TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING TOWARD

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

by

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APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

One of the greatest challenges our society faces is how to transform a fundamentally inequitable educational system. The societal inequities marginalized groups witness and experience on a daily basis are magnified by hegemonic educational policies and practices which produce, reproduce, and reinforce the concepts of white privilege. Developing transformative leaders is crucial given educational leadership is considered second only to teaching as an influence on students' learning.

This qualitative study examined the personal and professional growth of eight administrators and described the process by which these adults learn, internalized what they learn, and put their new knowledge into practice through socially just action within their schools and departments. The targeted professional development employed the tenets of critical race theory and principles of transformative leadership development as key elements toward addressing educational inequities. The study provided insight into the lived experiences of educational leaders and explored their development of critical consciousness and how they utilized a lens of equity to effect personal and systemic change.

The study grounded in critical race theory, transformational adult learning, and social justice leadership development revealed administrators who participated in ongoing, equity centered, professional development, shared similar experiences as adult learners and educational leaders in their professional roles. The results strongly suggest the impact this professional development had on their beliefs and behavior was significant. These developing transformative leaders found the professional development to be relevant and urgent work resulting in the implementation of systemic change to varying degrees.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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To my research assistant, Sho Shigeoka, you were my eyes and ears during the interviews and for that I am forever grateful. I thank the courageous administrators who participated in my study for taking time out of their busy lives to share their story as developing leaders for social justice. I owe a debt of gratitude to the Hatfield School District for allowing me to conduct my research and to my colleagues for supporting my personal and professional growth throughout the process. A special thanks to my Cohort 6 family for their relentless encouragement over the past four years.

Finally, this accomplishment would not have been possible without the unconditional love and support of my family and friends. Most importantly, to my loving partner Jenny Lassen, who has always believed in me and has made countless sacrifices over the years so that I could pursue my doctorate. Thank you!

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory of my father, Houchang Haghighi-Khouchkhou. His wisdom, guidance and unconditional love have made me the person I am today.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The beginnings of critical thinking are frequently seen in people perceiving a contradiction between how the world is supposed to work and their own experiences of reality.

– Stephen Brookfield, 1991

The hallways of Freedom High School are plastered with makeshift signs created with butcher paper and bright colored markers that read, "Come Celebrate Diversity Week." Underneath in smaller print are the names of foods available for purchase during lunchtime from local vendors. Each day during this week-long celebration a "diverse" culture will be highlighted through food and the end of the week it will culminate with a school-wide assembly about anti-bullying, sponsored by two student leadership groups, *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Atzlan* (MEChA) and Gay Straight Alliance (GSA). Some may say this is a noble effort on the part of students, staff and the administration to embrace different cultures and address issues of tolerance and student safety.

Yet at second glance, this school is no different than any other traditional comprehensive school in the district, state, or nation. Leading up to the school-wide diversity week celebration and shortly thereafter student leadership groups participated in many other school-wide events. The only difference being, the students who participated in organizing and sponsoring the customary school events as well as those being recognized at these events did not look or sound like the students who participated in the diversity week celebration. Students who take part in the traditional daily school activities are for the most part white middle class students.

One may argue this observation is irrelevant and, regardless of the type of activity whether a diversity assembly or school pep assembly, these events are just a minuscule part of a student's overall educational experience. Although there may be some truth to this statement, the fact is, students of color are not represented at pep assemblies, school organized sports, and band or drama productions as white students are. These extra-curricular experiences provide students with an enriched educational experience which students of color are being excluded from. Furthermore, upon reviewing high-level core curriculum course schedules at the high school level, it is evident that students of color have faced similar exclusionary experiences. There are a disproportionate number of white students versus students of color enrolled in high-level challenging course work. This phenomenon is coincidentally mirrored in other areas within the lived educational frames of reference students of color have experienced over the years, with the exception of discipline and push out rates. Students of color have been and continue to be confronted with deficit based stereotypes and placed in underserving circumstances that perpetuate inequitable outcomes. Quantz, Rogers, and Dantley (1991) affirmed that schools are a reflection of and tend to perpetuate greater societal inequities that recognize and value certain cultures over others.

Without the buy-in or approval of principals, the likelihood school activities such as the daily events characterizing the school's culture, or professional development and leadership for teachers, will reflect progressive, proactive equity strategies is minimal. The leadership of a principal is typically reflected as a product of lived experiences. The willingness of a principal to call attention to and address issues of inequities speaks to their courageous leadership therefore, a collective representation of these educational leaders has an impact on how policies are interpreted and implemented across an educational system. Too often, educators have viewed students of color as coming to them with deficits due to their language, culture or socio-economic status (Delpit, 1995; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Valenzuela, 1999; Wilson, Douglas, & Nganga, 2013). Instead of acknowledging and celebrating the "funds of knowledge" students of color and their families bring to education (Moll, Amanti & Neff, 1992), some educators tend to view these differences from a deficit perspective. For them it is not about what students bring into the class or school that matters, but instead what they lack based on an educator's white Eurocentric frame of how things ought to be. Furthermore, most educators intentionally or unintentionally use deficit discourse when addressing historically marginalized students and their abilities to perform academically. For example, from their white cultural lens, educators may refer to students of color as being high risk and/or having low skills, and therefore needing to be placed in intervention classes (Delpit, 1995; McKenzie as cited in Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999).

Social systems are the way they are because the people who have control within that system either want it that way or cannot envision it differently. Meadows and Wright (2008) characterized a system as a set of things which she defined as people, cells, or molecules, interrelated in such a way they produced their own pattern of behavior over time. Essentially, a system consists of elements that interconnect for a specific purpose, and while some individuals wish to change the system so everyone benefits (Heifetz, 1994), there are others who intentionally or unintentionally gain from a socially unjust system that may not support change because they are restricted by their mental models and/or fear that with change will come loss of power and privilege.

Statement of the Problem

One of the greatest challenges our society has faced in the past and continues to face today is how to deconstruct and transform an educational system fundamentally inequitable to historically marginalized groups. Race, gender, class, disability, and sexual orientation are factors linked to the achievement gap, access to high-quality curricular and extracurricular programs, disproportionate discipline, and family engagement (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Marshall & Ward, 2004; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). The societal inequities marginalized groups witness and experience are magnified by hegemonic educational policies and practices which produce, reproduce, and reinforce the concepts of white privilege. Developing leaders for equity is crucial given educational leadership is considered second only to teaching as an influence on students' learning (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

The power dynamics within education have played a major role in determining policies and parameters, and in limiting access for students of color and other nondominant populations to programs within the system. Whether intentional or not, the decisions made by educational leaders have prevented these groups of students from receiving a complete and equitable education comparable to their white counterparts. One in which schools have resources and students have access to a challenging curriculum coupled with the academic and emotional supports they need to be successful. Children, families, teachers, and communities need and deserve principals who will prevent inequities from occurring in their schools (Marshall, 2004).

Leaders for social justice who take part in this transformational experience can bring about change within the fabric of their organizations. They approach their work through a critical lens and in doing so create solutions to systemic problems that have long produced inequities for marginalized student populations (Marshall & Oliva, 2010).

Social Justice Defined

Bell (1997), Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002), Marshall and Ward (2004), Dantley and Tillman (2006), Lalas and Morgan (2006), Theoharis (2007), and McKenzie et al. (2008) have all described the term social justice as it pertains to reversing inequities currently existing for historically marginalized student populations within education. For the purpose of my study, I have chosen to adapt Theoharis' (2007) description of social justice. In doing so, I understand socially just educational leadership to be focused on policies and practices with a direct and indirect impact on the lived experiences of historically marginalized students. Educational leaders who put social justice at the center of their practice are willing to address, confront, and eliminate inequities that place students at a disadvantage because of deficit characterizations linked to their race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and/or disability.

Although there is a growing movement toward creating more socially just schools, Byrne-Jimenez and Orr (2013) have the belief that educational leaders remain challenged with understanding and therefore adequately addressing the relationship between inequitable educational systems and disparities in student achievement. To accomplish this, leaders must probe deeper and ask themselves four questions; social justice for whom, social justice by whom, social justice how, and social justice for what otherwise, the disparities will persist and continue to reproduce inequities.

At the core of promoting and practicing socially just leadership is the belief that engaging in critical reflection and discourse about race and other marginalized groups is an essential component in the quest toward exposing the underlying causes and consequences of the racial disparities in education (Brown, 2004b; Dantley, 2005; McKenzie et al., 2008; Scanlan, 2013). Furthermore, this form of leadership requires the practices of leaders in education to utilize a lens of equity to create change, to remove barriers for non-dominant students, and to ensure equitable outcomes (i.e., outcomes non-predictable by race, ethnicity, SES, gender, or disability).

Traditional training for educational leadership reflects a culture that has marginalized issues and concerns of social justice (Theoharis, 2009). Marginalization of social justice concerns not only affects those with unequal social, educational, and professional capital because they are poor, immigrants, female, gay, or different in race, abilities, ethnicity, religion, language, or culture, but also limits the voices of allies within educational leadership who would confront issues of inequity and injustice in our field. Theoharis (2007, 2008b, 2009) has conducted research on the key characteristics of effective principal leadership which include an advancement toward social justice in schools, the resistance experienced by principals of color in social justice work, and the strategies and techniques employed to care for self in light of the resistance to this work. Other researchers have studied multiple aspects of social justice leadership, but none with a purpose to gain insight into the lived experiences of educational leaders who are participating in targeted professional development focused on equity and social justice. Proponents of leadership for social justice have emphasized the critical role school administrators play in promoting and pledging the academic success of all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, age, language, religion, or socioeconomic status (Brown, 2004b; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Marshall & Oliva, 2010; McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2007). Additionally, school leadership programs at the university level are confronted with the challenge of preparing future educational leaders with the skills necessary to confront inequities existing in education today.

Amidst the ongoing discussions regarding the purpose of social justice, Byrne-Jimenez and Orr (2013) argued social justice leadership should ultimately include attaining equitable access, outcomes, and conditions. Each of these in isolation is insufficient and will fall short in creating equitable schools. School districts are increasingly in pursuit of future administrative leaders who understand and are willing to challenge inequitable educational systems by assuming an activist role and creating change in practices and policies that are in the best interest of students (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). Still, most educational leadership training places limited focus on understanding the inequities of our society and on preparing principals to engage in equity or social justice work (Brown, 2004a; Marshall, 2004).

Ironically, the burden of proof around whether inequities in education exist and are to blame for the unacceptable academic results perpetuated by educational institutions has long been placed on the shoulders of a small number of educational leaders for social justice, who address, advocate, and promote a socially just educational system to meet the needs of all students. At the same time no such demand for proving otherwise is made of traditional leaders who have invested time and energy in maintaining the status quo (Theoharis, 2010). Furthermore, according to Parker and Villalpando (2007) the knowledge base for educational administration has traditionally adhered to a narrow view of leadership theory by placing emphasis on management above all other components. That knowledge base is being challenged by research and policy demands for leading and structuring schools that create more socially just societal outcomes.

In a review of published work from research on preparing social justice leaders conducted over a 10-year span beginning in 2000, Bryne-Jimenez and Orr (2013) revealed that the focus on professional development around leadership for social justice and equity albeit growing, is fairly new and not prevalent in educational institutions across the nation. Furthermore, most educational leadership preparation programs are inadequate in preparing educational leaders to identify, challenge, and undo racial inequities in schools (Wilson et al., 2013). While school leaders are expected to engage in critical reflection, discourse, and analysis of systems that have perpetuated educational inequities in schools, the development of such skills has been absent in leadership preparation programs (Marshall, 2004). My research examined the relationship between ongoing professional development focused on equity among administrators from one school district and how the learning of these leaders was or was not reflected in their practice.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined the personal and professional growth of educational leaders toward socially just practice and described the process by which adults who participated in equity focused professional development learned, internalized what they learned, and put their new knowledge into practice through action within their schools and departments. The purpose of this study was to explore how educational leaders described their development of critical consciousness about issues of social justice in education and how they utilized a lens of equity to effect systemic change. This study also examined the importance of professional development and how a change is needed to adequately address social justice preparation for administrators.

Research Questions

The following questions shaped this research study:

1. How do educational leaders describe their experience and learning process within equity focused professional development?
2. What impact, if any, has professional development made on educational leaders beliefs and behaviors toward creating equitable educational systems for historically marginalized students?
3. If educational leaders have changed, how do they describe the change process, the barriers, and the supports for change?
4. Why have some educational leaders been able to develop further in their understanding of socially just leadership and/or effect more change than other leaders?

Context of the Study

For the purpose of this study, pseudonyms were used for district and individuals' names. This research took place within a school district located near a large urban center in the Pacific Northwest. The Hatfield School District consists of slightly more than 20,000 students with the following demographic breakdown of the major ethnic groups: 52% white, 34% Hispanic, 8% multiracial, and 6% Asian.

Demographic trends in the nation over the past 10 years demonstrate an overall increase in the general population and even larger growth among the Latino population. The United States Census Bureau (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2010) reported an increase of 27.3 million people from 2000 to 2010. While significant, the increase does not compare to the growth reported among Latinos in the U.S. during the same time frame from 35.3 million to 50.5 million, an increase of 43%. More than half the growth in the total population of the United States was due to the increase in the Latino population. Additionally, the population in the state of Oregon grew from 3,421,399 in 2000 to 3,831,074 in 2010 reflecting an increase of 409,675 people or 12%, and similarly, the Latino population grew by 8% over that same period. Lastly, both the county and the city where this study occurred demonstrate a significant Latino presence with a reported 15.7% and 22.6% population respectively.

This school district is one of the largest in the state with 25 elementary schools, four middle schools and four high schools. Coupled with an ever growing and diversified student population and a lack of awareness and understanding about diverse cultures comes the growing need to address issues of equity. The school district implemented a comprehensive equity plan as part of the overall strategic plan. The objective was to understand the current educational system, uncover areas that produce inequities for culturally and linguistically diverse students and families, and create systems of accountability to address the inequities. For approximately two years the district worked extensively to provide equity and social justice leadership professional development for administrators and teacher leaders. These leadership institutes were comprised of a series of eight all-day workshops designed to foster the exploration of the impact of race on student learning and investigate the role that racism plays in institutionalized academic achievement disparities. The school district has dedicated time, energy, and resources toward this professional development model.

The complexity of equity work lends itself to uncertainty and resistance. People are reluctant to discuss race and even more reluctant to share their own thoughts, feelings, and/or personal beliefs about the issue of race and racism. The district put forth multiple opportunities for professional development and implemented various practices and programs including, but not limited to, creating opportunities for structured and continuous dialogue about this topic.

I have chosen to situate this study within the discussion of how an educational leader becomes an educational leader for social justice. My objective here is to draw from the lived experiences and shared stories of colleagues to better inform our own leadership and recalibrate the lens we utilize to make decisions.

Significance of the Study

Related bodies of existing literature regarding leadership for social justice as it pertains to the experiences of educational leaders in their attempt to address social justice issues have been limited (Brown, 2004b; Kose, 2009; Lalas & Morgan, 2006; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Theoharis, 2010). The current body of research identifies “resistance” from the district, colleagues, and the community as a reoccurring theme administrative leaders for social justice incessantly confront (Marshall & Oliva, 2010; McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2010).

The significance of this study is paramount because districts across the nation are dedicating vast resources to provide targeted professional development focused on equity and social justice. The Hatfield School District has chosen to use a multi-tiered approach for delivering professional development to administrators over the past two years. This study can serve as a means of demonstrating how educational leaders have responded to the professional development model and utilized the knowledge and skills acquired to create change around access and opportunity of non-dominant student populations resulting in equitable outcomes. I have found no real evidence demonstrating the impact of these programs for changing leader behavior, yet many districts in the state are implementing similar social justice leadership development models.

This study offers a concrete framework for the praxis of social justice leadership. I anticipate this study will serve as a catalyst to gain a greater awareness of the process by which educational leaders experience, internalize, and express their learning around issues of social justice. Additionally, this study may encourage further research into the lived experiences of educational leaders who participate in social justice leadership development, and how they utilize new found knowledge and skills to address and eliminate the systemic barriers that prevent marginalized students from realizing their full academic potential. At the same time, the research may provide a greater understanding about the barriers that exist when leaders are engaged in this work and, as a result, why some individuals do not advance in their equity practice on a personal or professional level.

Furthermore, this study may provide school districts with a better understanding of how and when to implement professional development focused on equity and social justice. Is the best time to do so when teacher become administrators or should the work begin earlier on? Up until now districts have relied on readily available programs being implemented in neighboring school districts with little evidence of impact to the participants nor the system overall. Additionally, change has occurred slowly and with much resistance. This study may provide insight way of accelerating the change process while minimizing the barriers to change. The notion for many educational leaders is that something is better than nothing, but over the years districts have invested financial and human resources in this work without questioning the content of the training or its level of effectiveness on different groups of educators. The goal of social justice education according to Bell (2005) is for individuals to develop a set of critical analytical tools that are essential in order to comprehend oppression, and furthermore, their role within oppressive systems. Additionally, from this new sense of self, emerges a charge to develop a sense of urgency to confront, combat, and ultimately change internal oppressive patterns and behaviors as well as institutional ones.

Conceptual Framework

Steering this study is a conceptual framework supported by literature on transformative educational leadership development for social justice. In their examination into transformative leadership development, Wilson et al. (2013) offered a number of measures educational leaders can take to promote an asset-based approach to transformative educational leadership. Among them, the leader's willingness to critically reflect on how culture, ethnicity and race impacts the experiences of students and families along with their commitment toward developing cultural awareness about the educational community they serve.

I approach this work from the perspective of an educational leader who has participated in multiple equity focused professional development opportunities over the course of my career. Increasingly, school districts are turning to external organizations and consulting firms for assistance with providing professional development to staff around areas of equity. I am a strong proponent of the critical reflection and discourse that emerge from these workshops because they allow me and other educators to openly address the issue of race and racism and the role we play in perpetuating the inequities in schools. These are foundational components of developing social justice leaders (McKenzie et al., 2008).

Furthermore, I have chosen to construct a conceptual framework around social justice leadership development rooted in the five tenets of critical race theory, relevant leadership theory, theories of adult learning, and change theory, as a foundation to facilitate the progression of educational leaders toward culturally proficient leadership for social justice. Educational leaders who are able to utilize a social justice lens throughout all aspects of their leadership have demonstrated what Theoharis (2010) has the belief is a moral commitment to creating inclusive and supportive schools.

Additionally, individual and systemic factors may impact growth around social justice leadership development. Senge (2000) has the belief that behind each pattern of behavior is a systemic structure, a set of unrelated factors interacting with each other. These structures reveal the point of greatest leverage, meaning the places where the least amount of effort provides the greatest degree of change. These are not necessarily the points of highest authority in an organization, but instead they are the places deeply rooted networks of cause-and-effect are most prone to influence. Senge (2006) emphasized resistance to change almost always emerges from internal and external fears threatening traditional norms and ways of doing things. Often these norms are part of the fabric of recognized power structures and relationships.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework guiding this research study. The diagram visually depicts the internal process for administrators as they participate in equity focused professional development. The large arrow at the bottom right of the diagram represents input in the form of targeted professional development and initiates the professional and personal growth process for the participating administrators. At the core of the work are the different stages of development illustrated by three interlocking mechanisms continuously in motion. The movement of the wheel and cog is driven by the five stages of critical learning. The arrow at the top right of the diagram represents the output of the entire learning and growth process, which is characterized by equitable systemic change. Lastly, the words Individual and System flank the diagram and symbolize the resistance and external pressures these administrators encounter as they navigate between their own personal and professional growth and respond to opposing external influences.

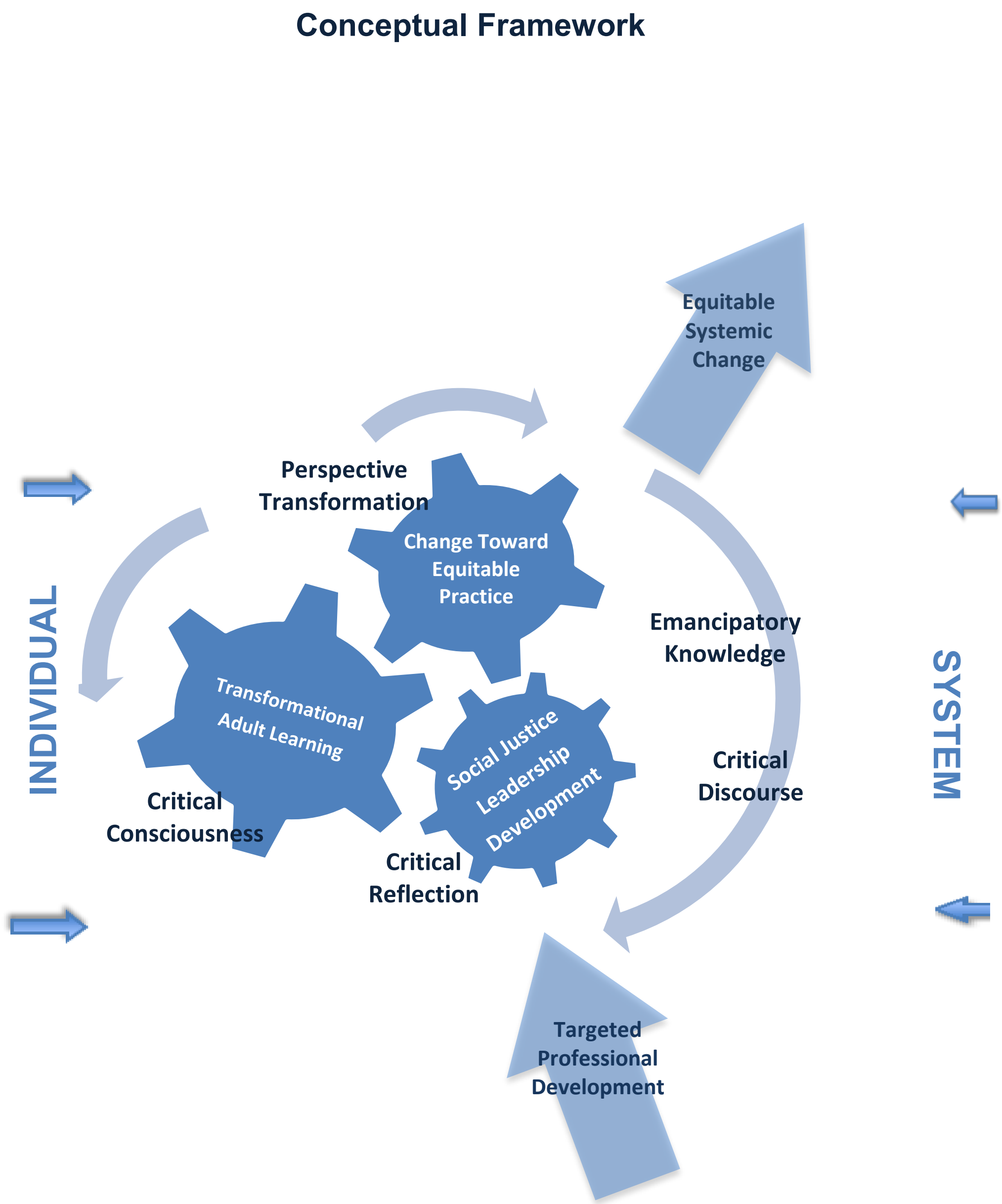

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

I believe our moral imperative as educational leaders is to recognize and remove the destructive factors that have in the past and continue to disenfranchise our most vulnerable and underserved student populations. The urgency surrounding this issue and the future of these children is evident. Educational leaders must begin to deconstruct, redistribute, and reconstruct an educational system that believes and demonstrates the reality that all students can, should, and will learn. Currently, the United States educational system does not adequately meet the needs of historically marginalized student populations. Therefore, in order to authentically address educational inequities, leaders must assess their school system and determine if the allocation of resources, policies, and practices is serving all students equitably.

Limitations

The following are potential limitations of the study:

1. The perceptions of the selected participants are subjective and may not encompass the perceptions of all educational administrative leaders within the Hatfield School District.

2. The interview questions may not similarly translate to each participant, thus participants may answer the questions from a different interpretation.

3. The reliance on memory and the recollection of past events, conversations and actions.

4. The final limitation of the study is my position as both the researcher and an educational administrative leader. Working full-time as a district level administrator, I have an insider's perspective regarding educational leadership practices and beliefs, and therefore, participant responses might be different if a non-practitioner conducted this research.

In conclusion, social justice leadership necessitates a critical awareness about issues of inequities in education and the determination to create change toward inclusive practices and equitable opportunities for traditionally marginalized student populations. Leaders for social justice not only transform educational systems to better meet the needs of historically marginalized student populations but they transform a community by offering a counter story to longstanding misconceptions about race and intelligence. Social justice leaders challenge the long held racial stereotypes and by creating a paradigm shift in others, lay the foundation for establishing a new norm. In continuation, I provide a review and analysis of the literature that supports this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

When leadership efforts fail to systematically address issues of inequity, specifically those related to race, racism and power, and to uncover the remnants of white privilege, liberal or progressive efforts benefit those in power.

– Theoharis and Haddix, 2011

This review of the literature examines the research related to three theoretical concepts selected to address the need for an equitable school system in which all students, but in particular non-dominant populations, are provided opportunities and access to an equitable education. Gutierrez and Jaramillo (2006) defined equity as intentionally providing critical resources necessary to support students with the greatest need thereby affording equitable educational outcomes. Critical race theory, adult learning theory, and leadership theory provide a structure and the parameters for this study. Figure 2 depicts the theoretical framework used to shape the study, which examines the personal and professional growth of educational leaders toward social justice leadership development and action.

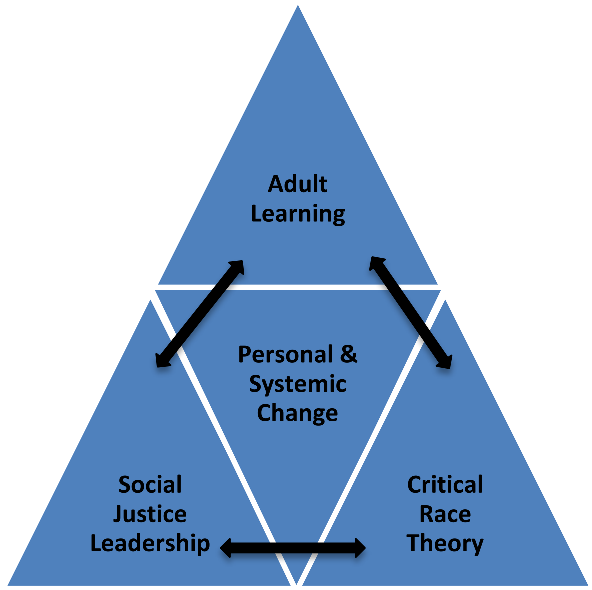

Figure 2. Theoretical framework.

I proceed to develop an argument for why these three concepts are instrumental in creating sustainable systemic change toward equitable outcomes within an educational organization. The tenets of Critical Race Theory are foundational to not only the core beliefs of these organizations but to varying degrees, are embedded in the curriculum and presented as the framework toward addressing institutionalize racism. Scheurich and Skrla (2003) described leaders for social justice as those individuals who link the concepts of excellence and equity by stating equity is nonexistent unless students of color and students from poverty are afforded a high quality education, equivalent or better than afforded their white affluent peers. The foundation of socially just leadership surfaced from the seminal work of scholars and activists who investigated the relationship between race and power to better understand the role of racism for the purpose of eventually eradicating it. Racism is one of the most impactful social problems of our times, and has single-handedly contaminated and defined social institutions and the interactions occurring within those institutions for more than 100 years (Dubois, 1989). Critical Race Theory combined with Adult Learning Theory and Social Justice Leadership Theory is essential components toward an effective professional development model for educational leaders. While Critical Race Theory establishes key concepts which serve as the underpinning of explaining the existence and permanence of racism in society, Adult Learning Theory and Social Justice Leadership Theory provide a structure by which individuals can engage transformational learning through critical reflection and discourse which should ultimately lead to transformative leadership exhibited through creating systemic change that produce equitable outcomes for underrepresented population.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory emerged from multiple areas including law, sociology, ethnic studies, and women's studies. Critical race theory originally surfaced from the work of the Critical Legal Studies movement. Scholars such as Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman believed the established legal system produced unfair political and social structures preventing any form of change from occurring without first addressing the issue of race and racism. At the core of critical race theory is the notion racism is deeply embedded in American society and subsequently in public education; therefore, racism comes across and is viewed as normal and acceptable by most individuals (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Similarly, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued race is a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States. Further, they point out despite the fact both class and gender intersect race, these two components alone cannot adequately explain the differences in achievement and success rates between students of color and white students.

Three underlying beliefs ground critical race theory: racism is persistent; racism is permanent; and racism must be confronted (Bell, 1997; Delgado & Stefancic 1997; Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995). First, racism is an elaborate system that shapes and characterizes institutions and how they function. Next, racism adjusts to sociocultural variations over time by adjusting and adapting, but never diminishing in strength or vanishing. Lastly, society must confront the inequities that exist because by not doing so, we essentially are passively perpetuating racism and surrendering to the status quo mentality of whites who benefit from inequities endured by people of color who have been historically marginalized.

One way of confronting inequities is by addressing racism and specifically questioning the colorblind response to issues of racism. Steinberg and Kincheloe (1997) reminded us being colorblind is a hegemonic practice only white people have the luxury of believing. Hegemony as the process whereby ideas, structures, and actions come to be seen by the majority of people as wholly natural, preordained, and working for their own good, when in fact they are constructed and transmitted by powerful minority interests to protect the status quo that serves these interests so well (Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971). Hegemony consists of the reproduction of oppression through adherence to subjective, biased, and taken for granted perceptions of reality that perpetuate current inequity. Shields (2004) asserted colorblindness perpetuates a situation in which educators ignore the color and culture of students and families. If educators remain silent about our differences and about lived experiences of oppression, then, in effect, we pretend everyone is the same. We are ignoring differences that may lead to deeper and richer relationships and an increased understanding about others and ourselves. Silence about color and culture gives the white dominant group permission to maintain the status quo in the school and greater community.

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) described the basic tenets of critical race theory to be first, the permanence of racism, which acknowledges racism exists and that most people of color have had a racialized experience. The second tenet is the critique of liberalism, where the idea of striving for diversity as opposed to equity essentially overlooks the fundamental problem surrounding racism and strengthens the permanence of racism in society. The third tenet is interest convergence, where apparent remedies to racial issues benefit the dominant group as well as those being oppressed. The fourth tenet is counter storytelling where people of color no longer must remain silent. These courageous individuals are able to share their stories with everyone, including their oppressors. The final tenet, whiteness as property, adheres to the idea race is a social construction, and therefore emerged from an intricate mental process where skin color and other physical traits are associated with intelligence. Further elaboration on this notion of whiteness as property follows.

Society positions whiteness and all it means to be white as the norm; everything else is determined in relation to this point of reference. According to Harris (1993) whiteness as an identity does not have a uniform set of characteristics other than the exclusion of other individuals who are not white. Those who possess whiteness are given the right to exclude others from the privileges inherent in whiteness. Whiteness gradually shifts from acts of exclusion to a construct of superiority. For example, prior to the end of the civil war, denying students of color access to an education demonstrated the absolute right to exclude. From the late 1800s to the landmark United States Supreme Court case Brown vs. Board of Education, the creation of separate schools also demonstrated the right to exclude (Laidler, 2009). In more recent years, the absolute right to exclude has been evident through white flight and the creation of vouchers. The absolute right to exclude is also evident within the school systems and programs such as intervention programs, gifted programs, honors programs, and advanced placement classes. Along the same lines, McIntosh (1988) stated whiteness allows for specific social, cultural, and economic unearned privileges that benefit white people in society. Whiteness represents a normative perspective of how white people see themselves in relation to the world around them. For every white person that experiences a false sense of comfort, a person of color encounters some form of alienation.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) use race as a critical instrument for understanding social injustice and draw parallels between the notion of whiteness as property and educational inequity. Whiteness as property relates to education in explicit and implied forms. Curriculum for example, represents a form of intellectual property. The quality and quantity of the curriculum may vary within a school based on who is receiving the instruction. There are explicit privileges associated with whiteness, and according to Ladson-Billings (1998), critical race theory has become a vital social tool for deconstructing oppressive structures and dialogue, reconstructing human agency, and constructing equitable power relations. Critical race theory provides an opportunity to reframe our discourse about social justice and the role that education plays in either reproducing or interrupting inequitable practices.

There is no doubt critical race theory has allowed for the analysis and interpretation of policies and procedures in educational institutions through a critical lens. The use of the tenets of critical race theory has provided a structure by which to uncover patterns of exclusion with respect to race and privilege that would otherwise have been ignored. However, colorblind ideologies and false notions of meritocracy still permeate schools today. Conversations about race and disparities in education, when not supported by data and framed through equitable and culturally responsive lens, can be overwhelming to school leaders, particularly those who do not share racial, cultural, and linguistic norms and traditions with their student populations. Recognizing and internalizing the whiteness ideology behind disparities and what it looks like in schools is a starting point for educational leaders to dismantle the inequities (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

Giroux (1992) insisted educational leaders must become actively engaged and transformative in their work. They must be willing to challenge the behaviors within a school system, which serve as an avenue to perpetuate this marginalized-privileged dichotomy. However, before educational leaders can engage in the process of transforming their educational institutions, they must first undergo a personal transformation of their beliefs, values, and assumptions (McKenzie et al., 2008). At the center of social justice leadership development is the process of adult learning and development. The following section elaborates on the process by which adults learn, internalize, and manifest their learning toward becoming educational leaders who promote a more socially just agenda.

Adult Learning

Transformational Adult Learning

Kegan and Lahey (2002) defined transformational learning as changing what we know because of our experience, meaning making, and reflection on the entire process. Transformational learning is also viewed as the ability to negotiate meaning in a critical, reflective, and rational manner (Mezirow, 1991). Transformative adult learning changes the way people see themselves and their world. It attempts to explain how an individual's expectations frame cultural assumptions, and how those expectations directly influence the meaning of those experiences. An essential component of transformation theory is the notion communication fosters learning and values such as truth, justice, and freedom are justified through critical and reflective dialogue (Mezirow, 1997, 1998). Brookfield (2009) developed this idea further by explaining transformative learning activities in the leadership development process should assist leaders to be involved in fundamental questioning and reordering of how they think or act. Transformative learning activities, he continues, should also assist leaders in thinking critically about, finding, and applying the best possible solution to challenging problems experienced in the working environment. There are four main components to Mezirow's approach: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action. This form of learning is transformative because it requires individuals to be open to other possibilities and be willing to admit what they believe to be real may in fact not be. One's own realities are not the only realities.

Transformational learning is a shift of consciousness dramatically and permanently altering the way of being in the world. Mezirow first introduced transformational learning as a theory of adult learning to help explain how adults changed the way they interpret the world (Taylor, 2001). This theory is uniquely adult centered and grounded in human communication, where learning is a process of using prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of one's experience in order to guide future action (Mezirow, 1997). Transformational learning is more than an epistemological change in worldview; it also involves an ontological shift, reflective of a need to act from new perspectives.

Transformational theory is described in a national study conducted by Mezirow (1978) and a team of researchers on women who, after an interruption in their education, decided to return to college. The research revealed the women had experienced a personal transformation (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The first phase within this process involved having an experience that did not necessarily coincide with a pre-existing meaning structure and therefore, caused a disorienting dilemma. Phases two and three emphasized the importance of critical reflection by means of self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame and a critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions. The notion here was critical reflection produced a growing sense of awareness, which in turn created a discomfort for the individual, thus resulting in further reflection. The fourth and fifth phase of Mezirow's theory focused on rational discourse. Throughout these phases, the process of transformation includes the ability for one to share their discontent with others who are similarly negotiating and exploring options for new roles, relationships, and actions. Through critical and reflective discourse individuals are able to share thoughts and feelings with others as they create a new meaning perspective.

Planning a course of action, acquisition of knowledge and skills, provisional trying of new roles, building of competence and self-confidence, and a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective are the final five phases of Mezirow's (1997) transformative theory. Individuals experiencing these final phases of transformative learning can find themselves in constant transition. The learner goes from creating a plan of action to acquiring skills to successfully executing the plan. With practice comes an increased level of self-confidence, and ultimately a new way of viewing and living in the world.

Meaning Making

How one goes about making sense of day-to-day experiences dictates the decisions he/she makes, and these decisions are based on interpretation derived from assumptions made early on in the meaning making process (Mezirow, 1990). Central to transformation theory of adult learning is the concept of meaning schemes by which experiences allow for a meaning system to strengthen and grow. Similarly, a lack of experiences creates boundaries, which limit and impede us from ever knowing beyond our sphere of comfort. Reflecting on assumptions transforms meaning schemes, also known as habits of expectations, and the act of reflecting may result in the expansion, production, or modification of those very schemes (Mezirow, 1991). Furthermore, Mezirow (1991) reminded us of how habits of expectation compare assigning old meanings to new experiences, and thus transformative learning allows us to reinterpret both old and new experiences from a set of new expectations.

How individuals define a situation, understand the world around them, and act upon what they believe to be true is their paradigm. Meaning perspectives give direction and orient understanding about everything. Freire (1970) developed an extended application to meaning perspectives, and he believed education to be the conduit to adult development where modifying an individual's frame of reference leads to both personal and social change.

Mezirow (1991) described the lifeworld as the contextual backdrop for how individuals navigate in and out of the various aspects of their lives. The lifeworld is an invisible array of unquestioned assumptions about shared social norms conveyed through physical acts and language. According to Merriam and Heuer (1996), adult development is a process through which making meaning requires individuals to challenge themselves through an experience or an event. In doing so, individuals are able to create a reflective space, and therefore, the focus of their thought process gradually transfers from the initial experience to a greater and more personal perspective.

One of the most difficult characteristics of meaning making is the combination of will and skills for an individual to take on the perspective of another person or group. Perspective taking is at the core of transformation because this process implies one must be able and willing to abandon a perspective so a newer more valuable one may take its place (Mezirow, 1978). A conceptualization of transformational learning and an analysis of the three pedagogical strategies embodied in the transformative learning theory, namely centrality of experience, critical reflection, and critical discourse follows.

Experience

Experience is essential as the starting point of transformation of meaning perspectives, since individuals generally construct assumptions from the interpretation of their experience (Mezirow, 1991). Adult learners' experiences appear to influence their beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning, namely, their epistemologies. Transformation is a fundamental change in personality by which individuals resolve a personal dilemma and expand consciousness (Brookfield, 2009). The unsettling feeling of being stretched to think beyond our normal capacity, which stimulates transformation, is seen in this theory to be one of the most valuable parts of learning.

Critical Reflection

Transformational learning requires an avenue by which individuals are able to reflect on themselves and on their interactions with their surroundings. Freire (1973) believed experiencing reality through a critical lens required individuals to be removed from the world they know. Critical reflection can have an impact on the perspective of individuals and the world (Merriam & Heuer, 1996). Mezirow (1997) found one is able to transform his frame of reference through critical reflection on assumptions, which originate from an individual's habits of mind. According to Kegan (1982) critical reflection and self-reflection on assumptions are necessary for one to have the capacity to fully engage in critical discourse. Habermas (1973) asserted the awareness resulting from critical reflection transitions a person from a state of unconsciousness to consciousness. The ability to engage in critical reflection is a key component within my study because educational leaders who participate in social justice professional development are expected and challenged to reflect on their life experiences and the impact of these on the practice of their profession.

Critical Discourse

Critical reflection must lead to critical dialogue as a means of creating change. Shields (2004) argued dialogue is central to the task of educational leadership. Dialogue and relationships are elements that become a fundamental way of life for individuals to make sense of the world around them. The word dialogue comes from the Greek *dia-logos* meaning through the word. For the Greeks, dialogue represented meaning that travelled freely within a group, allowing the group to discover new information not obtainable to them as isolated individuals (Bohm, 1996). Furthermore, Bohm (1996) interpreted dialogue as meaning that passes or moves between individuals in a free flowing manner, and therefore, a group accesses a larger pool of common meaning, which cannot be accessed individually. Interestingly, the practice of dialogue has been preserved in many primitive cultures, such as that of the American Indian, but it has been almost completely lost to modern American society. Today the principles and practices of dialogue are being rediscovered and put into a contemporary context.

Discourse is a form of dialogue central to learning and according to Mezirow (1994), successful communication occurs within rational discourse. This form of dialogue attempts to justify an individual's beliefs based on the evidence presented to validate a specific point of view. Freire (1973) referred to critical discourse as a dialogue created for individuals who in fact want to investigate the meaning of their involvement in a particular reality as well as the realities of individuals around them. Dialogue is a central concept in educational leadership and is more than a set of strategies by which individuals can converse, but instead, dialogue is a set of parameters by which one lives and makes sense of the world around them. Dialogue is a way of being by which one is open to accepting different realities and views (Shields, 2004).

The use of storytelling as a conduit for discourse allows individuals to gain a clear understanding of the message communicated by allowing the listener to make their own meaning clearer through reflection. Stories are a narration of an individual's experience told from the heart rather than the head and can have a significant impact on the outcome of discourse (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Both telling and hearing stories create a space by which everyone has a role and purpose instrumental for successful discourse to occur. It also establishes a shift in the power dynamics by giving value to historically untold stories and silent voices.

Communication through critical discourse and action is a form of learning Habermas (1984) referred to as communicative learning. Habermas (1979) has guided our thinking around the concept of communicative learning so learning itself has a number of purposes, among which are the need to control the environment, present oneself to others, and understand what is being communicated. Communicative learning involves two or more individuals determined to arrive at an understanding around the meaning or validation of a belief, and therefore, individuals must be able to participate in critical reflection and critical self-reflection to be aware of underlying intentions, values, beliefs, and feelings. To summarize, I review some of the parallels between the theories of Mezirow and Freire related to the process and development of critical awareness.

Beginning with the notion of critical consciousness, Mezirow (1991) shared his own transformative learning experience as he came to the realization his theory of transformative learning lacked two crucial components found in Freire's (1973) theory of critical pedagogy, which combines the concepts of a critical consciousness and the power associated with community development. According to Freire conscientization, or a state of critical awareness or awakening, is a developmental process by which an individual transitions from one state of knowing to the next until he reaches his full potential. The course of action is dependent on where individuals began their journey from unconsciousness to consciousness. There are multiple levels of awareness through which one passes along this course of knowledge formation. The level of least awareness is known as the magical state. Here, individuals are unconscious; and move about in the world without questioning their position or what surrounds them. Individuals are captive to external forces manipulating them and are powerless to change their current situation. The level of peak awareness is known as critical consciousness. At this stage, individuals have a clear understanding of how their lives are shaped and become instrumental in the construction of those realities. Conscientization is an ongoing process ultimately leading to social change, but the process begins with dialogue.

Emancipatory knowledge is a domain which identifies self-reflection and knowledge. Habermas (1973) considered the concept of emancipatory knowledge to be how one is perceived historically and socially through the roles and expectations set forth by society. Emancipation refers to external and internal forces limiting our options and our ability to perform at the highest possible capacity. Critical consciousness leads to a new knowledge, and emancipation is born from this new knowledge. Additionally, emancipatory knowledge addresses the unequal power dynamics and oppressive forces existing among different groups of people in society (Merriam, 1998). Similarly, the concept of liberation emerges from the notion of emancipatory knowledge. Freire (1970) compared the experience of liberation to that of childbirth; both acts symbolize a struggle for survival and ultimate freedom.

Despite the critique about aspects of Mezirow’s (1994) theory by fellow scholars, I consider the overall tenets of transformational learning theory most aligned with the theoretical framework I chose to guide my own research. The core concepts of Mezirow's theory are evident in what I have observed thus far among educational leaders and social justice work with respect to reflection, dialogue, resistance, and change. I anticipate my study expands on Mezirow's theory and create a solid link between transformational learning and transformative leadership and change. Apart from acknowledging transformational learning should lead to transformative change, nowhere does the theory or research explain how this occurs. I expect my work in this area will fill an evident gap in the research and contribute a missing perspective to the literature.

Just as Habermas (1973) spoke of emancipatory knowledge and Mezirow (1978, 1981, 1991, 1997) shared his views on transformative learning, a review of Freire's (1970) work makes evident that the origins of critical theory stems from similar philosophies about the power of new knowledge. Critical theory emerges from student and class inequities; however, these concepts are transferable to multiple contexts including, but not limited to, issues of race and educational leadership. Although critical theory is primarily applicable to underrepresented groups because of the focus on freedom of oppressed individuals, the benefits are transferable to society as a whole. Freirean theory casts a wide enough net to capture multiple interpretations of leadership for social justice while still respecting its core values of freedom, equity, agency/empowerment, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity (Larson & Murtadha, 2002). The following section further develops and expands on the key concept around critical theory.

Critical Theory

Freire's (1970) critical theory and concept of praxis serve as an effective framework for the analysis of leadership for social justice for six main reasons. First, his focus on liberation speaks directly to justice. Second, he emphasized examination of inequities through a critical lens. Third, his theory provides elements that can inform an alternative leadership methodology. Fourth, Freirean theory offers the means by which to deconstruct hegemonic ideology and generate a new social reality that counters current educational inequities. Fifth, it promotes a strategy of intervention, which is conducive to the practice of social justice (Bogotch, 2000). Finally, praxis is comprised of the relationship between leadership theory, leadership reflection, and leadership practice; however, knowledge of this relationship is lacking in the field of education. Critical theory positions praxis as political practice with the aim of social justice (Hall & Hord, 2011).

Praxis, according to Freire, Freire, and Macedo (1998) is a Greek word that means moving back and forth in a critical way between reflecting and acting. Freire asserted reflection alone does not produce change, but encourages action based on reflection. Praxis involves dialogue as social process with the objective of dismantling oppressive structures and systems established both in education and society. Praxis consists of the close and mutual relationship between an individual's reflections and actions (Freire, 1970). In the case of leadership for social justice, these reflections and actions are jointly aimed at transforming unjust structures. Furthermore, praxis is relevant to education and educational leadership, as demonstrated by Taylor's (1997) argument stating, if leaders are to foster the success of the increasingly diverse student population, they must concern themselves with social justice and praxis through a reflective and critical position.

Theoharis and Haddix (2011) discovered key aspects of the educational leaders' work are their own consciousness, knowledge, and skills in dealing with issues of race and making connections between issues of race and inequities toward historically marginalized student populations in the larger educational system. Social injustice is evident when paying close attention to ideas, policies, and practices about education created to serve the privileged and silence the marginalized. Critical theory reveals the fabric of our world and is a part of individuals, cultures, and organizations (Brown, 2004a). For this reason, critical social theory calls educators to activism. Educational activists recognize the ethical dimensions of teaching other people's children; they work to provide them with the highest quality of education they would desire for their own children; and learn to work as allies with the community.

From a critical theory perspective Delpit and Dowdy (2002) have the belief that reflection focuses on uncovering power dynamics and detecting the creation and maintenance of hegemony. Without critical intervention, both the oppressors and the oppressed remained unconscious of this dynamic. From a pragmatic and constructivist perspective, critical reflection is evident when people realize how they are active constructors of their own experience in a world of open possibilities. Critical reflection exposes leaders to information and ideas they may have resisted, and by assisting them to stretch beyond their comfort zones, a critique and transformation of hegemonic structures and ideologies can occur (Brown, 2006).

The purposes of critical reflection are to externalize and investigate power relationships and to uncover hegemonic assumptions. According to Brookfield (1995) critical reflection focuses on the following three interrelated processes. The process begins when adults question and then replace or reframe an assumption, followed by taking alternative perspectives, and finally by recognizing the hegemonic aspects of dominant cultural values. The exploration of new understandings, the synthesis of new information, and integration of these insights throughout their personal and professional lives lead future educational leaders to a common and more comprehensive approach to address issues of student learning and equity (Brown, 2004b).

In summary, for educational leaders critical inquiry involves the conscious consideration of the damaging implications and impacts of schooling practices on students. Self-reflection adds the dimension of the examination of personal assumptions, values, and beliefs. Critical reflection merges critical inquiry and self-reflection and involves the examination of personal and professional belief systems, as well as the deliberate consideration of the ethical implications and effect of practices.

Rational discourse involves the commitments to extended and repeated conversations that evolve over time into a culture of careful listening and continuous openness to new perspectives. This form of discourse is not parallel to reaching an understanding through consensus, but rather the development of deep and richer understandings of our own biases our colleague's perspective on particular issues and how each of us constructs those issues differently. The following section further explores the concepts of critical reflection and dialogue previously discussed through the lens of critical theory, now in the context of transformative leadership.

Leadership

Leadership requires a high level of efficacy, motivation, and success on the part of the leader (Heifetz, 1994). However, is leadership only about an individual with vision influencing or leading a group to achieve goals, or is there more to leadership than the traditional definitions describe? Leadership is an essential driving force to achieving the vision and mission of any organization. Northouse (1997) defined leadership as a process whereby individuals are able to influence other individuals to achieve or reach commonly desired outcomes. The importance of the human element is also accentuated by the ability to influence and mobilize individuals identified with specific skills to discuss and complete specific tasks in order to achieve results.

Leadership development should be rooted in leadership theory and aimed at assisting the leaders with complex challenges where leaders can grow and develop leadership skills congruent with the leadership roles required. Unfortunately, leaders often do not take the appropriate leadership theory into consideration when planning and developing leadership initiatives.

An analysis of leadership literature highlights leadership development and how it has been progressively regarded as an essential and valuable tool to build and enhance leadership capacity in a learning organization. Leadership development is becoming an increasingly critical and strategic imperative for educational institutions in the current, challenging environment (Leithwood et al., 2008). The changing and emergent perspectives of leadership development are inherently collaborative, social, and relational.

Gardner, Avolio, and Walumbwa (2005) warned leadership development does not happen overnight, and furthermore, insist leadership development is a continuous, systematic process designed to expand the capacity and awareness of individuals, groups, and organizations in an effort to meet shared goals and objectives. To summarize, leadership development is a continuous, progressive, sequential, and developmental process through which leaders acquire the skills, knowledge, and behaviors required (Leithwood et al., 2008). Development is change occurring over time due to both maturational processes and learning (Gardner et al., 2005). The following section elaborates further on the connection between critical theory and adult learning as they apply to social justice leadership development and systemic change.

Social Justice Leadership Development

Overall, schools in the United States are inequitable for students of color. Research conducted by McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) demonstrated how these inequities are caused, to a significant extent, by the attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors of teachers and administrators. Therefore, for the educational system to be equitable, drastically changing the attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors of the educators and leaders within the system is necessary. At the center of this challenge is the acute awareness that our educational system is failing historically marginalized students and has done so for many years. Educational leaders must redefine and redesign a school system that can afford all students access and opportunity toward a successful educational experience. By that I mean, one in which historically underserved students are valued, academically challenged, and provided with the supports to live up to their potential and thrive. Professional development of educational leaders requires models of equity and justice (Theoharis, 2010).

Principal Leaders

Educational leaders, and in particular principals, hold a unique position; they have responsibilities and opportunities crucial in defining the climate and structures within a school. Since meanings occur within organizational structures and routines, educational leaders can help change meanings by changing the habitual ways in which business is conducted and how the school organization is designed (Riehl, 2000). School leaders are the cornerstone of thriving schools in which all students, including students of color, are successful, and student achievement is dependent on their leadership (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Furthermore, school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning. Leadership acts as a mechanism without which other positive things are unlikely to occur (Leithwood et al., 2008).

Moreover, there are no documented cases of schools increasing student achievement in the absence of strong leadership. The kind and quality of leadership we have will help determine, for better or for worse, the kind of schools we have (Sergiovanni, 1992).

The leadership of principals is critical, and without their support it is unlikely the initiatives promoted within their schools will reflect a proactive stance on issues of equity (Carr, 1997). Educational leaders must have the skills and opportunities to become more reflective professionals and in doing so, become students of their own professional practice. Leadership is composed of three essential dimensions: one's heart, head, and hand (Sergiovanni, 2007). The heart of leadership includes beliefs, values, and commitment to a vision. The head of leadership represents the reflection and practice that develop over time. Finally, the hands of leadership represent the actions taken and the decisions made in forming school programs, policies, and procedures. Recognizing the heart, head, and hands of leadership brings to the forefront the moral imperative in the practice of social justice leadership (Sergiovanni, 1991).

Social Justice and Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership underscores the importance of dialogue and awareness leading to action. Weiner (2003) defined transformative leadership as an internal process someone in a position of power who critiques social injustice experiences as they attempt to gain a better understanding of their individual and global role and responsibility to society. The literature surrounding the research on transformative leadership provides a framework for understanding how and why the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data is so important. Transformative leadership hones in on how societal inequities manifest themselves in schools and negatively impact students (Shields & Warke, 2010). According to Wilson et al. (2013), transformative leadership differs from other forms of leadership in that these leaders demonstrate the moral courage to demystify and recreating perceptions and beliefs that create and perpetuate inequities. They are also determined to create meaningful change embedded in principles of emancipation, equity, and justice.

A major theme within the literature focuses on how to prepare administrators to become leaders for and of social justice: transformative leaders in education. Marshall and Ward (2004) addressed the patterns perpetuating inequities and identify policymaker perceptions of social justice needs and recommendations for creating institutes for social justice. The training of school leaders, who can promote democratic schools and address inequalities through needs assessments and follow up preparation reviewing curriculum and consensus building, is yet another form of professional development (Lalas & Morgan, 2006).

Theoharis (2008b) addressed leadership for inclusive schooling as a mechanism by which school leaders develop and implement systems that navigate away from traditional forms of school structures and practices that separate and isolate underserved students and move instead toward integration models. He also presented research supporting the notion there are leadership traits existing among school principals who are committed to addressing social justice for marginalized students and how this aspect of their work is instrumental in their desire to become school leaders. Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian (2006) proposed a framework for conceptualizing the preparation of leaders for social justice. Through the development of consciousness, knowledge and skills, educational leaders begin to address inequitable practices through a coherent and transformational approach.

According to Brown (2004b), professional development for educational leaders must undergo a drastic change if current and future educational leaders are to implement successful, equitable, and socially responsive learning environments for all students. Preparing educational leaders to accept this challenge requires a close examination of their personal values and beliefs in conjunction with a critical analysis of their professional behaviors. These processes can lead to a transformation of an educational leader's social responsibility. With sufficient determination, this personal transformation will lead to the development of transformative leadership. Additionally, Byrne-Jimenez and Orr (2013) identified three forms of action that define social justice: recognition, reversal, and redistribution. The recognition stage occurs when leaders gain awareness of inequities and the continued impact on historically marginalized communities. Measures taken by leaders to counteract these injustices is considered the reversal phase while redistribution examines how goods and services are allocated. These actions occur on a fluid continuum where leaders are expected to reassess their social justice leadership with each new dilemma they encounter.

Characteristics of Transformative Leadership

While Burns (1978), one of the seminal scholars of transformational leadership, believed leadership focused on certain values, such as liberty, justice, and equality and is intended for real change, Foster (1986) was recognized for developing transformative educational theories grounded in the notion that leadership must take the necessary steps to change current conditions. Foster's advocacy of leadership that both transforms and empowers is central to today's notion of transformative leadership. Along the same lines, Shields (2010) identified the need for transformative leadership to begin with critical reflection and analysis where leaders are able to move from a stage of enlightened understanding to action with the sole purpose of rectifying inequities and creating a level playing field for historically marginalized populations.

Although transformational and transformative leadership theories share some common threads, namely, to create change with a moral purpose of leadership, they are distinct in that transformational leadership centers on what occurs in an organization to optimize efficiency, whereas transformative leadership takes a broader perspective by addressing societal socio-political inequities and the implications within an organization. Burns (1978) asserted leadership transforms when individuals engage with one another, allowing both leaders and followers to elevate to higher levels of ethical motivation. Shields (2010) however, characterized transformative leadership as the ability to raise questions of justice and democracy and critique inequitable practices which favor some by erroneously promising greater individual and collective achievement. Furthermore, transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others. Shields and Warke (2010) characterized transformative leadership as an approach to intentionally disrupt the social and political dynamics in schools that perpetuate systemic inequities.

Transformative leadership, therefore, inextricably links education and educational leadership with the wider social context within which it is embedded. Thus, it is my contention that transformative leadership and leadership for inclusive and socially just learning environments are interrelated. According to Shields and Warke (2010) addressing issues of equity is an essential component toward creating a school climate and culture conducive to student learning. School leaders manifest transformative leadership within their daily practice by creating a more inclusive, equitable, and deeply democratic educational environment. This form of leadership holds the most potential to meet both the academic and social justice needs of complex and diverse education systems because they are able to address the needs and better serve historically underserved students and families.

Transformative leaders empower followers and nurture them toward change. In doing so, they attempt to raise the consciousness of individuals so they can exceed their own self-interests for the sake of others (Northouse, 2010). Possessing a social justice mindset or critical consciousness is a process that never ceases to evolve. Transforming leaders engage in shared purpose connected to social change, with the ultimate objective of achieving goals to improve conditions for all. In the end, transforming leadership raises the level of conduct and ethical aspiration of not only leaders, but also everyone involved. Furthermore, because society is continuously changing and there is always room for growth, transformative leadership development suddenly becomes something that leaders may aspire to yet never fully attain (Dantley, 2005).

Educational leaders for social justice are in fact activist leaders with a focus on equity. This understanding is universal among scholars who study and engage in social justice leadership (McKenzie et al., 2008). There is an understanding that leadership for social justice requires critical consciousness (Capper et al., 2006; Theoharis, 2008a). Not only does it require critical consciousness, but leadership also emphasizes the importance of creating opportunities to foster critical consciousness as an essential component of quality education. McKenzie et al. (2008) suggested leadership for social justice extends beyond a leader’s introspective critical consciousness toward the ability to promote and facilitate critical consciousness in others.

However, having a critical consciousness about social justice is not the same as knowing how to develop such a consciousness in others. Thus, professional development programs must provide educational leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to do this work. School leaders need to develop a social justice consciousness within their personal belief systems including a need to possess a deep understanding of power relations and social construction, including white privilege, heterosexism, poverty, and ethnocentrism (Capper et al., 2006). These transformative principles are derived from the work of Freire (1970), who used the terms transform, transformation, and transformative to describe the changes that may occur as a result of obtaining an education.

In summary, transformative educational leadership challenges the unacceptable manipulation of power and privilege used to further marginalize and perpetuate inequities. This form of leadership uses critical reflection as a conduit to move from awareness to equitable action. Furthermore, when new experiences do not coincide with habits of expectation, denial and avoidance come into play. Leadership, even though a hugely explored concept, still appears able to elicit dialogue among theorists. The evolution of global, social, economic, and political environments creates the need to reassess and reconstruct previous concepts of leadership. Kose (2007) insisted systemic school change for equitable and critical student learning is unlikely to occur unless we invest in developing leadership for that specific purpose. According to Kegan and Lahey (2009) the field of leadership development has put too much emphasis on the leadership aspect and not enough focus on the development portion.

In closing, change leaders begin to institute new forms of accountability that require collective ownership of and responsibility for the systems and issues in question. When leaders begin owning these problems and taking responsibility for student achievement, then the leadership model is different, and it is a more productive way of approaching concerns. Senge (2006) proposed a systems thinking framework as the foundation of what he terms a learning organization. A system is seen as a whole, the elements of which are connected together because they continually affect each other over time and operate for a common purpose. Systems thinking is about keeping the whole in mind, while working on the various parts. The following section provides a brief overview of systems thinking and its role in education.

Systems

Schools are institutionalized organizations embodying a set of understandings, beliefs, and values that find legitimacy within the context of the larger society and are embedded in educational structures, cultures, and practices. Culture is defined as the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to the quality of relationships within and beyond the school (Yosso, 2005). Culture refers to the invisible yet powerful meanings and mindsets held by individuals and the group collectively throughout the system.

Schools are constructed around the meanings people hold about them. According to Banathy (1996) people are unable to provide direction in their lives and cannot take command of their future unless they develop the will through transformational learning toward social justice leadership development and to participate directly and genuinely in designing the systems in which they live and demand the right to do so. Senge (2006) argued systems thinking is a discipline of seeing the whole. It is a framework for seeing connections and relationships rather than things, bursting patterns of change rather than static snapshots. Seeing the major interrelationships underlying a problem leads to new insights into what might be done.

Senge (2000) has the belief systems are often formed and take the shape of the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the people in them. Our mental models form our theories about the way the world works and influence our actions, which in turn influence the interactions within the system. Additionally, Meadows and Wright (2008) asserted even people within systems do not frequently recognize what system goal they are serving. Even though systems cannot be controlled, they can be designed and redesigned. Although systems in an organization may adopt change, individuals implement change. Change is the topic of the following section.

Change

Real organizational change occurs not simply when technical changes in structure and process are undertaken, but when persons inside and outside of the school construct new understandings about what the change means. Hall and Hord (2006) have the belief that change is a process through which people and organizations move as they gradually come to understand and become skilled and competent in the use of new ways of doing things. Furthermore, they claimed an entire organization does not undergo change until each and every member within the organization has changed.

There is an individual aspect to organizational change. Even when changes are introduced to every member of the organization at the same time, the rate of making the change and of developing skill and competence in using the change will vary individually. Some members will adapt to the change quickly, yet most will need some additional time, and a few will avoid making the change for a very long time (Hall & Hord, 2006).

Organizational change is more than just changing people's minds. Senge (2000) proposed whole system change is adaptive work that requires changing heads, hearts, and actions. System change requires all individuals in schools and districts to stay focused on the same work, to be engaged in a thoughtful and deliberate manner, and to work collaboratively toward common ends. To create and maintain the momentum and sense of urgency for change, people must understand why they are doing the work. Helsing, Howell, Kegan, and Lahey (2008) further explained the work around immunities to change helps participants change both behaviors and mental frameworks by explicating the contradictions between their intended goals and their actual behaviors, thus uncovering individuals' hidden assumptions that give rise to those contradictions. Our mental models determine not only how we make sense of the world, but also how we take action. Mental models are powerful in affecting what we do because they affect what we see and eventually, all adults working with children in schools will need to learn how to shift their paradigm and change their behaviors to better meet the needs of all students.

Gaps in the Literature

This study contributes to current academic literature and practice in the fields of educational leadership and leadership for social justice in multiple ways. First, it adds to the body of research regarding leadership development and adult learning. Second, it provides insight into the role of an educational leader and the progression toward becoming a leader for social justice. Third, it seeks to improve educational leadership practice by providing accounts of specific behaviors and changes implemented by educational leaders over the course of 24 months. Lastly, it demonstrates the obstacles and resistance educational leaders face as they effect change toward equitable practices and outcomes for traditionally marginalized populations.

Opposing Views

Although I have selected Mezirow's (1978) theory of transformational learning as the core theoretical framework for my dissertation, I am aware that his analysis of adult transformational learning has led to extensive discussion about where his theory falls short. According to Clark and Wilson (1991) although Mezirow's theory on transformational learning was primarily centered on the construction of meaning from experience and utilized as a guide toward action, the one critical piece Mezirow omitted was placing the experience within a contextual framework. Clark and Wilson claimed Mezirow's original research on women who had returned to school after a period of time lacked the necessary social, cultural, and historical context to better understand the complete meaning of their experiences.

Pietrykowski (1997) challenged Mezirow's writing when claiming learning cannot necessarily lead to emancipation due to the way culture produces a unique frame of reference among diverse communities. The implication is we are confined by our cultural meaning schemes, and therefore, unable to engage in discourse to best inform our judgment against opposing views. In this postmodern perspective on adult learning Pietrykowski argued not to ignore the connection existing between knowledge and power, and that adults approach situations from multiple positions through which they construct an understanding of their life world.

The centrality of rational thinking in Mezirow's (1997) theory is yet another gap brought to light by scholars. The separation of knowledge and emotion is a concept embraced in the West and the tendency is to give more value to cognition and critical reflection and less to other ways of making meaning such as feeling and imagination (Taylor, 2001). In his critique, Taylor (2001) stated Mezirow had placed too much emphasis on the importance of critical reflection and had not acknowledged the equally significant contribution to transformational learning of the unconscious development of thought.

Lastly, Mälkki (2010) suggested a more complete theory would benefit from incorporating key concepts of Damasio's neurobiological theory of emotions and consciousness. This integration would expand Mezirow's current theory by taking it to a deeper understanding of the influence emotion has on cognition. Emotions are vital to maintaining equilibrium of our mental state and functions as a support system in our decision-making abilities.

The purpose of this study was to explore how educational leaders described their development of critical consciousness about issues of social justice in education and how they utilized a lens of equity to effect systemic change. This research examined the relationship between professional development focused on social justice leadership development and whether or not the learning of participating educational leaders was reflected in their subsequent practice.

My approach with this study uses a conceptual framework constructed around social justice leadership development rooted in the five tenets of critical race theory, relevant leadership theory, the theory of adult learning, and change theory. The study addresses the impact professional development has on these educational leaders and how learning emerges in their personal and professional lives. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology, paradigm, and methods used to conduct this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

Transformative change is a qualitative shift in how participants understand themselves and their world and the relationship between the two.

– Robert Kegan, 1982

Introduction

This study was grounded in critical race theory, transformational adult learning, and social justice leadership development. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how educational leaders describe their learning and development of critical consciousness about issues of social justice in education and how they utilize a lens of equity to create personal and systemic change within their schools or departments. District leaders participated in up to three, distinct, equity focused professional development opportunities, all of which employed the tenets of critical race theory and principles of transformative leadership development as key elements in their program model and approach toward addressing educational inequities.

Uniting to Understand Racism (UUR), Pacific Educational Group (PEG), and the Oregon Center for Educational Equity (CFEE) are three organizations that partnered with the Hatfield School District and offered social justice leadership development to educational leaders. These groups have as their guiding principle the importance of critical reflection and discourse as a means toward gaining awareness about the underlying causes of the racial disparities impacting students of color in schools and the charge to interrupt these inequities. The tenets of Critical Race Theory are foundational to not only the core beliefs of these organizations but to varying degrees, are embedded in the curriculum and presented as the framework toward addressing institutionalize racism.

Initially, participating in UUR and CFEE was optional for all administrators. Those who were intrigued about equity related issues attended one or both of these professional development opportunities while all others were allowed to opt out and politely decline the invitation. However, as the number of leaders who attended grew, so did the realization from district leadership that the experience was necessary for all administrators and would benefit the district as they moved forward with their equity work. Soon a shift occurred where administrators returned from the trainings with an expanded awareness, new perspective, and desire to take action. The response was significant in that the following year, PEG was contracted to provide two years of ongoing professional development to all administrators.

Although similarities existed among all three professional development models, each used a different approach and format to deliver the content and message. My research examined the relationship between ongoing professional development focused on equity among educational leaders from one school district and how their learning was reflected or absent in their practice.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do educational leaders describe their experience and learning process with equity focused professional development?
2. What impact if any, has the equity focused professional development made on their beliefs and behaviors toward creating equitable educational systems for historically marginalized students?
3. If the educational leaders changed, how do they describe the change process, the barriers, and the supports for change?
4. Why have some educational leaders been able to develop further in their understanding of socially just leadership and/or effect more change than other leaders?

This chapter provides an overview of how the study draws upon the main tenets of a qualitative methodology as a means of developing a solid rationale that will best address the research questions. Crotty (2003) defined methodology as an approach and course of action supporting the choice and use of particular methods and associating the methods with the desired outcomes. Qualitative researchers are concerned with understanding behavior from the participant's own frame of reference. Qualitative methodology can be used to conduct research about people's lives, stories, and behaviors, thereby allowing researchers to explore the personal thoughts and experiences of participants, to explore the process of meaning making within a particular cultural context, and to discover rather than test variables (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative researchers, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994), study things in their natural surroundings and attempt to interpret participants' experiences through the process of meaning making. Qualitative research can be used to take a fresh look at something commonly known or to better understand phenomenon about which very little is known. Either way, qualitative research can be used to gain a focused and holistic picture of a situation and the impact on the people involved (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 1998).

Methodological Paradigm

I approached this qualitative study from a constructivist paradigm by which knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process, and researchers attempt to understand the lived experience from the perspective of those who live it (Schwandt, 2001). A paradigm is a way of looking at the world and is composed of assumptions that guide thinking and action (Mertens, 2010). Guba and Lincoln (1994) identified a paradigm as the basic belief system or worldview guiding researchers through the process of defining the nature of the world and their role in it.

The constructivist paradigm emphasizes research is a product of the principles of researchers and cannot be independent of them. Furthermore, the purpose behind this form of inquiry is to better understand and reconstruct the constructions people initially hold with the purpose of creating a new collective understanding that is continuously evolving and open to new interpretations. According to Crotty (2003) constructionism is an epistemology where meaning derives from our engagement with the realities that surround us, and therefore, meaning cannot exist without a mind, since meaning is not discovered, but constructed.

Additionally, the core approach used within the constructivist paradigm is referred to as hermeneutical or dialectical. Essentially it is the study of interpretive understanding and meaning or more generally defined, a way to interpret the meaning of something from a certain standpoint or situation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The hermeneutical process is a mechanism for exchanging knowledge and information between participant and researcher. Constructivists argue participants' understanding of a phenomenon depends on their perceptions, experiences, and social norms. Heidegger (1962) argued all meaning, including the meanings of research findings, is fundamentally interpreted. All knowledge is created within a prior social context and is constantly undergoing multiple interpretations.

Role of the Researcher

My voice was that of a passionate participant, actively committed to engaging the multiple voices of educational leaders for social justice, necessary to construct meaning, facilitate reconstruction of meaning and to act on them (Lincoln, 1989). My personal and professional social position informed how I approached this study. My role within this study was twofold in that I came to this work as the researcher with the objective of providing insight into the experiences and learning processes of educational leaders who had participated in social justice leadership development work. That being said, I am also an educational leader within the educational community I studied. I have not only participated in the social justice leadership development work, but have also led the work within the district. This can be seen as both a risk and a benefit to the study in several ways. First, my professional position within the district may be seen as one of power because of my access to executive level administrators, the superintendent, and the board. This may have affected my interactions with the educational leaders who participated in the study, which in turn may have had an impact on the way they responded to questions, thereby skewing the data. Second, it may appear that I had a hidden agenda and this study in some way seeks to validate the work around social justice leadership development that I have been charged with steering for the district and thus may be viewed as biased.

On the other hand, with my professional position comes the background knowledge I hold about the educational community I wish to study. I was privy to certain information that provided the readers with a complete picture of not only the history behind the work, but the seldom, unrevealed dynamics that occurred throughout the process of leadership development toward systemic change. As an educational leader I have grown significantly over the years and continue to do so as I gain a greater understanding about the role and influence of power and privilege in education.

Selection of Participants

I employed the position subject approach (Conrad, Haworth, & Millar, 1993) to address the research questions in this study. In a positioned subject approach the participants within a study, in this case the administrators, engaged in the meaning making process as they expressed and analyzed their experience (Conrad et al., 1993). The use of this approach allows for the selection process of possible subjects to be targeted and diversified so the questions in this study can be adequately addressed. Within the parameters of this study, the positioned subjects are educational administrators who have participated in social justice leadership professional development. Moreover, like the positioned subjects in this study, I viewed myself as a positioned subject as I interpreted and made meaning of the findings from this study.

In terms of identifying and selecting prospective participants, in order to fully comprehend the points of view of the positioned subjects, interviews were conducted with educational leaders from all levels within the administrative structure of the Hatfield school district. Another reason for choosing to include administrators from multiple areas and levels in one study is to address a gap in the literature. Until now, qualitative studies focused on social justice leadership (Brown, 2004a; Kose, 2009; Lalas & Morgan, 2006; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Theoharis, 2010) have not fully addressed the lived experiences of a diverse group of educational administrative leaders who have participated in equity focused professional development over time.

The aforementioned studies addressed the experiences and practices of teachers and principals who have implemented systems and/or programs guided by an equity focus in addition to the barriers and resistance these educators confronted as they implemented these equity focused strategies. While many of these studies provided my research with a foundation in the literature surrounding social justice leadership, and guidance in how I should approach my research questions, they failed to address the process by which educational leaders grew into the role of a social justice leader and cultivated the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful. Furthermore, because social justice discourse had not been a part of the traditional educational leadership meta-narrative, these previous studies omit the realities by which educational leaders choose not to embrace a social justice stance and the reasons behind it. My study may prove to be groundbreaking in that educational administrative leaders will be given the opportunity to break the silence and share stories not commonly heard. The study involved the willingness to share thoughts and feelings, which are often very private and personal with respect to racism, white privilege, oppression, and their own leadership in this area. Critical discourse is a key aspect within this study because one of the five tenets of critical race theory discussed earlier is the ability to share stories and counter stories.

Initially 68 educational administrative leaders had the option of participating in a preliminary survey. This first group of participants represents all administrators within the Hatfield School District. When broken down by level, there are 25 elementary school principals, nine secondary school principals, 12 secondary vice principals, and 22 coordinators, directors, and executive directors, including the assistant superintendents and superintendent. Further disaggregation of the preliminary sample size reveals 32 of the 68 educational administrative leaders are female and eight self-identify as persons of color. Administrators who participated in the survey were instructed to identify if they were interested in participating with this study. Of those who expressed an interest eight administrators were contacted via email and selected as subjects for this study.

The following selection criterion was used to determine which subjects would participate in the study. Selection criteria included: (a) current employment by the school district as an educational administrative leader, (b) participation in ongoing social justice leadership development workshops offered by the Hatfield School

District, (c) a broad representation with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, age, and leadership position, and (d) willingness to meet with the interviewer at least two times for a period totaling no less than two hours each time over the course of three months for audio recorded interview sessions.

Criterion purposive sampling was used to select participants who met the above criteria. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) defined purposive sampling, as an approach where particular individuals, characteristics, locations, or events are intentionally selected because the information gained from such a sample cannot be attained from other sources. The reason for the purposive sampling strategy as outlined above is so the data collected is substantively representative of the overall educational administrative leader experience within the Hatfield School District. Charmaz (1998) asserted studies centered on issues of social justice must include data that diverse individuals agree represents the real world and have been justly assessed. Furthermore, the rationale behind selecting a final sample size ranging between 5 and 15 educational administrative leaders is twofold. First, the decision is a heuristic one in that for qualitative research the guidelines around sample size stipulate appropriateness of 1 to 20 participants in a study. Therefore, a sample size range from 5 to 15 subjects is considered appropriate and manageable from a research standpoint. The second reason for selecting a range from 5 to 15 was based on the sample size of similar studies in previous years (Aleman, 2009; Kose, 2011; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Theoharis, 2010). The following section describes the methods used to collect data for this study. Tables 1-6 offer an overview of participant characteristics.

Table 1

Gender

	n	%
Female	4	50
Male	4	50

(n = *8)*

Table 2

Race/Ethnicity

	n	%
Non-white	3	37.5
White	5	62.5

(n = *8)*

Table 3

Participant Characteristics–Age

	n	%
30 – 40	2	25.0
41 – 50	4	50.0
51 – 60	2	25.0

(n = *8)*

Table 4

Participant Characteristics–Years in Education

	n	%
0 – 12	1	12.5
13 – 25	4	50.0
26 +	3	37.5

(*n = 8)*

Table 5

Participant Characteristics–Years in Administration

	n	%
0 – 8	2	25.0
9 – 17	5	62.5
18 +	1	12.5

(*n = 8)*

Table 6

Participant Characteristics–Job Position

	n	%
Elementary School	2	25.0
Secondary School	4	50.0
Administrative Center	2	25.0

(*n = 8)*

The researcher used criterion purposive sampling in the selection process of the participants with respect to the characteristics described above. The data in Tables 1-6 indicate that of eight administrators who participated in this study, half identified as being female and half male. Roughly 62% of the participants identified as white while 37% identified as being a person of color. The average age of participants was 47 with 50% of them between 41 and 50 years of age. The majority of the participants have been in the field of education for more than 13 years and in administration for more than nine years. Veteran educators with 26 or more years of experience constituted approximately 37% of participants with 12 years being the least. Finally, the participants are representative of administrators at all levels of the Hatfield School District. Intentionally seeking participants with unique experiences from diverse personal and professional backgrounds allows for multiple perspectives in this study. I was fortunate in that the administrators who chose to participate in the research study provided the diversity I sought with respect to gender, age, race, years of experience and position within the district.

Data Collection Instrumentation

Methods are the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question (Crotty, 2003). There are multiple ways to qualitatively collect data to address the research questions within this study. The three data collection instruments I selected were surveys, semi-structured interviews, and field notes. By utilizing three measures of data collection I implemented across-method triangulation. Denzin (1989) argued a problem should be examined from as many methodological perspectives as possible because the rationale found in one method can often be seen in a different method as either a strength or a weakness.

Furthermore, by employing multiple methods in this study I added to the breadth and depth of the analysis and overall outcomes.

Survey

I began this study with an online survey, designed to gauge the degree by which the social justice leadership professional development impacted the educational leaders on both a personal and professional level. The survey also helped me select the participants who would ultimately participate in the interview phase of this research. Participation in the survey was optional and at the end of the survey participants were able to opt in to the research study by clicking on the following statement:

- I agree to take part in a research study about leadership for social justice development and understand that my involvement will require participating in one to two in-depth interviews that may total up to five hours.
- I understand that I will participate in this research study outside of my work time, off district property, and will not be compensated for my participation.

The data collection period for the survey was from October 1-12, 2012.

The survey consisted of 10 questions, some of which were informational in nature such as, race/ethnicity, gender, years of experience as an administrator, and current role/position. These initial questions informed the subsequent selection process to ensure a diverse sample of participants for the interviews. The remaining questions on the survey were open ended and focused on the educational leader's initial thoughts surrounding the social justice leadership professional development they had engaged in over the past two years. For instance, they were asked to express their thoughts and feelings around the following questions:

- When you first learned about the social justice leadership professional development model to be implemented by the Hatfield School District, how did you feel? What were some initial questions and/or concerns you had, if any?

- How would you describe your level of engagement over the past two years with respect to the social justice leadership institutes?

- How has your level of engagement compared to that of your colleagues?

- Describe what you have learned, if anything, from the equity focused professional development?

- What have you done with the information you receive from the social justice leadership institutes?

- Have you witnessed a change in your leadership as a result of the social justice leadership professional development?

Interviews

Once the eight participants were selected, they participated in one in-depth semi-structured interview with the research assistant. I selected this data collection method because it was an effective approach to gain insight into the subjects' perceptions, actions, and feelings around equity and social justice related issues on a deeper level. According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), a semi-structured interview format allows the researcher to be flexible during an interview so she may be able to ask more in-depth follow-up questions and thereby, obtain necessary information. Therefore, interview questions or prompts reflective of the research questions were developed to guide the interview process.

The interview was centered on the following broad-based themes as a means to effectively arrive at answering the research questions. The first theme targeted the educational leader's overall learning process, how they best learn, and how they would describe their learning specific to social justice leadership development. The second theme focused on the emotional aspects of the professional development and what came up for them prior, during, and after each of the leadership institutes. The third theme addressed beliefs and behaviors around hegemony both prior to and after the leadership institutes. The next theme centered on change and how it was manifested in both their personal and professional lives. The final theme addressed both the internal and external challenges faced by these educational leaders (see Appendix A).

The interview began with a series of open-ended questions to seek candid responses and perceptions of the participants' experiences around issues of equity and social justice. I estimated each individual interview to be one to two hours in length and they took place in person at an off-site quiet location such as the café's, restaurants, or libraries. An educational administrator conducted the interviews with extensive knowledge around issues of educational equity from a neighboring school district and they were audio recorded using a digital recorder and I transcribed the recorded interviews. The data collected from these interviews including the information gleaned from the initial survey was kept in a locked file drawer within my home office. I ensured minimal risk to the participants by replacing their names with numbers thereby concealing their identity and by not conducting the interviews myself, but instead enlisting a neutral person from outside of the school district who has no relationship with the participants and no power over them. The benefits of participating in this study were twofold: (a) Participants contributed to expanding the knowledge base surrounding social justice leadership professional development in education and (b) Participants gained greater awareness about issues of equity from engaging in critical reflection and dialogue with a neutral party in a non-threatening environment.

Freirean (Freire, 1970) constructs called for research that allows for participant voice and perspective. In conducting qualitative research that employs interviews, we empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that exist between a researcher and the participants in the study. According to Gay and Airasian (2003), qualitative research is a form of data collection that provides an opportunity for the researcher to capture the social context and human essence of experiences. To provide another source of qualitative data and increase the credibility of the study by triangulation, a comprehensive field log were used as an instrument of inquiry to provide additional data and a holistic view of the participant's lifeworld. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998) field notes are the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study. In some instances, this may be the only opportunity a researcher has to acquire the information for a study and a tape recorder neglects the sights, smells, impressions, and additional comments made either prior to or after an interview. Therefore, field notes were taken by the interviewer during each interview to provide additional support to the recording in the way of body and facial language, emotional responses, and overall observations.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of preparing and organizing data and reducing it to themes through a process of labeling or coding the information. I used a constant comparative method of data analysis (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998) to examine the data and extract the key themes that emerge with relation to the social justice leadership professional development of educational administrators within the Hatfield School District. Methods that employ simultaneous data collection and analysis result in an interpretation of the participants' lifeworld and the means and process by which they arrive at the results (Charmaz, 1998). A thematic analysis of data may yield several themes within one subject's interview and multiple meta-themes across many of the subjects. The method of data analysis I chose determined how I interacted with my data and interpreted my findings. Therefore, for the purpose of this study I began with line-by-line coding technique situated in the constructivist approach. Coding is defined as defining and sorting collected data such as field notes, interviews, and documents valuable to your research question (Glesne, 1999). Additionally, line-by-line coding is referred to as an open coding system where each single line of information, whether in the form of an interview or documents, is analyzed into categories and subcategories. Furthermore, this method of coding data is scaffolded and used to develop thematic groupings, elaborate categories, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps in the data (Charmaz, 1998). These categories are identified through a process of focused coding, where I looked for conceptual patterns among my initial codes.

Each interview was assigned a number for identification purposes and to protect anonymity, then transcribed for analysis. Additionally, field notes taken during each interview were included as part of the interview to fill in the gaps and provide more depth to the responses given by the subjects. Conducting a multi-tiered approach of data collection influenced by the tenets of critical race theory and engaged in praxis with educational leaders will provide me with greater data analysis and deeper insights into how these leaders perceive and practice social justice leadership.

Trustworthiness

The nature of qualitative research requires the researcher to be a key instrument in the research, and therefore, researchers are more concerned with process and meaning than the ability to duplicate outcomes (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998). Because this notion about qualitative research contributes to the beliefs by some regarding the validity of the findings of qualitative research, this study intentionally incorporated strategies to increase the trustworthiness of the research. The idea the deficit of one method is often the strength of another (Merriam, 1998) is the rationale for this study incorporating triangulation of data sources. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the member checks are the most crucial technique for establishing credibility and provide a source of triangulation. In this study subjects were given the opportunity to review, revise, and confirm the transcripts of the interview and the interpretations of the researcher.

Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted peer review allows for an additional set of eyes and an examination of the thought processes of the researcher.

To further increase trustworthiness within this research study, I stated my personal epistemological stance earlier in the chapter by asserting a constructivist perspective and in doing so others will understand the position I take when interpreting the findings revealed in this study.

In closing, when approaching research from a constructivist paradigm, the researcher and the participants are continuously engaged in an interactive process where each influences the other. The constructivist therefore tends to select a more personal, interactive mode of data collection to arrive at the information needed for the research study. As mentioned earlier in this chapter this interactive approach is sometimes described as hermeneutical or dialectical because the goal is for multiple perspectives to exist in order to generate distinctive interpretations of meanings, which can ultimately be compared and contrasted through a dialogue.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The exploration of new understandings, the synthesis of new information, and the integration of these insights throughout personal and professional spheres can lead future educational leaders to a broader, more inclusive approach in addressing equity issues.

– Kathleen M. Brown, 2004

In chapter 4 I present data obtained from surveys containing open-ended questions and individual interviews with administrators. This study examined the personal and professional growth of educational administrators toward socially just practice and described the process by which they learned, internalized what they learn, and put their new knowledge into practice through action within their schools and departments. Tables, charts, and diagrams illustrate the data collected. Furthermore, the purpose of this chapter is to reveal and discuss the findings of the research study as it pertains to the four questions this research address, which are:

1. How do educational leaders describe their experience and learning process within equity focused professional development?
2. What impact, if any, has professional development made on educational leaders' beliefs and behaviors toward creating equitable educational systems for historically marginalized students?
3. If educational leaders have changed as a result of the professional development, how do they describe the change process, the barriers, and the supports for change?

4. Why have some educational leaders been able to develop further in their understanding of socially just leadership and/or effect more change than other leaders?

Data Collection

The data collection process involved gathering preliminary information about social justice leadership development through a survey and interviewing the eight educational administrators who work in multiple departments and school levels within the Hatfield School District who agreed to take part in the study. Additionally, the research assistant took field notes during the individual interviews to provide the researcher with a description of body language and emotion as participants shared their experiences. I have included relevant information from the field notes to provide the readers with a comprehensive narrative of the participants' responses. The preliminary survey was sent to a total of 68 administrators, of which, 10 responded and completed the survey, and of those 10, 8 agreed to participate in the research study.

Survey

The survey used to collect the general characteristics of the participants and responses to key questions regarding equity focused professional development contained 14 questions: 8 to collect demographic information, 6 open-ended questions designed to reveal perspectives on social justice leadership, and two statements allowing administrators to opt in or out of the research study (see Appendix A). Tables 7-12 describe the responses to each question and summarize the data findings from the survey instrument.

Table 7

Survey Responses–Question #1

When you first learned about the social justice leadership professional development model to be implemented by the Hillsboro School District, how did you feel? What were some initial questions and/or concerns you had, if any?

- I was excited to have the opportunity to learn more about this topic and grow as a leader.
- I was very excited to learn that our District would be pursuing this work. I have to admit I was a bit worried of the unexpected; how seriously it would be received by all of those involved and the continuation of this type of PD. I also wondered how this work would trickle down to make an impact in the classroom.
- I was happy to see that it was a priority for our district. Some of my initial questions and/or concerns centered on how this will influence practices as the group as a whole. Did we have the skill or will to move this work forward?
- I was supportive of it and wanted to be a part of it as a participant and a leader.
- I was curious and excited. I have always been interested in equity and identity. I am a life-long learner and feel like I am on a journey of both personal and professional discovery. I wondered how deeply we would engage in conversation around race and I wondered what the expectation was going to be around the integration of our learning in our work at individual schools.
- I was excited to learn more and develop for myself and my school community more understanding what equity meant, and a way to address the blatant hegemonic forces playing out in the classrooms I observed. My initial questions were more, finally, why did this take so long!
- I was thrilled.
- I was looking forward to it from a personal and professional level. My only concern was that we would be paying lip service to this and not really taking the professional development to an applicable, real level.
- I felt I already had a good grasp of social justice and equity. I felt it might be a waste of my time due to my background.
- I thought it would be a fleeting thing that was not as meaningful as it turned out to be.

Table 8

Survey Responses–Question #2

How would you describe your level of engagement over the past two years with respect to the social justice leadership institutes?

- I have attended all of the sessions offered to me and have fully participated in them.
- Very high, since I live and breathe social justice and equity within my school work. I started an Equity Team at my high school - and I have facilitated those meetings for the last 5 years.
- I have tried to be a leader in the work but have not pushed as much as I should. I have been a part of the district planning team and have tried to influence conversations in secondary principal meetings.
- I facilitate Uniting to Understand Racism 1x a year. I have attended Coaching for Educational Equity as well.
- Very high.
- Actively involved; purposefully practiced, disrupting the normality of acceptance.
- I am very committed and engaged, but always feel like there is so much more to do.
- All - in.
- I feel that I really appreciated it after I went to CFEE. I initially found the Pacific Educational Group trainings in conflict with what we were doing in HSD.
- 80%

Table 9

Survey Responses–Question #3

How has your level of engagement compared to that of your colleagues?

- I have taken these opportunities seriously and have tried to learn as much as possible. I feel most people did the same.
- Higher than most and comparable to some.
- I would say that the social justice issues are at the core of my leadership and thinking. I do not think that is the case for most of my colleagues.
- High in terms of daily practice as well as weaving it throughout the work I do.
- Very high.
- I fortunately have been involved with like-minded colleagues that have been supportive.
- Not as strong as my role models and heroes, but much more than others.
- Greater than most.
- I often feel my colleagues say one thing about social justice and equity (usually they are enthusiastic) but then I find their actions don't align.
- 90%

Table 10

Survey Responses–Question #4

Describe what you have learned, if anything, from the equity focused professional development?

- I've learned much about systemic racism and ways to combat inequities in schools. There is much more to learn however, and I hope to have more opportunities in the future.
- I have learned that the work is much more difficult than I originally anticipated, and that it is critical that we stay engaged in this work every day, every year. It takes time to instill in people that urgency that exists in our communities to create equitable outcomes for our students.
- The equity focused professional development has provided definition and baseline knowledge for all administrators to engage in the conversation. We are able to address issues and circle back to conversations and challenges that were discussed.
- I have grown and continue to grow in my personal understanding and awareness and have gained awareness of the need to focus on equity in the workplace and strategies to so.
- I have learned that the more I learn, the more I have to grow. I have learned that I am very passionate about equity work, partially because I feel like it is very closely tied to who I am as a person, and partially because the more I learn, the more I feel like I can make informed decisions with a lens on equity for the students in our school. I have learned that it is scary to engage staff and students (and parents– which I have not yet done) in dialogue about race, prejudice, and bias, but that it is critical to moving a school forward. I believe that student achievement and equity work are so closely tied that you cannot affect one without addressing the other. I have found that I seek out opportunities with people to engage in conversations or learning more about equity.
- A better understanding of the privileges of my own whiteness and the ability to disrupt the normality of prejudice.
- I have learned a lot about myself, and the way people from my race, especially my ethnicity, have dealt with challenges. I learned about my parent's generations and how their challenges pushed me differently. I have also unfortunately learned that much of my staff is resistant, and that hurts my soul.
- 1. How the economic disparity could be traced back to post WWII housing laws. 2. White privilege and how it impacted my thinking. 3. I learned that other administrators of color felt very similar (I don't think I ever spoke to another administrator of color about this topic). 4. I need to speak my truth and my story has power. 5. I learned that technical solutions won't solve the achievement gap problem . . . and so much more.
- I have really been focusing on my role in whiteness as property. I realized just how much I didn't know and how my actions (micro or macro) have direct impact on all students.
- I have become much more aware of the institutional racism present in Hatfield and in commercially created systems for kids overall–behavior systems, curriculum, interventions systems, etc. I have also learned to understand more where people of a different race or ethnicity are coming from when they struggle or are frustrated and play "the race card." I at least understand it more. I have learned how fundamental and integral race is to people's identity and how much it affects their perceptions of white people.

Table 11

Survey Responses–Question #5

What have you done with the information you received from the social justice leadership institutes?

- Equity is at the forefront of my decision making each and every day. I continuously use the courageous conversations protocol in my day to day activities.
- I have used this information to improve my own work at my school.
- It has influenced my decision making as a secondary principal. It has strengthened my core values that guide my decision making process. It has reinforced my role in supporting the understanding and practices of our staff.
- I became a trained facilitator for UUR. Other trainings have helped me grow personally and professionally.
- I typically read it, digest it with the counselor at my building, and make plans for how to work with students and staff. We have done many, many things to address equity at our school. Some of these things include: Identity Glyphs and book *Let's Talk About Race* with staff and students in whole school–Climate Survey–Community Circles in 6th grade to discuss race, bias, prejudice–Staff PD including a presentation of "the white box"–integration of looking at disaggregated data and the different support structures we have in place (data teams, student study teams, etc.) –creation of school-wide behavior plan to include families.
- Incorporated into my own practice and my building beliefs. Provided information to staff about building and classroom practices to be more inclusive and less isolating in regards to gender and racial awareness.
- Brought it to my staff and my daily life.
- I have used pieces of our training to work with/train my staff on the area of educational equity.
- I have tried to be a leader in equity and social justice in my district.
- For the first time in our department our staff is engaging in equity work. We now have monthly department meetings that include an equity activity each time, we have had multiple Administration Center staff in our department engage in UUR training, we sent 5 people to *La Cosecha* and we have engaged many staff in the opportunity to learn Spanish on *Rosetta Stone*. We also sent one of our administrators to CFEE.

Table 12

Survey Responses–Question #6

Have you witnessed a change in your leadership as a result of the social justice leadership professional development?

- Absolutely. Again, there is more growth to be made, but I believe having this professional development has empowered me to move forward with this work with the entire staff.
- Definitely. I am less hesitant to engage in courageous conversations with my white peers; without worrying whether they have the background or not.
- Absolutely, I am much more confident and sure of my practices and beliefs around these core values.
- Yes.
- Yes.
- Yes, I believe I'm more aware and more comfortable to address the blatant and subtle practices that play out.
- I am absolutely more focused on EVERY child. I do keep my racial lens open more and question others about the effect of theirs.
- Equipped with the knowledge and a process, I felt so much more confident to stand in front of my staff and push this work forward.
- Absolutely.
- Yes! I am much more tolerant and sensitive to the issues our families and kids are facing.

Summary of Survey Responses

The findings of the survey indicate a majority of the administrators responded with enthusiasm about engaging in the social justice leadership professional development model. As with any new initiative introduced into a system, words such as “worried” and “concerned” were echoed in some of the responses describing the level of caution by which these administrators approached this work. They expressed a degree of hesitation not due to the type of work introduced, but due to past experiences they have had. The district had been charged with similar equity focused work in prior years and did not carry it to fruition as planned. This was a disappointment to some and thus has caused skepticism among those who believe the work is important but do not believe that the district will follow through on its equity laden rhetoric.

When asked to elaborate on their level of engagement toward social justice leadership development, participants in the survey used words and phrases such as: lead in the work, full participant, actively involved, committed, very high and all-in. Their willingness to engage in equity focused professional development and begin to address inequities that exist in their professional life was evident from the survey results and spoke to their level of growing awareness and commitment toward eventually creating socially just systems and practices at the work place. Brookfield (2009) has the belief that many principals are unwilling to address equity related issues because they are unable to do so.

The responses generated when asked to describe what they have learned, if anything, from the equity focused professional development, varied based on where each of the participants fell on a social and racial awareness continuum. By that I mean, the administrators of color had experienced acts of racism first hand on both a personal and professional level throughout their lives and have had multiple opportunities to reflect and internalize who they are and their position in society. These participants referred to speaking their truth and the power that lies in telling one's story. Others either had not been exposed to circumstances that would invoke the need for reflection and discourse or perhaps, they were either unaware of the inequities or aware but unable to articulate what they were sensing and feeling. Madsen and Mabokela (2005) contended the reason leaders are hesitant to address diversity issues is because they may feel unprepared and do not understand racial matters because of their own limited monocultural experiences. These participants came away with baseline knowledge about equity issues and the vernacular associated with this work. Most participants believed the work to be an opportunity for personal growth and awareness but agreed that it was difficult and took time.

When asked what they have done with the information they received from the social justice leadership institutes, there was general agreement among respondents of how this was a priority for them and how for some, it was at the forefront of their decision making process. That is to say, they had incorporated what they have learned into professional practice which influences how departments, buildings, and classrooms function day to day. They are emerging leaders of equity on the ground with the knowledge and will to create change and interrupt systems that perpetuate racial disparities. Transformative educational leadership begins by challenging inappropriate uses of power and privilege that create or perpetuate inequity and injustice (Shields, 2010). Furthermore, they have noticed this change in leadership and describe themselves as being comfortable addressing issues that emerge, confident of their core values and beliefs, equipped with more knowledge, and empowered to move this work forward.

Interview Findings

In addition to survey results, the context for the study was based on my review of audio interviews, transcribing the interviews, and examining field notes. I utilized line-by-line coding, labeling and chunking when organizing the data into thematic groupings and categories (Charmaz, 1998). The analysis of the interviews included interpreting the responses of the administrators as they shared their thoughts, feelings, and experiences through personal stories from their past and present.

Emergent Themes

The administrators responded to 10 semi-structured interview questions and the result of those conversations produced the following four recurring themes; relevant, developing, committed, and urgent. As administrators described their individual learning process, they used terms such as “doing,” “practicing,” and “engaging” to express how they learn best. Similarly, when these administrators discussed the impact the professional development had made on them, they said it provided them with skills, language, and tools so they may engage in meaningful dialogue about issue of equity with others at the workplace. Responsible, intentional, and uncomfortable were the words these administrators used to describe the change process for them as they participated in the equity focused professional development over the years. Lastly, when asked why some administrators have been able to embrace and grow as socially just leaders, the research participants stated for them it was personal, emotional, and meaningful. They had attached the faces of students, family members and in some cases themselves to the work and thus raising it up a level of urgency. These themes surfaced as key factors for how these administrators described the impact, learning and change processes they experienced as a result of participating in the social justice leadership professional development (see Figure 1).

Each of these themes emerged from their candid responses during individual semi-structured interviews. The researcher subsequently identified and analyzed the themes, describing the learned experiences and impact of the equity focused professional development on the personal and professional lives of the participants. For many, this was the first time participants had the opportunity to share their own personal and professional stories related to issues of equity and social justice leadership development. They openly reflected on their lived experiences as not only administrators but as sons, daughters, aunts, partners, friends, mothers, fathers, and grandmothers. The study involved their willingness to share private thoughts and emotions with respect to their own beliefs about equity in the context of educational leadership. According to Theoharis (2009), principals have the belief that a critical component of maintaining a commitment to equity and social justice is the ability to understand and be comfortable with themselves, their strengths, and their challenges (see Figure 3).

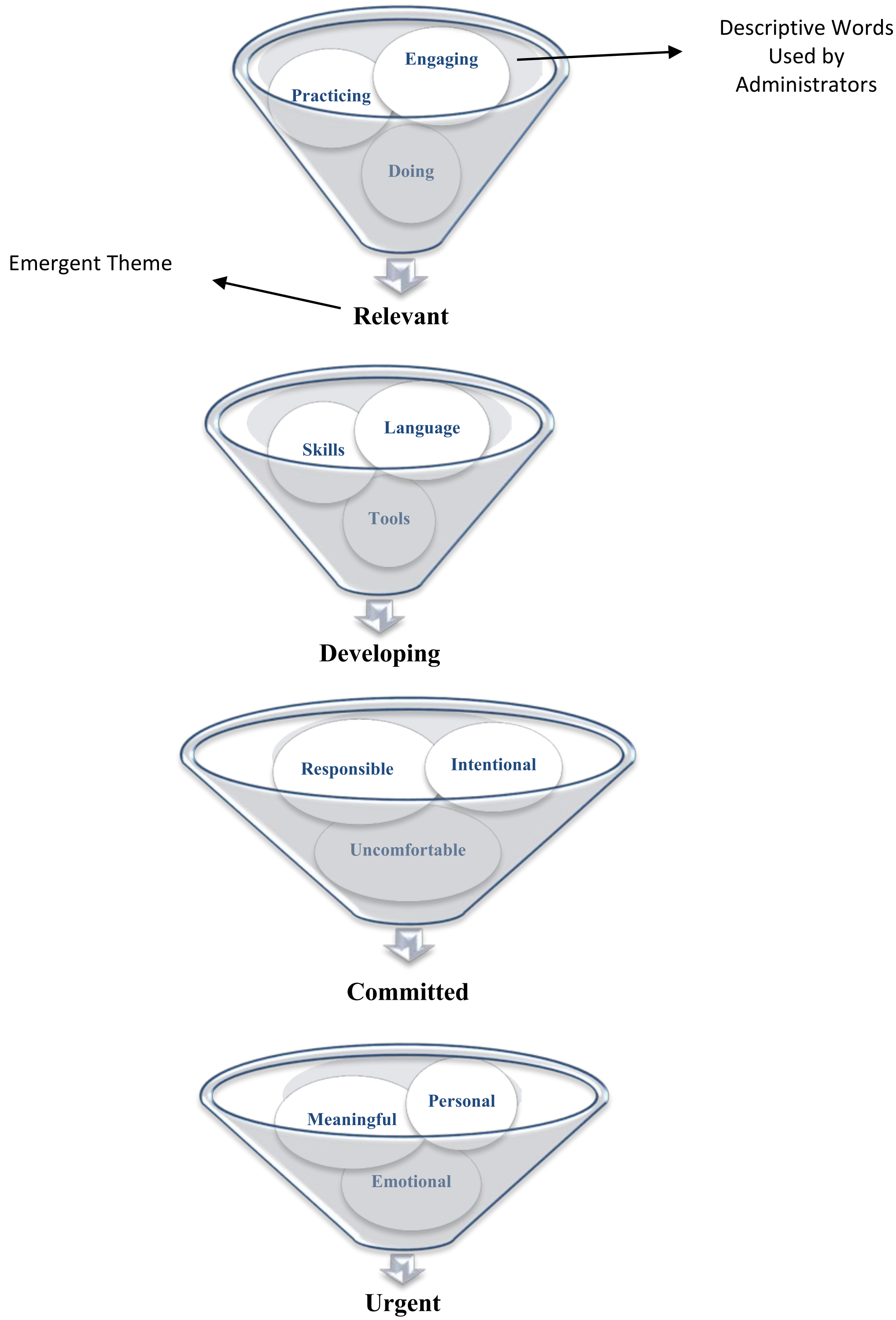

Figure 3. Emergent themes.

The following section elaborates upon each of the four emerging themes obtained from the eight semi-structured interviews. To maintain confidentiality, I omitted identifying information and created a pseudonym for each participant, as all administrators currently work for the Hatfield School District. Table 13 provides an overview of the racial makeup of the participants and their position within the Hatfield School District.

Table 13

Participant Overview

Participants	Racial Identifier	Level
Amelia	White	Elementary
Armando	Non-white	Secondary
Olivia	Non-white	Secondary
Lucy	White	Administrative Center
James	Non-white	Elementary
Sebastian	White	Secondary
Jacob	White	Administrative Center
Briana	White	Secondary

I have selected and included the participants' own words in my analysis to provide evidence and underscore the key themes as the administrators reflected on their thoughts, feelings, and practices as educational leaders and members of society. The results are described below:

Research Question One

In continuation, I share the prevalent theme and supporting accounts for research question number one. When asked the question "how do educational leaders describe their experience and learning process within equity focused professional development," the research demonstrates these administrators learned best when the work was relevant to them.

Relevant

They learned when they were actively engaged and doing the work and could authentically practice the strategies they had learned from the equity focused professional development. Amelia noted the best way for her to learn was trial by error. Successful learning to her involved gathering information either formally through workshops or informally by observing her colleagues implement the strategy in their schools, conducting some personal processing on her own, then "jumping in" and trying it herself in her building. She went on to say,

> I know that it's probably not going to be perfect but I know that I have the philosophy that the only thing that you can do that's wrong is to not do anything at all. So I guess I learn by doing.

Similarly, other participants echoed Amelia's sentiment and described their ideal learning process as doing, practicing, and engaging. Briana stated, "I would say whatever the information is, to be able to practice it right away." She is a proponent of applying what you learn immediately through group discussions or even with a think partner. She believed creating a safe space with someone to bounce ideas off of was a necessary component of this work and furthermore, recommended time be set aside to practice how to interrupt macro and micro aggressions through simulation or role play. James also believed he learns best by doing, while Olivia felt she needed to be, "engaging in conversations and working on it, taking action." She was determined to learn and grow as she engaged in the professional development opportunities. She claimed to be "part of the process" and her role as a person of color in this process was to find solutions.

Armando agreed with his colleagues but added the best way for him to learn was by "putting it in the context of my own personal experiences." Armando responded to all of the questions through a personal story. He would begin to answer a question and effortlessly transition into a childhood memory or recent experience and in doing so, provided for a visually rich and deeply personal answer. Similarly, Lucy would share something about growing up or her immediate family as a personal response. According to Lucy, the best way for her to learn was "to feel that there is a sense of need or relevance to what I'm doing. So I can draw on some personal experience or something that evokes an emotional connection or need, then it usually hangs in my mental framework a little stronger." Lucy was also eager to share her lived experiences and weave personal stories throughout her interview. For Sebastian, the best way to learn was through participation. He went on to say, "So I think for me the best way is how it resonates with me, how it's relevant to me to take it forward." Along the same lines as the other participants, Sebastian opened up and revealed very personal experiences as he responded to the questions. I have identified the emerging theme in question one to be relevance. All eight administrators interviewed used the terms doing, practicing, and engaging to describe how they learn best, specifically referring to the social justice leadership development participation over the past two years. Similarly, Theoharis and Haddix (2011) described the learning process of other principals as initiating with their own emotional and intellectual beliefs about their own racial identities and histories, their privilege, and the presence of institutional racism.

Research Question Two

The following section provides insight into a repeated topic expressed by participants in this research study. What impact, if any, has professional development made on your beliefs and behaviors toward creating equitable educational systems for historically marginalized students?

Developing

In response to question number two, Olivia agreed with Sebastian, Lucy, Briana, Armando, and Jacob in that, the professional development provided them with the language associated with social justice leadership as well as the foundation and framework to engage in deeper and more challenging dialogues about race. When speaking about the effects of the professional development on her, Olivia said,

> That work inspires me to continue and keep going and it gives me the tools to work with issues in a better way and in a way that's influential. I've been able to influence minds and people and students and my staff better. It gives me the language, and I can go on and on. The experience has been powerful. It has not only impacted my own professional life, but my personal life as well.

On a personal level, Olivia experienced authentic opportunities to engage in dialogue about racism with family members at home. She recalled many instances when they would approach her with a dilemma regarding race, discrimination or bullying that had occurred at school. She was able to engage in courageous conversations with her family, specifically her nieces and nephews and the experience was amazing.

Although her relatives do not know the extent of the work that she does around social justice leadership development, they continuously come to her for guidance and advice on race related matters they encounter at school. She found this to be very rewarding and what she lived for.

Professionally, Olivia has capitalized on encounters with staff and students to introduce and foster a culture of critical reflection and discourse about racial issues. At first, staff members avoided the topic and chose to deflect the conversations in another direction. While Olivia was cognizant of this, she was also aware that there were racial issues at the school that needed to be addresses and therefore staff would not be able to avoid the issue indefinitely. Over time, and after developing trust with her staff, Olivia was able to carry on meaningful and transparent conversations about disparities in academic, discipline, and access rates for students of color with staff members.

Similarly, Armando believed the ability to verbalize his thoughts and feelings had improved over the years as a result of his engagement in the social justice leadership development. He described his thoughts as now having the "words to what I've seen, injustices that I have seen, but didn't really have the words to describe it and the confidence to discuss it in a real way." Davis (2006) asserted transformative learning involves gaining information that disrupts prior learning and stimulates the reflective reshaping of deeply ingrained knowledge and belief structures.

Lucy shared how difficult, and at the same time necessary, it was to be able to express thoughts and ideas around issues of race and racism. She went on to describe how the level of fear associated with engaging in conversations about this topic can be paralyzing and yet part of the social justice leadership development is about navigating through the discomfort and growing in the process.

> Probably one of the more important things that have come out of this have been a struggle and challenge and I have learned from is how to talk about, how to find the words because I was afraid I'd use the wrong words. I was afraid of offending. Which terms are correct in which terms are not? And I'm not talking about the N-word or whether you say black or African-American and talking about just how to talk about these things that are so emotionally laden so that has been a big stretch and journey for me is to begin to feel comfortable about things that are so uncomfortable.

Professionally, Lucy is more mindful of the decisions that she makes on a daily basis and the impact these decisions have on the organization as a whole. Her perspective is a global one in that her position in the district can influence enormous change in schools and therefore, she is reflective and deliberate prior to acting on anything. Lucy shared the following with respect to how the learning is realized at work:

> I try to have that equity lens that I see through and I fortunately work with the people that do that as well. Some of them are way stronger at it than I am, so I learned from them all the time about looking at things with another perspective or more deeply in terms of whether or not it's fair or unjust. I also really endeavor to build a community of staff members that are more reflective of the families and the children that we serve and be in a place where I can really affect that.

Sebastian conveyed how prior to participating in the professional development opportunities, he didn't have the language to describe what he was thinking and feeling. He went on to say that what stood out for him was, "being able to name it and being able to put a name to the practice." On a professional level, Sebastian has implemented systems in his school that address the student as an individual with distinct needs and in doing so, has fostered a culture of trust and respect among students and staff. When describing the need and rationale behind creating a perspective shift about students at his school he says,

> There are just different lenses. There are different aspects to each person that they bring to the table, that play out daily and that they themselves have to interact and deal with. In turn, the work that I'm doing and that they have to navigate. What one male Hispanic student needs to navigate could be different than how the same age and same grade level normative white student has to navigate. I just can't see that there can be the same discipline for the same thing when people are coming at it in different ways and that's what I try to understand.

Sebastian goes on to share how the professional development workshops have provided him with insight into creating a non-threatening environment for students of color regularly forced to subsist in a white institution. By minimizing power perceptions in his school allows for dialogue to occur and trust to be built.

> I think that there probably wasn't a lot that I understood about that power dynamic so, really attaching that power dynamics, white privilege; those are pretty powerful and movable boulders in the lives of students of color. What I really try to do in this environment is to downplay those as much as I can, even in the way that I dress and interact with the students. I try to minimize the power right off the bat. They know I'm the principle, it's already there. I don't need to reinforce it.

Briana and Jacob shared similar experiences in that they knew something was not right with how things were currently, meaning, the systems in place further marginalize people of color in our society, however, they did not know how to articulate those feelings and voice their concern to create a compelling argument for doing things differently. According to Shields (2010) transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy and critiques inequitable practices. Further reflection on how this work has impacted her beliefs and behaviors has led Briana to share the following realization:

> I had a wakeup call but I didn't know how to use it . . . for the first time I had an opportunity to reflect on whiteness or think about whiteness as a systemic power and the role of whiteness or whiteness as property . . . I didn't know those terms but it was a first experience with that . . . that was a complete eye opening experience and I didn't realize that a lot of people were in the same position . . . As white people we haven't been forced to look and you just don't see it because you just don't know what you don't see.

Before participating in the social justice leadership professional development, Briana had never considered how her role as a white person of power impacted the world around her. Jacob expressed a similar revelation after participating in the professional development; he believed himself well versed in all that was equity and social justice related to suddenly find out he still had a lot of learning to do. As he attempted to make meaning of the emotions and thoughts surrounding his newfound dilemma, Jacob had the following to share:

> I think the only thing I'd add is that I struggled with a lot of the terminology I hadn't heard before and I was surprised at how uncomfortable it made me when I thought I was at this level and I was at a much lower level. I thought I was much higher in my thinking and my processing of being a leader of equity and how racist some of things that I've done in the past again unintentionally but 90% of the things that are out there are micro aggressions if not more and those little things add up to the big things causing systems to be put in place then cause marginalization and so forth.

These administrators acquired a new language allowing them to address educational inequities with greater confidence. The tools and skills gained over the years have enabled them to develop their abilities as social justice leaders in education and thus have a greater impact on the schools, programs, and the greater community they serve. Amelia asserted this when she said, “We integrate equity and everything we do and we make school decisions based on what’s best for kids.” She spoke about how she is influencing the systems and people around her by addressing racially discriminatory practices in her school. For her, the work is about naming the practices and confronting the systems head on.

> Race is so much a part of your identity because it’s an automatic judgment call that people will make when they see you they will look at your skin color they will look at your features and they will make a judgment call on who they think you are based on all of their preconceived notions about that race or those physical features.

For Amelia, the social justice leadership professional development opportunities have influenced her thinking and decision making in her building to better address academic racial disparities. Her transformative leadership was apparent as she moved her staff toward first recognizing and then implementing programs and systems that elevated educational expectations for all students but specifically, Latino student in her school. She described that experience as follows:

> We took the curriculum away and we said we are going to write our own units. We established a precedent for standards-based instruction and writing your own literacy units by making them culturally responsive, using culturally authentic texts, and creating standards-based instruction. We’re not going to be walking to read any more next year!

In addition to instilling the need for a culturally and linguistically relevant curriculum and delivery model, Amelia also saw opportunity to propose a paradigm shift aimed at student data collection and growth models in her school. The shift she had proposed below was paramount in that, it rerouted the focus to instructional practices and student learning.

> I need to be looking at data that is different than traditional data. It's not easy data to look at because it's more narrative style. What showing up in your lesson plans and what tasks are you having kids do? What is the cognitive rigor of those tasks? It's been a lot of work because it's not clear like OAKS scores were you can say meets/not meets. It's got a be more authentic and different kinds of measures that are more narrative and tell stories of teachers and tell stories of students and families and I don't know how I'm going to do that but I know that's where I need to go. I don't believe that putting emphasis on OAKS is going to get us anywhere. I feel like that just raises people stress level and then instruction goes away and then the focus just goes on passing this test. I think teachers are damaged because of all of the pressure that they've had over the last 10 years for passing OAKS.

In addition to developing the fundamental language skills associated with social justice leadership development, Jacob's beliefs and behaviors were influenced on a deeper level through his sense of responsibility and urgency for this work. He is insistent that his role as a social justice leader hinges on being a white ally and using his white privilege to convince other white people this work is the right work. He states,

> I have to be the one leading it because I'm sorry and I hate to say this to you but the white middle-class male is going to listen to the white middle-class male . . . if I'm the one modeling it, maybe, just maybe, they're going to pay attention . . . Someone has to be the middleman and ''m willing to do that!

Jacob argued he was willing to take a risk and essentially be the messenger so that people, who might otherwise be reluctant to stop and listen, thought twice before dismissing the message all together. He was also vocal about his determination to weave strands of equity into every aspect of his work on a daily basis. He insisted on making this a priority and encouraging his staff to join in on this journey so they too would see and feel the need to change their perspectives about the way things had always been done. The transformative power of leadership is the ability of the leader to reach others in a way which raises human consciousness, builds meanings, and inspires human intent (Bennis, 1986). Jacob was compelled to change the preconceived notions existing among his staff to improve the educational experiences and promote the success for all students, but in particular the students of color they served.

> I remember coming back and thinking, it’s not the same anymore and I have to make some changes in the way I do things. So, my last year as a principal I spent the better part of a year and everything that I did I was really focusing, hyper focusing on equity. I really wanted my teachers to see this is urgent. There is an urgency that I have overlooked and you need to get on the bus with me or we are going to have problems, and I think they did to some degree.

Jacob went on to describe changes he had made in his building to address the inequitable practices further excluding students of color and students with disabilities. He provided the following examples as shifts in program model and beliefs systems implemented at his school with the support of his staff:

> This is what we do at my school. I’m going to show you what we do and you tell me if this is bad for all kids because I'll tell you that it's not. We weren't perfect but I wouldn't do walk to read and I wouldn't do Language! I refused to do Dibbles and I refuse to do PBIS the way they wanted it. I'm not going to have kids walk in a straight line! That is ridiculous! I'm not going to marginalize kids.

In not so many words, James echoed the same sentiment by stating, “You know the saying, if you don’t stand for something you don’t stand for anything. My staff knows where I stand.” He too revealed his passion and level of commitment by placing an emphasis on issues of equity within his sphere of influence as a well-respected building leader. In closing, all of the participating administrators agreed acquiring the social justice language was a critical aspect of their learning and subsequently further impacted their beliefs and behaviors as administrators leading the social justice agenda in their buildings and departments. They also characterized their key learning as follows: Knowing what to call "it," how to talk about "it" with others and being able to interrupt "it." Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) asserted inclusiveness and activism define social justice discourse in educational leadership. The language of critique creates a new discourse with profound implications for social justice and the education of school leaders. Essentially, having the tools and skills to address equity focused issues and systems emerged as a priority for the administrators on a professional and personal level.

Research Question Three

If educational leaders have changed, how do they describe the change process, the barriers, and the supports for change? I share the findings for this question below in the section below.

Committed

Question number three exposed the level of commitment these administrators put forth on a daily basis toward ensuring that they were doing right by all students, especially students of color. They were intentional and transparent about making it part of their everyday conversations and decision-making processes. Amelia stated it best when she described her role within the change process.

> I guess that my mission, if you want to call it that, is to always have equity at the center of the conversation or part of every conversation that we have. It's my responsibility as the building leader to make sure that that's happening and to be consistent about bringing it up.

Amelia has held herself accountable to doing this work by inviting her staff to take part in the dialogue and including them in the change process. Senge (2000) identified this practice as the ability to participate in meaningful conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy where people effectively expose their own thinking and in turn influence the thinking of others. Clearly, maintaining an equity lens was a priority for her, and she understood that this work does not begin and end with engaging in courageous conversations, but rather, is about the ability to use discourse as a springboard for addressing the underlying systemic issues which exist and impede effective progress in this area. Systems thinking is a discipline of seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, bursting patterns of change rather than static snapshots (Senge, 2000). Amelia demonstrated her level of comfort with the process by asking pertinent questions about racialized disparities.

> So how does race interact with what we're talking about right now? How does our achievement gap play into this conversation? What race and what languages do the students speak? When we are talking about behavioral trackers and referrals or student achievement data? How does it show up in the conversations?

The change process for Jacob was similar to that of Amelia in that he had reflected on his position as a white administrator and determined it was not enough to just internalize social justice beliefs but for those beliefs to matter, he needed to take action and make his position known to those around them. In essence, he asserted it was critical for him to wear his equity stance on his sleeve for everyone to see.

> It had to be next to me as opposed to just being in me and that’s the difference. It had to be part of me that people could see. It’s one thing to have it inside and that's great but no one could see it. Then what's the point?

Although Jacob has held this equity focused position prior to being an administrator with the Hatfield School District, at one point he shared an experience he had with a woman at a social justice leadership retreat and marks that interaction as a defining moment in his life. The unexpected occurred and little did he know that from that day forward, his lens on the world around him would never be the same.

> I remember at CFEE there was a gal and she is a Latina woman and a wonderful person but I remember she was so was angry. I remember, she said to me, “why is it that I'm the only one that has to speak, why don't you ever speak up?” I was really quiet the first three days and I can hear her to this day. It was like you know when you touch something and you get an electric shock, like ouch, that hurt! That hurt and it hurt in a good way though because it woke me up. It went right down to my core and I thought to myself, I am not a bad person but you know what, she's right, she is right! So every time that I do this, there's a little bit of me that goes away, a little bit of my humanity slips away when I don't stand up for something. So personally, I am not going to let that happen. I am a better person than this and I will be the equity leader every single day and every moment of the day when I can.

Jacob described what Freire (2000) referred to as praxis or the ability to reflect while one is engaged in action. For Jacob the change process centers on his personal awareness as he contends with the realities associated with his positional power and simultaneously determines his level of commitment to changing the status quo. People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode. They are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, their growth areas, and they are deeply self-confident (Senge, 2006).

Unlike Amelia and Jacob, Armando's change process was challenging at times primarily because as a man of color, he could not always express who he was and what he felt to the fullest extent for fear it may be viewed as being too aggressive or inappropriate by those who work with him. These limitations impeded him from his own personal growth and learning experiences regarding the social justice leadership professional development.

> How do I ask questions? I'm in a delicate role as a Latino. How I ask questions matter. What I say matters so I constantly struggle with that in the larger context of knowing my personal responsibility. Speak up but yet trying to be very purposeful about when and how I did it.

Despite the restriction imposed upon him by his peers and society as a whole, Armando was still able to benefit from the social justice leadership professional development by voicing his awareness and concern regarding the school district's racial equity focus. Where the conversation was once about racial disparities in discipline data or the racial achievement gap, emerging bilinguals is now the emphasis. Armando was rudely awakened to know the district and colleagues he respected at one fell swoop detoured the conversation away from race thus minimizing its relevance and halting the momentum had been built up over the years. He stated, "Every I mean everything changed! I think it's our job to refocus the district to make sure that we're still keeping race at the forefront of our conversations."

While being patient and understanding may be considered a barrier for Armando, Lucy struggled with the discomfort and guilt associated with this work, especially for white people.

> It's really uncomfortable work and really uncomfortable for me. I have to make myself do it. The whole white privilege thing never really occurred to me until I was doing this training . . . in spite of the deficits during my life I still had advantages. I think that at some point in time I always realize that as poor as we were and as neglected as I was, I still had some opportunities that the kids down the block didn't have that were African-American and lived just like me. So what was different? How did I get there? Why was my world just a little bit easier than theirs?

Contrary to how Lucy felt while immersed in this work, Olivia appeared to be comfortable with every aspect of it. It was almost therapeutic for Olivia in that she came into this work with certain predetermined notions about racism and who would benefit from participating in the social justice leadership development. She approached the work believing that she knew it all and her role was to teach white people how to stop being racists. Unbeknownst to her, she gained just as much from the experience as her white colleagues. She did not realize just how important engaging in this work was going to be for her on a personal level.

> When I got off that UUR train, I was a train wreck. I need this. I need to engage in the work so I can help empower others. When I finished UUR, the last session we had, to me it was like, what? We just finished! This work cannot be finished. I cannot just go back to my building and say that I know everything about racism. So I felt like, now what? Something else has to happen.

Other participants have similarly expressed Olivia’s response to the change process. Although they had successfully completed the professional development workshops, they still felt a sense of non-closure and were uncertain as to what next steps would be. Furthermore, many indicated the work was difficult and uncomfortable but necessary, and they were grateful to have had the opportunity. Olivia described the experience as healing and elaborated further by stating,

> So, going into the work and doing it again is a cure for the pain. It's a way for me to continue to work on improving how I check in with myself. So the work has been like medicine. It helps cure the pain. It hasn't cured me completely from that pain because I'm human and I still feel it sometimes but it's not the level I was when I was in the earlier stages.

Undoubtedly, the change process was challenging for many reasons; however, the participants' support of the work resonated throughout the interviews. Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) have the belief that a key leadership dimension is to provide intellectual support to staff and to provide them with the cognitive and moral components of the equity work. The administrators all led some form of change in their respective areas and their efforts resulted in personal and professional growth for them as well as improving systems and outcomes for students of color. The changes in the buildings and departments were initiated by these administrators and continue to be implemented today.

Research Question Four

Why have some educational leaders been able to develop further in their understanding of socially just leadership and/or effect more change than other leaders? Participants' interview responses to the question above lead to the following recurring theme.

Urgent

One common thread throughout the interviews was the infusion of personal stories. During this process these administrators all had a story to tell and were eager to share their lived experiences. In most cases, they had never been asked to reflect and express their thoughts around their learning and leadership with respect to race and racism. They communicated a sense of urgency and were eager to make change occur faster. They also expressed a lack of patience and tolerance for staff members and colleagues who did nothing and essentially became an obstruction and slowed the process down. Amelia summarized this frame of mind when she stated,

> So I just like to jump into the work and I understand that it's messy and it's been my experience that it creates a lot of emotional responses and resistance but you have to just engage in the work and continue to persevere . . . I don't think you can grow unless you get to an emotional place and I think that's part of the process.

Below are some of the stories shared by these administrators and reasons behind why the social justice leadership work is so important to them.

Armando's story. I feel like me personally I haven't been doing the work or else I would've called this out sooner. I think one of the stories I remember most was you know my mom was really ashamed to say this but my dad told me one time when I was younger that my mom is very dark, very dark. I'm very light and my mom was pushing me in a shopping cart and somebody asked her if she was babysitting. And so that was one of the first times that I knew that skin color mattered and my mom was so ashamed of that. And so I've always known that skin color matters. I think it's been a very personal experience, personal learning, really helping me come to grips with my own personal development and personal identity struggles as someone who grew up second-generation Latino.

Lucy's story. It began to get more personal for me about 6 years ago when my first grandchild arrived and she's African-American and now I have a second grandchild who's just a few months old and he's African-American and for me that was when I really put a face with my concerns. I hear stories about children of color going to school and being treated unfairly or see it. I was a teacher and principal for many years. Now that child has a face. That's my child and it changes it for me. I'm not saying that I didn't care before but now I feel more desperate about it and that there be justice and fairness in the world because it's my children. Not that I didn't care about other people's children but it's so personal. I suspect that maybe the people that are white like me who don't do this work; I suspect that maybe they haven't found it personal. It doesn't rise to the importance for them.

These administrators saw the social justice leadership work as critical components in their daily lives as administrators. The work was personal and meaningful on so many levels and they proved to be leaders for social justice through their determination and relentless hunger for knowledge and skills toward addressing the fundamental inequities that exist on a daily basis in education and society as a whole. According to Theoharis and Haddix (2011) principals who struggle with racial issues felt the personal, emotional, and intellectual work was an essential before they could effectively lead schools to be more equitable.

The dedication of these eight administrators toward fostering safe environments that encourage authentic discourse among staff and students was evident by the communication systems they had created within their departments and schools. They are promoters of learning through active and meaningful engagement. They are change agents in the Hatfield School District, inspiring others to step up and challenge the educational systems and inequities, which continue to marginalize students of color.

Survey results and principal interviews indicated common characteristics among all the participating administrators regardless of the position they hold within the district or how they identify racially. The findings from this qualitative research study on social justice leadership development indicate the four main contributing factors to be relevant, emerging, committed, and urgent. An important observation that emerged in the findings is how these administrators learn best by doing and engaging in the work. Furthermore, the research indicated how important it was for these administrators to acquire the proper language in order to carry on difficult conversations about race with staff and colleagues. The study also suggests participants were more likely to engage in something meaningful and personal to them. Lastly, the research overwhelmingly reveals social justice leaders set themselves apart from other educational administrators because they understand and profess the urgent nature of this work and how with each passing day, another student of color is being pushed out of our educational system.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Disapproving of the systems won't be enough to change them.

– Peggy McIntosh, 1989

This chapter includes a summary of the research that reiterates the purpose of this study, the research questions that guided the study, a review of the methodology and procedures used, and a discussion of the findings. Furthermore, this section also consists of the discussion regarding the broader implications for practice including recommendations and questions for further research.

Summary of the Study

Purpose

Once again, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how educational leaders described their development of critical consciousness about issues of social justice in education and how they utilized a lens of equity to effect systemic changes within their schools or departments. My research examined the importance of professional development and how a change is needed to adequately address social justice preparation for administrators.

Research Questions

This study examined the personal and professional growth of educational leaders toward socially just practice and described the process by which adults learned, internalized what they learned, and put their new knowledge into practice through action within their schools and departments. The following questions shaped this research study.

1. How do educational leaders describe their experience and learning process within equity focused professional development?
2. What impact, if any, has professional development made on educational leaders beliefs and behaviors toward creating equitable educational systems for historically marginalized students?
3. If educational leaders have changed, how do they describe the change process, the barriers, and the supports for change?
4. Why have some educational leaders been able to develop further in their understanding of socially just leadership and/or effect more change than other leaders?

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that the administrators who participated in ongoing, equity centered professional development shared similar experiences as adult learners and educational leaders in their professional roles within the same school district. Regardless of race, gender, or job position, the participants all characterized the learning process and ability to internalize the new knowledge as reliant upon whether or not the information was relevant to them in the context of eliminating the racial achievement gap. Mezirow (1978) spoke of how the ability for an individual to take on the perspective of another person or group is one of the most difficult characteristics of meaning making. This notion coincides with what participants in the research study stated as well. Perspective taking is fundamental to transformation because it implies the ability and willingness to let go of a perspective so a different one may take its place. Furthermore, the participants all identified the importance of being actively engaged and immersed in the work as key components of how they learn best. These leaders were able to embrace and gain valuable information from the leadership development opportunity because it was meaningful to them and they were able to actualize what they learned in their schools and departments immediately.

The data also strongly suggest the impact this professional development had on their beliefs was significant in that it provided them with the language to describe and articulate what they had experienced, seen, and felt with respect to racial inequities that have disenfranchised many students for years. Concepts such as systemic power, whiteness as property, and micro aggressions were not terms they used on a daily basis to address the institutionalized racism around them until they participated in the ongoing equity focused professional development. The terminology had essentially converted into tools that they use to name the behaviors, address them and influence others to do the same. According to Theoharis and Haddix (2011) seeing and understanding the whiteness ideology behind the disparities was a starting point for leaders to dismantling them.

The level of knowledge and development these Hatfield School District administrators acquired over two years was also evident when looking at the decisions made by some on a daily basis and the impact those decisions had on eliminating racial inequities in schools. While some participants clearly articulated the change process that occurred within their buildings and departments, and produced evidence that aligned with transformative leadership principles, others fell short in this area.

Even though they expressed how the leadership development workshops influenced them on a personal level, some administrators did not demonstrate how they implemented change as leaders for social justice making a difference in the lives of historically marginalized students. Whereas, all eight participants were receptive to the professional development offered by the school district and were fully engaged in the process, only four took their learning beyond introspection to action. They were able and willing to establish a nexus between critical awareness and intentional systemic transformation.

All eight administrators reported that the outcome of the professional development brought about change and the change process for them was uncomfortable for distinct reasons. Administrators of color found discomfort in openly addressing racial inequities within their district for fear of being perceived as someone who is not a team player and in opposition of the district's mission. This was a precarious circumstance for administrators of color in a predominantly white space and system. They were hyper vigilant about what was said in their presence and cautious in their responses to staff and colleagues about issues regarding race and racism. White administrators also reported being uncomfortable but the source of their discomfort was due to a sense of shame and a lack of awareness. Lucy framed her experience as being uncomfortable but necessary. She was cognizant of the fact that this type of professional development does not successfully occur without feeling a level of uneasiness and challenging both the head and the heart. Brianna shared that at times she did not feel safe in a whole group setting where. There was fear of judgment from her colleagues as well as her supervisor. She was more comfortable sharing in a small group setting with administrators she had built trust with over the years. Olivia expressed the change as healing and therapeutic for her. She has grown from the experience and has become a leader for equity because of it.

All respondents also revealed a determination and commitment to the work surrounding eliminating racial disparities in education and creating equitable systems for all students. The change process revealed a need to hold themselves and those around them accountable for their actions and behaviors. McKenzie et al. (2008) suggest leadership for social justice goes beyond the critical consciousness of a leader but instead encompasses the ability to promote and facilitate critical consciousness in those around them resulting in equitable student outcomes. Some are farther ahead in the social justice continuum and have been intentional about the decisions they make as administrators as well as transparent regarding how they create opportunities to gain a multiple perspective and be better informed when making collective decisions. Regardless where they are along the journey to become more socially just leaders, there is no doubt these administrators have faced both internal and external struggles and challenges throughout the learning and change process.

Finally, the research data demonstrated how the participants in the study exhibited a sense of urgency with respect to realizing the information gained from the equity focused professional development. These leaders have been able to develop further in their awareness and understanding about racial inequities because for each of them, this work is personal and therefore affects them on a deeper level. The inequities they spoke of were not random, isolated incidences about an unknown individual or hypothetical situation. These were real people with real experiences. They had a face, a name, and a unique story to share and in nearly every case, the story was about them. The ability to reflect on the learning, growth and change process around issues of equity is fundamental in this study because administrators who participate in social justice professional development are expected and challenged to reflect on their personal life experiences and the impact it has on their profession. Some leaders went beyond developing a critical consciousness toward cultivating inclusive practices and systems in their schools that serve historically marginalized students and families.

Implication for Practice

This study may prove to be valuable in that educational administrators were given the opportunity to break the silence and share stories not commonly heard in traditional professional development settings. This may allow others to find the courage within and share their experiences and stories with others. Giroux (1992) proposes educational leaders must become actively engaged and transformative in their work. Furthermore, they must be willing to challenge the behaviors within a school system which serve as an avenue to perpetuate this marginalized-privileged dichotomy. However, before educational leaders can engage in the process of transforming the system, they must first undergo a personal transformation of their beliefs, values, and assumptions (McKenzie et al., 2008). Creating safe spaces for critical discourse and reflection to occur is the first step toward changing the culture and climate of our educational system as a whole. According to Brookfield (2009) reflection focuses on uncovering assumptions, the conceptual glue that holds our perspectives, meaning schemes and habits of mind in place. This study adds to the current research surrounding the impact of social justice leadership development and specifically to the significance of providing administrators with a venue to engage in discourse and reflection about race related issues through equity focused professional development with the anticipation of increasing those opportunities. At the core of promoting and practicing socially just leadership is the belief engaging in critical reflection and discourse about race is an essential component in the quest toward exposing the underlying causes and consequences of the racial disparities in education (Brown, Benkovitz, Muttillo, & Urban, 2011; Dantley, 2005, 2010; McKenzie et al., 2008). This belief may provide school districts with a better understanding of how to implement professional development focused on equity and social justice.

Additionally, this study offers a framework for the process of social justice leadership development. Social justice oriented principals face enormous pressures to maintain the status quo (Theoharis, 2008a). The research results will serve to provide knowledge and awareness about the learning and change process related to social justice leadership as well as the impact on belief systems and behaviors. Furthermore, this study may inspire additional research into the experiences of administrators who participate in social justice leadership development, and how they use the knowledge and skills to eliminate the racial disparities and institutional racism that prevent historically marginalized students from achieving success. At the same time, the research may provide a greater understanding about the barriers that exist when leaders are engaged in this work and as a result, why some individuals do not advance in their equity practice on a personal or professional level. What role do parents, school board members, and the community play in advancing or stifling social justice leadership development?

Recommendations and Questions for Further Research

The results of this study revealed significant findings regarding the impact and results of administrators participating in equity focused professional development. From the information gathered through interviews, this researcher formulated the following five recommendations. First and foremost, interviews revealed the value in providing administrators with a venue to engage in critical reflection and discourse about racial and social issues through equity focused professional development. They felt it was necessary for them as leaders to invest the time and energy toward having equity focused dialogues with their peers so they may grow on a personal level as well as professionally. That being said, participants disclosed that before they could engage in the process of addressing and ultimately transforming the inequities of an educational system, they must first confront their own personal biases and beliefs about the students they serve. These administrators often shared how they were better prepared to address issues concerning inequities in their building or department because they now had language to express their thoughts. The equity focused professional development model challenged their thinking and beliefs about their role as leaders in the context of race and racial disparities in education.

Another recommendation that consequently also emerged as a finding was the need for a multifaceted approach of equity focused professional development. Participants reported a level of unease and discomfort when taking part in the district-wide professional development sessions targeting all administrators. The reason being, first of all, they were expected to critically discuss what they view to be inequities in either their buildings or at the district level with colleagues they have had limited interactions with in the past. Furthermore, these discussions were often held with their supervisor and the district superintendent present. This caused a level of anxiety on the part of some participants to fully engage in these discussions. One participant recommended the district offer additional alternative venues and formats where for example, all middle school administrators could meet and engage in equity focused dialogues prior to participating in a large group setting.

Along the same lines, both administrators of color and white administrators described having a sense of fear and lack of trust among their colleagues when engaging in critical discourse regarding issues of equity and social justice. One participant conveyed that he and his colleagues of color refrain from speaking out too often for fear of being singled out as viewed as the loud and angry person of color. Similarly, white participants voiced their concern with sharing for fear that they may say the wrong thing and offend on of their colleagues of color. Laying a foundation of trust and creating a safe and opportune space for transformational learning to occur are essential components of any successful equity focused professional development program.

Furthermore, this researcher recommends extending the professional development opportunities to parents, students, board members, and community partners as paramount for systemic change to occur in education. School districts are a microcosm of societal inequities and unless all stakeholders are invited to actively take part in these critical dialogues and become part of the change, they may become barriers and continue to perpetuate inequitable systems that further marginalize underrepresented students and families.

Providing administrators with ongoing opportunities to grow personally and professionally is recommended for change to eventually occur within an organization. When the Hatfield School District first announced the equity focused professional development model to the administrators, some of the participants stated that as with many initiates in education, this too would fade away and fail to have any impact on creating systemic change. Fortunately, the superintendent and district leadership also shared the same values and beliefs about the importance in maintaining the consistency of the equity focused professional development.

Lastly, the findings reveal not all administrators were able to move from personal to professional growth and therefore, did not affect systemic change in their building or department. Therefore, it is evident that professional development focused of equity and social justice must occur sooner in the career of an administrator and not once they become an educational leader. The expectation for creating and sustaining systemic change is unrealistic if educational leaders begin their transformational journey once they become administrators. I recommend that work focused on equity and social justice is introduced in teacher preparation programs and is imbedded in every aspect of the coursework required to become an educator in the United States. Our teachers are currently unprepared to adequately address the needs of a growing culturally and racially diverse population. Infusing equity as a focus within teacher preparation programs will provide for a comprehensive and challenging curriculum and fundamentally impact how educators teach in the future.

The results of this study lend itself to many possibilities for future research. Among the questions that may be further investigated are:

1. Despite the positive impact on some administrators, there are just as many who do not see the value in this work. Why are some administrators resistant to social justice leadership?
2. What role do education preparation programs play in developing future leaders for social justice?
3. What role do the community and school board play around this work and how can they help or hinder efforts made by school districts?
4. What is the relationship between transformative leadership and student outcomes?

The implications from this study would allow for other researchers to expand and go deeper on the topic of social justice leadership development. The questions posed above provide another dimension to the existing body of literature and may fill a gap that currently exists regarding resistance and barriers to equity focused initiatives. Future research would benefit from nesting this study within a broader framework of leadership development to examine the perceptions and practice of administrators who oppose or are resistant to a social justice and equity focused agenda.

The recommendation for this study would be incomplete, however, without a discussion of the potential limitations. One factor restricting the research was the limited number of administrators studied and the concentration being in one school district. While the benefit of this was the ability for the research to focus and go deeper, it simultaneously narrowed the scope of the research thus limiting the results. This researcher believes that expanding the number of administrators to include ones from other school districts that are conducting similar work will provide a broader perspective and allow for generalizations to be made about the results.

Another limitation of the study, and an opportunity for further research, was coincidentally, all the participants were in some way positively transformed by the equity focused professional development and believed that it was the right work to do and a contributing factor in eliminating the racial disparities currently afflicting student of color nation-wide. The opposing view was not present in my study because those administrators chose not to take part in the discussion. I would propose that in order to gain multiple perspectives about this topic, it is imperative that other voices be heard so we can better understand the issue and learn from one another. Because the literature around this topic is fairly new and limited, I would recommend that any research conducted to further the knowledge base would be well received and welcomed.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore how administrators describe their development of critical consciousness about issues of social justice in education and how they utilize a lens of equity to create systemic changes in their professional roles. As a researcher, my goal was to understand how these administrators received and processed the information from social justice leadership development training. The focus was to identify patterns of insight and gained awareness among eight administrators with different backgrounds and life experiences. Additionally, my pursuit led me to determine whether the leadership development model set forth by the district impacted the participants and if so, how they manifested the gained knowledge toward creating equitable outcomes for historically marginalized students in their professional roles. The findings suggest the opportunities for critical discourse and reflection were instrumental and while not all administrators embraced it, those that did were transformed by the experience. The conclusion from these findings reaffirm what Theoharis (2010) believes is a moral commitment to creating inclusive and supportive schools. According to Byrne-Jimenez and Orr (2013) professional development opportunities must allow for educators to engage in critical discourse that examine their perceptions and beliefs in a non-threatening environment.

The outcomes of this study support the initial conceptual framework presented in chapter 1. The exposure to targeted professional development focused on equity and social justice allows for avenues to engage in critical discourse which fosters the opportunity for critical reflection. These activities eventually result in developing a critical consciousness and from that emerges perspective transformation which ultimately gives birth to emancipatory knowledge. The new knowledge ideally leads to the individual making decisions that produce equitable systemic change. Marshall and Oliva (2010) characterized leaders for social justice as those who take part in a transformational experience can bring about change within the fabric of their organizations.

Creating leaders for social justice is an essential component toward eliminating the racial disparities paralyzing students of color in the Hatfield School District. Although an organization's value statement may claim to strive for academic excellence, until there is a system of true accountability in place and the power structures that maintain and perpetuate institutional racism are confronted, we will continue to underserve a historically marginalized and disenfranchised population and then sit around a long meeting room table and wonder why "those" kids cannot succeed. Educational leaders must redefine and redesign a school system that can afford all students access and opportunity toward a successful educational experience. Professional development of educational leaders requires models of equity and justice (Theoharis, 2010).

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APPENDIX A

SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

Social Justice Leadership Development Survey

1. Name: ___________________ _____ ____________________
   Last M.I. First

2. Title: (choose one)
   Vice Principal Principal Coordinator Director

   Executive Director Assistant Superintendent Superintendent

3. Position/Location: ____

4. Ethnicity/Race: Hispanic White Black Asian/Pacific Islander Native American

   If you identify with more than one, please indicate here: _______________

5. Gender: __________

6. Age: __________

7. Years in education: __________

8. Years in Administration: __________

9. When you first learned about the social justice leadership professional development model to be implemented by the Hillsboro School District, how did you feel? What were some initial questions and/or concerns you had, if any?

10. How would you describe your level of engagement over the past two years with respect to the social justice leadership institutes?

11. How has your level of engagement compared to that of your colleagues?

12. Describe what you have learned, if anything, from the equity focused professional development?

13. What have you done with the information you receive from the social justice leadership institutes?

14. Have you witnessed a change in your leadership as a result of the social justice leadership professional development?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe the best way for you to learn something?

2. Please describe your learning specific to the social justice leadership professional development you were a part of as an administrator in the Hillsboro School District.

3. Please describe what you thought and how you felt prior to attending social justice leadership professional development.

4. Please describe what you thought and how you felt during the social justice leadership professional development workshops.

5. Please describe what you thought and how you felt after the social justice leadership professional development workshop had ended.

6. What were your personal and professional beliefs about hegemony prior to attending the social justice leadership professional development workshops?

7. What were your personal and professional beliefs about hegemony after attending the social justice leadership professional development workshops?

8. Did attending the social justice leadership professional development workshops result in you making a change in your personal life? If so, how?

9. Did attending the social justice leadership professional development workshops result in you making a change in your professional life? If so, how?

10. Did you experience any challenges as a result of attending and applying the information from the social justice leadership professional development workshops?