

REFLECTION AND ACTION: PRINCIPALS WORKING TOWARDS SOCIAL JUSTICE IN
THEIR SCHOOLS

by

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ABSTRACT

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As the disparity gap in U.S. schools continues to persist, school districts and their leaders look for ways to address this issue. In recent years, there have been multitude of attempts to remedy this concern through various trainings programs. Year after year, Wisconsin ranks number one for the largest disparity gap between Black and White students. Using a qualitative multiple-case study approach, this study explored the instructional and engagement practices of six principals in the Fox River Valley Region. This study asked -- how do principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment? More specifically: how do principals interpret the role of equity in implementing their school's instructional practices and how are equity practices reflected in principals' engagement with students and parents of marginalized groups. Semi-structured interviews with individual principals and a focus group interview were conducted, as well as a review of equity related documents. The collected data was analyzed using a coding process to look for emergent themes. Four themes surfaced from the data which include: (1) Transforming and Empowering through Leadership, (2) Inclusivity: All Means All, (3) It's All About Relationships, (4) The Value of Voice in Equity. This study found that these principals' social justice practices were at various levels ranging from emerging to more advanced and that other practices led to marginalization.

In memory of my mom and dad, Harvey and Louann Simon. Your unconditional love and support throughout my life enabled me to pursue my dreams.

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Chapter I-Introduction

For many years there has been debate and research surrounding student achievement and the disparities in achievement that exists based on socio-economic status, disability, and race (Carey, 2013; Condrón, 2009; Ferguson, 2003; Gaddis & Lauen, 2014; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McDonough, 2015; Quinn, 2015). One of the seminal studies to look at the difference in achievement between Black and White students was the *Coleman Report* in 1966 (Condrón, 2009; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009; McDonough, 2015). The *Coleman Report* found that non-school factors such as family background and poverty impacted the disparity gap more than school factors (Condrón, 2009; McDonough, 2015). As a result, schools and educators blamed non-school factors for achievement disparities and continued to educate students using the same methods. In 2010, Borman and Dowling reanalyzed the *Coleman Report* and found that schools do matter. They argued that there could be up to 40 percent difference in achievement scores between schools even when non-school factors are considered. The study further reported that there are also within school disparities that can be explained by teacher bias and academic tracking. The *Coleman Report* proclaimed that Black students would have higher achievement if they attended integrated schools. Coleman further suggested that integration would only work if Black students attended majority-white schools, where they would achieve at higher levels. After analyzing data, Bolman and Dowling (2010) found that Black students actually underperform and disparity gaps are larger in majority-white classrooms due to effects of stereotype threat.

Like the *Coleman Report* in the 1960's, *A Nation at Risk* report in 1983 raised national consciousness about education in the United States. The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) reported that American students were not doing as well in academic

achievement as their counterparts in other industrialized countries. These reports have heightened citizens awareness about educational issues and promoted changes in education. In addition, court rulings and legislation have attempted to mitigate existing disparities. In 1954, in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Supreme Court ruled that state laws which imposed racial segregation in public schools were unconstitutional – “separate but equal” was not equal. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) was the first federal legislation to provide financial resources to schools to improve learning opportunities for disadvantaged children (Thomas & Brady, 2005). Since this legislation was passed in 1965, ESEA has been reauthorized with added conditions. The most significant legislation for the purpose of this paper was the reauthorization act known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001.

The main purpose of NCLB (2001) legislation was to ensure that all students in public schools attain proficiency on targeted learning goals (Yell et al., 2006). Schools were held accountable for students’ academic success, which is measured by test scores (United States Department of Education n. d.). For the first time, schools needed to disaggregate test score information by student-groups (Thomas & Brady, 2005). Additionally, NCLB required that public schools close academic achievement gaps between economically advantaged students and other subgroups of students that include students with disabilities, students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and economically disadvantaged students (Yell et al., 2006). This federal legislation was the first of its kind to be specifically concerned with looking at the achievement of students by sub-groups.

Problem Statement

Since we know schools contribute to the disparity gap and since principals are held responsible for student achievement, principals have a central role in student learning. DuFour and Marzano's (2011) work centers on Professional Learning Communities (PLC) where teachers meet on a regular basis to focus on student learning. Principals are responsible to routinely attend these meetings to help drive student learning outcomes. When the PLC model is used, principals and teachers alike believe they are responsible for each child's academic success (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Yet more studies need to be conducted on how principal leadership impacts achievement disparities.

Various studies have been conducted on the influence of using social justice practices to increase student achievement. A limited amount of research (Brown et al., 2011; Kose, 2009; Scanlan, 2013; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007; Wasonga, 2009) has focused on principal leadership that led to closing achievement disparities for marginalized students. Theoharis (2007) describes strategies that principals use to enact social justice. These principals did away with pullout and segregated programs, increased access to opportunities, and provided more time for student learning. Scanlan (2012) looked at instructional practices used by principals to promote social justice. For example, to respond to an increase of diversity at school, the principal created an antiracism initiative. Kose's (2009) work was in the area of professional development of staff with a social justice lens. Santamaria (2014) examined how educational leaders of color use their positive traits to deal with issues related to social justice and educational equity. DeMatthews et al. (2016) explored the impact of a principal using a social justice framework built on family engagement, where principals organize, inform, and empower individuals and communities. In addition to enacting social justice practices, over the last

decade, there has been a push for equity training in schools as a means to increase academic achievement and rid schools of disparity gaps. While studies using social justice theory as it relates to school have been conducted, there remains a need for further studies to understand how principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine how principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment. In this study, social justice means that principals reflect on their practices and then take action to eliminate barriers that lead to inequity (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Capper & Frattura, 2009; Foster, 1986; Furman, 2012; Scanlan, 2012; Theoharis, 2007; Young, 1990). I further investigated how principals critique their current practices and take action to make change that positively influences student achievement. It is crucial that the disparity gap be addressed, so that all students are provided an equitable quality education.

Research Questions

This study explored the following question: How do principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment? To gain more information, the main question was divided into two specific lines of inquiry:

1. How do principals interpret the role of equity in implementing their school's instructional practices?
2. How are equity practices reflected in principals' engagement with students and parents of marginalized groups?

Study Significance

This study looked at six principals in the Fox Valley Region who were required to participate in equity training as the basis of a multiple-case study. I collected data by interviewing each principal, conducting focus group interviews with five of the six participating principals, and reviewing each school's equity related documents. I used a qualitative approach to analyze their responses to study questions in order to gain new insights. This study contributes to the literature by examining how principals in a Midwest Region reflect on their current practices and take action to create more equity in their schools, particularly for their shifting demographics. More specifically, the study looked at how principals reflect on and take action (or not) to change instructional and engagement practices that had been deemed to be unjust and inequitable – even in a state context that is not universally friendly to equity. In a region that has been historically predominantly White, issues of white privilege must be considered. We are living in a time where the political climate is hostile to diversity, equity and inclusion. The study conclusions found that these principals were at the emerging level of social justice leadership which is not surprising considering these factors.

Definition of Key Terminology

Disparity Gaps: The significant and consistent difference in achievement and engagement between groups of students based on their socio-economic status, disability, and race (Carey, 2013; Gaddis and Lauen, 2014).

Engagement Practices: Principal practices that lead to authentic student, parent, and community involvement and a sense of belonging in their school (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Frattura & Topinka, 2006; Gewirtz, 1998; Jayavant, 2016; Riehl, 2000; Theoharis 2007; Wasonga, 2009).

Equity: Principal practices that eliminate barriers and provide opportunity for all students to succeed (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Dantley & Tillman, 2006).

Instructional Practices: Principal practices and strategies for delivering instruction to students (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour & Marzano, 2012; Frattura & Capper, 2007).

Marginalized Students: Students who experience barriers that result in the lack of opportunities for engagement and academic success (Giroux, 2012; Torres, 1998).

Socially Just: Principal practices that eliminate barriers and create environments for all students to succeed (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Kose, 2009; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Theoharis, 2007).

Social Justice: For the purpose of this study, social justice means that principals reflect on their practices and then take action to eliminate barriers that lead to inequity (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Capper & Frattura, 2009; Foster, 1986; Furman, 2012; Scanlan, 2012; Theoharis, 2007; Young, 1990).

Chapter II-Literature Review

In recent years, many school districts have invested in equity training to address gaps in achievement. Further research is necessary to understand how principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment. This study used a critical and social justice approach to examine the instructional and engagement practices of principals. The critical approach provided a foundation through which to investigate how principals critically examine norms and assumptions that exist in structures and practices that create barriers to equity. Freire's (1970) work provides the link between critical theory and social justice theory. Freire (1970) espouses that having *conscientization* or critical consciousness is the beginning of the process of attaining social justice. The goal of critical theory is to identify and examine societal norms, assumptions and power structures that lead to barriers in equity. Once school leaders identify these systems, work to address and change these structures can begin. Social justice theory focuses on the concepts of fairness and providing equal access to the least advantaged members of society (see also Rawls, 1971, 2003). Along with these concepts, social justice theory centers on disrupting barriers with action that results increase equity.

Grounded in critical theory and social justice theory, this study reviewed critical theory and the ideas of critical educators and examined social justice theory as well. For the purpose of this study, social justice means that principals reflect on their practices and then take action to eliminate barriers that lead to inequity (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Capper & Frattura, 2009; Foster, 1986; Furman, 2012; Scanlan, 2012; Theoharis, 2007; Young, 1990). The conceptual framework constructed by Furman (2012), which focuses on reflection and action, was explored. These reflective and action practices were viewed through five dimensions that include: personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic, and ecological (Furman, 2012). Using

these dimensions, the examination of reflective and action practices was applied to empirical studies about principal leaders.

Critical theory

Critical theory, whose origins date back to the 1930's, is a social theory concerned with critiquing and changing society as a whole. The objective of critical theory is to examine and uncover the assumptions that inhibit us from fully understanding how society functions. This study's grounding in critical theory parallels with Kant's (18th century) and Marx's (19th century) use of the term "critique." The "critique" scrutinizes a body of knowledge, social, or philosophical beliefs and perspectives involved with a phenomenon (Wellmer, 2014). More specific to this study was the extent to which principals critique their instructional and engagement policies and practices to reveal barriers to equity.

Definitions of critical theory. Marcuse (2009) asserts that critical theory from its inception has involved both philosophical and social issues. His notion of critical theory is rooted in economics and how economic conditions are responsible for establishing a social structure in which reality is organized. As a result, an independent scientific discipline that dealt with the structure of reality was borne. Critical theory from its beginning in the 1930's and 1940's "was the most advanced form of consciousness" (Marcuse, 2009, p. 99). Littlejohn and Foss (2011) regard critical approaches as a means to identify power imbalances in order to rectify oppressive conditions. They refer to three essential components that embody critical social science. One, the critical tradition examines the accepted power structures and systems as well as beliefs that are dominant in society (Brown, 2004; Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). Critical theorists seek to understand who benefits from these power structures. Two, the critical tradition looks at social conditions with the goal of exposing oppressive power structures and hierarchies

in order to advocate for a more free and fulfilling society. Three, the critical tradition makes a conscious effort to unite theory and action.

While Littlejohn and Foss (2011) find it necessary to identify power imbalances to remedy oppressive conditions, Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) examine historical circumstances through a critical lens. The examination of structures and norms by Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) led them to make a connection between social dominance and human freedom. Young (2011) also explores the necessity of looking at history to make connections:

...critical theory is a normative reflection that is historically and socially contextualized. Critical theory rejects as illusory the effort to construct a universal normative system insulated from a particular society. Normative reflection must begin from historically specific circumstances because there is nothing but what is, the given, the situated interest in justice, from which to start. Reflecting from within a particular social context, good normative theorizing cannot avoid social and political description and explanation (p. 5).

Young (2011) further discusses that philosophers are always socially positioned, so they can either reinforce or combat against a society in which oppression is present. Horkheimer (1993) supports Young's ideas and expands upon them. He states that a definition of critical theory can only be sufficient if it is explanatory, practical, and normative (see also Bohman, 2005). It must point out, "...what is wrong with current reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms of criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation" (Bohman, 2005, Critical Theory, para 3).

Similarities and differences exist between the ideas presented by these theorists. Each of these theorists discuss the necessity of looking at current social structures and identifying

existing power structures. Even though there are differences in thought on how to explain power structures, all agree that only after identifying these structures can oppressive conditions be remedied. Several theorists proffer that an examination of traditions is important to understanding power structures and norms while another theorist uses an economic lens to gain insight. Since schools are a microcosm of society, oppressive systems are also present there. As a result, theorists have specifically explored oppressive systems, which are perpetuated in schools.

Critical educators. In education, critical theory is rooted in the struggle to achieve socially just schools, classrooms, and relationships among staff, students, and social classes (Williams, 2004; see also Frattura & Topinka, 2006). Critical educators recognize the reproduction of inequities and the marginalization faced by certain groups of students in schools. Apple (2013) states:

...since schools as institutions are so interconnected with other political and economic institutions which dominate a collectivity and since schools often unquestionably act to distribute knowledge and values through both the overt and hidden curriculum that often act to support these same institutions, it is a necessity for educators to engage in searching analyses of the ways in which they allow values and commitments to unconsciously work through them (p. 44).

Using their own experiences, histories, and struggles, critical educators attempt to understand the contradictions of schooling and the resulting marginalization found within it (Torres, 1998). Reflection (Greene, 1978), permanence of race (Ladson-Billings, 1998) and movement towards emancipation (Giroux, 2009) are lens through which critical educators examine oppressive systems in schools.

Ladson-Billings is a critical educator whose work centers on race. As a critical race theorist, she looks at how schools continue to replicate power and privilege to white students. The idea of “equal opportunity” was a recurring theme of the school/civil rights legal battles (Ladson-Billings, 1998). She (1998) states, “This notion of equal opportunity was associated with the idea that students of color should have access to the same school opportunities, i.e. curriculum, instruction, funding, facilities, as White students” (p. 17). Ladson-Billings (1998) examines these various factors through the lens of critical race theory to show that inequity continues to be sustained for students of color. Ladson-Billings’ work looks specifically at race while Greene considers other factors of equity system wide and reports on the significance of examining the system based on an individual’s experiences.

As a critical educator, Greene’s (1978) concern was with not only equity in the social system but also the importance of having individuals critically assess structures and systems based on their own experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives. Greene (1978) writes:

I want to try to develop an approach to equality and justice that rests upon a conception of individual inviolability and critical self-consciousness, one that takes into account the way inequity and exclusion actually afflict individuals struggling to define themselves in the world. I want to try to develop an approach that allows me to move back and forth between the objective arrangements made by the social system and the experiences people have with opportunities, both provided *and* withheld (p. 127).

Giroux (2009) like Greene places importance on the need for individuals to reflect critically on power structures and that their experiences and voice matters.

Giroux (2009) asserts in this era of neo-liberalism, which values the laws of free market, there is an attack on the social contract and democratic politics. Education becomes more of an

individual investment rather than a social investment where the privileged have power to make choices and those who lack resources do not have the same opportunities. Giroux's (2009) work has been in the area of critical pedagogy. To fight against neo-liberalism, Giroux contends that critical thought and pedagogy need to be re-established in higher education as well as in K-12 education. Giroux (2009) states:

In order for pedagogy that encourages critical thought to have a real effect, it must include the message that all citizens, old and young, are equally entitled, if not equally empowered, to shape the society in which they live. If educators are to function as public intellectuals, they need to provide the opportunities for students to learn that the relationship between knowledge and power can be emancipatory, that their histories and experiences matter, and that what they say and do counts in their struggle to unlearn dominating privileges, productively reconstruct their relations with others, and transform when necessary, the world around them (p. 236).

Like Giroux, Westheimer's (2009) work focuses on pedagogy and more specifically on critiquing current educational reform. Westheimer (2009) asserts that policies at the federal, state and district level have sought to restrict the critical analysis of current and historical events in the school curriculum particularly with regard to exploring multiple perspectives to controversial issues. As public education continues to be questioned, a real necessity still exists for the work of critical educators.

These critical educators all called for the need to critically analyze power structures that are present in education and in schools themselves. Education systems and schools perpetuate the norms and values of the larger society which result in the marginalization for certain groups of students. Although Giroux and Westheimer's work is in the area of pedagogy, each examines

a different perspective of pedagogy. While Giroux looks at critical pedagogy with an emphasis on individual participation, Westheimer centers on critical analysis of current and historical events. Similar to Giroux and Westheimer, Ladson-Billings critical race theory calls for the exploration of curriculum and instruction. Greene and Giroux are similar in that both focus on importance of individuals drawing from their own background and experiences to critically examine power structures. It is essential for individuals to understand that their voice matters. Identifying norms and power structures that allow one group to benefit from schooling over another group is the first step to bringing about change and parity in education (Giroux, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Westheimer, 2009). Only after these structures have been identified can steps be taken to create structures that are socially just for all students (Giroux, 2009; Greene, 1978).

Whiteness as a Construct. As shared above, Greene and Giroux discuss the importance of drawing on backgrounds and experiences to critically examine power structures else one can be hindered by their blind spots, particularly those related to *whiteness*. The predominance of whiteness has been undeniable throughout the history of the United States. This social construction carries power in all aspects of daily life including the economy, government and legal institutions, culture, and education (Forman et al., 2022; Leonardo, 2013). This system ensures that white people continue in their position at the top of the racial hierarchy. Forman et al. (2022) states, “Whiteness operates by avoiding acknowledgement of race, assuming meritocracy and individual good intentions...” (p. 356).

In her work, DiAngelo (2021) offers an additional critique even of “progressive Whites” who do not avoid race; she shares, there are “... White people who see themselves as *radically* progressive, well-meaning, *nice*” (p. 2). She further explained that White progressives might

consider themselves “woke” and generally fall on the left side of the political spectrum. These individuals are from all age groups and may have a marginalized identity other than race. These White progressives not only consider themselves non-racist, they believe that anti-racism efforts do not apply to them and that they are not part of the problem. As a result, they may not be interested in taking part in anti-racist efforts. However, if they decide to engage in anti-racist efforts, they can see racism in others, but never in themselves (DiAngelo, 2021).

DiAngelo (2021) discusses the concept of “preaching to the choir” which she describes as people that already know and agree with her ideas with regard to race. She believes that White progressives who are members of the choir are concerning because they do not see their own complicity in the established norms. As a White person, she argues that one is raised in social settings that normalize racial inequality and the supremacy of whiteness. She explains that one is raised in racially segregated places, and this continues throughout adulthood. As a result, particularly if one grows up in what is perceived to be good neighborhoods and attends good schools, in all likelihood, one will continue to live a segregated life. She goes on to note that, although most White people live their lives in segregation and do not move outside their comfort zones, there is a persistent belief that racial bias does not exist. One has to ask: how would I know racial bias exists, since I never experience it? There is a lack of knowledge by White people on the experiences and realities of life for Black people. Often this results from the fact that there is a lack of authentic cross-racial relationships. Due to the lack of these authentic relationships, there is no one to challenge their self-perceptions.

DiAngelo (2021) states, “We are the ones—with a smile on our faces—who undermine Black people daily in ways both harder to identify and easier to deny” (p. 6). This group sees themselves as not racist and becomes defensive if there is any suggestion to the contrary. There

is no urgency to change, because white progressives believe that they are not part of the problem, so no further action is necessary. DiAngelo (2021) goes on to say:

Nice racism results in personal complacency toward anti-racist efforts while upholding material consequences. We won't work toward systemic change if we don't even recognize, much less acknowledge, that we play a role, one way or the other. That role either implicitly supports or explicitly challenges systemic racism; policies don't write and enact themselves (p. 15).

White progressives understand that there is systemic racism, but do not recognize their role in perpetuating it.

For the purpose of this study, it was relevant to examine and to have solid foundational knowledge of critical theory including the role of whiteness. It was particularly important to see how critical theory is integrated into educational practices, even if enacted at different levels, and to study scholars who base their work in this realm. To better understand how educational leaders impact equity in schools, it was necessary to look at the norms, policies and practices that have been established and to identify barriers to equity. Foster (1986) provides insight into the relationship between educational leadership and critical theory. Foster (1986) states:

Leadership is conscious of conditions and conscious of change. Its twin concerns of empowerment and transformation focus on the same goals as the spirit underlying critical theory—to release us from our prisons of ideology and give vision.

Empowerment shares power by modifying those hierarchical structures that set up false distinctions among their members: empowerment enables unrestrained discourse.

Transformation communicates a message and symbol to show us possibilities far beyond

our current achievements: it provides a vision, a vision of a just and equal social order.

Leadership is the process of transforming and empowering (p. 188).

The purpose of this study is to identify and examine how principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment.

Social Justice Theory

Critical theory calls for the examination of norms, policies and practices to discover inequities in the current state, which lead to marginalization of certain groups of students. Social justice theory explores ways to disrupt barriers and change the current state to create a more just environment for all students. As Freire (1970) suggests critical consciousness is the first step in the process of realizing social justice. Therefore, a critical examination of current structures and systems is necessary in order to move towards social justice. Social justice theory is centered on the concepts of fairness, access and opportunities (Rawls, 1971, 2003).

Definitions of Social Justice. Rawls' (1971, 2003) conception of social justice theory is commonly referred to as the "justice of fairness." Social justice is about protecting equal access to liberties, rights, and opportunities and providing for the members of society that are least advantaged. Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) define social justice as an active approach to shifting institutional and organizational power structures by moving forward and advocating for basic human rights such as equity, equality, and fairness in all aspects of social relationships including education. The notion of equality is tied to the fair distribution of capacities needed in a lifetime to be a typical and fully participating member of society.

Distribution of benefits and burdens. Miller (1976) definition of social justice centers on distribution of benefits and burdens throughout society in connection with major social institutions such as public organizations and property systems. Allen and Reich (2013) share,

“The basic task of a theory of distributive justice is to identify what principle or principles should govern or structure the distribution of benefits and burdens in a society and to identify to whom—what people or class of persons—these benefits and burdens are to be distributed” (p. 44). Other scholars have similar ideas when describing social justice in terms of distribution (see also Adams et al., 1997; Gewirtz & Cribb, 2002; Gewirtz, 2006).

Gewirtz (1998) suggests that the definition of social justice should not be limited to distribution but should be conceptualized in broader terms. She categorizes her conceptualization of social justice into two major dimensions that include distributional and relational. Distributional justice is the means by which goods are allotted in society (Gewirtz, 1998, 2006). She argues that a relational dimension should be included under the social justice umbrella. The conception of relational justice refers to how power is distributed in society (Gewirtz, 1998). She states, “Thus it refers to the practices and procedures which govern the organization of political systems, economic and social institutions, families and one-to-one social relationships” (p. 471). Although the distributional and relational dimensions seem similar, Gewirtz draws a clear distinction between the two. The distributional dimension primarily focuses on how goods are allocated to individuals in society; whereas, the relational dimension centers on the essence of inter-connections between individuals in society (Gewirtz, 1998). In order for social justice to prevail there is a need to disrupt and subvert systems that contribute to marginalization.

Young (1990) refocuses the conversation and brings to light the issues of decision-making, division of labor, and culture. Young (1990) states, “I argue that where social group differences exist and some groups are privileged while other are oppressed, social justice requires explicitly acknowledging and attending to those group differences in order to undermine

oppression” (p. 3). Furman’s (2012) work supports this concept because she recognizes the importance of assessing and analyzing current practices in order to change a system. Singleton and Linton (2006) developed a protocol called Courageous Conversations to engage and bolster conversations about race in order to examine schooling and increase student achievement. The protocol includes four agreements, six conditions and a compass which are used together to provide a structure for difficult conversations. Singleton and Linton’s (2006) four agreements are, “1) stay engaged, 2) speak your truth, 3) experience discomfort, and 4) expect and accept non-closure” (p. 17). Their six conditions include:

- 1) Establish a racial context that is personal, local, and immediate, 2) Isolate race,
- 3) Develop understanding of race as a social/political construction, 4) Monitor the parameters of the conversation, 5) Establish a working definition of race, and 6) Examine the presence and role of Whiteness (pp. 18-19).

The Courageous Conversation Compass was created to help participants to navigate through conversations and to give them an understanding of their own and others’ beliefs and opinions, and the sources of their emotional location on the compass (Singleton & Linton, 2006). By using these protocols educators and others have a means in which to engage and deepen the conversation around race. In order to address the issues of racial domination and oppression conversations must occur and these protocols provide a structure for the conversation.

Gewirtz (2006) adds to her previous work by presenting a multi-dimensional nature of social justice. In this work she categorizes the dimensions into distributive, recognitional and associational justice. When these three dimensions are present, social justice is more likely to be established than if only one dimension is present. The definition of distributive justice has not changed from her previous work, but she adds the categories of recognitional and associational

justice. Recognition justice introduces the idea of an absence of cultural domination, non-recognition, and disrespect (Gewirtz, 2006). This definition is related to what Young (1990) calls cultural imperialism. Young writes:

Cultural imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm... Often without noticing they do so, the dominant groups project their own experience as representative of humanity as such. Cultural products also express the dominant group's perspective on and interpretation of events and elements in the society, including other groups in the society, insofar as they attain cultural status at all (Young, 1990, p. 59).

Bogotch's (2002) definition of social justice also includes the idea of recognition. She spells out the need for an emphasis on recognition of all groups and individuals as well as the redistribution of resources to address social inequity. Cribb and Gewirtz (2002) describe associational justice as the power provided to all individuals and groups to make decisions, participate and govern their own lives. Leaders for social justice, either as individuals or with their communities, investigate injustices. This requires these leaders to organize, inform and empower individuals and communities (DeMatthews et al., 2016).

Social Justice Theory in Education. Gewirtz (1998) provides a broad framework of conceptualizing social justice in educational policy research. She proposes that policies be examined by looking at the following questions to determine how these policies support, hamper, or undermine social justice.

1. Exploitative relationships (capitalist, patriarchal, racist, heterosexist, disablist, etc.) within and beyond educational institutions?
2. Processes of marginalization and inclusion within and beyond the education system?
3. The promotion of relationships

based on recognition, respect, care and mutuality or produce powerlessness (for education workers and students)? 4. Practices of cultural imperialism? And which culture differences should be affirmed, which should be universalized and which rejected? 5. Violent practices within and beyond the education system? (p. 482)

Like Gewirtz (1998), other scholars examine distribution, oppression, and domination in the education realm. Bell (1997) suggests that leaders, as social actors, have a strong belief in social justice and processes must be in place to ensure that all groups have full and equal participation. Young (1990) states that in schooling educational opportunity involves the distribution of material resources such as money, books, computers and the like, so it is reasonable to assume that the more resources, the greater the opportunity students have in an educational system. Educational leaders who are socially just must recognize and amend fundamental inequities that they find in the status quo (Young, 1990). In addition to funding, instructional materials and facilities, another area of concern is individual belief systems, which include expectations that certain groups, such as the poor, English language learners and the marginalized, do not have the capability to perform academically or have the capacity to be leaders (Young, 1990; see also Frattura & Topinka, 2006). Furman and Shields (2005) state that multiple aspects of equity must be used to address the increasingly diverse 21st century schools, which include a deep understanding of social justice, recognition of power and privilege which contribute to injustices, an awareness of collective inequities and individual prejudice, and dealing with pedagogical concerns. It is important to have a broad understanding of social justice in education in order to apply these concepts in educational leadership and understand the depth of the impact. This study considered how principals, who have been through equity training, use social justice concepts in determining instructional and engagement practices.

Social Justice and Educational Leadership Programs. Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) discuss social justice in the field of educational administration as well as the challenges that universities and others face as they prepare educational leaders to engage in social justice discourse and a call to action. Scholars in educational administration need to cultivate continuous critical discussions that draw on a variety of theoretical perspectives. Alternative perspectives to consider include multicultural leadership, critical African American, Latino leadership traditions, and feminist leadership, along with structural-functional and positivist research models which dominate inquiry in educational administration. The analysis of these approaches allows us to take action to make drastic, fundamental transformations in societal systems, which include schools, rather than solely examining and identifying inequities. To establish greater equity in schooling, school leaders are called to question the norms that guide school policies and practices (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). School leadership programs must meet this challenge by preparing future leaders to critically examine the tacit structures and assumptions that create overwhelming barriers to students' academic success.

McKenize et al. (2008) describe the structure and content necessary to create an educational leadership program to prepare principals for social justice work. For the purposes of their work, McKenize et al. (2008) argue for a definition of social justice that is broad in scope because the meaning cannot be universally applied in all circumstances in the same way with all marginalized persons. This definition is used because McKenize et al. (2008) recognize that perfect social justice leaders do not exist. Leaders may have strengths in one aspect of social justice but may be weak in another area. For example, the leader may be inclusive with students with disabilities, but is weak with providing opportunities for inclusion for English Language Learners (McKenize et al., 2008). Foundationally, students in educational leadership preparation

programs must have the following three goals around social justice. One, principals are responsible to raise the academic achievement of all students. Two, students must be prepared to be critical citizens in our society. Three, to realize the first two goals, students must be assigned to inclusive, heterogeneous classrooms where a rich and engaging curriculum is offered (McKenize et al., 2008). The authors suggest certain criteria for how students should be selected for a socially just educational leadership program, recommend the content and knowledge for a social justice program, and discuss the necessity of induction after graduating from the program.

Capper et al. (2006) provide a conceptual framework for preparing leaders for social justice. Capper et al. (2006) framework is organized by horizontal and vertical dimensions. In the horizontal dimension are critical consciousness, knowledge, and practical skills focused on social justice. Capper et al. (2006) refer to critical consciousness as the embodiment of a social justice consciousness that must be in a leader's belief and value system. This includes the understanding of power structures and social construction. Knowledge pertains to the information and understanding that a leader possesses specific to creating an equitable school. Leaders must have broad knowledge of current research on reading and mathematics curriculum and instruction, as well as evidenced based best practices specifically related to social justice. These would include understanding the positive effects of ridding the school of tracking and pull-out programs (Capper et al., 2006). Leaders must possess specific skills to enact social justice that allows them to practice their knowledge and consciousness.

The vertical dimension has three components, which include curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. In order to provide a leadership program that is based in social justice, it is necessary to look at critical consciousness, knowledge and skills through the lens of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Curriculum is the specific content that is taught which influences

consciousness, broadens knowledge and builds skills of leaders. The framework is set up to have intersections between the horizontal and vertical dimensions. In the intersection between curriculum and critical consciousness, students would examine power, privilege and racism as well as looking at how school structures perpetuate power inequities (Capper et al., 2006). At the intersection of curriculum and knowledge, students would gain knowledge on special education law, evidenced-based practices on second language acquisition, distribution of resources and reading and math curriculums.

Social Justice and Educational Leadership. Bogotch (2002) suggests that educational reform efforts are so complex, they cannot be moved forward without seeing the need to begin a reconstruction. Education moves from one generation to the next, which results in just and unjust practices being handed down (Bogotch, 2002; see also Young, 1990). As a result, it is necessary to continually critique and reinvent all social justice educational reforms efforts (Botoch, 2002; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). As Bogotch states:

...Nevertheless, the concepts of social justice and educational leadership provide for socially constructed agreements to emerge around specific problems, solutions, and courses of action. By connecting social justice to educational leadership, we can *direct* these possibilities toward creating new and just communities (p.154).

Educational leaders must continually examine how their actions connect to social justice inside and outside of schools (Bogotch, 2002). Educational leaders must actively advocate for and practice social justice in order to provide an equitable education for all (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). To understand social justice in educational leadership, there is a need for further examination of structures and norms through a critical lens. Also needed is more investigation into the development of leadership skills, instructional practices of socially just leaders,

engagement practices for students, staff, parents, and the community, and barriers that exist in current practice. In this study, a social justice lens was used to examine the engagement practices of principals.

Critical Theory, Social Justice, and Principal Leadership Practices

Drawing from the aforementioned literature, it is surmised that critical theorists examine systems and structures and in doing so they identify oppression and barriers to equity that exist. Once oppressive systems, structures, and barriers to equity are exposed, social justice theorists take action to disrupt and change the oppressive system. Furman's (2012) work aligns with both critical theory and social justice theory. She calls for reflection or the investigation of current practice. Only when principals reflect on current school practices will change or action for social justice begin. Reflection is a premise of critical theory while action is the cornerstone of social justice theory. Therefore, the conceptual framework that was used for this study is rooted in work of Furman (2012). Although Furman's framework was created to develop the capacity of future leaders in the area of social justice, for the purpose of this study, this conceptual framework was used to assess practices of principals that are currently working in the field as building principals. Furman (2012) presents three main concepts that include: one, social justice leadership is considered a practice involving reflection and action; two, social justice leadership has several dimensions which provide opportunities for practice; three, within the framework each dimension requires that leaders for social justice develop their reflection and action capacities.

The first concept social justice leadership is a practice that involves reflection and action. Furman (2012) argues that previous research has shown the necessity for reflection and action in

social justice leadership. However, little work has focused on what social justice leadership in practice actually entails. Furman (2012) describes this concept in the following manner:

Praxis involves the continual, dynamic interaction among knowledge, acquisition, deep reflection, and action at two levels—the intrapersonal and the extrapersonal—with purpose of transformation and liberation. At the intrapersonal level, praxis involves self-knowledge, critical self-reflection, and acting to transform oneself as a leader for social justice. At the extrapersonal level, praxis involves knowing and understanding systemic social justice issues, reflecting on these issues, and taking action to address them (p. 203).

Furman goes on to explore how the concept of practice aids in examining the individual capacities that educational leaders use to engage in social justice leadership. In her framework Furman (2012) identifies five dimensions for social justice leadership as a practice that include: personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic, and ecological. These dimensions are further described through both a reflective and action lens.

Personal Dimension. In the personal dimension, leaders must examine their beliefs, assumptions, and biases in regard to race, class, language, and sexual orientation in a critical manner and engage in honest self-reflection (Furman, 2012; see also Brown, 2004; Frattura, & Capper, 2024; Radd et al., 2021; Young, 2011). To develop capacities for reflection in the personal dimension, Furman (2012) suggest the following: 1) writing and sharing their cultural autobiography, 2) structured self-reflection, 3) guided reflection and journaling (see also Brown, 2004). The structured self-reflection model requires educational leaders look at their lives through various stages of development. At each stage educational leaders examine major experiences and the effects of these experiences on their values and beliefs (Branson, 2007a,

2007b). Guided reflection and journaling help educational leaders name and clarify their beliefs, thoughts and hopes (Brown, 2004). Using self-reflections, cultural autobiography, and structured reflections, educational leaders create a plan for developing their capacities for action as leaders of social justice.

Furman (2012) suggests that in this dimension action requires that leaders work to continually grow in practices of social justice by using self-reflections and that the plan will be ongoing throughout their careers. Like Furman, Brown (2004) provides a framework for training educational leaders for social justice and equity, which can be applied to educational leaders working in the field. Brown weaves three theoretical perspectives; adult learning theory/development, transformative learning theory/process and critical social theory, to create a pedagogy designed for social justice work. She proposes that leaders will be better prepared to work toward social change, if they actively are required to examine current norms, values, assumptions, and competing worldviews (Frattura & Capper, 2024; Warner, 2020; Young, 2011). To increase awareness, acknowledgement, and action, Brown (2004) recommends four pedagogical strategies to raise critical consciousness, which include completing a cultural autobiography, conducting life history interviews, participating in prejudice-reduction workshops and keeping reflective analysis journals.

Interpersonal Dimension. The interpersonal dimension focuses on the vital role that relationship building plays in social justice work. In this second dimension of Furman's (2012) work, she discusses the necessity for engagement. Being proactive in building trusting relationships across cultural groups with staff, parents, and students is essential (DeMatthews et al., 2016). Leaders must have knowledge and spend time reflecting on their style of communication and behaviors. They also need to evaluate whether their communication style

and behaviors contribute to silencing and marginalizing others (Furman, 2012). Leaders strengthen school culture and community by creating a welcoming environment and by reaching out to marginalized families (Riehl, 2000; Theoharis, 2007; Wasonga, 2009). Reflection and action are themes that are again presented, which can be applied to engagement of students, staff, parents, and the community (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Furman, 2012).

In order to analyze and develop their relationship skills, leaders must have knowledge of interpersonal relationship theories and models (Furman, 2012). Action in the interpersonal dimension is based on the proactive practice of building interpersonal relationships where clear communication, respect and caring, and active listening are paramount (Furman, 2012; Moral et al., 2017; Warner, 2020). To develop leaders' capacities for reflection in the interpersonal dimension, knowledge of self, of others, and of relationship theories are vital. Using structured reflections, which are part of the personal dimension, helps leaders to develop self-knowledge in the areas of communication and relationship skills. Leaders can build their knowledge of others by using the tools of life history, cross-cultural interviews, and diversity panels (Furman, 2012). The concept of student voice is also important in developing a knowledge of others. Furman (2012) states, "...they should become familiar with the concept of "student voice" (Lalas & Valle, 2007; Mitra, 2004, 2009; see also Frattura & Topinka, 2006) and how to develop processes in schools that allow for student voice to be expressed and heard" (p. 208). Role-playing is one method in which students can build their capacity for action. Educational leaders can work on their listening, dialogue, and cross-cultural communication skills. Leadership development plans should include the development and practice of interpersonal skills (Furman, 2012).

Communal. In the communal dimension, social justice leaders use inclusive and democratic practices to build community across cultural groups (Furman, 2012). Practice in this dimension requires a deep breadth of knowledge about the community and cultural groups that attend the school (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Furman, 2012; Scanlan, 2012). An understanding of democracy and democratic community in education today as well as inclusive practices are fundamental for practice in this dimension.

Action in this dimension requires that leaders are proactive in setting up democratic forums and processes for communication and making decisions that are inclusive especially for traditionally marginalized students. To build capacities for reflection in this dimension, principals should collect data about the communities and cultural groups that are served in their schools. The data should include life histories and cross-cultural interviews that were part of the interpersonal dimension. Adding neighborhood walks enriches the data (Furman, 2012; McKenize & Scheurich, 2004). Inclusion and inclusive practices must also be studied. Team building, open communication and inclusion are the set of skills needed for action. Principals should conduct an audit of inclusive instructional practices that are used in their schools (Capper, & Frattura, 2009; Furman, 2012; see also Capper et al., 2020; Frattura & Capper, 2024; Radd et al., 2021). The results of the audit should be used to develop a plan for improving inclusion.

Systemic Dimension. In the systemic dimension, practice includes assessing, critiquing and working to change the system at the school and district level (Furman, 2012). Using a social justice lens, this dimension requires the critical examination of school and district policies, structures and practices, which may create barriers to student learning (Furman, 2012; see also Ezzani, 2021; Frattura and Capper, 2024; McKenzie et al., 2008; Radd et al., 2021). Once barriers and injustices have been identified, engagement in transformative leadership practices is

necessary to change the current system. Social justice work in this dimension requires prioritizing, working for meaningful change even when facing resistance and barriers and engaging others in the work (Ezzani, 2021; Furman, 2012; Warner, 2020). To increase capacities for reflection, leaders are required to develop their critical consciousness as it relates to issues of social justice. Critical consciousness is developed by providing readings and guided discussions specifically related to race, poverty, language and other social justice issues. Other ideas for expanding one's critical consciousness include studying cultural relevant and responsive pedagogy (Capper et. al, 2006), visiting schools and classrooms where successful advocacy is for all learners, and sponsoring educational plunges and diversity panels. In the systemic dimension, capacities for action can be developed by creating action plans based on the audit of their schools (Capper & Frattura, 2009; Furman, 2012; see also Capper et al., 2020, Frattura & Capper, 2024). An essential part of the plan is professional development for staff related to socially just pedagogy (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Ecological Dimension. In Furman's ecological dimension, leaders need to act with the understanding of social justice issues as they relate to schools (Furman, 2012). Leaders must view these issues in the larger sociopolitical, economic and environmental conditions, which are interconnected to the broader issues of oppression and sustainability (Furman, 2012; Rivera-McCutchen, 2020; Young, 2011). In this dimension reflection requires that leaders have an awareness and understanding of broader societal issues and the school's role in addressing these issues. To build capacities for reflection in the ecological dimension, leadership students should read about and have guided discussions related to the connections between education and larger societal issues.

Action in this dimension involves making other educators aware of a schools' position in the greater societal context. Specifically, looking at how societal issues and their impact on schools. Principals provide teachers and students with experiences in their local community related to economic and environmental issues that may directly affect them. Action also requires that principals work to create positive relationships with the community in which the school resides. To advance their work in this dimension principals develop activities that connect staff and students to the community. These activities might include natural history projects, cultural journalism, and other forms of inquiry to get to know the community.

The focus of Furman's (2012) social justice leadership work is centered on three main concepts. These concepts include the practice of reflection and action, opportunities for practice in five dimensions, and capabilities of leaders to grow through reflection and action in each dimension. The five dimensions provide a framework through which to view the following empirical studies. This same framework was applied to examine the instructional and engagement practices of principals.

Empirical Studies

Personal. Based on Furman's framework, in the personal dimension school leaders critically examine their beliefs and assumptions regarding marginalized groups and engage honest self-reflection (Furman, 2012). Santamaria (2014) looked at the manner in which educational leaders of color use their positive traits to deal with issues related to social justice and educational equity. Although Santamaria's work was specifically directed at leaders of color, her findings can be applied to all leaders regardless of race. She used a culturally responsive case study design. Santamaria (2014) sample included six educational leaders who identify as male and female, varying race and ethnicity, and differing positions of leadership

from kindergarten through higher education. Data sources were comprised of an identity survey, interviews, review of written work, supporting documents from educational sites, and observations. Santamaria's work was grounded in critical multiculturalism and Applied Critical Leadership (ACL). She found that these leaders used an ACL approach from which Santamaria identified nine common leadership characteristics. Four of the characteristics fall within the personal dimension, which include critical conversations, Critical Race Theory lens, stereotype threat, and servant leadership. While the remaining characteristics fall under other dimensions. Leaders are willing to start and engage in critical conversations in both formal and informal settings even when individuals or groups are uncomfortable with the topic. Through a Critical Race Theory lens, leaders consider race first, see the benefits of story-telling as a means of communication, and understand the reality of racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Santamaria, 2014). Leaders are aware of stereotype threat as well as the possibility of passing along negative stereotypes which may be linked to their perceived racial, ethnic, or linguistic group (Santamaria, 2014; Steele, 2010, see also Frattura & Capper, 2024). As servant leaders, they feel that they are called to lead (Santamaria, 2014; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014). All participants felt the need to lead for something greater than themselves. From her research, Santamaria (2014) concluded that educational leaders of color bring a unique leadership skill set due to their own educational experiences related to their social position. This particular leadership skill set may lend itself well to confronting challenging social issues facing education today. By cultivating these practices, leaders are better able to meet the needs of an ever increasingly diverse K-12 student population.

Self-reflection, one of the concepts of the personal dimension, can be found in Theoharis' 2008 work. Theoharis (2008) explores social justice leadership traits of seven principals in

urban settings. He used a qualitative approach and incorporated principles of autoethnography to conduct his study. To gather data, Theoharis conducted interviews, reviewed documents and materials, kept a field log, and held group meeting of participating principals. Theoharis (2008) found that these seven principals had three traits in common, which were arrogant humility, passionate leadership, and a tenacious commitment to social justice. Arrogant humility is the blending of two terms. These leaders displayed arrogance by their strong belief system in knowing what is best, that they are right and that they are the person who is needed to lead the vision. Humility is described as their ongoing questioning of their capability and knowledge, their willingness to be transparent about their mistakes, and their continued evaluation of whether they are succeeding in their position (Theoharis, 2008). Passionate leadership is characterized by the depth of commitment, enthusiasm, and caring that the principal has for carrying out their work. These principals see their position as a way of life, not just a job. Theoharis (2008) describes tenacious commitment to justice as the dedication that these principals held to continually and persistently focus on equity and social justice for themselves and their staff. Theoharis (2008) states, “These leaders embody a complicated mix of arrogance and humility, lead with intense visionary passion, and maintain a tenacious commitment to her or his vision of social justice while nurturing and empowering their staff” (p. 12). Socially just leaders make every decision and take every action through a social justice lens (Theoharis, 2008).

The purpose of Jayavant’s (2016) study was to examine effective leadership, social justice and equity, and improved academic achievement in urban primary schools. This study was situated in Auckland, New Zealand. She used a qualitative comparative case study approach and data collection included semi-structured interviews and document collection. Jayavant

(2016) conducted interviews with five principals in four different schools with large numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Documents obtained from the school website, which included strategic plans, school policies, recent Education Review Office reports and newsletters were also analyzed. Specifically, Jayavant (2016) was looking for characteristics and behaviors of principals who practice social justice as well as how these principals lead in schools with diverse student populations. Eight common characteristics emerged from her work, which she listed as self-awareness, moral purpose, trust at all levels, courageous conversations, group consensus, transformational leadership, creating a socially just environment through social responsibility, and transcending interests for the greater good. All of these characteristics fall within one of Furman's (2012) dimensions. The first characteristic, self-awareness, fits in to Furman's personal dimension. Self-awareness is described as the ability of these principals to identify ways that their value and beliefs affect their leadership decisions (Ezzani, 2021; Jayavant, 2016). These principals discussed individual and professional development opportunities that challenged their deficit thinking. The practice of reflection led to increased self-awareness and the desire to enact social justice practices in school.

Jayavant's (2016) study also revealed the ideal of moral purpose, which is the awareness that principals have of their own beliefs and assumptions, and the impact of these on their actions. They understood that there are no neutral actions and all decisions are based on their beliefs and values. One principal stated the following:

Key thing about behaviour of effective leaders is, it's easy to say but they actually do walk the talk, and you actually show what you value by what you do, and when you do it, and how you do it, and how you make what you do explicit (p. 12).

These leaders understand that their beliefs, values, and actions can interrupt a system that is not socially just and can be the catalyst for providing equitable opportunities for all students (Jayavant, 2016; see also Frattura & Capper, 2024).

Warner's (2020) research measured a group of principals' awareness of social justice issues and helped to establish principals' greater knowledge of the leadership practices rooted in social justice. This qualitative research study took place in a North Carolina school district with a diverse and transient population. Surveys and interviews were conducted to gather information. Principals were given one-to-two-page vignettes on a variety of social justice topics. After reading the vignettes, principals were interviewed to gain their perspective on the issue. Warner (2020) found that participating principals believed it was their job to lead and teach social justice in their buildings. Principals indicated that by reading the vignettes they had increased their knowledge on social justice and would share the vignettes with their staff. By being part of the study, principals felt a deeper commitment to leading for social justice. This resulted in a change in the way they think and take action in their school (Warner, 2020). They pointed out that professional development in the area of social justice is necessary in order to make meaningful change in teaching and learning. The study also found that hiring the right people is essential to carrying out the mission of social justice. These principals were aware of the challenges in school communities and society surrounding social justice, but understood the importance of continuing to advocate and implement social justice practices in their schools (Warner, 2020).

Interpersonal. In the interpersonal dimension, building trusting relationships across cultural groups with students, parents and staff is imperative (Furman, 2012). DeMatthews et al. (2016) study looked at the impact of one principal, who led an elementary school using a social

justice framework built on family engagement. These researchers did a qualitative case study in which information was gathered using interviews with parents and teachers and observations of the principal in various school settings. From their research, they found four multifocal practices that the leader used to approach her work (DeMatthews et al., 2016). First, the principal was engaged in learning about the lived experiences of marginalized groups while recognizing inequities inside and outside of school, which influence student achievement and well-being (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Warner, 2020). Second, the principal was deeply reflective and committed to providing a balanced approach to schooling. It was the principal's desire to ensure that academic achievement was not significantly more important than community engagement, questioning social norms, providing a respectful and tolerant culture, and meeting the social and emotional needs of students and families (DeMatthews et al., 2016; see also Rivera-McCutchen, 2020). Third, the principal had the fortitude to understand that the leaders do not always have all the answers, that leaders must devote time to parents because they are the most important link to student success, and that the school's role is limited if parents are not fully engaged, empowered and supported (DeMatthews et al., 2016; see also Moral et al., 2017; Scanlan & Johnson, 2020). Fourth, the leader commits to providing a socially just family engagement environment where a school-community partnership builds on the cultural community strengths and develops a list of priorities based on the needs of the students, families, and communities. DeMatthew et al., (2016) conclude from their research that leaders must have the capacity to be collaborative, to understand the complexity of marginalization and to strongly commit to meeting the needs of students and parents simultaneously.

As previously mentioned, Santamaria's (2014) work can be applied in the interpersonal dimension. Honoring constituents and trust with the mainstream are two leadership

characteristics that fall under the interpersonal dimension (Santamaria, 2014). Leaders feel the necessity to recognize and honor staff, parents and community members. The voice and perspective of traditionally silenced groups and individuals are sought out and included by these leaders (see also DeMatthews et al., 2016; Santamaria, 2014; Scanlan & Johnson, 2020). Leaders conveyed the need for building trusting relationships with individuals and groups who do not necessarily have a shared interest in issues of educational equity (Santamaria, 2014; see also Jayavant, 2016).

Earlier in the paper, Jayavant's (2016) work was discussed and two characteristics fall within the interpersonal dimension, which include the characteristics of trust at all levels and courageous conversations. Building trust among staff, students, parents and the larger community was a component that was highlighted in this research (Jayavant, 2016, see also Moral et al., 2017). These principals felt it was fundamental to providing to their work as leaders. Each principal spent time building relationships with each of the previously mentioned sub-groups. To deepen these relationships, these principals made a commitment to being transparent. One principal discussed the importance of not having hidden agendas, and allowing teachers to try new things in their classrooms and supporting them even when things go wrong (Jayavant, 2016). An element that the principals shared was the need to have courageous conversations (Ezzani, 2021; Jayavant, 2016). These principals had courageous conversations with individuals, as well as groups, in both informal and formal settings. There is an overlap between the characteristics of trust at all levels and courageous conversations. Since principals had strong and trusting relationships, the sub-groups were willing to engage in courageous conversations (Jayavant, 2016).

Communal. In Furman's (2012) communal dimension, inclusive and democratic practices are used by social justice leaders to build community across cultural groups. In a 2017 study, Goddard et al. examined whether teacher collective efficacy plays a part in closing achievement gaps. For the purpose of their study, Goddard et al. (2017) looked at mathematics achievement and the Black-White achievement gap. One goal of the study was to determine if teachers specifically identify principal leadership as a source for their collective efficacy beliefs (Goddard et al., 2017). The researchers used a mixed methods approach. The sample included 13,472 students and 2041 teachers in 47 elementary and middle schools. For their qualitative data collection, Goddard et al. (2017) chose six schools for teacher focus group interviews. Using the quantitative data, the researcher chose three schools where collective efficacy measure was high and three schools where it was low to conduct the focus group interviews. Goddard et al. (2017) found that principal leadership did have an impact on teacher collective efficacy in the schools identified with high and low collective efficacy. Two main themes emerged from the focus group interviews. One, in schools with higher collective efficacy teachers described that their principals empowered them to collaborate to improve instruction. Structures were created that allowed teachers to collaborate usually through peer observations. Two, in schools with high collective efficacy, principals established shared norms that pushed for continuous instructional improvement, which included pressure to increase instructional time and an unwillingness to accept excuses for low performance.

Santamaria's (2014) study can be connected to the communal dimension. In this dimension group consensus and leading by example are leadership characteristics. In meetings and individual discussions, leaders prefer to use group consensus building to make decisions. Jayavant's (2016) research found that principals that practice social justice gathered input from

many stakeholders, which included students, teachers, parents and the community. Each principal advocated for group consensus when making decisions and created environments that allowed for this practice (Jayavant, 2016; see also Scanlan & Johnson, 2020). To meet the needs and challenges facing education, leaders lead by example (Santamaria, 2014). Critical issues with regard to race, ethnicity, and class are brought to the leader's constituents for resolution. By doing so publicly, these leaders are honoring their constituents and leading by example.

Systemic. In Furman's (2012) systemic dimension, social justice leaders assess, critique, and work to change the system at the school and district level. Scanlan (2012) examines social justice leadership through one strand of social learning theory, communities of practice. Specifically, Scanlan looked at one core dimension of communities of practice, learning architecture. Scanlan (2012) used a case study approach that involved interviews of teachers, administrators, support staff, volunteers/board members, observations from site visits and archival documents in one private school that served students in kindergarten through eighth grade. He completed 21 semi-structured interviews with six teachers, five administrators, five support staff, and five volunteers/board members. This study builds off the work of a previous study at the same site. In the area of learning architecture, Scanlan (2012) identified four dualities, which are: Participation and Reification; Designed and Emergent; Local and Global; and Identification. His research finds that socially just leaders create spaces for teachers, through communities of practice, and for transformational learning to take place.

In this space, Scanlan (2012) describes the four dualities of learning architecture and their relation to educate staff, so they have more capacity to serve traditionally marginalized students. Although each duality has its own learning architecture, there are interconnections between them. In the learning architecture of participation and reification, Scanlan (2012) describes

participation as one's actions and interactions with others and reification as the processes and materials that aid in participation. Scanlan provides an example from his study of participation and reification. The principal created an antiracism initiative to respond to an increase in diversity at the school. As a result of this initiative, workshops were held that discussed and examined race. In the learning architecture, participation is staff attending the workshop and reification is the materials provided at the workshop. In the learning architecture of designed and emergent, Scanlan (2012) states, "...learning emerges in response to design (p. 355)." Scanlan (2012) points out that there is an interconnection between participation and reification and design and emergent occurs when staff takes part in workshops on race. The workshop was specifically designed to introduce the staff to the main concepts of White privilege and institutional racism. In the area of identification, the purpose of the antiracism initiative was to help educators to identify as antiracist. Scanlan's (2012) work suggests that leaders can influence the direction of educators' learning when there is an understanding of the interconnections between the dualities. To promote equity and educational opportunity in schools, a design for learning must be afforded to educators.

Theoharis's (2007) study provides an example of action in the systemic dimension. Theoharis' (2007) research examined the ways that school principals enact social justice, deal with the resistance that they face, and the strategies they develop to overcome resistance. Theoharis conducted a qualitative study using a positioned-subject approach with seven principals that worked in an urban school setting. Using the positioned-subject approach, Theoharis postulates that these principals, "...actively create meaning from and interpret their work" (p. 224). He collected data through in-depth interviews, field notes, a group meeting with the participating principals and reviewing documents. Theoharis (2007) describes strategies that

principals use to enact social justice. He states, “These principals advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 222). The principals created better school environments by raising student achievement, improving school structures, building staff capacity, and enhancing school culture and community (Theoharis, 2007; see also Ezzani, 2021; Frattura & Capper, 2024; Kose, 2009; Scanlan & Theoharis, 2020). Theoharis (2007) states, “All of the principals felt they had a duty and a ‘moral obligation’ to raise achievement for marginalized students” (p. 231). Principals improved school structures by ridding the school of pullout and segregated programs, by increasing access to opportunities, and by providing more time for student learning (Theoharis, 2010; see also Frattura & Capper, 2007, 2024). To create and promote socially just schools and to improve student achievement, these principals-built staff capacity. Theoharis (2007) explains, “They sought to increase staff capacity by addressing issues of race, providing ongoing staff development focused on building equity, developing staff investment in social justice, hiring and supervising for justice and empowering staff” (p. 235).

Kose’s (2009) work falls within the systemic dimension because it demonstrates the importance of principals providing a systems wide approach to teacher development. He used a qualitative multi-case study design to examine the influence that three principals had on professional development in the area of social justice. Kose conducted interviews with three principals and 36 staff. In addition, data was collected by observing the three principals in their schools, as well as gathering documents such as professional development plans. Kose (2009) describes principals as transformative learning leaders and as such, principals are responsible for fostering and enhancing teacher growth. In this role, principals’ practices are twofold: promote

teacher development for social justice, and advance organizational learning development for social justice (Kose, 2009; see also Ezzani, 2021; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Scanlan & Theoharis, 2020; Warner, 2020). In the area of promoting teacher development for social justice, principals enact three practices that include: providing learning in subject matter expertise and social identity development, offering learning opportunities from experts inside the system as well as outside on subject matter or social identity development, and differentiating professional learning to meet the unique needs of teachers (Kose, 2009). Similarly, Scanlan (2012) found that socially just leaders design and provide professional learning opportunities through communities of practice where transformational learning can take place.

Through his research, Kose (2009) identified five principal roles that worked together to enhance professional learning. These roles include being a transformative leader in the following areas: visionary, learning, structural, cultural, and political (Kose, 2009). As a transformative visionary, a principal works collaboratively with staff to develop and communicate the vision of the school (Kose, 2009; see also Blankstein, 2013; Scanlan, 2012). Kose (2009) states, “These visions emphasized transformative values of equitable high academic achievement, inclusion, affirming diversity, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship” (p. 638). Within that vision, principals provided purpose and set the course for professional development. Kose (2009) explains, “Principals reenvisioned systems, practices, teaching, and learning for all students and for social justice rather than simply improving existing school practices” (p. 638). As a visionary leader in professional development, principals are responsible for changing current systems that do not provide for inclusive practices or impede the learning of marginalized students.

As a transformative structural leader for social justice, the principal ensures structures are created to make the best use of resources, assignments, schedules and people (Kose, 2009; see also Frattura & Capper, 2024). These principals established formal learning teams, built an inclusive service delivery model, and provided common work, time, and space for professional development (Kose, 2009; see also Capper & Frattura, 2009; Frattura & Capper, 2024). Kose (2009) asserts that socially just leaders create safe spaces for teacher voice in professional development around social justice. Principals as cultural transformative leaders work to institute school-wide shared norms and values (Kose, 2009). These shared norms and values included creating an environment for collaborative learning, establishing a collective responsibility for all students, and reflecting on personal as well as school values and actions that continue or put a stop to injustices at school and the larger community (Kose, 2009; see also Rivera-McCutchen, 2020). As leaders, principals must reflect on current systemic practices that lead to social injustice and take actions to change to these practices.

Ezzani's (2021) study looked at how an elementary school principal used social justice leadership practices to support Black male students, who received discipline referrals at a higher rate than their white peers. A qualitative case study approach was used to gather information. To begin, Ezzani (2021) used data from a larger study that took place in a Texas school district. Through purposive sampling from the larger study, she was able to single out a school and principal. Data were collected through five formal semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview with teacher-leaders, and seven school observations. District policy, the school improvement plan, and faculty meeting agendas served as other sources of data (Ezzani, 2021). From the data collected, three emergent themes developed, which include, "...data-informed leadership, teacher core values as anchors, and a model for cultural paradigm shift" (Ezzani,

2021, p. 234). Social justice leadership was enacted when decisions regarding students, particularly Black males, was data driven. This brought the issues to the forefront of conversations. By understanding teachers core values, the principal was able to provide professional development to meet their needs in order to move them to being more social just. This led to teachers individually and as group towards collective consciousness. The principal established structures that resulted in a paradigm shift for serving and caring for students (Ezzani, 2021). This study revealed how a principal changed the system in her school to ensure that all student but particularly Black males received the same educational opportunities.

Ecological. In the ecological dimension, leaders must understand the impact that larger societal issues have on schools and what school leaders can do to address these issues. A piece of Theoharis (2007) research falls within the ecological dimension. In his work he discovered that the principals faced resistance to their work for social justice not only within the walls of the school but in the larger society (Theoharis, 2007; Warner, 2020). The principals discussed the roadblocks they encountered from the district office to state and federal laws (Theoharis, 2007). One principal shared an example of a special education student who had been removed from the school even though the school staff wanted to continue to work with the child. This decision was made by district office staff without the principal's knowledge and was conveyed through a teacher. Another principal talked about the burden that state and federal laws posed in her work for social justice. The principal discussed state statutes regarding English language learners. The example she provided regarded the necessity for parents to sign students out of English language learner services so that the student could enroll in a two-way bilingual program. She found that these regulations were marginalizing her students from funding to programming (Theoharis, 2007). In Kose's (2009) work on professional development for social justice, one

role of the principal as transformative leader belongs under the ecological dimension. As the transformative political leader, the principal is responsible for developing school-wide support for change, as well as capitalizing on external resources and opportunities for professional learning (Kose, 2009; see also Shields, 2010). These principals also looked for professional resources and opportunities outside the school, which included the practice of writing local, state and federal grants; recruiting and hiring a diverse workforce; and advocating for district staff and professional development funding (Kose, 2009). One of the principals in the study wrote and received a grant that provided professional development in literacy and ELL. This same principal made it a practice to hire teachers with ELL or bilingual credentials, or those willing to get the certification (Kose, 2009). Principals as social justice leaders must have awareness of greater societal issues and their effect on schools.

In sum, although many school districts and schools have invested time and resources to address the disparity gap, the issue continues to persist. Therefore, further research is needed on this subject area and is merited. In general, more studies need to be conducted on how principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment. This study used critical and social justice approaches to examine the instructional and engagement practices of principals.

The critical approach provided a foundation through which to investigate how principals critically examine norms and assumptions that exist in current structures and practices which create barriers to equity. Once there is an understanding of the barriers created by existing structures and practices, principals can take action. Social justice theory focuses on disrupting barriers and taking action to achieve equity. Furman's (2012) conceptual framework aligns with

both critical and social justice theory. Furman (2012) calls for both reflection and action, where reflection can be linked to critical theory and action is tied to social justice theory.

For example, Furman (2012) provides a conceptual framework through which empirical studies can be organized. In the *personal dimension*, school leaders are called to assess and reflect upon their own belief systems and assumptions with regard to marginalized groups. Santamaria (2014), Theoharis (2008) and Jayavant's (2016) studies give examples of leaders reflecting on their own beliefs systems and taking action to create socially just practices in school. The *interpersonal dimension* is centered on the importance of relationship building and engagement. DeMatthews et al. (2016) as well as Santamaria (2014) and Jayavant (2016) found that principals saw the significance of building trusting relationships and engaging their communities in their efforts to promote social justice in schools. In the *communal dimension*, social justice leaders use inclusive practices and democratic ideals in order to build community across cultural groups. Goddard et al. (2017) and Santamaria (2014) studies showed that social justice leaders value the voices of all stakeholders in the decision-making process. The *systemic dimension* requires the evaluation of current school and district practices and further works towards changing those practices that create barriers to providing a socially just education. Scanlan (2012), Kose (2009), Theoharis (2007) studies give examples of social justice leaders accessing the current system and identifying barriers. Efforts to rid the system of barriers were most commonly addressed by providing staff development. In the *ecological dimension*, social justice leaders are called to understand the impact of larger social justice issues in the world and the impact those have on schools. Kose (2009) and Theoharis' (2007) research described the effects that state and federal governments have on schools, which include both barriers and opportunities.

As such, Furman's conceptual framework was used to examine the instructional and engagement practices of identified principals. The instructional and engagement practices of principals were scrutinized through the lens of the personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic and ecological dimension. Within each dimension, the reflections and actions of the principal were explored. Using this approach helped to determine whether principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment.

Chapter III-Methodology

Over the last several decades, educators across the United States have made efforts to address achievement disparities, yet these disparities continue to persist. More research is necessary to solve the issue of achievement disparities. This study sought to understand how principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment. This section provides information on how the study was conducted. The work is positioned within the realm of qualitative research. I interviewed principals and reviewed documents on the instructional and engagement practices of six principals from the Fox Valley Region of Wisconsin. To be in this study, principals must have participated in equity training as mandated by their districts. The study addressed the following questions:

How do principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment?

How do principals interpret the role of equity in implementing their school's instructional practices?

How are equity practices reflected in principals' engagement with students and parents of marginalized groups?

The methodology section includes: an overview of qualitative research and critical theory; a description of case study methodology; participant selection; data collection; data analysis; validity and reliability; and positionality and reflexivity.

Design

I used a qualitative research methodology in this study. Using a qualitative approach gave me the opportunity to be directly involved with the study and to provide the sensitivity necessary when gathering and interpreting data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Although the widespread use of qualitative research methods is a relatively new development in applied social

and policy research, its historical roots can be linked to Kant. In 1781, Kant published the *Critique of Reason* in which he asserted that there are ways other than direct observation to know about the world. He further argued that people are using methods other than direct observation all the time (Ritchie et al., 2014). Ritchie et al. (2014) states:

... that perception relates not only to the senses but to human interpretations of what the senses tell us. As such, knowledge of the world is based on ‘understanding,’ which arises from reflecting on what happens, not just from having had particular experiences. Knowing and knowledge therefore transcend basic empirical enquiry (p. 11).

Based on this reasoning, researchers using qualitative research have placed importance and value on human interpretation of the social world. Both the participants’ and researcher’s interpretations and understanding of the phenomenon being studied are significant (Ritchie et al., 2013).

Qualitative research was the most appropriate approach for conducting my research because it afforded me the opportunity to collect data in the natural setting, provided for rich description, and allowed for interpretation of the phenomena of principal practices (Merriam, 1998). Using a qualitative approach permitted the researcher to interpret the meaning of information while drawing on personal reflections. The researcher must be reflexive throughout the entire study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study was conducted using a multiple-case study approach that was positioned in the realm of qualitative research.

Description of Case Study Methodology

To understand how principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment, I conducted a qualitative multiple-case study that used semi-structured

interviews and document analysis, which focused on principals who were required to participate in equity training (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Case study research is essential to the field because it comes forth from the yearning to “understand complex social phenomena” (Yin, 2014) and has been used in many instances to add to our understanding of individual, group, social and other phenomena. Yin (2014) states, “In brief, a case study allows investigators to focus on a ‘case’ and retain a holistic and real-world perspective—such as in studying individual life cycles, ... school performance ... and the maturation of industries” (p. 4). Merriam (1998) also discusses the need for case study research, and like Yin, she emphasizes importance of trying to derive meaning from the views of those being studied. Further, she believes that case studies hold the best promise of contributing to the educational knowledge base. The examination of events and phenomena is the main aim of case study research and allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of those being studied (Merriam, 1998).

A case study methodology is appropriate when certain factors are present. First, when the researcher desires to consider questions of “how” and “why” (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). These two types of questions lead to “...operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence” (Yin, 2014, p. 10). Second, a case study is favored when the researcher is exploring contemporary events and pertinent behaviors that cannot be manipulated (Yin, 2014). Third, the case study methodology allows for a variety of evidence to be used for data collection including interviews, observation, documents, and artifacts (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). These various data collection sources are a strength of case study research and sets it apart from other methods. Fourth, a researcher must consider how the case is “bounded” (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). “Bounded” refers to boundaries that are set for a study. Merriam (1998) states, “... a case study is an examination of a specific phenomenon such

as a program, event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (p. 9). These four factors comprise the strongest basis for the use of a case study methodology. Based on these four factors, I determined that using a multiple-case study was the best method to answer my research questions. A multiple-case study looks at two or more programs, events, persons, institutions or social groups. Yin (2014) writes that a case study and multiple-case studies are equivalent.

A case study approach was best for my research because I asked “how” questions, which is the prime standard set by Merriam (1998) and Yin (2014). The examination of how principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment is “a contemporary phenomenon” which can be explored in a “real world context” (Yin, 2014). Additionally, I wanted to know if equity training impacts the practices of principals and I decided the best way to garner that information was by being out in the field interviewing principals and collecting documents for examination (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). These forms of data collection prevented me from manipulating data which is a concern of case study methodology (Yin, 2014). This case study had specific boundaries because it looked at a cadre of six principals who were required to participate in equity training, it took place in the Fox Valley Region which is a defined demographic region, and it examined specific documents. Using case study methodology to examine the instructional and engagement practices of principals who have been required to participate in equity training, permitted me to explore the phenomenon in a (Yin, 2014). I used a multiple-case study, which involved six principals, in order to build a more compelling body of data (Yin, 2014).

There are both concerns and benefits of using case study methodology. Case study methodology concerns include; lack of rigor, generalization, and manageability of scope (Yin,

2014). There has been concern over lack of rigor because it is believed that other methodologies use more specifically proscribed procedures. Yin (2014) states, “Too many times, a case study researcher has been sloppy, has not followed systemic procedures, or has allowed equivocal evidence to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions” (p. 20). Generalization is another concern when using case study methodology because it is difficult to generalize from case study findings. Manageability of scope refers to the amount of time and the potential for an over-abundance of data collection. While these situations lead to concerns with using case study methodology (Yin, 2014), the ability to conduct an in-depth study and provide rich information are strong benefits of using a case study methodology (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Merriam (1998) explains, “The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon” (p. 32). The benefits of conducting a case study outweighed the concerns in my research study. The principal interviews and review of documents were systematic and focused. A case study like mine which involved principal interviews and a review of documents yields in-depth and rich information.

Prior case studies have been conducted that looked at principal leadership and social justice practices. Santamaria (2014) and Jayavant’s (2016) case studies provide examples of leaders reflecting on their own beliefs systems and taking action to create socially just practices in school. Case study research by DeMatthews et al. (2016) found the significance of building trusting relationships and engaging their communities as efforts a principal made to promote social justice. Scanlan (2012) and Kose’s (2009) case studies give examples of principals that advance social justice by assessing the current system and identifying barriers and then

attempting to rid the system of barriers by providing staff development. Various case studies have investigated principals and social justice practices, but there was need for a dedicated study on how principals transform their instructional and engagement practices to create a more socially just learning environment.

Participant Selection

Participants for this study were chosen based on specific criteria to identify the school districts and school principals. In the following section, I describe how participants were selected and the criteria I used for selection.

School Districts

School Districts were selected based on the following:

1. All school districts are part of the Wisconsin public school system.
2. Districts are located in the Fox Valley Region which includes Fond du Lac, Winnebago, and Outagamie Counties.

Public schools were selected because there are consistent requirements and reporting as compared to private schools. This region was chosen because it has seen an increased number of students living in poverty as well as an increase in the number of students of color over the past two decades (USAFACTS, 2022).

Principals

For the purpose of this study, I contacted school districts to identify principals who were required to participate in equity training. Once the school districts were selected, I contacted a district level administrator to help gain access to principals that met the criteria. Yin (2014) indicates that the researcher should contact individuals that have knowledge about potential

candidates or use a limited documentation to get information on the potential candidate. The following information was requested:

1. Principals with five or more years of experience
2. Principals that have been in the same building for two years
3. Principals who have been required to participate in equity training

These criteria are noted in the literature about principal characteristics and equity work. For example, effective principals have strong instructional skills (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Ezzani, 2021) and build a positive school climate (DeMatthews et al. 2016; Grissom et al., 2021; Riehl, 2000; Theoharis, 2007; Wasonga, 2009). For these skills to be developed, principals need time and experience. The four districts that took part in the study identified specific principals to contact, which resulted in a total of six principal participants. Each district was limited to two participants. Both elementary and secondary principals were included in the study. Since these principals had been recommended by their district office, four of the six were notified by their district and I followed up with an email to them plus a phone call to determine the time for the interview. Please see Appendix D for the sample principal email. For the other two principals, I was given names from their district, and then I followed up with a direct call to their school to see if they were interested in taking part in the study. Both principals were interested in participating in the study and we set up times for interviews during the phone call. Please see Appendix F for the sample principal phone script.

Table 1***Principal Demographic Data***

Title	Gender	Level	Years as a Principal	Years in your current building	Jobs prior to becoming a principal
Principal One	Male	Elementary	10	20	Teacher
Principal Two	Female	Elementary	3	8	Teacher, Assistant Principal
Principal Three	Female	Elementary	8	5	Teacher
Principal Four	Male	Secondary	14.5	25	Teacher, Special Education Administrator, Assistant Principal
Principal Five	Male	Secondary	10	24	Teacher, Assistant Principal
Principal Six	Female	Elementary	11	11	Teacher

These six principals represent four school districts in the Fox Valley Region.

Demographic information was not collected from the participants to know how they self-identify. It appeared that all principals were white. There were three male and three female participants that represented both elementary and secondary schools. Their experience as principals ranged from eight to fourteen and a half years. All six principals shared that they had been teachers before becoming administrators. Three of the administrators reported that they

will not be in their current position next year. One principal indicated that they intended to retire at the end of the school year and two of them were moving on to district level administration.

Principal details:

- Principal One has a total 24 years in education was an elementary classroom teacher for 14 years before becoming a principal. He has been an elementary principal for 10 years. His equity training included: Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training, Response to Intervention Training (RTI), and *Soluciones: Teaching Latino English Language Learners Training*.
- Principal Two has a total of 24 years in education. She taught 16 years at the elementary level prior to taking an assistant principal position. After five years as an assistant principal in her current school, she became the principal for the last three years. Her equity training was provided through CESA 6 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging.
- Principal Three will be retiring after 34 years in education. She spent 26 years as an elementary classroom teacher before spending her last eight years as an elementary principal. Her equity training was created and provided by district level staff.
- Principal Four has 26 years of experience in education. He spent seven years as a special education teacher at the secondary level and three years as a special education administrator. He was an assistant principal at the secondary level for one and a half years before taking over the principal position, which he has held for the past 14.5 years. Principal Four's equity training included: Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (CLR), Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), Courageous Conversations, and Restorative Practices Training.

- Principal Five has 31 years in the field of education. He was a secondary teacher for 15 years. He served as an assistant principal at the secondary level for six years before coming a principal, a position he has held for ten years at the secondary level. His equity training included: Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (CLR), Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), Trauma Informed Care, Restorative Practices, and Collaborative & Proactive Solutions.
- Principal Six has been in education for 20 years. She was an elementary classroom teacher for nine years prior to becoming an elementary principal. She has served as an elementary principal for 11 years. Her equity training was created and provided by district level staff.

Table 2

School Demographic Data

Title	White Students	Students of Color	Students with Disabilities	Economically Disadvantaged	English Learners
Principal One	84.3%	15.7%	11.8	15.4%	7.7%
Principal Two	83.9%	16.1%	16.6%	43.3%	2.2%
Principal Three	77.6%	22.4%	19.8%	40.3%	9.9%
Principal Four	59%	41%	16.7%	52%	11.3%
Principal Five	54.3%	45.7%	20.8%	59.4%	11.8%
Principal Six	78.1%	21.9%	17.2%	40.1%	2.6%

Note. All race categories were combined (Students of Color) to eliminate any potential identifying factors. Adapted from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2024).

School & District Report Cards. <https://apps2.dpi.wi.gov/reportcards/>

Data Collection

To answer my research questions, I established various procedures and protocols. The procedures for gaining access to the research settings, to conduct semi-structured interviews, and to review documents, and methods used to analyze data are described below.

Access to the setting

To find study participants, I sent emails to nineteen district administrators in the Fox Valley Region for the purpose of identifying principals who meet the study requirements. Please see Appendix C for the sample email. Only six district administrators responded to the initial

email from which one participant was established. I followed up with phone calls to district administrator's offices to find additional qualified participants. Please see Appendix E for the sample phone script. Through the emails and phone calls, I learned that many of the districts had no mandatory equity training and that two district administrators were simply not interested in having their principals take part in the study. After another round of phone calls to district offices, I found three districts with qualified principals that were willing to be part of the study.

Interviews

I conducted in person interviews with six principals in their buildings using a semi-structured interview method. Yin (2014) refers to this type of interview as “intensive interview,” “in-depth interview” or “unstructured interview” (p. 110). Using this format gave me the opportunity to collect and use information gathered outside of the pre-determined interview questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Each of the six principals were interviewed once for approximately one to two hours and each interview was audio recorded, which was later transcribed. Yin (2014) describes these as “prolonged case study interviews” (p. 110). He states, “These interviews may take place over 2 or more hours, either in a single sitting or over an extended period of time covering multiple settings” (p. 110). The interview questions were designed to establish rapport and to gain knowledge on the type of equity training and the number of hours of training each principal received. More in-depth questions centered on principals' reflections on their personal beliefs and systemic structures in their schools and actions taken to grow personally and to change structures that are barriers to equity. Please see Appendix A for the interview questions.

Focus group interviews were an additional part of the study. Yin (2014) describes a focus group as a small number of individuals to take part in a group interview. The researcher

serves as the facilitator of the discussion with the goal of eliciting the views of each member of the group (Yin, 2014). The principals that participated in the study were asked to take part in a focus group interview via Zoom. After all documents were reviewed and individual principal interviews had been held, I conducted two separate focus group interviews to accommodate the principals' schedules. One of the six principals was unable to take part in either focus group interview. This format allowed me to ask follow-up questions of the principals as well as to corroborate findings from the individual interviews (Yin, 2014). Please see Appendix B for the focus group interview questions.

Documentation

I attempted to collect equity audits, equity training plans, equity plans, professional development minutes relating to equity, staff meeting minutes, and parent group meeting minutes. In this study, I used the district and school website as a means to access the previously mentioned documents. Yin (2014) states, "...an Internet search can produce invaluable information" (p. 107). This information gave me insight on the progress of the school towards equity and helped me to prepare for the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After each individual principal interview, I asked for any previously mentioned documents since I found little information on the district or school websites. The number of documents provided by the principals was limited. The documents consisted of records that the principals perceived to be equity documents. These included minutes from two school equity committees, teacher observation documents that included equity elements, a PowerPoint on equity training, materials from equity trainings, a data analysis protocol, and minutes from a PLC meeting.

Overview of Data Collection by Principal:

- Principal One: Elementary principal 10 years; 24 total years in education; Interview-Yes; Focus Group-Yes; Documents-Yes
- Principal Two: Elementary principal three years; 24 total years in education; Interview-Yes; Focus Group-Yes; Documents-Yes
- Principal Three: Elementary principal eight years; 34 total years in education; Interview-Yes; Focus Group-Yes; Documents-Yes
- Principal Four: Secondary principal 14.5 years; 26 total years in education; Interview-Yes; Focus Group-Yes; Documents-No
- Principal Five: Secondary principal 10 years; 31 total years in education; Interview-Yes; Focus Group-Yes; Documents-Yes
- Principal Six: Elementary principal 11 years; 20 total years in education; Interview-Yes; Focus Group-No; Documents-Yes

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed throughout the entire study (Stake, 1995). Merriam (1998) states that analysis starts with the first interview and the first review of documents. Stake (1995) explains that analysis starts when the researcher attempts to assign meaning to their initial impressions and continues until the final report. The researcher is concerned with generating trustworthy findings throughout this interactive process (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) writes, "... rigor in a qualitative case study derives from the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction, between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description" (p. 120).

Semi-structured Interviews Analysis

All interviews were transcribed in this study. Once the interviews were transcribed, I began the coding process. I looked line by line to assign short descriptive terms to the emerging themes. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) call this stage open coding because the researcher is looking for any bit of data that might be useful. The short descriptive terms may be from the literature, direct quotes of the participant, or from the researcher's notes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, short descriptive terms were assigned to the statements from the principals as well as to my fieldnotes from the interviews. After completing this process, I consolidated codes into broader categories, which Merriam & Tisdell (2016) call analytical coding. The themes were derived from patterns found in the data. Multiple case studies require cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). Once the six principal interviews were coded and categories had been created, I completed a cross-case analysis. In the cross-case analysis the researcher is looking for categories or themes that cut across all cases (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). In this study the following themes emerged: (1) Transforming and Empowering through Leadership, (2) Inclusivity: All Means All, (3) It's All About Relationships, (4) The Value of Voice in Equity.

Document Analysis

I used the same coding process to analyze the documents that were gathered from the districts' and schools' websites as well as documents that each individual principal provided. It should be noted that there was a limited number of equity documents gathered from the websites and from the principals. I read the text of the documents and assigned descriptive labels to the emerging themes. Next, I concentrated the codes into broader categories that led to themes

found from patterns in the data. Once the categories were generated, I did a cross-case analysis looking for themes that were present across all cases.

Focus Group Analysis

After the completion of individual interviews, document analysis, and cross-case analysis, two focus group interviews were conducted. The analysis of the focus group interviews followed the same procedures as individual interviews.

Trustworthiness

In any type of research, there are concerns with regard to trustworthiness. These concerns can be addressed through the design of the study with particular attention given to how data is collected, analyzed and interpreted (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) tackle trustworthiness in four general categories, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility focuses on whether the researcher's findings match reality. The following methods are employed to establish credibility: prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking. In this study, prolonged engagement in data collection was addressed through individual principal interviews, document collection though limited, and two focus group interviews. Multiple methods of data collection which included, semi-structured interviews of six principals, document collection, and a focus group discussion were employed to triangulate the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). More specifically, principal interview data was cross-checked with the limited documents, that were found on the districts' websites or that were provided by the principals, to see whether what principals stated match the documents. Efforts were made to determine if principals are being authentic about their engagement in equity work and not just being performative. After principal interviews and document analysis were completed, follow-up focus group interviews with five of

the six principals were conducted. The focus group interviews provided another cross-check of the data and also served as a member check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Transferability can be viewed as external validity, which looks at the generalization of one study to another study, situation, or phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A strategy used to demonstrate transferability is thick description. Thick description in this study involved providing a description of the principals participating in the study. The findings of the study are described in detail with quotes from individual principal interviews and the focus group discussions. While the number equity document was limited, information from the documents was incorporated in the findings. The quotes were used to substantiate the findings of the study.

Dependability is rooted in the concept of trust where findings are consistent and can be replicated. Confirmability recognizes the importance of researcher neutrality. Findings should be based on the study participants responses void of the researcher's biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To approach dependability and confirmability, researchers use audit trails, triangulation, and reflexivity. In this study, a section on the positionality and reflexivity of the researcher was included in the methods chapter. The previously mentioned methods of triangulation were used as a way to meet the standards of dependability and confirmability. I created an audit trail by using memos throughout the research process. To increase the trustworthiness of this study, strategies of triangulation, member checks, prolonged engagement in data collection, researcher's position, audit trail and thick description were used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Positionality and Reflexivity

It is important for qualitative researchers to recognize and understand the power dynamics that exist between the researcher and study participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

More specifically Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discuss insider/outsider issues, positionality issues, and reflexivity. For the purpose of this study, I understood that my time as a principal and interim superintendent gave me insider status. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) propose that insider/outsider issues may influence the access that the researcher has to participants and the types of information that the participants will share. It should be noted that I served as the interim superintendent in my school district for one year and have since retired. Since I have experience as a principal, I was aware of how my own biases affect data collection and how my concept of reality influences my personal interpretations. Throughout the research process, it was necessary for me to continually reflect on my influences on data collection. With regard to positionality issues, race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation of the researcher may impact the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Once principals were selected for the study, I considered my positionality. When looking at this study, I was aware that I am white like the principals in the study, I have experience as a principal and I was employed by a school district in the Fox Valley Region, where demographics are similar across the region. My personal biographic history includes being born, raised, and educated in an area of Wisconsin where approximately 99% of the population was white. I spent my 32-year career in this same area and continue to live there to date. Only in the last twenty years have the demographics slightly shifted, standing today at 90% white. I recognize that I may not always know what I do not know because of my *whiteness*. However, I do understand that my *whiteness* gives me privileges that are not afforded to people of color. I am conscious of the fact that I have inherent biases that I must confront and overcome. Reflexivity required that I was aware of the power relationship that exists between me, as a former superintendent of a Wisconsin school district, and the principals. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state,

... if one is serious about challenging power relations both in the world and in the research process itself—it is incumbent upon the critical researcher to be reflexive: to consider issues such as positionality and insider/outsider stances in research and to try to own their effects in the process in so far as this is possible (pp. 64-65).

Throughout this research study, it was imperative that I continued to be reflexive and consider my relationships with study participants. Based on the nature of this study, I decided that a qualitative multi-case study methodology was the appropriate format. I conducted my research and analysis by using prescribed procedures for qualitative research.

Limitations

Although this study maintained trustworthiness with data collection, there are still limitations to be considered. Since this is a qualitative study, making generalizations is more difficult than with a traditional quantitative study. Merriam (1998) states, “Results, however, would be limited to describing the phenomenon rather than predicting future behavior” (p. 32). Limitations that must be considered include: the study setting in a limited region; and the small number of participants. Another limitation of this study was my ability to collect equity related documents. The lack of documents is another possible indication of the principals’ emerging status as social justice leaders. More advanced leaders would likely have provided equity audits, equity training plans, equity plans, professional development minutes relating to equity, staff meeting minutes, and parent group meeting minutes. These principals’ definition of equity and equity trainings was broad in scope, generously including trainings such as RTI which could be considered counterproductive to equity work. An additional limitation was the inability to conduct the focus group as originally planned with all six principals participating concurrently. The focus group had to be broken into two Zoom sessions to accommodate the needs of the

principals. One session had three participants and the other session had only two participants, since one principal was unable to attend either of the sessions. Zoom may not have been the ideal format for conducting a focus group, however, logistical challenges made even coordinating a Zoom meeting difficult. Despite these limitations, rich data was gathered through the interview process. The focus group and document collection limitations did not severely impact this study. Merriam (1998) suggests that the strengths of a case study outweigh its limitations when it is the best design to answer the questions of the research problem.

Chapter IV-Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine how principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment. I further investigated how principals critique their current practices and take action to make changes with the hope of positively improving student achievement. This study looked at six principals in the Fox Valley Region who have been required to participate in equity training, who have at least five years of principal experience, and who have been in their current building for at least two years as the basis of a multiple-case study. I collected data by interviewing each principal, conducting focus group interviews with five of the six participating principals, and reviewed each school's equity related documents. I used a qualitative approach to analyze their responses to questions in order to gain new insights.

The results are presented by themes that emerged through the analysis and coding of the data gleaned from the individual interviews, focus groups, and documents combined. Four themes surfaced from the data which include: (1) Transforming and Empowering through Leadership, (2) Inclusivity: All Means All, (3) It's All About Relationships, (4) The Value of Voice in Equity. This chapter will discuss these themes and their related sub-themes.

Transforming and Empowering through Leadership

This study identified and examined how principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment. Foster (1986) discusses the concept that leadership is about transforming and empowering, which requires an examination of the current norms and practices. The principals in this study reported spending time reflecting on their current practices to identify barriers to equity which included continued learning about equity, coaching their staff, and obtaining necessary resources. In light of these barriers, all of the principals shared

information in the interview process on how they reflected on practice and took action, a concept presented by Furman (2012). The principals' approaches to confronting barriers to transforming and leading were often similar.

Barriers to Equity. After reflecting on practice, the principals reported on barriers that hinder them in creating equity in their school. Five of the six principals shared that "mindsets" of teachers and other staff create a barrier in their equity work. Principal Four discussed that when he first started doing equity work around 2008, the mindset at the time was centered on student deficit. He reported that over time this has changed. He stated, "I do believe when you know better, you do better." Without the proper skills or training, staff go back to their old ways. Principal Four provided the following example:

If you don't know better, you're going to revert back to how you've always done it or, you know, maybe how you were brought up or values in your house versus someone else's. You know when you dig into different cultural behaviors, there's some pretty big differences there sometimes. And by looking at those and understanding some of the cultural behaviors, just communication patterns, like understanding that is sometimes changing of the mindset.

Principal Two shared that closed mindsets among staff and not being willing to learn are an issue in her school. Principal Six reported about staff mindsets being stuck in "excuse language." Teachers become frustrated because they do not see growth in student achievement, so they fall back on making excuses for why it has happened. Principal Five described mindsets as established traditions that can hinder equity. He indicated that it is important to validate teachers when there is a shift in practice. Otherwise, many teachers may personalize that their teaching

practices have not been effective, which may make them less receptive to equity work. He discussed the importance of validating teachers and still moving the work forward.

All the principals shared their thoughts on the element of time and equity work, but five of the six described it in the terms of time being a barrier. Principal Four reported that he and his staff just need time to focus on equity, as will be further discussed below. Principal Three presented another time factor challenge. She described that the delivery of curriculum is timebound such that she expressed that “we have a rush to cover curriculum versus teach curriculum.” Her teachers have a certain amount of time to teach a concept and then must move on to the next concept, regardless if all students have mastered the information. She stated the following:

I feel like sometimes we look at a calendar and go, “Okay, I have to get through this math unit by the end of September because otherwise we're going to be behind. I have to get through this by this time or else we're going to be behind.” ... I feel like we set ourselves this benchmark ... we have basically nine months to cover a curriculum.

But if our kids are needing more than nine months to learn it, we don't necessarily give them that time to learn it, which then I think continues to create and foster a disparity gap. Right. So I think if we could come up with a better way of helping our teachers mind the curriculum for, “Okay, this is the big rock that has to be covered.” And by the time if they don't understand this, this and this, that might be okay for this year.

But as long as they understand this, we can still build that foundation. But sometimes I think we create holes which creates a disparity gap because we're trying to cover a curriculum versus instruct a curriculum.

Principal Five also discussed that teachers do not have enough time, especially enough time to dig into new strategies and practices during the school day and that his staff always runs out of time during professional development. He stated:

Now the key is we've really got to listen to our teachers who say, "Okay, we get it, but we have to dig deeper into it." So how do we afford them the time, Not only through PLCs, because they should be doing other things in PLCs too, but in our professional development -- to dig into and for us to really model that gradual release of responsibility, which I would say we do to an extent, but we always run out of time.

This principal further reported on the various strategies that his school has employed to meet the needs of his students. But as he shared, teachers needed time to dig into understanding and then be able to implement the strategies. Overall, they reported that time limits hinder their equity work.

How do we know what they need? All six principals indicated that they use student data to drive instruction to meet all students' academic and emotional needs. Student data were assessed through a variety of lenses which include, all school, classroom, and individual data. All principals reported that they gathered and reviewed data from the school year to develop a plan for the following year. Principals shared that teachers in the buildings use the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model to look at classroom data. By assessing data, principals indicated that staff are able to see which students have mastered the information through universal instruction and which students may need additional intervention. This model includes tier two as well as tier three intervention. In the PLC model, teachers from grade levels or like disciplines sit down and review the data. The purpose of assessing the data is to see how students performed and which students need additional support. It is also a means to have

teachers discuss instructional strategies. If the students in one teacher's room are having more success than in another teacher's, it is an opportunity to share information and instructional strategies to benefit students (DuFour, et al., 2008; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Goddard et al., 2017; Kose, 2009; Scanlan, 2012).

All six principals reported that they routinely disaggregate the data by subgroups (Theoharis, 2007). Principal One provided the Data Analysis Protocol document that his school uses to assess students' academic performance. All students' names and scores are listed on the protocol. On the bottom of the protocol there is a chart that list all the subgroups. Principal Three shared that she disaggregates the data by subgroup three times a year. In Principal Five's school, the Continuous School Improvement Team is responsible for looking at demographic data. He reported that they also dig into crossover demographic data. In the Focus Group Two interview, Principal Four stated:

When we think of teacher efficacy and high expectations and that kind of thing. I think that one piece that maybe is just like more of a concrete step that we've tried to take is when you look at classroom data, aggregating it out. And then I think, you know, in our PLC kind of process, the question becomes not which students or what are we going to do about students that didn't learn?

It's which students did not show success on that standard or that assessment. And then what are we going to do about that? So it's like really maybe calling it out a little more and being really specific about it.

Principal Six disaggregates data for her staff once a year and then her leadership team examines the data in summer to help set goals, which includes an equity goal for the next school year. She

and her leadership team are looking for trends in the data. They identify areas of strength and areas of concern as well as identifying barriers to success for certain groups of students.

Reflecting on Practice and Responding to the Data. The six principals also shared specifics on how they responded to the data to enact change. Principal One and Three reflect a pattern among the other principals and they are emphasized as an illustration. Principal One reported that, "...I first realized that my practices weren't equitable because it wasn't meeting the needs of everybody in class." He further described the need for additional support for his English Learners (EL). He and some of his teachers attended a training offered by Solution Tree called *Soluciones: Teaching Latino English Language Learners*. He reported that after the training, an EL Task Force was created and they identified strategies that could be used in each classroom around language acquisition. He stated:

We have right now in third and fourth grade, about a 10% EL population. And to me, that's enough to make some significant changes to classroom practice and allocation of staff, like what we need to do... And we've worked really, really hard at changing tier one practice.

So from the institute in Los Angeles, we created an EL task force here at school. And some handpicked people that were passionate about the subject identified what are some things we can do for every single classroom. Because when we talk about language acquisition and vocabulary, that's not just an EL strategy. That's a really, really good tier one strategy for every single student. And so we've been implementing that with sentence stems and language stems.

He provided the following statement as evidence of his transformation in thinking:

I think there might have been a part of me before where I thought that EL instruction can happen at a separate time and place. It doesn't have to involve the whole class because it's not what everybody needs. Now, I know that it's just good a practice.

Principal Three reported that she responded to the data around her EL students. After noticing that EL students were not making the same kind of gains as their peers, she and her staff starting asking questions such as, "How do we better service our students? What are things we need to do differently?" Their solution was to group all EL students into one classroom at each grade level, since EL staff was limited. This allowed the EL teacher to push-in the classroom. She reported that classroom teachers are working collaboratively with the EL teacher on best practices for universal instruction. She reported the following regarding results from the change:

We have seen for the last two years, like our EL students may not be proficient, but their rate of growth and closing those gaps is keeping pace with the growth of all of our students or even going at a higher rate.

Resources. All six principals reported adding resources to address inequities even though they face financial limitations in their school budgets. They indicated that they added material resources. This included purchasing more books for the library and classrooms that were more inclusive and more representative of the student population. For example, Principal Three stated:

We've also made conscious efforts in purchasing materials of having books and shared read-alouds and oral read-alouds and classroom libraries that are more reflective of our school population. So, to make sure there are more students of color that are represented in the books. Those have been intentionally purchased and bought to add to our libraries.

Three principals shared that they had purchased flexible seating, adaptive devices, and materials for regulation centers. Principal Two reported the following:

I think just making sure that there is supplemental aids and services in all the classrooms. So, we might have a slant board in you know all fifth-grade classrooms because if the students need it and they're switching, then they don't have to carry it around. It's everywhere. I think you know a lot of our seats now; we have flexible seating. So, there's a lot of seats that wiggle and move, standing desks. And so, I think all of those things are just all over the place, which makes it easier to have students everywhere in the building.

Although the majority of resources were allocated to students, principals shared that they also considered needs of staff and parents. Each principal indicated that they bought staff professional development materials, such as books around the topic of equity. Four of the principals disclosed that they provided resources to parents such as books for an all-school read aloud and access to community resources. These principals did provide examples of the type of resources that they were able to purchase for students and staff to create a more equitable environment with limited monies. However, they did not indicate that they were pursuing resources through other means besides school budgets.

Learning and Coaching with Your Staff. All six principals reported that continuing to learn about equity personally as well as with staff is important to creating socially just learning environments. Principal One and Principal Three provided more nuanced examples of how this type of continued learning influenced them. Principal One described the change in thinking about student learning over his career. He stated, "Instead of making everyone fit into this particular mold or package, we're trying to make a system that meets the needs of diverse learners, whatever those needs are."

Additionally, he added at the Focus Group One interview:

Remember when your child was ... you could set your baby on the carpet on the living room floor and go get a cup of coffee. And when you came back, they were still there laying on their back or laying on their stomach. But then one day you went to go get a cup of coffee and they had rolled across the floor. You're like, "Oh, my gosh. You know, they've moved." And then you have to crawl proof everything. And then all of a sudden, they're standing up at the coffee table. And now they're walking, and you have to keep it's like we're always a step behind the needs of the children that we serve. And so that's why we have to continuously learn because we can't ever get comfortable with our current practice because the needs change almost faster than we can learn how to meet them. And I think that's just a mindset also. So, it's constant learning. It's just that growth mindset and continuous improvement. And it's hard in our world because there's always another goal down the road. You meet this goal and you can celebrate it, but not for very long because we have another goal we have to meet. And it's the same thing with learning.

Documentation from the EL meeting minutes reinforced Principal One's commitment to coaching staff. The minutes from January 30, 2024 reported, "What is the mindset we hope teachers will have when working with EL's."

Principal Three reported that learning involves staying curious, asking questions, delving into learning, and not expecting other people to educate you. This refers to relying on marginalized groups to teach you about cultural differences and microaggressions. She stated:

When I would have to have conversations with the mom, the mom was like she very much was talking to me about microaggressions and the cultural differences between families.

And I would try to I would ask questions. And I can remember her saying to me, "It is not my job to educate you on cultural differences. That is your job." And that really stuck with me.

All six principals reported that they have continued to learn about equity by reading books, attending conferences, and participating in districtwide professional development. Although these principals indicated how they continued to learn about equity, Principal Five shared a subtle difference. Principal Five reported that he is intentional about choosing conferences that focus on equity and solutions that are specific to the needs of his school. He continues to read books about equitable practices and leadership. He stated, "I think it is incumbent on me to continue to read other practice around being a better leader, so that I can lead the staff down more equitable ways." He added, "Since I've been here, we've done work, even when it wasn't required, because it, in a sense was *required by the needs of our students.*"

Principals disclosed that once equity knowledge was obtained, they shared the information through coaching. The principals revealed that they used various methods to coach staff which included modeling, observing, and training. In Focus Group Two, both Principal Four and Five discussed the value of modeling new learning for their staff. Principal Four stated:

I was going to bring up the modeling as a learner, because I think that's important. I guess, first, it's just right. It's just the right thing to do, to continuously learn. And you know I think as leaders, we need to be like that. We just need to be always looking for what can we learn next. But then modeling for our staff.

Principal Five described how he used observation to coach staff. Principal Five reported that he uses an observation form that he and his staff developed, which includes equity components.

The form includes everything that he wants to see over the course of the lesson, however, recognizing that staff may not have all components in every lesson. A copy of the document was provided to the researcher. The form is divided in four sections which include, Classroom Culture & Norms, Instructional Clarity, Classroom Engagement, and Assessment. Each of the four sections contain what he is looking for during an observation. He reported that once the observation is completed, he leaves behind a copy of the form for the teacher. He also uses the form to track data on whether they are moving practices forward.

All principals also conveyed that they were either the lead or part of the team that provided equity initiatives training in their buildings. Additionally, each of the principals indicated that they were part of school or district equity teams. Two of the principals revealed that they are part of an equity team at their school which is responsible for providing training and support in their schools. Principal Six shared her reason and involvement in leading equity initiatives in her building. She stated:

So, I would say the urgency of getting to work on topics of equity coming from a district level sparked our initial plans. However, because we saw as a school students and families continuing to struggle with barriers and continually underperforming their peers, we continued that work much more heavily than the district had.

She co-leads these equity efforts with a group of teachers [*identifying information omitted*] whom she believes are equity minded.

In the Focus Group One interview, Principal Two shared how her thinking has evolved over time with continued training:

I think we started with talking about all the different parts of equity. I think it naturally goes to maybe race. And so, I think just looking at free and reduced lunch, you know just all the different parts of it.

So, it's just what are we doing within the classroom to make everyone feel included? And I think we started very simply like holidays. What are we putting up? What are we celebrating? What are we talking about? What kinds of community circle questions are we talking about? And so, we started you know with the learning on the side, but then for the transfer within the classroom, it was things like that that we could kind of easily make that shift. And now it's deeper. Now it's much more into the instructional practices and the other things that we can do.

Principal Three summed up the value of learning and coaching for her with the following statement, “So staying curious and then implementing what I learned and bringing it back and sharing it with staff. I think you have to live it. I think you can’t just be words. It has to be a way of being.” Although principals agreed on their need for continued learning, the degree to which they took action varied. They also expressed some concerns related to continued learning.

Four of the six principals shared specific thoughts and concerns. Three of the principals identified that while early training set a good foundation, their concern dealt with the need for *ongoing* equity training. Another concern was that new initiatives become the focus of professional development (PD) and that there is no time built into PD for equity training. An additional concern pertained to staff turn-over and equity training. New staff do not receive the same foundational training as existing staff and therefore, their base of knowledge is not the same. As a result, there is a lack of consistency, which these principals shared could slow down or hinder their equity work. Yet another consideration centered on the delivery of PD with

regard to equity. Principal Four reported that PD occurs in limited time increments. He wanted to see this type of training embedded in their daily work such as PLC'S. He stated:

I think just more job embedded. I don't think I want to say more time. That's probably the wrong way to say it because it's how you use the time you have. That's really important. Even if you gave us more time, like more PD days, I think it's what we do at that time to make sure it's like job embedded at maybe more of a PLC level where individuals are comfortable talking with each other versus in front of a full staff and actually putting action steps or action research kind of things in place.

Moving Forward with Courageous Conversations. All six reported that they had courageous conversations with staff. Principal Two shared that a transforming leader empowers through courageous conversations. She made the following statement:

We want to reflect on what we're doing, how we're doing, and then maybe change if we're doing things that can be better. But I think you have to be open to that. You have to want to learn. You have good resources. You have to be open to uncomfortable conversations. I think you have to be vulnerable to reflect on who you are, what you're doing, and if you can be better.

Principals also revealed when resistance happens such as when their staff members words or actions were not consistent with equity practices. To address concerns, Principal Five reported that he would use the term "bootstrappy," meaning he critiqued that students are responsible for their own learning and if they worked hard enough, they would succeed. He discussed that the staff understood how he is using the term. He shared that although he starts with conversations on equity, periodically you have to take a stand. He stated, "We're not standing for a "bootstrappy" conversation. We're not giving up." Principal Six provided an example of how

she approaches a courageous conversation. She starts with determining the source of the concern and attempts to have a “compassionate coaching conversation.” She describes the next step in the following manner:

When that’s not moving along or there’s still some pretty hard pushback, then it becomes a conversation of expectation that this is what we believe about kids. If you are committing to being part of our team and this what we believe about all kids, then this is what I need to see from you.

Like Principal Six, Principal Four is direct with the staff members. He reported that he simply states, “No, this is just what we are doing.” This was communicated after first attempting to work with the staff member.

Three of the six reported that they had counseled staff into leaving because they would not buy into the equity work that the school was doing. These principals indicated that they had worked with these staff members one-on-one to address their concerns and to provide the necessary supports to bring the staff member along. When staff members refused to buy into the work, the principals coached them out. Principal One stated the following:

If beliefs don’t line up, then they’re going to actively row the boat in the other direction because they don’t support what’s going on. They are not going to be able to do what they need to do. ...So, I do believe that part of my job is to coach people up or coach people out.

Principal Five gave an example of coaching staff out through expectations. He stated:

I think we beat that drum so continuously that most of those teachers have left. And you know there’s been sort of this thing out in the professional world of LinkedIn. You see a

lot of messages about people don't quit their jobs. They quit their bosses. If people are quitting because I want us to use equitable practices, I'm okay with that.

In sum, *The Transforming and Empowering Through Leadership* theme illustrated how these principals address equity in their buildings through leadership practices. The principals adhered to the concept of courageous conversations as defined by Singleton and Linton (2006) and, as leaders, these principals provided equity focused resources for students as well as staff budget permitting. The literature around the work of DuFour (2008, 2011) and Marzano (2011) emphasized the importance of using data to determine the needs of their students, which these principals all practiced. In accordance with Furman (2012), these principals reflected on practices as a response to what they found in the data to varying degrees and ends. These principals also identified common barriers that could possibly impede their work in the equity realm such as time, staff turn-over, and changing instructional priorities. Additionally, continued equity learning and sharing of new knowledge with staff were the essential components of equity work described by the principals (see also Warner, 2020).

Inclusivity: All Means All

A fundamental understanding of inclusive practices is essential to transforming how principals work with their students, staff and parents. According to the literature, a leader commits to providing a socially just engaging environment where a school-community partnership builds on the cultural community strengths and develops a list of priorities based on the needs of the students, families, and communities (DeMatthews et al., 2016). Socially just leaders work to create inclusive practices to build community across all cultural groups (Furman, 2012).

Students. All six principals gave examples of inclusive practices that they use in their schools with their students. Four of the principals reported that they had set up a system to help teachers build community in their classrooms and throughout the school. However, Principal One provided a detailed example of how the practice is carried out in his building. Principal One's school starts each day with all students taking part in the morning meeting, which is a fifteen-minute block of time set aside for community building. These morning meetings include some type of welcome, for instance a fourth-grade teacher has a different handshake for each of his students that he does with every student every day. The meetings are set up so that each individual student has an opportunity to share something and to have a voice. Meetings may also include some form of an academic task such as a math fact game. Teachers use the time for team building with their students. He provided the following team building example:

...The teacher will put a Jenga game out and say, "Okay. As a class, yesterday we got 10 pieces. We're going to see if we can get 11." And so, then they teach sportsmanship. So, if little Sharon knocked it over after 9:00, nobody gets mad at her. They just talk about you know it's okay. We're a team and everything. And then at the end of it is usually previewing the day, what the schedule has, so the day is predictable for kids. So, it's like a soft landing. It's one of the things I heard in an interview a couple years ago that I really liked.

All six principals reported that they were working to ensure that students of every demographic group feel included in their school. All shared that they had purchased books and other materials that were more representative of the whole student body. These principals disclosed that it is important for all their students to see themselves represented in their school, in resources and in staff. Principal Two, Principal Three, Principal Five, and Principal Six offered

more detailed explanations of their strategies for including students from all demographic groups. Principal Two shared that her school was getting new language arts resources. They were able to select from three different materials. She stated the following about what she is looking for in language arts and in other curricular areas:

We're looking at the diversity within the pictures, within what kinds of rigor are in the text. What questions are they asking? How are they asking our students to write and read about what they're looking at? And then I think you know is it exciting? Is it hitting their interest level and all of those things? So not only in the books, but in the music that we're singing, you know in music class, the instruments that we're exposing our kids to, the things we're doing in phy-ed. You know, are we trying different games? Are we trying different activities and things that they do in other cultures and around the United States too, not just here in Wisconsin.

In Principal Five's school, they have an Achievement, Culture, and Equity (ACE) Committee. One of the strategies employed by this group, as reported by the principal, is to put up photographs of their own students doing things, participating in activities, which was evidenced by the ACE committee meeting minutes document. Students of all demographics are represented in the photographs. This group also is responsible for putting up posters of icons that represent all demographics. Principal Five went on to say:

But it really is about continuing to offer different views of culture. And all of that's above surface, right? And then through professional development, we dig into the other pieces that are below the surface.

Principal Five shared another example of how students are represented in their school. For example, the school district recognizes scholars from the high schools. He reported that he is very intentional about looking for a student from marginalized groups. He stated:

... but for a while when I first started, we would have the one student of color up on the [identifying information omitted] with the other two white kids... We were picking our best scholars. And scholarship is more than just a grade point average. And we also wanted to be intentional that we were picking people who don't traditionally get represented. We had a very openly gay black male on one of our [identifying information omitted] and that was fantastic.

Note that Principal Three and Principal Six spoke specifically about identifying barriers to inclusivity and provided their own examples. For instance, Principal Three spoke about raising money for Jump Rope for Heart. Students were awarded rubber ducks for raising money and all the students wanted them. "But it creates such a have and have not situation because kids who have access to people that can raise those funds they get a lot of ducks," she said. Since this activity created a barrier for certain students, the principal made the decision to discontinue it. Both principals also discussed barriers that they identified in Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) activities. Most of the barriers were financial in nature. Some students' families simply could not afford to have their children take part in PTO activities. Both principals worked with their PTOs to find other activities that were either free or were inexpensive.

Parents. All six principals described strategies they use to make their school more inclusive for all demographic groups of parents. They all gave examples of different methods and types of communication that they used to reach out to parents. Most forms of communication were translated into other languages, most often in Spanish, which was

documented on district websites. Traditional ways that were included were as follow: phone calls, emails, text messages and newsletters. Additionally, principals shared other modes of communication, such as social media platforms and apps. Principals Two and Principal Three detailed the specific technologies that they use to communicate with parents. Principal Two explained various modes of communication used and their significance:

I think just being able to be more available for parents...having the seesaw app, having emails. I think sometimes the old-school way was like just calling school and now it's like we can be available to reach you no matter what time you work or where you're at. Or if you don't want to talk to us, that's okay. You can text us. You can send a message. We're good. I think sending out communication in so many different ways...we have Facebook and we send Thrillshare messages which has helped.

Principal Three stated:

When I am sending out blackboard blasts or emails, I send them in English and in Spanish to make sure that I'm reaching all my families. When we are doing printed letters home, we try very hard to make sure that we have them in a Spanish copy and an English copy so that communication is accessible for everyone.

Principal Three also uses the Smore's platform to send out her newsletter because it will translate the newsletter into any language. When parents receive this newsletter electronically, they can push a button and the document is translated for them. She stated:

One of the things that my whole staff does now, for the last two years, my family communications and my staff communications, when we do a newsletter, we do it on what is called Smore's. It's a Smore's platform because you can click a button and it will translate it into any language that whatever is your native-speaking language, you can

translate it in. So now all my communications, like my classroom communication and my communication home is always done through a Smore's so that we can do that.

All six principals discussed inclusive strategies that they use with the hope of engaging parents in their school. The majority of activities were provided outside the school day, however, there were some school day activities that parents could attend. Four of the principals reported that they have math and literacy night where parents can come to experience what math and literacy are like at school. Principal Two's school hosts "A Night of Excellence" which is an open house style event. It is an opportunity to showcase student work and the school. Other community resources such the public libraries, Boy Scouts, and youth athletics organizations are represented. The night serves as a celebration of the students as well as a way to bring community resources to parents.

As a part of their literacy efforts, Principal Three's school coordinates an all-school read aloud. She described multiple ways that she and her teachers attempt to include parents in this effort. Principal Three stated:

Right now, we're in the process of doing an all-school read aloud. And we made sure that if a family wanted a copy of the book, they could have a book. If families don't have time to read the book at home, we are videotaping and we have recordings of it that kids can access either in class or they can come to a live read aloud during a recess break that doesn't take 30 minutes, right, that they can come in and listen to the chapters so that it's accessible to all kids. For our Spanish-speaking families, we had copies of the book in Spanish if they wanted to have their parents read to them at home and the parents don't read English and they speak Spanish.

Principal Four reported on an event that he believed helped to make connections with families. The school was having a Gordita sale, so on a Saturday, he had 25 Latinx Hispanic families in the building cooking. These were families that he had not seen connected to the school before this event. Now, when this group of parents are dropping off their kids, they are saying “hi” and have more interaction with him.

Principal Five and Principal Six hosted Multicultural Family Nights. Principal Five described how his event came about:

We have an equity goal each year that drives kind of our practices in professional development. We are observing in classrooms whether or not culturally responsive practices are present, where there's opportunities for growth, thinking about how we're planning for family engagement. It has been a really big key for us the past two years specifically. And even just this past year, we hosted a multicultural night.

She further explained why she thought the night had value stating:

So, our Multicultural Family Night wasn't just learn about different cultures, languages, it was understanding that we all bring something to the culture of our school and something that we value. Whether that means we have a different race or we don't, but this is just a deep-rooted tradition in our family, and it's important to us, and we value it. So, giving space to showcase that and highlight the uniqueness and framing it in a way that creates a rich culture in your school and you appreciate that.

She reported that the night was very well received and families have already requested to participate in the event next year.

Three principals talked about different resources or changes they made to their routine, so that more parents were able to attend an activity. Although the other three principals inferred

that they made efforts in this area, there was no evidence gleaned from the interviews or documents. Three of the principals varied the times that parent/teacher conferences were held to accommodate parents' schedules. Principals Two stated that she and her teachers looked at changing the conferences through an equitable lens. She stated, "The discussion was around equity, families and their dynamics, and when can they be available and how can they come." Principal Three holds events at a variety of times so that more parents can be involved and there are no financial barriers to any of these events. This included a free before school breakfast as well as a free evening Cookies and Canvas Night, which is a painting activity for the student and parent. For an all school PBIS event that involved all students during the school day, the principal used Zoom as a way to have parents see their kids, if they could not attend. She also recorded the event and sent it out to parents. Principal Three stated:

Our building leadership team is really focused on family engagement opportunities. And as part of that family engagement opportunities, we were always mindful of barriers. So, whatever we're planning, we're looking at the barriers. We're looking at how can we make sure that this accessible to all. Like I said, whether it's staggering times, whether it's offering this or this, making sure we're always looking to see how can we reduce barriers with our planning.

All Means All. All six principals presented the idea of "All Means All." Each principal had a strong conviction to this concept, but each had a different way of explaining how it plays out in their school. Principal One, Principal Two, and Principal Six, each offer distinctions on how they address the concept of "All Means All" in their schools. In Principal One's school, he declared "All Means All" is their mantra. He stated, "We can't expect students to fit into what we do. We have to change what we do to fit what students need." He went on to say that all

teachers in his building are responsible to make sure each student reaches the benchmarks by the end of the year. The following is an example provided by this principal regarding how the principal and teachers attack the mantra of “All Means All.”

Example provided: On Monday teachers bring their data from the math test given on the previous Friday to review at their meeting. The data is shared, and if one teacher’s class did well and another’s did not, the teachers have a professional dialogue regarding their individual instruction, with the goal of learning from each other. They work together to ensure each student meets the benchmark.

When his school started with the mantra ten years ago, people would say to him, “All means all except...” He responded with, “If you’re not going to do it, who’s going to do it?” The question now is, “what do you need so that you can be successful.”

Principal Two also has collaborative teams that use data to drive instruction. She continues to push the concept of “All Mean All.” Her example dealt with assigning students to What I Need (WIN) time. She discussed that, in the past, a special education student would automatically be assigned to a learning specialist, who is a special education teacher - even if the student had scored high on a skill. To address what she believes is an issue, she presented the following strategy to her teachers: when they are looking at data to make WIN groups, they removed the names of the students. The team could only make decisions on the data. She stated, “It’s really transformed the way we look at it. If we didn’t take the name off it, or we didn’t look at it from a different lens, we’re going to always think, well you have an IEP.”

Principal Six reported that if the goal is that all kids can achieve then she needs to be responsive to the system. Barriers need to be examined as to why students do not achieve. She identified barriers such as mindset and excuse language. Examples of excuse language included,

“Oh, this child can’t, you just don’t understand. They don’t have the ability to because they either have an IEP or they’re in a very transient home.” She went on to say:

We need to continue to challenge our thoughts when we get stuck in the rut of excuse language and not expecting that all kids can achieve at super high levels. They can. It’s just something that maybe needs to be examined further and planned for differently.

For these principals, All Means All was central to their equity work. The principals believed that *all* students can learn at high levels with the proper support and it is the responsibility of *all* staff to ensure student success. To that end, the six principals reported that they used inclusive practices with the goal of better engaging their students and parents such as organizing community events and providing resources that are more representative of the student body. These principals also created systems for building community in their schools with their students (DeMatthews et al, 2016). Principals indicated that they used a variety of engagement opportunities with the hope of reaching more parents. These principals used inclusive practices for the purpose of increasing student and parent engagement and representation for all demographic groups. To meet *all* students’ needs, the principals used data to make decisions regarding instruction (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour & Marzano, 2011). The principals identified barriers to inclusivity and then changed practices to improve student and parent engagement. It should be noted that at times, principals made no clear delineation between including students and parents from different demographic groups and including *all* students and parents (DeMatthews et al, 2016).

It’s All About Relationships

Relationship building plays an essential role in social justice work and is considered a cornerstone of the work of principals (DeMatthews et.al, 2016; Furman, 2012; Jayavant, 2016).

Principals must have knowledge and spend time reflecting on their style of communication and behaviors. Furthermore, there is a need for principals to evaluate whether their communication style and behaviors contribute to silencing and marginalizing others (Furman, 2012). Proactively building trusting relationships across cultural groups with staff, parents, and students is paramount (DeMatthews et.al, 2016). The six principals that were involved in this study provided insight and examples of their work building relationships with students, staff, and parents.

Personal Reflections on Building Relationships. All six principals shared their reflections and struggles with developing and sustaining positive relationships with their students, staff and parents. Principals reported on the impact that examining their beliefs, assumptions, and biases had on relationships in their buildings. Further, they discussed how they think about and how they approach relationships differently upon learning more about themselves. The principals' relationship building approaches varied based on their previous experiences.

Principal Three and Principal Four, in particular, demonstrated how personal reflection impacts relationship building. Principal Three shared that she approaches her interactions with people through grace. She indicated that she believes that by using grace, empathy is built. As a result, she stated:

When you can take your own experiences and bring them into the classroom, it teaches empathy. It opens your eyes so that it makes you more empathetic to what other people might be going through. And I think it opens up more transparent communication. I think when you are able to reflect, and your staff is reflecting on their own personal experiences, they bring that in.

I have to think about this though. Depends on your experiences. If you felt like you've ever been marginalized and you bring that in, I think it opens the door for empathy, and it opens the door to see solutions where barriers are there, okay? Because you can look at it through that lens of, "How can I fix this and how can I make this better?" And wow, if only somebody would have done this for me, so now you're going to make sure you're doing it in your classroom.

If you've never felt marginalized, it can also, though, create a narrative of, why do you need to do this for me, and I'm fine. So, I think there has to be this relationship-building piece where you feel like you can trust another person's story, even if it isn't your own, to open your eyes up to the plight that others might be going through.

Principal Four stated that upon reflection that he was more open to hearing and trying to understand others perspectives before moving to judgement. He provided an example where a student had made a comment and the teacher inappropriately responded to the situation. He stated:

Just kind of an interaction between a student and a teacher where you know the student made one of those remarks.

The teacher responded sarcastically. You know. Upon looking into it further, you know, the student reported to me. I talked to the parent. The staff member also talked to the parent. It was just one of those situations that because there was a lot of conversation being had, it didn't turn into a much bigger situation. The comment wasn't like a good comment to make, but it also was sarcastic, which is not okay either.

But in that whole situation, there was a time to process with the student. I processed with the student. Processed with the parent. The teacher processed with the parent. But then

we also brought in our [*identifying information omitted*], the other person. Because what I don't want to do is just brush off a comment, "Hey, it's just sarcasm. Don't worry about it." Although after my looking into it, that's what I kind of concluded.

But I also wanted some conversation with the student and the family just to kind of dig to make sure it's not like a deeper held kind of pattern or things like that. So just making sure we're being thorough and taking care of the student.

Students. Three of the six principals identified ways that they attempt to foster positive relationships with students. These three principals disclosed that they were working on making connections with students by standing out in front of school each morning to welcome their students. Two of these three principals reported that they were routinely present in the hallways. During the interviews, the other three principals did not specifically address how they built relationships with students.

Principal Five reported:

The more I realized that if I developed relationships with these kids, they would trust me enough to tell me what they needed in some cases. Now, in other cases, they don't know what they need. And that's when we work together as a team, right?

So, it's been about focusing on those things that would leverage more equitable access to our building. It's been about creating a welcoming school, really always focusing on relationships within our building. Every year, I tell our faculty, by now, they chanted along with me, so that's nice.

But the three most important things in education are relationships, relationships, relationships. That's been a day one thing, but here's how the training fits within those relationship pieces. It's why I'm out in front of the school every morning.

He also stated when asked about informal ways that equity is pursued, “It’s the relationship piece. It’s being out in the hallways and being present.”

Principal Two also shared her thoughts on building connections with students. She stated:

I think you model it [socially just leadership] every day. I think making connections with all students, getting to know all staff, being visible, but really knowing students' names, understanding what they're interested in, making sure they feel comfortable that I feel approachable by everyone... just by making eye contact, smiling, being out at recess, and just greeting them, especially when they come in.

The apparent theme in building relationships with students gleaned through the interviews was the necessity of being present routinely, getting to know students individually, and learning about their needs directly.

Staff. All principals identified the need to form positive relationships with their staff and shared examples of how they had built trust with staff (Jayvant, 2016; DeMatthews et. al, 2016). Taking time to establish trust with staff, is fundamental to relationship building. Principal Four and Principal One gave the most detailed examples of relationship building. Principal Four shared that he had set aside time twice a month to meet with a certain group of staff. By meeting with this group consistently, he believed that trust had been established among group. Principal Four stated, in Focus Group Two:

For example, when I reference our DEI coordinator and [*identifying information omitted*], I have regular twice-a-month meeting check-ins with them.

And it was really kind of an indicator to me that just by having those check-ins, sometimes we didn't have much to talk about. It was just checking in. But then when we

did have something, you know, a courageous conversation to have, you know, I felt I could trust my conversation with them. They felt they could be open with me. An example, that's how some of the things come to light for me, and that's why I wanted those check-ins was you know maybe one example that's pretty easy to kind of walk through is we used to keep our SRO school resource police car in front of the building. Well, we still do. We didn't change that practice. But the reason for that was school safety. I mean, it was like we wanted our community to know that we're keeping the school safe was our philosophy. But it came up from some of our students that worked with our DEI coordinator that they didn't view it like that. There was potentially some negative police interactions with them, within their families.

It was kind of an uninviting environment to them. So, I mean, the way I walked through that was with conversation because like the easy thing would be to say, "Yeah, we should probably move it." We chose not to do that. We chose to talk through like, "Okay, how can we bridge this a little better?" Because for me, as a principal, that's important.

Principal One shared an example of the necessity of trust when PLC's are working together. He reported that teachers need to be vulnerable and have trust in each other and the principal.

Principal One stated:

We're going to give this math test on Friday. Everybody gives a math test, and then everybody brings their data to the next meeting on Monday. And we look and see that Sharon's kids did really, really well. [*identifying information omitted*] kids didn't. Let's have a professional dialogue about what you did instructionally that was better than mine. And how can you help my kids now, to make sure that they all get to that benchmark, which is,

again, that all means all. Right. And I think the hard part is for teachers to be vulnerable. They have to be vulnerable. Right. And there's trust with their team, trust with the coaches, trust with me.

Parents. All the principals shared that they were concerned with building relationships with parents. Each of the principals reflected on their practice and used varying approaches to build these relationships; however, Principal Six showed the complexity of building these relationships. In response to a question regarding an examination of her biases, Principal Six related a story about a complicated interaction with a parent regarding their child's attendance. She stated:

As an example, we have, over the past couple of years, acquired several families that have moved into our area that are coming from Milwaukee Public Schools. So that's kind of been their experience, right? And so, when I'm reaching out about attendance and wanting their child to be here and I'm thinking it's coming from a very caring, sincere place, it's not being received that way because that's not their experience.

So, I had a parent say to me, and it kind of smacked me right in the face, like, "Open up your eyes. This approach is not working." But she had said, "Why do you care about this at all? It's not your business. My other school, they didn't call us about any of these things. They didn't care." So, I was like, "Okay." So, I really am wanting your child here because I want your child to be successful, and I want us to have a great partnership and a collaboration.

However, that doesn't feel that way to you. That feels very invasive, and it feels like I'm stepping into your private household because you've not experienced that. The school setting that you were in previously, those just weren't factors. And that was also where

the mom had gone to school herself, too. And so, noticing that was sort of a trend for me, I kind of started digging into that with some of the equity experts in our area and just said, "I'm missing the mark on this clearly."

What can I do to approach this in a different way, albeit just being sincere in my conversation with the parent as part of it, but just how do I create some awareness for myself on this blind spot that I have? I'm hitting a wall. So, in that moment, it was a realization and kind of a wake-up call that I needed to look at this differently.

But since that period, I have realized that my approach needs to be a little bit at a time and starting to build a relationship now over the course of the past school year versus kind of the end of year one with this parent. And honestly, several other parents have had a similar expectation of our interactions. So, it wasn't just this parent, but kind of learning through this parent helped with several other families in our interactions too. But anyway, so no, I did kind of reframe my thinking and then approached the parent with a conversation that sounded and felt very different over time. Because if it felt invasive, me coming back to the table with an apology, but also that's not what I was trying to do. I needed time to rebuild that relationship with that family

She further explained how she went about rebuilding this relationship:

Well, I think she really needed to see that when we are talking about her child, it is coming from a place of care. It is not coming from a place of judgment. So, my language said that. Following up, "I apologize if this has come off as abrasive to you. I really do care about your child. And that is why I'm having this conversation with you because I really aspire to have a positive interaction with her and with you. I want us to be collaborative partners." But then she needed to see that. So as often as possible, initially

at least, reaching out and sharing positives about her child and acknowledging when she even came into the building because that wasn't always the case. I really love seeing you in the building. It's great that we can be on the same page as a team.

We can really support your child. So just saying it, but then showing it. And recognizing her presence.

From her initial interaction with his parent, Principal Six reflected on the interaction, examined how she was being perceived, and realized that she needed to change her approach. Next, she sought input from equity experts, developed strategies to build and rebuild relationships, and put the strategies into action.

Principal Five shared that his female Latinx students were not performing as well as their peers. He reported that he sought to gain information from their parents and wanted to build a relationship with this group of parents. He stated:

Because our Latinx students are suffering the most or having the least success, maybe suffering is a colorful word. I set up a couple of meetings to meet with their families. Actually, three meetings. I didn't get good attendance, but I'm going to work with [identifying information omitted], a community group.

He realized the importance of face-to-face meetings to develop relationships. By reaching out to the community group, he hopes that the group will serve as a conduit to getting parents to his meetings.

In the *It's All About Relationships* theme, principals reported that they reflected on their practice and discussed their approaches to building relationships. Building trusting relationships requires that leaders have knowledge and spend time reflecting on their communication style and behaviors, and examining how their communication style and behaviors could contribute to

silencing and marginalizing others (Furman, 2012). Although these principals recognized that trust is the foundation of relationships (Jayavant, 2016) and that clear communication, respect and caring, and active listening are of the utmost importance (Furman, 2012; Moral et al., 2017; Warner, 2020), some of their actions were to the contrary.

One principal discussed his interactions with a student, teacher, and parent following an inappropriate interaction between the student and the teacher that occurred during the school day. He met with all three of these individuals to process the interaction. He believed that by processing with the three individuals that he had resolved the issue for the student, teacher, and parent. He never considered that his outreach and communication style might not be appropriate or be culturally informed. Since he was not challenged by the student or parent, he never considered that he may be alienating them.

Along the same lines, this same principal did not change the practice of having a police car in front of the school even when concerns were brought to his attention. A group of students had raised concerns through the DEI coordinator about this practice. The principal met with the students to discuss their concerns, however in the end he did not move the police care due to what he perceived as school safety priorities. It is unknown whether this principal understands that the presence of a police car in front of the school might be disturbing to some marginalized groups of students and disruptive to their learning experience.

Another principal reflected on her relationship building practice in response a negative parent contact. She realized she needed to change her approach so she sought input from equity experts, and developed and employed strategies to rebuild a broken relationship with the parent (Furman, 2012). Another principal attempted to meet with parents of a marginalized group. His goal was to build a relationship with these parents so that they could work together to meet the

students' needs. Although few parents showed up for the meeting, this principal remained committed to establishing relationships with this group and he reached out to a community organization for assistance. This shows his commitment to his students and their parents as well as his ingenuity in developing relationships with parents of marginalized groups. Along with building strong relationships with students, staff, and parents, principals expressed the desire to giving voice to these groups.

The Value of Voice in Equity

It is essential that principals as leaders give voice to their school community, which include students, staff, and parents. Giroux (2009) and Greene (1978) emphasize that individuals experiences and voice matter in equity work. Clear communication, respect, caring, and active listening are paramount practices to building interpersonal relationships (Furman, 2012; Moral et al., 2017; Warner, 2020). In developing a knowledge of others, the concept of student voice is essential (Furman, 2012). Kose (2009) asserts that socially just leaders create spaces for teacher voice and DeMatthews et al. (2016) work discusses the importance of parent voice (see also Moral et al., 2017).

Student Voice. Although all principals discussed the concept of voice during the interviews, two principals shared examples of how students were given voice in their schools. All six principals talked about the importance of asking questions and listening to their students. Four of the principals expressed that students were given choice which they believed was giving their students voice. However, this is not consistent with the definition or the literature around the concept of voice. Examples were provided by Principal Four and Principal Five. Principal Four said “the more I listened to students in particular, the more I understood. I want to hear your story and where you are coming at it from.” He further went on to explain that he seeks

students input as a way of giving them voice. Although principals indicated that they listened to students, Principal Five felt that more time should be dedicated to listening to them.

Principal Four and Principal Five surveyed their students to gather data on the social climate of the school. Principal Four provided the following example about getting students input, regarding issues of tardiness, disrespectful behavior, and cell phone usage:

So, with behavior in particular, we went back to I mean, like it was like a feeling of a lot of conflict among staff with being consistent with following through on expectations and behaviors.

Some were much more lenient (referring to staff), some weren't. And so that was like four years ago where we just said, "All right. This is enough. We analyzed again, we surveyed all our staff on certain behaviors (referring to students). How consistent are we so we could identify? We surveyed different pockets of students, like sample groups of students, all students. We surveyed a sample of our Black and African-American students.

We surveyed a sample of our Hispanic students. And then we surveyed a sample of our student council students just to compare groups. And then we also had a parent aspect to that where it was more of like an informational like, "Here's what our staff and students are saying." We didn't really survey parents, but we kind of said like, "How would you feel about like this and that?" But that all came down to like, "Here's where we have to be consistent, non-negotiable on our expectations.

... So, to assess practices, we saw our data change. Tardy's got a lot better. Cell phone violations got a ton better. Disrespect, we actually dove into what does it actually mean to say disrespect and do cultural behaviors play into that? So, all of that data improved.

We still have our issues and stuff. And then engagement was a lot about working with some of the cultural behaviors, but also engagement protocols that you can use to engage students in the classroom.

Principal Five organized focus groups with students which were facilitated by a teacher, whom students trusted. He sought to comprise the group of students that may be struggling, based upon recommendation from teachers. The adult's job in room was to listen and let the students do the talking. He said:

We ask broad questions, but it's sort of like student type questions of what's working? How do we support you better? What are you grateful for? But the real focus is how do we support you better? If you could change one thing about the school, what would it be? What makes you feel good about coming to school? Why are you reluctant to come to school?"

He has been conducting these focus groups for six years because he felt it was important to hear from the students. This school has a diverse population and his staff is mostly white, middle-class, and well educated. The student focus groups were started because he wanted to know what was on the students' minds.

Staff Voice. All the principals shared stories of how staff voice is recognized in their schools. Principal Two, Principal Five, and Principal Six used staff surveys to give staff a voice. Principal Two reported that she gains insight from sending out a feedback form to staff to complete after staff meetings and by attending collaborative meetings. She stated the following:

And so, I think we're always looking at student data, talking to the teachers, through the collaborative teams of, "What do you understand? What do you need from us?" And so, I'm always trying to look back on, "Okay, what do I know? Do I know what the next

steps are?" Having a long-term plan, but also a short-term plan and where we're going next. And then I send out a lot of plus deltas after staff meetings, and just try to let feedback on you know how was that? Did you understand it? Was it useful? What do you need next from me?

In the Focus Group Two interview, Principal Five stated:

So, we have some systems that allow for voice. We do surveys, and I think that's important from a staff perspective, even though, boy, they can be painful to read when you've got the people that have an ax to grind. Not as many as we used to, thankfully. But in every criticism, there's truth. So, it's good to give voice to teachers. Typically, they're not showering you with the things that are going right. They're pointing out the things that are going well, going wrong, and they're doing it really, you have to presume from, "Let's just get better at these things."

Principal Three and Principal Five describe how small group discussions can provide a safe space for staff voice (Kose, 2009). Principal Three gave an example of creating safe spaces to carry out equity work. This principal was aware that some staff can dominate the conversation during equity training, but was conscious of the fact that all voices needed to be heard. She explained:

Those are my four that were leading out like they would present the information, teach it to us, and then we would break down into small groups because usually in the small group, you're going to be more likely to get more engagement, right?....So we'd break down into small groups and have these conversations. And we tried to keep the groups very diversified. So, we had some that had really a lot of talk, like really outgoing

spokespeople, but then also making sure all voices were heard. So, we tried to mix it up so that people would feel safe talking and sharing whatever group they're in.

Parent Voice. All six principals indicated that they gave voice to parents in their schools. All principals used surveys to get parent input. Principal One and Principal Six expressed concerns about the reliability of surveys. Principal Six's concern was that only parents that are already engaged complete the surveys. In the Focus Group One interview, Principal One echoed this same sentiment and offered a new survey strategy to get information from parents. He said:

I sent out the end-of-year survey in the classic way that you always do in two languages, but you get the same 50 power broker parents that respond. You're not getting input from everybody. So other ways that I've learned about this year are, you know, on average, it's about 110 cars to leave the parking lot at the end of the day at dismissal. And so, if you think about it, there's kind of a captive audience there. You could have a one or two-question survey on a clipboard and have somebody go from car to car....And that's a great way to get pencil and paper feedback to give parents a voice.

Principal Three and Principal Six are starting focus groups with parents in the fall of 2024. The impetus of this work came from the district level. This spring these two principals have worked on developing questions for the focus groups. Principal Three has identified five questions to guide the discussion for eight to ten parents, who mirror the school's student population. She stated the goal is, "To have a conversation and give us honest, transparent feedback so that we keep getting better." Principal Six is working on creating a focus group in the summer of 2024 with a sampling of parents that aren't as engaged. This will be an opportunity to bring their voices to the table to discuss things that have worked well here, and

areas of disparity. This information will guide their approach to parent engagement in the 2024-2025 school year. She stated:

So that's definitely an area of growth because I would say that we gather feedback. We gather feedback currently from surveys. Families that take the surveys are probably the families that we are most engaged with. What we are hoping to do this summer is to create a focus group where it will be kind of a sampling of families that maybe aren't as engaged. And because we are shifting boundaries this year, it'll be new to us, families as well that I don't have experience with and haven't interacted with yet.

So bringing their voices to the table, not in a survey format, but truly in person to discuss what has worked well here and maybe their previous schools, what has been a disparity, and what information we could have, how do we learn from you to plan our approach this year. So that's definitely an opportunity because I have had blinders on to surveying families as getting us the information of the families we're really trying to reach.

It's probably not. The mom that I had told you about earlier is probably not one of the individuals that answered my survey. But yet there are concerns that she has or had about our school and our interactions. So, it's kind of getting a larger sampling of people that are willing to provide their feedback.

One-on-one conversations were another form of voice for parents. Principal One provided an example of the one-on-one conversation. This principal described a situation where students from one family were continually tardy to school. The mom had seven children with one in high school, one in middle school, and three in elementary and two at home. The tardiness was perceived as the family's failure to consider school important. His calling and badgering the mother about attendance proved to be an unsuccessful approach. He realized the

necessity of better communication and listening to the mother. They had a one-on-one conversation where he asked her what her goals were for her son to ensure that they had the same goal for this student. He said:

So, once we aligned and we realized all of our goals are the same, then we could work together on helping her with what it was that she feels that she needs. So, we can really put something in place that will really truly help as opposed to something that we decide that she needs when that might not help the situation at all....we haven't cracked the code on that one yet. She still you know needs a lot of help. But the kids are doing well, and they're well taken care of, but they just need to get here on time.

In summation, the *Value of Voice in Equity* theme shows the limited voice that these principals gave to students, staff, and parents. This may be due to the fact that these principals do not have a clear understanding of the concept of voice or simply are unwilling to invite these groups to share in the decision-making process. For the purpose of this study, voice is best described by Furman (2012). She states that social justice leaders are proactive in setting up democratic forums and processes for communication and making decisions that are inclusive especially for traditionally marginalized students. These principals reported that they gave voice through surveys, focus groups, and one- on-one conversations. The principals discussed the importance of listening to their students. One principal assumed that he gave voice to students by surveying them. He wanted their thoughts on how staff was implementing student behavior expectations in the school. He surveyed certain groups of students, which included Black students, Hispanic students, and student council members. There was no rationale or process provided during the interview as to why these groups were selected. The principal assumed that all students would provide honest feedback, when in reality marginalized groups may be fearful

to share their concerns. It appears that the principal only sought limited input and did not explain how their input would impact the disciplinary practices.

Unlike the previous example, where the principal is looking for input to solve a perceived staff issue, another principal focused on supporting the students. This principal's approach is more in line with social justice leadership practices. Since his staff is mostly white, middle class, and educated and his student body is more diverse, he wanted to hear directly from the students about their needs so he set up student focus groups. He reached out to students that staff had identified as struggling and provides a facilitator that students have identified as trustworthy. He is aware that in order to get students, and more so students of marginalized groups, to share information there needs to be a safe and trusting space created.

Two principals intend to start parent focus groups in the fall of 2024 which include parents of marginalized groups. Although this is a step in the right direction, it is a very basic step and has not taken into consideration the barriers to gathering honest feedback from parents of marginalized groups. Both of these principals presumed that parents would want to be part of a focus group. They perceive that their schools are welcoming places and that parents share this same view with regard to the parent-principal relationship.

In all these scenarios, the principals are only asking for input from their students or parents. More advanced social justice leaders should involve these groups in the decision making. Students and parents should serve on school committees and teams such school leadership teams, equity teams, or curriculum committees for example. In the next chapter, there will be an analysis and discussion on the equity practices that these principals used with the hope of creating a more socially just learning environment

Chapter V-Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify and explore how principals transform their equity practices to create a more socially just learning environment. More specifically, there was an exploration into the instructional and engagement practices of the principals. I further investigated how principals critique their current practices and then take action to eliminate barriers that lead to inequity. This study included six principals in the Fox Valley Region who have been required to participate in equity training, who have at least five years of principal experience, and who have been in their current building for at least two years as the basis for a multiple-case study. I also conducted focus group interviews with five of the six participating principals, and reviewed each school's documents related to equity.

Before moving forward with discussion, there is a need to make a distinction between the terms advanced social justice leadership and emerging social justice leadership. The term advanced social justice leadership refers to principals who reflect on their practices and then take action to eliminate barriers that lead to inequities, even in the face of resistance (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Capper & Frattura, 2009; Foster, 1986; Furman, 2012; Scanlan, 2012; Theoharis, 2007; Young, 1990). In contrast, the term emerging social justice leadership describes principals who are still in the process of expanding their knowledge and raising their awareness of appropriate practices, and only beginning to take basic steps to eliminate barriers that lead to inequity. McKenize et al. (2008) recognize that perfect social justice leaders do not exist and that leaders may have strengths in one aspect of social justice but may be weak in another area. In this chapter, I analyze these principals' leadership, inclusivity, and engagement practices which include relationship building and voice. Additionally, my critique will share how these principals perceived their efforts to be equity minded and the ways their efforts were

limited. This study's conclusion finds these principals equity efforts more emerging than advanced. This chapter will also include practice considerations, implications for future research, and the limitations of this study.

Emerging Leadership Practices for Equity

Principals in this study reported that they personally led equity work in their respective buildings. They were responsible for providing equity training in their buildings and three principals were members of school or district equity teams. The principals in this study appeared to be using *some* socially just practices in instructional leadership because they reflected on their practice and took action (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Capper & Frattura, 2009; Foster, 1986; Furman, 2012; Scanlan, 2012; Theoharis, 2007; Young, 1990). They demonstrated that they reflected on practices by identifying barriers and reviewing student data (Furman, 2012; see also Ezzani, 2021; McKenzie et al., 2008). The majority of principals in this study disclosed that the mindsets of staff and the element of time are barriers that hinder their equity work. After examining these barriers and data, all principals took *some* form of action to address these barriers in response to the student achievement and demographic data.

In this study, two principals changed their instructional practices with EL students. Each principal based their decision on two different sets of data. Principal One based his decision on demographic data that indicated an increase in the number of students requiring EL services, while Principal Three used student achievement data to make her decision. Principal One changed his practice by including EL students in Tier 1 universal instruction. In the past, these students were pulled out of their classrooms to receive services from the EL teacher. Principal Three decided to group all EL students into one classroom at each grade level in her building. She made this decision because of the limited EL resources that were available to her. This

approach provided her EL teacher the opportunity to support EL students in their classrooms. Each principal used a different approach in providing universal instruction for their EL student which aligns with the findings of Theoharis (2010) and Frattura & Capper, (2007). It should be noted that grouping EL students into one classroom runs contrary to the literature (McKenize et al., 2008). These efforts, as reported by Principal Three, have resulted in increased academic achievement for EL students but creates a less heterogeneous learning environment.

All the principals used data to reflect on practice and to develop plans to increase student achievement. Student achievement was evaluated at the student level, classroom, and school level. These principals disaggregated the information by subgroups. The purpose of examining the data was to take action to improve achievement. All principals provided evidence on how they worked with staff to improve student achievement through the PLC process (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour & Marzano, 2011). On the student level, principals reported that teachers used data to provide additional supports to students that had not mastered the skill. When looking at classroom level data, teachers worked in PLCs to discuss strategies to improve student achievement. School level data drives the plan of action to improve the school's outcomes for all students. Principals responded to the data by changing instructional practices and strategies. Over half of the principals discerned that these practices and strategies were for the purpose of increasing universal instruction for all students. These principals used staff resources to push-in to classrooms (Capper et al., 2006). These different types of data analysis achieved various results for these principals and their schools.

These principals shared that the PLC process is used by their teachers to examine data and to reflect on practice. Principals were also involved in the PLC process by attending meetings and reviewing notes. All the principals disaggregated data; however, some used the

data to set goals for the following school year and others looked at the data routinely during PLC time. Although they used data to make instructional and engagement practices decisions, there is no consistent lens on equity. The lack of consistent focus on the disaggregated data is contrary to research that suggests that socially just leaders keep marginalized groups at the center of their practice (Ezzani, 2021; Theoharis, 2007).

There was a consistency in their beliefs that they and their staff need to continue to learn about equity (Kose, 2009; Warner, 2020). They increased their knowledge by attending conferences and professional development offered by the district, and by reading books and articles specific to equity. All the principals reported that they use modeling, observing and training to coach staff after they have gained new knowledge on equity practices. If a staff member was unable to grow through coaching or continued to hinder equity work in the building, half the principals disclosed that they counseled the staff member out of their current assignment.

The learning and coaching practices that these principals applied to equity work are mostly at the emerging level; however, coaching staff to leave their current position is a more advanced practice. By successfully coaching staff members who did not want to take part in, or did not believe in equity work, principals demonstrated advanced social justice practice. Three of these principals reported that they had counseled staff to leave their school if they were unable to support equity work after being unsuccessfully coached. These efforts embody the literature which prioritizes working for meaningful change even when facing resistance (Ezzani, 2021; Furman, 2012; Warner, 2020).

These principals all engaged in courageous conversations with their staff to address words or actions that were not consistent with equity practices. In the end, principals took a

stand and told staff: this is what we are doing regarding equity, because it is best for students. According to the literature, socially just leaders are willing to start and engage in critical conversations in both formal and informal settings even when individuals or groups are uncomfortable with the topic (Jayavant, 2016; Santamaria, 2014; Singleton & Linton, 2006).

An example of a more emerging level of equity work was provided by Principal Two. She described the evolution of her learning in relation to equity. The first steps in her equity work were to address inclusivity practices in classrooms. This would be considered the emerging stage of equity work (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Furman, 2012; Scanlan, 2012). For example, she examined with her teachers the holidays that were being celebrated and she further explored what kind of cross-cultural variety was included through visual depictions in the classroom. She reported that they then moved their efforts into instructional practices as it is related to equity work, which she suggested was deeper equity learning. Although she is engaged in learning, she did not recognize the *equal* importance of inclusivity and instructional practices for equity. The practices she described do not align with DeMatthews et al. (2016) work states that principals should provide a balanced approach to schooling where the principal's desire to ensure that academic achievement is not significantly more important than providing a respectful culture, and meeting the social and emotional needs of students.

The principals identified several factors that hinder their work in achieving equity in their schools. All principals acknowledged that time must be specifically set aside to focus on equity work. Several expressed concern regarding the continuity of training when there is a turnover in staff. There was a consist belief among principals that there is a need for additional resources beyond what they are currently able to provide. They shared that they purchased materials such as books for classrooms and libraries that were more inclusive and representative of their student

body. They also provided staff with resources that were geared towards equity. All principals led equity trainings in their building and half were members of their school or district equity teams.

Several of the principals recognized that equity training needs to remain a focus of professional development as well as their everyday work. One of the principals discussed embedding equity work using a PLC type model. This is consistent with the finding of Scanlan (2012) when he suggested that socially just leaders design and provide professional learning opportunities through communities of practice. Although this principal has not taken action on this model to date, he sees it as a practice that could normalize equity work in his school (Koze 2009). This type of complacency shows that many of these principals are at the emerging level because an advanced social justice leader would find ways to incorporate equity learning into everyday practice. The principals also realized that in order to sustain equity work in their buildings, they need staff that has the same, consistent ongoing training (Kose, 2009; Theoharis, 2007).

All principals made efforts to purchase equity related material for their students and staff. The purchasing of materials was a good first step with limited financial resources that are available to them. However, Kose (2009) suggests that a more advanced social justice leader attempts to secure resources outside the school budget. He explains that socially just principals look for professional resources and opportunities outside the school, which may include applying for local, state and federal grants, as well as advocating for professional development funding from the district.

These principals reported that they led or were part of a team that led equity initiatives in their building. For example, knowledge from the *Soluciones: Teaching Latino English*

Language Learners training was used to pass on learning at their school. They recognized as principals and as the leaders of their building that they must drive equity work. Literature suggests that socially just principals lead equity training for their staff (Kose, 2009; Theoharis, 2007; Warner, 2020).

Emerging Inclusivity Practices

All principals spoke about the concept of “All Means All.” Principals expressed a strong conviction to this concept and defined it in a similar manner. They defined it as: *every* student must get the support they need to be academically and socially successful. This is accomplished by examining barriers, reviewing data, and looking at instructional and engagement practices. The responsibility of student achievement falls on the principal and their staff, not on the student. These principals indicated that they are responsible for getting the necessary support to meet each student’s needs. (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour & Marzano, 2011, Kose, 2009).

The principals reflected and took action to create more inclusive learning environments for their students. In collaboration with staff, principals were purposeful in setting aside time in the daily schedule for community building, which is an inclusive practice. All principals indicated that they were working to ensure that every demographic group felt welcome and included (Riehl, 2000; Theoharis, 2007; Wasonga, 2009). They took action by purchasing and providing resources that are a reflection of the student body, which includes all demographic groups. Three principals increased participation in school events by removing financial barriers. One principal revealed that they were intentional in choosing students of marginalized groups to be recognized in their school, as well as at the district level.

Building community among students, staff, and parents is an inclusive practice essential to social justice work (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Ezzani, 2021; Furman, 2012; Kose, 2009). The

four principals that discussed community building did not specifically connect equity practices to this activity. Two of the principals identified perceived financial barriers to participation particularly in school and PTO activities. Again, this shows an emerging level of equity work. Principal Six reported that parents were surveyed at the end of the year, which included what events parents wanted to see. She indicated that these events were PTO sponsored events, not school activities. Although parents were surveyed, she never made the link between what parents were asking for and what the PTO did. Principals made the assumption that low attendance of marginalized groups was due to limited financial resources. This shows an emerging level of equity work because these principals were attempting to identify barriers (Furman, 2012; Kose, 2009; Scanlan, 2012; Theoharis, 2007), in order to include more students. Principal Five shared that he was intentional in picking students from all demographic groups to be represented for district and school-level recognition. However, this raises potential concerns, because he did not share his methodology for choosing a student other than that they were from a traditionally marginalized group. There should be a deliberate process which incorporates inclusive practices for selecting students or this practice could appear to be tokenism.

Principals were thoughtful in creating an inclusive environment for parents. They used various methods of communication to reach out to parents, which include phone calls, text messages, letters and newsletters. Letters and the newsletters were translated into other languages. Principals invited parents to various school activities so that they could be part of their child's learning experience. An example of this was math and literacy nights to highlight how these skills are taught. They were also purposeful in planning activities that were specific to including all demographics of students such as multi-cultural nights. Changing how schools scheduled activities was another strategy of being more inclusive. The time of events were

varied to accommodate parents' schedules, which included parent-teacher conferences. Not only did they vary times, but principals removed financial barriers to parent participation in activities. The goal of principals was to increase parental involvement and inclusivity.

However, there was no evidence that the principals had deep knowledge of the people they serve in order to influence not just communication needs but to also influence their decision making. According to Furman (2012), socially just leaders use inclusive and democratic practices to build community across cultural groups. Building inclusive practices requires a deep breadth of knowledge about the community and cultural groups that attend the school (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Furman, 2012; Scanlan, 2012). These principals shared what they believed were inclusive parent practices. The principals provided examples of communication and activities they used to create a more inclusive environment for parents. They also shared changes that were made to their current practice so that more parents could be included. These principals demonstrated some knowledge of their communities and who is attending their schools (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Furman, 2012; Scanlan, 2012), evidenced by the fact that they send out communications in various modes and in different languages. However, most of these methods and strategies do not align with best practices for creating inclusive environments. Best practices suggest that principals collect data about the communities and cultural groups that are served in their schools (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Furman, 2012) through more in-depth actions such as learning about life histories and neighborhood dynamics.

Emerging Relationship Building Practices

Relationship building is fundamental to establishing a socially just learning environment. Principals in this study shared that they reflected on their relationship practices and took action

when change was necessary (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Furman, 2012). By doing self-reflection and learning more about themselves, principals disclosed that they changed their approach to relationship building. Principals acknowledged that they were more open to listening without judgement (Furman, 2012; Moral et al., 2017; Warner, 2020). All principals recognized the importance of fostering positive relationships with all students, staff, and parents. They used various strategies to build positive relationships with students, which included being visible, knowing their students, and understanding their needs.

Relationship building is the bedrock of equity work. (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Furman, 2012; Jayavant, 2016). Principals must have self-awareness and spend time reflecting on their communication style and communication behaviors. Additionally, principals need to assess whether their communication style and behaviors contribute to silencing and marginalizing others (Furman, 2012). Proactively building trusting relationships across cultural groups with staff, parents, and students is paramount (DeMatthews et al., 2016). School culture and community are stronger when leaders create welcoming environments and reach out to marginalized families (Riehl, 2000; Theoharis, 2007; Wasonga, 2009).

Although these principals reported that they reflected on their relationship building practices and took action, most made no connection to social justice practices. All principals gave examples of how they work to build relationships with students, staff, and parents. However, in all of the examples, with the exception of one, there was no emphasis on building relationships across all cultural groups. Best practices, of a socially just leader, suggest that principals build relationships across all cultural groups (DeMatthews et al., 2016). Principal Five made efforts to develop a relationship with his Latinx families in response to poor academic achievement. Although he was reaching out to this cultural group (DeMatthew et al., 2016), it

was in response to a situation. Socially just leaders proactively work to develop relationships with parents across cultural groups.

Again, the practice of being visible, knowing their students, and understanding their needs is a general practice for building relationships. These principals did not link these practices to best social justice practices, which would include specifically reaching out to marginalized students. When reaching out, these principals must consider and ensure that their actions do not lead to trauma and alienation. In the realm of staff relationships, the information shared by the principals through the interviews again revealed that they did not see the relationship through a social justice lens. One example of a principal reflecting on practice and making changes was provided by Principal Six. She discussed that her interactions with a parent were not perceived as she had intended. As a result, the principal needed to repair the relationship with the parent. This principal took time to reflect on her approach, went to the equity experts to gain insight on making changes, and then took action and changed her approach (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Furman, 2012).

Not only do principals have to reflect on their communication style and behavior but an advanced social justice leader assesses whether their communication style and behaviors contribute to silencing and marginalizing others (Furman, 2012). One of the principals believed that an incident between a student and a teacher had been resolved because he had met with the student, the teacher, and the student's parent. Since he did not get any push back from the student or parent, he never considered that his behavior during the interaction could lead to silencing or alienating them. Along the same lines, this same principal offered the scenario regarding a police car in front of the school. Although he met with concerned students, it is

unclear whether he truly heard them or if he simply forced his explanation on them thus marginalizing their concerns.

Emerging Voice in Equity Practice

In equity work, it is essential that principals give voice to students, staff, and parents (Goddard et al., 2017; Santamaria, 2014). For the purpose of this study, voice is best described by Furman (2012). She states that social justice leaders are proactive in setting up democratic forums and processes for communication and making decisions that are inclusive especially for traditionally marginalized students. In this study, principals demonstrated giving limited voice to these groups. These principals gave students voice by listening to their students, conducting student surveys and focus groups. (Lalas & Valle, 2007; Mitra, 2004, 2009; see also Frattura & Topinka, 2006). The two principals that used focus groups disclosed that they were intentional in selecting students from marginalized groups to take part. While these practices gain input from students, these efforts would be considered an emerging practice because students are not involved in the decision-making process.

Principals also described the methods they used to give what they considered voice to staff and parents. All the principals used surveys to gather information from these two groups. Three of the principals identified that they were using or were preparing to use focus groups of parents to gain more information. They indicated that they specifically were looking for parents that were members of marginalized groups to be part of the focus group (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Santamaria, 2014). One principal was interested in using the focus group format because they felt that surveys were always completed by the same group of parents and that she was looking for different perspectives. All of these principals with the possible exception of one are at the emerging stage of giving voice to students, staff, and parents. This one principal's

behavior may actually lead to alienation of marginalized groups. These principals used tools such as surveys and focus groups to give voice to these groups which aligns with the Jayavant's (2016) findings.

Principal Four shared his perception of giving voice by surveying groups of marginalized students about how staff was implementing student behavior expectations in the school. He stated that he reached out to Black and African-American students, Hispanic students, and student council members about the application of discipline. Without more information, this could be construed that he was targeting certain groups of students who may be over represented with disciplinary referrals, or it could mean that he wanted the input in order to make true change for students over represented with disciplinary referrals. There is also concern with how he identified groups: Black and African-American, Hispanic, and student council. "Student council" is not consistent with identifying groups by race. This selection of the student council members could lead to Black and Hispanic students feeling marginalized and alienated.

Principal Five has been conducting focus groups with students for six years and he inferred that he was reaching out to marginalized students. According to the literature, a socially just leader gives voice to traditionally silenced groups and individuals are sought out and included (Furman, 2012; DeMatthews et al., 2016; Santamaria, 2014). In the interview, Principal Five shared that he wanted to gather information from the students because the school had a diverse population, but a mostly white, middle-class staff. While both of these principals sought student input, to become more advanced socially just leaders they need to involve students in the decision-making process. These students could be invited to serve on school committees and teams alongside teachers, administrators and parents.

Surveys and focus groups were the strategies that these principals used or were going to use in the next school year to give parents voice in their buildings. Two principals indicated that they will start parent focus groups in the fall of 2024, which include parents of marginalized groups. Although this practice may give them more insight about their parents' feelings, one has wonder why they do not already have more knowledge about their families. Engaging parents in focus groups is a very basic social justice practice. These principals also must consider potential barriers to parent involvement in the focus groups.

Although these strategies did give some voice to parents, they were not advanced social justice practices. Some of the principals specifically noted that the surveys were not completed by everyone and that they hear from the same group of parents. These principals were seeking input, but not really involving students, staff or parents in the decision-making process which is a more advanced social justice practice (Furman, 2012; Goddard et al., 2017; Santamaria, 2014).

Conclusions

The principals in this study work in schools in the Fox Valley Region, which has a predominantly white population. However, in the last twenty years there has been an increase in the number of students living in poverty as well as an increase in the number of students of color living and going to school in this region. Even with the increased number of students of color in this region, 90% percent of the total population is white (United State Census Bureau, 2023). Despite the fact that this region has seen an increase in the number of students of color, there appears to be no *urgency* by these white principals to make significant changes to the system. Kose (2009) suggests that socially just principals do not simply improve on existing school practices, but these principals look to totally recreate systems, practices, teaching, and learning for *all* students. The principals in this study did make improvements to their current practice,

such as adding resources that were more reflective of their student body, as well as providing communications in different languages. However, these principals' practices were weak when it came to providing voice and building relationships. For meaningful change to take place, these principals need to give voice to marginalized students and parents, which requires them to be included in the decision-making process.

Additionally white privilege is another factor to consider. At times, these principals simply seem to be unaware of how their practices and actions are affecting their students and parents of marginalized groups. While specific biographic data was not gathered, it is assumed through conversations in the interviews that all participants were born and raised in predominantly white communities. Even though these principals have received equity training and appear to want to do the right thing to move equity forward in their buildings, they may be hindered by their blind spots related to their *whiteness*. As DiAngelo (2021) explained, well-intentioned progressive white people acknowledge race and racism and proclaim the need for affirmative action policies. However, these progressive whites often have blinders to their own latent racism. White progressives understand that there is systemic racism, but do not recognize their role in perpetuating it (DiAngelo, 2021). When principals do not fulfill their default role as equity leaders in their buildings, certain groups of students and parents continue to be marginalized. This results in lower student achievement, disciplinary issues, and parent dissatisfaction. Finally, these principals may also fear community push back in the post-Covid environment where school board meetings have become politically contentious.

All of the principals were considered *emerging* social justice leaders because they are gaining knowledge, raising their awareness of their practices, and at times taking action to eliminate barriers, whereas *advanced* social justice leaders reflect on their practices and then take

action to eliminate barriers that lead to inequities even in the face of resistance. These principals showed that they reflected and took action more often in instructional areas than in engagement areas such relationship building and voice. These principals were at different levels in their equity knowledge and implementation of social justice practices. While one principal implemented more social justice practices and was more cognizant of the needs of his students from marginalized groups, the other principals were less advanced. It should be noted, this principal had a greater population of marginalized students. Although much of their work was at the emerging level, there were some advanced practices such as the willingness of principals to have courageous conversations with staff that are resistant to equity work and even removing staff who are unable to change.

Considerations: Moving Equity Work Forward

Socially just leaders make every decision and take every action through a social justice lens (Theoharis, 2008). From the findings in this study, it is apparent leaders need to have a clear vision for their equity work and develop a comprehensive equity plan. According to Kose (2009) socially just principals work collaboratively with staff to develop and communicate a vision that emphasizes the value of high achievement for *all* students and the use of inclusive practices (see also Blankstein, 2013; Scanlan, 2012). To advance equity work in their schools, principals must develop a comprehensive action plan. To begin the process, there needs to be an assessment of school policies, procedures and practices (Furman, 2012; see also Capper et al., 2020; Ezzani, 2021; McKenzie et al., 2008). Using the information gathered from the assessment, a comprehensive equity plan can be developed. The plan must include professional development and ongoing training for the principal and their staff (Kose, 2009). The plan must ensure that all new staff receive formal equity training and that booster training is provided to

existing staff. The plan should be audited annually to ensure that there is fidelity in their equity work (Capper & Frattura, 2009; Furman, 2012; see also Capper et al., 2020).

Another consideration is based on input from the principals in this study. They indicated that there are often competing priorities to equity work, such as new instructional, social emotional initiatives, and state mandates. This can result in a lack of emphasis, consistency, and sustainability of equity training. These principals reported that equity training was essential for transforming their leadership in their schools. The principals expressed the desire and need to continue learning about equity and equity practices. When new knowledge is obtained, principals can further their reflection on current practices and make changes once inequities are identified. Principals opined that they cannot do this work alone, so it is important that staff continue to receive training around equity and equity practices. By working together, the principal and their staff can create more equitable environments for all students. Beyond training, principals looked for policy and procedures to be adopted at the district level to ensure that equity practices and development are carried out.

Finally, principals reported the need to have more resources to carry out their equity work. With limited budgets, principals need to reimagine how they distribute the staff and financial resources that they do have. Kose (2009) suggest the that socially just principals create structures in their schools that make the best use of resources, assignments, schedules, and staff (see also Capper & Frattura 2009; Frattura & Capper, 2024). Capper and Frattura (2007) have created a process for systemic change which repurposes staff assignments in order to create more heterogenous classrooms. This process can be achieved with limited or no additional staffing resources. As previously stated, socially just principals seek professional resources and

opportunities outside of their school and district. These principals write for grants at the local, state and federal level as well as advocate for professional development training (Kose, 2009)

Considerations: Future Research

As stated in the introduction, this study contributes to the literature by examining how principals in a Midwest Region reflect on their current practices and take action to create more equity in their schools, particularly for their shifting demographics. More specifically, the study looked at how principals reflect on and take action to change instructional and engagement practices that had been deemed to be unjust and inequitable – even in a state context that is not universally friendly to equity. This study found that these principals’ social justice practices were at various levels ranging from emerging to more advanced and that other practices led to marginalization. These principals enacted more social justice practices in the instructional realm compared to the engagement realm, which included relationship building and voice. Still, most of the reflection and action steps in instructional practices for social justice would be considered in the emerging category. These principals had varying levels of reflection and action with engagement practices, particularly in relationship building and voice. While advanced engagement practices were limited in number, most were at the emerging level and there are examples of practices that led to marginalization.

This study adds to the previous research on social justice and the leadership practices of principals by reinforcing the findings of the existing body of research. Furman (2012) suggests that social justice leadership is a practice that involves reflection and action. In this study, principals described how they reflected on their practice particularly with regard to barriers and made changes to current practices to create a more equitable learning environment (see also Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Capper & Frattura, 2009; Foster, 1986; Scanlan, 2012;

Theoharis, 2007; Young, 1990). According to the literature, socially just leaders are willing to start and engage in critical conversations in both formal and informal settings even when individuals or groups are uncomfortable with the topic (Jayavant, 2016; Santamaria, 2014; Singleton & Linton, 2006). These principals all engaged in courageous conversations with their staff to address words or actions that were not consistent with equity practices. Through coaching and courageous conversations, several of these principals addressed staff resistance to equity work and took steps to have teachers leave their current positions. Principals in this study were strongly committed to the concept of “All Means All,” which means that *every* student must get the support they need to be academically and socially successful. By examining barriers, reviewing data, and looking at instructional and engagement practices, these principals identified the supports that the students needed to be successful. The responsibility of student achievement falls on the principal and their staff, not on the student. These principals indicated that they are responsible for getting the necessary support to meet each student’s needs. (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour & Marzano, 2011, Frattura & Capper, 2007; Kose, 2009; Theoharis, 2007). These principals reported that it is essential that they and their staffs continue to learn about and implement equity work (Kose, 2009; Theoharis, 2007; Warner, 2020). In the study, these principals identified factors that hinder their equity work and most dealt with training. There were issues of consistency in the training and providing enough time for training. Principals in this study shared the importance of relationship building and giving voice to students, staff, and parents. Although their practices both on reflection and action were weak and some instances led to marginalization, they were aware of the significance of relationship building (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Furman, 2012; Jayavant, 2016) and giving voice (Lalas & Valle, 2007; Mitra, 2004, 2009; see also Frattura & Topinka, 2006).

This study explored how six principals from the Fox Valley Region transformed their practices with a desire to create a more socially just learning environment. It further examined how these principals reflected on current instructional and engagement practices and took action to make changes when inequities were identified. However, it did not address the effect that these practices had on student academic achievement. Overall, more studies need to be conducted on the influence of using social justice practices to increase student achievement. More specifically, research needs to be focused on principal leadership that leads to increased achievement for all students. The Fox Valley Region was chosen because it has seen an increased number of students living in poverty as well as an increase in the number of students of color over the past two decades (USAFACTS, 2022). Further studies looking at how leaders have transformed their equity practices should be expanded to include additional geographic areas that are experiencing similar trends.

Principals in the study indicated that training was important to moving equity work forward. Further studies should be conducted on the effect that social justice training has on principal leadership. A comparative study could be conducted that looks at which social justice training programs have the most impact on moving equity forward in a school. Additionally, a study could examine how principals lead equity work at schools where a high percentage of students across all demographic groups meet academic benchmarks. This study showed that parents have limited voice in the schools their students attend. Therefore, there is need for further research on how principals give voice to groups of marginalized students and their parents. Another study could look at how principals positively engage with marginalized communities to effect student academic achievement.

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APPENDIX A

Principal Interview Questions

Research Questions:

How do principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment?

How do principals interpret the role of equity in implementing their school's instructional practices?

How are equity practices reflected in principals' engagement with students and parents of marginalized groups?

Furman Framework

Interview Questions

Question
General
1. How many years have you been a principal? In this building?
2. How many years in your current district?
3. What was your position before becoming a principal? How long were you in that position? What district?
Personal Dimension
Reflection:
4. How many hours/years of training did you receive in your role as a principal? 5. Who conducted the training? When did you complete the training? 6. Did you receive any training as a teacher? 7. How many hours/years of training did you receive? When did you complete the training? 8. How many hours/years of training did you receive?
9. At what point in your career as an educator did you begin to think about equity? Was there a time that you examined your own beliefs, assumptions, and biases? 10. What triggered you to examine your own beliefs, assumptions, and biases? 11. What did you learn from examining your beliefs, assumptions, and biases?
12. Have you ever examined your beliefs, assumptions, and biases with regard to race, language, gender, social economic status, sexual orientation in a critical manner and engage in honest self-reflection? How?

Action
<p>13. Have you experienced any transformations with the way you think about your current practices?</p> <p>14. Have you made any changes?</p> <p>15. What changes have you made?</p>
Systemic Dimension
Reflection:
16. What is the significance of examining equity as it relates to K-12 system?
<p>17. What things help or hinder in creating equity in your school? What would it take to overcome the things that hinder the creation of equity in your school? District?</p>
18. What value to you see in having principals/staff assess current practices based on their personal experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives?
<p>19. How is equity addressed in your school?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Who is involved? Why were they chosen? Are there formal structures in place to discuss equity? What are the informal ways that equity is pursued? When it comes to equity conversations in your building, what is a typical example of how do they start? Who is there? Can share a recent example? Can you also share your memory of when you first started having these conversations? What happens after these conversations? <p style="text-align: center;">In light of all the things discussed, how do you assess and analyze current practices?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Instructional? Engagement?
<p>20. When you think of your school culture, are there any particular norms/traditions that stand out to you?</p> <p>Do your school's instructional practices reflect certain norms/traditions? Is there something in the curriculum and/or instructional practices in your school that influence the disparity gap?</p> <p>What norms exist in your school's engagement practices with students and families? Are your student and parent engagement practices influencing the disparity gap?</p>
21. As a principal do you see the education system rigged against certain groups of students?
<p>22. Do you have a plan to continue to learning about equity? What does the plan entail?</p>
<p>23. What do you believe are the best instructional practices of a principal who strives to be a socially just leader? What do you believe are the best student and parent engagement practices of a principal who strives to be a socially just leader?</p>

Action:
24. What changes did you make in your instructional practices upon finding inequities? What changes did you make in student and parent engagement practices upon finding inequities?
25. Do you conduct equity audits? Did you act upon the data trends found in the equity audit? What changes were made? If changes were made, please share the extent to which the changes show a trend of improvement or lack of improvement?
26. What professional development opportunities related to equity do you provide for your staff? How often?
27. How do you deal with resistance to change for the purpose of equity? What roadblocks have you encountered in your equity work? With-in your school, district, community?

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. What are your expectations of yourself, your staff, students, parents and community when it comes to equity?
2. Through the interview process many of you used the phrase, “All means All.” When did you start using that phrase? Why? How is it accomplished in your school?
3. When it comes to equity in your schools why is it important to be a learner?
4. Why is important to have a strong conviction and passion for equity when engaging in the work?
5. What are some strategies you have used to reduces barriers when it comes to equity?
6. Several of you have used the word “Inclusive” as an important aspect of equity. What are some inclusive practices that you use with students, parents, staff, and your community? What effect do those practices have on your students?
7. What is a courageous conversation? Who have you had them with? What was the outcome?

8. Many of you stated that you need to coach your staff. What does that look like?
How has staff responded?

9. “Voice” was another term that several of you used during the individual interviews.
What does it mean to give voice to students, parents and staff? What does it look like in
your school for students, staff and parents? How do you encourage students, staff, and
parents to use their voice?

10. Why is time an important factor when it comes to equity?

11. Have students ever approached you with an equity issue? What was it and how was it
addressed?

APPENDIX C

District Recruitment Email

Dear _____:

As a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, I am working on a dissertation in the Urban Education Program. The goal of my dissertation is to identify and examine how principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment. I am looking to identify school districts in the Fox Valley Region and principals that have had equity training to interview for this study.

I am reaching out to the _____ District to find out your policies and procedures for conducting research in your District and to gain permission to contact your principals. Also, I am looking for information regarding equity training that has occurred in your District. I appreciate your consideration and I am happy to answer any questions you may have regarding my project. Please let me know if you are willing to participate within the next week by responding to me at smsimon@uwm.edu or feel free to contact me at 920-979-7754.

I appreciate your time and consideration.

Thank you,

Sharon Simon
Graduate Student
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

APPENDIX D

Principal Recruitment Email

Dear _____:

As a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, I am working on a dissertation in the Urban Education Program. The goal of my dissertation is to identify and examine how principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment. I am looking to identify principals who have been required to take part in equity training to interview for this study.

Your District has identified you as a possible participant in my study. As a participant, you will be asked to take part in a one-hour interview and to serve on a focus group panel. My hope is to conduct in-person interviews; however, I will use an electronic format as an alternative. If you agree to participate, your identity will remain confidential.

I appreciate your consideration and I am happy to answer any questions you may have regarding my project. Please let me know if you are interested by responding to me at smsimon@uwm.edu or feel free to contact me at 920-979-7754. I look forward to talking with you about this study, which I believe will provide useful insight on how principals transform practices to create more socially just learning environments.

Thank you,

Sharon Simon
Graduate Student
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

APPENDIX E

Phone Script District Level Administrator

Greeting. My name is Sharon Simon and I'm a Doctoral Student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I'm working on completing research on principal leadership. You should have received an email from me regarding my study and I wanted to follow-up with you today.

My study is more specifically looking at how principals reflect on their current practices and take action to create a more socially just learning environment.

I'm looking for districts that have required principals to participate in equity training. Has your district required principals to participate in equity training?

(If no) Thank you for your time, but the minimum requirement is that principals have taken part in equity training.

(If yes) continue with the following.

I'm looking for principals that have five years of experience as a principal and have been in the same school for two years. I will be conducting one in-person interview that would take approximately one to two hours. Following the interview, the principal will be required to take part in a focus group discussion with the other participating principals. The focus group discussion will be held via Zoom and will last approximately one hour. I will also be requesting documents, which include: equity audits, equity training plans, equity plans, professional development minutes relating to equity, staff meeting minutes, and parent group meeting minutes.

Would it be possible to get the names and email addresses of the principals with five years of experience and two years in the same school?

At the end of the study, each principal will be provided with a copy of my dissertation.

I believe that this study could provide your district with insight on how principals effectively transform their instructional and engagement practices to create a more socially just learning environment.

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

APPENDIX F

Phone Script Principal

Greeting. My name is Sharon Simon and I'm graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I am working on a dissertation in the Urban Education Program. The goal of my dissertation is to identify and examine how principals transform their practices to create a more socially just learning environment. You have been identified as a principal that has taken part in equity training, has five years of experience as a principal, and has been in the same school for at least two years.

Since you meet the screening criteria, I am hopeful that you will consider participating in the study. As a participant, you will be asked to take part in a one-hour interview and to serve on a focus group panel with the other principal participants. My hope is to conduct in-person interviews; however, I will use an electronic format such as Zoom as an alternative. I will use Zoom to conduct the focus group discussion. I will also be requesting publicly-available documents which include: equity audits, equity training plans, equity plans, professional development minutes relating to equity, staff meeting minutes, and parent group meeting minutes.

If you agree to participate, your identity will remain confidential.

At the end of the study, you will be provided with a copy of my dissertation.

By participating you the study, you will be helping contribute to work on equity in schools. I'm hopeful that through the interview process and focus group discussion that you and the other principals will find the discussion beneficial.

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time and consideration.