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Exploring the Impact of Leadership Values and Practices to Support Equity and Social Justice in an Urban School

Susan-Marie Farmen
University of Denver

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explores the leadership values and practices of a principal in a sixth through twelfth-grade school in the Rocky Mountain West to determine how leadership values and practices support the implementation of equitable and socially just practices in the school. Five key themes emerged: (a) equity as a Black/non-Black construct; (b) a lack of knowledge and awareness of the historical contexts of marginalized populations; (c) moral courage for all members of the school; (d) equity as an initiative or program; (e) resistance to deep equity work. From these themes, I devise three recommendations to support substantial and better-aligned work to increase equity and social justice in the school: (a) refining equity work in progress; (b) elevating other marginalized voices across the organization; and (c) increasing the moral-courage capacity of all teaching and coaching staff, especially those from marginalized backgrounds. There is also a post-study discussion with the school leader. Finally, I provide recommendations for further study.

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Kristina Hesbol

Second Advisor

Carolyn Shields

Third Advisor

Erin Anderson

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Author: Susan-Marie Farmen
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Keywords: transformative leadership, school leadership, equity, and social justice leadership

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Chapter One

What constitutes effective leadership for public schools in the 21st century is a widely explored area. However, it is increasingly evident that one of the most pressing issues in American public schools today is the need for school leaders to disrupt the marginalization of students and communities perpetuated by our current instructional system. The urgency of equity and social-justice work in public schools creates a persistent problem of practice for school principals in the challenging position of creating culturally inclusive and responsive schools to meet every student's needs, while leading in times the Army War College describes as “volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous” (VUCA) (Barber, 1992, p. 8). In addition to the daily work of leading schools (Lee & Lee, 2020), today’s school leaders must navigate the systemic and institutionalized racism inherent to our nation’s educational systems and structures, and ground their work in “disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary processes” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223).

Together, the Covid-19 outbreak and 2020 Black Lives Matter Movement illuminated longstanding disparities in education access and opportunity resulting from historic and foundational inequities in public education. Communities voiced their outrage in response. Now, more than ever, school principals who believe “leadership is

activism" (Capper, 2019, p. 163) are essential to disrupting the inequitable educational system and redesigning socially just and culturally responsive public schools (Dillard, 1995, p. 560; Khalifa, 2018; Reese & Lindle, 2014).

Background

I spent over two decades serving students in urban school districts in two states. I served as an assistant principal in a historically underserved community, where I experienced first-hand the importance of elevating equity and social justice issues in education. In 2020, I walked alongside students of color in protest and heard the community stories that led me to wonder how we could do a better job faster. I have taught in the classroom, tutored students and their parents, coached sports and activities, coached teachers, and led public schools. These experiences both informed my core beliefs of equity, access, and social justice, and taught me that being deeply committed to advocacy is insufficient on its own. As leaders, we need to understand better how our values and practices model an equity and social-justice agenda that will most immediately disrupt racist and marginalizing structures in our schools, and positively impact our students. Our leadership requires planning and strategic advocacy if we are to be transformative in this work.

Enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), the Great Teacher and Leader Act (2010), and more recently, the K–5 Social and Emotional Health Act (2019) increase accountability for schools to serve a variety of needs for all students. Accountability as an intentional, top-down call to raise test scores increases focus on

students in historically underserved, marginalized populations, as achievement and opportunity have mostly favored White and affluent students (Rowley & Wright, 2011).

Schools in historically underserved areas tend to serve higher populations of students of color (U.S Department of Education, 2018), in outdated buildings where effective teacher turnover is higher (Hanushek, 2014; Simon & Johnson, 2015). In both underfunded schools and all public schools, retention of effective and culturally responsive teachers is vital in the ongoing struggle to create more equitable and socially just learning environments. However, the move toward increased accountability tied teacher efficacy to performance evaluations and pay. Consequently, teachers felt immense pressure to meet specific standards for student achievement, as measured by growth on standardized tests, or risked losing their jobs. Indeed, the effects of increased accountability are significant, as teachers leave the profession faster than they can be replaced (Darling-Hammond, 2000a), and teacher turnover has a greater negative impact on Black students and students labeled under-performing than their White peers (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Indeed, effective educators serving in urban schools leave those schools at a higher rate than teachers serving in other environments (Hanushek et al., 2004; Karsenti & Collin, 2013).

Second only to parents, students form their most significant emotional relationships with teachers (Burke, 2002; Lippard et al., 2018), who also have a significant impact on student academic success (Darling-Hammond, 2000b; Heck, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011; Waddell, 2010). Constant turnover disrupts relationships, trust, and

academic consistency for students, and disharmony in the teacher-student relationship can impact student attitudes about school and school environments (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Roorda et al., 2011; Lippard et al., 2018).

For school leaders, teacher turnover inhibits positive-culture building, trust, and a shared sense of purpose among staff and stakeholders in the broader school community (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Additionally, turnover can inhibit critical social justice agendas, as teachers leave before the work can take hold. Thus, students who could benefit the most from a robust, consistent social and emotional support system led by informed practitioners may not get it (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Instead, students are left with a revolving door of teachers with whom they have to build new relationships and who may enter the classroom with outdated mindsets (Vélez-Ibáñez, 1983).

Teachers are not the only adults in schools who impact student experiences and academic outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood et al., 2020). School principals influence how students and teachers experience the school day and guide school culture and vision (Rabey, 2003; Engels et al., 2008). In addition, their interactions with employees determine how staff view their work and their value in the broader culture (Barnes et al., 2008). Thus, school leaders impact how teachers understand their work as practitioners of equitable and socially just pedagogies with asset-based mindsets about students. Just as teachers come from different preparation paths, school leaders also come from various programs. The people leading this sacred work in schools must be

consistent, well-calibrated, and rooted in the core belief that diversity is a cornerstone of a healthy democracy.

We cannot accelerate our progress concerning student achievement and equity unless school leaders model values and practices that clarify to teachers what it means to meet our students where they are and value what they bring with them. We must develop our school leaders with cultural awareness and critical pedagogy to disrupt racist, marginalizing systems and structures in our schools (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). School choice and access are moot provisions if we are not working to realize the notion of equity and access in every public school.

Leadership and teaching are the cornerstones of student experience in our schools. We must consider Shields' call for shifts that impact every marginalized identity, then go about the work. The work is grounded in the vision and culture we set as leaders; built upon deliberate, anti-racist actions; and fostered through honest, purposeful, direct, and courageous conversations about all marginalized groups in our schools. We cannot prepare every student for college and careers until we have aligned every facet of building culture to prepare students for the opportunities of their choosing, and resisted the racist constructs that limit, stereotype, and constrict them.

This study was an opportunity to analyze leadership within a school during a period when racism, equity, and social justice are at the front of our nation's consciousness. This work allowed me to explore how a leader engaged in this work and how her values and practices aligned with a robust equity and social-justice framework.

The goal was to deepen understanding of equity work in schools, in order to refine the planning and implementation among staff and students. The present study and findings have the potential to ground what consistency and continuity could look like for school-leadership practices across school networks. This work could also support a shared understanding of what it means for principals to lead with lived experience, and student and staff identities in mind (Velez-Ibanez, 1983). This work is also an opportunity to elevate bright spots in antiracist work and consider what it would take to scale that work across whole districts.

It is important to note that the school site for this study was situated within a larger school district. Thus, school board decisions and district central office-level mandates impacted the work required by school leaders and staff. In addition, in 2019, this district prioritized a focus on Black students and Black history after a group of Black female seniors at the school used social media, and local and national news outlets to elevate the need for district curriculum to include Black perspectives in history and literature. As part of the district mandate, schools were required to focus on culturally responsive curriculum that included Black experience to positively impact academic achievement outcomes for Black students. The principal was a consistent contributor to these efforts, a visible supporter of the students demanding change, and an advocate for Black student academic success in her building.

Statement of the Problem

Extant research examines principal efficacy related to instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2010), time management (Grissom et al., 2015), and the adaptive and technical challenges of implementing change within school structures (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). A growing body of work connects school climate to teacher job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012; Dutta & Sahney, 2016) and tracks leadership impact on student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2008). However, to disrupt historical and systemic racism in our schools, we need transformative school leaders who see their work as a form of advocacy and activism (Shields, 2010). This idea is essential, as our "goals as educators, and as an educational system, should include the development of competent and humane citizens who are proactive participants in social life" (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 89). And, as Jill Blackmore (2006) reminds us, "[e]ducational administration as a field can no longer ignore the material, social and cultural conditions under which students learn, teachers teach, and leaders lead" (pp. 196–197).

Educators stressed about student achievement and performance on high-stakes tests cannot increase student engagement and learn from positions that view those students through deficit-based and fixed mindsets. We cannot disrupt racist and marginalizing educational structures unless we shift our thinking, as Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) argue:

> Rather than presenting the community as a place to rise above, schools must equip themselves to draw from the knowledge that students bring with them to school—knowledge that is often not in their textbooks but is acquired from the streets,

> family cultural traditions, youth culture, and the media. (p. 9)

We need school principals who lead with what Carolyn Shields (2018) calls, "moral purpose" (p. 14), and the intention to increase equity in education with a willingness to exhibit the "moral courage" (p. 55) to challenge racist and classist systems, structures, and mindsets in schools. Only when we create equitable and socially just school cultures can our educational system shift toward a system that critiques and liberates, as Paulo Freire (1970) described:

> In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (p. 83)

School leaders make critical decisions each day, and those decisions either increase socially just outcomes and equitable access to opportunity and promote positive results for students—or they don't. It is essential that we explore fundamental leadership values and practices that effectively increase equitable and socially just practices in schools, and analyze the nuances of interactions between principals and staff. We could then identify ways principals positively influence the application of equitable methods in their buildings and avoid leadership that abandons a social-justice or equity agenda in favor of teacher satisfaction (Dizon-Ross, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to analyze a school leader's equity work and the specific leadership values and practices that impacted and influenced

equitable practices within a school. The present work also examined how staff interpreted and implemented equitable practices based on the direction and support they received from the principal. A better understanding of how leadership values and practices support equity and social-justice work in schools creates an opportunity to focus on potential areas of improvement. It elevates bright spots concerning equity and social-justice work to build that work to scale.

Through interviews with a school principal and educators, and observations of equity work with staff, this research sought to better understand the impact of the school leader's values and practices. Specifically, this work examined how these values and practices influenced teacher practices and supported a school culture focused on social justice and equity agendas during VUCA times. We must delve deeper into the complexities of how leaders interact and connect with the students and staff they support, to view pedagogy as both a form of advocacy and activism (Capper, 2019), and a form of care with greater democratic and societal aims of education (Beatty, 2007; Noddings, 2003.) Transformative leadership practices can develop cultures and pedagogical practices where student competencies are reflected by "global mastery of conditions in one's personal or professional environment" (Noddings, 2013, p. 62), instead of success on standardized tests, which often measure privileged funds of knowledge. Observing leaders and teachers interacting within professional meetings provided an opportunity to explore the context and the phenomena simultaneously (Yin, 2009). By including both leaders and educators, I heard from multiple perspectives (Stake, 1995), which produced

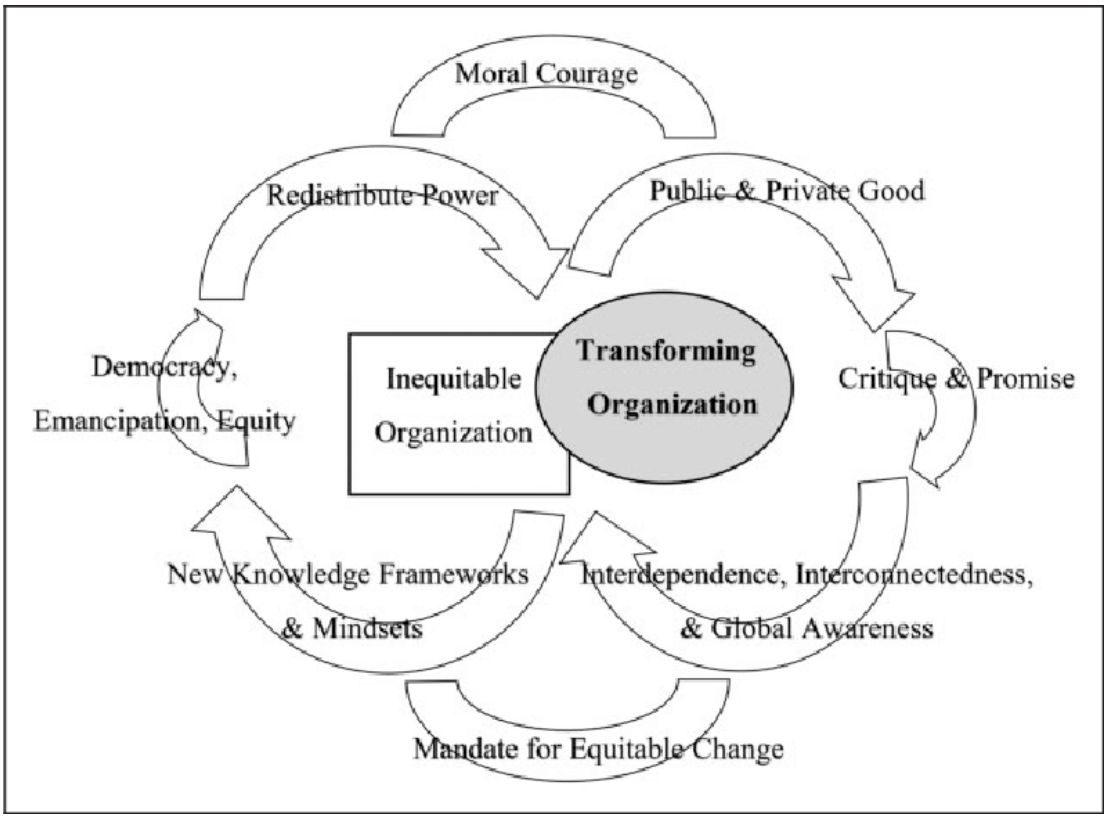
a more holistic representation of educators' views of their work with students related to leadership values and practices. As well, this process allowed me to better understand the specific actions teachers took to increase equity and opportunity for students.

Theoretical Framework

Suppose school leaders move the needle with intentional acts for equity, social justice, and restructuring for emancipation from old systems. In that case, we also need leaders who can do more than set the vision and motivate from a potentially privileged perspective. In consideration of the complexity of school leadership and interpersonal relationships between school leaders and their staff, students, and communities; and in recognition of the need to make significant and paradigmatic shifts in our nation's public schools, the theoretical framework for this study is the Transformative Leadership Theory (Shields, 2010).

The transformative Leadership framework contains eight interdependent core tenets, shown in Figure 1. The tenets describe the essential "traits, processes, and goals" comprising a framework that when integrated into leadership actions, "takes a moral stand in favor of excellence, inclusion, social justice, and both private and public good" (Shields, 2018, p. 126). Transformative leadership is an essential component to disrupting current systemic racism, ableism, homophobic attitudes, and deficit-based thinking that marginalizes and disempowers students and families in American public schools.

Figure 1.1 ***Model of Transformative Leadership Theory***



Note: This model demonstrates the interconnectedness of the tenets of transformative leadership. Source: Shields, 2018, p. 21.

Exploring leadership values and practices in their real-world context and through the lens of these interconnected transformative leadership tenets allows us to identify and analyze leadership practices that could eradicate systemic racism and injustice.

Research Question

The study was guided by a single research question:

> In what ways, if at all, do a school principal's values and practices align with Shields' Transformative Leadership Theory to support the implementation of equitable and socially just practices in the school?

Additional considerations for this work include:

1) How do teachers perceive their principal vis-a-vis their values and practices?
2) How do a leader's values and practices influence teacher mindset around culturally responsive work in schools?

Significance of the Study

More than ever, students in our public schools need leaders who promote an ethic of care (Noddings, 1988), but who are also courageous, anti-racist, and focused on social justice in the face of policies and systems that beg for disruption (DeMatthews, 2018). Teachers serving in these schools need responsive leaders who view the work of teaching from a place of appreciation for the stressors of accountability, but with a heart for mentoring others toward deliberate disruption of the racist policies, procedures, and attitudes that have not benefitted marginalized students. Finding clear connections to the eight tenets of transformative leadership (Shields, 2010), and how these tenets look and sound within daily school leadership is essential to discontinuing the mindsets and practices that do not serve every student.

The qualitative data gathered for this research will inform the design of professional learning resources in support of transformative leadership wherein social justice is the purpose of leadership (Shields, 2010; Blackmore, 2006). It will support a deeper understanding of transformative school leadership, as a transparent model for consistent leadership actions across a district that disrupt racist systems through practices that demonstrate dedication to social justice outcomes in public schools, even in challenging times (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Kendi, 2019; Shields, 2011, 2013, 2018).

Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED)

This study is aligned with the Carnegie Project's key descriptors on the Education Doctorate (CPED) guidelines for the Professional Doctorate in Education, as described in

Table 1.1 ***CPED Principles, Descriptors, and Applications in the Study***

PRINCIPLE	DESCRIPTION	APPLICATIONS
1	Framed around questions of equity, ethics, and social justice to bring about solutions to complex problems of practice	This work examines how principal values and practices can influence equitable and socially just practices in diverse public schools.
2	Prepares leaders who can construct and apply knowledge to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, families, organization, and communities	This work’s data analysis and insights will inform leadership-level professional development design aligned to the theoretical framework's fundamental tenets.

3	Provides opportunities for candidates to develop and demonstrate collaboration and communication skills to work with diverse communities and build partnerships	This work is a collaborative, meaning-making endeavor that involves principals and school staff to gather authentic insights from the field within their context and from multiple perspectives.
4	Provides field-based opportunities to analyze problems of practice and use multiple frames to develop meaningful solutions	This work recognizes the problem of practice for principals who must navigate unpredictable work in schools. (How can principals prioritize and sustain equity and social justice work in their schools during VUCA times?)
5	Grounded in and develops a professional knowledge base that integrates both practice and research knowledge, that links theory with systemic and systematic inquiry	This work uses the tenets of the Transformative Leadership Framework (Shields, 2011) to examine specific principal values and practices to understand better how teacher implementation of equitable and socially just practices are influenced
6	Emphasizes the generation, transformation, and use of professional knowledge and practice	This work will inform the creation of a website and blog dedicated to online leadership discussions and resources aligned with culturally responsive, transformative leadership practices.

Note: The study does not align to each attribute of the CPED descriptors, but does align to each of the CPED principles. *Source*: "Guiding Principles for Program Design" by the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate, 2019. https://www.cpedinitiative.org/the-framework

Definitions of Key Terminology

The following terms are used in this Dissertation in Practice.

Activism. Direct action on behalf of a person or cause, often outside of a system.

Advocacy. Speaking or acting on behalf of a person or cause, supporting alongside and within a system.

Concurrent enrollment. A type of high school design that allows students to complete high school credits and college-level coursework for college credits while still in high school.

Educators. Teachers, counselors, or instructional coaches who are in direct contact with students and/or have professional goals aligned to student achievement and/or support teachers with their instructional practices.

Equity. The idea that systems are in place to have their individual needs met for equal access and opportunity to succeed.

Latinx. A gender-neutral term to identify people of Latin descent.

Practices. Enacting or applying ideas, beliefs, methods, and values.

School culture. Various working conditions and relationships in a school, including interactions between staff, leaders, students, and community that stem from shared values, visions, and beliefs to support teaching and learning for students and staff development.

School leader. The principal or head of the school at the building level solely responsible for the supervision and evaluation of teachers.

Social justice. The idea is that all people deserve equal opportunity and access to economic, healthcare, employment, and political rights.

Social justice leadership. Leadership that makes "race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions…central to their advocacy, leadership, practice, and vision" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223)

Teacher retention rates. The number or percentage of teachers who remain in the same building and do not leave the school to work in another school or leave the teaching profession.

Title I schools. Schools that receive additional federal dollars based on the percentage of students enrolled in the federal free and reduced lunch program to improve learning materials, instructional delivery, counseling services, parent involvement, and staff development (USLegal Definitions, 2019)

Transformational leadership. A leadership style focused on morale and motivation to achieve goals and make progress as a team or community through leaders and followers in relationships and not through the give and take of transactional approaches (Burns, 1978).

Transformative leadership. A style of leadership that focuses on "more collaborative dialogic, and democratic processes of leadership" and "goals

of collective sustainability, social justice, and mutually beneficial civil society" (Shields, 2018, p. 18).

Urban schools. Schools located outside a principal city or inside an urbanized area categorized by populations ranging from small to midsize and large, with between less than 100,000 people and up to or more than 250,000 people (NCES, 2006).

Values. The standards, principles, or core standards a person holds to be correct shape judgment and decision making.

Assumptions

There were several assumptions for this research. The study assumed that leaders and teachers who shared their experiences would do so openly, honestly, and without concern for reprisal, which would provide an accurate detail of leadership and teaching experiences. Shields' Transformative Leadership Theory (2010) was used to create aligned interview questions and to code and categorize leadership language and teacher language from interviews, observations, and staff exchanges within the study. There was still an assumption that when the leader spoke of retaining effective teachers, there were components of equity and culturally responsive pedagogy embedded in their formal ratings independent of the principal's opinion. The study further assumed that teachers who remained at the school continued to do so because they were content or satisfied with their experiences and found the school's culture and leadership satisfactory. Unless

they indicated otherwise, I assumed that teachers agreed with equity and social justice goals as essential components of their work.

Limitations

It is essential to note the implications of the pandemic on school structures, systems, and operations required to facilitate learning outside of school buildings. These disruptions and structural shifts had an immeasurable impact, the repercussions of which were complex and far-reaching. In addition to Covid-19, the Black Lives Matter movement and the implications of multiple deaths of innocent Black people in rapid succession across the country at the hands of White men elevated the need to address inequity and social justice within all social structures, including schools. These events heightened the urgency of equity work in schools and created additional pressure on their systems.

Another limitation of the study was that my observations were interpretations aligned to the framework. Leaders' values and practices can be nuanced, and the present research did not imply that school leaders should exemplify a specific number of these tenets, attributes, and behaviors. Using the framework to interpret values and practices was also not meant to imply that any particular tenet, action, or philosophy was more or less valuable than another; or imply that a leader demonstrating one tenet could necessarily compensate for the absence of the others. The framework was also not meant to imply that a leader should embody all of these attributes at all times.

While my identity was not a limitation, the intersections of my identity influenced my strong beliefs about the importance of equity in education. My own experiences as a Polish, Jewish, foster child growing up in poverty and moving in and out of Christian homes were not positive. My ethnic identity and cultural pride were not viewed as assets by teachers. School counselors told me that college was not an option for "a girl like me."

As a White female school leader in a diverse, Title 1 school, my adult positionality shaped many of my own beliefs about the essential attributes of effective leadership to increase equity and social justice in public schools. I tried to remain conscious that I viewed situations through a racially privileged lens, and as a woman with a potential bias in favor of female leadership and female-leadership attributes (Capper, 2019). To reduce the influence of my positionality on the data interpretations, I verified participant responses during interviews and follow-ups, as frequently as was allowed by the district. My observation field notes contained discrete spaces for data, interpretations, and additional thoughts, ideas, or reflections to control for my bias. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me to immediately address how specific comments, non-verbal cues, or utterances entered the discussion to document an authentic representation of participant experiences (Rapley, 2007).

Other limitations of the study were the relatively short duration of interviews, and the limits of observing online interactions between staff members. The observation period for this study was just over a month in the middle of the school year. It was reasonable to infer that observing across the whole school year with its unique and timely

characteristics might enrich the data. Such an extended period might elevate other aspects of a school leader's values and practices. A more extended period might also allow a deeper exploration of equitable teaching practices.

Additionally, there are various tasks in any school environment directly connected to specific periods in the school calendar, impacting teacher and leader workloads, school days, and teaching practices. There are assessment windows, conferences, report cards, and community events taking place at different times; and those can impact the physical, emotional, and psychological capacity of staff and leaders. Such demands would require a school leader to utilize other leadership practices to respond to those demands, and those are outside the scope of this work.

Delimitations

There were delimitations to this study. The study included only one diverse school from one urban district to maximize the short amount of time for the study. Additionally, I focused on a diverse school because the leader and the staff in this school served students who could benefit from transformative leadership to disrupt racist practices within oppressive systems. Diverse schools experience higher rates of effective teacher turnover, which can negatively impact the school's consistency and culture (Hanselman et al., 2016). It is important to note that Johnson et al., (2012) found that "teachers who leave high-poverty, high minority schools reject the dysfunctional contexts in which they work, rather than the students they teach" (p. 4). None of the work in this study intended to reinforce false notions of teachers leaving diverse schools for reasons

related to students or the communities. The interviews with various participants actually indicated a high commitment to serving diverse populations of students.

The study included a Title I school in an urban district to support findings transferability to other Title I school settings with diverse student populations, similar school leadership demands, and funding sources. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasized the importance of qualitative research focusing on "whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (p. 251) and not with exact duplication of results as sought in positivist approaches to research. As Tracy (2013) explained:

> Because socially constructed understandings are always in process and necessarily partial, even if the study were repeated (by the same researcher, in the same manner, in the same context, and with the same participants), the context and participants would have necessarily transformed over time—through aging, learning, or moving on." (p. 229)

To align the data and results as consistently as possible, and strengthen the findings and transferability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), this study used multiple approaches to data collection and created a robust audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This path enhanced my understanding of my interpretations of the data and assured my interpretations were "most congruent with reality as understood by the participants" (Merriam, 2016, p. 252).

The school leader was chosen because she was a community and district leader committed to equity and social justice, who unapologetically empowered Black female students to act and organize within the community and the school district. She believed she retained adequate administrative and support staff who worked well with students from marginalized backgrounds and a teaching staff open to equity work in a community

of color. The principal who participated in the study was monolingual, Black female. This is important to note because female leadership experiences are impacted by race (Capper, 2019). The values and practices of female leaders of color can be influenced by their life experiences (Collins, 2000). This could offer insights about the intersections of race and gender leadership, further contextualized within the current civil and human rights discussions elevated by the Black Lives Matter movement at the time of this research.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter began by acknowledging teachers' increasing pressure to meet student academic, social, and emotional needs. It noted the need to retain effective teachers to develop professionally and maintain consistency for students. The chapter also stated the need for transformative leaders who actively promote equity through socially just practices, while simultaneously critiquing and challenging historical systems of racism and oppression within public-school structures. This chapter provided information about the importance of transformative leadership to disrupt historic marginalizing practices in school buildings and presented a rationale for a qualitative case study to better understand the nuances of leadership and teacher relationships from the participant perspectives. The chapter concluded with definitions of critical terms, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. The following section will present relevant literature in the field to explore the focus of this study.

Chapter Two

Myriad leadership theories and studies consider the challenges principals face, such as per-pupil funding, federal and state legislative changes, and student safety in educational environments (Dugan, 2017; Gonzales, 2019; Shoho, 2010). However, at its core, the work of an effective principal is to set a vision, lead teams of people, build a relational climate, implement change, and navigate a variety of technical and adaptive challenges along the way (Burns, 1978; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Gonzales, 2019; Heifetz et al., 2009). It seems appropriate, then, to expect that principals could set social justice and equity as their purpose (Blackmore, 2006; Bogotch, 2014; Furman, 2012; Shields, 2011), prioritizing training and support to retain culturally responsive teachers and create more equitable and socially just schools (Shields, 2011; Theoharis, 2007). Indeed, such work is realized through leadership that "investigates and poses solutions for issues that generate and reproduce societal inequities" (Dantley & Tillman, 2010, p. 20).

Prioritizing social justice and equity in public schools is not a simple task. Public school principals must navigate and prioritize an evolving list of educational goals from the district, community, and at the building level where they lead (Lee & Lee, 2020). Furthermore, school leaders work with individuals who have their own identities, beliefs,

and biases that can impact a motivational school culture (Osman & Atamturk, 2018). These various identities require acknowledgment, discussion, and deconstruction of knowledge to shift the way schools educate every child (Anderson, 2009; Shields, 2011). School leaders' interpersonal work to build positive cultures can be negatively impacted by social-justice advocacy, as conversations about race can be incredibly challenging for many White teachers (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

In addition to working with teachers to directly confront issues of inequity, leaders must continually navigate the intensifying and evolving list of accountability and legislative policies such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), the Great Teacher and Leader Bill (2010), and the K–5 Social and Emotional Health Act (2019). Accountability creates pressure that can be counterproductive to equitable learning environments (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005; Ooghe & Schokkaert, 2016). Students must attain prescribed levels of mastery, and the leadership work of supporting others must genuinely assist staff in engaging responsively with students (Gaetane & Cumings Mansfield, 2013; Williams & Noguera, 2010). Leaders are simultaneously navigating the daily operational demands, while "addressing the imbalances of power within schools to pursue greater agency for all stakeholders (students and parents)" (Blackmore, 2006, p. 197).

The work of school leaders has been forever altered in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement. We live in challenging times that are

also rich with opportunities for systematic reconstruction toward more equitable, inclusive, responsive, and socially just schools for students and staff—especially those whose have been historically relegated to the margins. As Khalifa (2018) reminds us:

> Leaders are often considered to be the drivers of reform and the connections between policy and practice. They are held accountable for their teachers' growth and efficacy who are persistently exclusionary and resistant to cultural responsiveness; they are poised to develop the willing teachers who can *become* culturally unresponsive to new, unfamiliar children; and they are uniquely positioned to impact non-classroom spaces in the school. (p. 25)

If ever there was a time that the military label of VUCA (Barber, 1992, p. 8) was appropriate in education, the country, and the world, it would be now. Our schools are ripe for leaders who dare to be transformative (Shields, 2011)—those willing to develop the knowledge and skills to support equity and social justice so all students have access and opportunity to an education that does not limit their ability to fully participate in all aspects of society.

Methodology of Literature Review

This study sought to better understand how a school principal's values and practices supported the implementation of equitable and socially just practices in her school. This literature review connects the tenets of Shields' (2011) Transformative Leadership Theory to literature that explores (a) the work of school leaders as creators of visions and positive school cultures, (b) instructional leadership for culturally responsive teaching, and (c) leadership as advocacy and activism. If school leaders create cultures

grounded in social justice, build teacher capacity for equitable practices, and advocate for students and the community, schools can become spaces of equitable learning and empowerment for every student.

Except for seminal work, the reviewed literature was limited to the last twenty-five years and bound by searches within educational, management, and psychology databases. The analysis included research beyond the United States to examine the different contexts in which leaders set a vision, lead teams of people, build relational climates, implement change, and navigate a variety of technical and adaptive challenges (Burns, 1978; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Gonzales, 2019; Heifetz et al., 2009; Marzano et al., 2005). The reviewed literature focuses on principals and does not include other forms of leadership within schools. For example, some school structures may include assistant principals, department leads, or instructional coaches with decision-making authority and leadership responsibilities. The present study focused solely on principals as the "drivers of reform and the connection between policy and practice" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 25) .

Why Transformative Leadership Work in Schools?

Leadership scholarship often cites transformational leadership as the leading theory to align specific attributes, actions, or behaviors when measuring leader efficacy concerning change or achieving goals (Burns, 1978; Braun et al., 2013; Bass & Riggio, 2006). According to Burns (1978), who studied political leaders, transformational leaders see the larger goals, then inspire and motivate others to pursue the goals through their

actions and collaboration models. Central to Burns's (1978) work was the idea that leaders are not exclusively supervisory; rather, leadership could include any group member working to achieve common goals. Later work built upon Burns's (1978) initial theories, agreeing that transformational leaders move others to perform at high levels with charisma and other personal attributes that contribute to leaders' positive employee perceptions (Bass, 1995). The efficacy measures of transformational leaders, as Burns (1975) and Bass (1995) describe, are measures of productivity and cost/profit efficiency, supported by subordinate survey data that primarily focus on positive relationships and motivational environments (Schlechter & Strauss, 2008). However, public school students need more than positive relationships and motivational environments from their teachers.

Transformational leadership does not include social justice as a goal that requires engaging others in honest discussions about race, historical marginalization, privilege, and challenging social systems that perpetuate injustice. However, transformative school leaders must engage social justice and equity work in ways that challenge existing paradigms that benefit some groups at the expense of others. Traditional classrooms perpetuate hegemonic structures through curriculum, instruction, and behavior policies (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). In our increasingly diverse school environments and communities, leaders must leverage their positive cultures and technical leadership skills for purposes beyond test scores and employee

morale. It is imperative that school leaders "view leadership as a social practice aligned with democratic processes" (Blackmore, 2011, p. 26), and practice leadership in ways that increase access and opportunity for every student (Khalifa, 2018).

School principals are critical drivers of many factors ranging from teacher satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012), overall school culture (Brown, 2015; Gaikhorst et al., 2019; Hallinger, 2003; Hollingworth et al., 2018), and teacher retention (Johnson et al., 2005), to community relationships (Green, 2015), and instructional leadership (Brady, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2010; Marzano et al., 2005). Literature about school leadership acknowledges the importance of principals as creators of visions (Marzano et al., 2005) and cultivators of school culture (Brown, 2015; Gaikhorst et al., 2019; Hallinger, 2003; Hollingworth et al., 2018). The values, attitudes, and practices of a school leader are also strong determiners of change implementation within schools and other organizations (Fullan, 2001, 2010; Mintrop, 2016). This research is promising for schools with leaders dedicated to disrupting marginalizing and disempowering systems because these individuals are best poised to be the drivers to increase equity and opportunity for every student. Leaders whose values and practices are grounded in equity and social justice for every student can communicate a school vision that sets a standard for all staff to engage in responsive pedagogical practices.

Empirical studies, like Leithwood et al. (2010), focus on correlations between specific ways that principals shape rigorous and achievement-focused cultures through

different transformative actions and a variety of mediators, like those individuals to whom management and evaluation responsibilities are distributed. Likewise, in their mixed-methods approach, Lucas and Valentine (2002) found that transformational actions and positive cultures were better achieved when principals behaved less like managers and more as facilitators of distributed leadership. Other studies confirm that the principal has more significant levels of influence over aspects of school culture like collaboration, setting a unified purpose, creating high, positive expectations, concern for others, and modeling of expectations and values (Cotton, 2003; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Lucas & Valentine, 2002). Transformative leaders can leverage these practices and spheres of influence to create solid social-justice foundations in schools.

A Foundation for Social Justice: Tenets One, Two, and Three

The first three of eight interconnected tenets in Shields' (2010) Transformative Leadership Theory are (a) the mandate to effect deep and equitable change, (b) the need to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge frameworks, and (c) the need to address the inequitable distribution of power. These first three tenets create a strong foundation for equity and social-justice work in schools. The work starts with courageous leadership that recognizes education as a "tool for political liberation and socioeconomic advancement" (Wilson & Johnson, 2015, p. 104). It actively fosters an ongoing commitment by intentionally addressing existing mindsets and power dynamics inherent in historically racist and marginalizing school cultures (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Khalifa, 2018).

Much of the existing literature on transformational educational leadership focuses on ways principals effectively build strong cultures, as defined by supportive relationships, increasing efficacy for teachers, and inspiring others in their work toward common, principal-defined values and goals. Relationships, inspiration, and shared goals *are* essential components to schools' very human work. However, the common goals must now become equity and social justice grounded in transformative approaches that prioritize disruption of a marginalizing educational systems (Shields, 2003).

According to Shields (2018), leaders must set an uncompromising vision around equity. Once that mandate is accepted, the work becomes shifting mindsets away from deficit-based thinking, interrogating the privilege of the dominant culture within schools, and disrupting ideas of exceptionalism. Leaders must foster environments that challenge marginalizing practices and policies, and engage in the difficult work with staff to disrupt oppressive systems that do not benefit every student. With this goal, instructional leadership should be grounded in coaching critical pedagogy, shifting staff mindsets, and producing cultural knowledge and culturally responsive classroom practices (Khalifa, 2018).

In a comparative study focused on preservice teaching experiences in diverse schools, Lazar (2007) found that when a preservice teacher had an opportunity to engage in activities and readings about cultural diversity, they reported more positive experiences about their work and viewed their students from asset-based mindsets.

Preservice teachers who did not engage directly in diversity and cultural experiences did not have positive experiences and viewed students with deficit mindsets. When teachers are not prepared to work effectively in diverse communities, instructional leadership grounded in social justice becomes a vital priority to creating equitable, positive, and happy places for students to learn.

According to Shields (2018), the work begins with difficult conversations, adopting asset-based mindsets, and "a flowing through of ideas to promote reflection, critical analysis, and ultimately, democratic action" (p. 44). For teachers, this means culturally responsive and critical-pedagogical practices. For leaders, this means values and practices that elevate antiracist work in schools to "accept, respect, and include everyone" (Shields, 2018, p. 29), and an insistence on pedagogical practices that honor and build upon backgrounds beyond the traditional White constructs of curriculum and teaching (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Beyond Self and Building: Tenets Four, Five, and Six

While teachers are considered the strongest determiners of student achievement (Aaronson et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Jordan-Irvine, 2001; Rivkin et al., 2005; Wright et al., 1997), principals have an important impact (Cotton, 2003; Wu & Gao, 2018). Principals impact student achievement more indirectly, mainly through the school culture they foster to support trusting and collegial relationships (Brady, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2010) and by supporting teacher

development (Loeb et al., 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Principals impact student achievement through the distribution of their leadership authority in the building (Leithwood et al., 2009), which allows them to form more positive relationships with teachers (Lucas & Valentine, 2002), and frees their time and energy to set a vision, support the motivational atmosphere (Kalkan et al., 2020) and achieve professional development goals related to a social-justice vision. Research indicates that transformational leadership alone may not increase student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008; Shatzer et al., 2013)—even when achievement is a common goal. This elevates the need for transformative leadership in building inclusive schools with the responsive practices that are essential to addressing marginalized student achievement (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Gay, 2015). Leaders must prioritize responsive pedagogical practices in teacher development. Further, leaders must acknowledge that students benefit from interacting with educators who look like them (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Milner & Howard, 2004).

Tenets four, (a) an emphasis on both private and public good, and five, (b) a focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and social justice, describe how school leaders must adopt an approach to their work that "opens the curricular space" to "engage staff in difficult conversations, modeling, teaching, and giving explicit permission for them to do likewise in their classrooms" (Shields, 2018, p. 90). Tenet six emphasizes interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness, extending equity work

beyond school building walls. The school becomes a place that is responsive to student and community perspectives by modeling the empathy that leads students to see themselves as an integral part of a local and global society.

Culturally responsive leaders must be the drivers of a school vision that empowers students by acknowledging prior academic, cultural, linguistic, and religious knowledge, while teaching staff to do the same. As Geneva Gay (2018) notes:

> Culture strongly influences how we think, believe, communicate, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we teach and learn. Because teaching and learning are always mediated by cultural influences, they can never be culturally neutral. (Gay, 2018, p. 8)

Shields (2018) asserts that to increase equity in public education, transformative leaders must engage in a multi-cultural, global approach to democracy to foster a "deep form of democracy that is inclusive of everyone" (p. 59). If schools are to ensure students become critical thinkers and contributors to their communities, then culturally responsive leadership demands that principals see themselves as connected and empower the community beyond the school (Khalifa, 2018). In essence, these leaders care for student families as an extension of the work in the school (Noddings, 2002), and see their impact on students through "active stances and behaviors of anti-oppression" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 81). This means leaders cannot continue to enact the same old policies, uphold the same old rules, and budget resources in ways it has always been done; leaders must be in a constant state of action to upend longstanding equities. To disrupt these persistent

patterns, school leaders must create new structural norms that include and value all student identities and do not perpetuate historically dominant values. This means that both teachers and leaders must take a clear and unwavering stand as critical practitioners and advocates for their students. As Freire (1997) describes:

> I cannot be a teacher if I do not perceive with ever-greater clarity that my practice demands of me a definition about where I stand—a break with what is not right ethically. I must choose between one thing and another thing. I cannot be a teacher and be in favor of everyone and everything. I cannot be in favor merely of people, humanity, and vague phrases far from the concrete nature of educative practices. (p. 93)

Leaders' values and practices must clarify the need for pedagogy grounded in asset-based mindsets and view the work in diverse schools as a form of advocacy and activism. Transformative leaders must be about advocacy and action alongside their teachers, students, and communities. They must be willing to engage in work that brings them face-to-face with the politics and policies that seek to keep marginalized people disempowered. School leaders must be ready to roll up their sleeves and actively work to disrupt and dismantle inequitable systems so that education serves a moral purpose.

An essential component of tenets four and five is that all students must be given access to challenging classes that maximize their potential in settings that remove barriers (Shields, 2018). School leaders must hold teachers accountable to the idea that all students deserve a high standard of preparation "to live as critical citizens in society" (McKenzie et al., 2008, p. 111). There is no reason to hold a different bar for different

children; achievement gaps are not determined by race (Kendi, 2019). High academic expectations, coupled with a belief that all students have valuable perspectives to share, empowers every student to envision their rightful place in a larger, democratic society.

Building teachers' capacity for equity must be an intentional act of advocacy to disrupt marginalizing practices and include critical pedagogical approaches (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Research supports the positive impact of culturally responsive pedagogy on student outcomes and coupling care with clear expectations and respect (Brown, 2004; Garza, 2009; Ullucci, 2009). These actions create positive places that disrupt traditional power dynamics rooted in student management and punishment (Ullucci, 2009). A study by Shevalier and McKenzie (2012) found several critical behaviors among teachers who were culturally responsive in their approaches. At their core, culturally responsive teachers maintained student dignity in various student interactions and demonstrated a deep level of care for students (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). However, not all teachers graduate from teacher preparation programs ready to foster such responsive-classroom communities. Building this capacity falls to school leaders, who must embody transformative leadership values and elevate practices that include minoritized students.

Schoolwide Vision and Courage: Tenets Seven and Eight

Just as teaching is not a neutral act, culturally responsive school leadership is not unbiased. To improve educational experiences and outcomes for every child through

overt leadership values and practices, school leaders must “acknowledge[e] the need to value unconditionally the students they serve” (Davis, 2002, p. 10)—to care *for* them, not just *about* them (Noddings, 2002). Khalifa (2018) argued that culturally responsive teachers and leaders must not only care for their students, they must accept the cultural identities and voices that develop alongside their academy identities, as part of an “identity confluence” (Khalifa, 2018, p. 110). In other words, teachers and leaders must acknowledge and embrace student, family, and community cultural identities if they seek to grow students' academic identities.

Tenet seven (a) the necessity of balancing critique with promise, and tenet eight (b) the call to exhibit moral courage are parts of the framework that speak to the advocacy and activism required to create schools where impactful change can flourish. Every student needs teachers and leaders to demonstrate highly developed equity awareness. Advocacy within the school and community is increasingly essential, as we demand "teachers and students to reach beyond self-interest for a higher ideal—something heroic" (Starratt, 2005, p. 130). Leaders must join together the students, community, and teachers through a shared vision (Senge, 1990), and explicitly operate from values that “identify elements held in common, extending them, building on them, and ultimately articulating the new direction” Shields, 2018, p. 113).

Activism at the building and policymaking levels are essential to disrupting historic systems of oppression in education through culturally responsive leadership that incorporates and actively seeks to build inclusionary spaces (Khalifa, 2018). The moral

courage to model values and hold staff accountable to an equity vision that pushes against White privilege is not an easy task. It is an ongoing and complex endeavor that requires every staff member accept the call to "educate and empower every child, not just *do* school" (Duncan-Andrade, personal communication, November 30, 2020) and requires leaders to engage in direct and often difficult conversations.

School leadership that honors autonomy and encourages teamwork, while maintaining a constant back and forth between principals and teachers, creates more collective endeavors. Teachers feel they have both decision-making authority and a stake in the outcome (Zaccaro et al., 2001). This shared vision holds the potential to increase teacher cultural competency and increase public school equity, but only if existing racist ideas and mental models are challenged by a leader who sets the vision and holds others accountable to it (Senge, 1990).

Additionally, the tenets of Shields' framework (2011, 2018) extend beyond race and socioeconomics as marginalizing factors. Her work acknowledges complexities of identity that mark some as "other" or outsiders and, therefore, less deserving. Her concept of educational inclusivity encompasses "race, socioeconomics, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, religion, immigration, and citizenship status" (Shields, 2018, p. 37), which speak to the complexities of identity in ways that acknowledge students and staff funds of knowledge (Velez-Ibanez, 1983; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). Furthermore, transformative leaders who recognize funds of student

knowledge avoid the pity and low expectations that occur when caring becomes a form of "charity, not justice" (Capper, 2019, p. 59). Instead, transformative leaders engage in activism to extinguish attitudes and practices that perpetuate deficit thinking and reconstruct knowledge frameworks (Shields, 2011), through ongoing acts of moral courage that regularly connect back to the leadership mandate for equity through direct communication between leadership and staff.

Transformative leadership approaches recognize that these are stressful times in American education and that educators are constantly navigating a variety of stressors. Educational leadership in VUCA times calls for specific actions and mindsets to focus on inequality and injustice in education. This is why such qualitative research is valuable; we can better understand principal values and practices by observing and hearing about their work situated in the context where they experience it (Yin, 2009).

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted public schools' everyday routines, elevating the need for equity now. In addition to the Covid-19 pandemic, the deaths of multiple Black men and women at the hands of law enforcement occurred in rapid succession. These acts fueled the pain and outrage of historically marginalized communities across the nation. These events were an integral part of ongoing reactions and discussions about inequity, exclusion, and social injustice in schools across the country. These are precisely the kinds of conversations that transformative leaders must leverage to implement impactful social-justice work in their schools. They must have the

moral courage to set the mandate now and communicate values that foster an antiracist stance, so every child enjoys educational experiences that honor individual identity and do not limit future opportunities.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter began with the need to prioritize social justice and equity in schools. Next, I described various aspects of school leadership work, acknowledging principals as essential drivers of school culture and vision built on social justice and equity goals. Shields' (2011) Transformative Leadership Theory was unpacked and connected to research about the principals' responsibility to promote and build culturally responsive teaching, as a form of advocacy and activism with the potential to disrupt historical systems of oppression and racism in schools. The next chapter presents the study methodology.

Chapter Three

With a goal to better understand how a principal's values and practices influence equitable and socially just practices in their school, I used a qualitative case-study approach to the present study. A qualitative case-study method allowed me to explore authentic problems wherein "the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2009, p. 18). There were times during data analysis when it was challenging to distinguish between a phenomenon, the contexts, and the intervening factors, so a qualitative approach supported exploration of the complexities of equity work in schools. Further, to better understand school-leadership values and practices around social justice and equity and implications of principal practices as the school staff interpreted them, qualitative methods best captured the holistic environment of the school and staff descriptions. Qualitative methods were also helpful in observing exchanges between school leadership and staff within the context of their work and provided the opportunity for the "systematic analysis of language, actions, and documents to determine patterns, themes, or theories that describe and provide insight into situations" (Boudah, 2020, p. 38) and to construct knowledge from a variety of perspectives (Stake, 1995; Patton, 1980).

This qualitative case study utilized three case study methods as developed by Robert K. Yin, Sharan Merriam, and Robert E. Stake—seminal authors of qualitative methods and case study design (Creswell et al., 2007). Aligning various case study approaches to specific portions of this work supported a sequential process that "connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions" (Yin, 2002, p. 20). This approach also supported data analysis from multiple perspectives for robust interpretation (Merriam, 1998).

One of the criticisms of qualitative case study is that researchers can study a topic and describe interpretations and findings; and yet, findings can lack meaning and context (Hartley, 1994). Without a robust theoretical framework, results will not provide much in the way of specific knowledge (Gummesson, 1988). The present study used tenets of Transformative Leadership Theory (Shields, 2011) as a framework for interpreting school leader values and practices; examining leadership actions occurring in school environments; and to gain a deeper understanding of what is unique and specific about the case (Stake, 1998). Furthermore, this research took a constructivist approach, cultivating relationships between researcher and participants as a way to construct meaning (Stake, 1995). As Merriam (1998) noted, a "philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds" (p. 99). Additionally, "the researcher brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other people's constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied" (Merriam,

1998, p. 22). Using Transformative Leadership Theory as the lens for data analysis supported the construction of meaning from participant responses.

Another criticism of case-study methodology is that while interactions between researcher and participant build rich context and shape meaning (Stake, 1995), there is often a lack of detail about the researcher's relationship with the case, or how the researcher influenced the study structure and development of findings (Hyett et al., 2014). However, as O'Connor and O'Neill (2004) argue:

> There are several aspects of qualitative methodologies that lend themselves to research with emancipatory goals and purposes. First qualitative methodologies tend to move beyond a positivist frame of reference, which advocates that there is only one "true" reality. Instead, the notion of multiple realities is introduced. This concept opens the space for hearing the voices of others ascertaining the essential perspectives of those who have experienced it. Given the unique contributions that they can make, research participants are positioned as the experts on their own reality. This approach validates the experiences and understandings that participants bring, while simultaneously unsettling more traditional views of the researcher as expert. In doing so, it implicitly begins to address conventional power imbalances between the researcher and participants. (2004, p. 20)

To minimize my influence on the data, I designed a clear research plan and did not deviate from it during data collection (Yin, 2002). Participant responses were initially coded for equity language and interpretations of leadership values and practices. Responses were then coded for descriptions of practices and beliefs, so descriptions could be aligned with each tenet of the framework. Answers that did not align with the framework were noted. This approach helped avoid another common critique of case studies, noting that researchers will "change directions without knowing that their original research design was inadequate for the revised investigation, thereby learning

unknown gaps and biases" (Yin, 2009, p. 71). Interview questions and pre-determined probes remained consistent between participants and only explanations provided in response to participant questions varied from one participant to another.

While interview questions were not altered during the study, I did gather data beyond the pre-determined questions. For example, some participant responses brought to light new expressions or ways of stating experiences beyond my framework language. As Yin noted:

> Case study data collection does follow a formal protocol, but the specific information that may become relevant to a case study is not readily predictable. As you collect case study evidence, you must quickly review the evidence and continually ask yourself why events or facts appear as they do. Your judgments may lead to the immediate need to search for additional evidence. (2009, p. 69)

Asking additional questions and probing for information that surfaced during exchanges deepened my understanding of the case. I worked to remain as unbiased as possible. I used a separate column in my field notes to capture thoughts and reflections to reground me when I "may have inadvertently begun to pursue a totally new investigation" (Yin, 2009, p. 71). The observations, participant interviews, and exchanges between staff members were compared to the framework with some pre-identified language to code for Transformative Leadership tenets to reduce drift intonew lines of inquiry. This process supported data analysis that remained connected to the initial research question (Yin, 2009), while allowing participants to elaborate on their descriptive terms.

Research Question

The present study was designed to answer the following research question:

In what ways, if at all, do a school principal's values and practices align with Shields' Transformative Leadership Theory to support the implementation of equitable and socially just practices in the school?

Sample Site and Participants

The site for this study was College and Career Prep (pseudonym), a grades 6–12, public, concurrent-enrollment school in a large district in the Rocky Mountain West. To locate the site, I inquired within two doctoral cohorts at a local university, comprised of school and district employees from several area school districts. The university's principal-preparation program is known for immersing educators and prospective leaders in social-justice and equity work, suggesting cohort members would be suitable to identify equity-minded leaders. Initial participant-inquiry criteria included: five or more years in the principal role; a majority population of students of color in school student body; a majority population of students with linguistic diversity in school student body; and a district and community reputation for equity and social-justice leadership.

The principal in this study, Janice Thompson (pseudonym,) responded to the call to participate and met criteria as a principal who led her school site for more than five years. Requiring a five-year leadership minimum circumvented potential staff stress around recent-leadership changes and new-systems implementation. It also allowed time for the principal to build relational trust (Fullan, 2010).

College and Career Prep serves a population of approximately 1,200 students (see Table 2), where 97% of the student population identify as students of color, and more than 50% speak a primary language other than English. This is representative of district data (47% students of color; 31% linguistically diverse students) but not the state population (87% White/non-Hispanic).

Table 3.1 ***Student Demographics at CACP***

Category	Percentage of Student Population (Approximate)
Hispanic/Latinx	58
White	5
African American	25
Asian/Pacific Islander	9
Multi-Race	3
English Learners	54
	.2
	52
	48
	78

Category	Percentage of Student Population (Approximate)
American Indian	
Male	
Female	
Free/Reduced Lunch	

The school serves students in grades six through twelve with a concurrent-enrollment model. Ms. Thompson identified as female, Black, and monolingual. The principal retained what she described as an effective administrative team and effective teachers. The College and Career Prep staff is predominantly White.

By exploring how this school principal approached her work and engaged with staff around equity and social justice, I sought to understand which specific tenets of transformative leadership were at work and how those tenets interacted with each other to influence equitable practices in the building. Hearing directly from those working within the school context allowed me to better understand the nuances of interpersonal communications and relationships between teachers and leaders in school settings.

School cultures are built by the interactions between teachers and leaders, and are impacted by exchanges between staff members as part of a greater community interconnectedness (Wheatley, 2005). According to Yin (2009), "interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs or behavioral events. Well-informed interviewees can provide important insights into such affairs and or events" (p. 108), as well as school culture. Hearing directly from the principal was essential to understand how she interpreted situations within the building, and how she made decisions to improve social justice and equity while maintaining trust and a positive building culture.

Research Procedures

This study drew from Stake's (1998) defining characteristics of case-study design, which propose holistic, empirical, interpretive, and emphatic research. The design adhered to Merriam's (1998) literature review concepts and theoretical framework for crafting interview questions to determine where best to focus on data analysis.

This study used one-on-one staff interviews, website analysis, and observation field notes to capture the principal and staff perspectives and gain insight into social justice and equity issues in the school. The variety of data-gathering tools allowed me to construct meaning and better understand both the individual participant experiences and the contexts in which they occurred (Merriam, 1998).

Interviews were semi-structured, with separate staff questions (see Appendix B) and school-leader questions (see Appendix C), aligned with the Transformative

Leadership Framework and the research topic (Shields, 2011). Open-ended questions allowed participants to share authentic experiences and personal perceptions with little external input or influence (Yin, 2009). Probes were used to encourage participants to expand and clarify meaning; however, I used them sparingly to reduce reciprocal interactions and avoid leading or unknowingly communicating preferences to participants.

In addition to the remote Zoom interviews, I observed two small staff groups during two professional-development sessions facilitated by an assistant principal; and one monthly staff meeting, where the principal led part of the schedule. At the same time, an outside facilitator presented on racial equity. These types of meetings were important as staff interacted with each other and shared their thoughts and responses to construct meaning with peers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By consequence, “interactive discussion through which data are generated leads to a different type of data not accessible through individual interviews” (Hennink, 2014, p. 2). Online observations during the Covid-19 pandemic supported the potential for more robust data collection from which to interpret and construct meaning about participants' individual experiences and the context of those experiences (Merriam, 1998). Observation field notes were captured during professional development sessions and staff meetings. Observations of real-time interactions provided strong contextual evidence (Yin, 2009), despite occurring online due to pandemic-related safety restrictions.

I used the Transformative Leadership Framework to analyze the school website (Shields, 2011). I included those observations with data gathered from interviews, professional development sessions, and the staff meeting.

Confidentiality

Qualitative research involves creating a trusting relationship between researcher and participants to generate rich details contextualized within the participants' physical location and authentic, daily experiences (Maxwell, 2005). Study participants signed consent forms (Appendix D). Protecting the anonymity of the school and participants was essential to ensuring that exchanges between the researcher and participants were authentic and representative of daily work within the school context.

Speaking about equity and social justice issues—even during the Black Lives Matter movement, when equity and social-justice issues were daily headlines—can put school leaders in difficult positions. Equity and social-justice work can become challenging for principals because of perceptions around competing demands for their time (Tuters & Ryan, 2020). For example, district leaders may worry that equity and social-justice work is taking place at the expense of academic work.

Maintaining a social-justice focus was further complicated for the Black female leader in this study, who also contended with the intersectionality of her employment, race, and gender: “These leaders view and experience themselves or their ideas often as marginal as they are seeking social justice ends within White, masculinist environments” (Capper, 2019, p. 161).

To further protect participant identities, interview field notes and written documentation did not identify characteristics about school leaders, staff, educator grade levels, specific demographic data, or instructional content areas in any combination that would compromise participant anonymity. At the end of the study, I continued to protect participant anonymity by keeping all written transcripts in a password-protected account; in addition, all audio and visual recordings were deleted after transcription. Further details are discussed in the section on ethical considerations.

Ethical Considerations

As part of research design, I addressed five ethical considerations: demands on participants, informed consent, voluntary participation, avoidance of negative consequences, and confidentiality (Webster et al., 2014).

The availability of the principal and school staff was affected by the remote setting. I observed meetings and took notes without interfering with participants. There was no follow up and no member checking during the workday. Instead, we communicated outside of work hours at prescheduled times. I independently performed website analysis and sought clarification from the principal during pre-determined meetings. The DU Institutional Review Board granted approval for participants to receive gift cards in recognition of their time ($20 for staff members; $100 for the principal).

All study participants received information about the study's purpose, process, methods, and how their information would remain anonymous and confidential. All participants consented to have details about their comments and interactions recorded.

Staff member and principal involvement was voluntary, and all participants signed consent forms. I kept names of participants who opted out private. In addition, I sent emails and meeting invites to individuals and not to groups to further protect privacy. At no time did I share the identities, views, or comments of staff participants with the principal. Pseudonyms were created and used for all participants.

I did not anticipate any negative consequences or risks for the principal or staff. However, "the desire to be heard and the assumption that research serves a wider social good are strong motivations to take part in research" (Webster et al., 2014, p. 83). Thus, to maximize safety and minimize vulnerability, I followed Graham et al.'s (2007) guidance, as described in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 ***Participant Map of Research Ethics***

Before the Interview	**During the Interview**	**After the Interview**
Unpressured decision-making about participation	Ability to exercise the right not to answer a question or say more than desired	Right to privacy and anonymity through data storage, access, and reporting
Research is independent and legitimate	Unpressured pace, time to think	Unbiased and accurate reporting
Knowing why they were selected to be approached	Comfortable and at ease; valued, and respected; not intimidated or judged	Opportunity for feedback on findings and use

Before the Interview	During the Interview	After the Interview
Explicit and worthwhile purpose and objectives	Opportunity for self-expression and to document personal views	Research is used for social benefit
Clear expectations; able to prepare for coverage and questioning	Questions are relevant and clear; not repetitive	
Openness, honesty, and ability to correct misunderstandings	Left with positive or neutral feelings about participation	

Source: Graham et al., 2007

To ensure that participants felt safe and positive about their role in the research, I communicated to all participants that they could have their responses excluded from the study at any time prior to publication.

After interviews, member checks, and initial data coding, I organized the data, determined if there was a need to follow up with any study participants, and moved forward with data analysis and findings. The findings of the study will be discussed in chapter four.

Data Analysis Plan

Interviews and Observations

All transcripts from interviews and field observations were analyzed and open coded (Saldana, 2009) within the week they occurred. According to Maxwell (2005),

"[t]he experienced qualitative researcher begins data analysis immediately after finishing the first interview or observation, and continues to analyze the data as long as he or she is working on the research" (p. 95), as researchers must be able to view data and determine where next to inquire or where they might need to extend their questioning (Heinrich, 1984). The recorded interviews were transcribed using Happy Scribe software and reviewed for accuracy by comparing transcripts to original recordings. Once the meetings and discussions were transcribed, they were coded first line-by-line within Happy Scribe for keywords or phrases for initial themes of equity, diversity, social justice, culturally responsive language, critical pedagogy, and expressions of care and advocacy. Subsequent coding continued to distill data into categories aligned to the Transformative Leadership Framework (Shields, 2011), using ATLAS.ti—qualitative data-analysis software. I completed several rounds of coding as more participants were interviewed in accordance with Saldana's (2009) call: "There are mostly repetitive patterns of action and consistencies in human affairs, and one of the coder's primary goals is to find these repetitive patterns of action and consistencies in human affairs as documented in the data" (p. 16). Once I found similarities and differences across participants, I moved participant comments into a grid labeled with each of the Transformative Leadership Theory tenets to identify strong and less robust connections (Shields, 2011).

Observations of meetings and exchanges between principals and staff were recorded on Zoom. I annotated all transcripts with one column for the date and time of the observation; a second column for the descriptive information; and the third column

for any thoughts, reflections, questions, or ideas that surfaced during the observations or interviews. The interview notes followed the same format, with a column for descriptive information, and a column for thoughts, reflections, questions, or ideas that surfaced during observations or interviews. This structure helped further separate factual details and follow-up questions from subjective and potentially unrelated researcher reflections that might otherwise impact the data. This three-column structure also helped identify non-verbal cues during interviews. It facilitated a deeper level of in-the-moment probing to understand participant feelings about equity work.

Website Analysis

The page-by-page website analysis began with the home page and continued through each subsequent tab. I recorded field notes, similar to field observations, and coded by hand to identify areas of equity, diversity, social justice, culturally responsive language, critical pedagogy, and community and advocacy ideas. The notes were included with the interview transcripts and analyzed through the ATLAS.ti software. The coding language for subsequent coding utilized the Transformative Leadership Framework and grouped findings within each related tenet of the framework (Shields, 2011). This process increased consistency of coding and interpretation across all collected data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and aligned the data collection to the research question and theoretical framework.

Once the data were collected, I went through an axial coding phase to identify the phenomena that emerged from categories and looked at potential causes to understand

better the impact of leadership values on the implementation of equitable and socially just practices in the school (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This allowed me to explore strategies staff employed to engage or avoid equtiy work, and the consequences of those choices. Further, I was able to construct a deeper understanding of the context and the intervening factors that either supported equity and social-justice work or impeded the progress of the principal's efforts. Chapter four reviews findings and limitations.

Chapter Four

This chapter will review the findings, limitations, and ethical considerations for the present study. The study focused on College and Career Prep (CACP), a concurrent enrollment school for grades 6–12 in the Rocky Mountain West. The initial data collection included nine semi-structured interviews with the same questions (Appendix B). Interviews were conducted with various staff members serving in different roles who responded to the recruitment flyer emailed to all staff (Appendix E). And I conducted two semi-structured interviews with the school principal (Appendix C). Each hour-long interview was conducted in the second semester of the 2020–2021 school year. Most students were still receiving instruction remotely from teachers working from home, and some students were beginning to receive instruction at the school site with some staff in physical classrooms. All interviews were conducted via Zoom in accordance with Covid-19 safety protocols.

Staff participants included six content teachers, two of whom held additional coaching responsibilities; two staff members who supported students indirectly outside of academic instruction; and one instructional coach (Appendix F). Of the nine staff participants, one was male, and eight were female. One staff member identified as someone from a mixed-race background, one identified as Latina, one identified as

Black, and six staff members identified as White. One staff participant was bilingual, and the other participants were monolingual. The principal was female, Black, and a monolingual English speaker.

Additional data were collected through observations of two hour-long, afterschool book-study professional development sessions, a single one-hour whole staff meeting with a guest facilitator, and an analysis of the school website.

Participant responses were analyzed by reviewing interviews and open coding for language associated with the tenets of the framework and equity work in schools (Saldana, 2009). As categories emerged from staff interviews, the website analysis and field observations were analyzed for connections to the eight Transformative Leadership Framework tenets and compared to the leadership interview data (Shields, 2011). As the categories narrowed, similarities and differences between staff interviews, field observations, and the website analysis were explored and compared to the leadership interview data. Themes emerged through axial coding analysis that provided insight into potential sources of certain phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Examination of staff attitudes surfaced staff strategies for dealing with phenomena and resulted in consequences or impacts on equitable practices at the school. Also impacting these relationships were the contexts and intervening factors, which were often challenging to distinguish from the phenomena but were aligned with Yin's (2009) descriptions of the characteristics of qualitative analysis.

I identified five themes from the data related to the research question. Additionally, I considered how teachers perceived their principal's values and practices and how they influenced teacher mindsets around culturally responsive work.

The themes identified were (a) equity as a Black/non-Black construct; (b) lack of knowledge and awareness of the historical contexts of marginalized populations; (c) moral courage for all members of the school; (d) equity as an initiative or program; and (e) resistance to deep equity work.

Theme 1: Equity as a Black/Non-Black Construct

Transformative leadership requires an interpretation of equity that moves beyond a Black/White binary. The school leader described whole-school messages about equity at the start of the year, and she believed those definitions were broad and inclusive. Staff did not report the same understanding. While staff agreed that equity was a significant value, and the school leader cared deeply about students, staff reported a focus on elevating Black history, as both a priority and an expectation. Multiple staff reported that they interpreted her connections to her identity as support of Black students. For example, Chris highlighted her emphasis on Black history, noting "[c]urrently, our principal promotes Black history and wants it to be taught in all classes. She wants Black students to know their history." Selene described the principal's focus on pedagogy: "The principal wants people to change how they are teaching Black students." And Susan emphasized the principal's priority was "racial justice for Black students," noting further that conversations "about data are Black/non-Black." Pat highlighted a difference

between what was said and what was meant in her view: “The message that is spoken is Black and Brown kids when there are whole-group discussions, but the real message is Black students.” However, Alicia offered a more capacious interpretation the principal’s focus:

> The principal’s values influence how we think about and interact with like our thoughts and our mindsets and behaviors with all students but especially students of color, underrepresented groups, minority groups, whatever the terms is that best describes our students that are not in the majority culture.

Both principal and staff agreed that her identity as a Black female leader shaped much of the messaging. For example, Joe noted:

> I would say her leadership flavors everything. I can tell it comes from her and through her. She seems authentic in terms of saying, “I am a Black woman, and I’m telling you, we’ve got to be more equitable.”

However, the school principal believed her messages, while strongly supporting Black students and the need to teach Black history, were more inclusive. She described sharing personal anecdotes with staff to inspire and make certain the purpose of the work at CACP was “to meet all students where they are and to provide them with opportunities, so they can thrive as individuals in their community as adults” and to make “school a place of belonging and home-like.” She also referenced social media and podcasts that a small group of Black female students produce, which she believes targets “others’ histories, too.”

There were three distinct participant responses to the principal's values and practices around equity and social justice work at CACP. The first response type was buy-in and belief that the principal's equity and social justice agenda was influential. These staff members provided clear descriptions of equitable practices that attempted to support the call to focus on Black students, and in some cases, extend the work to include Latinx students. For example, Joe noted his own growth since arriving at CACP:

> We have social media for our Black students challenging that current state. Now it's just part of my values, but I had to learn once I came here. I realized I was part of the whitewashed narrative of history and teaching. So, in my class, this means students get to explore and choose what they want to discuss and get into for the content.

Like Joe, Selene reported learning and growing her practice, noting, "I feel pushed to think strategically about how I'm talking to students, how I'm instructing students, how I'm learning from students, and how I'm arriving on a daily basis with them." In her comments, Alicia reported ways the principal helped her improve connections with students:

> The principal helps me understand how to reach out to students who might not usually just reach out to connect and understand that the frequency and the persistence to communicate with students might be different for different students, especially those different from me since I am White.

By contrast, Shenae shared her own perspective on the need for equity and how both teachers and the principal are powerful models for students:

> I'm okay that we are offering a lot of lead by example. And that's something that she has done since [Janice] took over. Black Excellence is a state of mind and a movement. I think the main thing is to have kids see that they are in control of their own volition, that the sky is the limit, and that they need to be empowered by the teachers, creating safe spaces for them to find what their excellence is, right? That excellence and being confident in yourself and being able to go out and be agents of change does not mean that you have to be a master of algebra or that you need to be able to perfect the, you know, the five-paragraph essay. There's a lot of ways to see yourself as being successful and to provide as many opportunities and routes for kids to be able to see that within themselves and celebrate that, right?

Finally, Selene highlighted ways in which racial justice for Black students also impacted Latinx students:

> Changing what we do for Black students can help all of our students feel safe and feel validated. This is not just Black like it really is our Latino group too. They're dealing with systems of oppression too, but when we look at that, we have to look at the dismantlement of systems and policies that are there, that are outdated, and we have to ask those questions that challenge those systems.

The second type of response was from those who expressed some buy-in but were struggling with implementation at times. Betty reported incremental change and expressed concern about whether she's living into the model:

> I definitely see, like, more of an alignment of what is focused on now and how that aligns with her values. And so, with that, I feel like my own programming and practice, like I don't want to say there's been a humongous shift, but I think there has been a little bit of a shift of where we were before versus where we are now and how we do our job. But when it comes to, like, my own practice, even though I feel like I'm trying to make some changes to my practice, I just don't know if it's like hitting the mark or the target.

Susan went further, reporting frustration and overwhelm, as the work of educators continues to grow:

> I am trying to implement changes to equity in curriculum and practices, and beliefs, but it all feels overwhelming. The way public schools are set up is there's not a lot of bandwidth to make substantial changes because teachers don't have enough time because it's all put on teachers.

In his comments, Brock expressed both a reluctance to adopt these practices and discomfort in doing so because of his Whiteness and privilege:

> I am not sure how to talk about race. I don't know much about social justice, so I am willing to listen to students' comments, but I am not comfortable commenting. I fit a lot of the checklist items of the oppressor.

The third response type was rejection of the approach, based on the student body and perceived misalignment of a focus on Black students within a largely Latinx population. Chris insisted that Janice's focus entirely on Black students, noting, she "may be open to all students learning their history, but not as a driver of the school culture…Her concern right now is Black history and Black students." Pat pointed out the large numbers of Latinx students at CACP and how they might feel left out of racial justice conversations focused on Black students:

> When you have such a huge Hispanic population at your school that has also had their own issues in this country, they are also feeling things and getting those messages feeling like, you know, they're not important, they don't matter. They can't amount to anything. That is the majority of our students.

The website analysis showed that there were a majority of Black students' photos on the site, primarily female. On the page that showed different affinity groups, Black female students represented the page. In some images, photos depicted a mix of student racial representation and gender. However, the page reserved for special-education services content was the only page containing a photo of a child with a visible disability; the student depicted was being helped by a staff member in a classroom.

The page that lists affinity groups did not have any images, content, or labels for students who might belong to an LGBTQ+ group. The tab for the Gay-Straight Alliance did not have content and under "program information," information was listed as "coming soon."

Theme 2: Lack of Knowledge and Awareness of the Historical Contexts of Marginalized Populations

Issues of equity and access in education vary across racial, socio-economic, gender, ethnic, linguistic lines, as well as and sexual identities, disabilities, and citizenship statuses. Defining equity through a binary racial or gender construct silences the voices and experiences of minoritized groups, staff, and students. It creates a false notion that racial backgrounds are the same as other identities and marginalizing experiences. At CACP, a binary construct contributed to the idea that some marginalized groups simply did not exist at the school, or that equity for one group would translate to other groups. For example, when asked about LGBTQ+ students, Pat replied, "Oh, is that the gay thing? I'm pretty sure we don't have any gay students here." She then described a flyer she may have seen that encouraged people hire gay staff and claimed there was no staff she was aware of who identified as gay. Selene shared her frustrations about historical constructs of oppression and the need for White staff to shift Black focus to include everyone:

> There is a need to address this on many levels. I see and hear teachers mentioning some students by their identities, but always in opposition to the work that could be made with Black students. If teachers can change practices for Black students, then those will lead to the practices that the teachers have with all our students. We say this about ELLs, right? Why can't we say this about Black students?

While she eschewed LGBTQ+ presence at CAPCP, Pat described her frustrations and experiences as a Latina with "no leadership acknowledgment of other groups and populations." She explained how that hurt her as a woman who is not Black or White. She felt doubly wounded every time the struggles of different groups were not acknowledged:

> For Black History Month, there was a lot of discussion, but for Hispanic Heritage Month, and with almost exclusively language learners, every one of those groups asked where the celebrations were for them. Students asked me why they don't matter. And it's not like they're saying, "No, we should have it instead of them. It's just we want to matter too." Trying to convey that message to leadership at our school across the board, it seemed to always fall on deaf ears.

These messages contrast Janice's stated the values and actions, who "wants staff to feel valued and supported and have tools to do the work" and who acknowledges how staff of color are impacted differently than White staff, especially during protests for racial equity and during times of increased violence in the community near the school. The principal acknowledged how different political and social events impacted staff of color and created stress or trauma. Still, participants did not express their identities as shapers of the equity work from their own experiences and positionalities.

Additionally, all staff participants, except for the principal, spoke about students by referring to them by a racial, linguistic, or special education identity in response to meeting needs or solving problems around their identities. There were no asset-based

exchanges about students. Students were referred to by educators and assistant principals in the professional development sessions as *these kids, SpEd kids, poor kids, SpEd students, behavior kids, center kids, SEL kids*, *ELLs*, and *trauma kids.* The assistant principals did not redirect staff to use person-first language or remind staff to speak about students from an asset-based mindset. Likewise, assistant principals did not use person-first language in their facilitation.

The website affinity group page showed a group of Black female students in a video, describing how they seek to disrupt negative social stereotypes about Black females. By contrast, the Latina group video showed students who sought to create a sisterhood across middle and high school.

As staff spoke about students, there was a consistent, surface-level acknowledgment of Black and Brown students as members of the school community. Still, no staff referenced any other groups during their interviews unless I asked specifically. When I pushed for what different groups of students might need beyond considerations of their race alone, responses were consistently about math achievement, as Joe noted, "making sure they pass algebra,"—a strong determiner for graduation. Brock, a White staff member, noted:

> I just have to make sure students are engaged online during the pandemic. That came from my mentor. I want diversity in the work, but I don't want to offend anybody. I would not have that conversation [about racial events in the news] if I would not have gotten that email school counselors sent scripted messages for

> staff to share with students about police killings in the news]. I might have left it alone. I mean, the email itself had language about how to talk about it and what was appropriate.

Overall, staff actions were described with deficit mindsets and as if the teachers needed to adjust assignments, requirements, and grading policies to create successes. As a coach observed:

> We talk a lot about understanding and knowing our students, which would be like their strengths and the struggles that they're facing. Ideally, it helps support them in learning and achieving. I think the reality is that sometimes it lowers the bar. It just gives teachers a way to have lower expectations.

It was not just the lowering of expectations that was concerning. There was an overall sense that the complexity of identity was not explored and the social justice focus was about empowering Black students. As Chris noted, there was little attention paid to diversity beyond the work around elevating Black history for students and how her awareness of this shifted over the year:

> We don't talk about this, but we have staff with lots of different backgrounds that I think go underappreciated and completely unexplored. I value diversity, but I am in a tricky spot because I see equity and diversity very differently. Here it evolved into a Black-focused idea at a school that serves a more diverse population. I think I have gone through a metamorphosis, and like I may have

outgrown this space. It is not a value judgment against individuals. I evolved, and I am ready to do something different.

Theme 3: Moral Courage for All Members of the School

Modeling moral courage is an essential component of transformative leadership that supports equitable and socially just practices in public schools. However, moral courage cannot be exhibited by the leader alone. An essential aspect of transformative leadership must be the call to build moral courage within organization members, even if messages about equity push for an expansion of the leadership's conceptualization of equity. We cannot elevate one group's voice, while coaching to shape or downplay the message of another group; or, worse, silence or fail to acknowledge the experiences of another group.

The principal described, with pride, moments when her Black female students were in the public eye, when students or parents speak at staff events, on when the CACP student board speaks with the district school board. She has worked tirelessly to elevate the concerns of her Black students. She has advocated for change in curriculum, increased funding for the specific social and emotional needs of students in the building, and openly shares personal experiences grounded in her own identity as a woman of color. Her own courage to challenge the district status quo and support her Black female students through her position has had positive results for those students.

In contrast, staff participants who did not hold additional leadership roles or responsibilities did not feel empowered to speak or advocate on behalf of their students or

themselves, especially if they were staff of color. Pat reported, “There is a sense that if teachers bring up other marginalized groups, the principal feels personally attacked or dismissed. It can be difficult as a staff member to know how to advocate for our students.”

Other staff described experiences of trying to build onto equity and social justice work but feeling shut down, as Chris noted:

> The principal’s conversations about how people talk about students are more reactive than proactive. When I say that equity is based on instructional practices, she [the principal] says, ‘Well, what about Black history?’ Black identity is important, all identity is important, but as far as I am concerned, we have a lot of work to do on rigor and high-quality instruction. And so, I think any time I am taking away from that is a disservice to our students.

However, staff with some additional responsibilities often reported feeling trusted to do what they thought was right within the sphere of their content or their other duties. None of them described ongoing conversations or checking back about their actions but made assumptions that they were okay. It was not clear how they measured the efficacy of the choices they made.

Another staff member who held additional responsibilities at the school and worked closely with the principal, reported that she could only advocate for students to a certain degree with non-Black staff. She described feeling as though being silenced or told to “tone it down” was the principal’s way of not letting her passion get the best of

her. She appreciated that someone would want to look out for her and offer that kind of "protection," but she felt it came "at a price." Selene explained:

> The [White] people receiving the message—I am finally learning now—that when you make White people feel uncomfortable, either they pull you in to understand or they push you out; and when they push you out, they silo themselves from the work to be done. I never really see them again. They don't come and try to center themselves in the conversations or center themselves in the vulnerability of asking, "How do I do this?"

Selene also described feeling as though her authentic voice and her choice of words were either silenced or discouraged, when her message was emotional or related to personal experiences of oppression or micro aggressions she experienced as a Black woman:

> I know she [the principal] has to speak to different people outside of the school to promote what we are doing and to get the district to buy into this work too. When do we reach a point when we don't have to buffer the messages anymore? I have been doing a lot of this work around supporting our Black students, and our [district] leaders have started using the term BIPOC. Is that to make it more comfortable?

She described understanding that her principal supported her. At times, she felt she could speak her mind from her personal experiences and even felt "protected" by her principal, who would use different phrasing or rephrase the message. She also felt that if what she had to say made someone uncomfortable or if she appeared angry or passionate, she was

held accountable by a White assistant principal. She explained that it felt like "people get to act out the angry Black woman, when I am just frustrated or passionate or speaking my truth or telling my story. No. I get told I need to change my approach" (Selene).

Theme 4: Equity as an Initiative or Program

The call to become a more equitable and socially just public school cannot be approached as an add-on program or initiative. It runs the risk of becoming a rote list of surface-level actions that do not support profound shifts in teacher mindset and practices. The work to increase equity on behalf of all marginalized groups must be intentional and carefully implemented to allow leadership to continually connect with staff about ongoing actions and ensure there is a positive impact on all marginalized groups.

One teacher reported that the previous year's equity book-study made her want to do a better job. Initially, she was given some next steps she was excited to implement, but then there was no follow-up support. The new group only included those in leadership positions. No one was sure why they were no longer included. Betty shared:

> Equity is a district core value, so the district dictates what that looks like too. The social justice night projects were an expectation, so people were doing them, but I am not sure that everyone really did it and not sure what the outcomes were from that work. Sometimes that just happens with our equity team since it became just a book study.

While the school leader modeled values of social justice as empowering students to act and elevate their voices to places of power and decision making to increase awareness

and make change, the social justice projects staff created with students were more about getting parents to see a project idea students created. Staff described the event as a night to get families into the school and the purpose of projects and potential to increase power and access for minoritized populations was not mentioned.

Across all of the staff interviews, there was a consistent mention of the expectation to conduct porch visits, make calls home, and listen to the podcast put out by a group of students. Various tasks included checklists, activities, book study assignments, classroom decorations, or tasks related to equity work. Staff could not name any areas where these tasks resulted in equitable practices, but they were tasks intended to be part of equity work. As Chris shared, "The work we do around identities of students and staff is very surface level and that kind of where a lot of it lays." And Pat noted, "Restorative practices were supposed to be something we could be involved in, and then different decisions were made." She noted further that none of the work was revisited, and they were "onto the next thing."

Another teacher, Susan, described how teachers viewed equity work concerning their other work: "Teachers see equity as competing with academic and social-emotional needs of students. So, it's hard to get them to want to do things." She described what her content area was doing to support equity: "We are focused on changing books away from Black suffering. We are finding authors who are Black, so students can read Black authors."

During the book studies, I observed that teacher conversations about the text and their grading approaches were all related to the time efficiencies, the decrease in their workload around grading, and the potential to make students feel better by getting better grades. There was no mention of the practices and their relation to equity, social justice, post-secondary readiness, or academic excellence. Instead, the focus was on increasing grades. There was no mention of an increase in student content or standards proficiency in either group. The conversations remained technical and focused on physical implementation in the district computer system. The protocol questions posed by the facilitator created were about implementation expectations and support to enter grades and decide which assignments to grade.

Theme 5: Resistance to Deep Equity Work

Transformative leadership can only move the needle on equity and social justice issues if leaders commit to direct and uncomfortable conversations and clear actions to increase equity. Issues cannot be decontextualized to suit comfort levels of White staff. Further, leaders must empower all staff to hold one another accountable to equity and social-justice work, even when it makes White staff uncomfortable. If leaders are unwilling to create spaces where White staff are vulnerable and accountable, there will be no progress forward. As Selene noted:

> Conversations aren't happening because it forces White people to be like, *hold on, wait a minute, maybe these things that I'm doing subconsciously and having to admit wrongful acts to our students for or even just to a culture*. And it's almost

like, I can't blame you for doing what you don't know that you're doing. But now that you know, ok, let's talk about what's going on here. Are you doing this because this is what you feel is right? And if that's the case, then this probably isn't the space you need to be in.

Janice describes her work around resistance to deep equity work with staff as having empathy and patience balanced against the bigger picture. Sometimes she had challenging conversations about the work. This can anger or frustrate people, but she tries to reason as best she can. She notes:

> You have to remind people what's at stake and remind them of the purpose and the reason that brought us all together. Sometimes, you have to unapologetically say, this is what I do, and this is what it is. I try not to judge. I did not raise you. I do not know how you grew up. I try to be patient and help people come around.

She describes her support of teachers and how hard it can be to hold people accountable or speak directly because of her own identity. She crafts her comments and messages, even being careful to "watch the body language of the people," noting how her ideas "are being received." She worries about reactions of those who do not understand equity work or see the need to focus on the histories and experiences of Black students. The stress of these concerns contributes to feelings of job insecurity for taking these risks. She explained her messaging strategy and how it relates to her racial identity:

> There is a timing and a trajectory. And you know, that is kind of what it's like working for a Black female leader. Most of my assistant principals are not Black,

> so they know that we talk about it frequently so that they can understand where I'm coming from when, you know, things have to be done the right way. I have always shared that there's a stigma out there that when you look like me, you have to work twice as hard as your other counterparts. And, unfortunately, because your principal is Black and female, that means you get to work twice as hard right along with me.

CACP has nearly 100 staff members, so circling back to ensure that equitable practices were implemented became a factor in whether White staff opted out of the work or performed more surface-level tasks only. For those seeking to deepen equity work, this was frustrating. As Chris noted:

> Equitable instruction is multifaceted and includes understanding your own privilege as an educator, and for me, a White educator. Discussions about data are racial breakdowns as part of an equity experience, and coaches follow up, but completing a data task and implementation or internalization of culturally responsive practices are two different things.

Chris described working with teachers willing to complete a task or write up. Still, she felt they were unwilling to deeply consider how they teach or believe about students from backgrounds different than their own. She described people wanting to believe they hold no biases; thus, the progress they needed to make stalled.

Another staff member described seeing a group teacher chat in which White staff shared photos of people of color to put on their classroom walls. Janice asked staff to

display images of people of color in their classrooms as role models for students of color. Selene, who is a woman of color, was disheartened to see White staff miss the opportunity to learn about different historical figures and instead reframe the task as something to cross off a checklist. She explained her frustrations:

> No one said anything about how crazy this was. They clearly did not get it, and don't see how important it is to be able to talk about those people and know who they are so they can teach the students. How can you teach here and do that? If I say something, then the focus is on how I said it and not what they should be doing for students.

Pat shared similar frustrations, noting, "I feel like I am not able to advocate or hold others accountable to the work the school is doing around equity." Furthermore, Selene calls out unconscious bias as driver of White staff resistance:

> There is some unconscious bias for White people receiving a message from a Black educator who is advocating for Black students. For some reason, and I have yet to figure it out, it's like a weird science that has no easy solution.

For White staff members, like Brock, avoidance is a viable strategy:

> I just stay away from participating in those kinds of discussions. I'm not sure how to talk about race. I know students' living situations might not be stable or they work or watch a sibling and that's really difficult.

Chris described problematic "colorblind" approaches to students as a homogenous group. She offered that White teachers did not explore how being White and teaching students of color might impact the student experience:

> Students' identities outside of Black are not explored the same ways. We do a good job here of understanding and validating students as learners, capable learners. In any school, what is talked about is what's most important. Where time is spent and what's consistently discussed is what's most important. So, if we didn't talk about it this year then we weren't doing it this year.

Furthermore, Selene highlighted a general discomfort with addressing issues of Black students directly and specifically:

> For some reason focusing on Black kids is uncomfortable. So, once you begin to say, well, these practices will also help with this group, then they're like, 'Oh, ok, so we're helping BIPOC. Then it's great.' It's like you have to take being Black out of it.

During the professional development book study, all participants made agreeable comments about the book and the ideas proposed. There was no deeper exploration of the topics and no pushback or disagreement. Those who admitted not reading the text were not held accountable for the reading, and many joked about it but discussed the concepts anyway. The assistant principal facilitating did not consult with White staff about how their dismissal of the work might impact the students of color who attend the school.

Limitations

The coronavirus pandemic and Black Lives Matter movement had important implications for this study. Disruptions to school-year routines and shifts to remote teaching and learning had immeasurable, complicated, and far-reaching repercussions. The Black Lives Matter movement and the implications of multiple deaths of innocent Black citizens elevated inequity and social-justice issues in various settings. This disruption heightens the urgency of leaders' actions and can create additional pressure on the school culture included in this research.

One of the limitations of this study was the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on traditional in-person learning in public schools. The school year was at times partial or fully remote, and the technical components of the school year often shifted without notice. Principals and staff navigated the unfamiliar structures of remote learning for students and created new education processes that had to be renegotiated when students returned to in-person learning. These shifts continued over the year as health guidance shifted.

Other limitations of the study were relatively short interview and observation periods for observing interactions between the principal and staff members, as well as the lack of access to classrooms or physical teaching environments. The duration of the observation period was a month during the winter. It would be reasonable to infer that a more extended period of observing across the entire school year with its unique and timely characteristics might enrich the information collected. Various tasks in any school

environment are directly connected to specific periods in the school calendar, impacting teachers' and leaders' workloads and school days. There are assessment windows, conferences, report cards, and community events at different times. These events impact the physical, emotional, and psychological capacity of staff and shape principals' work. Additionally, a more extended time could offer additional opportunities to observe various interactions and tasks. More time could deepen the understanding of how and where equity work might occur and be prioritized to illuminate further how values and practices impact equity across the building.

My positionality is a limitation because I am female, White, and work in school leadership. Thus, interpretations of data were made through a racially privileged lens, with a potential bias in favor of female leadership, female leadership attributes, and attitudes. Furthermore, as someone in a school-leadership role, the interpretations I made about interviews and interactions between principals and staff could have been biased in support of the ideas and actions of those in positions of leadership. It is essential to my interpretations' accuracy that I verified the transcripts with research study participants. This helped address specific comments that entered the discussion, and how they were interpreted to create an authentic representation of participants' experiences (Rapley, 2007).

Another limitation of this study was that interpretations of the principal's values and staff practices were gleaned from remote observations. Participants described their practices and mindsets, but I could not see them directly working with students. Also, the

remote interviews may not have yielded the same comfort and trust desired between the researcher and the participants that might have been cultivated in a face-to-face environment. The remote interview structure adhered to state Covid-19 public health mandates for in-person contact.

Chapter Five

Transformative leadership as a theory of action, requires that two issues be addressed: “The first related to the individual achievement and the second to the collective welfare of a democratic society” (Shields, 2020, p. 3). Transformative leadership work was in the early stages at CACP, and while there were efforts benefitting some student groups, there were areas requiring a great deal more attention and intention. For school leadership to be transformative, the mandate for equitable and socially just practices must include all students from all marginalized populations in our schools (Shields, 2018). This study empahsized the need to include staff from all marginalized backgrounds as well. We cannot construct more equitable and socially just knowledge frameworks if we only consider perspectives from a small portion of students and/or staff. Furthermore, we must deconstruct damaging existing frameworks, which at CACP meant addressing deficit-based mindsets about students and their families, and directly dismantling false ideas about gender identity and intersections of LGBTQ+ students and race. Finally, the need to redistribute power is essential to building a school community of students, staff, and families that can work together to address equity and social justice concerns within and beyond the walls of the school.

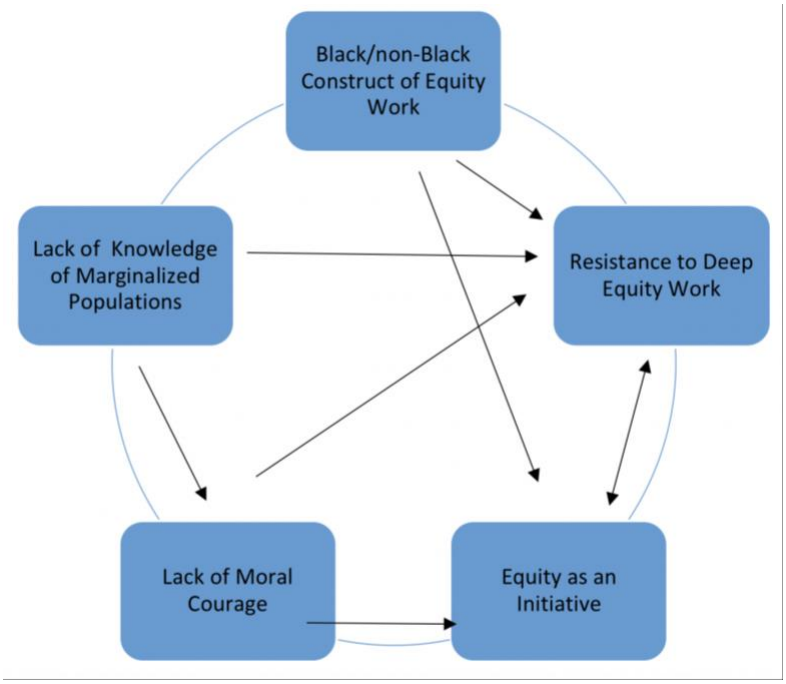
Several leadership values and practices at CACP aligned to varying degrees with tenets of the Transformative Leadership Framework (Shields, 2011). Those values and practices created spaces for intentional equity and social-justice initiatives at the school. However, in alignment with district mandates, and in support of the students who initiated the focus on Black students, this work was focused on the academic achievement of Black students and the economic needs of families in the community. Instead, the principal's attempts to elevate the socio-economics of the community fostered deficit-based mindsets about students and families, and inhibited teachers' appreciation of cultural values that differed from their own.

The themes that emerged in the course of the study were interconnected (see Figure 5.1) and indicated specific places where the work could be strengthened, supported by the leadership of marginalized voices, redesigned to be less task-driven, and more directly messaged and monitored by the principal to inform and enhance the consistency of the work and maintain the strength and impact of her vision for equitable and socially just practices. These efforts could strengthen schoolwide alignment to the Transformative Leadership Framework (Shields, 2011) and more positively impact the experiences of marginalized groups within the school.

Building alignment to something as rich as the Transformative Leadership Framework (Shields, 2011) is essential because principals can continue to build on it to elevate student voices to increase equity. Like the principal at CACP, they may leverage their own identities and inadvertently narrow the focus of the work to the exclusion of

other marginalized groups. However, a shared vision of equity and social-justice work must exist across all positions within the organization (Senge, 1990), which allows responsibility for the work to be distributed and built upon from a variety of perspectives. To disrupt historical and systemic racism in our schools, we need transformative school leaders (Shields, 2010), who see their work as advocacy and activism on behalf of all marginalized groups, including staff. This advocacy must begin with the principal's moral courage to facilitate clear and direct discussions with staff about the harmful ideas they hold about different groups of people, and how those biases impact their ability to be culturally responsive educators.

Figure 5.1 ***Model of Interconnectedness of Themes***



Note: Leadership defined equity work as a Black/non-Black construct. This led to resistance and equity work viewed as an initiative. As long as equity work remained a

surface-level checklist of items, resistance continued. The lack of knowledge of marginalized populations created a lack of moral courage and some resistance by White staff. It led participants to work with equity at a superficial "initiative" level.

This chapter analyzes study findings through the tenets of Transformative Leadership Theory (Shields, 2011) and revisits literature that explored (a) the work of school leadership as creators of visions and positive school cultures, (b) instructional leadership for culturally responsive teaching, and (c) leadership as advocacy and activism. This discussion would not be complete without exploring the contexts of staff experiences of leadership values and practices, and considering the intervening factors that appeared to impact staff mindsets and the implementation of equitable and socially just practices.

While principals are often viewed as the most influential drivers of school vision, culture, and improvement (Fullan, 2003), other leadership roles can impact the work in schools (Berg, 2019; Leithwood et al., 2009). At CACP, there were opportunities for those in coaching and other leadership roles to support equitable practices. While effective pedagogical practices have a high degree of influence on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000a, 2000b), culturally responsive practices have the potential to shift educational outcomes for marginalized students (Gay, 2018; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Tenets One, Two, and Three: Themes One and Two

Janice is deeply committed to equity and social justice work. She is also a strong supporter of Black excellence and the district curriculum efforts around Black history, which resulted from her work with a group of Black female students. It was evident in conversations with her that the social and emotional well-being of her Black students weighed heavily. Her deep sense of responsibility and care for the physical and emotional safety of those in the building—students and staff—did not go unnoticed. Staff participants frequently expressed their appreciation for her dedication and funds to prioritize student social and emotional needs. Many participants understood her perspectives and valued her stories and experiences, but found the definitions and actions around equity limited support to Black students in a school whose student population was 58% Latinx.

Ongoing messages about Black students created mixed feelings for some and caused some non-Black staff of color to report that they could not recognize themselves in those messages. Further, these staff members also described daily interactions with students, notably male Latinx students, who felt their marginalized experiences were unrecognized. In this way, the leadership framing of equity and social justice as a Black/non-Black construct inadvertently fostered a lack of awareness for needs of other minoritized groups in the building. For LGBTQ+ staff and students, the construct created a misconception that they do not exist at CACP. These inaccurate and harmful erasures

by White staff need to be deconstructed and addressed directly so student identities can be seen and valued.

For students with an individualized education plan (IEP) or with social-emotional needs, there were references by staff that indicated these students were defined solely by their diagnoses or placements in supportive programming, which does not acknowledge intersections and complexity student identity. Such deficit-based expressions and the resulting descriptions of practices directly oppose transformative leadership efforts to promote equity and social justice (Shields, 2018. The principal must address these misconceptions directly to elimate deficit-based thinking about students before she can construct different knowledge frameworks that value student funds of knowledge (Velez-Ibanez, 1983). Further, the principal cannot address power imbalances or increase access and opportunity if there is no acknowledgment that those groups exist (Hollins & Torres-Guzman, 2005). Once there is a deconstruction of deficit-based knowledge frameworks, principals must follow up with clear and direct coaching to support access and opportunity on behalf of those groups (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Gay, 2015). Further, students should not be relegated to one-dimensional identities based on school labels which foster deficit mindsets about closing gaps and meeting needs defined only by standardized measures of academic achievement (Au, 2020).

Leadership values around equity and social justice were the intended drivers of the principal's messaging to begin the school year and in ongoing communication with administrative staff, particular service providers, and instructional coaches. In this way,

Janice set the tone for profound and equitable change by stating to staff her unwavering values and beliefs about the importance of equity and social justice work clearly and directly. Throughout the school year, she shared personal stories to connect with staff and personify the work. She openly spoke about her deep care and concern for the safety and futures of the students; staff participants reported this as well. However, some participants seemed to view the school as "her school," which connected to her identity as a Black woman but also her identity as the school leader. For some participants, their desire to support Janice conflicted with their need to advocate on behalf of other minoritized groups. For other participants, there was a lot of language about who was and was not part of ther administrative leadership team. Staff viewed these people as those closest to Janice, and therefore the only ones allowed to share ideas, elevate concerns, and push back when they felt conflicted. Some of this distance and disempowerment was evident in the intervening factors that surfaced in the axial coding phase. Participants described a "closeness" or "lack of access" to the principal and did not view themselves as part of the decision-making process; thus, they did not express their feelings about the focus on Black students. The result was that staff performed the tasks asked of them, but again, attitudes and mindsets were not changed and the surface-level actions rarely connected to teaching practices.

As the principal, Janice's practice was to encourage staff to see Black students through an asset-based mindset, recognize their potential, and consider how they show up as White staff serving in a diverse environment. However, what surfaced in many

participant comments was a misinterpretation of the principal's efforts to create relationships with students. Instead of an opportunity to connect, staff believed they were helping the poor, disadvantaged children by performing required acts of service. Further, staff viewed their "porch visits" as a way to understand how much less these families had when compared to themselves; this is the opposite of Janice's intention and reinforced what Shields (2020) refers to as an implication that "theirs [students'] is a kind of negative or lesser sub-culture" (p. 44).

Staff mindsets became about performing specific required tasks to overcome deficits related to perceptions of poverty, student trauma, and lack of family support—what Capper (2019) describes as, "charity not justice" (p. 59). Further, the tasks teachers performed were regarded similarly to other district initiatives that had come and gone over the years. Equity and social justice work was not approached differently, which led to many staff dismissing it as a checklist to complete (Oakes & Rogers, 2007). Staff understanding or acknowledgment of student funds of knowledge was not evident in the observations of professional development discussions or the participant interviews (Velez-Ibanez, 1983). Further, staff participants did not report specific changes to pedagogical approaches beyond personal relationships with some students or required communications with families; thus, the more profound shifts toward increasingly socially just mindsets and equitable practices were not evident.

Janice attempted to address student-staff power dynamics within the school by elevating Black student voices and community member voices at staff meetings and

during professional development. She also promoted the voices of her Black, female students at the district level and beyond, through the ongoing podcast presentations these students created. While some of the podcast content attempted to address broader issues of equity for other minoritized populations, there was not a pronounced focus on other marginalized groups in the building; and other marginalized groups did not produce their own podcasts. Staff interpretations of this indicated that this reinforced the idea that Black students were the focus of equity work at CACP. However, even within the focus on Black students, there was no discussion of how teachers could elevate student voices and choices in the classroom. The only participant who mentioned such shifts was receiving district-level coaching—a benefit the principal and her fellow teachers did not have. Thus, addressing and shifting power imbalances in the school was siloed.

While Janice approached conversations about equity and social justice directly in whole-staff settings as foundational facets of the school identity, another aspect of teacher mindset surfaced during conversations with White staff members. When staff spoke about students and families in broad and general terms, I probed about students' intersectional identities. In those exchanges, there was a lack of awareness that racial struggles were different from other types of struggles. The specific needs of diverse populations of students, the historical contexts of different people, and the intersectionality of student and staff identities were not discussed in participant interviews or book-study meetings. There was a general lack of awareness of how intersections of identity shaped experiences of minoritized students and staff. When

asked directly in follow-up questions about multiple identities, participants were unable to speak to those experiences. Students were referred to by staff participants and book-study participants by one label or another. This singular-identity issue aligned with reports from staff participants of color that they did not feel their identities shaped their work at CACP or equity conversations between staff of color and White staff.

Context and Intervening Factors

The context for most of the principal's direct messaging to staff for equity and social justice work was during whole-staff meetings. This was important because Janice's vision for the work was otherwise communicated during data meetings with different department leads, during observations with instructional coaches, or in meetings with administrative team members. Teaching staff members without additional responsibilities reported having no direct or consistent interactions with Janice about her vision for equity and social justice at the classroom level. While some staff reported having the autonomy to make their own equity-based decisions or to infuse social-justice instruction as part of their content, others were unsure what to do beyond making required phone calls, repeating verbiage emailed to them, or hanging photos of people of color on bulletin boards. Participants reported that conversations in data meetings were typically about math progress as a determiner for graduation, numbers of students failing required courses, and numbers of students on and off-track to graduate. Specific ideas about culturally responsive instruction and elevating student voice and choice to positively impact students' academic achievement or examining teaching practices through a critical

lens were not addressed in these meetings (Gay, 2018; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

It appeared that those who worked closely with the principal or were part of the teams with which she met for more direct discussions about equity and social justice were more aligned with her values about equity, but may not have been able to expand that alignment into coaching or support of others. Those with coaching responsibilities who reported directly to the principal spoke clearly of equity work as an essential factor in their daily work. They described relationship building with students and families as necessary for supporting students, instead of framing communicating with students' families as a directive. Those who were distanced from her in their daily work and not a part of the administrative team described almost being fearful of approaching her with ideas or described times they felt shut down, ignored, or dismissed.

In some of these exchanges, those in coaching roles reported that they would shift some messaging to make it more comfortable for teachers or more aligned with what they, as coaches, believed to be more critical areas of focus in the school. This may also have been because they felt uncomfortable as White staff messaging certain information about equitable practices to their White peers (DiAangelo, 2018; Earick, 2018), or because they lacked understanding of different cultural backgrounds (Hollins & Torres-Guzman, 2005). In this way, the distributed leadership may have interfered with the principal's intentions and prevented teachers from accomplishing goals that Janice set for the staff (Leithwood et al., 2009). These shifts by coaches and other administrators were

in opposition to the principal's desire for teachers to consider how their teaching and relationships with students impacted student engagement. As Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) observed, "more leadership actually detracts from clarity of purpose, sense of mission, sufficient certainty about what needs to be done to allow for productive action in the school and the like" (p. 61). As a result of different messaging, it was not clear how teachers were challenged to shift their mindsets about equity or adjust their pedagogy in the classroom. It was also unclear what impact the principal's values and practices could have had on these staff members, had the messages and discussion come directly from her.

Just as other leadership roles impacted individual coaching, it was interesting to note that in observations of professional development work, there were missed opportunities for those in leadership and coaching positions to expand the focus of equity work to include other minoritized groups of students. There were also missed opportunities to redirect negative or deficit-based comments and ways of labeling students. Further, those meetings were opportunities for those in leadership or facilitator roles to expand the notion of identity at CACP to include more robust understandings of intersectionality. Instead, those in leadership roles focused on agreement with the book-club text or types of data gathering to support the grant work. No one was observed challenging deficit-based ideas or misconceptions, stereotypes, redirecting staff to asset-based comments, or modeling person-first language. This is important because Janice prided herself on being in close contact with her leadership team to ensure alignment

around her equity values, and she was convinced her efforts created consistent messaging. She spoke clearly to times she addressed deficit mindsets about students with the whole staff and her attempts to model how she talks about students and equity work. Janice's work to create strong alignment between her values and her leadership team was an essential component of her practices, intended to disrupt biases and resistance to anti-racist work at CACP. She presumed that the administrative team shared her messages directly and consistently.

Tenets Four, Five, and Six: Theme Four

For a leader's values and practices to impact the implementation of equitable and socially just practices at a school, the expectations for practices and how they are implemented must be connected to specific equity outcomes for students. This must lead to students feeling "cared about and cared for and culturally responsive, engaging, and empowering learning opportunities in contexts that provide supportive relationships and community" (Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 137). Further, leaders need to be sure that staff understand the connections between the tasks they are asked to complete, and the potential impact on the students' futures and the communities they serve. Participants in the study often referred to tasks and directives about equity as part of the other initiatives they saw come and go in their careers. There was a willingness to comply, but the lack of understanding about the potential impact for students seemed to imply the tasks were stand-alone; and doing them, or not, had no consequences for staff or students. This aligns to what Oakes and Rogers (2006) noted about equity work that is framed

identically to other school initiatives. The equity work runs the risk of merely identifying problems, but never moves forward to impactful solutions because the deeper biases and negative assumptions about marginalized groups goes uninterrogated.

Staff participants shared lists of tasks they were required to complete. They referred to their book study as part of their work toward a more equitable school, but it was unclear to them how the book study would change their mindsets or biases and impact equitable practices. In essence, staff engaged with the text, but there was no critique of the text or the ideas proposed about grading, and no interrogation of their own pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). For example, the White staff with teaching duties mentioned that they displayed photos of people of color in their classrooms, but they did not describe how this would promote equity and social justice. There was also no discussion by White staff about how those tasks or directives would positively impact students, or the purpose of specific tasks as an essential component of their pedagogy as White teachers serving students of color (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Gay, 2015, 2018). Tasks described during staff interviews did not result in asset-based descriptions of students, the community, or detail the potential impact of such tasks on students as citizens in a democracy or more significant social-justice issues. However, teaching staff of color expressed frustration that hanging up pictures of famous Black leaders was not an effective way to compel White teachers to interrogate their own biases. They were displeased that White staff were not accountable for knowing the histories of the people they displayed, nor were

they asked to reach beyond frequently cited figures in Black history. In this way, hanging pictures of Black historical figures was a task many teachers could say they completed, but it did not meaningfully impact equitable and social-justice practices.

Participants discussed how initial communication about required tasks were messaged as part of the school identity as a place of equity and social justice, but then follow up and accountability for instructional work ocurred only intermittently, if at all. Participants who felt they complied with task requests were frustrated because there was no follow-up or consistency around the expectations as ongoing work within the school. There was no sense that ongoing, deep work around teaching practices was expected, consistent, or revisited to calibrate what it meant to be equitable and socially just in an equity-based organization.

There was an intentional focus by the principal on social justice as part of the design work to implement project-based learning and infuse student presentations with a social-justice focus. Janice described her desire to impact students beyond the classroom and realize their potential as people who could implement change in their communities. Her overarching goal was described this way:

> A lot of times, in our culture, we are raised to believe that once your are grown or once you receive an education, that you should move out of your community. That's how you know that you have made it. Truly, what we should do is teach our students how to thrive in the communities that they are in. If you continue to move out of the communities, then you are taking your knowledge, your

> education, your wealth, your dollars out of your community, which means your community will never grow and prosper. And, if we teach our students the opposite, to learn to love your community and to stay within your community and thrive in your community, then you bring your knowledge, your dollars, and your education back into your community.

However, participants who described these efforts viewed them as one of the directives to make sure students completed a project related to equity and social justice. These descriptions of the social-justice projects were focused on the presentations to invite the community into the school. Still, they did not address the potential for the work to change student perspectives about their impact on their communities or beyond. When asked about their principal's communication about the purpose of education, all staff participants mentioned the idea of creating a safe place for students and being like a family; these were more school-related ideas. Janice's values about a larger purpose for education to develop critical thinkers and people who remain in their communities to contribute to democracy were not acknowledged.

The professional development book-study was part of a grant-driven effort to measure grade shifts with a more equitable approach to grading student work. During the two observations of those meetings, discussions were about the logistics of implementing such a program and interfacing with district technology. The questions (Appendix G) in the book study were posed but not answered through the conversations by staff who admitted they had not completed the reading. The book-study sessions did not involve a

deeper interrogation of biases, teaching practices, relationships with students, or culturally responsive teaching and assessment.

Another example of a task for staff to increase awareness and build community was Janice's expectation for staff to conduct porch visits to start the year. She sought to foster connections between students and teachers, and for staff to see students of color and their families in ways that would construct new appreciations for others. By contrast, participants discussed these interactions as part of an assigned list of directives and shared details about how students lived as compared to themselves. Participant descriptions did not indicate a belief that students held valuable funds of knowledge or that students were supported by families who cared about their education and post-secondary success. Instead, staff descriptions included the absence of parents, caretaking of other siblings, and how some students worked at jobs. Descriptions were not presented through a positive lens of parents working to support their families, the importance of sibling bonds, or the positive impact of teenage employment, for example. Instead, staff participants described these interactions as forms of "trauma" and indicators they were serving poor students who needed support. Participants who engaged in these porch visits did not describe any next steps beyond having completed the visits to fulfillt the principal's expectations.

Some deficit-based staff mindsets about the community seemed reinforced by the donations and giveaways the principal led at different times. Some participants described these tasks as things the school did to support the community and referred to students as

"coming from trauma." However, the specific trauma was never described, and the term was used alongside descriptions of poverty, students who cared for siblings, or students who held jobs while enrolled in school, which felt more like value judgments. They did not demonstrate an appreciation for the funds of knowledge and the navigational capital of the students (Gonzalez et al., 1993; Velez-Ibanez, 1983).

Additional requirements to send postcards, make phone calls, and participate in different community donation events and giveaways were also described as tasks to complete. The benefits of such exchanges were not described. When probed about the potential of the positive phone calls home to increase the connections between teachers and families, some teachers commented that they did not have time to give compliments. They felt pressured by coaches or members of the administrative team to message whether students were failing classes. This seemed to contrast Janice's desire for teachers to know students deeply, develop an appreciation for their backgrounds, and connect to their families.

Context and Intervening Factors

The contexts participants described when they expressed a lack of buy-in or follow up to equity work occurred during observation feedback meetings, building walks observing teachers, and during professional development. Teacher participants claimed there were certain parts of their observation protocol that would incorporate a focus on equity. Still, they reported that work was related only to students receiving English language support. They did not feel there was a focus on other marginalized groups.

Coaches and other administrators described lists of things they looked for, like the consistency of entry and exit from the room, systems, and structures that supported control of students through classroom management, and making sure students could predict expectations from one room to another. These descriptions did not target specific pedagogical practices or mindsets about equity and social justice. During the professional development book study, there were conversations about the expectations to implement the grading practices and the expected implementation timeline. Still, there was not an exploration of bias or discussion of culturally relevant pedagogy.

The intervening factors for theme four were the length of time in education and the staff racial and linguisict identities. Teachers who had been in education long enough to experience multiple initiatives in different schools did not express any resistance to other tasks, and did not express a deep investment in the equity and social justice work at CACP to impact students. When probed about the potential for strong family relationships as a part of equity and social justice in schools, one participant replied, "This is just like everything else. Initiatives come and go. This too shall pass." However, teachers and coaches with non-White racial identities did not express such comments. Instead, staff participants of color reported that the initiative-type work was not having a profound impact on student engagement and academic outcomes. These staff also expressed ways they were resisting assigned tasks and intentionally deepening equity work independently, by redesigning the tasks to be more culturally and linguistically relevant. One coach described how she pushed for more rigorous instruction and high

expectations for every child instead of focusing on pictures on walls or some of the other checklists during observations. In her mind, lists of things were not as powerful as rigorous instruction coupled with high classroom expectations.

Tenets Seven and Eight: Themes Three and Five

In this study, two strong themes emerged that impacted the implementation of equitable and socially just practices in classrooms. Both themes were grounded in ideas of White privilege (Allen, 1967; Solomona et al., 2005; Sullivan, 2019). The context of most messaging occurred during whole group meetings, team meetings, and during professional development. Messaged were communicated by various coaches and assistant principals which inhibited the development of a shared sense of moral purpose about robust shifts across the school (Fullan, 2003). This interfered with the ability of marginalized staff to feel empowered by their lived experiences in support of equity work.

It was clear that Janice had a great deal of professional dedication and the moral courage to set a vision to address equity and social justice issues at CACP. She described courageous and direct conversations with different administrative team members. Those conversations were infused with empathy and understanding of where various people were in their experience of equity work. In this way, Janice communicated the idea that there was much work to do at CACP. She was hopeful the staff could make the necessary shifts to embody a more equitable and inclusive approach to education, but she did not clearly define the steps to increase equity, build out social justice initiatives, or indicate

the expected impact on students. She also did not take into account how bias about different students and groups would inhibit the work (Shields, 2020). Staff participants of color expressed frustration with the pace of equity work at CACP, and the lack of a coherent design that held people responsible for their work and impact on students.

In the observations of professional development and whole staff meetings, White staff did not acknowledge their own biases or explore ways to de-center their White perspectives. Staff in different content areas whose district supports led work in this area did this with their larger district teams, but not all staff participants had such groups or supports. Participants who held coaching responsibilities and envisioned more inclusive approaches to equity work reported a lack of accountability to increase the quality of instruction and build authentic, asset-based relationships with students of color, which are thought to be "our most powerful lever to change the trajectories for children's lives" (Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 135). This aligned with what some staff participants described, then they spoke about checklists teachers followed to "do equity," and staff texting each other with photos of people of color to put on classroom walls. It seemed as if the White staff was trusted to self-interrogate and reflect on their own. This is problematic because we cannot know what we do not know. White people must also be accountable to recognize that their Whiteness, which has always been accepted as the norm, should not be the norm and that acting from this space influences our mindsets and actions. Whiteness cannot continue to be accepted as the norm. As Eddo-Lodge (2017) wrote:

> Neutral is White. The default is White. Because we are born into an already written script that tells us what to expect from strangers due to their skin colour, accents, and social status, the whole of humanity is coded as White. Blackness, however, is considered the "other" and therefore to be suspected. Those who are coded as a threat in our collective representation of humanity are not White (p. 85).

As I listened to the book-study sessions, there seemed to be no direct discussion about how privileged mindsets informed their assignment creation or the development of rubrics to determine how students progressed in their mastery of grade-level standards. There was no exploration of how White teachers' perspectives of race, special education status, or linguistic status informed their ideas about student capabilities. Instead, more than half of the White staff in the book study admitted they had not done the reading, but still dominated conversations in both sessions. In this way, their lack of effort to do the work and the resulting discussion felt like outright avoidance of deeper discussions. Such resistance to more profound equity work was similar to what DiAngelo (2018) described:

> I could see the power of the belief that only bad people were racist, as well as how individualism allowed white people to exempt themselves from the forces of socialization. I could see how we are taught to think about racism only as discrete acts committed by individual people, rather than as a complex, interconnected system. I realized that we see ourselves as entitled to, and deserving of, more than people of color deserve; I saw our investment in a system that serves us. I also saw how hard we worked to deny all this and how defensive we became when these dynamics were named. (pp. 3–4)

While no one was observed being overtly defensive in any of the settings for this study, some participants were yet protecting the status quo. Each White staff member carefully detailed all of the tasks they completed, how they agreed with the book topic, and believed equity as a concept was essential to the school's identity. Only two participants

discussed ways they were shifting their prior thinking or expanding their ideas about equity and social justice. Participants worked with district teams to explore ways to increase student voice and de-centralize White perspectives in curriculum, texts, and pedagogy. They brought this work back into their classrooms but without similar efforts across all content areas this work cannot be brought to scale. By shifting the coaching efforts to concrete tasks with the materials and training to directly impact teaching and materials, there could be a more immediate impact on students.

Taking her Black female students to the district and elsewhere to support more accurate and Black-centered conversations about Black history was one the ways Janice exercised moral courage on behalf of her Black students. She spoke openly with staff about the need to do better for Black students and grounded her discussions in her own identity. She also prioritized funding for social and emotional supports and hired Black female and Latina social-emotional support staff whose racial identities aligned with those of some of the students. However, there was no mention of the social and emotional needs of male students, or a plan to provide similar staff for students from other marginalized groups.

For a principal to support the shifts necessary to implement new knowledge frameworks and hold everyone responsible for the systemic changes required to increase access and opportunity for every student, there must be clear, direct, consistent, and uncomfortable conversations with those who enjoy privilege and power throughout the organization. These conversations cannot occur only between the school leader and

distributed leadership roles; and they cannot be limited to whole-staff meetings. All members must be encouraged and supported to engage in these discussions, and marginalized staff members should not be "tone policed," wherein the topic of conversation shifts from authentic and charged discourse about racism to a focus on volume, passion, and tone of message delivery (Martin, 2018). Staff of color reported feeling scrutinized under the guise of professionalism or politics when they brought the passion of their lived experiences to the conversations in their authentic voices. Further, staff of color who spoke up to support various marginalized groups described experiences with White staff who shut them down and, in some instances, lectured them for having been upset, loud, or unprofessional in their exchanges. They felt frustrated that they could not increase social justice because their attempts were reframed or disregarded. Transformative leaders must guard against this, so privilege is not reified. White staff members must not be empowered to shift the focus of conversation to a more comfortable space by distorting the focus ***(DiAngelo, 2018)***; instead, White staff members must be expected to explore their own biases and consider the perspectives of others. All staff and students should be empowered by their lived experiences to use their voices, passion, and volume. Further, staff of color must include other marginalized populations in the equity work, so that all marginalized groups within the organization benefit from the work to increase access and opportunity.

Participant comments indicated that different tasks, the book study, and required communications with families were not leading White staff to a more extensive

understanding of the potential impact of more responsive pedagogy and the importance of antiracist work in schools. In my observations and conversations with staff participants, I found an absence of discussion about students with IEPs, and the false notion that no students or staff identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community. We cannot shift our perceptions and practices at our most basic level if we do not acknowledge and discuss that people exist. We cannot balance critique with promise if we cannot commit to doing the more profound work around equity and social justice.

Recommendations

The research question for this case study asked: In what ways, if at all, does a school principal's values and practices align with Shields' Transformative Leadership Theory (2011) to support the implementation of equitable and socially just practices in the school? Some of Janice's values and practices were aligned to portions of the eight tenets. However, much of her work with staff and students extended from her personal experiences as a Black woman, which shaped her messaging and her focus. Further, the implementation and support of equity initiatives was delegated to coaches and assistant principals, which inhibited message consistency and did not further define the steps to increase equity. While Janice expressed a desire for her work with Black female students to extend to other identities, there was no clear plan to accomplish this. It would be highly challenging for any leader to fully align at all times to every tenet of the framework; yet, there are clear opportunities to revise and build on current work to

increase the alignment with the tenets and improve the educational experiences of students.

The following recommendations emerged from the findings to strengthen the leader's alignment to the Transformative Leadership framework to impact the equity and social-justice work at CACP, by refining what is already started; elevating other marginalized voices across the organization; and increasing the moral-courage capacity of all teaching and coaching staff, especially those from marginalized backgrounds who can disrupt and expand ideas about what content should be delivered to students.

Refinement of Current Work

As the school leader at CACP, Janice was deeply dedicated to the physical safety of all students and was aware of actions in and around the community that threatened the physical wellbeing of students. Further, she knew that local violence threatened the social and emotional wellbeing of students, so she took immediate actions to secure the building and keep students connected to mental-health supports. She expressed the desire to build a robust equity and social-justice identity for the school and set the mandate for equity on behalf of Black students. She challenged existing knowledge frameworks about Black history at the district level to build a deeper and more culturally responsive understanding of the Black student and family population at her school. Her efforts to support her Black female students were grounded in the importance of growing their social identities as marginalized citizens in a democratic society. She elevated the voices and centered the experiences of Black students at her school, while the population comprised over 58%

Latinx students. While Janice expressed a desire to incorporate the voices and experiences of students from other marginalized groups, the work had not materialized in impactful ways. The conversations she encouraged coaches and assistant principals to have with staff were interrupted by their own work with graduation data and inhibited by the inability to facilitate deep equity-related conversations. Further, beyond conversations about the importance of the work, there was no clear definition for what the work would look like for staff or how it might impact students.

Distributed leadership is an ongoing and necessary practice in many schools (Leithwood et al., 2009), given myriad demands on school leaders. However, equity and social-justice efforts are too important to delegate to teachers or peer coaches entirely. There is deep reflective work to do in exploring biases, and there must be clear and sequential steps toward achieving a common goal. Furthermore, we cannot expect staff to build their capacity alone—especially when the people in those roles are White and working in a school where most students are from marginalized backgrounds.

One recommendation is for Janice to observe and participate more often in work conducted by those with distributed leadership and coaching responsibilities. An additional support for Janice could be a coach to provide feedback on her work with staff. By providing meta-coaching on leadership coaching practices, Janice could ensure clear, consistent, and timely messaging of each component of the vision for the work, clarify her intentions, and provide concrete examples of what teachers should do at the pedagogical level. As Ramanathan (2002) observed:

> Meta-awareness is a heightened awareness of how their thinking evolves as they are being socialized into their disciplines because you cannot, after all, address problems in your existing condition unless you have reflected on them and recognized your own participation in this condition. (p. 2)

This would allow Janice to construct a clear connection for teachers between the initiatives and tasks related to equity and social justice work, and elevate the potential positive impact for all students and families. This is an opportunity for her to continue to challenge deficit-based mindsets about the marginalized students in her school, explore her own biases, and push beyond surface-level work. These efforts could extend beyond what Freire (1997) terms, "vague phrases" (p. 93), to model equity leadership and moral courage, address imbalances of power for students and staff, and fulfill an essential component in the work of transformative leaders (Blackmore, 2006; Shields, 2011).

Additional coaching with teachers and members of the administrative and coaching teams could increase the continuity of messaging and support the ability for these roles to grow their moral courage and ability to directly engage in ways that challenge all staff—including the principal—to explore their biases. This meta-coaching approach could enable Janice and the staff to develop a more cohesive shared vision over time (Senge, 1990), and build consistency and clarity around equity and social justice.

The second area of refinement involves timely and consistent alignment with equitable-pedagogical practices. Many participants noted that initiatives around teaching and the classroom environment started strong and dissipated quickly. This led to apathy and inconsistency, and created a disconnect between stated directives and the potential

positive impacts on students. Observing the work happening in classrooms could create opportunities to elevate bright spots within the community, and effective classroom practices might be shared. Spreading this knowledge throughout the building could increase the flow of more responsive practices across the grade levels. The school leader could then be part of those conversations to witness positive and responsive pedagogy, and offer direct coaching of teachers and meta-coaching of the extended administrative team.

Elevating All Voices

The second recommendation is related making all identities visible in the school community, both students and staff, as drivers of the design of equity and social justice work. Transformative leadership involves equity for all members of the organization and cannot be focused on one marginalized group (Shields, 2010). Further, while staff viewed their leader as an authentic representative of lived experiences around equity work, the limitations of a Black/non-Black binary were challenging to those from other marginalized identities. Expanding conversations beyond Black students to encompass diverse identities in the building, including staff voices, and distributing the work beyond the predominantly White administrative team could allow diverse members of the teaching, coaching, and administrative team with intersectional identities to share their knowledge. Distributing work across the diverse identities listed on the website means no student groups should be left blank and "under construction" again. All student and staff groups could be represented, and students could enjoy the social-emotional and academic

benefits of role models with whom they could relate (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Milner & Howard, 2004). The principal could more directly impact teachers' daily work to be responsive and inclusive (Gaetane & Cumings Mansfield, 2013; Williams & Noguera, 2010).

By including and elevating all marginalized identities and intersectionalities, there is greater opportunity to connect people to components of the work where their experiences and identities best contribute. Further, if the principal sets the mandate to increase equity for all members of the school population, there is an acknowledgment of the existence of multiple, diverse identities and a foundation from which to build awareness of the historical contexts of different groups. With the diversity of staff elevated, equity and social-justice work could be messaged and shaped beyond the principal's identity and experiences, and all staff and students might feel empowered and valued.

By elevating the voices and including all marginalized identities in work, staff cannot insist they have no work to do around other marginalizing factors because they do not believe those identities are present in the organization. This work can intersect with district equity training currently provided for some content areas to broaden their work to support Janice with meta-coaching as she coaches those leading book studies and other professional development in real-time, so all staff was consistently responsible for determining their next steps regarding the applications of their new learning. Doing this type of meta-coaching support would provide Janice and staff with robust opportunities

to interrogate potentially deficit-based assumptions that ultimately impact student achievement (Dee, 2005).

Moral Courage for All

It is essential to grow the capacity of all members of the school community to realize the moral purpose of equity and social-justice work through acts of moral courage (Fullan, 2003). Leaders and teachers must also take an active stance to interrogate how their own biases, values, and backgrounds impact their practices (Gay, 2018). While Janice currently advocates on behalf of Black students, there is an opportunity to fully realize the idea of moral courage to expand her definitions of equity on behalf of all members of the school. She is able to engage in conversations on behalf of Black students; now, she must grow the capacity to engage in conversations on behalf of all identities in the school. This overlaps with the concept of elevating others' voices. The principal could support those leading different equity and social justice work components by entrusting them to communicate their lived experiences to authentically de-center White experiences while disrupting the binary of Black/non-black. This requires first interrogating her own biases, then building her own moral courage to advocate on behalf of all students and staff in the school and supporting their authentic voices as she has for her Black female students.

While Janice grounds her staff in the importance of equity and social justice work through her own identity as a woman of color, she can elevate other staff identities as powerful models for the students and the White staff. Further, by inviting the insights and

experiences of those who serve students with exceptionalities and language development needs, Janice can leverage staff expertise and content knowledge to provide robust insights into intersecting student identities. This grows the collective understanding about oppression from the very people engaged in the work, and whose identities can add a rich layer of lived experience. Providing the space and time to engage in reflective, vulnerable, and potentially uncomfortable conversations might also support White staff to see the tendrils of oppression reaching from multiple marginalizing factors. This could deepen staff understanding of ways hegemonic practices and White-dominant pedagogical practices impact students of color (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

For Janice, this means fostering trust among the staff and providing opportunities for all voices to be included in the equity work by discouraging disengagement. It means refusing to shut down uncomfortable conversations about race, gender, religion, socioeconomics, or any other aspect of student or staff identity. A new norm, where all staff members, including the principal, consider the work yet to do around racial equity and social justice would make it impossible for checklists to replace deeper equity and social-justice work. Further, staff cannot continue to equate all marginalizing experiences with racial experiences (DiAngelo, 2018), limiting conversations and inhibiting deep equity work on behalf of all marginalized groups.

School leaders are in a challenging political position to adjust messages and ensure the wording of exchanges does not alienate others. Still, those exchanges must hold enough substance to shift long-held beliefs and practices to foster a more culturally

responsive school environment (Shields, 2011). It is important that others in the organization grow these skills themselves, and do not feel compelled to downplay their own identities or forms of expression because the audience is resistant. Further, it is equally important that those who struggle with concepts of equity and social justice work develop those skills. Those in positions of leadership and authority are well-positioned to model reflective practices, make real-time observations, and support equity and social justice initiatives (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; McKenzie et al., 2006). A willingness to stick with hard conversations and difficult self-reflection is essential to disrupt historically marginalizing practices in schools.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

One limitation of this work was interviewing teachers during a pandemic. Many staff expressed overwhelm and exhausted during this time, which could have impacted how they felt about education, teaching remotely, the school leader, or students. Since there is no way to fully explore the impact of this historical stressor on schools, there is no way to discern to what degree their responses were impacted by distanced and remote work environments. There is also no way to gauge how the distance affected coaching conversations, professional development, and staff interactions, including principal messages.

Another limitation of the study was the number and diversity of participants who volunteered to participate. This may have been impacted by the school email asking staff to email the principal to participate. Instead of reaching out directly to me to connect

about participation, staff members were instructed to email the principal. Those who did participate expressed concerns about sharing anything unfavorable. A majority of the participants were White, female, and monolingual. No one identified by margins other than race, ethnicity, or linguistic status. It would be beneficial to hear from more staff who identify as LGBTQ+ community members, gender non-binary, linguistically diverse, disabled, or who had once been served by an IEP themselves. These experiences could add a more robust understanding of perceptions of marginalized staff.

A significant limitation of the study was the inability to observe instruction in the classroom setting. Covid-19 safety protocols did not allow for in-person learning during the research period, and it did not feel appropriate to observe teachers and students during such an impactful event. Based on my own teaching and leading experiences during this period, I determined that I would likely not have an authentic understanding of any teacher's pedagogical practices while they were also trying to determine how to teach remotely. I would also not likely have a genuine sense of students' learning experiences during this stressful time.

Opportunities for Further Study and Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate

This study analyzed one school in a large, urban district in the Rocky Mountain West. It did not examine how the district influenced equity and social justice work. Districts are positioned to operate in social and political contexts that were not considered

for this work. Further study could include ways district initiatives and priorities influence equity and social-justice work in schools. CACP serves students in grades 6–12. The present study did not explore leader experiences in elementary schools. The equity and social-justice practices of elementary school leaders may vary remarkably from those in the upper grades, where students might express their ideas about race, gender, and other parts of their identities more openly or be better able to articulate their experiences. There could be a benefit to comparing the leadership approaches to equity and social justice work in other schools to elevate innovative approaches and examine transformative leadership through all years of K–12 schooling.

Another essential component of this work was the identity of the school leader, who was both Black and female. This study did not examine the historical constructs of race and gender and how those intersections impact the Black-female leadership work (Capper, 2019) in schools. Janice works in a political position as a school leader who must support a community and work within a larger district construct. White leaders are a majority in her district. Advocacy and activism on behalf of marginalized populations of students, while commendable, is a considerable risk for a female of color. While there is more awareness of White privilege, Janice's faces the added intersection of gender and race—as a woman of color in a position of authority (DiAngelo, 2018). It could be highly beneficial to explore inherent risks to women of color who advocate for minoritized students. Further, it would be valuable to note how districts support, or do not, the advocacy and activism of leaders of color in different districts throughout the country.

It would be beneficial to explore connections between a leader's values and practices, and how they impact the instruction. During this study, in-person learning was not possible; however, in future studies, interviewing participants might provide insight into how leadership values and practices shape teacher mindsets. By comparison, their actual teaching practices could provide rich data about implementation.

Finally, the work in this study could begin the conversation about how to expand concepts of distributed leadership to examine distributed equity and social justice leadership in schools. This could support the work of White leaders with little or no experience living in the margins, who may not have explored equity leadership in their preparation programs. This is not to suggest that school leaders find various people of color, gender identity, disability, and linguistic backgrounds to do the equity work in their schools. Instead, it suggests multiple individuals with diverse knowledge, skills, and experiences should inform the work and support staff with deep, intentional, and meaningful shifts that deconstruct knowledge frameworks that disempower and marginalize others.

When we consider the CPED components of this work and the ways leaders can prioritize and sustain equity and social justice work in schools during VUCA times, we must first acknowledge that much of the work of school leaders operates within varying degrees of uncertainty (Shields, 2011) at all times. The pandemic's impact on schools in the past two years is undoubtedly an extreme case of uncertainty and constant change. Still, the way we prioritize and sustain equity and social-justice work in schools is, in

part, aligned to what Janice has consistently elevated to her staff about the importance of building solid relationships. It is “the teacher’s pedagogic and interpersonal skills which pupils find influential in engaging and motivating them to work hard and learn” (Carrington et al., 2007). If those skills were not centered on White values, perceptions, and interpretations, and if all marginalized voices across the organization were elevated and supported in schools' equity and social justice work, we might genuinely transform the educational experiences of every student in our schools.

To this end, the study and ongoing conversations with the school leader have informed the creation of a website: publicschoolleadership.com. The site addresses one of the central issues for teachers and school leaders whose racial identities differ from the students and communities they serve. However, understanding different perspectives and engaging in learning about identities and experiences that are not centered on Whiteness are an essential part of leadership work focused on equity and social justice in public schools. The site hosts a blog and shares a variety of resources that highlight both the importance of equity and social-justice leadership and materials that directly address experiences from diverse perspectives. The blog welcomes others in the community to share their ideas and experiences, so that we can actively support one another in building more transformative leadership approaches to the work we do in public schools.

Conclusion

School leaders who wish to increase equity and social justice in schools must incorporate all identities—including school staff—into this work. Leaders who come

from marginalized backgrounds must be careful that leveraging their own experiences and identities does not limit their ability to advocate on behalf of all members of the organization. While our own stories can be compelling and relevant to our own motivation for engaging in such work, we must guard against the inclination to narrow the work in favor of our own comfort level. When we narrow the focus to elevate some voices and experiences, but do not elevate all marginalized identities, we inadvertently model values and practices that perpetuate the very marginalization we seek to disrupt.

As leaders seek to increase equity and social justice in schools, we must expand the work to include all identities, grow our own moral courage to support those identities, and commit to growing the moral courage of all students and staff. Doing this allows leaders to leverage the diverse experiences in the school to inform the work, shape the vision, and define clearly the steps needed to achieve equity and social justice goals. Every student and staff member deserves the opportunity to fully develop into the individuals they are capable of becoming, without marginalization and disempowering limits, and with a strong sense that who they are is important, valued, and essential to their local, national, and global communities.

Post-Study Planning

At the completion of the study, I shared research themes and recommendations with Janice, the principal of CACP. We discussed emergent topics and worked collaboratively to strategize how findings might inform and advance equity and social-

justice work at CACP. The conversation led us to discuss how our work together could impact other school leaders and identify helpful resources for equity work.

The themes in the present research offered Janice new insights into school efforts. Importantly, the study revealed a critical disconnect between the equity and inclusion she sought, and staff interpretations of the work. Janice believed she elevated the voices and social justice projects of Black students, as a way to model an equity and social-justice commitment to the community. However, she had not realized that Latinx staff and students did not see themselves reflected in the district design of equity work to which she had contributed. Furthermore, she found the sentiment that there were *no* LGBTQ+ staff or students at CACP in direct opposition to her own values and perceptions. She was surprised and unsettled that the intersections of her identity did not properly communicate her value of all students to staff. We discussed the need to deconstruct some of the ideas, values, misconceptions, and biases her staff held about students and families before she could build new knowledge frameworks. With a goal of using the present study to improve equity and social-justice efforts at CACP, Janice and I collaborated on how to start the next year differently.

The first change we identified was to cancel the summer sessions of the book-study professional development. If staff were not reading or engaging meaningfully with book content, pedagogy would not shift. Further, if staff really held these views about students and families or the various intersectionalities of identity at the school, there was a lot of unpacking to do. Specifically, staff needed to share their current mindsets and

engage in open and direct discussions about what they believed. Until they confronted these ideas and Janice deconstructed staff beliefs, she could not expect book studies and professional development to positively impact pedagogy. Instead, Janice asked the outside facilitator to engage administrative staff as participants. In order to create new knowledge frameworks, administrative staff must cultivate their understanding and comfort with the content. In addition, any future book discussions should begin with an inventory of current understanding and beliefs. Janice could not simply assume that staff held asset-based mindsets and embraced new ideas. To enhance the work and augment change at the classroom level, we agreed that CACP staff needed to begin with a shift in how they speak about all groups of students, families, and the larger community. It seemed simple, but we acknowledged how we cannot speak about groups we have not learned about; part of that work means exploring our own biases. Acknowledging where she might hold biases, too, is an important part of her work as the principal.

In an effort to explore her own biases, our next topic concerned meta-coaching. When Janice heard that administrative staff were not intervening in negative discussions, holding staff responsible, or modeling asset-based thinking, she planned a targeted intervention. Janice reorganized her coaching calendar to prioritize times with her administrative team and coaches to observe and provide feedback. She also acknowledged a need for additional time with her own equity coach. Here, we also discussed the need to expand staff access to her. Participants perceived barriers that kept

them from sharing their own ideas with her, or pushing back on her approach to equity work at the school.

Janice's identity and lived experience had long been a driver of her values and practices as a school leader. However, she realized she needed to grow and evolve her approach to equity work. She reflected that social justice work at CACP needed to move beyond Black histories and experiences to include other marginalized identities. To address this issue, Janice intended to explicitly include and amplify other marginalized voices, eschewing the Black/non-Black construct she had fostered. Further, by enlisting support of other staff whose identities are different than her own, Janice intends to grow her own knowledge and awareness. To this end, Janice reached out to a former colleague whose identity could support and strengthen her perspective. An important next step here will be to include teachers and students in more discussions about identity and equity. For teachers, this might lessen some of the hierarchies and inner-circle dynamics they perceive between the administrative and coaching staff and those in the classroom.

Finally, Janice explored ways she hoped professional development could manifest in pedagogical practices. I shared that before this could happen, there needed to be deep reflection and new norms established for whole-group and team meetings. There had to be acknowledgement of the richness of others' experiences, passions, frustrations, and biases without shutting down uncomfortable discussions. This meant direct and uncomfortable conversations about privilege, and a need to remain committed to understanding one another. Additionally, this work had to start with her. The

conversations to directly address deficit-based mindsets and a lack of understanding about different marginalized groups had to begin with Janice exercising her own moral courage to engage in such conversations. Further, she had to shift perceptions of power and authority throughout the building, so that all staff were empowered to engage in such discussions and hold one another responsible for the mindsets and beliefs about the intersectionalities of staff, student, and family identities.

As a Black female leader, the idea of pushing hard on White staff was frightening for Janice to consider. While she was not afraid of vulnerability, she was worried about her job. Asking White staff to hold space for deep reflection and self-interrogation in ways that might be uncomfortable did not bother her in practice because she has previously told people that the school was not a good fit for them. However, engaging in broader conversations about other identities felt like a high level of exposure for her as a Black leader. We brainstormed how she might address and prepare staff for such conversations and model the necessary risk-taking. Janice agreed that staff could not deepen their equity and social-justice work without some risk. She intends to model the courage it takes to sustain this work. Further, she acknowledged that she cannot truly be engaged in equity and social justice work if she does not have direct and meaningful discussions on behalf of all identities in the building.

As we wrapped up the conversation, Janice acknowledged she could not change everything in one school year. However, we realized that in order for her to truly begin the work to align with the tenets of Transformative Leadership (Shields, 2011), she

needed to first identify the knowledge frameworks she wished to dismantle, then build the new knowledge strategically and in steps throughout the building. This approach would ensure that student experiences were positively impacted and that equity work could not be dismissed as just another initiative. This could begin with work to identify a baseline for where staff currently are in relationship to the tenets of the Transformative Leadership Framework (Shields, 2020), which would support more intentional focus in areas of highest need. Given the feedback from staff participants, she could start with a focus on deepening staff care and connection to students to create classroom environments where students feel they belong. As Shields (2020) acknowledges, "No new program or pedagogical strategy will succeed over the long term until or unless this kind of safe learning environment is in place" (p. 4). As this work has shown, this would include staff as well.

All staff and students at CACP will benefit from having their identities acknowledged, included, and valued. CACP can no longer elevate Black experiences and histories alone, assuming it will transfer to other minoritized groups. Instead, students and staff from varied backgrounds in the school community need dedicated time and space to contribute their authentic selves to conversations, professional development, action steps, and to the design of the social-justice projects. By allowing the marginalized voices of her school to speak for themselves, and by imploring White staff to acknowledge and embrace these shifts, Janice will build moral courage across her organization and disrupt marginalizing education experiences for every student.

Finally, there must be a shift away from the current ideas about social justice as actions outside of the daily teaching and learning and the projects students create, to an intentional focus on culturally responsive pedagogy that includes data analysis beyond test scores and moves toward larger democratic ideals (Shields, 2020) that de-center White perspectives. Currently, at CACP, there is a lot of documentation and analysis of standardized test results, gaps between different groups of students, algebra scores, and graduation rates at CACP, but discussions about these data are not shifting how teachers teach and what or how students learn. Instead, they seem to reinforce deficit-based mindsets about students. Further, these exercises take hours but generate little action, and ultimately do little to increase equity (Oakes & Rogers, 2006).

At this time, staff have autonomy to do much of this thinking and work alone, and to one participant's point, "are trusted to just reflect and change on their own" but before staff can truly understand their own biases and how those biases show up in their teaching and relationships with students whose racial identities are different from their own, there has to be some accountability to this reflection. Janice acknowledged that she has often trusted her assistant principals and coaches to do this. Now that she knows this is not happening, and there are other hierarchical aspects at play, she plans to be more directly involved in meeting with teachers to reinforce the idea that everyone holds biases, but until they explore them together they cannot begin to dismantle them. Further, she now realizes these biases are not solely racial. Her involvement will be an important

next step as Janice seeks to build a more reflective and culturally responsive staff that meets the needs of every child.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide for Staff Participants

1. In what ways do your principal's values influence the practices here?

   Probe: on your specific personal practices

2. What does your principal communicate about the purpose of education?

   Probe: How is this communicated?

3. How do you know what the most important priorities are at your school?
4. What leadership expectations most impact your daily practices?
5. How does your principal support your work around equity?
6. How does your principal support your work around social justice?

   Probe: In what ways are you empowered to speak up or act?

7. How is staff accountable to issues of social justice in this school?

   Probe: Data meetings, PLCs?

   Probe: Planning and differentiation?

   Probe: Observations and Evaluations?

   Probe: Advocacy, activism, support of the community?

8. Describe what is expected of you to build relationships with students and families.
9. How do your practices shift when there are unpredictable and challenging times like the ones we have seen with Covid-19 or Black Lives Matter?

Appendix B

Interview Guide for Leadership

1. Tell me a little bit about your leadership style.
2. What do you believe to be your most important priorities as a school leader?
3. What are some specific ways you align your values with your leadership actions?
4. What do you believe to be the purpose of education?
5. How do you communicate this purpose to the staff of your school?

    Probe: What are some actions you take with toward fulfilling that purpose?
6. Describe your relationship with the community.

    Probe: .4 As a leader, how do you develop the relationships between the school and the community?
7. What does your leadership look like for teachers who are different than their students?
8. Describe a typical staff pd session?

    Probe: Focus? Or Who designs? Or Who leads?
9. How does your staff know what you expect from them with regard to equity?
10. Describe a time you encountered misalignment between your leadership vision and values and teachers' work with students and families?
11. Describe a time when you had to advocate for your students?
12. How has Covid-19 influenced your leadership work?

13. How has the Black Lives Matter movement influenced your leadership work?

    Probe: How do your leadership priorities shift when there are unpredictable times like these?

Appendix C

University of Denver Consent Form for Participation in Research

Title of Research Study: Leading for Equity and Social Justice: Exploring Transformative Leadership in an Urban School

Researcher(s): Susan-Marie Farmen, M.Ed., University of Denver; Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Kristina Hesbol, Associate Professor, University of Denver

Study Site: College and Career Preparation 6-12 School, Rocky Mountain West

Purpose

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to better understand how the values and practices of school principals influence the application of equitable and socially just practices in their schools. You are being asked to be in this study because you are a teacher/leader in a school included in the study. Your experiences teaching in your school bring valuable insights to this work from the teacher/leader perspectives.

Procedures

If you participate in this research study, you will be invited to participate in interviews about your school and your school's leadership, share your reflections about your work, your peers, your students, your community, and issues of equity and social justice. You will be a source for fact checking anything recorded that you share and on-site observation notes that include you. You will be able to participate in interviews about your work or in a focus group about your work. The duration of your participation would be approximately one month total with one interview not to exceed 1 ½ hours. Time spent with the researcher would be scheduled to best fit your needs in date, time, setting, and duration. Any additional fact checking outside of scheduled interviews would be scheduled with you to best fit your needs.

Voluntary Participation

Participating in this research study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose to answer or not to answer any specific interview question or refrain from discussing certain aspects of your work. You may also decide at a later time that a response you provided should not be included in this work and ask that it be removed. Upon request to remove or discard any comments, the researcher will remove or discard those comments. You reserve the right to change your mind about the inclusion of your responses at any time, for any reason without penalty or other benefits to which you are entitled.

Risks or Discomforts

The researcher has taken steps to minimize the risks of this study. Even so, as a participant, you might still experience some discomforts related to feelings that may be evoked from questions being asked in the interview or as you share your ideas, insights, or reflect on your experiences. The study may include other risks that are unknown at this time. If, however, you feel embarrassed, stressed, upset, or uncomfortable at any time to answer a question, you may

decline to answer the question or end the interview. You may also choose to withdraw from the study. There will be no penalty, no negative consequences, and no removal of other benefits to which you are entitled if you decline to answer any question, end the interview, or withdraw from the study.

Potential risks and/or discomforts of participation may include sharing aspects of your work that could change a perception of you, your school, your peers, or your students, embarrassment, stress, a loss of privacy, a loss of some personal time given for participation up to that time. There are also risks inherent to sharing thoughts, ideas, reflections, or ideology that does not align with one's employer, a direct supervisor, or school district leadership.

Benefits
Possible benefits of participation include sharing aspects of your work that lead to more socially just and equitable outcomes for students, sharing aspects of your work that can positively shape the practices of school leaders and teachers to create positive outcomes for students in the community, district, and state. Other benefits include being able to reflect about your educational values, struggles, joys, and triumphs with someone outside of your organization. You may also influence new approaches to teaching and learning in diverse communities, educational equity, and culturally responsive practices with your unique perspectives as an educator. You may also gain allies in this work in order to grow your own impact and increase your instructional capacity.

Incentives to participate
You will receive a small honorarium in the form of a small gift or gift card not to exceed $20 in value as an expression of gratitude for your participation in this study and at the conclusion of the study. Should you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, you will still receive such a gift or gift card as an appreciation for your time invested in the study. You will not be compensated with money at any time for participating in this research project.

Alternatives The alternative to being in this study is to not participate.

Confidentiality
The researcher will make every effort to keep your information private and to keep your information safe throughout this study. Your individual identity will be kept private when information is presented or published about this study. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in the reports that might be published. The name of the district will also be kept confidential. You may choose a pseudonym for yourself, the school, and the district. Once the original data is transcribed, and the study is completed, the data will be destroyed. Any and all voice or image recordings of interviews, meetings, or focus groups will be conducted only with prior consent and used for the purposes of the study. Any information gathered during these interviews, meetings, or focus groups will be used for educational purposes only. Information about you will kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law. Research records will be stored securely on a password-protected device, and only Susan-Marie Farmen, the primary investigator, and Dr. Kristina Hesbol, Associate Professor, will have access to any information. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the University of Denver Human Subjects Protection Program may access your record to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly. Furthermore, should any information contained in this study be subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. The research information may be shared with federal agencies or local committees

who are responsible for protecting research participants including individuals on behalf of the University of Denver.

Questions

If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions now or contact Susan-Marie Farmen at (303) 999-8973 and by email at sam.farmen@du.edu or smfarmen@gmail.com. You may also reach Dr. Kristina Hesbol at Kristina.Hesbol@du.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the DU Human Research Protections Program by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researchers.

Appendix D

Recruitment Flyer for the Study

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP & PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Principal Investigator: Susan-Marie Farmen

The purpose of this study is to explore school leadership values and practices that impact equitable and socially just practices in public schools.

To participate in this study, you must:

- Be a current staff member at a participating school.
- Be 18 years of age or older.

Participation in the study involves participation in one Focus Group lasting 1.5 hours to answer questions about equity and social justice in the school. You will receive a gift card at the completion of the study in an amount not to exceed $20 per person.

Contact Information:

To learn more about this study, please contact:

Principal Investigator: Susan-Marie Farmen
303.999.8973 sam.farmen@du.edu

Faculty Sponsor: Kristina Hesbol, Ph.D.
Kristina.hesbol@du.edu

UNIVERSITY of DENVER

Appendix E

Staff Participant Pseudonyms, Identifying Factors, and Responsibilities

Pseudonym	Main Role	Racial Identity	Gender Identity	Additional Leadership Responsibilities
Joe	**Teacher**	**White**	**Female**	**Yes**
Chris	**Instr. Coach**	**White**	**Female**	**Yes**
Pat	**Teacher**	**Latina**	**Female**	**No**
Susan	**Teacher**	**White**	**Female**	**Yes**
Selene	**Teacher**	**Black**	**Female**	**Yes**
Brock	**Teacher**	**White**	**Male**	**No**
Betty	**Support**	**Mixed Race**	**Female**	**Yes**
Alicia	**Support**	**White**	**Female**	**Yes**
Shenae	**Teacher**	**White**	**Female**	**Yes**

Appendix F

Professional Development Book Study Protocol at CACP

Virtual Norms

A. Mute your microphone
B. Keep video on when feasible
C. Use the chat function to ask questions & share comments

Community Agreements and Acknowledgements

A. This is a safe space in which you will be heard and empowered to ask questions. Yet, this will also be a brave space where you will be pushed to engage in equity conversations that are grounded in mutual respect.
B. We are going to be discussing our values as they pertain to our instructional practices. It will be important to recognize that our practices could possibly be wrong and definitely incomplete.
C. Institutional racism exists in our building.
D. Our policies and practices need to continue to evolve to be in line with our vision of equity.

Recommendation(s):

1. I recommend and encourage you all to keep a journal during the reading of this book and during conversations. Write down the questions or thoughts you have to not only maintain engagement but also help process the content of the text and discussion.

Today's Goals (Part III: Equitable Grading Practices, 7-10)

A. Grapple with two pillars of equitable grading practices:
a. Accurate - Our grading must use calculations that are mathematically sound, easy to understand and correctly describe a student's level of academic performance.
b. Bias-Resistant - Grades should be based on valid evidence of a student's content knowledge, and not based on evidence that is likely to be corrupted by a teacher's implicit bias or reflect a student's environment.

Take 3 minutes to address the following question(s):

1. Over the course of the last few chapters, we not only learned about two of the three pillars of equitable grading but we learned about the grading practices that accompany them. These practices can be found below. Take the next few minutes to identify and explain, in the table below, which big idea of each category is resonating with you the most.

Accurate	Bias-Resistant
Avoiding Zeros	Grades based on required content, not extra credit
Minimum Grading	Grades based on student work, not the timing of work
0-4 Scale	Alternative (non-grade) consequences for cheating
Weighting more recent performance	Excluding participation and effort
Grades based on an individual's achievement, not the group's	Grades based entirely on summative assessments, not formative assessments (such as HW)

Chapters 7-10 Questions

1. Consider and discuss the following:
    1. "I've moved away from thinking of grading as a carrot or stick. Grades should be a mirror."
2. How easy should it be for a student to be able to calculate their own grade? How could we use a student's own grade as an opportunity to teach mathematical principles of median, mean, mode, scale, and percentages, and thereby empower students to be more critical consumers of statistics?
3. Thoughts and reactions to summative assessment only based grades?

Closing:

- How do the 2 pillars of equitable grading that we have read about and discussed align with your values as a teacher? As a former/current student?

Appendix G

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the "family" I created for myself over the years, near and far, who consist of those who fostered me, those who befriended me, and those who held me together-mind, body, and soul at times and through difficulties no child should endure, through pain and fear that over time carved a deep chasm, which is now the space where I hold joy, empathy, compassion, and unyielding determination. And to all foster children who left behind something bad in hopes of something better. It is out here, come join me.

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.

—Kahlil Gibran