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A Phenomenological Study Of How Anti-Racist Leadership Training Principles Impact The Actions Of Middle School Principals

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF HOW ANTI-RACIST LEADERSHIP
TRAINING PRINCIPLES IMPACT THE ACTIONS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL
PRINCIPALS

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Morgridge College of Education
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
John G. Kennedy
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Advisor: Dr. Kent Seidel
Abstract

The national crisis of the academic achievement gap is one of the most impactful phenomena for the nations’ public schools. This study used a phenomenological qualitative research design to capture the essence and perceptions of building principals’ experiences related to principles of anti-racist leadership training. The researcher interviewed ten principals who had provided numerous questions in an interview format, to gain insight into the attitudes, beliefs, and leadership practices as they relate to the eradication of the achievement gap at their respective sites. The researcher conducted ten, in-depth, interviews with specific questions related to the achievement gap. All of the principals’ are employed in the Meadow Grove School District boundary area in an affluent residential suburb outside of southeast Denver, Colorado. Each Principal received an initial ninety-minute interview and a follow-up phone call. The ten identified principals’ were from varied racial and cultural backgrounds.
Acknowledgements

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To my friends and co-workers, and the Cherry Creek School District who taught me the meaning of “Dedicated to Excellence.” Again, thank you for the financial support to crystallize this dream.

I can’t forget my mother, Minnie R. Kennedy, who taught me the joy of life-long learning. You may never know how much you inspired me to value education. I remember your words today, “Education is something nobody can ever take away from
you.” And, of course my steadfast father. You taught me strength, resiliency, and the art of hard work. All of these attributes were instrumental in my success in this endeavor.

Finally, I want to thank all of the educators of color out there that continue to believe that “education is the great equalizer.” We must all believe this, internalize it, and transmit it to everyone human being we encounter.
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Chapter One

Either the United States will destroy ignorance or ignorance will destroy the United States. - W.E.B. Dubois, 1907

Preface

As an educator for over 20 years, I have come to the profound realization that leadership is the primary catalyst in transforming a school organization. In a building site, the principal is the deciding factor when it comes to programmatic changes, staffing allocations, hiring, curriculum alignment, and—most importantly—creating a school culture that reflects the values of a pluralistic society. As an African-American male principal, in a predominately White, middle class suburban school district, I am consistently reminded of the poor academic performance of students that share my history, culture, beliefs, and values. National, state, and local standardized test scores show a dismal racial disparity in achievement. Even in light of such historical advances as the Emancipation Proclamation, the Civil Rights movement and Brown vs. Board of Education, minority students have made small progress in taking advantage of these landmark advances. As a building leader, I am confronted with the same dilemma, even in a suburban, affluent school district. As an educational leader, I am committed to identifying the strategies and leadership practices that will eradicate the achievement gap. There are a number of studies and theories related to this subject, but none provides a definitive answer to the problem. It is a quandary that requires a multi-faceted approach.
To this end, I will continue to dispel the theories and myths that all students cannot learn at high levels.

**Introduction**

In her book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* (1997), acclaimed psychologist, Beverly Tatum, states that racism, like other forms of oppression, is not only a personal ideology based on racial prejudices, but a *system* involving cultural messages, institutional policies and practices, as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals. She further contends that racial prejudice, when combined with social power (i.e., access to social, cultural, and economic resources and decision-making), leads to the institutionalization of racist policies and practices. The Commission for Racial Equality (2001) concluded in its findings that if racist consequences are due to institutional laws, customs and practices, than the institutions are racist, whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have racist intentions. Institutional racism, therefore, is racism that is overtly or covertly embedded in the policies, procedures, operations, and culture of public or private institutions, reinforcing individual practices of prejudice and being reinforced by them in turn (Sivanandan, 1999). This study examines training that was offered in one large suburban district to assist building principals, central office personnel, and teachers in understanding the principles of anti-racist leadership. The study examines the views of principals about racism and anti-racist values in leadership, and whether the implementation of such principles is viable in a school setting.
Many educators and researchers have studied the academic achievement of minority students, and concluded that schools that provide sub-par educations and foster low expectations for academic achievement keep minority students trapped in a setting void of hope (Bailey, 2001). In her highly acclaimed book, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms*, Diane Ravitch (2000) states that all students have the capacity to learn and are equally deserving of a solid liberal arts education. All students are not learning to their potential because traditional educational systems are not living up to their promise of quality education for all Americans. However, Ravitch is confident that public schools hold the best hope for educating all youth, especially African American males. Public schools can make a tremendous difference, but only if strong principals have the will to focus their attention and reform efforts on practices and programs that stymie the success of minority students. There are a myriad of barriers that must be eliminated if public schools are to achieve their charge to educate all students. Principals and other school personnel must work diligently to eradicate institutional racism and its debilitating effect on the success of minority students (Ravitch 2000).

Education can be the great equalizer. However, the chance of becoming a productive member of society is minimized for students who fail in the current educational system. Minority students are primarily those most affected, and without a quality education, are more likely to become economic and societal burdens as adults. If the current educational system and motivations of individuals does not change, the process of disenfranchisement will repeat itself for generations of minority students. There is no single, clear cause for the achievement gap within schools, but there are many cultural and structural factors that have an impact on this discrepancy (Ravitch, 2000).
Other researchers, such as Freire (1973) and Kozol (1991,) suggest that academic achievement is more closely tied to race and socioeconomic status. Regardless of which factors have the greatest impact, it is clear that minority students are more likely to find themselves at a distinct disadvantage. The current gap in academic achievement between Black, Hispanic, and White students in America’s schools is deeply rooted in historical inequities perpetuated today through institutionalized barriers (Kozol, 1991). Minority students have much to overcome to succeed in the academically based institutionalized learning environment of the United States.

According to Linton and Singleton (2006), school principals using anti-racist leadership methods can help close and ultimately eradicate the achievement gap. Many achievement gap studies have implicated low socioeconomic status as a primary contributor to poor student performance across various measures.

Equity and achievement have been closely linked. The Education Trust (2004) aggregated the grade eight mathematics scale scores from the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP, 2003), to show discrepancies between poor and non-poor students. The data showed significant differences between the two groups across all fifty states. For example, the average scale score of non-poor students in the state of New York was close to 295, compared to an average scale score of just below 265 for poor students, a 30-point difference. Colorado was the same, with a 30-point difference between poor and non-poor students.

This epidemic does not only exist between lower and higher socioeconomic classes. There are also significant racial implications contributing to the academic achievement of students in the U.S. Specifically significant were the African American,
Latino, and Native-American ethnic minority groups. According to The Education Trust (2004), 61% of eighth grade African American students, 53% of eighth grade Latino students, and 46% of eighth grade Native-American students in the United States scored below basic in mathematics on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), compared to only 21% of White eighth-grade students performing below basic.

Affluent and middle class school districts are also reporting gross disparities in achievement between minority and non-minority groups. According to Harvard researcher, Christopher Jencks, “This has been an on-going issue at least since the 1950’s, and probably a lot longer than that” (Fletcher, 2002). Educators have been puzzled over the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students for decades. Theories are abundant, and range from issues of poverty (Payne, date), to The Education Trust research (date), and others on teacher quality (add citations). Although these researchers and theorists have suggested causes, only two major studies have been conducted to address the achievement gap in affluent educational settings.

John Ogbu (2003) conducted an in-depth ethnographic study of students at all grade levels to determine factors contributing to the academic achievement and social experiences of African American students in higher socioeconomic brackets. Ogbu identified several reasons for the gap and suggested strategies for the educational promotion of African American students in affluent educational settings.

Ferguson (2003), of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, conducted a study analyzing the minority student achievement data of fifteen middle- and upper-income school districts across the country. The purpose of his study, similar to Ogbu’s (2003), was to better understand the educational experiences and trends of
achievement for minority students in higher socioeconomic settings (Ferguson, 2003). Historically, achievement gap research has sought answers to provide relief for students living in lower income neighborhoods, attending poorly funded and highly segregated schools, yet an even greater achievement gap exists between minority and non-minority students in suburban middle- and upper-income neighborhoods (Ogbu, 2003).

Many scholars and researchers have worked to provide a better understanding of the basis for the achievement gap. Qualitative work has primarily focused on cultural, environmental, contextual and racial sources of the gap. The perceived effects of variables such as peer pressure within the school (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), cultural and language deprivation among minority students (Ogbu, 1992), ethnic identity development in American society (Smith, 1991; Tatum, 1999), long-standing class and racial stratification (Ferguson, 2002; Ogbu, 1994; Rothstein, 2004; Viadero, 2000a), and continuing racial prejudice (Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 1978), have been thoroughly explored. Limited empirical research has emphasized perceived deficits such as economic correlations of underachievement (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Lee & Burkam, 2004; Marzano, 2004), biogenetic factors (Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Nisbett, 1998), the quality of teachers in public schools (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Marx, 2004; Viadero, 2000a), and appropriateness of curricular and programmatic focus for minority students (Marzano, 2004; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia & Nolly, 2004).

The research base on the achievement gap is growing and numerous theorists have provided great insight, although at times contradictory. Ongoing research helps to explain the depth of issues that students potentially experience on a daily basis causing measurable underachievement for minorities compared to their White counterparts.
To focus the issue for schools, the federal government, through the reauthorization of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (PL 107-110, The No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2001), implemented a system of accountability that compels schools to disaggregate, present, and discuss the achievement of all subgroups of students with their stakeholders (PL 107-110, NCLB, Adequate Yearly Progress, 2001). No longer are schools able to manipulate their achievement data in order to conceal large disparities or gross patterns of underachievement (Steptoe, 2004). This new legislation has caused a dramatic increase in the resources and programs focused on closing the achievement gap in schools across the nation (Weissglass, 2001). Schools are looking for ways to change their structure and programmatic focus (Skrla et al, 2004) while increasing the capacity of their staff (Darling-Hammond, 2000) to better meet the academic needs of minority students.

As has been discovered in almost every educational setting, however, the achievement gap is not a problem that can be fixed by implementing a “canned” program. Consider that this country has:

…spent hundreds of millions of dollars in the last two decades on attempts to decrease the achievement gap without any significant outcomes. It is clearly time to implement approaches – ones based on addressing the root causes of the achievement gap (Weissglass, 2001, p. 3).

Regardless of the focus of change a school or school district decides to employ when working to close the achievement gap, the key to successful implementation and sustainable reform (Fullan, 2005) is insightful, focused, and moral leadership (Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1992) implemented by a knowledgeable and skilled principal (Waters et al, 2003). The role of the principal is changing (Siegfried, 1975) from maintaining the
status quo to leading change from the front lines (Fullan, 2003). This work is especially crucial for minority students and for those from low-income households, as most educators focus on a deficit approach to minority underachievement.

As we look to the future, the change necessary to appropriately educate all students in our public schools must focus more on inputs (e.g. resources, accessibility, culture, and quality and appropriateness of instruction) instead of outputs (e.g. race comparative frameworks of the achievement gap) as discussed prior (McMillian, 2003). The work of school leaders, then, is vital in linking the intent of accountability policy to equity outcomes in local contexts. School principals need avenues of influence (Hallinger & Heck, 1998), strategies, and the leadership tools (e.g. Heifetz, 2004; Leithwood & Poplin, 1992; Waters et al., 2003) with which to successfully accomplish this work.

Many studies have been conducted to show continuing trends in the national achievement gap. When compared to their White counterparts, minority students (Black and Hispanic), on average, score lower on every measure of academic achievement (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2000). From lower grades (Hoffman et al, 2003; Miller 1996; Ogbu, 1994; Perkins et al., 2004) and standardized test scores (Hoffman et al., 2003; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Miller, 1996; Ogbu, 1994; Williams, 2003), to higher representation in proficiency level and special education classes (Loveless, 1999; Oakes, 1995), minority students disproportionately represent the lower tracts in public education. Miller (1995) offers the following synthesis of the need for change:

The continued existence of substantial minority-majority educational gaps is prohibitively costly, not only for minorities, but for the nation as a whole. Among the
most compelling reasons for seeking to eliminate these gaps as soon as possible are the following: (1) the achievement of significantly higher minority education levels is essential to the long-term productivity and competitiveness of the U.S. economy; (2) if minorities are to enjoy the full benefits of their recently won civil rights, they need formal-education-dependent knowledge and skills much closer in quantity and quality to those held by whites; and (3) the maintenance of a humane and harmonious society depends to a considerable degree on minorities’ reaching educational parity with whites (4). Ferguson cites the following statistics: More minority students attend suburban schools than popularly believed; in 2000, 33 percent of African-American children, 45 percent of Hispanic children, 54 percent of Asian children, and 55 percent of White children lived in suburban areas, and attended both poor, segregated schools and excellent racially integrated schools with many resources (2002).

**Background of the Proposed Study**

As an American, one should be proud of the tremendous advances the nation has made along with its prosperity in the past century. Even during moments of academic decline, Americans could still enjoy, appreciate, acknowledge, and share the pride of citizenry in a nation that is recognized internationally as a super power (Kuykendall, 2004). However, as the great nation we are, we are in deep peril as it relates to the growing disparity of the achievement gap of Black and Hispanic students. The public school system and society at large has not been as successful with minority students, as they should be. Therefore, it is imperative that
building principals, move beyond differences and focus on a new vision to educate all students.

Minority students are disproportionately below White and Asian students in most standardized test score measures. According to (Ravitch, 2000), the main purpose for education is to acquire knowledge and skills that are essential to compete and flourish in an American democratic society. According to achievement data the reality does not point to that ideal. It is fair to say that the public school system has not served minority students favorably. The data from, *A Nation At Risk* (1992), as well as statistics provided by the Black Urban League, find that Black and Hispanic/Latino students are slowly becoming an academic endangered species. The incarceration rates of 1990, published by the Sentencing Project, highlights a range of approximately sixty to eighty per cent of Black and Hispanic males are either in jail, on parole, or awaiting trial.

The national dropout rate, the number of Black and Hispanic/Latino males entering college and the increased poverty rate of these minority groups makes the prospect of becoming contributing members of society bleak if not impossible if there isn’t a substantial change in these figures. As evidenced by the U.S. Department of Education 2000, the Brown vs. the Board of Education decision of 1954 had little impact on the life chances for minority students. It is evident that Anti-racist leadership is critical to address this national epidemic of racism. It is essential for leaders to understand the color, culture, and consciousness of minority students to better serve them in the monumental task of closing the achievement gap.

**Purpose of the proposed research study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how components of anti-racist
leadership training principles impact the actions of middle school principals, along with their perspectives of leadership and their work in their respective schools. This research can help school leaders better understand the characteristics of anti-racist leadership strategies, and how anti-racist leadership differs from general leadership strategies and can assist in effectively close the academic achievement gap of minority students in a suburban school district. Additionally, this study will identify the practices, procedures, and strategies that are currently implemented in the Meadow Grove School District’s middle schools.

**Research Questions**

1) Do principals’ perceive that the training they have received has/has not impacted their leadership actions towards closing the achievement gap in their schools?
   a) Is there a difference between principals’ perceptions of the strategies necessary to close the achievement gap?
   b) Are there differences in principals’ perceptions of the levels of implementation of the conceptual framework?
   c) Are there differences in principals’ skill, will, and knowledge base in regards to the implementation of the conceptual framework?
   d) Are there differences in principals’ attitudes regarding the conceptual framework?

**Significance of the Study**

This study is of particular importance as a key factor in examining if anti-racist leadership training strategies impact the actions of middle school principals. In his recent book, *Toward Excellence with Equity: an emerging vision for closing the achievement gap*, Ronald F. Ferguson (2007), chronicles fifty years of economic change toward Black-White earnings equality. Ferguson traces the Black-White earnings from the 1940’s to the 1990’s and highlighting the growing importance of reading and math skills as causes of earnings inequality. Ferguson’s research led him to investigate why test
scores stopped rising for Black and Hispanic teens at the end of the 1980’s. He contributes a partial decline during this era is due to youth culture. Ferguson contends youth culture profoundly affects what young people do with their spare time, how free they feel to be ambitious, and ultimately their confidence in doing what is right in spite of retribution (social isolation) from their peers. It must also be noted that Ferguson discusses the impact of rap music and its impact on shaping Black students’ attitudes towards academic achievement. As an educational leader, the researcher must constantly be aware of the negative forces that are at war with the hearts, souls, and minds of minority students. Similarly, Jencks and Phillips (1998) concluded that not reducing the Black-White test-score disparities, more than any other form of racial inequality retards minorities’ chances of overcoming other adversities in life circumstances. In their landmark book, Black-White Test Score Gap, (1998), Jencks writes:

Reducing the test-score gap is probably both necessary and sufficient for substantially reducing racial inequality in educational attainment and earnings. Changes in education and earnings would in turn help reduce racial differences in crime, health, and family structure, although we do not know how large these effects would be (p.4). It must be mentioned that Jencks stated previously in another passage that has become a standard in Black-White test score gap research: If racial equality is America’s goal, reducing the Black-White test-score gap would probably do more to promote this goal than any other strategy that commands broad public support (p.3).

The current gap in academic achievement between Black and Hispanic, and White students in America’s schools is deeply rooted in historical inequities perpetuated today through institutionalized barriers. To succeed in the academically based institutionalized learning environment of this country, minority students, as a group, have much to overcome. To truly support success for all students there must be significant changes
within the public school system. This will only occur when school leaders understand and are prepared for their role in leading successful organizational change.

Successfully closing the achievement gap in America’s public schools will require extraordinary levels of transformational leadership from school administrators (Leithwood, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1992). If teachers and principals perceive the work to be accomplished as fundamentally dissimilar in nature, the building and district leadership will require differentiated skills and knowledge. The more knowledge leaders have regarding the transitions (Bridges, 2001) inherent in significant organizational change, the more successful they will be in implementing and sustaining meaningful reform.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

**Academic Success** — For the purpose of this study, academic success describes proficient or above ratings on standardized tests.

**Achievement Gap** — The phenomena of racial disparities between African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students and their White and Asian counterparts according to standardized achievement test data (Haycock, 2006).

**African American/Black Negro** — Descendants of captive Africans who survived the slavery era within the boundaries of the present United States (en.wikipedia/wiki).

**Affluent Educational Setting** — The researcher defined community affluence their identification according to an average cost of housing (over $250,000), average household income (above $75,000), and a low percentage of students identified as needing free or reduced lunch (below 10%).
Anti-Racism — The conscious and deliberate, individual and collective action that challenges the impact and perpetuation of institutionalized White racial power, position and privilege (Singleton, 1996).

Anti-Racist Leader — A type of leadership approach led by the principal, who design and deliver professional development activities which shift the culture of the school toward embracing school-wide equity transformation (Singleton, 1996).

Courageous Conversation — A formal structure of conversation utilized by schools to deepen, engage, and sustain the interracial dialogue about race in order to examine schooling and improve student achievement (Singleton, 1996).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) — A theory that evolved in the mid 1970’s, whose ideas are currently being used to understand issues of equity and social justice, including topics such as school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Equity — Raising the achievement of all students, while narrowing the gap between the highest and lowest students and eliminating the predictability of which student groups occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories (Singleton, 1996).

Equity Team — District and school-based Equity Teams or E-Teams include emerging leaders who wish to develop their will, skill, knowledge, and capacity to support their colleagues in understanding race and deinstitutionalizing racism (Singleton, 1996).

Excellence — Excellence is the state or quality of excelling. It is superiority, or the state of being good to a high degree. Excellence is considered to be a value by many
organizations, in particular by schools and other institutions of education, and a goal to be pursued (En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Excellence).

Minority— For the purpose of this research, this term will be used for all persons considered to be other than Anglo (Wright, 2003).

Invisibility— For the purposes of this research, refers to students of color, when White privilege persists in schools without acknowledgement and when Whiteness in that school remains invisible. (Linton & Singleton, 2006, p. 217.)

Hypervisibility— For the purposes of this research, refers to the phenomenon that to students of color in a White context draws disproportionate attention (Linton & Singleton, 2006, p.217).

Institutionalized Racism —The institutionalization of racist policies and practices, which provide greater access to social, cultural, and economic resources and decision-making for Whites (Tatum, 1997).

Leadership — The art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal.

Phenomenology — Phenomenology as a research methodology ultimately seeks to describe, “basic lived” experience (Creswell, 1998). As a research method it is the study of essences. “The essence of phenomenon is universal which can be describe through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). Research using phenomenology seeks to uncover the meanings in ones everyday existence. Its primary aim is “the fulfillment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are” (van Manen, 1990, p. 12).
Race — The socially constructed meaning attached to a variety of physical attributes including but not limited to skin and eye color, hair texture, and bone structures of people in the United States and elsewhere (Linton & Singleton, 2006).

Racism — A system of advantage based on race or “Prejudice + Power” (Tatum, 1997). Generally speaking, can be defined as beliefs and enactment of beliefs that one set of characteristics is superior to another set (e.g., white skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes are more beautiful than brown skin, brown hair, and brown eyes (Linton & Singleton 2006).

Racist — Any person who subscribes to those beliefs and perpetuates them intentionally or unconsciously.

Stereotype threat — A theory that assumes that sustained school success requires identification with school and its sub domains, “thus suggesting that when a racial group identifies with stereotypes which supersede and interfere with academic success,” (Banks, 2004).

Students of Color— For the purpose of this research, this phrase will be used for students who are not defined as White.

White Privilege— Societal privileges received by Whites-with or without their knowledge of receipt-often associated with the ability to be viewed as an individual separate and apart from being White (McIntosh, 1990).

Dissertation Structure

In Chapter Two, there is a detailed review of the literature that identifies numerous factors and theories that impact the academic achievement of minority students. It is imperative that the researcher identifies the many factors that contribute to low academic performance. They include but are not limited to external factors such as
socio-economic status, inferior fiscal resources, and an educational system that was not designed to promote minority students. However, to accurately discuss the institutional barriers facing minority students it is significant that the current data reflect the dismal conditions that minority students must navigate. Additionally, the researcher will discuss the challenges facing minority students in White educational institutions, where they are often confronted with issues of institutional racism.

The chapter provides the utilization of the Anti-Racist Leadership Conceptual Framework as the instrument by which principals’ leadership will be compared to. This Conceptual Framework is illustrated on page 30 of this study and was introduced by Singleton and Linton (2006). Since the goal of the research study is to examine the perceptions by principals of the Excellence and Equity training, and the impact such training has had on their leadership towards closing the achievement gap, it is logical that this instrument should be utilized as the framework. The framework ultimately will serve to assist the researcher in “interpreting” the specific activities and work that principals implemented or not. The Conceptual Framework will identify the areas of focus to help determine how the implementation of the principles of anti-racist leadership impacts the leadership actions of principals in middle schools.

In Chapter Three, the researcher will describe the research methodology for this study. The researcher has identified in this chapter the bases for the selection of the research design and data collection process. The phenomenological research design affords the researcher the opportunity to obtain the “essence” of principals’ perceptions of the conceptual framework identified in the Equity and Excellence initiative, implemented in a suburban school district.
Summary

This chapter grounds this study by critically analyzing literature relevant to the need for training in anti-racist leadership for school principal. The goal of this study is to assist leaders by providing evidence that there needs to be a change from the current model, and to offer the model of anti-racist leadership (Singleton & Linton, 2006) as a viable option to consider. The new leaders of the 21st century must comprehend the important work that is necessary in developing “excellence and equity” (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Moses, 2004; Riel, 2000), findings could impact the areas of selection of leaders, policy changes, staff development opportunities, and ultimately the performance evaluation of principals (Andrew & Soder, 1998). Also, these findings could assist in teacher preparation programs at the graduate level (Skrla et al, 2004) that would prepare potential leaders of the requisite skill set that would impact issues of equity within their organization (Brown & Anfara, 2003).

It is hoped that this study will also offer insights into the Excellence and Equity initiative implemented in the Meadow Grove School District, including identifying the areas of skill, will and knowledge that are key indicators in the degree of implementation of the Conceptual Framework.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Introduction

I believe that the community's duty to education is, therefore, its paramount moral duty. By law and punishment, by social agitation and discussion, society can regulate and form itself in a more or less haphazard and chance way. But through education society can formulate its own purposes, can organize its own means and resources, and thus shape itself with definiteness and economy in the direction in which it wishes to move. -John Dewey (1897), pioneer U.S. educator

Leadership vs. Management

According to Northouse, (2001, p.2), there is a multitude of ways to finish the sentence “Leadership is…” In fact, as Stogdill (1974) points out in a review of leadership research, there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it (p.7). There have been numerous classification systems developed to define the dimensions of leadership (Fleishman et al., 1991). One such classification system, directly related to my research, is the scheme proposed by Bass (1990, pp. 11-20). He suggested that some definitions of leadership are the focus of group processes. It is fair to say that that perspective conflicts with the one used for this study, whereas the leader is at the center of the group change and activity embodies the will of the group. While the study of leadership can be tracked as far back as Aristotle, in contrast management emerged around the twentieth century with the advent of the industrialized society. The sole purpose of management during that time was to minimize chaos in organizations and to assist them in running more efficiently.
Historically, a man named Fayol in 1916 first created managerial functions. The functions of management he outlined were to serve the purposes of planning, organizing, staffing, and controlling. These functions are still predominant today and especially common in the field of public education. Kotter (1990), in a book that compares the function of management to the functions of leadership, he argues that the functions of the two are quite dissimilar (See Table 1). The overriding function of management is to provide order and consistency in organizations, whereas as the primary function of leadership is to provide change and movement. Management is about seeking order and stability; leadership is about seeking adaptive and constructive change.

Table 1.

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<th>Management</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
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<td>“ Produces Order and Change”</td>
<td>Produces Change and Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Planning/Budgeting</td>
<td>• Vision Building/Strategizing</td>
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<td>• Organizing/Staffing</td>
<td>• Aligning People/Communicating</td>
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<td>• Controlling/Problem Solving</td>
<td>• Motivating/Inspiring</td>
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Source: Adapted from John P. Kotter, A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs From Management.

However, additional research on instructional leadership rarely explores issues of student diversity and learning explicitly. Thus, knowledge about how leaders promote inclusive instructional practices must often be inferred from broader work (Riel, 2000, p.62). As research has continued to grow, there have been some gains in linking leadership behavior with school effectiveness and student achievement.
A number of these researchers such as: Fullan & Hargreaves (1998), Heck & Marcoulides (1993), Kirby, Paradise & King (1992), Schlecty, (1990), Sergiovanni (1992), and most recently Waters, Marzano & McNulty (2003) have attempted to demonstrate and articulate the linking of effective schools to effective principals.

As one continues to scour the research on this topic, there appears to be more clarity in the literature that suggest and implies that there are many correlations between principal behavior and academic achievement. Again, such researcher as: Collaborative decision making (Brown & Anfara, 2003; Cotton, 2003; Heck & Marcoulides, 1993; Tyack & Cuban, 1995), ensuring that expectations are held high and unwavering (Cotton, 2003; Sweeney, 1982), discusses the significance of an orderly, safe and caring environment (Cotton, 2003; Sweeney, 1982); the role of a culture that diminishes toxicity and ensures it is healthy (Barth, 2002; DuFour, 1998; Fullan, 1991, 1993; Marsh, 2000); the role of strong instructional leadership capacities (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Barth, 2000; Cotton, 2003); the significance of having strong, vibrant relationships promote student achievement (Hackman & Johnson, 1991; Hersey & Blanchard, 1993; Riehl, 2000; Wheatley, 1999); the ability of the principal to create a vision, that is compelling, realistic, and attainable (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Leithwood, 1992); and being a visible presence within the school (Andrew & Soder, 1987; Cotton, 2003)—all correlate highly to effective schools with effective leadership.

With the large body of research available to leaders, the primary question is not what needs to be accomplished, but rather how do I accomplish this? Successful implementation of these strategies and practices relies heavily on a principal’s knowledge
and skill set regarding the specified reform effort. The initial effort should involve the willingness of the principal to change, and understand the change process. A building principal can impact decisions regarding class size; access to resources, academic achievement, and opportunities for exposure to a world of possibilities through the access of technology or travel can powerfully impact the quality of instruction. In essence, the principal must judge every decision through the eyes of equity in order to create an environment of Anti-Racist leadership.

Linton and Singleton (2006), state that transformation of a school is not merely a set of technical or structural changes. It requires that leaders and educators imagine a new approach to delivering instruction and embrace it. Typically, the initial phase of this process involves each individual within the organization examining his or her own attitudes and behaviors as it relates to minority students ability to perform. Linton and Singleton further believe in order to eliminate racial achievement disparities educators must confront their own racial attitudes before they can facilitate classroom changes. This is critically important for a principal who is the key instructional leader.

**Change- The Foundation for Transformational Leadership**

It order to have real and sustainable change, leaders must realize that real change will not occur when only mechanical changes in structure and process are undertaken, but rather when community members and constituents of the school. If this statement is true, then it only makes sense that the role of the principal is crucial (Fullan, 2003). Effective change relies on the capacity of the principal to create intrinsically motivated followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2001) who will sustain a newly formed learning organization (Senge,
Fullan (1991, 1993, 2003) claims principals should no longer engage in restructuring efforts but rather endeavor to re-culture their schools based on shared values, traditions, beliefs and objectives (e.g. Dufour, 1999; Kanter, 1997; Schlechty, 1997; and Sergiovanni, 1992).

McREL’s meta-analysis on Balanced Leadership (Waters et al, 2003), found a positive effect for principal leadership behavior and student achievement. Within the overall findings, McREL positively correlated 21 leadership responsibilities with the differential impact of the focus and magnitude of change necessary for success. Upon review, a common-sense idea of great significance emerged; different types of reform or change require different knowledge and skills sets. Understanding the magnitude of change for a specific reform such as closing the achievement gap, therefore, would provide important information to principals’ and district leaders as to the direction necessary for successful and sustainable reform (Fullan, 2005).

Cuban (1989), presented second order change as a process that alters the, “fundamental ways of achieving organizational goals or to introduce new goals and interventions that transform familiar ways of doing things into novel solutions to persistent problems,” (p. 266). Key to differentiating between first and second order change is first understanding current culture and then discerning whether the intended change is “business as usual” (first order), or a significant move from the way things have been done traditionally (second order) (Waters & Grubb, 2004). The magnitude of change may appear to be clear from an external perspective.
Changing the thoughts, beliefs, and habits of those within the system, however, relies more heavily on each individual’s personal mental models (Senge, 1994) prior to implementing the transition.

Approaching the magnitude of change from a symbolic inter-actionist perspective, therefore, provides insight as to the nature of the transformation. Mullin and Keedy (1998) ground such interaction in, “truth as found in the actors interpretation of their constructed reality, rather than in a correspondence between their understanding and some objective reality existing independent of the participants,” (p. 9). It is reasonable to believe, therefore, that a majority of educators think themselves to live without bias, as teachers and principals, and overwhelmingly enter the profession to positively impact the lives of their students.

As institutionalized organizations that are based on the social constructions of society at large, schools perpetuate beliefs, attitudes and values that are incongruous with their stated mission. Contradictory to the objective reality, educators’ constructed truth is in line with American society and is evidenced by the often-recited phrase in our public schools; “I don’t see color”. This serves as a basis for studying the perceived nature of change necessary to close the achievement gap.

**Excellence and equity.**

Ron Ferguson (2007) in his book entitled: Toward Excellence with Equity, *an emerging vision for closing the achievement gap*, states, “Closing the achievement gap between children of different racial and ethnic backgrounds has been a long-term challenge with long-term implications for the United States.
However, he believes there are reasons to be hopeful. Since the 1970’s, there has been progress made in narrowing racial test-score gaps. The (NAEP) National Assessment of Educational Progress, began tracking the data by racial groups, they found that the Black-White reading score gap for 17-year-olds narrowed by more than 60 percent between 1971 and 1988(U.S. Dept. of Education 2005) (although it has widened slightly), and evidence exists that the Black-White IQ gap is narrowing (Ferguson 2005, Neal 2005, and Dickens and Flynn (2005). Further, recent national data show virtually no racial differences in measured ability among children approaching their first birthday (U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

Ferguson asserts, “The nation’s long-term experience establishes clearly that progress is possible,” (2007, p. 255). He further contends that skillful parenting and deeply transformative, community-level reforms are two important and feasible goals to pursue within the broader national movement for “excellence with equity”—a movement aimed at ensuring high standards of achievement among children from all racial, ethnic, and social class backgrounds.

In addition, schools must be transformed from within. Whole school models and other types of programs that originate outside school systems all have a part to play in this transformative process. Ferguson further contends that experimental evaluations often show positive effects. However, if gaps are to close dramatically across the nation, school systems will need their own internal capacities and supportive political constituencies for long-term excellence (Ferguson, 2007).
In their book entitled *Courageous conversations about Race: A Field guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* (2006), Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton provide a systemic approach to addressing achievement in schools through the lens of race. The Excellence and Equity initiative adopted by the Meadow Grove School District is based upon the tenets of this book. The following is a description that outlines the Excellence and Equity initiative, and the basis of its position as it relates to closing the achievement gap in schools. They state:

Educators are acutely aware of the statistical gaps in achievement between different racial groups. Considering the rapidly changing racial composition of student populations, how can educators reach a level of cultural proficiency necessary to eliminate this disparity? Examining the achievement gap through the prism of race, this comprehensive text explains the need for candid, courageous conversations about race to that educators may understand why performance inequity persists, and learn how they can develop a curriculum that promotes a true academic parity (Singleton, 2006, p 108).

To help guide policy analysis and institutional reform, the authors present a system wide plan for transforming schools and districts.

Practical features the book include:

- Implementation exercises
- Prompts, language, and tools that support profound discussion
- Activities and checklists for administrators
- Action Steps for creating an equity team

Linton and Singleton believe that only when educators have established both a language and a process for addressing the intersection of race and achievement will they be able to restructure their schools in ways that improve student performance and fulfill the promise that every child has a right to learn regardless of their race, culture, or class (2006).
These theories of action are embedded in the conceptual framework that the researcher will utilize in the study. The literature review explains the components or domains essential to providing leadership that creates an anti-racist school as outlined in this book. Again, the hope of the Meadow Grove School District in working with this consulting firm is that they would deepen the school district’s understanding of racial factors in academic performance and discover new strategies for closing the achievement gap in their district. “The book provides empirical data and well-constructed exercises to help us think through the ways that race affects our lives and our professional practices. My sincere desire is that after you have had an opportunity to read this volume you will, indeed, engage in some courageous conversations about race,” (Gloria Ladson-Billings, 2002).

**Courageous conversation and the Four Agreements.**

As educators gravitate towards a higher level of racial consciousness, it is imperative they effectively engage in an interracial dialogue that includes, but is not limited to students, colleagues, and parents. According to Singleton and Linton (2006), to participate in an effective interracial dialogue about race, the first step is to commit to what they have entitled the “Four Agreements of Courageous Conversation”. By committing to these agreements, participants are publicly stating that they will:

- Stay engaged
- Experience Discomfort
- Speak Your Truth
- Expect and accept non-disclosure (Linton and Singleton, 2006).
These Agreements coupled with the “Six Conditions,” provide a clear structure for conversation about race. The following are the “Six Conditions” to engage in a racial dialogue:

- Focus on Personal, Local and Immediate
- Isolate Race
- Normalize Social Construction and Multiple Perspectives
- Monitor Agreements, Conditions and Establish Parameters
- Use a “Working Definition” for Race
- Examine the Presence and Role of “Whiteness” (Linton and Singleton, 2006).

As educators commit to embracing these agreements to engage, sustain, and deepen interracial dialogue about racial identity, racism, and the racial achievement gap that exists between White students and students of color, the process of deinstitutionalizing racism within the school setting begins. The courageous conversations serve as the basis for creating a systemic conceptual framework for creating an Anti-racist environment. The areas of leadership, teaching and learning, equity, anti-racism, empowerment and community are aspects of the overall conceptual framework that must be visible within a school (Linton and Singleton, 2002). The framework is graphically represented in Figure 2.
The literature review is organized using the domains from *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*, and the tenets represented in Figure 1. The domains include: Community, Learning and Teaching, and Leadership. Additionally, there is data presented in the literature review that represents the achievement gap research over the past thirty years. Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton (2006), in their book entitled “Courageous Conversations About Race- *A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*,” discusses the fact that teaching is a demanding profession. There is minimal effort associated with technical requirements of the job. However, the right attitude and passion are essential characteristics of an effective teacher and leader.
Furthermore, Linton and Singleton (2006), contend that having worked with thousands of educators, that the most effective teachers and administrators, who are most proficient at teaching all students of every race, also have a tremendous amount of passion for their work. According to their book, there are a number of characteristics that must exist in an anti-racist leadership environment. There must be “Courageous Conversations” about race that elicits multiple perspectives. They outline a process whereby schools are instructed to operate under. This includes but is not limited particular readings, books, articles, etc. in a time conscious manner. The book outlines a conceptual framework that includes: teaching and learning, leadership, community, anti-racism, equity, empowerment, and equality. These are all critical components of the conceptual framework, which must be addressed under the all-encompassing umbrella of courageous conversation.

The researcher has endeavored to address the critical areas identified in the conceptual framework, but also have cited a review of the literature as it pertains to these specific domains. Whereby, providing a coherent organization of the pertinent information. The first concept outlined in the conceptual framework listed below is the teaching and learning.

**Empowerment—CARE Teams.**

As teachers began to embrace their own racial comfort level, and then choose to explore at a deeper level, they can become members of the CARE Team. CARE is an acronym that stands for Collaborative Action Research for Equity (Linton and Singleton, 2006). According to Singleton and Linton, race impacts all students at various levels.
This includes but is not limited to the lowest performing students. Through CARE, teachers analyze a focus group of students to learn how to best teach and support them in their learning. Supporting teachers in discovering the impact of their relationships with Minority students and to adjust their instructional delivery accordingly will accomplish this.

CARE teachers must meet every six weeks or more often if necessary, to share what they have learned with their colleagues. Additionally, they observe one another’s instruction, and discuss the success and failures of students within their focus groups. The CARE Teams are structured and designed for teachers to research and develop strategies that enable them to provide culturally relevant curriculum that engages minority students.

**Community—Pass groups.**

According to Linton and Singleton (2006), community is defined as a network of effective and supportive relationships shared by all throughout the educational system. This domain is focused on improving relationships between White teachers and families of color. Additionally, it involves the interactions of building administrators, students and teachers to be positive and productive. It is imperative in this work that everyone acknowledges that the schools represent a community in and of itself, yet is a part of the established community as well. It is vital, through this organized framework, that the basic goal of developing and strengthening the institutional appreciation for community is not lost. Professional educators and community-based educators empower families, clergy, government and law enforcement officials to engage in a different kind of dialogue that recognizes and appreciates their disparate experiences.
The P.A.S.S. Team is trained and recognizes that “Courageous Conversation” is critical in creating strong communities. Therefore, the P.A.S.S. team works diligently by institutionalizing the “Four Agreements”, and the “Six Conditions” in their daily interactions with school personnel. The school officials (lead by the principal), assist in communicating the expectations, standards, and overall services that the school provides for their children. In turn, the hope is that parents involved on the P.A.S.S. Team have a better understanding of the operations of the school, and can therefore support school efforts through a partnership for academic success for all students. As there is an exchange of ideas, strategies, and inputs provided by both entities, the overall success of students would be the outcome. However, if either party disengages, then the entire community suffers.

According to Singleton and Linton (2006), it is important for community members to visually observe educators struggling with the conversations of race. This is more acceptable, than avoiding the conversation. Conversely, White educators, and especially those working in high minority-majority communities, must also work on perfecting their interracial dialogue effectiveness.

Ultimately, this framework will prove to be an invaluable one for both educators and community members. Primarily, because of the fact that minority communities of color typically live in segregated settings, and may not have positive interracial interactions with White educators. Therefore, through the process of implementing P.A.S.S. Teams, students of color benefit as deeper understanding and greater trust is built between the institutional community and established community educators, leading
to authentic support, improved instruction, and higher student achievement (Linton and Singleton, 2006).

**Equity—Equity teams.**

Systemic Equity Anti-Racism Transformation requires leadership. That leadership must begin with the principal and translate to every aspect of the school building. As Courageous Conversation is practiced, every faculty member within the organization will ultimately internalize it. According to Singleton, the system should include what he calls Equity Teams or E-Teams. The E-Teams are comprised of educators who are emerging leaders that are committed to developing the will, skill, knowledge, and capacity that is necessary to support their colleagues in understanding the issue of race and deinstitutionalizing racism.

Members of the E-Teams must begin their development process by examining their own beliefs or mental modes and then begin careful instructional practices within their own classrooms. Once they are comfortable in their own development, then they can solicit the support and services of their colleagues in professional learning that enhances their teaching. E-Teams have the following responsibilities:

1. Engage in the process of investigation to discover how race impact one’s personal and professional attitudes and beliefs.
2. Lead the school staff in the examination of individual and institutional culture as it relates to equity and anti-racism.
3. Establish a professional learning community in which adults can effectively develop skills and knowledge necessary to improve student performance and eliminate racial predictability and achievement disparities.
A building principal can impact decisions regarding class size, access to resources, academic achievement, and opportunities for exposure to a world of possibilities through the access of technology or travel can powerfully impact the quality of instruction. In essence, the principal must judge every decision through the eyes of equity in order to create an environment of Anti-Racist leadership. Linton and Singleton (2006), state that transformation of a school is not merely a set of technical or structural changes. It requires that leaders and educators imagine a new approach to delivering instruction and embrace it. Typically, the initial phase of this process involves each individual within the organization examining his or her own attitudes and behaviors as it relates to minority students ability to perform. Linton and Singleton further believe in order to eliminate racial achievement disparities educators must confront their own racial attitudes before they can facilitate classroom changes. This is critically important for a principal who is the key instructional leader.

**Anti-racist leadership defined.**

Prior to outlining specific components of Anti-Racist Leadership, it is imperative the researcher begins with a working definition of racism. Beverly Tatum (1997) states in her book “Why are all of the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria,” that many individuals use the terms prejudice and racism interchangeably. Additionally, David Wellman argues, “limiting our understanding of racism to prejudice does not offer a sufficient explanation of the persistence of racism.” He defines racism as a “system of advantage based on race.” He illustrates his definition, by stating how Whites defend their racial advantage-access to better schools, housing, jobs-even when they do not
embrace overtly prejudicial thinking. Therefore, racism cannot be fully explained as an expression of prejudice alone. This working definition is helpful, as with other forms of oppression, is not only a personal ideology based on racial prejudice, but a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and procedures as well as beliefs and actions of individuals. Especially, in the United States, this system clearly favors advantages for Whites and disadvantages to people of color. Anti-racist educators and consultants commonly use another definition of racism called, “prejudice plus power.” The bases of this definition is to suggest that racial prejudice when combined with social power-access to social, cultural, and economic resources and decision-making—leads to the institutionalization of racist policies and practices. Both Beverly Tatum and David Wellman’s definition captures the fact that racism is more than just individual beliefs and attitudes. The notion of systematic advantage and disadvantage is critical to an understanding of how racism operates in public schools and the United States at large.

The systemic advantages of being White are sometimes not recognized by Whites themselves. They do not perceive themselves of holding power in the United States because of the color of their skin. Despite their denial, every social indicator, from salary to life expectancy, reeds the advantage of being White (Farley, 1993). The system of advantage of being White has often been referred to as White privilege. Peggy McIntosh, a White feminist scholar, in a well-known article, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” identified a long list of societal privileges that she received simply because she was White.
In order to effectively close the achievement gap of minority students, this fundamental awareness of the unintended consequences of a racist educational system, promotes pain, alienation, anger and guilt by everyone (Tatum, 1999). These types of feelings can lead to and foster the achievement gap of minority students. Most people believe that they deserve the good things they have received, and that others, too, get what they deserve. This tendency has been called a “belief in a just world” by Social Psychologists. The notion that racism as a system of advantage based on color is antithetical to the notions of an American meritocracy. According to Tatum, this definition generates great discomfort. Notions of power or privilege do not have to be addressed when one’s understanding of racism is constructed in that manner.

**Factors that influence anti-racist leadership—persistence.**

According to Linton and Singleton (2006), although there are many components to Anti-Racist Leadership, the key is persistence. For an effective organization, a leader must stay the course in pursuit of an equitable school. A school principal leader is relentless in his/her quest to identify, and implement strategies that transform their schools. They constantly examine curriculum, pedagogy, and the overall effectiveness of teacher instruction. They are single minded in their focus for results, and won’t permit the huge disparity of Black and Brown students results on standardized tests in relationship to their White and Asian counterparts. The No Child Left Behind Act in 2000 and related legislation will not permit educators and leaders to ignore this mandate. The bar has been raised and the standard is constant—that all children must learn. The research by (Haycock, 2003) contends that in order for the achievement gap to close, teacher
effectiveness in the classroom must increase. It is clear that educators have no control over the life circumstances and backgrounds that students arrive in their classrooms with. However, the areas that can be impacted by teachers and schools are the quality of instruction and preparedness of educators. One of the most difficult aspects of Anti-Racist leadership is to maintain focus as the demands become increasingly difficult. This requires perseverance as you endeavor to create equitable /anti-racist leadership actions because cultural transformation is difficult to orchestrate. However, without persistence, schools will continue to adopt one school initiative after another without impacting the achievement gap, and creating systemic changes within their school. But, with persistence, principals’ will have the time and support necessary to yield tangible strategies that will create success for all students.

A primary question that must be answered by a building principal is whether his/her school system is adequate for struggling Minority students? To answer this question with confidence, a building level principal understands that in order to close the racial achievement gap, then schooling must be focused on the needs of students rather than the personal needs of adults (Linton and Singleton, 2006). Additionally, there must be a community of leaders both within and outside of the school that cooperates to establish a set of core values that will guide the interactions of staff, students and families. These values must be the “heart” of the school’s educational philosophy, district policies, programmatic structures and instructional practices. The cultural fabric that weaves everyone together is the ability to sustain Courageous Conversations, which embraces all people along with their multiple perspectives.
Anti-Racist leadership factors to close the achievement gap.

“Don’t wear those clothes, don’t listen to that music, don’t talk that way, and don’t sit together in the cafeteria.”--Beverly Tatum (Sparks, 2004, p. 49)

Minority adolescent students really begin to think about their racial identities during this time frame. It’s an important time to explore racial and ethnic identity. While White youth are also exploring their identity at this time, they usually aren’t exploring the racial aspects of that identity. So, it’s not uncommon to find adolescents of color actively exploring identity, which manifests itself in styles of dress, patterns of speech, music, and who they hang out with in the corridors of their schools.

All of this occurs in the presence of White teachers who have no personal history with that type of identity exploration, nor have they given much thought to their own identities, even in midlife. If one person is having an experience that another has not shared or even thought about, it’s easy to see where there can be misunderstanding and conflict. This is particularly true when adults respond by telling youngsters to not do things associated with their identity exploration:

It is vitally important for students of color to have quality relationships with adult educators in a school. This is most especially true with student’s teachers. As Beverly Tatum suggests in the passage above, it is imperative that educators accept and understand the cultural identity of their students. Again, this applies also to principals’ if they want to obtain the best from their teachers. By giving their students the racial understanding, empathy, and compassion they need, educators begin to develop their effectiveness with students of color (Linton and Singleton, 2006).
Third culture and racial isolation.

Linton and Singleton (2006, p. 219) discusses a very unique concept that they have termed the “Third Culture.” They believe that people of color who strive to conform to White culture often find themselves living in what they define as a Third Culture—always striving but never succeeding in fitting into Whiteness, and no longer culturally accepted within their own primary racial culture either. They further contend that students of color experience racial isolation in a White-dominated school context during the day and often find their own primary culture—say, their neighborhood—increasingly foreign and distant. This is an example of what they mean by a Third Culture experience: racially speaking, they contend that a student of color doesn’t gain the privileges of White skin, but they are losing contact and connection with their Blackness or Brownness on a daily basis. In essence, the bottom line is that they’re forced to trade their kinship and alliance with people of color for scholastic success and high academic achievement. This is what is meant by what I have termed the “acting” White theory that is further explained in the research paper. (Gail Thompson, 2004,).

Institutional racism.

It is evident that any intelligent, educated, and progressive thinking individual would ponder the origin of the dismal statistics cited previously. Linton and Singleton (2006) in their book titled Courageous Conversation about Race provide insight into the lack of student achievement gains by minority students. Linton and Singleton discuss the need for educators and leaders to understand institutionalized White Racism. They explain that institutionalized White Racism persists because it is supported. Just as a
tabletop can only be supported with four legs, the same analogy applies to institutionalized White racism (Figure 3). The four supporting legs are entitled: internalized White racism, interracial White racism, intraracial White racism, and reverse White racism. These are the pillars of support that allow the status quo to persist.

They further define the various characteristics of the pillars that support institutionalized White racism. Furthermore, they contend that internalized White racism presents itself differently to Black and White people. For Whites, internalized White racism may range from the radical White supremacy espoused by the Klu Klux Klan to a more passive reaction that renders people of colors voices, views, perspectives, and contributions as insignificant. However, for people of color, internalized White racism manifests itself in an active form of self-hatred as well as disapproval of other people of color because they lack White color, culture, or consciousness.

Interracial White racism occurs when there is a conflict between different people of color over their respective positions of power relative to the top of the table or to White culture. Intraracial White racism occurs typically within the same group of color. An example would be that a Black individual might assimilate into the White culture to a larger degree than another Black person. The varying levels of assimilation or resistance to Whiteness may result in conflict between Black people as they collectively work together to change White supremacy. The very act of same color individuals threatens their solidarity as a minority group.
Understanding institutionalized white racism.

Figure 3. Singleton and Linton (2006)

Invisibility versus hypervisibility.

Singleton and Linton (2006) discusses the notion of invisibility versus hypervisibility as it relates to the racial experiences of people of color. In his illustration he asks one to imagine a Black dot in a circle Figure 4.1 (pg. 215). The black dot represents a Black student, and a circle represents his learning environment or context. They make the point that traditionally the white space between the circle and the Black student has not been defined; in other words, when asked what surrounds the black dot, most people would say nothing. When nothing is noticed within the circle except for the Black student, the White context or White cultural backdrop is neutralized or made invisible, and all dark dots, by virtue of their color contrast, stick out or are hypervisible.
They further contend that rather simply representing an empty circle, the circle actually comprises a plethora of white dots—or White students and adults. Interestingly enough, their Whiteness is only made apparent by the existence of the Black dot—or the student of color. If you take and add more black dots or additional students of color grouped together amongst the larger number of white dots—or White students and adults, they become even more noticeable or even threaten the White dots’ sense of entitlement to the entire space. This is most accurately illustrated in Beverly Tatum’s book, “Why are All of the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” (1997). Black students grouped together become hypervisible and draws disproportionate attention to themselves, see Figure 4.2 (pg. 215). As one observes an educator, only the association of minority students is scrutinized, then the larger group of White students is left invisible in terms of color, culture, and consciousness. This does not mean that White students’ presence is not recognized, however, their color, culture, and consciousness are viewed as normal and appropriate. Consequently, these factors are not subject to scrutiny or examination. If educators want to authentically address the needs of minority students, the examination must be done in the context of acknowledging White students’ and their culture by being made visible, as shown in Figure 4.3 (pg. 216). This illustration allows educators to fully understand the impact of White culture on the educational experience of minority students. This illustration also applies to a lone White student within a school of Hispanic/Latino or Asian students can become hypervisible as in Figure 4.4 (pg. 216). Linton and Singleton further states that as unfair as it is to single out this one lone student, it is equally unfair for White educators to single out Black and Hispanic/Latino
students. This perception has a profound impact on the reality of what Minority students experience in schools rather than White students. One obvious example is the disproportionate discipline referrals received by Black males as opposed to White males. Singleton and Linton attributes this to their hypervisibility in a dominant White system, whereby White culture is the normal standard that they are compared to. They believe this and a classic daily example of White privilege that persists in schools without acknowledgement. As long as Whiteness in that school remains invisible, White educators may experience difficulty seeing how different life is for minority students, whose race and racial culture are hypervisible. Furthermore, according to Singleton and Linton, along with White privilege comes an unconscious skepticism about or dismissal of minority student’s racial perspective or experience and insensitivity toward the racial backdrop of American society. The ability of educators and building principals’ to understand the concepts of hypervisibility and racial invisibility is critical in building a system of Anti-Racist leaders who are committed to creating environments that promote equity/anti-racist schools.
Figure 4. Hypervisibility vs. Invisibility, Singleton and Linton (2006)

Understanding students of color within a white school.

Singleton and Linton (2006) suggests that people often ask the question, if race matters in schooling, then why do Asian students do so well? They have concluded that the element of expectations plays a significant role in this regard.

The larger White dominant society has labeled Asians people as the “model minority,” and are encouraged and supported by White people to act accordingly. Additionally, White Americans, generally speaking, use positive racial characteristics-intelligent, hard working, quiet and unassuming-to define Asians, Black and Latino students are often defined as “academically at-risk,” gang-affiliated, and lazy, among other negative descriptions. However, the key point in their rationale is that the achievement of all students is typically measured against White student performance. White students are considered to be the norm, reference group, or standard, and their performance as a racial group is rarely examined or questioned.
The phenomena of *stereotype threat* allow us to better understand achievement disparities existing between student racial groupings. As one observes only the association of minority students, and is scrutinized, then the larger group of White students is left invisible in terms of color, culture, and consciousness. This does not mean that White students’ presence is not recognized; however, their color, culture, and consciousness are viewed as normal and appropriate. Consequently, these factors are not subject to scrutiny or examination. If educators want to authentically address the needs of minority students, the examination must be done in the context of acknowledging White students’ and their culture by being made visible. This illustration allows educators to fully understand the impact of White culture on the educational experience of minority students.

This illustration also applies to a lone White student within a school of Hispanic/Latino or Asian students who can become hypervisible (as shown in figure 4.3). The perception has a profound impact on the reality of what Minority students experience in schools especially that of White males. One obvious example is the disproportionate discipline referrals received by Black males as opposed to White males. Singleton and Linton attributes the higher discipline referral rate to race and culture. They believe this and a classic example of White privilege that persists in schools without acknowledgement.

As long as Whiteness in that school remains invisible, White educators may experience difficulty seeing how different life is for minority students, whose race and racial culture are hypervisible. According to Singleton and Linton, along with White
privilege exists an unconscious skepticism about or dismissal of minority student’s racial perspective or experience and insensitivity toward the racial backdrop of American society. The ability of educators and building principals’ to understand the concepts of hypervisibility and racial invisibility is critical in building a system of Anti-Racist leaders who are committed to creating environments that promote equity/anti-racist schools.

**Equality—minority students an endangered group.**

There has been data collected on educating minority students since the mid-1980’s, yet without any substantial gains. According to (Ravitch, 2000), the main purpose for education is to acquire knowledge and skills that are necessary to flourish in an American Democratic society. However, the reality is in the data that indicate Blacks and Hispanics on suspensions, expulsions, retentions, and drop out rates are higher than any other racial groups. It is fair to say that the public school system has not served our minority youth very well. Undoubtedly, this is a national tragedy as minorities continue to underachieve and further isolate themselves from mainstream America. It is predictable that if more resources are not put into this national epidemic, then the United States will remain a “Nation at Risk.” In 1992, the Black Urban League noted that, Black youth were being attacked by a series of forces that if allowed to go unchecked, could create a lost “generation.” As the 21st century began, the Urban League found that:

- The leading cause of death among 18 to 24-year-old Black men was murder by other Blacks (National Urban League, 2000).
- The fastest-growing population of homicide victims continued to be Black males between the ages of 11 and 22 (National Urban League, 2000)
- In 1990 the sentencing Project collected data to show that 1 out of every 3 Black men under the age of 30 and 1 out of every Hispanic men of the same age was either in jail, on trial, or on parole. The figure for Black men that are part of the justice system had been as high as sixty per cent in
Washington, D.C., and eighty per cent in Los Angeles during the 1980’s. It has been confirmed by the Department of Justice that there has been little change in these percentages for both Blacks and Hispanics in federal penal systems since the mid-1980’s U.S. Department of Justice, 2001).

- The National dropout rate for all students was approximately twenty five per cent, but as high as fifty per cent for Black youth over the last decade (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).
- Since the mid-1980’s, studies have consistently shown that Black youth have been suspended from schools and rates generally three times that of their White counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).
- The proportion of Black men attending college was still the largest decline at all racial and gender groups (American Council on Education, 2003).
- The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has documented that since 1985, the
- largest group of increased poverty were of Blacks without college educations.

Additionally, the number of Black children in female-headed households that are poor is still nearly two-thirds. When those households have mothers under the age of 25 years, the poverty rate has been as high as ninety per cent (National Urban League, 2000). These are undoubtedly disturbing statistics, however, there are trends that aren’t as easily documented. For instance, in school districts where dropout rates among Blacks are lower, administrators must recognize the fact that mere completion of high school is not enough (U.S. Department of Education, 2000.) The 1954 Brown vs. board of education decision has had minimal impact on the achievement and student performance of African-American students. A recent report that was released by the U.S. Department of Education on student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests in reading and science would cause considerable anguish from the forefathers of the past, educators and parents of today in the United States. Although there have been significant investments in public education, the average scores for fourth graders on the NAEP have remained relatively steady since 1992 (Fletcher, 2001).
Additionally, the NAEP test that was given in 2000 to twelfth graders from a nationally represented sample of students was worse than the 1996 results. That translates into eighty per cent of the nation’s high school seniors are partially proficient or less in science. Fletcher (2001) further contends that the United States students are becoming weaker in the primary subjects that are increasingly significant to America. The literature is clear when examining the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students conclude that most of the these students are being held hostage in school environments that provide sub-standard educations as well as foster low expectations for their academic achievement (Bailey, 2001). It is inconceivable that in the year 2008, student achievement for Black and Hispanic/Latino students is still ineffective.

There continue to be major educational problems in public schools as evidenced by several studies during the Reagan-Bush years (1980-1992) indicating that African Americans, particularly males from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are disproportionately represented in grade-retention, school-suspension, and dropout rates of public schools (Bennet & Harris, 1981; Campbell, 1982’ Hess & Greer, 1987; Hess & Lauber, 19985; Kaufman, 1991. The same identified students, prior to leaving their adolescent years; in most cases were poor academic achievers in the elementary grades and experience academic suspensions and other disciplinary issues. Historically, since the beginning of public schooling in the United States, African American children have been labeled, identified, tracked, and misclassified. They have been the recipients of inequitable resource allocations; the application of inadequately developed and normed intelligence and achievement tests; disproportionately placed in special education
classrooms, with minimal if any attention paid to their learning styles. (e.g. Designs for Change, 1982; Epps, 1992; Hale-Benson, 1986; Hilliard, 1976; Miller-Jones, 1988, 1989; Myrdal, 1944; Shade, 1982).

**Teaching and Learning**

*Unfortunately, many ...teachers...share the general belief of educators and the public that racial differences in intelligence were innate, real, and fixed.*

--Diane Ravitch, 2000

**Culturally responsive teaching.**

It is without contention that every teacher wants students to become successful contributing members of society. However, in order to transform that statement into reality most teachers will have to make monumental shifts in their viewpoints and will have to learn new pedagogical practices that are better matched for the students of the twenty first century. This is most especially true for Black and Hispanic/Latino students. Ultimately, that translates into principals and school leaders must invest in high quality, sustained professional development to build capacity of the teachers in their schools to be successful with their students of color. (Joseph, Scheurich, Skrla, 2003, pg. 48). More specifically, the area of culturally responsive teaching is a critical area that professional development efforts should be focused on. Ladson-Billings (1994), Delpit (1996), and Gay (2000) are pioneers in this area of work. They have outlined in their research frameworks for what culturally responsive teaching is and what it looks like in classroom practice, and teachers’ instructional delivery.

Culturally responsive teaching operates on the basic premise that teachers should teach using philosophies and methods that respect, value, and use positively the strengths
of students’ home cultures, contexts, and languages. Moll has argued (see Moll, 1992; see also Gonzalez et al., 1995) that is based upon the “funds of knowledge” that all children bring to school. Since the overwhelmingly majority of the nation’s teaching force is White females, and the growing number of students seated in today’s classrooms, are students of color, the need for professional development in culturally responsive instruction has never been so demanding. This is especially true when the vast number of White female teachers that occupy our classrooms may not have neutral perspectives on the dignity, worth, and educability of children they come from low-income homes that inhabit their classrooms. Unfortunately, there are many teachers that carry (often subconsciously) negative and deficit viewpoints about the children that they are charged to educate (Marx, 2002; Mckenzie, 2002). According to (Valenzuela, 1999) it is vital that these negative and “subtractive” views be brought to teachers’ awareness and how these views must be changed, and culturally responsive teaching practices to replace this deficit thinking.

**Prevailing gap theories.**

According to Gail Thompson (2004), below is a list of the prevailing theories that researchers have thought for decades to explain the causes of the Black-White achievement gap. All of these theories are explained but also is listed to emphasize that regardless of student’s backgrounds, teacher’s beliefs, attitudes, and expectations have been a self-fulfilling prophecy for minority students. These theories have been used to explain the causes of minority students’ underachievement. However, it also indicates numerous salient points that must be factored into this research study. First, there is no
simple answer; instead, multiple theories exist. Secondly, the research can be categorized into two distinct areas. The first area blames students and their parents (the victims) for the underachievement. The second area comprises attributing factors in the research that believes the underachievement is related to schooling deficits. It is my goal of this research study to demonstrate how the actions or non-actions by building principals may perpetuate inequitable opportunities through institutional racism.

- **Deficit-Deprivation Theory**—This theory describes a hierarchical system of intelligence which places Whites and Asians at the top and Black and Hispanic at the bottom.
- **Theory of Structural Inequality**—This theory suggests that schools were designed to perpetuate class differences between African Americans and Whites, assuming African Americans are “represented among those at the lowest socioeconomic level,” (p. 14).
- **Tracking**—This theory examines the disproportionate representation of Black and Hispanic students in remedial classes as compared to White and Asian students placed in advanced courses.
- **Theory of Discontinuity**—This theory describes the Eurocentric emphasis placed on the positive aspects of European culture, “However, the same system has promoted the underachievement for many students of color by ignoring the strengths of their cultures,” (p. 16).
- **Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome**—This theory suggests that boys of color, specifically, may start out strong early in their academic careers, but by the fourth grade many have been “relegated to special education or labeled underachievers,” (p. 16).
- **The “Acting White” Theory**—This phenomenon describes what happened when Black and Hispanic/Latino students equate academic achievement with “Acting White”. This perception often leads to rebellion of that idea and ultimately poor academic achievement.
- **Peer Pressure and the Lure of Street Life Theory**—Researchers have used this theory to help explain poor academic performance. This theory suggests that education must compete with negative peer pressure and the allure of street life. Parents Are at Fault Theory—This ideology points to lack of parental involvement by Black and Hispanic parents as the culprit for poor academic performance. This theory is two-fold to include teacher beliefs versus the beliefs held by parents, (Thompson, 2004).
Critical race theory.

Critical race theory is an analytical framework developed primarily by legal scholars of color to address social justice and racial oppression in U.S. society. According to Delgado and Stefanic (2001), “The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in transforming and studying the relationships among race, racism, and power.” The inception of the theory can be traced back to the 1970s with the work of such renowned researchers as Derek Bell and Alan Freedman. These individuals were frustrated with the slow and lethargic pace that racial reform was taking place within the liberal civil rights process in the United States. Their efforts were combined with many other individuals that included students, legal scholars, and civil rights activists who also felt that the civil rights movement had come to a standstill (Delgado & Stefanic, 2000).

Although CRT continued to emerge in the 1980’s, however, it was being spearheaded by predominately White male leftist law professors who challenged the traditional legal scholars that create, supports, and legitimizes social power in U.S. society (Matsuda et al., 1993). By 1997, people of color, White women, and others were attracted by critical legal studies (CLS) because it challenged orthodox ideas about the inviolability and objectivity of laws that oppressed minorities and White women for centuries (Wing, 1997).

However, there were many members within the CRT legal community, that felt that CLS excluded the perspectives of people of color and that the CLS movement was non-attentive to the role that racism played in the United States and the U.S. legal system.
To this end, legal scholars of color began articulating a theory of race and racism that “allows us to better understand how racial power can be produced even from within a liberal discourse that is relatively autonomous from organized vectors of racial power” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xxv). Although CRT began in legal studies, it has spread to other disciplines, most specifically education. One way to examine CRT in education is to view it as a developing theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical strategy that accounts for the role of race and racism in U.S. education and works to eliminate racism as a part of a larger goal of eliminating other forms of subordination (Solorzano, 1998).

There are at least three important components and implications for multicultural education that should be infused in teaching to diverse student populations: (a) it theorizes about race while also addressing the intersectionality of racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression; (b) it challenges Eurocentric epistemologies and dominant ideologies such as meritocracy, objectivity, and neutrality; and (c) it uses counter storytelling as a methodological and pedagogical tool. The original origin of multicultural education was to combat racism in schools, although its writings tend to focus on classroom practices without necessarily contextualizing classrooms within analyses of racism. The current teacher training in multicultural education often takes the form of offering solutions to problems connected to race and ethnicity without digging deeper into the nature of the problem. Critical Race Theory is similar to antiracist education because it is a social justice paradigm that endeavors to combat racism as a part of a larger goal of ending all forms of subordination.
Stereotype threat.

Stereotype threat and the responses it elicits can play a powerful role in the relatively poor achievement of certain students-African American males, Latinos, and girls in math-oriented domains...Understanding stereotype threat has the potential to help educators narrow persistent achievement gap states Aronson (2004). According to researcher Claude Steele (2004), in his Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education, he discusses the impact of what is termed stereotype threat. According to Steele, stereotype threat has an impact on certain groups that have been the recipients of factors such as; socio-economic disadvantage, segregating social practices or restrictive cultural orientations that have been historical and ongoing. Individuals that have survived such structural obstacles, such as women, and/or African-American males are vulnerable to a social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one’s group applies. Stereotype threat is a situational threat-a threat in the air-that, in general form, can affect the members of any group about whom a negative stereotype exists (e.g., skateboarders, older adults, White men, gang members, Black males, etc.). Where bad stereotypes of about these groups apply, members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype. And for those who identify with the domain of which the stereotype is relevant, this predicament can be self-threatening. The negative stereotypes about African American males bear on the significance of their academic abilities. Therefore, for those individuals that the stereotypes apply, the threat of these stereotypes can be sharply felt and, in several ways, hampers their achievement.
If the threat is experienced in the context of a high stakes test performance—a classroom presentation for example—the emotional reaction caused could directly interfere with performance (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999; C.M. Steele & Aronson, 1995).

**Summary of the Literature Review**

As evidenced in Chapter two of the literature review, minority students are disproportionately below White and Asian students in most standardized test score measures. According to (Ravitch, 2000), the main purpose for education is to acquire knowledge and skills that are essential to compete and flourish in an American Democratic society. However, according to the data provided the reality does not point to that ideal. It is fair to say that the public school system has not served minority students favorably. The data ranging from the 1992 publication “A Nation At Risk,” as well as the statistics provided by the Black Urban League, all find that Black and Hispanic/Latino students are slowly becoming an academic endangered species. The incarceration rates of 1990 published by the Sentencing Project highlights a range of approximately sixty to eighty per cent of Black and Hispanic males are either in jail, on parole, or awaiting trial.

Additionally, the national dropout rate, the number of Black and Brown males entering college and the increased poverty rate of these minority groups makes the prospect of becoming contributing members of society bleak if not impossible if there isn’t a substantial change in these figures. As evidenced by the U.S. Department of Education 2000 findings, the Brown vs. board of education decision of 1954 has had little impact on the life chances for minority students.
According to the literature review, there has been considerable attention paid to internal and external barriers that may contribute to the perpetuation of the achievement gap. I would consider this research as an internal barrier. That is, it is a phenomena that the “individual” posses or internalizes. The findings of Delgado and Stefanic (2001), suggests that critical race theory played a significant role in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s. The movement paved the way to heighten focus on race, race relations and racism in the United States of America and around the world. The introduction of “Critical Legal Studies,” or (CLS) questioned the assumption that the justice system as a “color-blind”, race neutral system, lead the way for others to travel. By the late 1970’s, Gloria Ladson-Billings and other prominent researchers applied the principles to the field of education. This prompted the foundational argument suggesting that the process of schooling is neither race neutral nor “color-blind.” Other researchers such as Aronson and Steele (2004) introduced the concept of stereotype threat and the powerful role in the relatively low academic achievement of minority girls in math-oriented domains, as well as African-American males. An internal factor that promotes the achievement gap would be institutional White racism. Linton and Singleton (2006) suggests that institutionalized White Racism exists because it is supported.

In light of these findings, the implications for further research of the role Anti-racist leadership plays in closing the academic achievement gap of minority students is essential. Further research is paramount to fully capture the factors that influence positive, as well as negative leadership strategies that impact the closing of the achievement gap. It is evident that Anti-racist leadership is critical in addressing this
national epidemic. It is essential for these leaders to understand the research outlined in the literature review to better assist them in the monumental task of closing the achievement gap. The theories, and multiple perspectives provide insight into the color, culture, and consciousness of minority students.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This study seeks to examine the following research questions:

1. Do principals’ perceive that the training they have received has impacted their leadership actions towards closing the achievement gap in their schools?
   a. Are there differences in principals’ perceptions of the strategies necessary to close the achievement gap?
   b. Are there differences in principals’ perceptions of the levels of implementation of the conceptual framework?
   c. Are there differences in principals’ skill, will, and knowledge base in regards to the implementation of the conceptual framework?
   d. Are there differences in principals’ attitudes regarding the conceptual framework?

These questions will be used to investigate the impact/or lack of impact the Anti-racist leadership principles provided in the training by the Pacific Educational Consulting organization. The study will attempt to identify the perceptions of the training by principals, and if the training impacts the actions of principals’ in middle schools within the Meadow Grove School District.

The researcher hopes to be able to identify specific practices by building principals’, which will optimize the experiences for middle school students in a suburban
school district. Although, I will address the issues in the literature review, it is my primary objective to conduct this dissertation study to gain an in-depth understanding of principals’ perceptions of the training, and the impact that it may/may not have on their leadership actions as they endeavor to close the achievement gap for minority students.

The principal is the captain of the ship regarding any reform efforts in a school. Without the commitment of the principal at each site, closing the achievement gap for minority students would be extremely difficult if not impossible. The principal ensures through systemic changes that the culture of the school has been profoundly transformed. The goal of this research is to investigate the impact of the Excellence and Equity initiative training on principal’s perceptions of leadership and actions at their schools. The researcher will examine the degree of implementation of the conceptual framework outlined by the Excellence and Equity initiative, and principals’ perceptions of the impact of the work at their sites.

Methodology

Dilthey (1985) suggested that lived experience is to the soul what breath is to the body: “Just as our body needs to breathe, our soul requires the fulfillment and expansion of its existence in the reverberations of emotional life” (p. 59). The purpose of this study was to examine middle school principal’s perceptions of the Equity and Excellence initiative, and the impact of their leadership, outlined by the systemic conceptual framework that was to be implemented at their respective sites. The study focuses on providing leadership strategies based upon the work by (Linton and Singleton, 2006), that provides a framework to increase student achievement for students of color, and provide
awareness for principals that may increase their perspective in relation to working with students that are racially and culturally different from themselves in a public school educational setting. The study draws upon the institutionalized systems, beliefs, and practices, to address the issue of increasing achievement for minority students. This qualitative action research study intended to address the lack of skill, will and knowledge of building principals to systemically eradicate the achievement gap at their schools. The focus of this research through the lens of anti-racist leadership perspective and theories critically examined principal’s views of strategies to close the gap, their levels of implementation of the framework, and their general attitudes regarding the conceptual framework.

A two-fold purpose assisted in guiding this action research study:

1. To provide research based strategies that work for all students, but an emphasis to illuminate the pedagogical strategies theories, and contributing factors that impact student achievement for minority students.

2. To assess empirically how these strategies and the conceptual framework affected principal’s perceptions, particularly in relation to students that are very different from them.

This chapter presents an overview of qualitative research paradigm and the action research design. Specifically, phenomenology as a research methodology that seeks to describe, “basic lived” experiences (Creswell, 1998) of middle school principal’s. I present a discussion of critical action research and consider how these research approaches inform and relate to this study. Furthermore, the chapter provides a series of data collection, data analysis methods, and examines the issues central to qualitative research design methods. Additionally, the researcher included in this chapter a discussion of the limitations of the methodology used for this study.
Qualitative Research

Typically, there are many different authors that intentionally differentiate qualitative research from other types of research design (e.g. quantitative) by its concern for meaning and the prospect of an internationalist perspective. (Mason, 2002). It is a research that is vitally interested in the “lived experiences” of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2). It has been referred to as a naturalistic inquiry, due to the nature of the research in its natural setting in which the research takes place. It also has been described as a methodology that is humanistic and interactive in focus that “fosters pragmatism” in using a multiple method approach to collect data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.3; Mason, 2002). Practiced for many years by anthropologists in the form of ethnographic research, qualitative methodologies are now finding their way into the sociological, and social work disciplines as a way to address social interactions and the meanings of people attribute to these interactions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Mason, 2002; Morse & Richards, 2002).

There are three critical areas of focus that Rossman and Rallis describe qualitative research by. First, the qualitative paradigm views social phenomena holistically. The notion of the environment, the person and the thing collectively are all interrelated. Ultimately, these factors impact and influence the experiences. Second, it allows the researchers to reflect on their role in the research process. This requires self-discipline by the researcher in practice to not impart his/her own beliefs, actions, and biases (Mason, 2002, p.7). This statement is based upon the assumption that the researcher is not neutral or objective in the research process, but plays an integral role. The third principle
addresses the “emergent and evolving” characteristic of qualitative design (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.2). This speaks to the interpretist nature of qualitative research that allows the shaping of the study by the participants according to the context of the situation (Mason, 2002). According to (Patton, 2002), since qualitative research takes place in the natural setting (where phenomena is taking place), data is collected through observation, interview, document analysis, and participant observation. As a result of this type of methodology, the researcher is allowed the flexibility to make decisions to alter or change the strategy based on insights that were gleaned in the course of the research process, thereby increasing the uniqueness of each study (Mason, 2002). However, it must be seriously noted that due to this flexibility, there is a high degree of generalizability (although themes often emerge that can be further scrutinized) beyond the study at hand (Mason, 2002).

The naturalistic attribute of qualitative design greatly contributes to the applicability of qualitative research to the current study due to the contextual focus and attention to the importance of the natural setting. Typically, the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the participants, or influence the study, but rather takes a discovery approach where the participant is able to claim his or her own “voice” in the process (Patton, 2002, p. 41). Research using phenomenology seeks to uncover the meanings in our everyday existence. Its primary aim is “the fulfillment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are” (van Manen, 1990, p. 12). In this action research study, the researcher wanted to examine and understand the perceptions and experience the phenomenon of leading a suburban middle school to closing the achievement gap, and
creating an anti-racist environment that fosters student achievement for all students. It is the hope by the researcher, that by examining the essence of their lived experiences, the researcher will understand, more holistically, the impact of the phenomenon. Therefore, this form of action research known as qualitative, lends itself to understanding experiences and producing knowledge through interaction, reflection, and interpretation (Jacobson, 1998), and therefore was chosen to guide this study.

**What is a phenomenology?**

A phenomenological qualitative research design was determined to be the most effective approach in examining if the implementing Anti-Racist leadership principles impact the achievement of minority middle school students. According to Cresswell (1998), a phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon. This type of research design is intended to explore the structures of consciousness in human experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989). In this case, the experience of building level principals’ as they structure their schools to close the achievement gap, specifically for Minority students. The phenomenology has its origin in the philosophical perspectives of Edmond Hesserl (1859-1938) and philosophical discussions to follow by Heidegger, Satre, and Merleau-Ponty (Spiegelberg, 1982), and it has been commonly used in the social and human sciences, especially in sociology (Borgatta & Borgatta, 1992; Swingewood, 1991), psychology (Giorgi, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1989, 1994), nursing and health sciences (Ni-eswiadomy, 1983; Oiler. 1986), and education (Tesch, 1988).

1. The researcher will search for the *essential, invariant structure (or essence)* or the central underlying meaning of the experience and
emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where the experiences of principals’ contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on their memory, image, and meaning in leading this District initiative. The data analysis of the phenomenological research will proceed through a methodology of reduction, while analyzing specific statements and themes observed by principals’. The researcher will set aside all prejudgments, of each principal and rely on their intuition, imagination, and building wide structures to obtain a picture of their experiences at each respective site.

2. The research performed by Clark Moustakas (1995, p. 50) describes his use of Epoche based on his own interpretive meanings in the discovery process as setting aside one’s own preconceptions of what things mean but remaining open-minded, appreciative, and what is immediately laid before him. It is at that point he is able to stand in the other person’s frame of reference as the most authentic admission into the other persons’ world or reality. As it begins free from suppositions, with nothing assumed and the initial and singular focus on the self-validating cognitive experience itself, the phenomenological epoche unmask hidden assumptions about the nature of the reality (Farber, 1967, pp. 37-58, Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p.7).

3. The aim of phenomenology is to …[turn] to the content of consciousness itself-to the phenomena-and to see philosophy’s task as being that of describing the essences of phenomena, the explication of the various levels of meaning of phenomena, and their interrelationships. Such is the significance of the phenomenology’s quest for a starting point free from suppositions. (Stewart and Mickunas, 1990, p.8).
Conceptual Framework of Systemic Transformation

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of Systemic Equity Transformation
Singleton & Linton (2006)

Conceptual Framework

The study will utilize the *Anti-Racist Leadership Conceptual Framework* as an organizing framework (see above). There are numerous factors and theories impacting the academic achievement of minority students. It is imperative to identify the many factors that contribute to low academic performance including external factors such as socio-economic status, inferior fiscal resources, and an educational system that was not designed to promote minority students. In accurately discussing institutional barriers facing minority students, the current data reflects the dismal conditions that minority students must navigate and the challenges facing minority students in White educational
institutions where minority students are often confronted with issues of institutional racism. Research studies the effects of the Excellence and Equity training from the Anti-Racist leadership Conceptual Framework, it is logical that it be utilized as the conceptual framework for the study. The framework ultimately will serve to assist in interpreting specific activities and tasks principals’ implemented.

According to Linton & Singleton (2006, p. 239) A Field guide for Achieving Equity in Schools, Courageous Conversations about Race, and the authors discusses the significance of dynamic leadership in transforming schools. That is, to create powerful, dynamic, and prolific leaders who are willing to do whatever is necessary to build an anti-racist/equitable educational system where all students can succeed. The authors further contend that an effective force of anti-racist leaders can foster real equity transformation in America’s schools and districts. These leaders must possess specific attributes that exercise passion, be engaged in the design and delivery of innovative practice, and demonstrate persistence toward achieving equity at all levels of the system— from the Central Office to the individual building site classrooms. This also includes, but is not limited to the local communities at each site.

Anti-Racist/Equity Leadership involves the entire educational community. It includes and examines what it feels like for each member at the personal, individual teacher, whole school, and systemic levels, as each part of the entire organization assumes their own unique role. Linton and Singleton (2006) further elaborates on the point that each individual can begin their own personal journey toward this work by recognizing that both White educators and educators of color have an equal amount to
offer to the conversation on race and educating all students. This journey demands personal transparency, and the basic resolve that every race that may be different from our own has inherent value. This value can only be realized when we avail ourselves to people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Our individual tightly held beliefs must be examined, and shared openly to promote a deeper understanding of perspectives other than our own. Hopefully, we all will become more reflective, self-critical, and ultimately change our practices by first changing some of our beliefs that have paralyzed our instructional deliveries and attitudes towards individuals that are different from us. Linton and Singleton cites Harvard legal scholar Derek Bell (1992) stating that “the faces at the bottom of the well” are Black. This statement should encourage educators to understand that until we satisfy that deep seated need to know, to understand, and ultimately to be in the company of Minorities, we will not have fully challenged our own personal deep rooted issues associated to racism. However, once we do discover and act upon our personal and professional connection to Minority people in our daily lives, then members of the entire racial continuum of color populations-Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Native American, multiracial-gains presence, position, and power in our schools. As the Conceptual Framework has been previously discussed, it is important to establish a common language around race. This is critical because conversations around race typically are quite emotional.

The goal of this research is to assist school organizations in developing critical understandings around how racial issues impact schooling. Although, there is not one single all encompassing definition, for the purposes of this research the following
definitions will guide the discussions and provide a clear understanding of the meanings intended when racial terminology is used.

**Site Selection**

The researcher examined the literature related to achievement gap studies that included such factors as socioeconomic status; school funding and resources; parental involvement; single parent homes; and early access to preschool. The primary two individuals research that was studied was Ronald Ferguson (2002) and John Ogbu (2003). The school district that the researcher will examine is suburban, lower to upper middle class. There remains a significant achievement gap of minority students within this school district; therefore indicating other factors may be impacting the gap. Undoubtedly, these variables are critical components attributing to the gap, this study attempts to alleviate the external factors, and focus on structures, attitudes, beliefs, culture and climate, and other related factors that are controlled by the leadership of school personnel. For the purpose of this research the focus will be on principal leadership. The researcher chose the phenomenological research design, as the intent of the study was to capture the leadership experiences of principals’ in an affluent middle school, as the leader perceives it. The study is designed to capture the experiences of principal’s and their approaches in leadership to close the gap.

All of the middle school principals’ in the Meadow Grove district were provided specific training on anti-racist principles of leadership. All of these principles were identified within the conceptual framework presented earlier in the research study. The study aims to understand what their perceptions are of that training, and their perceptions
about how their own leadership practices and thinking may have been impacted, or not, by the training. The researcher will be collecting data (interviews), and will be investigating only principals’ perceptions. To answer this question, this study will access nine middle schools in a suburban school district of 50,000 students, where each principal have been trained in the Equity and Excellence Initiative adopted by the Meadow Grove School District for the past six years.

**District Background**

The Meadow Grove School District (pseudonym), Strategic Plan states the goal to increase the achievement of ALL students by closing the achievement gap between the highest and lowest performing students. To obtain this goal, the district contracted with a consulting firm to assist them in this endeavor. The initiative was implemented during the past six years. Building principals are responsible for ensuring that an Anti-racist school is a major indicator for middle schools closing the achievement gap. There are four critical areas of the Equity and Excellence initiative as outlined by the superintendent in his 2008 Keynote address to the Administrative Council of the Meadow Grove School District. Below is the address:

To get an idea of how we are doing on our goals, it is appropriate that we take a look at the recently released CSAP/ACT data from both an aggregate and disaggregated point of view. The CSAP data reveals flat results on an aggregate basis. I think we should feel uneasy about these flat results, even though the district is changing demographically. It is also critical to take a look at the second part of our goals, which is to close the achievement gap. This year’s data indicates the gap has narrowed a bit, which is welcome
news, but it is essential that we narrow the achievement gap even more, so that it is
impossible for us to predict scores solely on the basis of ethnicity. The idea of equity
remains elusive to us, even though some schools appear to be achieving breakthroughs.

We have a long way to go and we must be totally committed to the journey if the
Meadow Grove School District is to retain its place as one of the great school districts in
Colorado and the country. In order to successfully close the achievement gap, a more
robust and transparent theory of action is needed. We should begin with some basic
explanations for the gap. One explanation is we don’t do as much for Black and
Hispanic/Latino students as we do for White and Asian students. Another explanation is
that doing the same for Black and Hispanic/Latino students as White and Asian students
aren’t enough for them to succeed at equitable levels. Either way, the implication is clear,
we have to do more for Black and Hispanic/Latino students if they are going to achieve at
higher levels. And that means better instructional techniques, a robust curriculum
delivery system, and stronger relationships with these students. The theory of action we
are utilizing to close the achievement gap is based on simple pillars that each need
diligent effort.”

The Superintendent outlines the following strategies during the address:

Ensure an anti-racist culture and climate.

- Foster courageous conversations and actions.
- Use equity teams to implement school-wide plans for excellence and equity.
- Strengthen instruction and elevate accountability.

Ensuring an Anti-Racist Culture and Climate

- Once you are aware, then you must incorporate behavior into actions.
- Expand trainings to all employee groups; be persistent
• Whether principal, teacher, Educational Office Personnel (EOP), bus driver, central office administrator, or any other employee in the district, anti-racist behavior must be integral within the school district.
• Students must be greeted by name and shown interest in their personal lives.
• Equity cannot be separated from job requirements.
• Instruction is focused and challenging to expose all students to rigorous and demanding curriculum this is reflective is student diversity.
• Teachers and administrators work together to disaggregate data, and review action research in order to determine the best method to reach each child.

**Fostering Courageous Actions**

• Moving beyond courageous conversations about race to taking courageous actions that create an anti-racist culture and climate in the Meadow grove School District. Integrate Equity into performance appraisals.
• Equity must be integral and not merely additive.
• Beliefs create action therefore transformation of systems follow once there is a transformation of beliefs.
• Rules and practices must be cooperative to benefit all students.

**Expanding Building Equity Teams**

• Expand and embedded Equity Teams in buildings for staff support, learning and accountability.

**Improve Teacher Instruction**

• CARE teachers must continue to build capacity in the culturally responsive teaching strategies.
• Implement the strategies building-wide
• Administrators more aligned with CARE teachers, by examining the highly effective teachers that are consistent in meeting the needs of students of color and closing the achievement gap. What do excellent teachers look like? What are the indicators?

**Be persistent**

• Educators must develop, apply, reflect, revise and master the requisite knowledge and skills to guarantee success for all.
• Invite courageous conversations; examine practices aimed at closing the achievement gap.
• Increase the number of children in focus groups.
• Increase the number of students in advanced/honors classes.
• Increase the accountability of staff relative to these actions.
• Connect with teacher evaluations.
**Expect rigor and high expectations for all**

- Increase the number of students in advanced/honors classes.
- Increase the accountability of staff relative to these actions.
- Connect with teacher evaluations.

All four elements are essential and should work hand-in-hand with our drive to get every student college ready. Without such an effort we are bound to continue replicating the bell curve and never move the curve to a “success for all” model. Many of you, I’m sure, are tired of hearing about overcoming the bell curve, but it remains the ultimate challenge for education, and will require some outside-the-box thinking.” (Superintendent, Meadow Grove School District, 2008).

The researcher has described the tenants of the Excellence and Equity work, along with the Meadow Grove School District’s Strategic Plan, which states that they want to increase the achievement of ALL students and by closing the achievement gap between the highest and lowest performing students.

The superintendent believes that the building principals’ are the “primary” persons responsible for ensuring that an Anti-racist school is a major indicator for middle schools in closing the achievement gap.

**Pilot Study**

The researcher immediately conducted a pilot study after receiving permission from the University of Denver’s Institutional Review Board of Human Subjects (IRB). The pilot study was presented to three administrators within the Meadow Grove School District that were familiar with the Excellence and Equity initiative. After a brief introduction to the process, participants were asked if they had any objections at this time
concerning their participation in the preliminary interview process. If there were no objections, each participant was handed out the interview questionnaire. As the researcher asked each individual question, they were requested to make notations or write their questions on the interview instrument (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Each pilot study participant received a letter of appreciation for participating in the pilot interview and was assured that complete confidentiality will be adhered to in handling his/her responses to the interview questions. (See appendix E).

After ample time was provided to complete the interview process, the three members were asked to cite their concerns related to any aspect of the questioning process. Afterwards, the researcher proceeded through each question, soliciting feedback from the participants and probing deeper to ensure understanding. Notations were made on a large poster to indicate points of concern and necessary future clarification. Individual interview questionnaires were collected from each participant to confirm any misunderstandings, and make adjustments to be used in the pilot study.

Participants

Participants for this study consist of nine middle school principals’ within the Meadow Grove School District, designed to represent the various aspects of the public school continuum. Each principal of the nine different sites with varying demographics within their communities was chosen to provide insight into the varying perspectives afforded by his/her role. This framework provides for the involvement of all nine principals’ representing the middle schools. The researcher adopted the best practices for this type of research from the author Merriam (1998). Merriam further contends that the
needs of qualitative research are best met by non-probability sampling. He further asserts that non-probability sampling is “based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most (1998, p. 48).

There are many others researchers that advocate this approach as ideal to a phenomenological research design such as (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, Napolitano, 2006; Creswell (1998). The recommendations and the selection criteria were in alignment with these noted researchers that espoused for phenomenological study individuals that are able to articulate their conscious experiences of outstanding educational leadership and thus comprised a sample that allowed the researcher to “best study the problem under examination” (Creswell, 1998, p. 111). Although there were a total of eleven schools within the Meadow Grove School District, one school opted out of the process, while the researcher is the principal of the other school and is the conductor of the research. One hundred percent participation was requested to provide continuity, validity and reliability to the findings. However, as stated above due to mitigating circumstances a ninety percent participation rate was accomplished.

The primary focus of the study was to examine the perceptions of how Anti-racist leadership principles impact the actions of middle school principal’s specific sites. A model has been adopted and implemented at each site that was carefully prescribed by the Pacific Educational Consultant Organization. This organization has consulted with the Meadow Grove School District for the past six years, and every school and Principal hired within the district has been trained in the model. Each principal chosen has been
trained extensively in every facet of what has been entitled Beyond Diversity Training. All the principals were hired and expected to implement every facet of the training throughout their school and community. However, the researcher is endeavoring to examine the principals’ perceptions of the training, and the degree of implementation of the model.

The perceptions of each principal are critical to this research as they are the ambassadors of the model, and the instructional leaders that are expected to implement the plan. The researcher examined the perceptions of ten building principals’, through a qualitative design, whereas ten in depth interviews were conducted (1 per principal). The researcher selected participants of the study as colleagues within the district of his employment. The following individuals were chosen due to their designation as a middle school principal, along with their on-going training with the Pacific Educational Consultant firm. Each member has received staff development with their respective Equity Teams, CARE teams, and individual training with the consulting firm. The total years of experience range from one to eight years by all of the principals.

Once the University of Denver Institutional Review Board for the protection of Human Subjects had granted approval, the recruitment efforts were launched. Each middle school principal was chosen to receive a letter (See Appendix A). Included in the letter was an overview of the research study and an invitation to participate in the study. Additionally, the letter included the following as outlined by Creswell (1998, pp. 115, 116):

- Their right to voluntarily withdraws from the study at any time.
The central purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in data collection
Comments about protecting the confidentiality of the respondents.
A statement about known risks associated with participation in the study.
The expected benefits to accrue the participants in the study (See Appendix B)
A copy of the research questions and interview questions was included for preview. (See Appendix E & F)

All of the above were reiterated on the Informed Consent sheet plus a place for the participant and the researcher to sign and date the form. (See Appendix A)

Once the researcher had received a pro or con position for the request, he immediately proceeded to follow-up with emails and phone calls for confirmation to participate in the study.

Meadow Grove Demographic Profile

In the Meadow Grove School District, "Dedicated to Excellence" is more than a motto or a catch phrase. It's a way of life. The district wants their students to encounter excellence everywhere: in academics, in the arts, on the athletic fields, during participation in activities, and from support programs such as security, food services and transportation.

The Meadow Grove culture of excellence is all encompassing. It envelopes its employees, motivates and challenges them and guides their thoughts, words, and actions. It is both tangible — in terms of the exceptional people, facilities and programs that make up this district — and intangible, in terms of the attitudes and passion that exist there. The community expects its schools to provide outstanding educational opportunities for students.

The Meadow Grove School District has enjoyed strong, steadfast support from its
constituents for fifty-six years. Furthermore, community members have been a critical component of their excellence equation.

The Meadow Grove School District is one of the most successful districts in the state of Colorado. Two-thirds of its schools are rated high or excellent, and no schools are rated low or unsatisfactory. Meadow Grove students continue to score well above the state average on CSAP tests and above both the state and national averages on the ACT and SAT tests. The 2005 graduation rate was ninety-two percent, and more than eighty-five percent of their graduates pursue post-secondary education. Ongoing community support of the Meadow Grove Schools helps maintain and increase the level of educational excellence, especially as they manage growth and increasing diversity in their student population.

During the past decade, enrollment has increased by forty percent — an average of 1,100 new students per year — and enrollment will top 50,000 students in 2007. Today, twenty percent of the district’s students qualify for free or reduced cost lunch, compared with nine and one half percent in 1995. Nearly thirty-three percent of students are children of color, up from seventeen percent a decade ago. More than 9,000 Meadow Grove students speak a language other than English at home, and more than 3,000 students are served or monitored by the district’s English language acquisition program.

All students need extensive knowledge and skills in the core areas of language arts, mathematics, science, social studies and foreign language, as well as information literacy and technology.

They also need opportunities to explore the arts, participate in athletics and other
extracurricular activities, engage in community service projects and develop citizenship. These are all components of an excellent education (See Figure 4).

The Meadow Grove school district along with its middle school principals is an excellent district to examine. It has a long history of academic excellence, yet has considerable achievement gaps. Although it is a suburban middle class school district, most minority students are not achieving at the rate of their White and Asian counterparts. The ten middle school principals represent both male and female, and compose of both African-American, and Hispanic principals. However, in 2003, the existing Executive Director of the Multicultural Office at Meadow Grove, thought it was necessary that the district undergo this training. The notion being that if all students are not performing and there is disproportionality at the degree that the district was experiencing, then maybe there is another underlying issue transpiring. Perhaps, the issue could be race, or a racial system that is excluding certain students.

Table 1. Demographic Descriptors of Participating Middle Schools (As of Oct. Count 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>TOTAL # OF STUDENTS</th>
<th>% BLACK</th>
<th>% HISPANIC</th>
<th>% FREE &amp; REDUCED LUNCH</th>
<th>STABILITY RATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thunderbird</td>
<td>1158</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>97.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huskies</td>
<td>1058</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolf (K-8)</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>99.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lion</td>
<td>1228</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>95.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawks</td>
<td>1528</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>61.2%</td>
<td>93.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cougar</td>
<td>1193</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>97.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustang</td>
<td>1462</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>97.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky Owl</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>97.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox Heights</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>94.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection Process

The goal of this research proposal is to critically examine the factors that influence, promote leadership strategies and practices, and implement systemic transformation within schools under the leadership of Anti-racist principals’, to promote academic excellence and equity for all students. Additionally, the role of the teachers and school personnel are key as they develop high expectations, cultural relevant curriculum, and meaningful relationships to prepare students for a global society. Leadership is the key to reaching the hearts and minds of minority students and by developing trusting relations that understand and value the myriad of colors, culture, and consciousness a diverse society represents. The following methods will be used: (a) individual interviews of principals’.

Interviews

As a means of collecting data, the interview was the chosen method. The researcher chose this method based upon the research of Ferrarotti’s (1981) observation that: “Social abstractions like ‘education’ are best understood through the experiences of the individuals whose work and lives are the stuff upon which the abstractions are built.” The approach that is recommended is a one or two one-on-one interview(s) with each participant, lasting between one to two hours. Although three interviews are recommended as a favorable structure, for the purpose of this study a one-time interview was scheduled lasting no longer than ninety minutes in duration (Siedman, 1998, pp. 4, 5, 7, 8).

This adjustment was due primarily to the time constraints and scheduling issues that
could not be adjusted for this purpose. Therefore, both the researcher and the participants involved in this study compiled all of the questioning and answering was incorporated into one interview.

There are a myriad of qualitative research design methods that vary in type, purpose and quality. The interview is one of the most commonly used methods for gathering qualitative data according to Newman (2000). Additionally, (Patton 2002, p. 4) mentions that findings can be retrieved from one of three various methods used for data collection: in-depth, open-ended interviews; direct observations; and written documents.

Patton further suggests that standardized semi-structured interview is used when it is important to minimize variation in the questions posed to interviewees (220, p.342). According to Van Manen, in his book entitled “Researching Lived Experience:” (1990, p. 67), he cites that there are various ways in collecting data or accounts of individual stories is to audiotape their conversations that tell their “personal life stories” (anecdotes, stories, experiences, incidents, etc.). He further indicates that it may be easier for them to talk rather than write down their experiences, because writing may make them more reflective, thus making it more difficult to stay close to the experience as it was lived. It is very important to stay close to the experience lived as the interviewer asks questions. It is important to be concrete with questioning.

The researcher was extremely diligent in the use of an interview protocol. Lofland and Lofland (1995) put it, “logging data,” (p.66) states that this process is essential.
That is the process of writing up interview summaries and recordings may incorporate an informal process of “jottings,” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). This was the process that was utilized by the researcher during the transcription phase after the interviews. It was vitally important in this study to understand how principal’s perceptions, impact their actions to address the overall achievement gap in their buildings under their leadership.

The researcher believes that since this study focuses on race and the relationship to the experience by principal, the role of commensurability and bracketing will serve as a key role in this study. Commensurability specifically plays a part in the relationship between certain culture studies and phenomenology. The notion of lived experience and the “experience of “culture” indicates that social and cultural roles definitely influence the experiences of the principals. This phenomenon is especially true in the Meadow Grove School District whereby the role of race is directly related to the experience of the principals (Van Manen, 2000). Therefore, critical theory is extremely important to this study as it is directly related to the understanding of social constructs, which are evident in philosophical notions in oppression and dominant culture studies. According to Van Manen, 2000) a dialectical synthesis of philosophy occurs when researchers attempt to understand society through a scientific lens. To better illustrate this point of view, according to Van Manen, he writes:

Critical Theory has identified itself with the Marxist legacy of attempting to forge a dialectical synthesis of philosophy and a scientific understanding of society. Some features of synthesis are:

- an adapted appeal to a widened notion of rationality
- a resistance to all forms of domination
- an orientation to praxis, and
- the centrality of the concept of emancipation, (2002)
It is quite interesting to note that this phenomenon in research has a critical theory in the realm of education aims to promote critical consciousness, and attempts to eradicate institutional constructs which perpetuate oppressive structures and social inequalities (Dixson and Rousseau, 2006). According to Creswell, the importance of bracketing is best described as, “In order to understand the phenomenon through the voices of informants, the concept of epoche is central, where the researcher brackets his or her own preconceived ideas about the phenomenon,” (1998).

Again, as was mentioned previously, for the purpose of this research study, individual face-to-face in-depth interviews will be conducted with the participants. This research will use semi-structured, in-depth, qualitative interviews. A setting that is comfortable and conducive to the interviewee was determined. The researcher recorded the interviews on garage band (a computerized taping program) and transcribes them verbatim for future analysis.

A DVD was made of the interview in its entirety and provided to the participants for veracity and accuracy of the actual interview. Only the information that was audio taped may and will be used by the researcher to extrapolate statements to be quoted in Chapter four and Chapter five of the research study.

The researcher discussed the informed consent form during the first ten minutes of the interview process to confirm their understanding of the content of the research study. However, all nine principals’ were briefed at a Principals’ meeting in September of 2008, of the process. This interview additionally served as an opportunity to further discuss the demographics of their school sites, and to reiterate the focus of the
initial letter outlining the purpose of their participation in the research study. During the interview process the participants were asked to describe their leadership experiences and approach through the lens of the conceptual framework.

This interview served to introduce many aspects of general leadership, anti racist leadership, and their perceived institutional barriers to closing the achievement gap. The primary focus was for the participants to describe their perceptions and his/her leadership approach as it related to the implementation of the Equity and Excellence initiative. Principals’ were asked to describe the factors, if any that influence their leadership in closing the achievement gap of minority students. At completion of the interview, a final DVD was mailed to each principal to check for validity and accuracy of the interview.

The purpose of the individual interviews was to understand how principals’ perceptions of the Excellence and Equity initiative have impacted their leadership actions as they attempt to close the achievement gap at their sites. The researcher has identified the most critical individual in a school setting (the principal) as well as the most effective interview questions and research method (phenomenology). The phenomenological interview involved an informal, interactive process and utilized open-ended comments and questions (Moustakas, p. 114). The interview protocols are provided in Appendix F.

The Interview Process

The researcher elected to choose an in-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing approach (Siedman, 1998). The bases for choosing this approach is the fact that this allows for the researcher to combine life history interviewing (Bertaux, 1981) and focused, in-depth interviewing processes based on phenomenology (Schutz, 1967;
Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998). During this interviewing approach, the researcher/interviewer is able to provide open-ended questions. According to Seidman (1998, p. 9), he states, “Their [interviewers] major task is to build upon and explore their participants’ responses to those questions. The goal is to allow the participants to reconstruct their experiences within the topic under study.”

During the interview process, the researcher solicited information from the participant to share as much about him or herself in light of the research topic, within a 90-minute time frame (Siedman, 1998). The interview process further included questions that would permit the participant to focus on, and elaborate on their leadership experiences as it relates to the Excellence and Equity initiative. This included, but was not limited to details, practices, and learning’s gained through the experience. The researchers’ questioning techniques were intentional, focused, and isolated to the research questions that attempted to be answered. It was during this process that the details of the experience were sought after rather their opinions. Additional time was administered to the [participants, whereby they could actually focus on the meaning of their experience. The intent of this reflection was to garner the their perceptions, along with the personal and professional connections between what they had been previously doing at their respective sites, to now isolating race, and creating intentionality around providing an anti-racist culture and climate at their sites. According to Siedman (1998), this process required participants to examine how factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation. More importantly, it required them to examine their present experience in detail along with the context in which it occurred.
Therefore, the interview process required participants to focus on their educational trainings, life experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and ultimately how these variables affected their leadership practices. It is during this critical process, that participants’ mental models become challenged and examined in a manner that allows for ultimate reflection and deliberation. Although, Schuman (1982) outlines a standardized set and amount of time be utilized for the best meaning and results, Seidman (1998) recognizes that life events can impact the process. He states, “as long as a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experience within the context of their lives, alterations to a three-interview structure, and the duration and spacing of interviews can certainly be explored.”

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis can simply be defined as a process of “making sense” of field data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The researcher will “make sense” of the data by attempting to extrapolate themes and the essence of the comments by principals as it relates to the research questions. The in-depth interview (Appendix F) is the primary resource for obtaining data for this study. The one-on-one interviews were conducted with each of the nine principal participants. Van Manen describes the in-depth interview if conducted properly, the reader almost feels as though they are witnessing the experience themselves, 1990). Through the analysis of the data, the researcher attempted to identify the factors that principals’ believe influenced their ability to provide leadership in a suburban middle school. Phenomenological data analysis proceeds through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meaning
(Miller & Salkind, 2002, p. 151). While interpretive, the analysis will proceed simultaneously with the data collection. After each interview, I had the DVD transcribed and reviewed to confirm that the tapes have been transcribed verbatim. My notes were organized and examined for thoroughness and reliability. According to Patton (2002), this process will provide an invaluable opportunity to generate emergent themes and insights.

The researcher followed to fidelity the guidelines established by the work of Moustakas (1994), which outlines a detailed description of the method of organizing and analyzing phenomenological data. Additionally, the work of Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1978), and Keen (1975): The researcher carefully studied the transcripts from the audiotape from the Garage Band application of the computer, and transcribed the interviews by the methods and procedures required by phenomenological analysis. The procedures included the method of horizontalizing the data. Basically, the researcher viewed every statement that deemed relevant to the research questions and the study. After the interviews were conducted, a DVD was made to capture the interview in its entirety. Each DVD was labeled according to the respective participant. The recording from the DVD was transcribed by the researcher word for word, and examined three consecutive times for accuracy and validity. The DVD was stored in a safe place whereby only the researcher could access. Hard copies of the transcriptions were prepared. The transcription was printed according to the pseudonym name provided by the participants. Additional transcriptions were saved in computer files as well as backup disks and DVD’s.
The researcher followed the recommendations for analysis of the data as outlined by Tesch and Creswell, general reviews of all information was done-first by listening to the recordings of the interview, second during the transcription process, and subsequently by reading repeatedly the transcriptions utilizing marginal notes to obtain an overall sense of the data (Creswell, 1989). Next, Creswell suggests the next step is to describe the meaning of the experience for the researcher.

**Meaning of the Experience for the Researcher**

The essence of the interviews encapsulated a vast array of emotions exhibited by the participants. The researcher was impressed with the knowledge, commitment, and overall willingness to create an environment in which every student achieved. However, the daunting of their roles and the leadership challenge were vividly expressed on their faces. Although these were driven, educated, and well-intentioned leaders that often times were perplexed by the requisite leadership strategies that would diminish the achievement gap. However, from the eyes of the researcher, one could tell that these leaders had been forever changed in their leadership capacities.

The infusion of isolating race, along with the cultural experiences of minority students, and the differences in their educational experiences in public education, was something new on their radars.
It is without hesitation that the researchers’ experiences during the interviews and consolidating their experiences on to paper, has proven to be an invaluable experience in the implementation of this study.

**Significant Statements**

There were a total of four research questions that were the focus area of study. Through the interview questioning process, the researcher endeavored to obtain information that was proved to be relevant to the research questions and the overarching research question of the study (see Appendix E); phenomenological reduction of the data was achieved by extracting significant statements from the transcriptions. The first extraction was taken individually from the responses of the participants to the thirteen interview questions. Secondly, significant statements were extracted from each of the thirteen interview questions, and consolidated for each of the thirteen questions. Afterwards, the researcher performed the next level of data reduction by extracting significant statements that directly related to the four research questions. All of these significant statements are bulleted under the names of each participant.

**Formulated Meanings**

According to (Creswell, 1998, p. 150) formulated meanings of the phenomenon were developed using verbatim examples from participants’ responses. Ultimately, meanings were from these significant statements.
Clusters of Common Themes

The next step of the process is to organize formulated meanings for each of the research questions into clusters of common themes as they relate to the overarching question of the study.

Exhaustive Description

In the final step of this process of data reduction, Creswell suggests that this is an exhaustive description of the phenomenon, and is a result of the integration of all of the results identified. During this final phase of the process, it is vital that the researcher is clear in reaching the ultimate goal. That is, the goal of the exhaustive description of the phenomenon is to be “as unequivocal a statement of the essential structure of the phenomenon as possible” (Creswell, 1998, p. 280). At the completion of the process, Moustakas and Salk left the researcher in a state of discovery, imagination, and focus as described so eloquently.

The descriptive process draws everything in, lets everything in, and lets it be. In the process of letting be of what is in the person’s world, certain universal themes often stand out; each is considered in its possible meanings (Moustakas, 1995, p. 52). After the final description was written, the researcher contacted all of the participants to ensure that they’re descriptions actually reflect their original experience.

Timeline

The researcher adhered to a very stringent timeline after the approval of the research proposal and human subjects review. Within several weeks, the participant participation agreement was signed, collected, and a true copy was submitted back to the
participants. The data was collected during the fall of 2009, and was analyzed in the spring of 2010. The results were presented after the data analysis was completed in the summer of 2010.

**Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in this study will be that of a facilitator and participant. As an African American Principal that is employed in the Meadow Grove School District, and trained in the Equity and Excellence initiative for the past six years, examining the experiences of peer colleagues is highly relevant. As a result of my employment, racial background, and experiences in the Meadow Grove School District, this study will strengthen my familiarity with the research matter, as well as my leadership actions regarding this study. I am a principal in the Meadow Grove School District, charged with the same mandate as the other principals that have consented to be part of this study. However, my experiences and involvement in this process is limited. I am a researcher that is interested in this topic and the perceptions by my colleagues, as they immerse themselves in this work. Therefore, this can either be an asset or a hindrance depending on how it enhances or detracts from data gathering and analysis (Patton, 2002, p. 566). I must bracket my own perceived ideas about being an African American principal in the Meadow Grove School District. My experiences as an African American male does not exclude from the painful micro aggressions of racism, and feeling that no matter how hard I work, there is a double standard for minority principals’. As the researcher, I need to fully understand that the philosophical perspectives behind the phenomenological research approach, especially the concept of
studying how individuals experience a phenomenon (Miller & Selkind, 2002 p. 152). Therefore, the effects of gender, race and bias should be minimized (Boeke, 2006; Warren, 2002).

The role of the researcher in this study is to give a platform and voice to building Principals’ in this study. To this end, it is my hope that the administrators of the Meadow Grove School District will be able to obtain an insight into the effects of the Equity and Excellence initiative. Hopefully, any reader of my research study will be able to comprehend the monumental task of leadership, and most especially to “better understand what it is like to experience the role of an Anti-Racist leader in the twenty first century,” (Miller & Salkind, 2002, p.153).

**Benefits and Limitations**

The benefits of this research are that it will allow educators to understand the complexity of closing the achievement gap of minority students. The history of oppression, diminished resources, poverty, incarceration, stereotype threat, critical race theory, institutional racism is a mere few of the institutional barriers that minority students must navigate through in the United States public educational system. This is especially difficult during adolescent years whereby racial identity has such a profound impact on students and their academic self-esteem. Principals’ must understand the significance that color, culture, and consciousness plays in educating minority students. The notion of general leadership may not be enough. However, bold, innovative, and persistent transformational Anti-racist leaders are the most likely candidates to address this national epidemic.
While there are always limitations with any research effort, the primary disadvantage may be my role as a researcher. Each researcher brings their suppositions, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations. My challenge will be to refrain from my own personal perceptions to affect the findings and conclusions. I must remain an active listener during the interview process, and not misinterpret statements, or over analyze body language, attitudes, and overall not accurately capture the thoughts and feelings of the principals’.

To minimize these limitations, the decision to audiotape the interviews will prove invaluable; document through note taking my observations of the principals’ mannerisms and schedule a meeting with each Principal following the interviews to confirm their responses for accuracy and validity. In addition, there may be limitations as a result of the principals’ being afraid of retribution. That is, the Meadow Grove School District’s data on middle school academic achievement demonstrates achievement gaps in every content area. That includes math, science, reading and writing throughout each of the sites within their district. The district Leadership Team, Principals’, educators are all under considerable scrutiny to close the achievement gap. Their school board has provided the necessary resources to contract with the Pacific Educational Consultant firm to provide the framework that the Meadow Grove School District is to employ within their district. This process has been implemented for over six years with minimum impact on closing the gap district-wide. Although there are high performing school sites, typically those same schools have the highest achievement gap disparities.

Therefore, a limitation to this research study would be the veracity of principals’ responses to my research questions. They may feel that the findings may directly or
indirectly have an adverse impact on their careers. Especially, since the Meadow Gove School District has attached performance appraisals and merit pay to the success and/or lack thereof to the middle school Principals’ ability to close the gap.

Summary

Chapter Three provided a detailed summary of the research methodology proposed for this dissertation proposal. In this chapter, the researcher described qualitative research and how a phenomenological research design would enhance his ability to gain meaningful answers to the research questions. Participants of this study represented middle school principals in the Meadow Grove School District, with a shifting demographic that were committed to meeting the academic needs of all students. The phenomenological research design approach to this study was an attempt by the researcher to gain the most “naturalistic” and “true” depiction of the actions and perceptions of middle school principals as they lead their respective sites in closing the achievement gap. The candor, honesty, and sensitivity articulated by the principals helped to provide a deeper understanding and awareness of the complexity that is involved in Anti-racist leadership principles.
Chapter Four: Principal Profiles Through Interviews

Introduction

Racism is a complex, multifaceted, and constantly changing set of practices, attitudes, and beliefs that can be disabling, disempowering, marginalizing, and stigmatizing an entire group of students. Simultaneously, it must be recognized that racism cannot be understood in isolation from socioeconomic, social, and political inequalities. However, racism operates in part through countless ordinary assumptions made and actions taken by professionals in educational settings, as well as outside of schools.

As a school leader, it is critical that principals deal with racism not merely by adopting a simple set of strategies for all situations, since what works in one setting may not work in another. Antiracist leadership involves a constant struggle to move a school to a greater state of equality. The purpose of this study was to study how middle school principals believe antiracist leadership training may have impacted their leadership actions. The primary assumption of the study is that antiracist leadership training is necessary for principals to begin to become culturally competent leaders as they endeavor to close the achievement gap between Black and Hispanic/Latino students and their White and Asian counterparts. A second assumption is that White principals in predominately White schools lack some skill, will or knowledge needed to relate to and impact their students’ racial experiences in the school setting.
This phenomenological study involved principals in a suburban school district that has been consulting with a firm for over seven years. The firm isolates race as the factor to address rather than external factors commonly used such as mobility, free and reduced lunch, and socioeconomic status. Principals were all well versed in their understanding of the Excellence and Equity initiative as they have been in charge of implementing these efforts at their school site. This chapter presents the findings from data collected during interviews, presenting the essential themes from principals’ responses to thirteen question prompts.

Description of Participants

Participants of this study were middle school principals employed in the Meadow Grove School District. Each principal had received training in the Excellence and Equity initiative whereby they were provided a framework that they were expected to implement at their sites and communities. A total of nine principals were provided an opportunity to participate, a number that is supported by Polkinghorne (1989), agreed to be interviewed and administered the selected assessments (See Invitation to Participate in a Research Project and Specific Informed Consent forms, Appendix A). All of the participants identified their own pseudonyms to protect their anonymity in this study. The composition of the principals was three White males, two Hispanic females, two African-American females and two Hispanic females. The principals were given pseudonyms during the final few weeks of the study. They were asked to choose a name they felt represented them; no additional stipulations were imposed. The selection of participants for this study followed clear and specific criteria.
Organization of the Study

The researcher interviewed nine principals from the Meadow Grove School District. There were a total of three men and six women. Their principal experience ranged from one to thirteen years of experience. Each of these individuals were selected based upon the charge of the district that every building are expected to participate in the Excellence and Equity initiative. This was a District mandate that listed a set of non-negotiables that were attached to the expectations from each principal at their respective site. In other words, it didn’t matter where your building was in terms of the initiative, there were certain accountability measures expected from every principal within the district.

Data Gained from Interviews

Personal interviews were conducted by all of the nine principals during the months of October and November 2009. The interviews were conducted at their respective schools and lasted from one to one and a half hours. The questions were asked in a manner to determine each principal’s level of skill, will, and knowledge as it related to the implementation of the conceptual framework. All of the questions that were asked, attempted to garner where each individual principal was in relationship to the mandate of implementing the various components of the conceptual framework, regardless of their length of time in the position as principal. The excerpts of the summaries of each interview for each participant are provided in Appendix H.
**Significant Statements**

**Overarching Research Question** – Do principals’ perceive that the training they have received has/has not impacted their leadership actions towards closing the achievement gap in their schools?

**Research Question 1**

Is there a difference between principal’s perceptions of the strategies necessary to close the gap?

**Principal A—Pooh Kalamath - Statements taken from transcript of interviews**

- “A new school that was permitted to open with every initiative. Expected all kids to achieve at a high level. School started with the understanding that every initiative is the plate, and not a “new” thing to add.”
- “Yes. The notion to just teach at a high level to all kids has not proven favorable in closing the gap.
- “There were numerous analytical and thoughtful conversations about the reason this has not been accomplished.”
- “Each year I implemented something different to try and address the issue.”
- “Actually, I am quite perplexed about the phenomena.”
- “My dissertation was on closing the achievement gap. As a principal leader, my first article that the staff had to read was “Canary in the Mind.”
- “Well, I wouldn’t say I’m not ready to implement, but the parent groups frighten me because I don’t know if I am bright enough to do it.”
- “I know White teachers care, but I thing students would really like to see people that look like them.”

**Principal B—Alicia Camille - Statements taken from transcript of interviews**

- “Eliminating the racial predictability while narrowing the performance of all students. Data collection of assessments by ethnic groups. Teachers need to know “who am I teaching to?” Analyze suspension reports, data, interpreters, and reward field trips at the end of the quarter. Why put a system in place whereby Blacks and Brown kids will not be able to attend?”
- “Excellence and Equity initiative allows for students of color to make progress under her leadership. Bring the community together to work
collaboratively. Make the environment comfortable for all groups to attend.”
• “All kids benefit. Whites learn about racism and the system that supports their benefits. Additionally, culturally responsive teaching benefits all kids. All kids benefit.”
• “It’s going to cost to fully close the gap, but it will take time and attention to be a part of this work.”

Principal C—Pauletta Washington-Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “Rigor is the focus of all the classes at her school. Culturally relevant instruction is the focus. As a new school, she was able to include all of her expectations were introduced by her. Primarily, raising the level of rigor is most important.”
• “As the principal, I interview and hire teachers, and I must ascertain whether the candidates have the “heartbeat” of the school and embrace her leadership vision which includes closing the achievement gap.”
• “There is a screening tool to see if candidates see data (and everything) through the eyes of equity.”
• “Additionally, that requires me to put more supports in place for students of color.

Principal D—Casey Shaw - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “The Black and Brown students will be the most positively impacted once the initiative is implemented in its entirety.” Currently, their Swiss data (discipline data) is unbelievably better.”
• “The climate and equity work requires that both sides of the school (north and south) are ready to merge together to resolve issues and collaborate together to dispel some negative perceptions.”
• “The resistance has been due to teachers having to change. I have a mixture of old and new staff members, they have been reluctant to be open to new strategies.”
• “I am really placing the data to the forefront of teachers and charging them to make changes.”

Principal E—Angela B - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “Well, the number one focus is Excellence and Equity, and closing the achievement gap.”
• “We’re coming together as a staff finally.”
• “One, examine the extended core period focus on reading and math. Secondly, we have our proficiency classes, who are general education teachers to booster their scores, and finally the PBS strategies, boosting Affective Ed strategies in their building.”
• “This includes climate, and measurements of safety.”
• “Also, Professional Learning Teams grade level by departments, this time examines GVC (guaranteed and viable curriculum), common assessments, AVID strategies that are institutionalization throughout the building.”

Principal F—Shawntrell Jenkins - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “The primary focus for my school and me is reducing the achievement gap.”
• “My school has one of the largest gaps in the school district. This is definitely a high priority.”
• “I will be working with the Equity team to plan and implement training.”
• “I started my conversations with my leadership team. From that point, I felt I needed to make it more systemic.”
• “That included staff development efforts, and a member from my CARE cadre that was actively working in the building. I obtained my perspective from those in leadership positions to develop my course of action for the entire school.”
• “I felt I needed to go back to the basics of the Beyond Diversity training to catch new staff up to date.”
• “Well, again the achievement differences between Blacks and Hispanics. There are solid gains with the ELA population in math. However, many Hispanic students at his site are not in ELA. More work need to be done with that population overall.”

Principal G—Lupe - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “I am at a quandary how to close the gap at the middle school level.”
• “I want the staff to realize that they do have students of color, and how they’re level performance at this school is related to their race.”
• “The students of color were achieving higher than some of her White students.”
• “I don’t allow teachers to use the excuse of having a small number of students in their classes is a reason to not focus on students of color.”

Principal H—Bradley Pitford – Statements taken from transcript of interviews
• “All three 21st century literacy reading and writing strategies), and trying to deliver culturally relevant instruction via differentiation, and shown moderate growth in all content areas (2-3 % points). Very low in mathematics, and have improved in reading and writing.”
• “There have been radical staffing changes throughout the last few years. The impact of downsizing has been an important contributor to the status of implementing the Excellence and Equity strategies.”
• “I think that SOAR groups, the equity team, and the PASS parents have had elements of success.”
• “When teachers can actually debrief after a walk-through, is the most effective manner to implement this work.”

Principal I—Katie - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “That’s a tough one.”
• “I’d like to see evidence that this approach is working and where is the evidence?”
• “Delay it a little longer for my school.”
• “It was mentioned at a meeting is because the teachers and the district weren’t doing the work.”
• “I pondered that for a long time.”
• “Where is the problem?” “Is it with the teacher or the leadership?”
• “The work has been going on for seven years, and has not been successful of getting people to move off center what is the reason.”
• “Why? I wish every school could have an Equity coach.”
• “The type of conversations required to bring about changes in teachers and classrooms would require an Equity coach that could articulate their craft could change the world.”

Research Question 2

Are there differences in principal’s perceptions of the levels of implementation of the conceptual framework?

Principal A—Pooh Kalamath - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “I’m surprised that he was further along than many other schools.”
• “At Feeder meeting, when the “Dots” were placed on the initiative by building principals, I was astonished at the minimal degree of implementation middle school-wide.”
“I have successfully implemented the CARE teams, Equity Team, but has not implemented Leadership groups.”
Additionally, I realize the need for such groups now, but didn’t think it was necessary as a new principal opening a school.”
“Both African American boys and girls groups are needed. I realized that I didn’t stress enough of the “whiteness” conversations along with White privilege articles.”

Principal B—Alicia Camille - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

“My site is in their 7th year working with Pacific Educational Group.”
As a principal, I had to decide whether I could lead a diverse population of students.”
“First year, she had to understand her own White perspective. Required intentional soul searching, to try and gain another perspective.”
“What did you see in the curriculum, systems, walls, books, and communication with each other? Making teachers accountable for their actions. There’s no place to hide in my building. There is no growth without the courageous conversations.”
“We have implemented the entire conceptual framework at my school.”

Principal C—Pauletta Washington-Statements taken from transcript of interviews

“The school began PASS this year. However, the community is divided. Parents of Color are excited, and the White parents are merely tolerating the initiative. In theory, the community has embraced RIGOR, but not the ‘closing the gap’ piece of the initiative.”
“I have a CARE team and Equity team. I struggled with having a select group of people on the team, but chose to institutionalize the initiative with my coordinators and staff developers.”
“PASS is in process and ready to go forward.”

Principal D—Casey Shaw - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

“We have CARE and an Equity team. They meet as an Equity team once per month.”
“The Equity work is not where I want it to be yet. I am currently working on ethnic leadership groups.”
“Me along with my Assistant Principal is in the process of putting these programs in place.”

Principal E—Angela B - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

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• “We have a Latino PASS team and African-American PASS team.”
• “Some teachers have participated but not completed the CARE initiative.”
• “Some teachers have participated but not completed the CARE initiative.”
• “African-American students that have participated in the Brotherhood organization have experienced success.”

Principal F—Shawntrell Jenkins - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “At this point are under consideration but not fully implemented. Primarily, I’m looking for parents for the PASS group participation.”
• “I started my conversations with my leadership team. From that point, I felt I needed to make it more systemic. That included staff development efforts, and a member from my CARE cadre that was actively working in the building. I obtained my perspective from those in leadership positions to develop my course of action for the entire school. He felt he needed to go back to the basics of the Beyond Diversity training to catch new staff up to date.”
• “The PASS parents are anxious to become involved.”
• “I feel that there is hesitation around the PASS committee.”

Principal G—Lupe - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “We’re nowhere near where we need to be.”
• “Currently, we are now getting into the PASS work, and now have two CARE teachers. I believe that the two teachers are very astute and committed to ensuring all kids are benefiting from the Excellence and Equity work.”
• “There’s so much more to do. All the other initiatives are easily implemented, yet the Excellence & Equity work is not fully implemented to the degree as other middle schools.”
• “My school has a CARE team, and Equity team but not a PASS team as of yet.”

Principal H—Bradley Pitford – Statements taken from transcript of interviews
• “The PASS team has been the most challenging because most parents don’t want to be involved in an accountability system.”
• “Our equity team has to be a sounding board and is utilized as a sounding board for the school decision-making.”
• “There are a total of forty SOARR kids that have been involved in school functions and events.”
• “Our CARE team is coming into its own but not as big as I would like for it to be.”
• “I don’t think I’ve ever been given a choice not to implement the work.”
• “It is tied directly towards my evaluation as a principal”

Principal I—Katie - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “I will do in-service on the motivational framework and working with my equity team.”
• “There have never been any student leadership groups done at my school.”
• “The group will be an advisory group to me, to assist me informing the culture and experiences of our students of color.”
• “All initiatives have equal priority.”
• Well, I don’t know if the community of my school has embraced the work.
• I think they want me to tell them what to do rather than them initiating the work and internalizing the need.
• My equity team has changed every year, and has embraced the notion that “this work is just good for all kids, right?”

Research Question 3

Are there differences in principal’s skill, will, and knowledge base in regards to the implementation of the conceptual framework?

Principal A—Pooh Kalamath - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “I thought if I could just make all kids achieve by teaching at high levels to every group. Consequently this hasn’t worked and the gap remains.”
• “Additionally, I realize the need for such groups now, but didn’t think it was necessary as a new principal opening a school.”
• “Both African American boys and girls groups are needed. I realized that I didn’t stress enough of the “whiteness” conversations along with White privilege articles.”
• “I thought if I could just make all kids achieve by teaching at high levels to every group.”
“Consequently this hasn’t worked and the gap remains.”
“My dissertation was on closing the achievement gap.”
“As a principal leader, my first article that the staff had to read was “Canary in the Mind.”
“Well, I wouldn’t say I’m not ready to implement, but the parent groups frighten me because I don’t know if I am bright enough to do it.”

Principal B—Alicia Camille - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

“As a principal, I had to decide whether I could lead a diverse population of students.”
“First year, I had to understand my own White perspective.”
“That journey required intentional soul searching, to try and gain another perspective.”
“What did I see in the curriculum, systems, walls, books, and communication with each other?”
“Making teachers accountable for their actions. There’s no place to hide at my building.”
“There is no growth without the courageous conversations.”
“It was very intentional.”
“As the principal, I had to become centered about what I believed about racism, and how I took advantage of the privilege I had.”
“I had to see it for myself before I could expect it from my staff.”
“Later, I had to provide a lot of different forums for people to engage in this work.”
“As a leader, I had to limit the opportunities to hide, and expose the issues.
“Be intentional, and expect non-closure.”
“You live and breathe this work. It is the way business is conducted at my school.”

Principal C—Pauletta Washington – Statements taken from transcript of interviews

“As the principal, I interview and hire teachers, and I must ascertain whether the candidates have the ‘heartbeat’ of the school and embrace my leadership vision that includes closing the achievement gap.”
“It was structured from the hiring process throughout the entire system.”
“There is a screening tool to see if candidates see data, and everything else through the eyes of equity.”
“It was structured from the onset of opening the school.”
“A very difficult set of issues from my community.”
“I have been labeled by my community as the principal of the ‘kids of color.’”
“[They think] I must have accepted these kids as School of Choice and [so] really don’t legitimately belong at this school.”

“Parents are in the mode of ‘White’ flight.”

“I have been inundated consumed with people accusing her of not servicing all kids.”

“It has solidified my conviction.”

“As a leader, I’ve also become also more protective of my staff”

“I communicate everything and make sure every T is crossed and there is no room for error in my leadership.”

Principal D—Casey Shaw – Statements taken from transcript of interviews

“As a new principal, don’t know the answer to this question as of yet.”

“The Equity work is not where I want it to be yet.”

“I am currently working on ethnic leadership groups.”

“As a second year principal, I am not where I want to be at with the equity work.”

“I along with my Assistant Principal am in the process of putting these programs in place.”

“The climate and equity work requires that both sides of the school (north and south) are ready to merge together to resolve issues and collaborate together to dispel some negative perceptions.”

“I will be able to answer the question better within a year.”

“I am still learning how to effectively run a middle school.”

“As I become more knowledgeable, more modifications will be forthcoming.”

“The resistance has been due to teachers having to change.”

“I have a mixture of old and new staff members, they have been reluctant to be open to new strategies.”

“I have a very caring staff that wants the principal to tell them what to do. There has not been any outward resistance.”

“There has been minimal resistance but the old adage of “this is how we’ve always done it.”

“There is not anything that I don’t feel ready to do. However, I feel part of it is vague and requires more concreteness.”

“I feel ready but the level of implementation needs more work.”

Principal E—Angela B-Statements taken from transcript of interviews
• “I am leading the charge. “
• “Every facet of the initiative involves my leadership and direction.”
• “Because I have a new administrative team, it is imperative that I know and lead the charge at every new program offering at the school.”
• “It is under my leadership that others must carry out implementation of this vision.”
• “My assistant principal is responsible for carrying out my vision of the work.”
• “The demographic shift has created a struggle for our teachers going from ten per cent minority to fifty per cent have proved a huge paradigm shift in their instructional methods.”
• “The staff needs to examine the achievement gap, and need more direction in how to address the issue.”
• “The demographics now are at fifty five per cent non-White students. This reality requires that teachers know whose sitting in their seats.”
• “I believe the resistance at my school is around the issue of diversity.”
• “The Beyond Diversity training has proved challenging for them to examine and the training was extremely difficult for the staff.”
• “Specifically, recognizing that there is a need and that we have to change.

Principal F—Shawntrell Jenkins - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “I felt I needed to go back to the basics of the Beyond Diversity training to catch new staff up to date.”
• “To date, I haven’t attempted to implement anything at this point that has not already been introduced.”
• “The teacher’s association monitors the allocation of time constraints for staff development sessions.”
• “From a contractual perspective, if I use too much time I may hear pushback.”
• “I feel that there is hesitation around the PASS committee. “
• “I am uncertain about the hesitation, but I believe it will open the staff to potential criticism and critique.”
• “Every teacher may not welcome the feedback that they will get.”
• “My school would welcome the Equity walk through in April 2010, to give feedback to the entire school.”

Principal G—Lupe Statements - taken from transcript of interviews
• “I am at a quandary how to close the gap at the middle school level.”
• “We’re nowhere near where we need to be.”
• “Currently, we are now getting into the PASS work, and now have two CARE teachers. I believe that the two teachers are very astute and committed to ensuring all kids are benefiting from the Excellence and Equity work. However, they are nowhere near where they need to be.”
• “There’s so much more to do.”
• “All the other initiatives are easily implemented, yet the Excellence & Equity work is not fully implemented at my school to the degree as other middle schools.”
• “Yes…. I came on too hard and too fast. “
• “My eyes were opened during the Beyond Diversity training.”
• “I was tired of the excuses that there aren’t that many students of color at the school.”
• “As principal, I had to know that ‘this isn’t going away.’ I never relented on the training, or compromised my expectations.”

Principal H—Brad Pitford – Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “There are always outliers but the majority of the staff has embraced the work.”
• “The PASS team has been the most challenging because most parents don’t want to be involved in an accountability system.”
• “The PASS team has been the most challenging because most parents don’t want to be involved in an accountability system.”
• “I want to make sure they’re engaged in specific areas of the building.”
• “As a principal, my greatest frustration is that I can’t be there to provide leadership to the degree that I would like to be.”
• “Therefore I have had to relegate the work to others.”
• “The balance between not micro managing and allowing others to lead the work has been debilitating and frustrating.”
• “However, from a management point of view it is impossible to do all of these requested things by Pacific Educational Group.”
• “If you don’t micro manage things slip away from you.”

Principal I—Katie - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “Well, I don’t have enough experience to be able to say.”
• “We’re just starting.”
• “I wish I were better at some of this stuff. We’re getting there.”
• “This is my thirtieth year in education, but this equity work is the most challenging part of my career.”
• “Therefore, I have only had one year of Equity training, and I don’t feel that I have adequate training to do this work.”
• “The PASS work is the most challenging for me at this time.”
• “Trying to obtain someone to take a day off of work to go through the district training and expectations are demanding.”
• “I would say that the CARE work has been highly successful.”

Research Question 4

Are there differences in principal’s attitudes regarding the conceptual framework?

Principal A—Pooh Kalamath - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “Wow, okay I’ll be really honest. This is my only concern with the work we do, and understand the frustration. I get the frustration from PEG, but at times at the training when people almost get shredded in front of the room”
• “These aren’t courageous conversations if I am fearful and scared.”
• “It leads to some schools not doing the work due there not being a safe environment to express my ignorance.”
• “Ultimately, the principal’s or teachers just go subversive and relinquish from the work.”
• “Oh my God, I can’t ask a question because I am going to get ripped.”
• “As much as I know we need the courageous conversations, and the need to speak my truth, and need to really know that I can speak my truth. It’s a tough conversation anyway.”
• “But, what you do in that situation is give White people an excuse to not do the work.”
• “I would say, ‘just be more manipulatively.’”
• “Don’t give White educators a way out.”

Principal B—Alicia Camille - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “The District needs to decide if they really want it.”
• “It’s going to cost to fully close the gap, but it will take time and attention to be a part of this work.”
• “Reduce the number of kids, and increase the time will yield positive results.”
• “The operative question is whether the CCSD have the will to make the changes necessary to close the gap.”
• “Once they have the will, they will make it happen!” I need the District to make this work a priority.”
• “It’s the will that needs to be determined.”

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• “The goal that we’re asked to accomplish then they need to finance the commitment.”
• “Make it a priority!”

Principal C—Paulettta Washington—Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “I am baffled ‘why’ we are so many years into this initiative and there are some principals that have not implemented it in their schools.”
• “Especially, the newer schools that have been allowed to open without the initiative being followed.”
• “I am extremely concerned about not “pushing” students of color into more challenging course work.”
• “Also, the feeder areas must systematically send the same unified message.”
• “There are no parents of color represented at the school district Parents Council, DAAC, etc.”
• “A larger question needs to be asked why do we not as a district have adequate representation in our large district meetings and forums.”

Principal D—Casey Shaw – Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “The message that Glenn Singleton increased my awareness of White privilege and the gap.”
• “The frustration expressed by Glenn is why is the district only at this minimal point.”
• “The request for modification would be to provide more tools and more direction.
• “There were many questions of how to implement the work school-wide.
• “However, there was never a need to say that it wasn’t necessary.”
• “I feel that there should have been more improvement district-wide, and now it is my duty to lead the initiative at my school with limited direction and guidance.”

Principal E—Angela B - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

• “I believe any organization, that leadership is the most important. I would modify that every leader would go through this work and be well trained.”
“I believe that the Meadow Grove school district has not trained everyone in a timely manner.”
“Different persons are at different places within their organizations.”
“When it started, the: green” light and “red” light issue hampered some folks in moving ahead at a more accelerated rate.”

Principal F—Shawntrell Jenkins - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

“Would make it less optional.”
“I feel that it has made his job more challenging due to the school or the district not whole-heartedly expecting it to be done.”
“Because I worked at another middle school, I am more prepared to facilitate this work.”
“If I hadn’t worked with another principal that had implemented all facets of the conceptual framework, I would not be prepared to lead my building now as a principal.”
“As a White male, and an Asst. principal, I had to seek out the work and become more involved in the initiative from a leadership perspective.”
“The leadership capacity needs to be broadened to ensure capacity and the District leadership achieves sustainability.”

Principal G—Lupe Statements - taken from transcript of interviews

“I think need an administrator that is there for a longer part of time, and to have some input to hire that person.”
“There was confusion around the CARE team being members of the equity team, etc.”
“My school is at a disadvantage because the school is smaller and more teachers are not available to be part of all the different parts of the training.”
“The expectation for new administrators attend the training of Beyond Diversity is paramount.”
“The capacity building must remain in place and an expectation for all.”

Principal H—Bradley Pitford - Statements taken from transcript of interviews

“There are times when I get frustrated for the reality of outcomes.”
• “I know there is a need for change as the data demonstrates as identified by our students of color. I think that the reality from what I can see is that it has to be institutional.”
• “I get the intensity and urgency that is needed.”
• “It can’t be person dependent such as a good PAS teacher, or Parent member, or a charismatic principal.”
• “The reality is that all individuals will leave, be promoted, or transferred. Retirement, illness, etc.. It may take three to four years to see the residual of the efforts.”
• “When PEG comes to visit our schools, it is often difficult to hear their critique from merely a “snapshot” of time.”
• “It can be extremely difficult to hear and doesn’t show the totality of the work.”
• “The new Executive Director of Excellence and Equity has a different take and approach on the leadership of the initiative.”
• “I have no problem with doing the work, or recognizing the value of the work.”
• “It is the most meaningful work that I have done in my twenty-five years of education.”
• “I applaud the work of the Meadow Grove school district in bringing in this consultant to lead us in the work.”
• “I know the district is trying to break away from the work because we need to embrace it on our own.”
• “I’ve learned a lot from Glenn Singleton as his members in training personnel in this work.”
• “I believe it is the responsibility of the Meadow Grove School District first to train the incoming teachers, and then the principal must continue the development of the staff they hire.”
• “I believe that over ninety five per cent of my staff wants to bridge the achievement gap, and the others are not worth the energy.”
• “I don’t spend time and energy trying to bring them on board.”
• “The non-negotiable employed by Central Office has been helpful.”
• “It doesn’t feel comfortable to be mandated this, but it is necessary to expect it we want the achievement gap to be diminished throughout the entire Meadow Grove school district.”

Principal I—Katie - Statements taken from transcript of interview

• “Well, I don’t know if the community of my school has embraced the work.”
• “I think they want me to tell them what to do rather than them initiating the work and internalizing the need.”
• “My equity team has changed every year.”
• “This is my thirtieth year in education, but this equity work is the most challenging part of my career.”

Major Themes

During the final phases of my principal interviews, it was clear that there were some themes emerging. Although the various principals had their different challenges, whether they were new to their positions, or whether they came from a high school prior and is still learning middle school philosophy and programming. Additionally, there were certainly some commonalities related to their experiences with the Excellence and Equity initiative that was implemented by the Meadow Grove School district.

The researcher has elected to categorize the themes in accordance with their relationship to the research questions. Additionally, these “theme summaries” help to serve as a baseline for answers to the research questions as it was the essence of the principal interviews perceptions, which provided the foundation in which to construct answers. The “theme summaries” were derived from the interview questions, (See appendix F) then categorized to fit in the area of the research question that specifically addresses that question (See appendix E).

Research Question 1

Is there a difference between principal’s perceptions of the strategies necessary to close the achievement gap?
The common themes that were extrapolated from this area by principals were varied. However, there were some commonalities that they all shared. Primarily, all of the principals agreed that the training increased their level of awareness concerning the issue of race. The constant was that prior to the training their focus of successful academic achievement was grounded in the area of mobility, socio-economic status, and free and reduced lunch. The notion of the impact of race and institutionalized racism was a new construct for many of the principals. However, this was not new for the principals of color.

Their personal and professional experiences with schooling always centered on the notion of race. Whether they were the only one in their graduate level coursework, or merely examining the data of their sub-populations at their site, they issue of race and racism was evident in every facet of their daily experiences. Although each principal is at a different place at their sites regarding the strategies to close the achievement gap, it is fair to say that the value added by the training has proved rewarding. It isn’t enough to merely implement a strategy, but the individual that is leading the work has to employ certain characteristics that students must be able to see. That is high expectations, cultural validation, culturally responsive teaching strategies, and opening up opportunities for students of color to access higher level course work is a fundamental requisite for increased student achievement.

As evident in working with human beings, and the social sciences every strategy does not work for every student. There are outliers of students that perform within the current context of the school organization. However, the principals perceptions may vary
in the degree or levels of experience and comfort, there is a consensus that the culture of
the school and the attitudes of all students are enhanced as they’re recognized as a racial
group and are reflected in the overall operations and programming of the school. In
regards to principal’s perceptions of strategies, again the responses were varied based on
experience, race, and overall confidence in their abilities to lead a school with race being
a focal point.

The interviews gleaned a level of comfort over time that each principal expressed
as they became more knowledgeable about the motivational frameworks that enhance
learning for different racial groups. It allowed them to realize that there are cultural
differences that must be recognized, embraced, and implemented into the curriculum and
instructional delivery of teachers. Additionally, leadership was pivotal in terms of setting
the “tone” and expectation of the school. The principal must continually place anti-racist
leadership tenets to ensure that everyone within the organization is responsible for the
success of all students. Therefore, from a systemic level every aspect of the school must
exude equity and excellence for all students.

It was also noted, that the level of implementation by the principals, along with
the length of time they were principals was quite evident. The longer the individual had
been a principal, it was obvious that they’re level of confidence was higher than the new
principals. As a result, they’re level of accomplishment in implementing the conceptual
framework, and restructuring their schools to address the needs of their minority students
proved less of an issue for them. In contrast, the majority of the new principals, wanted to
“shadow” other principals, or have an “Equity Coach” or even be allotted additional time for their buildings to become more competent leaders in this initiative.

There were also some misperceptions by the newer schools that were opened. Several of the school believed philosophically that race should not be an issue in this work. If everyone is taught at a high level of instruction, there should not be a gap. During the interviews, the researcher observed “Aha” moments for those leaders. Consequently, they have had to reconsider their school programming such as the implementation of leadership groups, or hiring more teachers of color.

**Research Question 2**

Principals Perceptions of the levels of implementation of the conceptual framework?

Again, there were divergent responses to this question from the principals. Because there were principals that were new to their positions, or haven’t been there long enough to have answers their responses primarily originated from that vantage point. However, it must also be noted that there were some principals that had held their position for a substantial amount of time that still hadn’t implemented the conceptual framework in its entirety. Most sites had implemented some aspects of the conceptual framework such as; equity teams, CARE teams, Leadership groups and SOAR groups. There were some sites due to their many years in the work, had implemented every facet of the conceptual framework. However, the researcher found out that only a few sites had implemented the conceptual framework to fidelity.
As for those sites that had implemented the conceptual framework to fidelity, they were experiencing various levels of success within their buildings. It must be noted that the “various levels of success” may include a more positive culture and climate, suspensions reduced, and more students of color advancing into more rigorous course offerings. This also included, but was not limited to a more welcoming environment for parents, community members, and the various levels of culturally responsive teaching taking place by classroom teachers.

There was a consistent theme from all principals expressing the need to train and maintain sustainability. The schools that had more annual teacher turn-over found it more challenging to bring the new hired staff up to speed in maintaining the momentum of the school regarding the work. Additionally, maintaining new members in the equity teams, CARE teams, new administrative hires to lead the work were all daunting challenges that had a profound impact on the work. Each principal had to constantly adapt, improvise, and alter his or her delivery model to ensure that every facet of the conceptual framework was being implemented and maintained.

Many principals were surprised that other schools weren’t as far along as they had expected. Or, that they were further along than other schools that had done the work longer. An additional theme that was expressed by several principals was that if they implemented rigor for all students, then students would perform. Their statements reflected the need to have ethnic leadership groups held by culturally aware staff members really supported their learning. The principal that implemented the entire conceptual framework stated the following: “I have to make teachers accountable
for their actions.” “There is no place to hide in my building.” And finally, “there is no growth without the courageous conversations for my students.”

At this point in the research many principals have not put together their PASS teams as of yet. Therefore, there was a lot of angst around this portion of the conceptual framework. The notion of meeting with parents of color and inviting them into the school was an uncomfortable aspect of the conceptual framework that principals wanted more direction around.

The aspect of the how the training was introduced, sustained, and altered during the years was a frustration stated by many. The consulting group that introduced the training appeared to have provided “mixed” messages. Initially, certain aspects of the conceptual framework was to be guided slowly (book readings, Beyond diversity curriculum, implementation of P.A.S.S. teams) while at other times the consulting firm allowed for variance depending on which Feeder system they were speaking to.

Additionally, it was felt oftentimes that many individuals didn’t feel like having a “courageous conversation” would engender collegiality and respect of diverse perspectives, although this was the intent of the training. Conversely, there were some principals that chose to handle the “harsh” critique from the consultant and move on, while other principals’ were stymied and reluctant to further the debate. For the latter, they became gifted and talented in “subverting” the reform.

It is believed that at this moment, the District Leadership Team decided to implement the non-negotiables that “every” building would have a full implementation of the conceptual framework with distinct time frames.
Research Question 3

Are there differences in principal’s skill, will, and knowledge base in regards to the implementation of the conceptual framework?

The answer to this question is evidenced by the diversity of responses and statements made by the principals. They range from “it solidified my convictions” to “this is the scariest work I have ever done in my entire career.” Although, there weren’t many, if any, that struggled with the “will” of doing the work; the vast majority of the “themes” of the statements encompassed their breadth of knowledge and skill. Often-times, there were some principals that felt they had the knowledge, but because they were White the message would be “buffered” because they weren’t leaders of color that had a racial personal experience. However, in contrast the majority of the principals of color, felt knowledgeable and skilled enough to manage the conversations, and handle the issues that would arise within their buildings.

As always, there are outliers. One particular female principal, that was a veteran educator, had probably experienced the most success of all of the schools in the Meadow Grove School District. She was part of the original implementation and training of the Excellence and Equity initiative. She explains her journey into this type of leadership transformation as “challenging” and the most rewarding work in her career. However, she first had to examine her own racial consciousness, and locate the privilege that she has been afforded as a result of the being White. Statements such as “I had to decide if I could lead a diverse population of students,” and first, I had to understand my own White perspective, along with the statement of “that journey required intentional
search searching, to try and gain another perspective all assisted her in becoming the effective leader that she is today (See statements from Alicia Camille).

The essence of the themes generated from all of the participants’ appeared to have begun with each leader coming to terms with their own personal conviction regarding the initiative first. However, since the implementation of the initiative was non-negotiable at all sites, the “will” of each participant was examined and tested. Once their wills were set, then the varying levels of skill and knowledge followed. According to Alicia Camille, she began to examine critically what she saw on the walls, in the curriculum, books, and overall communications with staff members. As she so eloquently put it, “I had to see if for myself, before I could expect it for my staff.” She further contends, “You live and breathe this work.” As a result, she is currently the most productive leader that has been able to implement every aspect of the conceptual framework, and her school that is a minority-majority school has been able to successfully close the achievement gap in most content areas.

Although every participant has implemented almost every component of the conceptual framework there are various degree and pockets of success. There may not have been dramatic quantitative indicators, but the qualitative outcomes for the majority of the schools have been positive. Specifically, the P.A.S.S. group interactions have been well embraced in each of the communities. The culture and climate of the schools as evidenced by more participation and involvement of parents frequenting the school has been extremely successful. Additionally, the majority of the schools collectively agree that disciplinary referrals have diminished to more positive interactions with students of
color. The ethnic leadership groups have opened up an avenue of communication between students and staff that has proved to be more trusting and deliberate as stated by the principals. As issues arise with a racial overtone, staffs are more ready and prepared to have the courageous conversations that allow them to isolate race if the parent or student feels such is the case.

A very significant theme that arose from the interviews, were the necessity of the building principals to lead every facet of the initiative. Because the primary focus of the initiative being race, it was critical that the discussions, trainings, and all aspects of the work be lead by the principals. There was a high correlation between the levels of leadership experience (as a principal) and the skill-set and knowledge that ensued. Those veteran principals were more capable and confident in leading the conversations with staff, parents, and students in their leadership groups.

The degree of implementation, and the successful Equity Teams, P.A.S.S. Teams, and CARE teams are all a direct result of the skill and knowledge of the principals and their ability to implement systemic anti-racist transformational structures within their sites. In contrast, the participants that had the least amount of training, and the least amount of experience as principals had the most difficulty in the initiative. It is also fair to say the principals that were permitted to not lead this work, did so at their leisure. That is, as long as there was minimal accountability requirements from the District Leadership at Central Office, those principals felt no “sense of urgency” to do the work.

**Research Question 4**

Are there differences in principal’s attitudes regarding the conceptual framework?
In answering this research question, the researcher “gleaned” from the significant statements that principal’s attitudes regarding the conceptual framework went from initial fear to hopefulness that this initiative may be a viable aspect of their leadership that needs to be addressed. Primarily, since the previous initiatives were presented in a fashion as either “good teaching” or that “general” leadership practices will work for all students. Therefore, there was not a need to focus exclusively on race. However, what the principals learned was that even after all the external factors were eliminated such as; socioeconomic status and mobility, there were still achievement gaps ranging in double digits at mostly all of the middle school.

It became quite evident that they could not be “color blind” as they lead the charge for all students to receive a high quality education that prepares students for a 21st century education that requires globalization. Although attitudes ranged from happiness, fear, anxiety, stress, and the unknown variable of whether they were capable of actually doing this work, principals had to remind themselves of the four agreements and the six conditions that was previously discussed in the research study. That is, even if there was not a mandate by the meadow Grove School District, to implement this work, they had to address the issue of the achievement gap in their buildings. This reality was especially true for a nationally recognized school district such as the Meadow Grove School District.

The attitudes by principals ranged from every emotion possible, at any given time during the process. Even as I spoke to them during the interview, I can see worry, concern, and an element of questioning their ability to do this work. Initially, an
inordinate amount of time was spent complaining about the consultants, how the initiative was rolled out, and why are we only utilizing this firm?

The Meadow Grove School District realized that in the past six years there were only pockets of success to show for this their financial and human resource output. Therefore, under the direction and leadership from the Superintendent, and the Excellence and Equity Executive Director, every school in the district has a new expectation of “full” implementation. There were stricter guidelines, and a higher degree of accountability that was imposed on principals. Consequently, their attitudes concerning the initiative began to change. For the first time it was clearly articulated, “This work will not be going away.”

The tone and seriousness of the expectation began to make principals actively pursue their lack of knowledge in critical areas of this work. They started to seek out culturally responsible teachers, administrators, and any personnel that showed an affinity for this work. The Feeder systems within the organization began more collaboration and articulation between levels as students transitioned from elementary to middle and ultimately to high schools. As schools began to experience small successes, such as PASS parent representatives, and Equity Team leaders, along with student leadership groups, a quiet confidence began to surface according to the significant statements. The focus of building capacity within their sites, to maintain and continue the training from year to year became a new challenge as expressed in the statements. As one principal stated “I never felt that there wasn’t ever the need, I just was confused about how to
implement the conceptual framework in my affluent side of the meadow Grove School District.

It was evident that there was not a clear road map to this type of leadership. However, No Child Left Behind caused each principal to disaggregate their data by ethnicity, thus exposing the large discrepancies in racial categories. Specifically, the achievement levels of Black and Hispanic/Latino students were not performing at the same level as White and Asian students. Even more alarming was the systems that were and are still in place doesn’t allow for many of these students to be on an academic track and trajectory to place them in Honors, and Advanced Placement classes. As each principal performed equity audits, they found that they’re students were at risk of continuing the same paradigms that were listed in the literature review of this study.

**Final Reflections**

At this point of the data reduction and analysis in a phenomenological study, Creswell refers to the fourth step in a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi- Keen method reviewed by Moustakas in 1994:

The researcher next reflects on his or her own description and uses **imaginative variation or structural description**, seeking all possible meanings and divergent perspectives, varying frames of reference about the phenomenon, and constructing a description of how the phenomenon was experienced (Creswell, 1998, p. 150).

The overarching intent of this qualitative action research study was to glean insight into principals’ perceptions on the how anti-racist leadership principles impact their leadership actions at their site? This purpose was addressed by implementing the Equity and Excellence conceptual framework that was mandated by the Meadow Grove School District, and the training that was provided by the Pacific Educational Consultant
firm. The framework specifically addressed strategies that were outlined for building principals, teachers, students and community member’s involvement in their respective schools.

The goal of these strategies were to assess principals’ perceptions, level of implementation, their level of skill, will and knowledge relative to the initiative, and the differences in principal’s attitudes regarding the conceptual framework. In addition, given that the study took place at an affluent suburban middle class school district made up of mostly White Euro-American, principals as building leaders that were charged to implement the initiative, but the researcher wanted to examine their perceptions, degree of implementation along with the impact of student achievement. They appeared to have had little knowledge or understanding of systems of oppression, especially in relation to education, race, curriculum, power, and privilege.

By exploring principals’ perceptions in light of the Equity and Excellence initiative implemented throughout the Meadow Grove School District, this study examined the value of the strategies outlined in the conceptual framework of the initiative. The hope of the study was to examine middle school principals increasing self awareness of their own racial leadership lens, and increase their learning about institutionalized racism within the context of a public school system the has an achievement gap between various sub-populations of students. This is especially evident between Black and Hispanic/Latino students as compared to their White and Asian counterparts. It was a hope that this study serves to substantiate current research practices and knowledge about culturally responsive teaching and anti-racist leadership principles
suggested in the literature, as well as contribute to the knowledge base by empirically assessing the levels in which principals implement these strategies to increase student achievement for students of color in a public school setting.

Critical research action principles contextualized this study through recognition of White privilege and institutionalized racism, and prioritizing the need to attend to these issues (Linton & Singleton). In addition, attention to providing culturally responsive teaching, and placing systems in place to support teachers, empowers parents and students, and communities were of critical importance. These efforts would assist by deconstructing traditional or institutionalized pedagogical educational strategies typically embedded in classroom structure serve to increase exclusivity through the attention to the cultural aspects of minority ethnic groups. The critical aspect of this action research study allowed actual middle school principals to be involved in the educational governance and leadership process and supported interpretation of lived experiences through the lens of race, ethnicity, culture, and White privilege. This served to situate principals via action research in a posture that allows them to understand how their leadership practices and beliefs serve as the lens by which they view equity, access, and how they can develop an anti-racist school that works towards promoting social justice and eradicating the achievement gap between various sub-populations.

The elements of critical race theory, stereotype threat, achievement gap theories, anti-racist leadership, and culturally responsive instruction along with courageous conversations about race informed this study. The meaning making of the principals and researcher was situated in the discourses that served as the theoretical grounding of the
study. In particular, the study chronicled how institutionalized racism, perpetuates the achievement gap. However, through the implementation of the conceptual framework described by Singleton and Linton, that includes but is not limited to: PASS teams, CARE teams, Equity Teams, with the principals as the anti-racist leader, and the intentionality of reshaping the culture of the school, the gap can be eradicated and diminished at a minimal.

The researcher believes that these components are central to principals being able to understand the impact that race plays in schooling, but also be able to examine the presence and role of whiteness within their organization. In addition, the multiple perspectives on race and schooling allow principals to create space to better understand the lived experiences of their students, and their families in a dominant culture. As principals moved through the conceptual framework, the model or framework created space for them to begin to deconstruct categories of race, and most importantly access of students of color to experience high level rigorous courses that will prepare them for high school and post secondary options. Ultimately, they would be able to understand that there are barriers and systems in place for students of color that are framed in White privilege.

**Exhaustive Description**

The overarching goal for any building principal is to create a school that allows every student to grow and release their God-given potential, talents, and abilities to a world that is changing at a rapid pace. The uniqueness of their position within their
organization is that “they have to become all things to all people.” The vast array of skills that they must possess is an ever-challenging endeavor.

As the name implies, transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms individuals. It is concerned with such variables as values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. It is an encompassing approach that can be used to describe a wide range of leadership, from very specific attempts to influence followers on a one-to one level to very broad attempts influence whole organizations. These types of leaders have an inordinate amount of responsibility on their shoulders. Their personality traits must encompass specific types of behaviors. First, they are strong role models for the beliefs and values they want their followers to adopt. Secondly, they must appear competent to their followers. Third, they articulate ideological goals that have moral overtones. Specifically, such individuals like Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech is an example of such a charismatic figure. Fourth, transformational leaders communicate high expectations for followers, as they exhibit confidence in followers’ abilities to meet their expectations.

Ultimately, the impact of this behavior is to increase followers’ sense of competence and self-advocacy (Avolio & Gibbons, 1988), which in turn increases their performance. It is with great passion, wisdom, perseverance that principals must examine themselves and others beliefs, attitudes, and most importantly their leadership practices about the students that have been left in their charge. Every one of them should be extremely clear that there is only one goal for every classroom, school, and district in America, and that goal must be pursued by a single belief that equity and excellence
cannot be separated. Therefore, it is critical that principals recognize that every student regardless of their culture, race, ethnicity, economics, language, gender, or lifestyle-must be educated to attain well-defined and high standards of learning. Any other goal short of this mark perpetuates a public educational system that expects more of some students, mainly White and wealthy, than any other student, specifically students of color, in poverty or both.

As a researcher, I have unequivocal hope that, that in the midst of entrenched systems, attitudes, and beliefs, under the leadership of great principals American schools can narrow and eventually eliminate the achievement gap. Yes, there are educational methods, programs, and lofty expectations that can catapult a population of students to insurmountable heights. Principals must see to it that not only the highest achieving students in schools are the ones who traditionally are expected to do well, and the others in special needs programs, and viewed as “high risk” due to their poverty, language, race, or ethnicity are slated to do poorly. I submit to you that the anti-racist leaders of today are the individuals that will foster a generation to overcome the ills of the future.

**Final Validation**

The researcher sent a final validation of the data analysis to each participant to ensure that they’re significant statements that was extracted from the transcription was accurate. This information was mailed through the Meadow Grove District mailing system. Each participant received a copy of the transcription copy of the significant statements, along with a CD copy of the interview so they could playback the actual interview and corroborate the statements. A total of seven respondents’ cited
they were “right on target” and, “I totally trust your judgment on the transcription,” and, “everything appears accurate.” However, there were two respondents’ that edited some spelling errors of names, along with changing a few words that accurately reflected the “essence” of what they were saying. As a result of the ongoing pressing demands of her job, one participant elected to read it again to see if she missed anything. I agree to allow for this, as I would not be submitting my final copy until a later date. Overall, the respondents felt that “essence” of their statements were accurate, and reflected their responses to the best of their knowledge to the interview questions at the time of the interview.

**Summary of Chapter Four**

The interview questions were submitted to nine outstanding educational leaders with various principalship experiences, and various levels of the implementation of the conceptual framework. Some of them were new to their position for the first year, some in their second year, and others on the extreme of thirteen years. The themes that emerged were framed and answered in the area of the research questions. Their perceptions and actions were reflective of their experience levels and training in the Excellence and Equity initiative. However, the political realities of maintaining a healthy staff, involved community, yet, implementing an extremely difficult topic that “race” is the primary issue, proved challenging, difficult, and as one participant put it, “the most difficult work I have ever done in my thirty year career.” I sincerely believe the “themes” that were captured by the significant statements of these exceptional leaders, paint a picture of the complexity of this national epidemic for public schools.
Chapter Five: Discussions and Recommendations

Greatness does not come to any people on flowery beds of ease. We must fight to win the prize. No people, to who liberty is given, can hold it as firmly and hold it as grandly as those who wrench their liberty from the iron hand of the tyrant. The hardships and dangers involved in the struggle give strength and toughness to the character, and enable it to stand firm in storm as well as in sunshine.

--Fredrick Douglas (1881), former slave, author, and statesman

Introduction

The purpose of qualitative research study in this chapter was to examine the perceptions of middle school principals’ and their leadership actions towards closing the achievement gap at their respective sites. To assist the reader in comprehending the format of the study, I have elected to divide the sections into four distinct categories. During the first section, the researcher has included a summary of the methodology of the study, along with the summary of the results. The second and third sections discuss the implications of the study, and reflections. Lastly, a conclusion will finalize the study.

Summary

Methodology

The purpose of qualitative research study in this chapter was to examine the perceptions of middle school principals’ and their leadership actions towards closing the achievement gap in their respective sites. Although the literature is exhaustive in the area of leadership, and more specifically anti-racist leadership, as the researcher it was my objective to explore the phenomenon of the essence within each selected principal’s
leadership practice as they endeavor to close the achievement gap between minority students and their White and Asian counterparts. In order to adequately represent the perceptions of principals, a phenomenological tradition was the methodology employed to investigate this phenomenon. The overarching question of the study was: Do principals’ perceive the training they received has impacted their leadership actions towards closing the achievement gap? In addition, the four research questions were: (1) Is there a difference between principals’ perceptions of the strategies necessary too close the achievement gap? (2) Are there differences in principals’ perceptions of the levels of implementation of the conceptual framework? (3) Are there differences in principal’s skill, will and knowledge base in regards to the implementation of the conceptual framework? (4) Are there differences in principals’ attitudes regarding the conceptual framework?

The means of data collection was the one-on-one interview. There were a total of thirteen interview questions that were chosen: (1) From the many district initiatives, what are your primary initiatives and how many are the primary focus in your building?...(2) Which of these initiatives are having the most impact on your students’ academic achievement?...(3)…Which sub-populations of students are the most impacted by these successful initiatives?...(4) Where are you in your building in terms of implementing these strategies?...(5)…How did you structure that implementation? (6) What characteristics of your community influenced your plan of implementation? (7) Have modifications to your implementation plan been necessary? (8) What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have been embraced and implemented by your
community? (9) What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have you, as principal attempted to implement but met resistance from your staff? (10) What aspects of the District’s Excellence and Equity initiative are successful in your building and with whom? (11) What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative do you feel not ready to implement and why? (12) What additional support does your building need to fully implement the Excellence and Equity initiative? (13) If you could modify the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative, what changes would you make and why? The researcher categorized the interview questions that he felt would solicit the responses that would “best” corresponds to answer the research question (See Appendix E and F).

Once the researcher received IRB Board approval, a pilot study was obtained from three Meadow Grove School District administrators as a means whereby feedback was solicited regarding the interview process and the nature of the questions. All of these administrators were trained in the Excellence and Equity initiative, with the hope of when they become principals within the district they would continue to carry out the mission and vision of the superintendent. The researcher was analyzed in accordance to the phenomenological analysis methodology outlined by Colaizzi (1978) (See appendix G) They include but were not limited to the extraction of significant statements from transcriptions. Afterwards, all of the significant statements were consolidated by all of the responses from principals. The final process included the formulation of meanings, the clustering of themes as they pertained to the overarching research question.
Discussion

As the number of principals that were interviewed vary, so does they’re perceptions and leadership actions vary as it relates to closing the achievement gap. In this section of the study the researcher will provide answers that are specific and directly related to the research questions. All of the answers will be summarized in the four research questions, and afterwards will be summarized as it relates to the overarching research question.

Research Questions

Overarching Research Question

Do principals’ perceive that the training they have received has/has not impacted their leadership actions towards closing the achievement gap in their schools?

It was evident to the researcher that unequivocally all of the principals were in agreement that the training they had received from the Pacific Educational Consultant Firm was invaluable. However, there were inconsistent approaches to the issue based on their level of experience.

Research Question 1

Is there a difference between principals’ perceptions of the strategies necessary to close the achievement gap? Again, the answers as reflected in the significant statements would suggest, “yes” to this research question. The perceptions of the strategies vary in range and depth; however, there was also consensus that there is a need for their staffs’ to continue to increase their capacity as leaders, and instructional leaders around this topic. However, the perceptions may vary the professional responsibility to not be satisfied or
allow this phenomenon to continue at their respective sites. In essence, to not actively pursue strategies to address this issue would be a derelict of duty to the profession.

**Research Question 2**

Are there differences in principals’ perceptions of the levels of implementation of the conceptual framework? There was a difference in principals’ perceptions of the levels of implementation of the conceptual framework. The reasons were many from improper communication from the Pacific Educational Consultant firm, to their own personal levels of resistance to implementing the initiative. Again, as has been mentioned in the previous chapter of the research study. The researcher firmly believes that once the Superintendent and the Executive Director of Excellence and Equity mandated the non-negotiable edict, the levels of implementation began to be addressed in a solution-oriented manner. Consequently, every middle school site had implemented to varying degrees the conceptual framework of the initiative.

**Research Question 3**

Are there differences in principals’ skill, will, and knowledge base in regards to the implementation of the conceptual framework? The answer to this research question based on the significant statements from the participants’ suggest that there are differences in principals’ skill, will, and knowledge base in regards to the implementation of the conceptual framework. Each participant’s perceptions and actions vary due to experience, confidence, professional knowledge, personal conviction, moral imperative, racial implications, leadership experience levels, and a myriad of other factors. In essence, to address a systemic transformation overhaul that operates on the premise of
“institutional” racism cut to the core of every facet of one’s being. The implications had far reaching effects that involved new learning’s, and dispelling entrenched beliefs and attitudes some of which were personal and professional held beliefs.

**Research Question 4**

Are there differences in principals’ attitudes regarding the conceptual framework? According to the significant statements by the participants’, the researcher concluded that there are differences in principals’ attitudes regarding the conceptual framework. Again, the differences are grounded in many of the areas that were described in question number three. However, it was quite interesting to note, that although challenging, difficult, and not easy to implement, the conceptual framework that was introduced was a beneficial one. The four agreements and six conditions created a framework in which organizations such as schools could hold courageous conversations around the issue of race.

It created “space” to discuss the issue of race from a community, teaching and learning, and systemic framework whereby schools could examine their attitudes and practices that were pervasive in their schools, and the District. The mandate was very clear, which is the “what” but there was freedom at each site to address the “how”. Each school had the autonomy to tailor the initiative to their specific site. However, no school was permitted to not implement the conceptual framework.

As a result, the attitudes of principals were in constant flux. The successful implementation of any part of the conceptual framework brought about a confidence that this task is doable. Also, the notion of systemic assistance, support, and Central Office leadership provided some element of solace to the participants. Although there was
support from various aspects of the organizations, it was evident that the participants;’ knew that they’re success and failure (evaluation) would be based upon the success at their sites in closing the achievement gap.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

The outlined recommendations and implications are solely based upon literature review, data analysis, and the drawn conclusions extrapolated from the interviews need further study.

A recommendation for further study includes but is not limited to:

- Replicate this study with High School and Elementary school principals in the Meadow Grove School District to examine if similar results occur.
- Conduct annual middle school principal interviews (with these same principals), to examine if there is an increase in the area of skill, will, and knowledge as they continue to implement the conceptual framework.

**Implication for Principals**

Although this study examined the perceptions and leadership actions of nine principals in the Meadow Grove School District; yet it was an extremely important sample. The findings of this study lend itself to phenomenological research design as a viable instrument to research the essence of principal leadership. Cited in Creswell (1998), and (Rieman) 1986, it is not what the leader *does*, but what the leader *is* that adds to the value of this study. There are far reaching implications for this study in the area of teacher preparation programs, staff development efforts, principal research, and multicultural education.
The researcher has listed below some critical elements that inspiring principals must be proficient in leading minority majority schools, and educating minority students. In the 21st century. Principals should be knowledgeable about the differences between general leadership vs. anti-racist leadership traits.

The implications for proficient principals are:

- Principals should be aware of cultural differences, culturally responsive teaching strategies, and the research by prominent authors of color that shed insight into effective teaching strategies that impact the achievement of students of color.
- Principals should be well verse in critical race theory, and knowledgeable about the prevailing gap theories that occupy the minds and hearts of students of color.
- Principals should access other constituencies such as the community agencies, family, and significant personnel in the lives of students of color to garner support for their achievement.
- Principals must open their minds to a new approach to leadership for the 21st century. As a result of the “Browning of America,” they cannot remain ignorant, and entrenched with their biases and preconceived ideas about race and intelligence. Additionally, they must provide access and opportunity for every student to reach their true potential in these United States of America.

The Implications for School Districts

- School Districts’ must make a bold and unequivocal stance on the achievement gap, and the role that race plays in this on-going systemic phenomenon.
- School Districts must provide district leadership, principal training, and new teacher hiring practices that expect all employees at every level, must be proficient in their Excellence and Equity initiative.
- School Districts’ must have an Excellence and Equity department that is responsible for assessing data, training, and implementation strategies that continually audit the school district’s curriculum, hiring and retention practices, and overall monitoring of the performance of minority student in every program that is offered.
- School Districts’ must hire principals that are anti-racist leaders that examine schooling through the lens of equity.
• School Districts’ must maintain a list of “non-negotiables” that include the implementation of the conceptual framework at every site.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

The unyielding variable of “training” was the reoccurring theme that echoed from the voices of the participants. If the expectation is to do this work, than it is important that they attend schools that have been successful in this work. This work is so “emotionally” intensive, that it requires that principals continue to be allowed to attend workshops, trainings, and national programs to learn from schools that are successful in closing the achievement gap with this framework. Therefore, they recommend using other consulting firms along with Pacific Educational Consulting, to enhance their professional development. As the researcher, the areas of need were glaring. Each participant had their own unique strengths and weaknesses. However, what was clear is that, in order to be a principal leader in the Meadow Grove School District, you must be an anti-racist leader equipped to address the issue of race at your site. Below is a list of suggestions for further study that may be considered:

• What were the perceptions and actions of the Principals of Color in implementing the conceptual framework?
• Which White principals’ have successfully implemented the conceptual framework, and what were the barriers the personal obstacles they had to overcome?
• What strategies are middle school students of color that do not comprise the “gap” using to successfully navigate in the same setting?
• Would this study be relevant if Critical Race Theory was utilized as a conceptual framework rather than just a theoretical tool, (Billings, 2006)? In essence, rather than phenomenology in its purest form.
• Does the race of the principal have anything to do with how parents perceive the school?
• Is “stereotype threat” (Steele, 1994) prevalent by principals of color?
Although many of these suggestions may be extreme, and even difficult to perform, however I do think these are questions that have always been in the minds of principals of color. There are different principal leadership experiences by persons performing the same job, and carrying out the mission of the Meadow Grove School District. Therefore, more insight into the perceptions of principals can only enhance awareness of such issues as these. Therefore creating space for educational leaders to develop strategies and support structures for anyone that chooses to become a building principal.

**Reflection**

The principals in this study confirmed for me, that our current educational system is not working for all students. What’s even more frightening, many of the building leaders that are responsible for eradicating the gap are doing so in a “colorblind” state. They really don’t know, or believe that race is an issue of concern in our public schools. Additionally, I can’t understand why middle class students of color still struggle both emotionally and academically in this setting. As a practitioner, and scholar I am constantly reminded of the national data and the many indicators that convey images of Black and Hispanic/Latino students in crisis. The various researchers such as; (Steele) on stereotype threat, (Tatum, 1997) on social mirroring, low teacher expectations (Kuykendall, 2004); and the constant reminder of the plight of Black Boys, (Noguera, 2008) *The Trouble With Black Boys*, serve as a constant reminder that the social construct of “race” has a devastating impact on all students in public schools. And, it will take a lifetime to be corrected if ever.
It is my hope that each principal leader will become more intimately involved with this framework as they attempt to restructure their schools is to promote excellence and equity for all. It is only through the painful experience of “speaking your truth” can multiple perspectives be engendered. It is only one way, and not the only way that the “lived” experiences of all have a platform to share their realities.

The value of this study was life changing for me as a researcher, and also personally. It was through the statements and candor spoken by these principals that illuminated their deepest fears, celebrations, and pursuit of the unknown in public education as they try to understand and close the achievement gap that gave me the most hope. It is through their stories and experiences; future researchers may gain some clarity.

The Last Word

The history of the United States includes slavery, genocide, racial discrimination, war—in other words; it’s a country like all others. What is exceptional is that this country has created a vision of a new world and a new human being. Through its rhetoric, its poetry and prose, it has succeeded in investing the word “America” with enormous symbolic power…Rhetoric can also shape reality.

-Sacvan Bercovitch, (September 2007)

As I conclude this process of my Doctoral quest, the research that I have learned, and the experiences I have gained, has challenged me both professionally and personally. I try to remain hopefully optimistic that as a nation we will continue to move towards excellence and equity with education. There has been only gradual change in the past hundred years regarding this issue, and has required sustained struggle and perseverance. It is still amazing to me that some of us are still treated less “American” than others. Yes, the struggle continues with our various allies and resistors. I have come to the conclusion that regardless of these current conditions, I have a responsibility to carry on the labor
that was foundational for the previous generations to ensure that all students are treated equally. They are considered Americans-irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, or national origin. This must include both rhetoric and reality. It is and will always be America’s unfinished business.
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U.S. Department of Justice (2001)


Appendix A

Informed Consent

“Principal’s Perceptions of the Excellence and Equity Initiative”

You are invited to participate in a phenomenological study of how the Excellence and Equity initiative training impacts the actions of principals in middle schools? The study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration and Policy Study. This study is being conducted by John Gregory Kennedy and supervised by Dr. Kent Seidel at the University of Denver at 303-871-2496.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain how the Excellence and Equity training impacts the actions of middle school principals in the Cherry Creek School District. The ultimate goal is to close the gap of African-American and Hispanic students, as compared to their White and Asian counterparts. This interview is designed to take approximately one hour (1 hour) of your time answering specific questions related to your perceptions of the Excellence and Equity initiative. Your participation is completely voluntary and your decision to participate or not participate will not influence your current assignment in any way.

I sincerely hope you choose to meet with me and share your perceptions as it relates to this topic. Remember, your role is to merely describe the experience as it is lived by you. There will be no need to analyze the experience, but to allow the patterns and themes to emerge naturally. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Refusal to answer interview questions or to withdraw from participation at any time involves no penalty. I understand that there are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. However, it is imperative that you understand that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse or neglect, the law is explicit in that this is reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order of subpoena.

If you have concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd, Denver, CO 80208-2121.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may draw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature ______________________________________ Date _________________

I agree to be audiotaped.

I do not agree to be audiotaped
Appendix B

Letter of Introduction

September 1, 2009

Dear Principal,

Successfully closing the achievement gap in Cherry Creek School District at the middle school level will require tremendous leadership by building principals. Therefore, this study endeavors to examine your perceptions, behaviors, as well as reflection from the training you’ve received from Pacific Educational Consulting, and how it may/may not impact your leadership work at your site. I have developed a series of questions designed to elicit your perceptions of the numerous years of implementation of this work.

I am inviting you to join me on Thursday, September 3, 2009 during our regularly scheduled Principal’s meetings, to participate and receive an overview of the types of interview questions I am planning on asking all of you. Your feedback will assist me in assuring that the type of questions being asked are helpful as we all attempt to address this national epidemic.

Sincerely,

John G. Kennedy, Researcher
Appendix C

Letter of Appreciation/ Pilot Participants

[Date]

[Name & Address of Pilot Participant]

Dear [Name of Pilot Participant]

Thank you very much for agreeing to help me with my dissertation.

I can’t express how much your feedback regarding my research questions was to me. Your insight, interest, and overall encouragement to pursue this topic and line of questioning were invaluable.

Please be aware that your participation in this study was strictly voluntary. Your name will not be used in the dissertation, nor any information that was provided by you, if alluded to in the study, or at any time, will be handled in a confidential manner. I will be delighted to share the results of the study upon completion of the dissertation.

Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to assist me in this endeavor, I am most appreciative. I hope you have a tremendous school year!

Respectfully,

John G. Kennedy
Doctoral Candidate
University of Denver

5140 Perth Street
Denver, Colorado 80249
jokenned@yahoo.com
Appendix D
Letter of Confirmation

[Date]

[Name & Address of Participant]

Dear [Name],

This letter is to confirm my appointment with you on [date & time] at [place]. I am so appreciative of your commitment and willingness to participate in my dissertation research. I am convinced that your sharing of your outstanding leadership will definitely enhance the quality of this study.

Enclosed you will find two copies of a consent form dealing with the promise of confidentiality, and permission to audiotape our interview. One copy is for your records and one is for mine. I ask that you please sign and return the consent form prior to the interview? A self-addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience. Finally, to allow some introspection concerning the topic of the interview, I have enclosed a copy of the questions we will be discussing during the interview.

I am excited that we will be exploring this action research topic via a phenomenological exploration. I am eager to learn more about the essence of your outstanding educational leadership concerning this provocative topic.

Respectfully,

John G. Kennedy
Doctoral Candidate
University of Denver
5140 Perth Street
Denver, Colorado 80249
(303) 913-7716
jokenned@yahoo.com
Appendix E

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine your perceptions, behaviors, as well as reflection from the training you’ve received from Pacific Educational Consulting, and how it may/may not have impacted your leadership work at your site. I have developed a series of questions designed to elicit your perceptions of the numerous years of implementation of this work.

1) Do principals’ perceive that the training they have received has/has not impacted their leadership actions towards closing the achievement gap in their schools?
   a) Is there a difference between principals’ perceptions of the strategies necessary to close the achievement gap?
   b) Are there differences in principals’ perceptions of the levels of implementation of the conceptual framework?
   c) Are there differences in principals’ skill, will, and knowledge base in regards to the implementation of conceptual framework?
   d) Are there differences in principals’ attitudes regarding the conceptual framework?

Research Question main ideas:
   (a) Perceptions of necessary strategies
   (b) Acknowledgement of degree of implementation
   (c) Skill, will, knowledge of implementation
   (d) Perceptions of Pacific Educational Consultants conceptual framework
Appendix F

Interview Questions

- From the many district initiatives, what are your primary initiatives and how many are the primary focus in your building? (c)
- Which of these initiatives are having the most impact on your students’ academic achievement? (c, b)
- Which sub-populations of students are the most impacted by these successful initiatives? (c, b)
- Where are you in your building in terms of implementing these strategies? (a, b, c)
- How did you structure that implementation? (a, d)
- What characteristics of your community influenced your plan of implementation? (c)
- Have modifications to your implementation plan been necessary? If so, what and why? (a, b, c)
- What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have been embraced and implemented by your community? (c, b)
- What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have you, as principal, attempted to implement but met resistance from your staff? (c, b)
- What aspects of the District’s Excellence and Equity initiative are successful in your building and with whom? (b)
• What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative do you feel not ready to implement and why? (b, c, d)
• What additional support does your building need to fully implement the Excellence and Equity initiative? (c, a)
• If you could modify the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative, what changes would you make and why? (d)
Appendix G

Phenomenological Analysis

Methodology developed by Colaizzi (1978)

1. All the …[participants’] descriptions were read in order to acquire a feeling for them.
2. Significant statements were extracted from each description; phrases and sentences directly pertain to the investigated phenomenon. Statements were eliminated that contained the same or nearly the same statements.
3. Meanings were formulated by spelling out the meaning of each significant statement. In this difficult step, the meanings arrived at must not sever the connection with the original description. The formulations discover and bring out those meanings hidden in the various contexts of the phenomenon that are present in the original descriptions.
4. Clusters of themes were organized from the aggregate formulated meanings. This allowed for the emergence of themes common to all of the…[participants’] descriptions.
   a. These clusters of themes were referred back to the original descriptions in order to validate them. This was done to see if there was anything in the original that was not accounted for in the cluster themes, and whether the cluster proposed anything, which was not in the original. If either of the above was true, a re-examination was necessary.
   b. At this point discrepancies may be noted among and/or between the various clusters; some themes may flatly contradict other ones or may appear to be totally unrelated to other ones. The researcher then proceeded with the solid conviction that was logically inexplicable might be existentially real and valid.
5) An exhaustive description of the phenomenon resulted from the integration of the above results.
6) The exhaustive description of the phenomenon is as unequivocal a statement of the essential structure of the phenomenon as possible.
7) A final validating step was achieved by returning to the …[participants’] and asking if the description formulated validated the original experience.
## Principal Interview Questions and Responses

**Principal A—Pooh Kalamath**

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<td>From the many district initiatives, what are your primary initiatives and how many are the primary focuses in your building?</td>
<td>Excellence and Equity and RTI process.</td>
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<td>Which of these initiatives are having the most impact on your students’ academic achievement?</td>
<td>A new school that was permitted to open with every initiative. Expected all kids to achieve at a high level. School started with the understanding that every initiative is the plate, and not a “new” thing to add.</td>
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<td>Which sub-populations of students are the most impacted by these successful initiatives?</td>
<td>Successful with SPED kids due to the parallel curriculum model. Additionally, ELA kids were successful due to a great teacher. African-American males were the least successful.</td>
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<td>Where are you in your building in terms of implementing these strategies?</td>
<td>I was surprised that he was further along than many other schools. At Feeder meeting, when the “Dots” were placed on the initiative by building principals, I was astonished. I have successfully implemented the CARE teams, Equity Team, but have not implemented Leadership groups. Additionally, I realize the need for such groups now, but didn’t think it was necessary as a new principal opening a school. Both African American boys and girls groups are needed. I realized that I didn’t stress enough of the “whiteness” conversations along with White privilege articles. I thought if I could just make all kids achieve by teaching at high levels to every group. Consequently this hasn’t worked and the gap remains.</td>
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<td>How did you structure that implementation?</td>
<td>The implementation was never structured formally. As the school observed the data, they saw that certain student groups were not performing. Therefore, by opening my own school, I never had to say, “This is a district initiative.” The goal from my leadership perspective was to make the initiative as “seamless” as possible, or a marriage between all of the initiatives that were taking place in the district.</td>
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<td>What characteristics of your community influenced your plan of implementation?</td>
<td>The school is a solid middle to lower middle class community. Therefore, I can get away with a lot! There is minimal involvement by parents, and the PTO is very small (three members). The classes that are offered such as; Honors, or GT requires no standardized test score to enter. “If a student wants in, then they’re in.” I received no “pushback” from my parent community due to the fact they’re too busy working. Also, they’re kids come home happy which translates into a lot of trust they have in the school personnel, and me as a leader.</td>
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<td><strong>Have modifications to your implementation plan been necessary? If so, what and why?</strong></td>
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<td>Yes. The notion to just teach at a high level to all kids has not proven favorable in closing the gap. There were numerous analytical and thoughtful conversations about the reason this has not been accomplished. Each year I implemented something different to try and address the issue. Actually, I am quite perplexed about the phenomena.</td>
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<th><strong>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have been embraced and implemented by your community?</strong></th>
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<td>We don’t have the parent leadership groups yet. We talk about our Equity team but not in a formal capacity sharing out with parents. We don’t get a lot of parent involvement. This is a blue-collar community with both parents working, which do not push me to hold public forums. Right now they’re not involved but the program will be totally accepted by our community. Our parents are not aware that we have an Equity team. Honestly, they’re not aware of this occurring at my school. When we put together an African-American girls groups the parents loved it. The teachers don’t gripe about parent involvement, because they know both parents are working. Well, they’re kids come home happy so they’re happy.</td>
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<th><strong>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have you, as principal, attempted to implement but met resistance from your staff?</strong></th>
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<td>The only time I got pushback was about two years ago. I along with the leadership team met with the staff in small groups, which held about 8-10 teachers in a group. That is a benefit of a new school starting out small. So, we started out the conversations about White privilege, and it went stunningly well. However, it was a stark contrast with the classified personnel. The staff did not fully embrace the work because I believe they could not view themselves as having White privilege and entitlement, when they only make $9.00 per hour. As a result of this conversation, it took me about two months to get the building back to its original order.</td>
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<th><strong>What aspects of the District’s Excellence and Equity initiative are successful in your building and with whom?</strong></th>
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<td>The P.A.S.S. and CARE initiative is successful. The CARE strategies are things that have been highlighted any way. The goal of group work, inquiry based learning, has always been a part of the culture that the school was based upon. The teachers are use to targeting students and focus on students that are not performing. The race conversation is just not uncomfortable. As principal, I don’t call it an initiative. It’s something that I interweaved into the culture. The bias is to hire first year teachers. The hiring process involved race and equity as part of the interviewing and hiring process. How do you connect with your Black and Hispanic/Latino students were an integral part of the questioning. As principal, when the Equity and Excellence initiative was implemented in the Meadow Grove School District</td>
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I was a participant but was later pulled out to began the opening of my school. My dissertation was on closing the achievement gap. As a principal leader, my first article that the staff had to read was “Canary in the Mind.”

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<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative do you feel not ready to implement and why?</td>
<td>Well, I wouldn’t say I’m not ready to implement, but the parent groups frighten me because I don’t know if I am bright enough to do it. I don’t know what to say. I will pull them together and say, “we have an achievement gap and your students aren’t performing that well, and I need your help to fix it?” We don’t have enough teachers of color. I know White teachers care, but I thing students would really like to see people that look like them.” The conversation with parents around the Obama’s speech. The Leadership groups with our students to facilitate the groups because I feel the students connect better there.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What additional support does your building need to fully implement the Excellence and Equity initiative?</td>
<td>The main thing I could use is an exemplary one “Hellacious” teacher recruiter from the Human Resource department. Where in our process are we failing to get through with recruiting our new incoming teachers of color. What I think happens here, is that we really hold a long arduous process. A three level process with starting with the coordinator of the department (2hrs.), then with an administrator staff developer and GT Coordinator (2hrs.), and then with me the principal (3 hr. process). The problem is everyone on the committee is White. They hire so much gut wise and affective. Hey interviewed a strong Social Studies candidate did not o forward because they said she had such a flat affective. That’s the biggest thing that I need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you could modify the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative, what changes would you make and why?</td>
<td>Wow, okay I’ll be really honest. This is my only concern with the work we do, and understand the frustration. I get the frustration from PEG, but at times at the training people almost get shredded in front of the room. These aren’t courageous conversations if I am fearful and scared. It leads to some schools not doing the work due there not being a safe environment to express my ignorance. Ultimately, the principal’s or teachers just go subversive and relinquish from the work. Oh my God, I can’t ask a question because I am going to get ripped. As much as I know we need the courageous conversations, and the need to speak my truth, and need to really know that I can speak my truth. It’s a tough conversation anyway. But, what you do in that situation is give White people an excuse to not do the work. I would say, “just be more manipulatively.” Don’t give white educators a way out.</td>
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</table>
## From the many district initiatives, what are your primary initiatives and how many are the primary focus in your building?

My primary initiative is close the achievement gap. Excellence and Equity initiative. If that’s done, everything else will fall into place. Eliminating the racial predictability while narrowing the performance of all students. Data collection of assessments by ethnic groups. Teachers need to know “who am I teaching to?” Analyze suspension reports, data, interpreters, and reward field trips at the end of the quarter. Why put a system in place whereby Blacks and Brown kids will not be able to attend?

## Which of these initiatives are having the most impact on your students’ academic achievement?

A primary White school, once system is broken down to eradicate institutional racism. Community Outreach created to bring all families into the schools. The outreach programs of community forums, and be intentional to create an environment whereby everyone is welcome. Excellence and Equity initiative allows for students of color to make progress under her leadership. Bring the community together to work collaboratively. Make the environment comfortable for all groups to attend.

## Which sub-populations of students are the most impacted by these successful initiatives?

All kids benefit. Whites learn about racism and the system that supports their benefits. Additionally, culturally responsive teaching benefits all kids.

## Where are you in your building in terms of implementing these strategies?

This site is in its seventh year working with Pacific Educational Group. As a principal, I had to decide whether I could lead a diverse population of students. First year, I had to understand my own White perspective. That journey required intentional soul searching, to try and gain another perspective. What did I see in the curriculum, systems, walls, books, and communication with each other? Making teachers accountable for their actions. There’s no place to hide at my building. There is no growth without the courageous conversations.

## How did you structure that implementation?

It was very intentional. As the principal, I had to become centered about what I believed about racism, and how I took advantage of the privilege I had. I had to see it for myself before I could expect it from my staff. Later, I had to provide a lot of different forums for people to engage in this work. As a leader, I had to limit the opportunities to hide, and expose the issues. Be intentional, and expect non-closure. You live and breathe this work. It is the way business is conducted at my school.

## What characteristics of your community influenced your plan of implementation?

The community was pretty happy, and really didn’t know or realize there was a gap. Pulled together my African-American parents, and student leadership groups. The issues were specific to each individual group of students and their parents. I placed myself
in a situation where I was the minority, although I was the principal. I surrounded myself around my Hispanic and African-American parent groups so they were able to talk freely and not have their feelings translated. They didn’t want to talk in a mixed audience because they would have been intimidated. Parents are included in data in a day with just students from different ethnic groups.

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<th>Have modifications to your implementation plan been necessary? If so, what and why?</th>
<th>Not modifications per say, but go deeper into the work as new hires are recruited. Interview questions, and overall employment at the site is very rigorous, and a high expectation to be successful at the site. Also, as a principal her staff constantly examining disciplinary data, and not working against the system. Various leadership groups such as the Brotherhood and also Hispanic groups. Now the boys can be “seen” in the building now. The challenge of bringing new staff annually to bring them up to speed with the rest of the staff and the direction of the school. How as a school do they continually work within the system, and not be disproportionately being suspended. “If I can get the boys, then the girls will follow.”</th>
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<tr>
<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have been embraced and implemented by your community?</td>
<td>The Black Conferences and the Hispanic conferences. Specifically, whereby Carlos Cuauhtemoc Sanchez (actor and activist) was the keynote speaker for the Hispanic conference. The goal in this conference was to try to make sure the Hispanic conferences may be presented in the Spanish language. The African-American families wanted some of the power that has traditionally been shared by the West Side of the district. Dr. Moses said, “It was one of the most inspirational events he’s ever attended.” All of the parent ethnic groups have been heavily involved in promoting the Excellence and Equity initiative. Both groups now have a voice and a forum within the school district. The community is empowered to the point where they can organize and have a voice. “I think that if they are not organized, then their power is limited. They wanted to hold the district accountable, specifically around calling the conference a Black conference.”</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have you, as principal, attempted to implement but met resistance from your staff?</td>
<td>Well, I met a lot of resistance from my staff. As I also met resistance from Glenn Singleton, challenging my White perspective. The resistance was around not talking about race and especially racism. Everyone had to educated and comfortable to say the word black, or white, and White privilege. Therefore, as Glenn models the work for me, I was able to deepen and sustain my resolve with my staff. More resistance is met from the district level, and not necessarily doing the work at</td>
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<td>What aspects of the District’s Excellence and Equity initiative are successful in your building and with whom?</td>
<td>The work is around increasing the performance of our Black and Hispanic students. The White educators have also grown to be better community members and leaders. I believe that everybody has to understand his or her role and part in this work. (Bus drivers, SRO officer, Etc.)</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative do you feel not ready to implement and why?</td>
<td>I’m seven years in, and don’t feel there is no part that I am reluctant to implement. As far as the school is concerned, I feel I have lead my school to that end. My concern is the power at Central Office if they fully get it. I feel as a principal, I have done all that I know to do. However, the question lies in the Central Office personnel committing to do their part.</td>
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<td>What additional support does your building need to fully implement the Excellence and Equity initiative?</td>
<td>The District needs to decide if they really want it. It’s going to cost to fully close the gap, but it will take time and attention to be a part of this work. Reduce the number of kids, and increase the time will yield positive results. The operative question is whether the Meadow Grove has the will to make the changes necessary to close the gap. Once they have the will, they will make it happen! The district to make this work a priority. It frees my staffing decision-making to be more flexible at my site. As a result of increasing math time and staffing, I was able to reduce the gap for my students of color. It’s the will that needs to be determined. The goal that we’re asked to accomplish then they need to finance the commitment. Make it a priority!</td>
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<td>If you could modify the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative, what changes would you make and why?</td>
<td>I would make every middle school principal responsible for the growth of Baseline Middle School. They would stretch themselves to share their resources and provide for students the resources that they need. The goal would be to start making principals care about the lowest performing, and most impacting school before they are failing.</td>
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<td>From the many district initiatives, what are your primary initiatives and how many are the primary focus in your building?</td>
<td>Her primary focus is Excellence and Equity and that’s it. All CCSD initiatives must compliment the Excellence and Equity work. Goal is to create a school that all students can achieve.</td>
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<td>Which of these initiatives are having the most impact on your students’ academic achievement?</td>
<td>Rigor is the focus of all the classes at her school. Culturally relevant instruction is the focus. As a new school, she was able to include all of her expectations were introduced by her. Primarily, raising the level of rigor is most important.</td>
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<td>Which sub-populations of students are the most impacted by these successful initiatives?</td>
<td>Many African-American females have some holes in their learning. The Latino students are not having much success either.</td>
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<td>Where are you in your building in terms of implementing these initiatives?</td>
<td>I am implementing everything and everything</td>
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<td>implementing these strategies?</td>
<td>currently. As a principal, I am the primary person responsible to lead the work. AVID and the Equity Team share teachers. As the principal, I am the administrator overseeing everything. I cannot let go of the reins at this point. As a second year school, all of the initiatives have not been separated out to administrators. The induction process was part of hiring of teachers. I can’t separate the initiative from the foundation or origin of the school. It’s an “active” work in progress. As the principal, I interview and hire teachers, and I must ascertain whether the candidates have the “heartbeat” of the school and embrace her leadership vision that includes closing the achievement gap.</td>
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<td>How did you structure that implementation?</td>
<td>It was structured from the hiring process throughout the entire system. There is a screening tool to see if candidates see data (and everything) through the eyes of equity. It was structured from the onset of opening the school.</td>
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<td>What characteristics of your community influenced your plan of implementation?</td>
<td>I have a very difficult set of issues from her community. I have been labeled by my community as the principal of the “kids of color.” She must have accepted these kids as School of Choice and really don’t legitimately belong at this school. Parents are in the mode of “White” flight. I have been inundated consumed with people accusing her of not servicing all kids. It has solidified my conviction. As a leader. I’ve also become also more protective of my staff. I communicate everything and make sure every T is crossed and there is no room for error in my leadership.</td>
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<td>Have modifications to your implementation plan been necessary? If so, what and why?</td>
<td>Yes…. The school has had to examine my screening criteria. I had to make sure kids have completed Algebra 1 by eighth grade. The coordinator along with her has had to increase access to kids in to the more advanced classes. Additionally, that requires me to put more supports in place for students of color. I physically walked with my coordinator to observe the “tracking” of kids of color in the classes.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have been embraced and implemented by your community?</td>
<td>The school began PASS this year. However, the community is divided. Parents of Color are excited, and the White parents are merely tolerating the initiative. In theory, the community has embraced RIGOR, but not the “closing the gap” piece of the initiative. She has a CARE team, Equity team. She struggled with having a select group of people on the team, but chose to institutionalize the initiative with her coordinators and staff developers.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have you, as principal, attempted to implement but met resistance from your staff?</td>
<td>She has NOT met any overt resistance, and that concerns her. Minimal resistance with a counselor. Some courageous conversations with a few teachers, that resulted in a positive outcome. As a</td>
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new school, I was able to “weed” out the new proposed teachers before they’re hired or tenured. I had one issue in particular with the technology coordinator; eventually I removed him from a leadership position. Nobody is permitted to get into the work progress, without my stamp of approval and access.

**What aspects of the District’s Excellence and Equity initiative are successful in your building and with whom?**

The African-American girls are doing well. There is a partnership with her feeder high school, and students of color from their home high school, to support the learning of her middle school students.

**What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative do you feel not ready to implement and why?**

I can’t think of anything. PASS is in process and ready to go forward. The Especially Me conference was a big event that she wanted people to attend. Counselors to attend identified a group of girls to attend the conference. It’s challenging to “identify” the students’ ethnicity, therefore allowing her to receive a letter of invitation. A letter was written to the School Board, and level directors of the Meadow Point school district. The parent eluded that there were many other parents that also felt the same way as she did. There are the “distractions” that make the job difficult.

**What additional support does your building need to fully implement the Excellence and Equity initiative?**

Yes, there are some things needed. Right now she is basically trying to staff her building. She would like more “clarity” around the expectations of implementation. For example, the student leadership groups would be helpful. She wants to do a good job, but is not clear about the “how” of implementing the groups.

**If you could modify the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative, what changes would you make and why?**

I am baffled “why” we are so many years into this initiative and there are some principals that have not implemented it in their schools. Especially, the newer schools that have been allowed to open without the initiative being followed. I am extremely concerned about not “pushing” students of color into more challenging course work. Also, the feeder areas must systematically send the same unified message. There are no parents of color represented at the school district Parents Council, DAAC, etc. A larger question needs to be asked why we not as a district have adequate representation in our large district meetings and forums.

From the many district initiatives, what are your primary initiatives and how many are the primary focus in your building?

Excellence and Equity is a huge focus in the building. My school is also is a Middle Years I.B. program within the district. The goal is to incorporate all of the initiatives to be intertwined. However, I am working diligently in creating a positive culture before the goal can be totaled realized. The school has been extremely focused in analyzing the schools’ data. The three areas of
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<td>Which of these initiatives are having the most impact on your students’ academic achievement?</td>
<td>As a new principal, don’t know the answer to this question as of yet. The goal of creating a more positive culture that would allow me to answer the question more specifically. The goal of positive culture includes the Excellence and Equity work.</td>
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<td>Which sub-populations of students are the most impacted by these successful initiatives?</td>
<td>The Black and Brown students will be the most positively impacted once the initiative is implemented in its entirety. Currently, their Swiss data (discipline data) is unbelievably better.</td>
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<td>Where are you in your building in terms of implementing these strategies?</td>
<td>The MYP or middle year’s program. In my first year as principal, the teachers did an enormous amount of work putting together lesson plans. They have MYP strategies in place that are embraced and implemented by all teachers. The climate is recognizably better, as evidenced by substitute teacher’s comments. The Equity work is not where I want it to be yet. I am currently working on ethnic leadership groups. As a second year principal, I am not where I want to be at with the equity work. Me along with my Assistant Principal am in the process of putting these programs in place.</td>
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<td>How did you structure that implementation?</td>
<td>We have CARE and an Equity team. They meet as an Equity team once per month. The challenge is to get the entire school to meet together at a scheduled time. Because I have to implement the Middle Years Program, it is difficult to provide staffing to other areas such as literacy or numeracy. A pivotal decision has to be made in the near future whether I am going to be able to continue this program. I have not announced this prospect, but know it will blow people out of the water if the vision that was implemented by the previous principal is changed.</td>
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<td>What characteristics of your community influenced your plan of implementation?</td>
<td>Me, as the principal set the vision, and allow teachers to implement the vision. A climate committee and a Pride camp were implemented. Teachers took the role and provided notebooks, planning, curriculum, etc. The middle years program has impacted the school to a large degree. This includes financial resources, staffing and me as the principal has to determine if I am able to sustain this program. The climate and equity work requires that both sides of the school (north and south) are ready to merge together to resolve issues and collaborate together to dispel some negative perceptions. The community influenced this by the reputation that needed an overhaul in public relations.</td>
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<td>Have modifications to your implementation plan been necessary? If so, what and why?</td>
<td>I will be able to answer the question better within a year. I am still learning how to effectively run a middle school. As I become more knowledgeable, more modifications will be forthcoming. The current early signs are trending positively.</td>
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However, the determination of continuing the middle years program and the positive culture work will be the litmus test for the 2010-11 school year. For the first time, I have hired an African-American female math teacher. The goal is to hire more teachers of color. I want my teaching force to reflect her student body percentages.

**What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have been embraced and implemented by your community?**

I have a very strong P.A.S.S. program. Although the parents of students have migrated to high school, they have elected to stay at work at the middle school. The Back to School Night format shifted to more of a community celebration rather than an informational night. They are still working on CARE and PASS implementation. The data is interpreted through their community meetings. I do not want any secrets or information hidden. She is a proponent of full disclosure. We have CARE, PASS, and an Equity team but not to the level of implementation. However, results have not been yielded yet.

**What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have you, as principal, attempted to implement but met resistance from your staff?**

The resistance has been due to teachers having to change. I have a mixture of old and new staff members, they have been reluctant to be open to new strategies. I have a very caring staff that wants the principal to tell them what to do. There has not been any outward resistance. There has been minimal resistance but the old adage of “this is how we’ve always done it.”

**What aspects of the District’s Excellence and Equity initiative are successful in your building and with whom?**

I would like to implement the P.A.S.S. program stronger, and because I feel it is really a solid program that is in place and highly effective. I am really placing the data to the forefront of teachers and charging them to make changes.

**What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative do you feel not ready to implement and why?**

There is not anything that I don’t feel ready to do. However, I feel part of it is vague and requires more concreteness. I feel ready but the level of implementation needs more work.

**What additional support does your building need to fully implement the Excellence and Equity initiative?**

I need more direction in how to spread out the CARE work. There is a need to increase capacity for teachers. Teachers at her current school have expressed difficulty in getting more teachers involved. I need more help in the CARE work.

**If you could modify the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative, what changes would you make and why?**

The message that Glenn Singleton increased my awareness of White privilege and the gap. The frustration expressed by Glenn is, “why is the district only at this minimal point.” The request for modification would be to provide more tools and more direction. There were many questions of how to implement the work school-wide. However, there was never a need to say that it wasn’t necessary. I feel that there should have been more improvement district-wide, and now it is my duty to lead the
initiative at my school with limited direction and guidance.

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<td>From the many district initiatives, what are your primary initiatives and how many are the primary focus in your building?</td>
<td>Well, the number one focus is Excellence and Equity, and closing the achievement gap. We’re coming together as a staff finally. One, examine the extended core period focus on reading and math. Secondly, we have our proficiency classes, who are general education teachers to booster their scores, and finally the PBS strategies, boosting Affective Ed strategies in their building. This includes climate, and measurements of safety. Also, Professional Learning Teams grade level by departments, this time examines GVC (guaranteed and viable curriculum), common assessments, AVID strategies that are institutionalization throughout the building.</td>
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<td>Which of these initiatives are having the most impact on your students’ academic achievement?</td>
<td>Well, under the Excellence and Equity initiative, are the professional learning teams that are most instrumental. This forum allows teachers to focus on specific student needs. Working together as a team to come up with common assessments.</td>
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<td>Which sub-populations of students are the most impacted by these successful initiatives?</td>
<td>This year, the goal is for African-American males to be targeted by our educators. That is because they are the most at risk, and have consistently demonstrated a negative decline on our standardized tests to impact the most. Right now, White students are making the most success from the things we’re doing at our school. The reason is that we have a White staff. The demographic shift has created a struggle for our teachers going from ten per cent minority to fifty per cent has proved a huge paradigm shift in their instructional methods.</td>
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<td>Where are you in your building in terms of implementing these strategies?</td>
<td>I am leading the charge. Every facet of the initiative involves my leadership and direction. Because I have a new administrative team, it is imperative that I know and lead the charge at every new program offering at the school. It is under my vision for the implementation of this vision. My assistant principal is responsible for carrying out my vision of the work.</td>
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<td>How did you structure that implementation?</td>
<td>By examining the data from the time I became the principal to now. The second year required me to talk with teachers, community leaders, and other colleagues to get ideas to implement.</td>
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<td>What characteristics of your community influenced your plan of implementation?</td>
<td>The demographics now are at fifty five per cent non-White students. This reality requires that teachers know whose sitting in their seats. The ongoing communication with parents drove my time to implement my vision.</td>
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<td>Have modifications to your implementation plan been necessary? If so, what and why?</td>
<td>No. I have not made any modifications to the plan.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have been embraced and implemented by your community?</td>
<td>My staff has been willing to disaggregate the data. The staff needs to examine the achievement gap, and need more direction in how to address the issue. We have a Latino PASS team and African-American PASS team.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have you, as principal, attempted to implement but met resistance from your staff?</td>
<td>I believe the resistance at my school is around the issue of diversity. The Beyond Diversity training has proved challenging for them to examine and the training was extremely difficult for the staff. Specifically, recognizing that there is a need and that we have to change.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the District’s Excellence and Equity initiative are successful in your building and with whom?</td>
<td>With some teachers it’s successful. Some teachers have participated but not completed the CARE initiative. African-American students that have participated in the Brotherhood organization have experienced success. They walk with their shirts on. However, this program is being revamped. For parents that have participated on the PASS team there is also limited success. They appear to like it and continue to do the work. The administrative team is too new to have experienced many of these experiences by her community.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative do you feel not ready to implement and why?</td>
<td>I believe the overall Beyond Diversity; the staff needs to approach it differently. Although the goal is the same it must look different. We should continue to focus on race, but do it differently. Race is important, and a part of everyday life. Having a White staff and having a diverse student body really poses a challenge for her staff. What has been implemented, I would do differently. When I arrived at my school, we had a CARE team, a PASS team, and the Brotherhood. Now, under my leadership, I am at the point whereby I can fully implement every facet of the initiative in its proper context. Although it is in its sixth year, it has not maintained its original momentum due to turnover and change in administration.</td>
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<td>What additional support does your building need to fully implement the Excellence and Equity initiative?</td>
<td>The district has provided my school with a consultant that works with my school. Because we’re on a fast track, I’ve asked for additional support. Additionally, I travel to other schools to obtain their successes to implement in my school.</td>
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<td>If you could modify the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative, what changes would you make and why?</td>
<td>I believe any organization, that leadership is the most important. I would modify that every leader would go through this work and be well trained. I believe that the Meadow Grove school district has not trained everyone in a timely manner. Different persons are at different places within their organizations. When it started, the: green” light and “red” light issue hampered some folks in moving ahead at a more accelerated rate.</td>
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Principal F—Shawntrell Jenkins

From the many district initiatives, what are your

The primary focus for my school and me is
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<td>primary initiatives and how many are the primary focus in your building?</td>
<td>reducing the achievement gap. My school has one of the largest gaps in the school district. This is definitely a high priority. I will be working with the Equity team to plan and implement training. The priority was there prior to me taking the helm at the school. The school has done many of the same trainings as all of the other middle schools have. However, the level of implementation has not been implemented to the larger degree.</td>
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<td>Which of these initiatives are having the most impact on your students’ academic achievement?</td>
<td>The school is reducing and trending in the appropriate way. Black students are out performing the Hispanic students.</td>
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<td>Which sub-populations of students are the most impacted by these successful initiatives?</td>
<td>I think that the results of the African-American students, and culturally responsive teaching strategies have been the most successful. The goal for the upcoming year is to focus on the Hispanic students.</td>
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<td>Where are you in your building in terms of implementing these strategies?</td>
<td>That is an interesting question. The work was done and stalled, a year ago. As the in-coming principal, I believe that there should be more of a continuation of school wide work. The school should be moved towards the achievement team format (professional learning community) instead of specific breakout committees or groups, and redirected to the original structure outlined by Pacific Educational Group. I feel as a new principal, that the staff needs to deal with both issues simultaneously. I sensed a tone that signaled if the initiative was more broadened and infused with regular school related events, it would increase the schools’ that we would accomplish the goal.</td>
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<td>How did you structure that implementation?</td>
<td>I started my conversations with my leadership team. From that point, I felt I needed to make it more systemic. That included staff development efforts, and a member from my CARE cadre that was actively working in the building. I obtained my perspective from those in leadership positions to develop my course of action for the entire school. I felt I needed to go back to the basics of the Beyond Diversity training to catch new staff up to date.</td>
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<td>What characteristics of your community influenced your plan of implementation?</td>
<td>I have a highly involved parent community and start at that top and defer back down to the school level personnel. This applies primarily to White parents, and not parents of color. They take on the role of advocacy for their kids and seek information on behalf of the school related issues.</td>
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<td>Have modifications to your implementation plan been necessary? If so, what and why?</td>
<td>At this point, all aspects are under consideration but not fully implemented. Primarily, I’m looking for parents for the PASS group participation.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have been embraced and implemented by your community?</td>
<td>The PASS parents are anxious to become involved. Many parents have also embraced the events in the Glendale community (lower income student families). A lot of participation from various ethnic</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have you, as principal, attempted to implement but met resistance from your staff?</td>
<td>To date, I haven’t attempted to implement anything at this point that has not already been introduced. The teacher’s association monitors the allocation of time constraints for staff development sessions. From a contractual perspective, if I use too much time I may hear pushback. Teachers are open with progress monitoring tools for their students. I’m very anxious to see how that meeting will play out.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the District’s Excellence and Equity initiative are successful in your building and with whom?</td>
<td>Well, again the achievement differences between Blacks and Hispanics. There are solid gains with the ELA population in math. However, many Hispanic students at his site are not in ELA. More work need to be done with that population overall.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative do you feel not ready to implement and why?</td>
<td>I feel that there is hesitation around the PASS committee. I am uncertain about the hesitation, but I believe it will open the staff to potential criticism and critique. Every teacher may not welcome the feedback that they will get. My school would welcome the Equity walk through in April 2010, to give feedback to the entire school. I imagine that there may be people that may be dismissive in terms of the feedback from the Equity team. That’s why the school-wide push is essential. We have a functioning Equity team (but worked amongst themselves). We did not provide school-wide training, and it was optional if teachers would access the training. The Equity team of teachers has not put themselves forward to change the culture of the school, but appear to be anxious to assume this world entirely for the upcoming year.</td>
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<td>What additional support does your building need to fully implement the Excellence and Equity initiative?</td>
<td>I simply need more time. I have to ensure that I build time into teachers’ conversations, planning, and school designated staff development to successfully implement this work. I will work with the Meadow Grove Executive Director of Excellence and Equity to provide a coherent and timely plan in a cautious manner.</td>
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<td>If you could modify the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative, what changes would you make and why?</td>
<td>I would make it less optional. I feel that it has made his job more challenging due to the school or the district not whole-heartedly expecting it to be done. Because I worked at another middle school, I am more prepared to facilitate this work. If I hadn’t worked with another principal that had implemented all facets of the conceptual framework, I would not be prepared to lead my building now as a principal. As a White male, and an Asst. principal, I had to seek out the work and become more involved in the initiative from a leadership perspective. The leadership capacity needs to be broadened to ensure capacity and the District leadership achieves sustainability.</td>
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<td>From the many district initiatives, what are your primary initiatives and how many are the primary focus in your building?</td>
<td>One of the primary initiatives is the equity gap in writing for the instruction in Black and Hispanic students. However, their writing scores are needed to increase. It appears to be a programmatic issue. Since it is an advanced school, making sure they continue to grow is the primary goal for my middle school students. The growth data has been a critical point for my school.</td>
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<td>Which of these initiatives are having the most impact on your students’ academic achievement?</td>
<td>The growth data is intentional for at least four students a quarter. I am at a quandary how to close the gap at the middle school level. Especially for the Hispanic students are most glaring. The school climate data showed they didn’t have strong relationships with the staff. I want the staff to realize that they do have students of color, and how they’re performance level relates to others at this school. My primary issue is transportation. That is not always available for kids to have access to my school.</td>
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<td>Which sub-populations of students are the most impacted by these successful initiatives?</td>
<td>The students of color are achieving higher than some of my White students. I don’t allow teachers to use the excuse of having a small number of students in their classes is a reason to not focus on students of color. I believe the Students of Color are benefiting from the initiative.</td>
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<td>Where are you in your building in terms of implementing these strategies?</td>
<td>We’re nowhere near where we need to be.” Currently, we are now getting into the PASS work, and now have two CARE teachers. I believe that the two teachers are very astute and committed to ensuring all kids are benefiting from the Excellence and Equity work. They are nowhere near where they need to be. There’s so much more to do. All the other initiatives are easily implemented, yet the Excellence &amp; Equity work is not fully implemented to the degree as other middle schools. As a principal, I constantly have to bring up the point of globalization or equity. I must make sure that the culture of the school be changed and challenged.</td>
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<td>How did you structure that implementation?</td>
<td>The Equity work is a part of every meeting, as well as staff development days. So I always have to go to the compass to locate where I am on the compass. I believe that I should attend the CARE training with my teachers. It was quite a surprise to find out that other principals did not have to do the same or held to the same standard. The view of parents was that I would accept more students of color (therefore letting down their standards). I constantly have to make sure I dispel those misconceptions.</td>
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<td>Have modifications to your implementation plan</td>
<td>Yes…. I came on too hard and too fast. My eyes</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have been embraced and implemented by your community?</td>
<td>Parents know about some parts on the governing board, and not to detail. However, now that there are more parents of color attending her school, parents are asking about the initiative. Now there are more conversations happening amongst the parents, and they realize the need for the school that will benefit all students. Those that frequent the building are now observing the vast racial differences.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have you, as principal, attempted to implement but met resistance from your staff?</td>
<td>The conditions were obviously observed on some of the teachers. The examination and role of whiteness was difficult. The staff did not easily embrace the notion of White privilege. The entire area of examining privilege and whiteness. As an administrator of color how do I get my all White staff to observe that portion of the training?</td>
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<td>What aspects of the District’s Excellence and Equity initiative are successful in your building and with whom?</td>
<td>The accessibility issue is most in need of examination as a magnet school. The application process makes it an optional question. The ability to write in their self-identification allowed her to see the demographics of what students are in which classes. I have a spreadsheet to determine which students are in which classes.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative do you feel not ready to implement and why?</td>
<td>I’ve already done the percentage sheets, and wonder why other principals are having a difficult time in completing this. Teachers and sponsors have control over the hiring, and programming needs of students. There is a lack of support and accountability for this work. That makes this work more difficult. The accountability and the support from the district-level are not allowed, although it is a great goal. My own personal struggle is that some principals’ will get there, and others never have to get there. My school has a CARE team, and Equity team but not a PASS team as of yet. I have good relationships with my parents of color, but I have not empowered my parents to become empowered in the school. This is a program that is unknown but is approaching the expectation with excitement.</td>
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What additional support does your building need to fully implement the Excellence and Equity initiative?

I think need an administrator that is there for a longer part of time, and to have some input to hire that person. There was confusion around the CARE team being members of the equity team, etc. My school is at a disadvantage because the school is smaller and more teachers are not available to be part of all the different parts of the training. The expectation for new administrators attend the training of Beyond Diversity is paramount. The capacity building must remain in place and expectation for all.

If you could modify the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative, what changes would you make and why?

Most things are rolled out in a big fashion, but this issue was not. There is little or no accountability for this work for principals, directors, etc. There’s no need for buy-in but is expected to do. This intensity should be built in with everybody to every facet of our school responsibilities. The district needs to stick through the goal and hold everyone to do the work.

Principal H—Bradley Pitford

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<td>From the many district initiatives, what are your primary initiatives and -how many are the primary focus in your building?</td>
<td>Differentiation Project, 21st century initiative that is overarching. This is done under the umbrella of CARE work, culturally responsive coaching. This is being done through differentiation.</td>
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<td>Which of these initiatives are having the most impact on your students’ academic achievement?</td>
<td>All three 21st century literacy reading and writing strategies), and trying to deliver culturally relevant instruction via differentiation, and shown moderate growth in all content areas (2-3 % points). Very low in mathematics, and have improved in reading and writing.</td>
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<td>Which sub-populations of students are the most impacted by these successful initiatives?</td>
<td>Well, I’d like to say it is our Students of Color, but is with subgroups within certain populations. The ELA, Latino, and Asian and White students, and Black females have shown moderate gains. Black boys continue to struggle in all of these content areas.</td>
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<td>Where are you in your building in terms of implementing these strategies?</td>
<td>We’re in year two in a three-year implementation plan. I have four differentiation coaches and five culturally responsive coaches and delivering staff development with PAS teacher. The PAS teacher organizes the work and the seven to eight teachers train the remainder of the building in how to deliver this instruction to teachers. Then elements of AVID strategies, ELA strategies, and twenty first century literacy strategies infused from time to time.</td>
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<td>What characteristics of your community influenced your plan of implementation?</td>
<td>I got involved with the differentiation project with the Meadow Grove curriculum council project. From that point a designee has come to his building to work with his trainers. An arrangement of sharing financial obligations has been agreed upon by both groups.</td>
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<td>Have modifications to your implementation plan</td>
<td>I have a competent PAS teacher that has been</td>
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been necessary? If so, what and why?

involved with this project. Because I have a stable and veteran teaching staff, therefore the staff development of this project was well received by the building. There have been radical staffing changes throughout the last few years. The impact of downsizing has been an important contributor to the status of implementing the Excellence and Equity strategies. I’ll either be criticized or praised for the changes. As the characteristics of the community have changed, I’ve had to make adjustments.

What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have been embraced and implemented by your community?

Yes, we adopt and modify as we go along. There have not been huge changes, but the culturally responsive coaching has been different than what’s going on with the differentiation coaches in the building. There needed to be just one team sharing a shared vision and not duplicate their services. As the principal I had to bring both entities together to become more aligned. The demographics have embraced the equity work, and realize the demographic shift from sixteen percent four years ago, to thirty four per cent currently. Now we’ve more than double in nine years. They want the tangibles of how to make it work in the classroom. And that’s what our building is going through currently.

What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have you, as principal attempted to implement but met resistance from your staff?

I think my staff has been very receptive. A total of about six years with PEG. I hear grumblings from some staff must most of the staff is on board. There are always outliers but the majority of the staff has embraced the work. The PASS team has been the most challenging because most parents don’t want to be involved in an accountability system. The turnover for parents that go to the high school, and new members that must be recruited has proved to be an on-going dilemma. Our equity team has to be a sounding board and is utilized as a sounding board for the school decision-making. I want to make sure they’re engaged in specific areas of the building. There are a total of forty SOAR kids that have been involved in school functions and events. Our CARE team is coming into its own but not as big as I would like for it to be. There are elements of each that are working well with measured success. As a principal, my greatest frustration is that I can’t be there to provide leadership to the degree that I would like to be. Therefore I have had to relegate the work to others. The balance between not micro managing and allowing others to lead the work has been debilitating and frustrating. However, from a management point of view it is impossible to do all of these requested things by pacific Educational Group. If you don’t micro
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<td>What aspects of the District’s Excellence and Equity initiative are successful in your building and with whom?</td>
<td>I think that SOAR groups, the equity team, and the PASS parents have had elements of success. The continuum of having how to make it run on its own will be challenging. My hope is that the work will continue when I leave, but I don’t see the work continuing. I believe the work is person dependent at my feeder elementary schools. I followed the model to allow parents to oversee the PASS program, and the parent participation dwindled. The other aspects of CARE, Equity teams, and SOAR continues to function at varying elements of success. I think PASS needs definitive leadership by the principal and continue to be the struggle.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative do you feel not ready to implement and why?</td>
<td>I don’t think I’ve ever been given a choice not to implement this work. It is tied directly towards my evaluation as a principal. We need to get more sixth grade parents of color in our PASS program. As you lose staff members, there is the prospect of bringing in new hires to become involved in the work. We need to involve younger kids and have a longer time of kids being involved in the program for several years. Since I have lost $20,000 from my decentralized budget, it’s been hard to provide release time for teachers to go and visit other teachers’ classrooms. When teachers can actually debrief after a walk-through, is the most effective manner to implement this work.</td>
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<td>What additional support does your building need to fully implement the Excellence and Equity initiative?</td>
<td>For me it is staff development. The support from Central office in providing some intensive training has been the biggest need and the most bang for the buck at our sites. The ability to watch culturally responsive teaching and differentiation instruction in action allows for the implementation of the work. I was allowed to use the substitutes to share their insight with personnel in the building classrooms.</td>
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<td>If you could modify the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative, what changes would you make and why?</td>
<td>There are times when I get frustrated for the reality of outcomes. I know there is a need for change as the data demonstrates as identified by our students of color. I think that the reality from what I can see is that it has to be institutional. I get the intensity and urgency that is needed. It can’t be person dependent such as a good PAS teacher, or Parent member, or a charismatic principal. The reality is that all individuals will leave, be promoted, or transferred. Retirement, illness, etc.. It may take three to four years to see the residual of the efforts. When PEG comes in, it is often difficult to hear their critique from merely a “snapshot” of time. It can be extremely difficult to hear and doesn’t show the totality of the work. The new Executive Director of Excellence and Equity has a different take and approach on the leadership of the</td>
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initiative. I have no problem with doing the work, or recognizing the value of the work. It is the most meaningful work that I have done in my twenty-five years of education. I applaud the work of the Meadow Grove school district in bringing in this consultant to lead us in the work. I know the district is trying to break away from the work because we need to embrace it on our own. I’ve learned a lot from Glenn Singleton and his members in training personnel in this work. I believe it is the responsibility of the Meadow Grove School District first to train the incoming teachers, and then the principal must continue the development of the staff they hire. I believe that over 95% of my staff wants to bridge the achievement gap, and the others I don’t spend time and energy trying to bring them on board. The non-negotiable employed by Central Office has been helpful. It doesn’t feel comfortable to be mandated this, but it is necessary to expect it we want the achievement gap to be diminished throughout the entire Meadow Grove school district.

Principal I—Katie

<p>| From the many district initiatives, what are your primary initiatives and how many are the primary focus in your building? | All the initiatives are my priority. For the past few years, the Equity work completed was just the CARE work, with a few CARE teachers. I did not pull PASS or student groups together. This year I was told to go easy my first year, and ease my way in as a new principal. This year, I have an Equity team that meets frequently. I will do in-service on the motivational framework, and working with my equity team. There have never been any student leadership groups done at my school. The group will be an advisory group to me, to assist me informing the culture and experiences of our students of color. All initiatives have equal priority. Therefore, I have only had one year of Equity training, and I don’t feel that I have adequate training to do this work. The PASS work is he most challenging for me at this time. Trying to obtain someone to take a day off of work to go through the district training and expectations are demanding |
| Which of these initiatives are having the most impact on your students’ academic achievement? | Well, I don’t have enough experience to be able to say. But, I believe to provide information on the motivational frameworks will have an impact on student achievement. My hope is that once teachers were trained it will have a systemic impact on the school’s achievement levels. I want intentionality around “what” the teachers are doing. Other initiatives include academic advising. We believe this is having an impact on our students. They receive training on anti-racism and anti-bullying, and are receiving positive feedback from our |</p>
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<td>Which sub-populations of students are the most impacted by these successful initiatives?</td>
<td>Well, I would have to say it is my Black students. Last year, we had student groups that were meeting with leadership members to just talk. My directive was that students just needed a safe forum to talk about their experiences. The goal was to target “Black” boys that were underperforming. It felt good to see these boys connecting with adults in our building.</td>
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<td>Where are you in your building in terms of implementing these strategies?</td>
<td>We’re just starting. I wish I were better at some of this stuff. We’re getting there.</td>
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<td>How did you structure that implementation?</td>
<td>Making sure that my administrative team, and instructional team to advise me about specific issues occurring in the building. The advisory group (composed of teachers) to provide me direction around the equity work. The parents that I see are parents that are in our specialized programs for advanced students, or students in our AVID program.</td>
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<td>What characteristics of your community influenced your plan of implementation?</td>
<td>Well, that’s a tough one to answer. I see some of my parents involved in the school meetings, but am not sure why they do not come in regularly. They don’t turn out to conference to the degree that our White parents do.</td>
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<td>Have modifications to your implementation plan been necessary? If so, what and why?</td>
<td>Well, yes…The PASS piece has been the biggest challenge for me. It is difficult to pick up the phone and talk with a parent of different ethnicities as a bi-racial woman. So, it is not comfortable and confusing as to how to orchestrate this conversation.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have been embraced and implemented by your community?</td>
<td>Well, I don’t know if the community of my school has embraced the work. I think they want me to tell them what to do rather than them initiating the work and internalizing the need. My equity team has changed every year, and has embraced the notion that “this work is just good for all kids, right?” This is my thirtieth year in education, but this equity work is the most challenging part of my career.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative have you, as principal, attempted to implement but met resistance from your staff?</td>
<td>I haven’t met any resistance from my staff. But, I don’t know if they’ve embraced the work. The equity gap at my school is not huge. Some of our Black kids are out performing their White and Asian counterparts. Especially in math. However, that’s because all of our kids are not performing to the level they need to be. That is why I restructured the school, and every teacher has an academic coach.</td>
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<td>What aspects of the District’s Excellence and Equity initiative are successful in your building and with whom?</td>
<td>I would say that the CARE work has been highly successful. The teachers that originated on my CARE team were dropped and a new teacher was inserted with minimal experience and the school</td>
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lost momentum during that transition. The Equity
team’s first two meetings were good. The staff
embraced the topic of intellectual poverty and their
work with the book studies has been positive.

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<td>What aspects of the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative do you feel not ready to implement and why?</td>
<td>The PASS work absolutely. I am concerned about doing something as important as working with parents and not have adequate background scares the living daylight out of me. It’s uncomfortable because I don’t want them to think I am calling them because of their color, but that is exactly why I am calling. The one parent I talked to was comfortable in sharing their experience rather than a spokesperson for the community.</td>
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<td>What additional support does your building need to fully implement the Excellence and Equity initiative?</td>
<td>Honestly, here’s what I wish. I wish I could create more hours in a week and observe other schools with up and coming programs. I want to do it right, but require I know the land mines and pitfalls. I need to develop my own personal approach to the work that fits my school and community. You have training, and scholastic knowledge behind you. Therefore, your school is more functional and works for everyone students and community members. There are no do-overs and I can screw things up for the next principal. I wish I could have a little more time. As a new principal, I am forced to expedite the work, whereby my predecessors didn’t do the work. However, my students deserve more.</td>
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<td>If you could modify the district’s Excellence and Equity initiative, what changes would you make and why?</td>
<td>Delay it a little longer for my school. That’s a tough one. I’d like to see evidence that this approach is working and where is the evidence? It was mentioned at a meeting is because the teachers and the district weren’t doing the work. I pondered that for a long time. Where is the problem? Is it with the teacher or the leadership? The work has been going on for seven years, and has not been successful of getting people to move off center what is the reason why? I wish every school could have an Equity coach. The type of conversations required to bring about changes in teachers and classrooms would require an Equity coach that could articulate their craft could change the world.</td>
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