabled them to rise to the challenge and produce effective, relevant plans for improvement. Similarly, when we strengthened our focus on equity throughout the PBL Project, the quality of the interns' experience and the benefits to the school site increased.

CONNECTION TO "THE THIRD WAY"

Gordon (2012a, 2012b) persuasively argues for a "third way" to prepare school leaders to be leaders for equity and social justice, a model that neither promulgates the status quo ("the conventional approach"), nor increases conflict or marginalizes perspectives ("the critical approach"). Specific features of the PBL Project that support Gordon's "third way" include:

1. Awareness: Following completion of a cultural autobiography, students analyze data from an equity audit using one of three frameworks (Frattura & Caper, 2010; Johnson & Avelar La Salle, 2010; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004).
2. Critique: Identification of culturally responsive and evidence-based practices contributing to increased achievement scores in reading, writing and math (Delpit, 2002; Gay, 2010; Lindsey et al., 2005; Nieto, 2000; Tatum, 1997).
3. Expertise and Community: Working with those in the school community to develop a plan of action based on equity audit data, evidence-based research, the school profile, budget, school improvement goals and expectations of the school's governing body and presenting the plan to the community, administrators, or colleagues.
4. Accountability: Identifying ways to measure progress toward goals, self-assessing the success of the plan, modifying the plan based on data.

While the PBL Project does not specifically include Gordon's theory of the role of care and relationships, these two components are hallmarks of our pedagogy and how we prepare our future leaders to work with their school communities (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1997; Gay, 2010; Noddings, 1992).

CONCLUSION

For several years prior to our PBL Project revision in 2011, Problem Based Learning was an exciting alternative to traditional classroom learning. It was, however, not meeting all the needs of our future leaders, nor was it focusing directly on equity. Our success increased after we asked interns to use data from an equity audit in their PBL Project. The use of SMART goals and implementation plans increased. The involvement of stakeholders increased. We learned that neither school administrators nor staff had examined much of the data that revealed inequities prior to the audits. By itself, this discovery was eye-opening. Though the focus on equity data was critical, additional components of the PBL Project were also instrumental to our redesign. One was identification and analysis of local practices that contribute to student achievement. Another was closer alignment with the School Improvement Plan documents required by the State Department of Education. Together, these changes increased the impact of the project. Through their participation in this PBL Project, interns were able to create School Improvement Plans that increased their ability to address the achievement gaps present in their schools, which were immediately useful in their districts, and increased the intern's confidence and sense of professional efficacy. Our experience suggests that a focus on equity in the PBL Project significantly contributes to principal preparation for school improvement, and as such, is an excellent example of a "third way," a caring, collaborative way to provide leadership for equity in our schools.

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