

Talking about Race:
Overcoming Fear in the Process of Change

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Emily Lilja Palmer

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Prof. Karen Seashore Louis, faculty advisor

May, 2013

Copyright © 2013 Emily Lilja Palmer
All rights reserved

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to all of my students for the lessons I have had the privilege of learning from each one of them. I am still learning every day.

I am thankful to my parents, who always expected me to earn a PhD, and who expected it because they both had Masters degrees, and they wanted me to go further. My mom's loving support and faith in me is something I will continue to "pay forward" all my life.

My husband Jonathan has been an unwavering source of support for me throughout this process, and I am grateful every day.

I have been blessed with many powerful mentors along the journey. Each one has pushed me forward in a positive way and in a positive direction. Heartfelt thanks go to Sandra Rowell, who first drew me into leadership in professional development, and modeled the way; Louise Sundin, who showed me what teacher empowerment should look like; Jackie Hanson and Paul McMahan, who taught authentic leadership by example; Jean Stilwell, who is able to be lovingly honest with me like no other colleague I have known; Kate Foate Trewick, who gives me a vision of who I want to be when I grow up; Cryss Brunner, who always encouraged me to aim high and have faith in myself; and especially my doctoral advisor Karen Seashore Louis, who understands me and guides me in just the right direction, and who has made this journey a lot of fun!

I salute the equity leaders who have pulled me into this important work, challenged me, and inspired me by example: Pedro Noguera, Glenn Singleton, Stephen West, Lisa Valdez, Leah Larson, Alison Nisbet, Willie Jett, Patrick Duffy, Jamie Almanzon, and Luis Versalles. Also Lisa Delpit, whom I have never met, but whose work started me down this path.

I am very grateful to my doctoral committee members: Heidi Barajas, Bic Ngo, Cryss Brunner and Karen Seashore Louis. You ask all the right questions, and push me as hard as I need it. You are why I am so glad I chose the U of MN for this degree.

Deep thanks to my friends who have taken time to read drafts of my work and give feedback: Ann Brustuen, Betsy Ford, Jean Stilwell, Brionna Harder, Margaret Taft, and especially my mom Dot Lilja and daughter Sahro Vedder! Their eyes made all the difference when mine were too tired to see straight.

I am grateful to my principal and friend, Brian Zambreno, for always supporting my growth, and treating this work as real professional development that is of value to our school and district as well as to me.

Finally, I am so thankful for each one of my study participants, for their candor, time, and willingness to experience discomfort and speak truth with me! Especially to those who became "Daniel" "Brad" and "Matt" in the paper, you have inspired me for life. ¡Gracias!

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my brilliant and wonderful daughters, Sahro Lilja Vedder and Siobhan Palmer. I look forward to eventually reading *your* doctoral dissertations!

Abstract

This study is a doctoral dissertation that proposes new theory about teachers overcoming fear in the process of change, and finds significant changes happening in classrooms as a result of overcoming the fear of talking about race. The study context is professional development for teachers and administrators who are talking about race and learning about institutional racism as a strategy to address racial achievement gaps. The three primary findings of this study are: the extent to which the fear of being considered racist is a barrier for White teachers and administrators, preventing them from engaging in the work at a deep level; the manner in which some principals successfully mediated this fear and helped their teachers overcome it; and the meaningful changes in curriculum, instruction and practice that happened in classrooms as a result of this professional development work.

Keywords: Achievement Gaps, Professional Development, Change Theory, Courageous Conversations, Principal Leadership, Instructional Leadership.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgements..... | i |
| Dedication..... | ii |
| Abstract..... | iii |
| Table of Contents..... | vi |
| List of Tables..... | x |
| Chapter 1: Why Talk about Race?..... | 1 |
| Problem Statement..... | 3 |
| Purpose of the Study..... | 9 |
| Research Questions..... | 10 |
| Study Context..... | 12 |
| Delimitations and Limitations..... | 13 |
| Definitions of Terms (Appendix A)..... | 17 |
| Significance of the Study..... | 17 |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review..... | 20 |
| Racial Achievement Gap Data..... | 25 |
| Current and Historical Data..... | 25 |
| Current Data..... | 25 |
| Historical Data..... | 27 |
| Growth Measures and Snapshot Measures..... | 28 |
| Relevant Issues with Standardized Testing..... | 31 |
| Causes of the Black/White Achievement Gap..... | 34 |
| Structural and Institutional Challenges..... | 36 |
| Test Bias and Stereotype Threat..... | 37 |
| Segregation..... | 39 |
| Tracking and Course Content..... | 41 |
| The Intersection of Race and Class..... | 47 |
| Critical Race Theory..... | 51 |
| Individual Challenges: Students, Teachers and Administrators..... | 55 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Student Contributions..... | 55 |
| Teacher Expectations..... | 60 |
| The Administrative Role..... | 66 |
| Talking about Race..... | 70 |
| Conventional Wisdom..... | 70 |
| “Colormute”..... | 72 |
| Beyond the Education Field..... | 73 |
| Conclusion..... | 75 |
| Chapter 3: Methodology..... | 80 |
| Research Design..... | 80 |
| Context..... | 86 |
| Sampling and Selection..... | 87 |
| First level: Districts..... | 87 |
| Second level: Participants..... | 90 |
| Third level: Concepts..... | 92 |
| Data Collection..... | 93 |
| Individual Interviews..... | 93 |
| Artifacts and Observations..... | 96 |
| Data Coding and Analysis..... | 98 |
| Protecting Research Subjects..... | 103 |
| Conclusion..... | 105 |
| Chapter 4: Changing the Discourse on Race – The Experience..... | 106 |
| <i>Preface: The Equity Impact – One Teacher’s Story</i> | 106 |
| The Experience..... | 109 |
| The Beginning..... | 110 |
| Illustrations: Three White Men..... | 113 |
| Daniel’s Experience: Excitement and Passion..... | 113 |
| Brad’s Experience: Anger and Resistance..... | 115 |
| Matt’s Experience: Balancing..... | 118 |
| Context of Fear..... | 120 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Equity Drivers..... | 122 |
| Changing Demographics..... | 122 |
| Achievement Concerns..... | 125 |
| District Push..... | 126 |
| Reticence to Engage..... | 130 |
| Fear of Being Considered Racist..... | 131 |
| Equity Inputs: The Work..... | 133 |
| Shock of the <i>Beyond Diversity</i> Workshop..... | 134 |
| Excitement and Enthusiasm..... | 135 |
| Defensiveness and Anger..... | 136 |
| Best Activities: Increasing Understanding, Decreasing Fear..... | 138 |
| Learning from Colleagues..... | 139 |
| Testimonials..... | 139 |
| Small group discussions..... | 141 |
| Sharing instructional strategies..... | 142 |
| Structured <i>Courageous Conversations</i> | 144 |
| Looking at Data and Learning How To Use It..... | 145 |
| Learning from Students and Families of Color..... | 151 |
| Unique Challenges..... | 155 |
| Speak Truth and Experience Discomfort..... | 156 |
| Isolate Race..... | 157 |
| Emotional Work versus Concrete Strategies..... | 161 |
| Required Participation..... | 162 |
| The Leadership Imperative..... | 163 |
| Perspectives of Teacher Leaders..... | 168 |
| Perspectives of Other Teachers about the Leadership..... | 172 |
| Perspectives on the Principal’s Role..... | 174 |
| Perspectives on the Superintendent and District Role..... | 186 |
| Changes in Perspectives and Beliefs..... | 187 |
| Beyond “Colorblind”..... | 189 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| From “Those Kids” to “Our Kids” | 191 |
| Taking Responsibility: Beyond “Yeah, but...” | 192 |
| Facing White Privilege and Institutional Racism..... | 195 |
| The Equity Work Imperative..... | 198 |
| Questions Remain..... | 202 |
| Conclusion..... | 203 |
| Chapter 5: Changing the Discourse on Race – The Impact..... | 206 |
| “Just Tell Me What To Do!”..... | 206 |
| Changes in Practices of Individual Teachers..... | 207 |
| Curriculum Changes..... | 208 |
| Social Studies..... | 211 |
| English/Language Arts..... | 210 |
| Science..... | 213 |
| Math..... | 214 |
| Electives..... | 214 |
| Special Education..... | 215 |
| Instructional Strategy Changes..... | 216 |
| Planning..... | 219 |
| Visuals and Manipulatives..... | 219 |
| Differentiation..... | 219 |
| Scaffolding..... | 220 |
| Group Work..... | 220 |
| Multiple Perspectives..... | 221 |
| Relevance..... | 222 |
| Participation and Student Voice..... | 222 |
| Movement..... | 223 |
| Technology..... | 223 |
| Grading/Assessment Changes..... | 224 |
| Classroom Practice Changes..... | 228 |
| Changes in Collegial Interactions and Relationships..... | 231 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Changes in Interactions with Students..... | 234 |
| Changes in School-wide Practices..... | 237 |
| Group Norms..... | 237 |
| Policy Changes..... | 240 |
| Coming in the Back Door..... | 240 |
| Privilege..... | 241 |
| Understanding and Addressing Tardies..... | 242 |
| Professional Development..... | 243 |
| Teacher Observation and Evaluation..... | 245 |
| Programmatic Changes..... | 245 |
| Student Programs..... | 246 |
| Schedule Changes..... | 247 |
| Unique Changes..... | 248 |
| Hopes for the Future..... | 248 |
| Impact on Students..... | 249 |
| Behavior and Climate..... | 250 |
| Relationships..... | 252 |
| Student Achievement..... | 254 |
| Conclusion..... | 256 |
| <i>Final Illustration: Brad's Journey</i> | 257 |
| Chapter 6: Conclusions – Moving Through the Fear..... | 261 |
| Grounded Theory: Creating a Bridge from Fear to Deep Change..... | 264 |
| Study Conclusions..... | 266 |
| Overcoming the Fear of Being Considered Racist..... | 266 |
| Principal Leadership through the Fear..... | 267 |
| Model a Professional Approach to Vulnerability..... | 269 |
| Create Safe Space..... | 269 |
| Empower Shared Leadership..... | 270 |
| Persist over Many Years..... | 271 |
| Resulting Changes to Better Serve Students of Color..... | 272 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Implications for Schools and Districts..... | 274 |
| Superintendent and Principal Must Be Perceived to Embrace the Work..... | 275 |
| Prepare for Anger and Defensiveness at the Beginning..... | 275 |
| Carefully Construct the Equity Team (E-Team)..... | 276 |
| Specific Structural Lessons and Recommendations..... | 277 |
| Pacing..... | 278 |
| Differentiation..... | 278 |
| Requirement..... | 278 |
| Small Groups..... | 279 |
| Not Embedding..... | 280 |
| Learning from Students and Parents..... | 281 |
| Applying the Paradigm to Other Initiatives..... | 281 |
| Recommendations for Further Research..... | 282 |
| Building Capacity..... | 282 |
| Link with Technology..... | 282 |
| Longevity in Principal Leadership..... | 283 |
| Difference for Principals of Color..... | 284 |
| Cultural Competence Component of Evaluation..... | 285 |
| Quantifying Classroom Changes..... | 285 |
| Conclusion..... | 285 |
| Bibliography..... | 289 |
| Appendices..... | 296 |
| A. Definitions of Terms..... | 298 |
| B. Interview Protocols..... | 303 |
| C. Theme Chart..... | 308 |
| D. Additional Sample of Curriculum Changes..... | 309 |
| E. Additional Sample of Instructional Strategy Changes..... | 316 |
| F. Grounded Theory Graphic..... | 327 |

List of Tables

Table 1: Participation Response Rates.....16

Table 2: School Demographics.....87

Table 3: Participant Demographics.....90

Table 4: Results after Overcoming Fear.....110

Table 5: The Four Pathways.....261

Table 6: The Bridge.....263

Table 7: Recommended Principal Actions.....270

Chapter 1: Why Talk about Race?

“While it is true that all students, no matter what our expectations, may achieve unequally, they deserve to go to school in a system that does not guarantee it.”

- Pam Fisher, *Center for Inquiry on Secondary Education (DiMartino, 2004, p. 48)*

Closing racial achievement gaps in public education has become the civil rights issue of our time. There is no question that babies of different races are born with the same cognitive abilities, and that America’s racial achievement gaps are – like the notion of race itself – a social construct. As William Dobbie of Harvard University recently reported:

At nine months old, there are no detectable cognitive differences between Black and White babies. Differences emerge as early as age two, and by the time Black children enter kindergarten they lag Whites by 0.64 standard deviations in math and 0.40 in reading. On every subject at every grade level, there are large achievement differences between Blacks and Whites that continue to grow as children progress through school. Even accounting for a host of background factors, the achievement gap remains large and statistically significant (Dobbie and Fryer Jr., 2010).

But addressing racial achievement gaps has turned out to be a very difficult challenge for schools across America. Despite the best intentions of educators and supporters, and the implementation of many different initiatives over many

years, the gaps have not closed much over the decades that the federal government has kept statistics by race.

A review of research by Vilsa Curto and colleagues at Harvard University concluded that:

The problem is, despite decades of interventions, we do not know how to close the racial achievement gap. Early childhood interventions... boost kindergarten readiness, but the effects on cognitive ability often fade after children enter school. School-district-based strategies such as smaller schools and classrooms; mandatory summer school; merit pay for principals, teachers, and students; afterschool programs; budget, curricula, and assessment reorganization; ending social promotion; and policies to lower the barrier to teaching via alternative paths to accreditation have not substantially reduced the gap in even the most reform-minded districts” (Curto, Fryer Jr., and Howard, 2010).

In recent years, a new trend of “courageous conversations,” or talking intentionally about race and institutional racism in America, has emerged in many schools and districts, led by external providers like Pacific Educational Group (PEG) and the National Equity Project. But this work has been minimally studied with regard to its impact on teachers and on teaching practice.

This study set out to help facilitate the closure of racial achievement gaps by studying the results of professional development that involved teachers talking about race, racial achievement gaps, and institutional racism with colleagues. It sought to identify how teachers responded to this work, and the extent to which that response included changes in classroom practice.

Problem Statement

Racial achievement gaps have been confounding educators since racial integration of public education in the United States first brought Black and White students together in large numbers. Although educators have attempted many different structural, curricular, and instructional changes to address the issue, the gaps remain large and movement toward eliminating them is slow. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data from 2011 shows that nationally, the gap between average scores of White and Black students in reading has decreased only 4 points in 19 years, from a 30 point gap in 1992 to a 26 point gap in 2011. Although the scores of Black students have risen 13 points in that time, the gap remains wide. In Minnesota, students in grades 4 and 8 showed no significant change in either reading or math test scores from the prior year's scores (NCES 2011), even though, ranging between 28 and 37 points, Minnesota has one of the largest gaps in the nation between Black and White students (NCES 2011). Only Connecticut and Wisconsin have gaps as consistently large as Minnesota's (NCES, 2011).

The achievement gap exists in a context of very complicated race relations in America. Dr. Martin Luther King died 45 years ago, and the Civil Rights Movement he helped to launch is no longer so visible. Some people believe that race is no longer an issue in America, and others believe that racism is still alive and well (Simon 2008). Many people have difficulty talking about race, and White people especially are often taught from young ages to avoid the subject. Beverly Daniel Tatum gives the example of a White child asking a parent “why is she so dirty?” upon seeing a Black child for the first time. Instead of answering: “She’s not dirty, her skin is as clean as yours. It’s just a different color,” the parent is probably more likely to just say “Shhh,” teaching the child that we do not talk about race (Tatum 1997).

On March 18, 2008, then-candidate for President Barack Obama gave a strong speech on the subject of race in contemporary America. The Los Angeles Times reported that:

“Obama urged Blacks and Whites to reach out to one another. He asked Blacks to recognize that “most working- and middle-class White Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. . . . No one's handed them anything. . . . They've worked hard all their lives, many times only to see their jobs shipped overseas or their pension dumped.” Whites, he said, must acknowledge “that what ails the African American community does not just exist in the minds of Black

people; that the legacy of discrimination -- and current incidents of discrimination . . . are real and must be addressed” (Simon 2008).

Many educators have come to believe that racial achievement gaps are the result of institutional racism, and some educators have determined that talking directly about race and teachers’ experiences with race is a good way to address teachers’ unconscious biases and unintentional perpetuation of racism within the K-12 educational institution. Pedro Noguera and other researchers assert that we cannot embrace and implement recommended reforms, or make other substantial improvement to closing racial achievement gaps, without talking about race, understanding White privilege, and unlearning our biases (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Books like Beverly Daniel Tatum’s 1997 Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race and Lisa Delpit’s 2002 The Skin that We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom propose that teachers need to be thinking about and talking about race in new ways (Delpit, 2002; Tatum, 1997). Glenn Singleton’s 2006 Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools goes further, proposing specific activities that school faculties should engage in (Singleton & Linton, 2006). However, although they present very interesting ideas, these ideas did not have a strong empirical research base behind them. (Published in 2012, Delpit’s Multiplication is for White People is more research-based than some of her prior work.)

A significant amount of research points to the interrelated nature of the factors affecting racial achievement gaps: not only is there no one cause, but the multiple factors involved are interrelated in the ways that they impact students (Lee 2002; Magnuson and Waldfogel 2008). But these factors are predominantly outside of the school's control (Ogbu 1992; Lee 2002) which makes the studies less useful to educators who are being held accountable for racial achievement gaps. And while Critical Race Theory looks at how the institution perpetuates racism and continues to oppress students of color, (Ladson-Billings 1999; Duncan 2002), researchers have not spent much time on the questions of whether and how teachers should talk about race.

One strategy to address racial achievement gaps that is firmly rooted in research is the need to create a school-wide culture of high expectations for all students (Corbett 2002; Davis 2004; Landsman 2004). Student attitudes are naturally affected by teacher attitudes. What teachers believe about student ability and what teachers communicate to students about their ability are critical factors affecting student achievement. Decades of research show that teacher expectations have a significant bearing on student success (Rosenthal 1987; Corbett 2002). Robert Rosenthal, in a 1987 article discussing his original 1966 "Pygmalion experiment" and others in the same vein, asserts that: "based on the meta-analytic evidence, as well as the evidence provided by the original Pygmalion experiment, the education self-fulfilling prophesy has now been well established" (Rosenthal 1987). The Pygmalion experiment was one in which

teachers were told at the beginning of the year that certain children's test scores indicated that they would show great gains in the coming year. The only difference in context between those students and the control group was what the teachers had been told. Eight months later, those students who had been predicted to "bloom" had done just that, attributed by the researchers to the effect of their teachers' high expectations for them (Rosenthal 1987).

Misapprehensions are natural when people come together from different cultures. Middle-class White people – especially teachers – sometimes expect everyone else to adapt to their "right" ways of being (Landsman 2004; Tatum 2007) because to their perspective, that's just "how it's done". But Beverly Daniel Tatum asserts that asking Black students to embrace White America's traditional values and work ethic may not make a lot of sense to Black students who view it in the shadow of slavery (Tatum, 1997). Further, given America's history of White mistreatment of Blacks, she holds that it is disingenuous to hold White people up to Black students as models of correct behavior. Thus, what Whites see as merely a recipe for school success, Blacks may see as part of a larger culture of oppression. This can create dissonance between the student and teacher (Gloria Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Further, Julie Landsman finds that it is important that teachers hold all students to high standards not just in spite of "tough backgrounds", but because of them (Landsman 2004). She notes that children who face disadvantages outside of

school sometimes find the problem exacerbated by well-meaning teachers who do not push them to their potential (Landsman 2004). This fits with Critical Race Theory's critique of liberalism (Singleton, 2013).

Along these lines, one approach that has been gaining momentum in recent years is professional development around racial equity, with the goal of decreasing achievement gaps by increasing the awareness and understanding of issues of race in teachers and school leaders. Groups such as Pacific Educational Group (PEG), the National Equity Project, and Hackman Consulting Group propose courses of action through which school leaders can engage teachers in talking about race as a pathway to decreasing racial achievement gaps (Singleton 2006). Pacific Educational Group – known to participants as PEG – is the group that has provided most of the training experienced by the participants of this study.

For example, using what PEG calls the “Four Agreements” and “Six Conditions”, faculties can process their individual beliefs and understandings about race, potentially clearing away misconceptions and unconscious biases that may be holding them back from reaching students of color as effectively as possible. Through specific assignments like writing about one's first memory of race and completing a White privilege checklist, teachers engage in discussions with colleagues about race in America and in our schools (Singleton 2006). PEG asserts that these “courageous conversations” about race should “deepen our

understanding about how and why the racial achievement gap persists in most schools and at all economic levels” (Singleton 2006), and that the elimination of racial achievement gaps is predicated on our ability to talk about race.

Professional development around racial equity holds the goal of decreasing achievement gaps by increasing the awareness and understanding of issues of institutional racism in teachers and school leaders. Specific courses of action through which school leaders can engage teachers in talking about race as a pathway to decreasing racial achievement gaps are being used across the country. However, while teachers undoubtedly want to close racial achievement gaps, they do not necessarily want or know how to make the tough changes in practice that would accomplish that goal. As Pedro Noguera asserts, “The reason why some schools succeed in closing or at least reducing the racial disparities in achievement while the overwhelming majority fail, has less to do with skill than with will” (Noguera 2007, p.2). Professional development work that talks about race assumes that the point of doing so is to change attitudes and perspectives, which will then lead to changes in teaching practice. This study was conducted to learn more about the extent to which this might be the case.

Purpose of the Study

Martin Luther King, Jr. noted in the late 1960’s that, to get beyond racism, “The Negro needs the White man to free him from his fears. The White man needs the Negro to free him from his guilt.” (Washington 1986). Fear and guilt are powerful

negative emotions, leading naturally to human beings attempting to avoid them by avoiding the topic that raises them. Teachers who engage in talking about race with colleagues confront fear and guilt directly, which is not commonly done in America. (Simon 2008). This study proposes to examine what the results of this work are for teachers and schools.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn the extent to which professional development activities around racial equity impacted teachers and/or their classroom practice with regard to addressing racial achievement gaps. The dissertation presents a working grounded theory that speaks to the need for teachers to talk about race as a step toward eliminating racial achievement gaps.

Research Questions

This study explored the experiences of teachers who have participated in professional development around racial equity that included talking about White privilege and institutional racism with colleagues. The impact this has on racial achievement gaps is of interest, but the study focused on impact on teachers and teacher practice, learned primarily through interviews with participants, with triangulation through artifacts and observations.

The research questions addressed by this study are:

1. What are teachers' experiences talking about race in the context of racial

achievement gaps?

2. In what ways has talking about race impacted teacher practice, both in terms of relationships and in terms of instructional strategies?

The first question looked at the challenges of talking about race in America, and of doing so with colleagues, students and parents. The legacy of racism in America is so complicated and ugly that even educators have difficulty talking about it (Tatum 2007). The experience of talking about race with other teachers does not seem to have been directly studied prior to this, so this study has yielded important information for K-12 principals and staff developers. In addition, the first question also explored teachers' changing understandings and beliefs about race, white privilege, institutional racism, and their own role as teachers in combating achievement gaps.

The second question got closer to the challenge of how to close racial achievement gaps. The study is based on a significant amount of data collected through interviews, with support from both artifacts and observations.

Within these questions, the study includes an exploration of the principal's role, both through interviews with principals, and through exploring teachers' perceptions about the role of the principal in the work through the interviews with teachers.

Study Context

In the suburban metro area studied, at least twelve school districts have made a commitment to engage in this kind of equity work through professional development. Schools in these districts have engaged at some level in talking about race as part of professional development training offered through two metro area consortiums of districts. The training was offered over multiple days each school year for several years, and was free for participants from member districts. Even the costs for substitutes were covered by the consortium. However, there seems to be wide variation in how much work the individual districts and schools have done.

For purposes of this study, minimum district participation included the leadership from at least two schools attending at least two years of training, and then conducting the expected professional development sessions with the faculties at their schools over at least three years. However, the study was able to secure participation from two districts that had not only participated on this level for more than 3 years, but had also made additional investments to bring the training to more teachers sooner.

The study was initially structured to involve four secondary schools from two districts, and interviews with about 5 teachers from each school. Districts were chosen so that the schools from the different districts were similar in size and demographics.

The purpose of using four schools in two districts was to mask teachers' identities, so that quotes and other data are not easily linked back to one particular site or district, even when a grade level or discipline is identified. Further, the parallels (two high schools, two middle or junior high schools, from similar-sized districts) provide the foundation from which to consider the school context and situational factors that may impact the professional development experiences. In this way, the group becomes a variable to consider.

After data collection was complete in the first two districts participating, a third district with a much higher poverty rate was added for comparison in a different context. The high school and middle school/junior high were chosen for parallel structure.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations that impacted the scope of the study come from the researcher. The study was initially set up so that I could complete it as a single researcher over the course of one school year. I did not have a budget to offer incentives for participation, though I did offer to buy participants coffee at a coffee shop if they chose to meet there instead of at their school. Because I work full time as a school administrator, I was not able to be away from school very often for interviews, so they were mostly conducted on days that my school was not in

session but the school being studied was. This necessarily spread out interviews over a longer period of time than anticipated.

Although the purpose of the professional development experiences being studied is to impact student achievement, this study did not attempt to correlate this. The impact of the work was measured through teacher's reports of their own and their colleagues' and students' perceptions and actions, combined with observations and a review of available artifacts for supporting documentation. Artifacts included teacher surveys from two schools that were able to provide them.

The study was limited by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to only 30 interviews, all of which would be conducted in one metro area. This had potentially limited the scope and application of the theory that was produced. However, because saturation was reached after 29 interviews, it does not appear that the number of interviews was a real limitation. It is unknown what limits might be factors given that all three school districts are from the same metro area.

The generalizability of findings from this study will necessarily be limited. The schools studied do not represent other schools, in that they were chosen because they were further along in and had made a greater commitment to the training than most other schools in the area. Thus, the impact of the study will not come through understanding what a lot of schools are doing, but rather through learning what the results have been of what a few schools are doing.

This can offer useful guidance to school leaders about the advisability of investing in this type of professional development – both for districts that are already engaged, and for those who are not yet involved. It also offers guidance to principals about the administrative actions that were found to be effective in the study.

There is one limitation to this study that was anticipated at the outset, and one that was not. First, relying primarily on interviews means that the data is only as good as the participants are able to provide. Although the participants in this study were generally articulate and reflective, the information collected is still indirect, in that it is filtered through the participant's own lens, rather than observed. We know what participants reported; we do not know to what extent reported data accurately reflects the participants' experiences.

It is also relevant to note that I was able to conduct observations of faculty meetings and Equity Team meetings in only two of the six schools. Invitations were extended to me from two additional schools, but scheduling was difficult, because I was working full time as a school administrator during the entire study. In one school, the principal refused the request. In addition, teachers were not observed in the classroom as a part of this study, so although significant artifacts were collected to confirm the professional development activities that took place and some of the classroom changes, most of the data is self-reported through interviews.

Representation is also a potential limitation. The nature of the topic is such that it was anticipated that some teachers might not be comfortable being completely honest about their experiences, but it was anticipated that teachers who felt strongly about the work, both positively and negatively, would want to participate. However, teacher participation happened differently than anticipated. Teachers in the original districts were selected randomly in each school, and invited to participate. However, many of the teachers invited through the first round did not respond to the invitation. Respondents were not asked why they chose to participate, so it is unclear to what extent one's view of the equity work may have impacted the decision to participate in the study. The following table shows the response rates from the four original schools:

Table 1: Participation Response Rates

| Invitation Response in First Round Schools: | | | |
|---|-------------|---------|------------|
| School | Replied Yes | Ignored | Replied No |
| A | 6 | 9 | 2 |
| B | 5 | 5 | 1 |
| C | 6 | 8 | 2 |
| D | 7 | 6 | 3 |

Given the strong finding that teachers must get over the fear of being considered racist before they can meaningfully engage with the work, this leads to the question of whether a sub-set of teachers might exist who resisted the training and did not change anything, but were not included in the sample. Although the

study expected at the outset that teachers who hated it would want to share that, it became clear through the study results that the fear of being viewed as racist causes teachers to avoid talking about race. Thus, it might be reasonable to conclude that any teachers who are still highly fearful would avoid participating in the study, so their existence is not necessarily disproved by the more positive responses received by the respondents.

In addition, most of the teachers interviewed referred, at some point in the interview, to colleagues who had negative reactions to the work. They shared examples of colleagues who refused to participate in certain activities, or who made very negative comments afterward to people they perceived to be sympathetic. Therefore, although some of the respondents fit this profile in the first year or two before they grew more comfortable, the profile of the teacher who never engaged is included through second-hand information only.

Definitions of Terms

Because there are several terms that are unique to this study and cited in participants' quotes, the list grew too long to include in the chapter, so definitions are listed in Appendix A.

Significance of the Study

Given the significant positive impact on teachers' thinking and on their practice that these professional development activities are having, the potential for

transformation of our teaching culture seems significant. In particular, the fear of being called racist is addressed by racial equity professional development in an attempt to empower teachers to be able to talk about race and racism with their students. This could potentially remove barriers to education by building pathways for students to help their teachers understand where the system is getting in the way of learning, leading to greater achievement by students of color.

It is clear that while American racial achievement gaps have been the topic of extensive study, addressing them through professional development has received much less attention from academic researchers. When I started this study, a search through ProQuest Digital Dissertations on “Racial Achievement Gap” in July 2010 found 178 dissertations going back to 1980, but only five dissertations that addressed in any way talking about race as a step toward closing the gaps. In the entire database, the term “courageous conversations” yielded only one dissertation. There is no doubt that there is much to be learned through this study.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the topic of addressing racial achievement gaps, with an afterword including literature that became relevant or available during the course of the study. Chapter 3 reviews the methodology used to conduct the study. Chapters 4 and 5 present the data, with a separate chapter

addressing each research question. Chapter 6 discusses the data and presents conclusions, recommendations for schools, and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review
Understanding the K-12 Racial Achievement Gap
between Black and White Students

“Standardized testing is calibrated to reflect students’ class experience and social capital: the best predictor of how a student will do on any high school standardized test is how she did on her first test in third grade, and the best predictor of how she will do on that first test is her parents’ income.”

- William Ayers (Grineski, Landsman, & Simmons III, 2013, p. xxii)

“Achievement gaps” have been a topic of growing interest in K-12 education in recent years. The term “gap” refers to the difference in the average score of one group of students compared with another, but has become a buzzword to refer to multiple categories of measurable differences in achievement rates between different groups of students. One gap receiving much attention is between students of different racial groups, especially Black and White students. This is the area of focus for this dissertation.

The attention currently being given to racial achievement gaps in America is partly a result of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 2001, commonly called “No Child Left Behind” or NCLB. This law mandates that schools publish their achievement data by student categories including race, poverty, and special programs. Specifically, reporting is to include: “separate measurable annual objectives for continuous and substantial improvement for... the achievement of economically disadvantaged students; students from major racial and ethnic groups; students with disabilities; and students with limited

English proficiency” (ED.gov, 2009 Sec 1111, b, 2, C, v, II). Looking at data this way provided surprising information for some K-12 educators in majority-White schools, who until 2001 may not have noticed patterns of underachievement of students of color, because the majority of students in the school were meeting standards. The NCLB law labels schools as “failing” if even one group of students is not making “adequate yearly progress,” which turned out to be the case in a majority of schools across the nation, and is still the case today in 2013 (NCES, 2013).

The NCLB law has been controversial in the education community because of its penalties for what it labels as “failing schools”. But the notion that measuring and addressing racial achievement gaps must continue has been generally embraced. More debate exists around the kind and amount of testing than whether or not students should be tested and results should be published (Casselius, 2013).

After seven years of NCLB, President Obama introduced a new federal education initiative after his 2008 election. As part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Obama set aside \$4.35 billion for the “Race to the Top” Fund, which would be:

“A competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including making

substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates, and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers; and implementing ambitious plans” (USDE, 2009).

At the time of this writing, only two years of results data on the Race to the Top program is available, but a sampling of state-by-state data shows that progress on racial achievement gap closure is mostly flat so far (USDE, 2013).

Research shows clearly that there is a significant and persistent difference between the academic achievement levels of White students in America and those of Black students, in that White students, as a group, show higher levels of achievement. The data most commonly presented about gaps are reflected in student test scores, although what is commonly called “the Black/White achievement gap” also appears in drop-out rates, placement in advanced, gifted and honors programs, numbers of students who take advanced-placement examinations, and college acceptance and enrollment rates, including graduate-level programs (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

This chapter reviews the research to show what the current status of our K-12 Black/White achievement gap is in America, and what the empirical research base says with regard to its causes. It looks also at what little research exists about how schools can address the gap by first talking about race.

The first section reviews testing data – along with some of the challenges of testing – to give a picture of the problem. There is a significant body of research available on the subject of testing, both around measuring student progress and concerning the validity of various measures that are commonly used. There is also readily available data on the academic performance of Black and White students throughout the K-12 continuum.

The next two sections review several factors that are cited as causes of racial achievement gaps in America, dividing them into two parts: causes that are primarily outside of school-level educators' control, and causes that can usually be impacted by teachers and principals. Because of my strong interest in professional development, I am most interested in those causes that can be addressed at the school level, but both are clearly impacting student achievement.

I intended at the outset to include a section on solutions to racial achievement gaps. Unfortunately, while there is much published literature in education presenting potential solutions, the empirical base for these ideas is generally shallow. In particular, the research around teachers talking about race as a strategy toward closing racial achievement gaps is not strong, because it does not appear to have been studied much. The final section addresses this topic with regard to conventional wisdom, stories, and the research that is available.

Finally, although several racial groups lag behind White students in academic performance, the reasons for this are not uniform across different racial groups. In fact, there is some research to show that the reasons for this are in some cases not primarily related to race, with the Black/White gap held up as a conspicuous exception (Downey & Pribesh, 2004). I am also very interested in looking at the achievement of Latino and Hmong students, because of my work with these groups over the years, but this chapter would be too broad if it included more than one racial group in comparison with White students. I chose to focus on Black students in part because my daughters are Black, and in part because there is a research base behind the assertion that Black/White achievement gaps cannot be explained away by poverty and other factors beyond race.

Throughout this dissertation, I use the terms “Black” and “White” (as opposed to African- American and Caucasian) intentionally, because geography of ancestral origin does not seem to have much to do with racism in America any more.

Where racism persists, it seems to be based on people’s ability to judge and sort others by physical features, not culture or ancestry. While I respect any group’s right to name itself, I think that the terms “Black” and “White” are most appropriate to the discussion of race within the context of this study.

Racial Achievement Gap Data

“If racial equality is America’s goal, reducing the Black-White test-score gap would probably do more to promote this goal than any other strategy that commands broad public support.” - Christopher Jencks (Jencks, 1998, p. 3-4)

Current and Historical Data

The “gap” between average test scores of White students and average test scores of Black students has existed in America for as long as we have been testing students. Although it has generally decreased since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s, most researchers assert that we seem to be many years away from closing it completely.

Current data. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is known as “The Nation’s Report Card” and used by researchers across the country. The 2011 results in reading and math, like results for decades before that, show that America has significant achievement gaps between Black and White students, with Black students lagging behind their White peers on all measures (NCES, 2011).

Specifically, in 2011, at age 9, the score gap between Black and White students’ achievement on the reading test was 25 points (up one point from 2008); at age 13 it was also 25 points (up 4 points from 2008), and at age 17 it was 27 points (down 2 points from 2008). On the mathematics test the score gap in 2011 at age 9 was 25 points (down 1) ; at age 13 it was 31 points (up 3), and at age 17 it was 26 points in 2009 and not available yet for 2011 (NCES, 2008, 2011). The fact

that the gap has not changed much in the last three years or in the last decade, and is still more than 20 points at all levels, is cause for significant concern in America.

The NAEP data shows that Black students have made significant gains since the early 1970's: the smallest gain showed that the gap has narrowed 17 points on the high school math test; the largest gain showed a narrowing of 34 points on the elementary tests in both reading and math. Further, Black students have outpaced gains made by White students in that period, implying that the gains are not due to an easier test or better education across America, but to the students' own increase in skills (NCES, 2008).

However, Black students have made less progress overall than White students in recent years. The current NAEP data from 2004 and 2008 shows that Black students gained slightly more than White students on the reading test at ages 9 and 13, but beyond those two measures their performance showed their growth to be even with or less than the growth of White students (NCES, 2008).

In recent years, Black and White students seem to be finding equality at the bottom, in that as a group, low-scoring students tend to be racially proportionate to the general population, but there are many fewer Black students at the top than there should be if they were proportionately represented (Hedges & Nowell,

1999).

Historical data. Gaps were much wider before the mid-20th century – in some cases showing as much as a 50% difference in scores between Black and White students. As recently as 1971, the gap between Black and White students on the NAEP test in reading was 52% (Roach, 2000). So the progress made in recent decades can be viewed more positively when measured against how far Black students have come.

Why was the gap originally so large? Gloria Ladson-Billings offers a summary of America's history of education of Black students:

“In the case of African-Americans, education was initially forbidden during the period of enslavement. After emancipation we saw the development of freedmen's schools whose purpose was the maintenance of a servant class. During the long period of legal apartheid, African Americans attended school where they received cast-off textbooks and materials from White schools. In the South, the need for farm labor meant that the typical school year for rural Black students was about 4 months long. Indeed, Black students in the South did not experience universal secondary schooling until 1968” (Ladson-Billings, 2006 p.5).

She goes on to ask: “Why, then, would we not expect there to be an achievement gap?” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p.5). Black and White students are coming from a

history of very different experiences.

The creation and maintenance of racial achievement gaps is not just a social issue, but has an economic impact as well. In a 2009 study, McKinsey and Company's researchers determined that our failure to close the gaps between Black and Latino student performance and White student performance represents a loss of \$310 billion to \$525 billion, or 2 of 4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) just since 1998 (McKinsey, 2009). Further, they find that "these achievement gaps have a clustering effect akin to economic dead zones, where communities with low-achieving schools produce clusters of Americans largely unable to participate in the greater American economy due to a concentration of low skills, high unemployment, or high incarceration rates" (McKinsey, 2009 p. 16-17). This is a strong call to address achievement gap issues, and they note that "America's history of bringing disadvantaged groups into the economic mainstream over time" suggests that this is a solvable problem (McKinsey, 2009 p. 6).

Growth Measures and Snapshot Measures

Academic performance can be assessed through many different kinds of measurements, but federal law mandates that states evaluate schools based on test scores. For this reason, most states use standardized achievement measures to assess how their schools are performing (Hershberg, 2009). Standardized testing has its fans and foes. While performance-based measures

may be more authentic, they are much more labor-intensive to score, and arguably just as vulnerable to test bias (Maeroff, 1991; Sanders & Horn, 1995). For large-group testing, standardized tests can be useful for comparing, generalizing, and showing levels of attainment based on pre-determined standards (Sanders & Horn, 1995), and are thus an efficient way to comply with federal NCLB law.

Standardized testing most commonly involves one of two different types of measures. Achievement measures describe the actual achievement attained by students at a certain point, usually the end of a school year, as measured against a particular standard or benchmark. The achievement or “snapshot” measures are the most common measures used to assess K-12 academic performance in the United States (Hershberg, 2009; NCES, 2008). These standardized tests measure what a student – or group of students – can do at one point in time, and scores are measured against a standard of proficiency. Groups of students can then be compared with other groups who took the same test. In Minnesota, the required Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) tests were snapshot measures until 2011. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests are also snapshot measures.

Growth measures, in contrast, describe the progress a student has made over a period of time, usually a school year, as compared against their own prior achievement, rather than against a set benchmark (Hershberg, 2009). Also

called “value-added” measures, growth measures also use standardized testing, but compare each student – and group – to their own achievement at a prior point in time, usually either from the beginning of a school year to the end, or from one year to the next. Growth measures are considered by researchers to be a better way to compare “apples to apples” and to evaluate the contribution a school or teacher made to student progress (Hershberg, 2009; Sanders & Horn, 1995). Hershberg notes that tracing individual students over time means that each student’s prior work becomes the baseline data, so that unvarying characteristics, such as socioeconomic factors, are removed (Hershberg, 2009). Further, through value-added assessment, researchers can measure the contribution made to a student’s progress by the teachers, schools, and/or districts (Hershberg, 2009), especially at the elementary level, where a student is typically with one teacher for most of the school day and year. This is important because under NCLB law, test scores can be used to reward or punish schools.

The distinction between these two types of tests becomes important as schools focus efforts on trying to “close the gap” – a popular catchphrase that refers to efforts to accelerate the achievement of students of color so they catch up to their White peers. Growth measures give teachers more useful information with regard to how their individual students are progressing than do snapshot measures. While growth measures have not been used widely as part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal testing requirements, there is movement in that direction, as several states have been given permission by the Department of

Education in recent years to use growth-measure exams in their NCLB reporting (Hershberg, 2009). Minnesota made the move in 2010, with 2011 the first year that schools received reports of growth measures.

Relevant Issues with Standardized Testing

Standardized testing is not only a measure of achievement gaps, but some critics charge that it can be a cause of them as well (Aronson, Lustina, Good, & Keough, 1998; Fleming, 2000). There are several problems that arise when standardized testing is widely used as a measure to compare the achievement of different racial groups.

Research finds that the test itself is sometimes part of the problem. For example, the commonly used college-entrance Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) test has been shown to be less than neutral, both with regard to student's background, and also with regard to the subject tested. SAT test scores have consistently correlated to household income, rising with every \$10,000 of parental income ((Hershberg, 2009). Jacqueline Fleming's research found that the reading comprehension section of the SAT has been comprised of as much as 41% science-related questions, so it is not really a neutral assessment of reading ability. (Fleming, 2000). Further, Fleming notes that researchers have found that the predictive validity of the SAT for White students – that it correlates with college GPA – does not hold for Black students: "The SAT under-predicted Black academic performance, and... Black students performed better [in college] than

their test scores indicated” (Fleming, 2000, p. 30). She argues that this has serious implications for any debate on affirmative action, because the tests currently in use are not predictive for all students, even though they are used that way. Fleming cautions that: “whereas the nation may do away with mandates that consider race and racial context, these forces continue to influence the performance and lives of Black students” (Fleming, 2000, p. 27).

Christopher Jencks calls this problem *selection system bias*. He defines this as bias that exists “when Blacks and Whites who would perform equally well if they got a job have different chances of getting it” (Jencks, 1998, p. 77). This means that the test used is not accurately predicting the ability of the candidate to do the work needed. This is a huge issue with college entrance exams. He concludes that: “relying on [standardized] tests to select either college applicants or job applicants will exclude far more Blacks (and Hispanics) than performance-based selection will” (Jencks, 1998, p. 84).

In addition to selection system bias, Jencks finds two other types of test bias to be relevant to the issue of racial achievement gaps. He asserts that *labeling bias* can be a problem when tests that purport to measure intelligence or aptitude (like screeners for gifted/talented programs) are claiming to measure something innate, when in fact environmental factors also impact the score (Jencks, 1998). He notes that psychologists generally agree that these environmental influences impact the Black-White test score gap (Jencks, 1998). This means that tests

which sort students into different courses or programs will disadvantage students who have negative environmental factors influencing their scores, which creates a double barrier to success because those same factors then help to prevent access to enriched or honors courses.

Finally, Jencks notes that *methodological bias* has come into play in Steele and Aronson's work on stereotype threat, which speaks to the psychological context in which the test is given, showing that it can affect scores (Jencks, 1998). In other words, the methods used to administer the test actually impact test performance. This issue rises up as a factor in looking at structural causes of racial achievement gaps, which is covered in the next section.

A final issue that must be considered when examining racial achievement gaps is how the test data is used. Anthony S. Bryk and Kim L. Hermanson find that educators – and those who would influence them – are use testing data for much more than the tests are really meant for. Instead of focusing on what students have learned, educators at school, district and state levels use testing data “to monitor the educational system, evaluate its programs, diagnose its troubles, guide policy formation, and hold school personnel accountable for the results,” (Bryk & Hermanson, 1993, p. 452), and then the data is misused. Bryk and Hermanson offer what they call “a more prudent set of aspirations for an educational indicator system” with the recommendation that educational indicators – especially testing data – be used to “broaden our understanding and

catalyze new ideas,” recognizing that the information “will rarely provide specific solutions for school improvement that can be directly enacted” but that it can be of value in that it can “tell us how we’re doing, provide information that helps to define problem areas meriting closer attention, and stimulate initial discussions about possible solutions” (Bryk & Hermanson, 1993, p. 465). What it is not good for, they maintain, is a system like that set up by NCLB to punish “failing” schools (Bryk & Hermanson, 1993).

Issues of test structure and bias must be understood and considered when attempting to understand the current state of racial achievement gaps in America. Because this is such a political issue and one that affects so many people, there has been much misinformation created through the use and misuse of statistics. Understanding a particular test is important to understanding what that test’s results really show.

Causes of the Black/White Achievement Gap

So I’ve said to our staff, many times, I hate to keep putting it this way, but either Black kids are inherently dumber, or it’s something else. What is it about our belief system, our approach, our attitudes? – Principal, Study Participant

The short answer to the question of why we see a consistent Black/White achievement gap across the United States in K-12 education is that there are no easy answers. In fact, research reveals that the relevant factors are actually interrelated; there is literally no one cause of racial achievement gaps, because

the different causes affect each other (J. Lee, 2002; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2008). Katherine Magnuson and Jane Waldfogel explain: “Because economic and social dimensions of inequality are interrelated, and because many factors affect student achievement, we would not expect any single aspect of inequality to play a predominant role” with regard to the Black-White test score gap (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2008, p. 16-17).

Jaekyung Lee conducted a data review published in 2002 that looked at factors shown in various studies to affect racial achievement gaps, with the goal of determining which factor(s) were most important. He focused on three broad areas: “socioeconomic and family conditions (educational attainment, income, poverty, single household); youth culture and student behaviors (motivation and effort for learning, alcohol and illicit drug usage, crime); and schooling conditions and practices (instructional resources, course taking, dropout, segregation)” (Lee, 2002, p. 6). He concluded that, “factors that have been attributed to the narrowing of the racial and ethnic achievement gaps in the past do not easily explain the current widening gap phenomenon... [so we must] investigate simultaneous changes across a broad range of factors from multiple data sources, and to examine their interactive, joint influences on the achievement gap” (Lee, 2002, p. 10). In the 21st century, we cannot simply point to segregation or poverty to explain racial achievement gaps. John U. Ogbu’s research supports this idea: “The complex interlocking forces that affect the social adjustment and academic performances of minority children are not limited

to those of the wider society, [or] the school and the classroom; they also include those from the minority communities themselves” (Ogbu, 1992, p. 288-289).

For purposes of this literature review, achievement gap causes are broken into two sections: “structural and institutional challenges,” which includes factors that most teachers and school administrators cannot control, and “individual challenges,” which looks at factors more likely to be affected by school personnel.

Structural and Institutional Challenges

The structure of the public educational system includes several facets which can impact student achievement and contribute to racial achievement gaps.

Segregation exists at the school and classroom levels. Racism is built into the system in sometimes hidden ways. It is important to examine and understand these factors as they relate to student achievement, even though they are difficult to impact at the school level.

There are many things that schools can do to contribute to the problem of racial achievement gaps: test bias, segregation and tracking are just three examples. Structural issues are contributors that are outside of the teachers’ and often even school administrators’ control. For example, spending on education still varies widely by community across the country, with students from wealthier families tending to go to schools with more funding than poorer students (Darling-

Hammond, 1998). Linda Darling-Hammond summarizes the challenge with regard to structural causes: “Despite stark differences in funding, teacher quality, curriculum, and class sizes, the prevailing view is that if students do not achieve, it is their own fault. If we are ever to get beyond the problem of the color line, we must confront and address these inequalities” (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 28). Other researchers have come to similar conclusions (G. Ladson-Billings, 2006; Oakes, 1986a; Sirin, 2005). There is little doubt in the research community that the structures within the school can and often do contribute to the creation and maintenance of racial achievement gaps. Three that are commonly cited, though they have different degrees of impact, are test bias, segregation, and tracking.

Test bias and stereotype threat. As mentioned above, the test itself is sometimes part of the problem. Stereotype threat is a well-documented condition in which a member of any group may find their academic performance negatively affected by messages that suggest that they are not expected to do as well on a test as members of other groups. This has been shown to be true of gender, age and educational attainment, as well as race and culture (Aronson et al., 1998; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Stereotype threat can be caused by something as simple as asking for a student’s race as the beginning of a test. Claude Steele showed that just putting the demographic questions as the end of the test instead of the beginning made a positive difference in test scores for Black students (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Further, Joshua Aronson and colleagues found that students who were exposed to the stereotype before the test reported expending more effort on the test, implying that the problem was not that students did not try hard enough, but that they could be trying too hard (Aronson et al., 1998). This phenomenon has been shown to affect students in K-12 settings, especially at the secondary level, where students are more self-conscious and group membership is more salient to personal identity (Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003).

Test bias has been shown to correlate with high-stakes testing outcomes. High-stakes testing is sometimes touted as a way to get students to work harder and learn more, but research does not bear that out. A 2009 study of the effects of a high-stakes high school exit exam in California found that the requirement to pass the test in order to graduate from high school had no positive effect on student achievement and significant negative effects on graduation rates (Reardon, Arshan, Kurlaender, & Atteberry, 2009). The researchers found that making the test high-stakes didn't even affect students' persistence in high school. When the data was analyzed, Reardon and his colleagues found that the negative effects were concentrated among students who were low-achieving, of color, and/or female (Reardon et al., 2009), with the result that the most vulnerable students were most negatively impacted. Investigating several hypotheses about why this might be, they concluded that a stereotype-threat explanation was consistent with their findings, in that girls and students of color did not perform as well as their prior academic achievement predicted they

should (Reardon et al., 2009).

While teachers may not be able to control whether a state test asks for racially identifying information at the beginning or end, the good news is that teachers can still combat this phenomenon. In a 2003 study, Catherine Good worked with Aronson to see what would happen when 7th graders were taught specific messages that might counteract stereotype threat. With one group, the students were encouraged to view intelligence as malleable, and with another group, students were told that academic difficulties should be attributed to the novelty of the setting. In both cases, the students who received these messages scored much better than the control group (Good et al., 2003).

Segregation. Almost 60 years after the Brown v. Board Supreme Court desegregation decision, segregation is still an issue in American schools. As of 2004, 66% of Black students attend a school at which more than half the students are students of color (Goldsmith, 2004). Though research does not conclude that this has a significant impact on racial achievement gaps, Pat Antonio Goldsmith reports that “most studies have found lower achievement in predominantly minority schools” (Goldsmith, 2004, p. 124). Research is mixed with regard to what is “best” for Black students, because there is also evidence that attending majority-White schools is not better for Black students than attending majority-Black schools (Goldsmith, 2004). The one point of agreement seems to be around the notion that it’s best for students to learn with teachers

who have confidence in them (Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2002; Rosenthal, 1987).

Jacob Vigdor and Jens Ludwig's research on Black students attending majority-White schools found that school segregation can impact test performance, and that American neighborhoods are desegregating faster than American schools (Vigdor & Ludwig, 2008). They judge this to be important because their research found that "a 10 percent increase in the Black share of a school's student body would reduce achievement test scores for Black students by between .025 and around .08 standard deviations, and reduce test scores for Whites by perhaps one-quarter to two-fifths as much" (Vigdor & Ludwig, 2008, p. 184). While these numbers do not seem large, they are considered to be statistically significant. Vigdor cites Caroline Hoxby's work in Texas as producing similar results (Vigdor & Ludwig, 2008).

However, another Vigdor study in 2007 examined the relationship between peer composition (percentage of a Black student's peers who were Black) and test scores at both the school and classroom levels. The results "fail to show any negative association between peer percentage Black and the relative performance of Black students" (Vigdor & Ludwig, 2008, p. 202). Conversely, Goldsmith found that Black students do best in segregated- minority schools where there are a significant number of Black teachers working (Goldsmith, 2004). But he is careful to note that the culture of the school is relevant, and that

there is research showing that “Black teachers are particularly effective teachers of Black students” (Goldsmith, 2004, p. 125). In this way, his results support Vigdor’s work, in that the point is not the percentage of Black students, but the culture at the school. He asserts that: “teachers and administrators in segregated-White schools need to address how they lower minority students’ beliefs” (Goldsmith, 2004, p. 121), and consider what messages students are receiving about their potential for success.

Results are mixed with regard to the impact of racial segregation on student achievement. Vigdor notes that the really interesting question lies with the fact that “the most striking change in school racial composition patterns has been the increase in students who are neither Black nor White,” (i.e. increasing numbers of Latino and Asian students) and that there is little research yet on what this means for Black students (Vigdor & Ludwig, 2008, p. 203).

Tracking and course content. While the percentage of Black students within a school may not have a huge impact on racial achievement gaps, the percentage of Black students in honors and remedial classes is an issue that has received significant attention from the research community. Tracking is commonly understood to be the practice by which students are sorted by ability level – usually based on one or more test scores – and then grouped together with other same-level students for instruction. This practice, while very practical for teachers because instruction can focus on one ability level, is generally unpopular with

researchers. There is a significant body of data showing that students in the lower “tracks” do not tend to catch up to their higher- achieving peers, and sometimes even lose ground comparatively (W. J. Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002; Oakes, 1986a; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Jeannie Oakes articulates the problem:

The practice of tracking in secondary schools... provides evidence of how schools, even as they voice commitment to equality and excellence, organize and deliver curriculum in ways that advance neither.... Rather than promoting higher achievement, tracking contributes to mediocre schooling for most secondary students (Oakes, 1986, p. 13).

It is very hard to help lower-achieving students make more than a year’s growth when they are segregated from their high- achieving peers, and all students lose out on learning from the diverse ideas of their peers.

William J. Carbonaro looked at key aspects of high quality instruction to see what most impacted achievement gaps, and found that the most substantial impact on academic growth comes from course content. For example, he found that higher reading scores are associated with an analytical writing emphasis in the curriculum (W. J. Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002). Carbonaro asserts that this has implications for tracking, in that the students in the lower tracks – usually disproportionately students of color – have less access to challenging content, like analytical writing. When students are tracked into easier courses, they are not exposed to the same rigorous content and thus learn less, creating an achievement gap (W. J. Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002). Oaks echoes these

concerns, noting also that the higher-track teachers tend to work harder, prepare better, and be more supportive and enthusiastic, all traits which are likely to increase student achievement (Oakes, 1986a). Ronald Ferguson adds that higher tracks show better results with time in instruction, time off task, and expectations for homework completion (Ferguson, 2008). These results do not support the idea that lower-achieving students will benefit from instruction that is separate from their peers.

Oakes also finds that the tracked groups form a hierarchy, with students in the most advanced tracks seen by other students as being of higher status (Oakes, 1986a). Oakes asserts that this naturally leads to very different school experiences for students in different tracks (Oakes, 1986a). As research shows that the messages teachers give to students and the resulting student attitudes both impact student achievement (Garrett A Duncan, 1996; Ford & Harris, 1996; Ogbu, 1992), it becomes apparent that tracking students of color into lower courses – which research on testing shows is bound to happen when standardized measures are the primary determinant of placement (Hershberg, 2009; Oakes, 1989) – leaves them with a lesser-quality education than their peers are receiving upper-track courses.

There is a meaningful body of research arguing for the elimination – or at least very careful use of – remedial or “lower-track” courses. Steele posits that much of remediation is currently done in a context that actually makes the problems of

stereotype threat and disidentification worse (Steele & Aronson, 1995). This speaks to why federal special education law (IDEA) requires the least restrictive setting for all special education students.

Enid Lee calls for “detracking the school by removing its lowest level classes” (E. Lee, 2008, p. 6). In this way, students all may receive greater challenge and opportunity by ensuring that they are exposed to more rigorous coursework. Further, this does not hurt higher-achieving students; it is the recommended best practice for gifted education as well. Renzulli’s Schoolwide Enrichment Model, while created around research-based best practices for gifted students, is designed “to promote both challenging and enjoyable high-end learning across a wide range of school types, levels and demographic differences” (Renzulli & Reis, 2001, p. 2). Steele echoes this with a recommendation that schools replace remediation with a “model of challenge” that would provide “challenging schoolwork in a supportive, collaborative environment that conveys respect for [all students’] social and academic potential” (Osborne, 1999, p. 562).

However, Steele, Osborne and other researchers are clear about the need for teacher skill in strategies like scaffolding and cooperative learning in order to make such models work for all students. Any model for teaching students in heterogeneously mixed ability groups requires significant skill on the part of the teachers. Ferguson points out that the case for detracking is somewhat

controversial not because critics hold that tracking is good, but because the alternatives are not necessarily better. He says:

Critics are not wrong in saying that instructional practices in lower groups and tracks are worse, that instruction in such tracks is not tailored to the needs of low- performing students, or that membership in lower tracks is stigmatizing. But that does not mean necessarily that heterogeneous classrooms are better. Without major changes in teacher training... there seems little reason to expect that more heterogeneous grouping would be a panacea for any students, Black or White (Ferguson, 2007, p. 85).

As a part of any detracking effort, then, research points schools toward investment in professional development on differentiation, because addressing multiple ability levels in one classroom necessarily involves differentiating the curriculum to meet the needs of a range of learners.

“Cooperative learning” is an example of an instructional strategy that can be used to meet this goal in a heterogeneously mixed classroom – but is not simple for teachers to learn. This strategy uses mixed-ability small groups in a carefully structured model, which incorporates both positive interdependence and individual accountability (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). While it can be very effective, it can also be easily misunderstood, so requires meaningful professional development for teachers before being successfully implemented.

Tracking seems likely to continue until educators learn and get comfortable with better ways to teach all children without it. This is a structural problem not only because the composition of the classes is not always determined by the teachers, but also because the professional development required for teachers to be successful without tracking is also not always within their own control.

Structural problems like tracking, segregation and test bias persist in part because they are complicated to address. Research is clear that tracking is not good for many students, but also that its alternatives are not always good either. Segregation, though it is a persistent problem, is not a significant cause of achievement gaps, so is no longer at the center of most reform agendas. Test bias, though real and remediable, is often not the purview of school-level educators in this age of NCLB and state testing requirements. For these reasons, structural factors will not be a focus of my research.

The intersection of race and class. While some causes of racial achievement gaps are built right into the school structure, others are entirely external to the school community. Poverty is a factor often cited by educators as an external cause of underachievement. Research does show that poverty creates multiple barriers to achievement, but it also shows clearly that poverty itself is not a primary cause of racial achievement gaps.

The biggest challenge to interpreting the impact of poverty on racial achievement gaps is separating the influences of race and poverty, as they are very intertwined in the United States. Black students in America are more likely to be poor than White students (Sirin, 2005). Selcuk Sirin's review of studies done between 1990 and 2000 found that students' socioeconomic status (SES) is both linked to academic achievement directly, and linked to it indirectly "through multiple interacting systems, including students' racial and ethnic background, grade level, and school/neighborhood location" (Sirin, 2005, p. 420). More specifically, Sirin asserted that the research indicated three main factors to explain the gap: "Minorities are more likely to live in low-income households or in single-parent families; their parents are likely to have less education; and they often attend under-funded schools" (Sirin, 2005, p. 420). So it is difficult to extract the role of race from these types of factors.

However, some researchers have been able to separate them. Sarah Theule Lubienski tested to see how much of the racial achievement gap in NAEP math scores between 1990 and 2000 was attributable to socioeconomic status (SES) and found "serious disparities between Black and White students' academic achievement and access to reform-oriented instruction, regardless of students' SES" (Lubienski, 2002, p. 285), leading her to conclude that: "Student SES failed to account for much of the Black- White achievement gaps" and "despite current reforms promoting high-quality mathematics education for all, Black students of

both low and high SES are being left behind” (Lubienski, 2002, p. 269).

In an attempt to point conclusively toward or away from poverty as a cause of racial achievement gaps, Larry V. Hedges and Amy Nowell analyzed all the major national surveys of high school students since 1965 that have tested both Black and White students (Hedges & Nowell, 1999). They found that about a third of the gap in test scores between Black and White students is accounted for by social class differences between Black and White students (Hedges & Nowell, 1999). However, the finding that two thirds of the difference is not poverty related is significant. Their hypothesis was that racial discrimination would likely be revealed as the cause of achievement score differences when differences in social class and family structure are controlled for, and that is what they found. Hedges asserts: “This result does not give much support to the hypothesis that the gaps in average tests scores are caused primarily by differences in social class or family structure. Therefore, it supports the hypothesis that the gaps in test scores are a consequence of other factors, such as discrimination” (Hedges & Nowell, 1999, p. 130). This is not to discount the strong correlation between poverty and lower achievement; rather, to illustrate the complicated nature of the correlation and extent to which other causes are relevant as well.

Judith R. Blau and colleagues found that student achievement of both Black and White students is higher in areas “where race and socioeconomic resources are not highly related” (Blau, Lamb, Stearns, & Pellerin, 2001, p. 133), meaning that

no one race makes up the majority of high or low SES levels. Their contention is that “such places are cosmopolitan in that they allow for fluid social relationships across racial lines, thereby expanding the horizons of young people” and leading to higher student achievement (Blau et al., 2001, p. 133).

With regard to the role that poverty does play, some research supports common understandings about poverty’s role in education, most notably with regard to inequitable funding of schools. Linda Darling-Hammond finds that: “In contrast to European and Asian nations that fund schools centrally and equally, the wealthiest 10 percent of U.S. school districts spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10 percent, and spending ratios of 3 to 1 are common within states” (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 28). As noted above, Sirin found that attending underfunded schools does correlate with lower student achievement (Sirin, 2005).

However, research around poverty and education sometimes runs counter to conventional wisdom. Educators often cite student mobility, for example, as a logical cause of achievement gaps. However, research does not find that student mobility is a significant cause of underachievement. (Grissmer & Eiseman, 2008; Smrekar & Owens, 2003). Mobility is associated with lower income populations, who generally do less well academically, and states with high rates of geographic mobility generally have lower NAEP scores (Grissmer, Flanagan, & Williamson, 1998), but Russell Rumberger’s review of literature in this area finds that when

background differences are taken into account, “mobility may be more of a symptom than a cause of poor school performance” (Rumberger, 2003, p. 9).

David Grissmer and Elizabeth Eiseman actually found statistically significant positive associations between student achievement and mobility (Grissmer & Eiseman, 2008). The authors note that this “may indicate movement either into better school districts or linked to job changes that are linked to higher wages, and does not risk learning gaps from changing schools” (Grissmer & Eiseman, 2008, p. 152). This implies that mobility itself is not necessarily a barrier to student achievement, and it is supported by other research.

Claire Smrekar’s research shows that high student mobility is less of a barrier to student achievement if the school is prepared for it. Looking at schools run by the United States Department of Defense (DOD) and designed for children of military personnel, which have an average of 37% student turn-over each year, she found that the middle-class status of some students was less important than certain factors in the structure of the schools: a strong and stable teaching force, high expectations, individual attention, sufficient staffing, and small school size. She also points to successful racial integration and tight community as factors supporting DOD school students (Smrekar & Owens, 2003). These factors are combining to lead to significant achievement. Black students at the DOD schools had the highest scores in the nation on the 1998 NAEP test in reading, and were second in the nation on the 1998 NAEP writing test (Smrekar & Owens, 2003).

Further, while the achievement gap between Black and White students nationally was 26 points in 1998, for DOD students it was half that: only 13 points. And Smrekar points out that 80% of the DOD school students are children of enlisted personnel, not officers, meaning that their parents usually have only a high school diploma, no college (Smrekar & Owens, 2003).

William Julius Wilson cautions that research in the area of Culture of Poverty Theory has been polarized by politics, in that: “Liberals highlight social factors, such as racial discrimination, low wages, inadequate schooling, lack of jobs, and so on. Conservatives emphasize cultural factors, such as values, attitudes, habits and styles” (Wilson, 1998, p. 502). He cautions that “the environment includes both social and cultural opportunities and constraints, and social and cultural variables often interact” (Wilson, 1998, p. 502), so researchers should not focus on just one aspect of the issue to the exclusion of other factors.

It seems that the main conclusion we can draw from the research is that poverty is relevant, but it is not the main cause of racial achievement gaps. Poverty is clearly interwoven with race in America, but while it is important to acknowledge that poverty can put additional obstacles in a student’s path that are not there for other students, this will not be an area of focus for my research.

Critical Race Theory. The most challenging and possibly most controversial theory around racial achievement gaps is Critical Race Theory (CRT), which

holds that the causes of racial achievement gaps cannot be separated from White privilege, which is held to undergird almost all of American society (Duncan, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Beyond school structures or community troubles, CRT asserts that racial inequity is so deeply rooted in the American institutions, (education, health, political, etcetera,) that only overhauling the whole of American society can fix it. “Although the standard education story explains the plight of young Black male students as a persistent and troublesome, but random, outcome of a reasonably fair, aracial system,” Garrett Albert Duncan says, “Critical Race Theory (CRT) holds that their situation is actually a manifestation of the racial politics that are intrinsic, even vital, to the day-to-day functions of U.S. society and social institutions such as schools.” (Duncan, 2002, p. 131). Beyond all the other factors, CRT points to the system.

Gloria Ladson-Billings defines CRT as “the notion that racism is... so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in the culture” (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 212-213). She says that critical race theory scholars are interested in two main understandings. First, they want to understand how the subordination of people of color through a culture of White supremacy has been created and maintained in America, in that this dynamic did not end with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s. In addition, researchers in this area look at the connection between law and racial power, or how American law actually supports continued racial inequality (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Scholars are no longer shying away from naming White privilege as a culprit

causing racial academic achievement gaps, though it is clearly interwoven with other relevant factors (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Duncan, 1996; Lee, 2002).

Pedro Noguera goes even further, contending that capitalism itself is partly to blame. “Under the cover of a pseudo-meritocracy – a system in which status is determined by effort and merit – education is used to make the inequality that is intrinsic within a capitalist system appear natural and warranted” (Noguera & Wing, 2006, p. 283). This theory implies that because capitalism requires low-paid workers to do certain jobs, the school system must be structured in a way that will continue to produce them. He presents this as an observation, of course, not a research-based conclusion, but it is relevant to understanding the context within which we examine racial achievement gaps (P. Noguera & Wing, 2006).

Noguera is not alone in viewing racism as embedded in the educational system. Duncan asserts that “the powerful narratives that exclude and marginalize Black youth are canonical” (Duncan, 2002, p. 141). Just as teachers of literature have in recent decades been grappling with the notion that the Western canon in literature needs to open up to multiple perspectives, Duncan holds that educators need to look at how our systems may continue to hinder Black youth. However, living within White privilege as their home context often means that White teachers simply do not see the mechanisms within the system that slow down our Black students (Singleton & Linton, 2006). In fact, one of the benefits of White privilege is that White people do not have to see it. But change is

possible, as Duncan states: “I nonetheless reiterate that a concrete step towards eliminating oppression of Black male students and providing space for their narratives is challenging the structures of domination in schools” (Duncan, 2002, p. 141).

Although confronting White privilege is complicated and difficult, ignoring it maintains a chasm between White teachers and their students of color. “White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks” asserts Peggy McIntosh (McIntosh, 1989, p. 1). White teachers who do not understand this, she says, expect their students of color to have all those tools, and when the students do not bring them, teachers may blame the students without looking hard at the system that disadvantages them (Darling-Hammond, 1998; McIntosh, 1990). This points to the need for training that directly addresses issues of White privilege to be a part of all professional development efforts to address racial achievement gaps.

Teachers and administrators cannot change most of the factors addressed above, because they are either external to the school system, or out of the hands of school-level personnel. But the research is clear that in spite of all the things they cannot change, there is much that teachers and administrators can do at the school level to impact racial achievement gaps, for better or worse. The next section explores actions of school staff and of students that are likely to impact

achievement gaps.

Individual Challenges: Students, Teachers and Administrators

Although the factors outside of their control can be very frustrating for educators, it is important for teachers and administrators to focus their energy on the factors affecting achievement gaps that they can actually impact with the resources they have. Further, educators sometimes unwittingly contribute to the very gaps they are trying to address. Research on the roles of student attitudes, teacher expectations, and principal leadership speaks to how each can impact racial achievement gaps.

Student contributions. Students clearly hold some responsibility for their own achievement and underachievement, even as schools and communities are throwing barriers in their way. William Carbonaro looked at the issue of school structure vs. student agency, and determined that both student effort and student experiences (tracking, curriculum exposure, etcetera) contribute to academic achievement (Carbonaro, 2005). Much research has been done – some of it contradictory – around student attitudes toward school and the extent to which those attitudes impact achievement. Researchers agree that Black students achieve at all levels, and race itself is not a predictor of student achievement. But although there is significant diversity of experience for Black students, research finds that underachieving Black students as a group show some similar attitudes

about school (Morgan & Mehta, 2004; Osborne, 1999).

One theme that runs through much of this area of research is that of opposition – that underachievement can be a form of resistance to the power structure.

(Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Morgan & Mehta, 2004; Osborne, 1999). Signithia

Fordham and John U. Ogbu's research makes the central point of what they call Oppositional Culture Theory: "One major reason that Black students do poorly in school is that they experience inordinate ambivalence and affective dissonance in regard to academic effort and success" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 177).

Although this certainly does not affect all Black students, their research identified patterns among Black students in which their growing awareness of their own racial marginalization led to anger and resentment that then took the form of an oppositional social identity (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). It is from this foundation that many subsequent researchers have explored the question of how attitude impacts the academic achievement of Black students in America.

The most controversial piece of the research on student attitude comes from Ogbu's early work, in which he proposed the notion that some Black students associate academic success with "acting White". Fordham and Ogbu lay out the trajectory: White Americans devalued the abilities of Black Americans, which led to Black students questioning their own abilities, which caused Black students to view academic success as a White prerogative, which resulted in a lack of effort and persistence in school and discouragement of peers from succeeding and

thus “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This notion has become so common that it even surfaced in the 2004 keynote address at the Democratic National Convention, as then-Senator Barack Obama asserted that we need to “eradicate the slander that says that a Black youth with a book is acting White” (Fryer Jr, 2006, p. 2).

However, several studies have failed to find evidence of this. Duncan’s study of Black high school students found that “The participants in this study do not equate academic achievement with ‘acting White’ nor was their ‘Black consciousness’ a deterrent to their academic achievement, as demonstrated by their successful transition into college” (Garrett A Duncan, 1996, p. 147). Roland G. Fryer’s research shows that the relationship between popularity and grades has no effect on the achievement of the average student, and accounts for part of the Black-White achievement gap only among the highest-achieving students, though even there he calculates that it accounts for only 11% of that gap (Fryer Jr, 2006, p. 6).

With regard to the aspects of Oppositional Culture Theory that do not involve the notion of “acting White”, Garvey Lundy’s review of literature finds that: “Black students, in their rejection of White cultural references, are embracing their own culture and asserting African agency. It is not a rejection of academic success but rather a rejection of White cultural hegemony” (Lundy, 2003, p. 463). He proposes that Black students really want to be what he calls “culturally centered”,

meaning “Afrocentric and academically successful” (Lundy, 2003, p. 463). This counters the notion that some Black students don’t want to be academic achievers. In an article titled “The Myths of Oppositional Culture”, Lundy asserts that Ogbu misses the mark: “when Black students express a preference for their own culture and unmask the dislocation of their peers” it is not that they are avoiding acting White, but rather that “they have challenged... the Eurocentric bias in determining academic success” (Lundy, 2003, p. 464).

Several researchers have explored the idea of “disidentification” with schooling – that is, the phenomenon of Black students viewing themselves as something other than successful (or potentially successful) students. For example, Morgan and Mehta’s research on disidentification found that Black students are generally less likely to believe the performance evaluations they receive from teachers, which may support both stereotype threat, and the notion that Black students expect assessments to be racially biased (Morgan & Mehta, 2004). However, their research also showed that Black students were as fully identified with schooling as their White counterparts – if not with their school or teachers – which counters the notion that Black students are generally disaffected or disidentified from formal schooling because of the racism inherent the system. Morgan and Mehta theorize that instead of contradicting each other, these two findings work in concert: putting less stock in test results allows Black students to maintain their motivation in spite of receiving discouraging results (Morgan & Mehta, 2004). It is a coping strategy.

Morgan and Mehta note that while their studies do not confirm Ogbu's theories about oppositional culture, the finding of students' discounting of the importance of performance evaluations "may nonetheless represent, in the aggregate, a generic type of oppositional culture – one that takes the form of resistance to the school as an institution and yet does not break Black students' beliefs in the importance of achievement or the desirability of pursuing schoolwork" (Morgan & Mehta, 2004, p. 96). The theme of resistance is consistent, even as researchers do not align entirely around the reasons for it.

Jason Osbourne posits that educators can help students at risk of disidentification with academics to avoid it, and also can help disidentified students to re-identify (Osborne, 1999). He recommends, for example, that: "a truly multicultural curriculum... in which the contributions of people of color are infused throughout the school curriculum, would counter both the stereotype and the anxiety" that students feel about it (Osborne, 1999, p. 562).

With regard to student attitude, Lundy is blunt in his assessment of the bottom line: "The ultimate issue is one of cultural and racial liberation, and an organic yearning on the part of Black students to be free from the oppressive yoke of White supremacy" (Lundy, 2003, p. 465). Where teachers and administrators are struggling with motivating Black students to "buy in to the system", research implies that teachers may be better served to ask what they are doing to

influence the extent to which Black students see themselves and their place positively in the larger system. This is an aspect of teaching practice that may be impacted by professional development around the issue of how teachers influence student attitudes about school and achievement, and is addressed in the next section.

Teacher expectations. Teacher attitude is not the same as teacher quality. Teacher quality is usually defined by advanced degrees or state licensure, neither of which necessarily even impact, more less determine, a teacher's expectations of different students. Sean P. Corcoran and William N. Evans show that teacher quality, as it is traditionally defined, is not a significant factor in explaining racial achievement gaps. (Corcoran & Evans, 2008).

While they did find that “teachers of the average Black student are consistently more likely to be inexperienced, uncertified, and unhappy...” (Corcoran, 2008, p. 242). they also found that changes in the mean quality of teachers – as measured by correct licensure – does not seem to have affected the achievement gap in the schools they studied. They concluded that, “evidence on the role of observed teacher qualifications in students' academic achievement remains inconclusive” (Corcoran, 2008, p. 241).

Rather than focusing on traditional measures of quality, Cultural Competency Theory posits that teachers who are very good at working with kids who are

culturally similar to themselves may still have difficulty with students from unfamiliar cultural backgrounds, and will need to learn about those backgrounds in order to better serve those children (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Along these lines, Ford and Harris find that “despite the cultural gap [between Black students and White teachers], few teachers have received substantive preparation in multicultural education, few teachers are trained to examine their own biases and stereotypes regarding Black students, and few teachers live in the neighborhoods in which they teach” (Ford & Harris, 1996, p. 1142). They assert that addressing racial achievement gaps should include addressing these important areas for professional development (Ford & Harris, 1996).

Douglas B. Downey and Shana Pribesh found not only that students do better academically with culturally-matched (same-race) teachers, but that “the strain between Black students and White teachers is evident as soon as Black children begin kindergarten” (Downey & Pribesh, 2004, p. 279). Their research showed that this effect is attributed more to teacher bias than to student opposition, though they note that “both students and teachers have agency in the classroom, so identifying a single culprit (White teachers or Black students) is likely to fail to produce a complete answer” (Downey & Pribesh, 2004, p. 279). What matters, they note, is that even in the 21st century, race continues to be relevant in the classroom (Downey & Pribesh, 2004).

One strategy to address racial achievement gaps that is firmly rooted in research

is the need to create a school-wide culture of high expectations for all students (Corbett et al., 2002; Davis and Thompson, 2004; Landsman, 2004). Student attitudes are naturally affected by teacher attitudes. What teachers believe about student ability and what teachers communicate to students about their ability are critical factors affecting student achievement. Decades of research shows that teacher expectations have a significant bearing on student success (Corbett et al., 2002; Rosenthal, 1987). Robert Rosenthal, in a 1987 article discussing his original 1966 “Pygmalion experiment” and others in the same vein, asserts that: “based on the meta-analytic evidence, as well as the evidence provided by the original Pygmalion experiment, the educational self-fulfilling prophesy has now been well established” (Rosenthal, 1987, p. 39). The Pygmalion experiment was one in which teachers were told at the beginning of the year that certain children’s test scores indicated that they would show great gains in the coming year. The only difference in context between those students and the control group was what the teachers had been told. Eight months later, those students who had been predicted to “bloom” had done just that, attributed by the researchers to the effect of their teachers’ high expectations for them (Rosenthal, 1987).

Dick Corbett and his colleagues studied teachers with a “no excuses” attitude, and found that student achievement was actually higher in the classes of those teachers than in the classes of teachers who believed that students must have family support or internal motivation in order to be successful, which are things

that teachers cannot often control. They found that in the two schools in their study with the best test scores – and no poverty gap – the most notable difference compared with the rest of the district was that every teacher in the school “asserted that he or she was responsible for student success.” (Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2005, p. 12). Corbett concluded that: “the difference appeared to stem more from the teachers’ attitudes than from any particular instructional method they used” (Corbett, 2005, p. 12). The professional development implications from this research are profound. Instead of learning a new math curriculum or better strategies for teaching reading, Corbett’s research implies that schools should focus their professional development resources on changing teacher attitudes (Corbett, 2002). This is supported by other research on the impact of teacher attitudes on student achievement (Garrett A Duncan, 1996; P. A. Noguera, 1996; Rosenthal, 1987). Teaching the teachers to move beyond these external excuses made a real difference for students.

A culture of high expectations must take into account that not all “Black” students are culturally African-American. African immigrants often come from very different cultural backgrounds than their peers with similar skin tones – and very different cultural backgrounds from each other. They face a separate set of pressures that contribute to achievement gaps between African students and White students (Farid & McMahan, 2004).

Teachers know that, as Mohamed Farid points out, “It is especially difficult for refugee parents, who speak little or no English and who are unfamiliar with the American school system, to help their children with homework” (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 43). But while it is obvious that a parent who does not speak English cannot read English directions, it is not as obvious when parents from other countries come from different systems of learning. Somali immigrant parents, for example, understand a colonial system in which not all kids were able to go to public school, and those who misbehaved were kicked out to make room for someone else. Hence, there were minimal behavior problems (Farid & McMahan, 2004). So they are often mystified by bad behaviors that are “allowed” in school. On top of that, the Somali language did not have a written form until 1972, so parents are used to a strong oral tradition of recitation and memorization (Farid & McMahan, 2004). American lessons are often formatted with an emphasis on the written word that makes it difficult for parents to help their students learn, created by teachers who may have no idea that this is the case.

Beyond expectations, there are instructional issues that are relevant as well. Gloria Ladson-Billings proposes what she calls a “culturally relevant theory of education” that examines and affirms “ways that teaching can better match the home and community cultures of students of color who have previously not had academic success in schools” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469). She calls this culturally relevant pedagogy. This approach involves using the students’ culture

and what is most salient to them to help pull them into the academics (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Examples include using rap music as a bridge into poetry, having students translate written work from their home language into standard English, and bringing in parents as resources from the work world (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This also helps teachers to get to know their students' home cultures and backgrounds, which can help to build stronger relationships with students. Culturally relevant pedagogy is something that teachers can be explicitly taught and then apply in appropriate contexts according to the needs of their own unique students.

Instructional strategies that have been shown to raise student achievement in general, like Thomas Guskey's "feedback and corrective" process, should also be considered with regard to narrowing achievement gaps, whether the research behind them explicitly addressed race or not (Ferguson, 2008). Jeanne Oakes noted above, Black students are more likely to have novice teachers who will benefit from professional development around effective instructional strategies in general. The implications of all this are positive for teachers. While research clearly shows that teacher bias impacts student achievement, (Downey, Hippel, & Broh, 2004; Rosenthal, 1987), it also shows that teachers can learn more effective ways of working with Black students (Corbett, 2002; Oakes, 1986). Teachers can do very little to change the racial make-up of their school, but research shows that they can learn to provide their students with both important

academic skills and positive messages about who they are as capable learners (Aronson et al., 1998; Davis & Thompson, 2004)

The administrative role. Research in the area of racial achievement gaps does not spend as much time on the role of school administration as on teachers and students, even though leadership is clearly understood to be an important factor in schools where tests scores have risen dramatically (Ferguson, 2007). When interviewed, teachers consistently talk about whether or not the principal supports their work (Corcoran & Evans, 2008; Ferguson, 2008). but the principal's role in addressing racial disparities does not seem to have been studied as extensively as the roles of teachers and students.

In at least one study, the administrative role was analyzed only because it got in the way of expected reforms. In his work with Berkeley High School, Pedro Noguera and his team encountered an unanticipated obstacle to promoting change that would help to close racial achievement gaps there: organizational dysfunction and lack of leadership (Noguera & Wing, 2006). When “basic operations” at the school were not under control – like working restrooms and copy machines – staff morale was affected and teachers were distracted from their work. Because of discipline problems, he found that “efforts to promote equity and achievement have to take a back seat to the effort to establish calm and order” (Noguera & Wing, 2006, p. 285). This implies that before spending significant time on closing the achievement gap, administrators need to first

ensure that the basic operations of the school are functioning well.

Penny Bender Sebring and Anthony S. Bryk's research with the Chicago Public Schools looked at the principal's role and found that the principals of what they called "productive schools" – those elementary schools that showed significant gains in student achievement – all shared four characteristics with regard to their leadership style. The principals all had an inclusive, facilitative orientation; promoted an institutional focus on student learning; provided efficient management; and relied on a combination of pressure and support in motivating others (Sebring & Bryk, 2000). This fits with other research around leaders who embrace shared decision-making. For example, Ferguson asserts that the principal bringing two teachers to a training and then sharing the work of introducing a new initiative to the faculty is particularly effective (Ferguson, 2007). Sebring and Bryk found that the best leaders "look for opportunities to bring parents, teachers and other staff members into leadership positions because they know that change requires the commitment, talent and energy of many individuals" (Sebring & Bryk, 2000, p. 441).

The current school culture plays a role in the extent to which a leader can apply these characteristics, however. Researching organizational leadership, M. Trice Harrison and Janice M. Beyer looked at the difference between leaders who are cultural innovators and those who maintain current culture, finding that followers tend to accept innovators in times of crisis, while they prefer a cultural

maintenance approach at other times (M. Harrison & Beyer, 1991). With regard to the principal's ability to make structural changes, this finding seems especially relevant. It follows that until the stakeholders in a school see racial achievement gaps as a crisis, both leaders and followers may not actually implement the needed reforms.

Harrison and Beyer found that workers define structural changes as either major changes or minor adjustments. This definition does not necessarily come from objective analysis of the change, but rather, they found that "alterations that go beyond experience of members of a culture are likely to be defined and treated by them as major, while those that they can implement with existing expertise are likely to be defined and treated as minor and adjustments to the status quo" (M. Harrison & Beyer, 1991, p. 165). This has significant implications for principals. Because understanding another racial group's experience is often not often something that can be done from one's existing expertise, it follows that efforts at expanding cultural competency among teachers are likely to be felt by them as major, and thus may be resisted unless they feel a sense of crisis driving them toward change.

However, Thomas Guskey asserts that with important reforms, leaders cannot wait for teachers to all "buy in" before moving forward. Sometimes, teachers buy in only after using a new strategy and seeing the resulting impact on student achievement (Guskey, 1982). Teachers need to see a balance between external

control and their own autonomy, (Ferguson, 2007), so the principal must carefully create the conditions through which teachers will be able to learn and implement meaningful reforms.

As Corbett shows with teachers, the messages that educators send their students – intentionally or not – clearly make a big impact on student achievement. This is a theme of the research around closing racial achievement gaps that principals should be aware of. Theodore Cross asserts that: “Reputations – good or bad – cannot be sustained indefinitely if confronted by objective evidence to the contrary. This means that it is possible to improve the lot of Black people by publishing facts that directly and unqualifiedly refute what Whites believe about them” (Cross, 1996, p. 110). This takes the notion of articulating high expectations as an important path to student success a step further. The principal has a unique position from which to “publish” or convey messages throughout a school.

Cross articulates a harsh conclusion: “It is both insulting and regrettable that the upward progress of Blacks should be controlled by the opinions of Whites. Yet that is an almost inevitable consequence in a society in which virtually all economic, political, media, and educational power is in the hands of White people.” (Cross, 1996, p. 110). This of course includes White teachers, who can be uncomfortable talking about race (Singleton, 2006).

Principals must attend not just to curriculum and instruction, but also to teachers' opinions and the resulting messages received by students. Research shows that the principal impacts student achievement indirectly, but meaningfully. Principals choose how to support teachers and help them to grow; determine how to approach reform and create the right context for it; and promote positive messages to staff, students and the wider school community about what the school believes about its students.

Talking About Race

This literature review found much more empirical data around causes of racial achievement gaps than solutions. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the research base around factors that actually work to close achievement gaps is slim. However, there is some contemporary empirical research that is of note. This section reviews both the conventional wisdom and the actual research base, both from and beyond the education field.

Conventional Wisdom. Much of what has been published and recommended for closing racial achievement gaps does not have an empirical research base behind it. As Boykin and Noguera note, "Too much educational practice is based on hearsay, on what sounds good, on how things have always been done..."

(Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. 37).

For example, a book called Talking about Race: Alleviating the Fear was just published in the spring of 2013, edited by Steven Grineski, Julie Landsman, and Robert Simmons III. This is a collection of essays by teachers, students, and others that look at experiences of talking about race in schools. It is designed for teachers, to help them navigate the experience of talking about race in schools. And while there is great value in hearing others' stories – in fact, this is at the heart of equity work – it is not empirical research. Similarly, books like White Women Getting Real about Race (2013) are stepping up to the issue of the need for educators to talk about race, but are doing so with stories rather than research.

There is much in the popular press – especially with the rise of online discussion forums – from all different sides of the current education reform debate. In a non-academic setting like the Barnes and Noble website, the average non-educator must wade through titles like: Teaching Baby Gangsters and Inventing Better Schools to find real research about closing racial achievement gaps in America.

Many of the well-known titles are books about ideas, not research. Popular books about education reform like Paul Tough's How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character (2012) and Tony Wagner's Creating Innovators: The Making of Young People Who Will Change the World (2012), have become best sellers even beyond the education community. They are

promoted for their new ideas and documentation of cutting-edge programs, and that is enough for a large readership. But while they contain interesting and worthy ideas, and individual programs and successes are cited, they do not purport to present a solid research base.

Colormute. There has been, however, some solid research about talking about race emerging in recent years. Mica Pollock, a researcher at Harvard University, documented the concept of “colormuteness” in two studies, in which she showed how Americans have difficulty talking about race both within and beyond the school setting. The first study, from a school in California, showed the ways in which both students and adults avoid talking about race, especially in interracial settings (Pollock, 2004). The second, from her work at a regional office of the federal Office of Civil Rights (OCR), documented the norm that “harms to children of color should not be discussed”. She found that: “OCR’s habit of deleting specific discussions of harm to children of color was one version of what I call colormuteness in contemporary American education: the active refusal to talk in racial terms about patterns, policies, practices, and disparities” (Pollock, 2008a, p. 98). Pollock shows how these patterns of American discourse hamper our abilities to create meaningful reform for students. (Pollock, 2008a, 2008b).

Karin Chenoweth has studied individual schools that are “beating the odds” and has documented what’s happening in schools that are successfully decreasing achievement gaps (Chenoweth, 2007, 2009). This work informs the debates

about closing achievement gaps with real-world examples of success, and Chenoweth draws conclusions about what educators can do to replicate the success of the schools she profiles.

Recent research by Claude Steele is also relevant to this topic. Steele asserts that for schools to produce academic outcomes in which race is not impacting achievement, educators must look at how racial identity and stereotypes can be reinforced within schools. This is an argument for talking about race in a “colormute” educational culture. He also finds that “narrative interventions” in which the “I don’t belong” narratives of students of color are interrupted with intentional strategies, can lead to a positive spiral of better grades leading to a better sense of belonging, which leads to continued achievement (Steele, 2010, p. 166).

Perhaps the most relevant new research to be published during the course of this study was Creating the Opportunity to Learn, (2011), from Wade Boykin and Pedro Noguera, who present an evidence-based framework of what they found, in their review of published studies, to be working to close achievement gaps, and how it can be replicated by schools and teachers (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

Beyond the Education Field. The persistence of racism in America is an issue in and beyond its schools. Faye Harrison, an anthropology researcher at the University of South Carolina, asserts that:

“Contrary to the belief some hold that the conditions have already been created for a color-blind status quo, this problem [of] ‘the color line’ will be accompanying us into the next century and millennium, manifesting itself in historically specific new ways (F. Harrison, 1998).

She goes on to note racism's persistence and “ability to reinvent itself in new postcolonial and postmodern forms”, which include ways that actually deny or disguise its continued existence. There is no question that this makes achievement gaps very challenging for educators to address at the school level.

But the intractable nature of racism in America is only one facet of the challenge. Our fear of being considered racist is not just about racism’s persistence in American culture. It is also about the nature of fear itself. Brené Brown is a social work professor and a leading researcher in the areas of shame, authenticity and belonging. She asserts that the inclination to avoid tough conversations is “symptomatic of our cultural fears. We don’t want to be uncomfortable” (Brown, 2010, p. 35). It is not just the topic of race that we avoid. We naturally avoid all difficult topics. But, she asserts, we should be talking about them instead:

If we want to engage with the world from a place of worthiness, we have to talk about the things that get in the way – especially shame, fear, and vulnerability (Brown, 2010, p. 36).

This is an area of research that is not commonly shared and discussed in education, but appears to be relevant to the work of overcoming the fear of being considered racist and learning culturally competent instruction.

Conclusion

“A provocative question I’m often asked is ‘Are you saying all Whites are racist?’ All White people, intentionally or unintentionally, do benefit from racism. A more relevant question is what are White people as individuals doing to interrupt racism?” - Beverly Daniel Tatum (Tatum, 1997, p. 11)

The literature review shows clearly that the differences in academic achievement between Black and White students in America are a problem, and this problem has identifiable causes both institutional and individual. The individual causes are certainly easier to address than the institutional, because they are more in the purview of school- level educators. This much is clear. The question that is yet unanswered is at the intersection of the two: to what extent can talking about race, i.e. looking at and understanding institutional racism, help teachers do the more practical (individual) work on closing racial achievement gaps?

The literature is solid on the assertion that teachers’ attitudes can directly impact student achievement. The teacher attitude that seems to be most closely associated with high achievement by students of color is summarized by Dick Corbett: “All students can learn, and it’s my job to see that they do” (Corbett, 2002, p. 1-2). This means that White teachers can effectively teach Black students, but they have to believe that they can, and also believe that their Black

students are able to reach high standards along with the White students, no matter how many hurdles are in their way. This presents a challenge that was best articulated by Admiral James Stockdale, now commonly known in business literature as the Stockdale Paradox: “You must retain faith that you can prevail to greatness in the end, while retaining the discipline to confront the brutal facts of your current reality” (Collins, 2001, p. 86). For educators, this means looking hard at factors like institutional racism, while maintaining the faith that we can make a difference at the school level. Literature speaks much less on the subject of how teachers make sense of this challenge in the context of addressing racial achievement gaps, and I think it will be interesting to explore.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues that “Changes in systems of domination and their accompanying ideologies are never accomplished by racial dialogues... education, or ‘moral reform’ alone,” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 184) and gives “workshops on racism” as an example of this. Certainly, talk is always only a first step, and must eventually be accompanied by action. He further asserts that the goal must be “equality of results” not just “equality of opportunity” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 184), which, even in the era of NCLB, is not a common way of looking at the problem of racial achievement gaps and racism within American educational systems.

It seems that the great fear that many White Americans have of being called racist is in itself a cultural barrier, in that the taboo makes it easy to avoid the

issue of race, and hard to engage in anti-racist work. This concept is presented in several published works, but without a real empirical research base behind it (Tatum, 2007; Singleton, 2006). Conventional wisdom holds that talking about race is complicated in America; talking about it in the context of Black students' underachievement is even harder, and talking about the systemic ways that White privilege perpetuates achievement gaps is downright painful for many teachers (Singleton, 2006). For those who have believed that the American system is one of meritocracy, looking at racism as a system of advantage based on race can be very uncomfortable (Tatum, 1997). Singleton proposes that experiencing this discomfort is actually a prerequisite for meaningful conversation about race and racial achievement gaps (Singleton, 2006). Although this assertion does not appear to have been empirically studied, I believe it is worthy of further consideration.

For my dissertation, I would like to explore the experiences of teachers who have participated in professional development activities that included talking about race with colleagues, to see what impact this may be having. I wonder what happens to teachers throughout the process. What barriers do they face? What is learned? How does the learning impact classroom practice? What are the implications for professional development for other schools?

The metro area in which the study was conducted is a good context for this exploration right now. There are many city and suburban districts and schools

whose teachers are engaging in a program of “courageous conversations” around racial achievement gaps through two consortiums of districts, which have hired Glenn Singleton and the Pacific Educational Group (PEG), Heather Hackman, the National Equity Project, and others to work extensively with its member schools over the last five years. Singleton and his colleagues focus on talking about race as a way to move forward with the work of closing racial achievement gaps. They assert not only that educators need to focus on race specifically, without poverty, language or parenting excuses involved, but also that teachers talking with colleagues about these issues, in the “courageous conversations” format, and then acting to implement culturally appropriate curriculum and instructional strategies, is the best path toward increasing achievement for students of color (Singleton, 2006). Other experts are split on the concept, and none seem to have actually researched it. Gloria Ladson-Bilings, in her introduction to Singleton’s book on the subject, endorses the idea. Pedro Noguera holds that may be a good idea, but is not a requirement for anti-racist work (Noguera, 2009). I would like to find out.

My research questions are:

1. What are teachers’ experiences talking about race in the context of racial achievement gaps?
2. In what ways has talking about race impacted teacher practice?

I am also interested in the lessons that can be learned about how to structure conversations about race most productively for teachers, but this is a secondary consideration for this study.

There is no reason to expect that the strong emphasis on standardized testing in education is going to change in the coming years, and the current context of judging schools by looking at the test scores of racial subgroups has many teachers and administrators highly interested in “closing the gap”. Because this paper has found that the empirical base around racial achievement gaps is much stronger on the subject of causes than solutions, this dissertation will add to the body of research around solutions at a time that it will be useful to K-12 educators.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

This study relies primarily on individual interviews to access data about specific experiences of teachers, teacher leaders and administrators in schools that have participated in professional development activities around racial equity and involving talking about race. Four secondary schools in two districts were identified. After data collection was complete in those districts, an additional district with different demographics was added for purpose of comparison in a different context. Observation and artifacts were used to support the findings from the interviews.

A qualitative methodology was chosen for this study for two main reasons. First, learning how teachers experience professional development activities talking about race requires an orientation toward how people construct meaning from their experiences, and this is the nature of qualitative research. According to Sharan Merriam: “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009). This study proposed to learn how teachers experience one facet of their working world, and to discover what actions they take based on that experience. A qualitative methodology was best suited for that purpose.

Second, where quantitative research is deductive in nature, qualitative research is primarily inductive (Merriam, 2009), which is important for this study. Because it is looking at experiences that have been minimally researched, the point is not to deductively test a hypothesis, but to build a theory from the data that is collected that will speak to the importance (or lack thereof) of talking about race to address racial achievement gaps.

Further, while one may be able to quantify some changes in classroom practice, the qualitative approach would be required first in order to identify the types of changes that could then be looked for in a quantitative study. Only a qualitative method will yield changes in classroom teaching unanticipated by the researcher. “Qualitative researchers build toward theory from observations” (Merriam, 2009) rather than proving or disproving a hypothesis. Specifically, a quantitative survey would use particular questions about teaching practice that would have to be generated from some knowledge about what the researcher expected to find. Because there was no prior research to suggest possible outcomes, this study was not beholden to any assumptions about what the data would reveal. However, now that the types of changes teachers made have been discovered, implications for further study do include the possibility of a quantitative study.

Where there are many interrelated factors, this study is less interested in cause-and-effect than in identifying multiple perspectives and revealing the different facets of a complicated phenomenon. The experience of teachers talking about

race is necessarily complex and multi-layered, lending itself much more to a qualitative approach to understanding the experience (Van Manen, 1990).

Merriam notes that qualitative research is often undertaken when existing theory fails to adequately explain a phenomenon, or when there is a lack of theory to address it (Merriam, 2009). This is certainly the case with this study, leading to the adoption of a grounded theory method. Grounded theory approaches the subject with an openness toward what will be learned from the data, rather than bringing any prior expectations to it (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Grounded theory provides a means through which to construct a descriptive theory in a social context (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The “social context” in this study can be considered both the professional development experience – a group of teachers working together in large or small groups – and also the larger school and school community, which bring forces to bear on the professional development experience and subsequent actions teachers take in their classrooms. Corbin and Strauss assert that a grounded theory “should explain as well as describe” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) meaning that it’s not enough to *know* what is happening – the result of the study should bring some *understanding* of events as well.

The grounded theory approach provided for this through two important principles that guided me to choose this approach. The first relates to change. According to

Corbin and Strauss: “Since phenomena are not conceived of as static but as continually changing in response to evolving conditions, an important component of the method is to build change, through process, into the method” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This study grappled with change at two levels: the changing demographics of schools that drive educators to look at racial achievement gaps, and the potential changes in teacher practice that are the intended outcomes of professional development around racial equity. The grounded theory method was best suited to this study because it “seeks not only to uncover relevant conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and the consequences of their actions” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

In addition, grounded theory is based on the principle that both strict determinism and nondeterminism are rejected stances. Rather, “Actors are seen as having, though not always utilizing, the means of controlling their destinies by their responses to conditions” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This means that the method expects that teachers are making choices, based on their perceptions of the options before them, with regard to closing racial achievement gaps. The hope of professional development is that teachers gain new knowledge and skills that are then applied in practice to increase student achievement. Ideally, this study can capture not only what happens in the professional development experience, but additionally what happens within the teacher’s individual choice-making process and how the experience translates (or doesn’t) into changes in practice.

This study approached the research without a predetermined theoretical perspective. Something about Critical Race Theory and Cultural Competence Theory inform the research, neither provides a theoretical framework from which to approach the work. Starting with no predetermined theoretical perspective minimized potential bias, and facilitated letting the data guide the framework for the study, treating all information gathered as data, and generating new theory that is grounded in the research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The study did not set out to generalize to a larger population; indeed, it was undertaken with the expectation that the work these teachers are doing is *not* representative of educators in America. The inductive, concept-generating approach of grounded theory facilitated coming to an understanding of how teachers experience and are impacted by the activities of talking about race with colleagues, leading to the generation of new theory around the potential outcomes of experiencing the discomfort of talking about race, which is a relatively new experience for American teachers.

As codes, concepts and themes emerged through the process, it became apparent not only that the original research questions were being answered in the affirmative, but that there was a saturation of evidence around two additional concepts – the fear of being called racist as a roadblock to the work, and how principals helped teachers overcome it – which came together as one unified

theory of how the context of fear actually creates opportunities for deep change for teachers and administrators.

Another method that was considered but not used was case study. Although utilizing four different schools and looking at them as specific contexts opens the door to the use of a structured case study approach, this is not appropriate for this study. Yin asserts that, “The case study is the method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context” (Yin 2003), like a program or project. Although context certainly plays a role, it is secondary to the work each teacher does in processing the information and experiences, which will happen both during and outside of the professional development context. Case studies have generally been used to document and analyze implementation processes (Yin 2003). If the topic under study were the professional development itself, and the researcher wanted to study the implementation of a certain method of adult education, then a descriptive case study might have been appropriate. Case study is also being used more and more as an evaluative tool (Yin 2003) which is not the purpose of this study. Similarly, the explanatory case study could have been used if we knew that professional development around racial equity either was or was not producing a particular outcome, and we wanted to find out *why* (Yin 2003). But none of these situations represent the intention of this study, so the grounded theory method, relying primarily on individual interviews, was selected.

Context

The study is looking at the results of participating in a particular set of professional development activities around talking about race that all study participants engaged with over several years. Most of the activities were based on the work of Glenn Singleton and Pacific Educational Group (PEG), which conducted trainings for participants over several years through a cultural collaborative that involved twelve local school districts. The participating districts also worked with some other external providers as well.

The general framework was a train-the-trainer model. First, PEG invited districts to create a District Equity Leadership Team (DELT), which included the superintendent, principals, and other district leaders. This group was expected to attend four training sessions over the course of a year before any training was brought to the schools. Then at the end of that first year, each principal organized an Equity Team (E-Team) at their school. For the next few years, the E-Team members, mostly teachers, participated in four day-long training sessions spread out over the course of the school year. Each training included both reflective activities for their own personal growth, and activities to bring back and use with their faculties.

PEG activities used by most or all six schools in this study included the following.

See Appendix A for Definitions of Terms.

- Learning the “Four Agreements” and “Six Conditions” for having “Courageous Conversations” about institutional racism and racial achievement gaps;
- Writing one’s racial autobiography about early memories of race, and sharing it in a small group setting;
- Reading and discussing articles such as “But That’s Just Good Teaching!” by Gloria Ladson-Billings;
- Discussing personal experiences with race in partners using the “Knee-to-knee Protocol”;
- Hearing colleagues of color share some of their personal experiences with race;
- Completing the “White Privilege Checklist”;
- Interviewing a friend of color – not from one’s school – using the White Privilege Checklist, and discussing the results with colleagues;
- Talking in departments about how to make curriculum and instruction more culturally relevant, using PEG’s “Four R’s Checklist” to focus on rigor, relationships, relevance and realness.

Sampling and Selection

First level: districts. This study utilizes three levels of sampling. This first level is the selection of the participating school district. This selection was based upon the extent of implementation of the work that the district schools had done in the area of interest at the time the study commenced. It was less of a challenge than

expected to find contacts at levels high enough to approve the study but close enough to know how much of the professional development work has been done. It was anticipated that gaining entry into the field would be facilitated by the great interest that those in leadership have in this topic of study. Because they are interested in seeing the results of their investments, leaders in two districts offered access at the outset, though one of them was not far enough along in the process to be used. The second district was procured through a proposal to the director of curriculum and instruction, and was approved. So conditions were met at the outset of the study to utilize two secondary schools from each of two districts, which was ideal for purposes of anonymity and providing good exposure to the field, though using only two schools in just one district would have been adequate if that was all that access permitted.

The initial study was conducted in two suburban districts that had engaged in these professional development sessions consistently over several years. The two districts are both second-ring suburbs of the largest city in the state. Both districts are low-poverty, high-achieving, mostly-White districts, with numbers of students of color and students in poverty increasing in recent years. In fact, the percent of students of color more than doubled in the last decade in each of the schools studied.

After data collection, coding and analysis were complete, a third district, which had also engaged in the same professional development over several years, was

added to test the themes in a different context. This district is a first-ring suburb of the same city, but a less affluent, more working-class area, which experienced a significant racial demographic shift a few years prior to the others. Twenty years ago, this was also an almost all-White suburb. The student body in its secondary schools is now over 60% students of color and from poverty.

All three districts have just one high school. Two of the districts also have only one middle school or junior high; one of the districts has two, but only one of those schools participated in the study. The data below is about the schools participating in the study.

Table 2: School Demographics

| Percent Students of Color in Each School | | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 |
| District A: HS | 10% | 14% | 23% |
| District A: JH/MS | 10% | 15% | 25% |
| District B: HS | 13% | 22% | 31% |
| District B: JH/MS | 13% | 19% | 30% |
| District C: HS | 26% | 41% | 58% |
| District C: JH/MS | 28% | 48% | 65% |

Because of the very personal nature of the topic, the focus of this study was on the teacher or administrator, not the school, although the study also looked at the processes and organizational influences that were unique to the context through which each teacher experienced the activities. It was anticipated that several teachers from one school, though they participated in the same activities through

the same leadership, may have very different experiences based on what they personally brought to and took away from the activities, and this certainly proved to be the case. So the study looked primarily at the individual experiences of the different teachers, while still including the school context that gave rise to them.

Second level: participants. The second level of sampling involved the number and selection of teachers to interview. Interview studies tend to use about 15 subjects, +/- 10, to arrive at a number that is the best use of available resources. Too few subjects yields too little information to be useful; too many goes beyond the point of saturation and wastes resources without learning anything new (Kvale 1996). For this study, it was anticipated that a total of twenty teachers, about five from each of four sites, would provide enough data to generate grounded theory. In fact, since the study was approved for 30 interviews, and the topic is so complex, 29 interviews were conducted before saturation was reached.

Selection of teachers was done randomly, so participants would be as representative a sample as possible. The original plan was that all full time teachers who have worked at the site for at least one year would be invited to participate via email and paper invitations. From those who volunteered, participation of teachers who had two or more years of experience with the work would be prioritized, and then about five teachers from each of the four sites would be randomly selected. However, in the prospectus meeting, the committee

determined that it would be better to randomly select five to ten teachers from each site to invite, and then invite more as needed until enough agreed to participate.

In addition to teachers, a principal and professional development leader at each site were also interviewed. The professional development lead's role varied at different sites; some were classroom teachers, while others were administrators or other licensed support staff like counselors. The selection of sites was dependent on cooperation from the people in these roles. In one district, there were two middle level/junior high schools, and only one principal agreed to have their school participate. In the other two districts, the principals of both the middle level/junior high school and the high school agreed to participate.

Of the 29 semi-structured interviews conducted at six schools, 23 were with classroom teachers, while 6 were with administrators or licensed support staff. More than half of the teachers originally invited to participate declined or did not reply. Although the makeup of the respondents may have been affected by who chose to participate, the group ended up looking demographically very much like the staff in the schools.

Table 3 shows the demographics of the participants, below.

Table 3: Participant Demographics

| Category | Teachers | Admin/ Support | Total |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| Middle School | 11 | 3 | 14 |
| High School | 12 | 3 | 15 |
| Male | 10 | 5 | 15 |
| Female | 13 | 1 | 14 |
| Of Color | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| White | 21 | 4 | 25 |
| Less than 10 years teaching | 8 | 0 | 8 |
| 10+ years teaching | 15 | 6 | 21 |

To obtain consent, each selected participant returned a signed content form, stating that they were aware of the purpose of the study, parameters for anonymity, the confidentiality of information they share, their right to withdraw at any time, and the agreement to provide them with a transcription of their interview to verify the accuracy of their statements. Given the enthusiasm of district leaders for the research, there do not appear to be any risks involved with participation that might lead to teachers being afraid to participate, beyond the sensitive nature of the topic itself.

Third level: concepts. The third level of sampling is less concrete, but no less important. Corbin and Strauss assert that, in grounded theory, “representativeness of concepts, not of persons, is crucial” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), and so in grounded theory, representativeness and consistency are achieved through theoretical sampling. As concepts are identified and coded, they can then be sought as data continues to be collected, with an eye toward

learning how consistently and under what conditions they may be found (Corbin). Because the relevance of each concept must be demonstrated by being repeatedly present – in interviews, observations, and/or documents – this helps to mitigate any researcher bias. As concepts arose repeatedly, the protocol questions were adjusted for future interviews, until saturation was reached on several concepts. See Appendix B for Interview Protocols.

Data Collection

Individual interviews. The primary data source for this study was individual interviews with teachers. This method was most appropriate for this topic for several reasons. Because of the sensitive nature of the research topic, the methods must ensure privacy and anonymity for the participants.

The challenge for the qualitative researcher is not just to discover information, but also to “understand the meaning of what the interviewees say” (Kvale, 1996), which requires observation – of body language, tone, etc – as well as attention to what is actually said. This creates a tension between two opposing requirements. First, the researcher must bring a “deliberate naiveté” in order to be open to new and unexpected phenomena, and to set a stage from which the participants will be revealing. But simultaneously, the researcher must have some knowledge of and sensitivity to the topic being researched in order to capture the “nuances and depths” of the themes expressed (Kvale, 1996).

The interviews with leadership were conducted prior to the teacher interviews, to provide context for the teacher interviews. Both the principal and the person identified by the principal as having primary responsibility for implementation of the professional development activities were interviewed at each of the original schools selected. These interviews provided context about what professional development activities the teachers have experienced, and how leadership of these activities is structured at that school. They also provided points of comparison among the schools, so that interviews focused on the specific activities that multiple faculties engaged with. The data revealed that all six schools had engaged in many of the same activities, as all were sending E-Teams to the same PEG training, from which they brought back training for their faculties, during the years studied.

Utilizing at least four schools ensured that I could randomly select enough participants for a meaningful study, and provided a great measure of anonymity for participants. Given the time constraints of using only one researcher, more than five teachers from each site were anticipated to be too much to cover in one school year. Because of the unanticipated nature of some of the results, it was determined that continuing data collection in a third district with different demographics would be of value. In this way, the results were tested in a different context, to learn the extent to which the themes were appearing when the school context was significantly different.

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that it is not an open conversation, but neither is it a formally constructed questionnaire. This is best for grounded theory, because the interview must be open to unanticipated ideas (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The structure contained some specifics, like examples of activities that leadership have stated the staff participated in, which aided in identifying themes across the interviews. But broader, open-ended questions were at the heart of each interview, so that what was most resonant with the participant had a chance to surface (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

An initial set of questions was planned in advance, and then modified over the course of the data collection process. The grounded theory process provides for questions to be modified on an ongoing basis, building on data as it is collected since there is little existing data from prior studies. Change is at the heart of the research questions, and this method will best facilitate capturing that change.

To give participants maximum anonymity and facilitate honest responses, interviews were conducted with one participant at a time, with participants being offered the option of meeting at a coffee shop of their own choice if they preferred. Several found it more convenient to meet in their own classroom or office at school. Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed by the researcher.

Artifacts and observations. Artifacts and observations were also included as a concurrent embedded approach within the primary work of the interviews. It is expected in grounded theory that artifacts may be discovered during the data collection process that could not be anticipated at the outset, but would be used as appropriate (Creswell, 2009), and similarly that it is unknown at the outset just what types of artifacts may be available at all. The use of artifacts in this study is more a concurrent embedded approach than triangulation, in that the artifacts are necessarily secondary in importance and analyzed at a different level than the interviews were (Creswell, 2009). Commonly used with mixed methods approaches, triangulation is a strategy through which the researcher collects data in different ways concurrently, and compares the results. This strategy is used to offset the weaknesses of any one method through the strengths of another (Creswell, 2009). In this study, because interview was a strong method, observations and artifacts provided some verification of the data collected from the interviews, but were not needed at the level of triangulation.

Although observation does not provide the depth that interviews can, it does provide for breadth in that it involves many more participants. Observations were made of both large group faculty meetings and small group E-Team meetings, including one leadership meeting with an external provider coaching the group. At least one observation per school site was requested. However, only four were actually completed. Whole-faculty staff development sessions were observed in two schools, in which the staff of one school discussed their approach to a

change in assessments, and in which another staff participated in a fishbowl activity discussion of equity prompts. E-Team planning meetings were observed in two schools. One principal vetoed the invitation that the E-Team lead had extended to observe an E-Team meeting there.

Artifacts were collected in the following categories: staff development plans and activities; lesson plans and curriculum from teachers; teacher survey results; building climate data; and student achievement data. Staff development plans were collected from four of the six sites to confirm the activities that the participants had engaged in. Lesson plans from some of the teachers provided corroborative data about classroom changes, but were not obtained from all participants.

The use of surveys was also considered, but was not appropriate for this study. Because little was known at the outset about the answers to the research questions, creating a survey would presuppose too much about what the participants' answers might be. Also, an element of candor would be missing with the use of paper instead of face-to-face conversation, and the opportunity to read facial expressions and body language would be lost. Finally, because the data being collected for research question number one “resides primarily in teachers' minds and hearts,” it makes sense to access it through the interaction of conversation, which required interviews (Van Manen, 1990).

Data Coding and Analysis

With the grounded theory approach, data analysis happens as a part of the data collection process. In fact, the analysis begins with the collection of the first bit of data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Several steps were utilized, and only the last step involves post-interview analysis by the researcher alone. The first two steps happened within the interview, in that the participants bring some analysis to the data within the description of the experience. It was expected and did bear out that participants spotted patterns or relationships within the data as they were describing experiences (Kvale, 1996). With follow-up questioning, participants were generally very reflective about how their own experience and actions compared with their perceptions of their colleagues, for example, and in assigning meaning to their experiences and resulting actions. In addition, grounded theory expects that the interviewer will interpret meaning in the data and reflect that back to the participant for confirmation or correction during the course of the interview (Kvale, 1996). This is an important component of the semi-structured interview, so that the researcher is not locked into the interview protocol, but is able to probe with follow-up questions as needed within the interviews.

Analysis of data in a grounded theory method happens as the constant comparative method is applied to data as it is gathered, whether from observations, interviews, or documents (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The “joint” collection, coding and analysis of data – happening in a circular pattern rather

than a linear pattern of completing collection before beginning coding or analysis – allows what is learned along the way to inform the rest of the process (Glaser 1967) which is important when so little is known at the outset. Glaser and Strauss propose that the “definite separation of each operation hinders generation of theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, approaching the operations jointly, or in a continuous loop, allowed not only for fuller understanding of the data, but also for better data to be collected, in that the researcher gets a sense along the way of what else to ask about. For this reason, teachers from different schools in the original two districts were interviewed in random order from all different schools, rather than starting with one school, interviewing all the teachers from that site, and then moving on to the next site. In this way, it was anticipated that patterns across sites would emerge earlier and could inform the process for the remaining interviews, and this was borne out.

Similarly, when a third district was added, teachers from both schools there were interviewed in random order. For the second round of interviews, questions were related to the themes that has already appeared in the data, rather than just the open-ended questions used in the first round. Appendix B contains the original set of questions proposed, the questions as they evolved throughout the first round, and the questions used in the second round.

For the first year of data collection, a majority of interviews were transcribed myself, which Raymond L. Gorden maintains is important to ensure that nothing is lost. If the recording does not pick up every word, for example, the interviewer may recall what was said, where an external transcription would leave a hole (Gorden, 1975). Further, spending a large amount of time with the data helps patterns to emerge. In the second year, to save time, permission was granted to have the interviews professionally transcribed. However, I then reviewed each transcript carefully while listening to the tape, so that nothing was lost, and corrections were made as needed before transcripts were sent to participants for approval. In this way, the experience of listening to the tape was preserved while saving time.

Transcripts were initially coded, and then reviewed and re-coded as new codes and categories emerged through later interviews. The joint coding process began with open coding, breaking down the data by labeling key illustrative quotes for the purpose of comparing and contrasting what was found, and to generate insights and concepts. This was done initially in a chart in a Word document, into which quotes were placed with labels as to which participant and school they came from, and labels as to what the quote represented. Ideas were grouped together and similarly labeled, which began to develop concepts or themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

As data collection progressed and it became apparent that interviews were generating a significant amount of data, HyperResearch software was purchased to manage the volume. At this stage, axial coding was used to create categories and subcategories from the concepts generated. The software allows for re-labeling of codes as they become categories and subcategories. This process was ongoing over time as each subsequent interview confirmed and strengthened existing concepts, and as new ideas were presented. At the end of data analysis, 55 unique codes remained in use in the study.

Member checks were utilized with participant approval of the transcripts.

Participants were asked via email if the transcript was an accurate representation of their thoughts, and invited to make any corrections or additions right into the transcript. Most participants approved it “as is” while a few added short clarifications. In addition, I met a second time with selected teachers from each of the three districts to share the concepts that were being generated and get feedback from them.

Finally, as saturation was reached and it was apparent that a significant number of themes were represented in all six schools, selective coding was used to eliminate those that were not representative across all schools. The 31 themes that were saturated across the majority of participants’ experiences are shown in the Themes Chart in Appendix C, along with the number of respondents citing each. Chapters 4 and 5 explain the results that were found across all six schools.

The themes represented both results and conclusions from the data. The three most significant conclusions unified into one concept around which the grounded theory took shape. Delimiting and writing the theory happened as a part of writing the conclusions in Chapter 6, which explains the newly generated grounded theory in detail. In true grounded theory, Glaser explains that:

Subsequent data collection and coding is thereby delimited to that which is relevant to the emergent conceptual framework. This selective data collection and analysis continues until the researcher has sufficiently elaborated and integrated the core variable, its properties, and its theoretical connections to other relevant categories. (Glaser & Holton, 2004).

Because interviews were conducted with 29 different participants, there was constant movement back and forth among the different kinds of coding, and the codes were revised several times as data was re-labeled to reflect new information and understandings that arose through the analysis. This process included theoretical sampling, which delimits the study by focusing new data with the core concepts in mind. 24 of the 55 codes were left out of the chapters on results and findings, because they did not appear in all six schools, or did not speak to the core theory that arose.

In addition, this differentiation between core and incidental themes controlled for the expectation that some of what is important to teachers about closing racial achievement gaps may not actually be related to the professional development work of talking about race with colleagues and research questions. As data was coded, the focus was on that data which was most directly relevant to the teachers' experiences with the racial equity work, and other data, while coded, was left out of the discussion of results.

In this study, all of the data presented is relevant to the research questions and to the theory. Some of what is presented in the results chapters could potentially have been delimited to truly focus on the theory. Instead, I chose present a wider swath of the results, in order to fully answer the research questions, and to give readers a clearer picture of what happened in these schools as a result of the equity work.

Protecting Research Subjects. Several practices were employed to protect the anonymity of research participants. Teachers from more than one school in each district and from more than one district were interviewed, so it is not apparent which school or district specific information came from. This was critical. Names of participants have been changed so that none are identified, and other identifying information – like teaching assignment – was only provided where it would not identify the teacher. Otherwise, general labels like “high school

teacher” were utilized. There was no case where unique identifying factors were relevant enough to merit publishing.

The study provides a level of anonymity that is not present in district- or school-level data collection attempts, so it was built with an expectation that the teachers who had a strong positive or negative opinion about the work would want to participate for emotional reasons, and that would provide enough potential participants. Although it is more common to create circumstances of anonymity in order to increase honesty, and this is important here, it was also my hope that the level of anonymity provided by the study might increase participation as well. Racial achievement gaps have been at the forefront of education reform since the advent of NCLB reporting requiring scores to be reported by racial categories, and race relations in America have also been a topic of great interest since the election of President Obama. It was expected that participants would desire a safe venue through which to express thoughts on these matters. Unfortunately, this did not seem to bear out. It took multiple rounds of solicitation to find enough participants in three of the four original schools.

It was not clear at the outset how leadership’s encouragement to participate might impact my ability to earn the trust of the teacher subjects, or impact participation rates. It was hoped that encouragement to participate would yield a high number of positive responses to invitations, without anyone feeling compelled to participate. Each principal informed their staff that a researcher was

working with their school, and that the research was supported by the district. They also provided me with the name(s) of professional development leads who were involved with the equity sessions. Beyond that, principals were not involved in participant selection.

Conclusion

The Grounded Theory methodology served this study well. The constant comparative method of data collection and analysis allowed me to apply what was learned in earlier interviews to the next interviews to look for common themes once they started to appear in multiple settings. After data collection and analysis was complete in the original two districts, applying a third district with different demographics allowed me to test the themes in a different context. This allowed for a deep saturation point to be reached, so that the results and conclusions presented in the next three chapters come from themes that were present in all six schools.

Chapter 4: Changing the Discourse on Race – The Experience

“Race is the proverbial elephant in the parlor. We know it’s right there staring us in the face – making life uncomfortable and making it difficult for us to accomplish everything we would really like to do – but we keep pretending it isn’t.”
- Gloria Ladson-Billings (Singleton, 2006, p. x.)

Preface: The Equity Impact – One Teacher’s Story

This chapter is an account of what happens when teachers experience talking about race and White privilege in a professional context, often for the first time. Here is Daniel’s description of his introduction to equity as a high school English teacher:

I went to *Beyond Diversity* [training] and had an amazing experience the day I got back to my classroom. I got back and I was four chapters into a book called *The Last Shot*. It’s a book that takes place in Coney Island, New York in 1992. It’s a modern non-fiction class for seniors, and this reporter went to [look at] the boys in these projects, who really only had one shot out of there, which is a D1 scholarship playing basketball, what are they going through? So he went to Lincoln High School where there’s a freshman named Stephon Marbury [now a famous NBA player] and then three seniors. The reporter follows these four basketball players, and he wrote this great book about them called *The Last Shot* and we teach it in our non-fiction class.

I was four chapters into this book.... I’m walking in the classroom on Monday and I said, “All right, standard English teacher question, what’s

the theme of this book?” We’ve got 18 themes on the board in the brainstorm: dedication, perseverance, basketball, ok, American dream, good. Guess what’s not on the board? Nobody said race, not a one of the students. I have five Black kids in this class and they don’t know where I’m going with this.

I turned around and I said, “Okay well why hasn’t anybody said race?” Our building was just starting on this journey, so the students weren’t quite ready for that, and the room just electrified and everybody got uncomfortable.... When that electricity comes its like, “Okay where’s the reinforcement if this gets ugly? Have I got my posse?” I saw the five Black kids [look at each other to] do that, and I said, “Listen, I need to tell you real quick where I’ve been over the weekend and some of the things that happened.” I shared a little bit and I said, “What I learned at the conference is that up until now I’ve been really afraid to talk about race in any kind of way because it’s scary, and at the conference I learned that I need to get over that because if I can’t talk about it, I can’t do anything about it, so we’re going to talk about it. And if at any point it looks like I don’t know what I’m doing, it’s because I don’t, so bear with me.”

I turned to one of the kids and I said, “Mike, why didn’t you say race when we were brainstorming things for this book?” He’s a White kid and his skin was crawling. He said, “You just don’t talk about that.” We had a little

conversation about why don't you talk about that. I asked another girl, "Mandy, why didn't you say race?" "I didn't even think of it, it didn't even cross my mind." I was like, that's interesting, okay let's talk about that a little bit. The cover has this basketball with this big Black hand on it and you haven't thought about race at all? I had a student in the class whose name was Andre and he and I had a great relationship. I turned to him and I said, "Andre, I've noticed that you're Black." The White kids [are thinking], "oh my God, [he] called Andre Black." And Andre looked up and said, "Yeah I've noticed that too." We had to smile and laugh about it and I said, "Why didn't you bring it up?" And he says, "I don't want to have to be the one who always brings it up." It's like, there it is, okay. Andre has just graduated from [a University], he's going to be a social worker, great kid.

So I said, "All right, you don't have to be the one to bring it up, I brought it up." We continued the conversation and the awkwardness is coming down and it all ends, and everybody files out. I'm sort of in the moment, of [heart racing] ba bump ba bump, and I finally let my guard down because it's over. You stand in your room after an emotional class like that, and it's just like, whew.

Then I turn around and there's still a kid in the room. She is a Somali immigrant and she's standing there in the middle of the room, and she

walks up to me, and I'm thinking, "Oh no, what did I do?" She says, "I wanted to say race." She said, "I wanted to say race." I said, "Why didn't you?" And she said, "It's too hard." Then she turned and walked out, and I was just like, "Okay, anything I can do to make this better for a kid like that, I have to do."

Just like that, in one day, Daniel's teaching was transformed and he was on a new professional journey. Like other teachers who attended a *Beyond Diversity* workshop or participated in similar activities with their colleagues, Daniel found that once his perspective was stretched in a new direction, whether he liked that direction or not, he could not return to old ways of thinking about race, (or *not* thinking about it, as it were.)

The Experience

Asking teachers to enter into discourse about race as a step toward closing racial achievement gaps might seem simple on the surface, but in America, the topic of race is deeply complicated. The teachers interviewed for this study want their students of color to achieve at high levels. They take the gaps seriously, and every one of them is putting significant effort toward closing them. But it is a difficult, emotional, and sometimes painful journey. Confronting institutional racism and White privilege in a professional context is probably one of the most difficult things that many of these teachers have ever done.

The good news is that the results they are getting, in behavior, classroom climate, relationships, and student achievement, are highly motivating to the teachers themselves, and seem to make the hard work worth it. But the work is very hard for everyone involved.

This was learned through an almost two-year long series of one-on-one interviews with participants who had engaged in this work for at least three years. Interviews started with principals and teacher leaders to get a foundational understanding of what had transpired in that school with regard to the equity work. Then individual classroom teachers were selected randomly and invited to participate. In some of the original schools, this took more than one round of invitations before enough teachers agreed to participate. When results had become clear from the data collected in the original two districts, a third district was added for comparison in a different context. That round of interviews confirmed most of the understandings, and those themes that appeared in all six schools are included in the results reported here.

The Beginning

Teachers' responses to the initial experience of talking about race and White privilege with colleagues all fell into one of two categories: positive and negative. None of the participants were neutral. Eventually, all of the teachers interviewed who started out negative moved into the positive category, though a few of them took a long time to get there. However, they reported that this was not the case

for all of their colleagues. It is impossible to know whether this group of holdouts refused to be interviewed, or were not in the sample that were invited, or were not really holding out in the ways that their colleagues reported.

Teachers reported that, through professional development around talking about race, they did overcome the fear. This happened for most respondents through a process of experiencing discomfort, speaking their truth and working through the fear in a structured professional development context with colleagues, which will be detailed in this chapter. When leaders provided experiences that facilitated learning about White privilege and institutional racism, teachers learned to separate the notion of being a part of a racist institution from any personal blame on them as racist people.

Teachers reported three things happening after their fear of being viewed as racist lessened and the roadblock of fear moved out of the way. First, they reported changes in their beliefs about how to address racial achievement gaps. Participants also reported that conversations about racial issues, along with collaboration with their colleagues on how to address them, increased as a result of talking about race in professional development contexts. Finally, talking about race led to an increase in the courage to try new strategies in the classroom. Teachers reported making specific changes in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and other general classroom practices.

The implication in all three areas was that while fear was high, teachers could not engage in these areas with any depth. But after the fear subsided, teachers were able to engage in a more intentional and productive way. These findings are summarized in the table below:

Table 4: Results after Overcoming Fear

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Three commonly reported results when the fear of being considered racist was lessened or removed: | | |
| <p>Belief: Teachers reported changes in understandings and beliefs about how to address racial achievement gaps.</p> | <p>Conversation: Teachers engaged in conversations about achievement gaps and other issues of race, and collaborated with colleagues on how to address them.</p> | <p>Strategy: Teachers reported an increase in the courage to try new strategies in the classroom, and an increase in the implementation of such strategies.</p> |

For all respondents, their experience over the first few years of the work depended a great deal on the principal's approach to it. Where the principal took an approach of intentional engagement with an attitude of reflective humility, the faculty responded very well and engaged with less stress. Where the principal took a back seat, was intimidated, or was unenthusiastic, teachers struggled. Where the principal was too pushy or overbearing, teachers engaged, but the work slowed as soon as that principal left the school.

Illustrations: Three White Men

Like over 95% of teachers in this Midwestern state, the participants in this study were predominantly White (Boyd, 2010). Only four of the 29 participants were of color: three Black and one Latino. Beyond that, other than three participants who married someone of color and one who grew up in California, the rest of the respondents – 72% – shared that their life experience had been mostly surrounded by White people.

What does it mean to be a White teacher or principal in the age of racial achievement gaps? What is it like to realize that some of the causes of these gaps are within your control? How do we, as caring educators, process learning about institutional racism and the extent to which we are actually part of the problem? One thing is certain: we do not all approach it similarly. Here are three examples: a teacher who initially responded positively but struggled to keep the faith, one who initially responded negatively but grew over several years, and a principal who embodies the most successful administrative approach.

Daniel's Experience. Energized and excited are not words usually associated with talking about race, but they are words that Daniel uses as he describes his experiences as a teacher in professional development sessions that force him to confront White privilege and talk about institutional racism. He acknowledges that facing his own prejudices can be rough, yet he finds the work invigorating and

empowering. Daniel is a mid-career high school English teacher. He has been at his school for over ten years, and loves his work passionately. He says:

I went to the Beyond Diversity training and finally got what I'd been sort of seeking from book studies that we had in the district. Even my Human Relations class in my master's program didn't do it for me, which was to really bring me up against my own biases and show me where I'm cowardly around issues of race. That was a nice, wonderful, brutal awakening at that conference for lots of reasons. I came back and I was teaching differently the next day, talking about race in class, talking about race with colleagues, creating those conversations and really energized and excited about it.... Back then [the initiative] was building wide, and so [some] people are going: "Yes finally," myself included. And other people were just like, huh.... And you know that posture, this one, [arms crossed] "I can't believe I'm here, I didn't enlist for this...."

Daniel is reflective, and realizes that all his learning and success do not mean he is "there". In addition to reflecting on his own emotional journey through the professional development sessions at the original workshop and at school with his colleagues, Daniel found that his classroom experiences were sometimes even more powerful for shaping his own understanding of the impact of institutional racism on his students. He gives an example from a unit he has taught several times:

Other kids were saying it as they were going through [reading the literature out loud]. The N-word is rolling off White lips in front of this poor Black kid, and I had no idea that there was any problem with that. Then I wonder why he doesn't want to do his homework, or was coming late to class and doesn't really want anything to do with me. It's like I made a very unsafe environment for him. [Now] we have the conversation about what the deal is with this word. How there is no word that a Black person can say to a White person that is going to have the same impact.

Cracker, oh, ow. No, that's not going to hurt me. That is because of the racism in our society that is based on power structures that have been there for centuries. The word has centuries of history behind it. A White person saying the N-word to a Black person is like hurling a brick from a ten-story building. A Black person calling the White person a cracker is like him throwing the brick back.

Brad's Experience. On the other end of the spectrum of teachers' experiences talking about race are defensiveness, anger and fear. These come up often when talking with Brad about equity training. Brad is an early-career middle school Social Studies teacher, with less than 10 years in teaching. He frames some concerns as coming from his colleagues, but gets personal and shares his own experiences and concerns as well. He loves his work and his district, which is also his hometown. He wants to include and empower his students of color, but

he is wary of “the race conversation,” and he did not like how his district approached the initial training. He shares:

I remember the district really pushing the Equity work, that began with *Beyond Diversity* training, which, I think, as a school, really challenged a lot of teachers, and some of them got quite angry, just at the process, and by how kind of in your face it was. I don't think some people were ready to have that, that conversation yet.... I think throwing people into *Beyond Diversity* right away without any idea of what it was going to be like probably wasn't the wisest thing to do to a staff of 98% White people. It was ugly. Now I'm not saying that we shouldn't have gone, but some people were just so angry. They kind of got turned off to it. So I think, hindsight, 20/20, if they would have done some of this work before – but the system didn't exist. There was no E-Team. So I think you do the best that you can with what you have, but I think, looking back, most teachers would agree it would have been nice to know what they were talking about, at least. But it was just, you have to go, here are your two dates in the summer. We'll see you then.

One big sticking point for Brad is the push to isolate race as a factor impacting racial achievement gaps. He doesn't buy it. He presents his concerns as coming from his department:

So then that's the focus on race – it's not socio-economic status, it's not family structure, it's race. And I think we have a really tough time with that.

Where some of us want to believe it, but we just don't see how that's true. We just don't get it. How can it just be race? ... So that's the big contentious issue – at least when our department gets together, because we're social scientists. We want to focus on the social aspect of what causes, cause and effect – it's not that easy, you can't do cause and effect, there's certainly a reason. And it's not like every White kid in this school is brilliant and doing wonderfully either. So we struggle with that.

But when he gets into discussing the changes he has made in the classroom because of the conversations about race, his tone turns positive. He gets excited about curriculum and changes that are not only more engaging for students, but more fun for him. He shares:

[With] North America we do an immigration unit. Usually it focuses on groups who settled here. We deal with push and pull factors, why people come, why people left. ... What we chose is more recent, what's happening with the border, down south, and then the influx of Somali immigrants in the last 10 years. So we kind of shifted the focus from the Irish settled here, the Germans settled here, to more relevant to what's going on right now. So that was fun. And we got to talk about the push and pull factors, you know, the process, it's just that it wasn't ancient history. It was recent. It was fun.

Matt's Experience. When engaging in this kind of difficult work with a mostly-White faculty, the principal must walk a tightrope between preparing people for each next step, but also keeping the staff moving forward in the work. Matt is a principal who is very reflective, and also very practical. He understands that changing the discourse around race in his mostly-White school and community is going to be an ongoing process. He has been leading his school for longer than the six years they have been doing equity work. He is thinking regularly about the struggles and successes he has had on the equity journey, both personally, and leading a large faculty. While his experience is not the norm for principals, it does represent what was reported by teachers to be most effective approach for principals. He reflects:

How do you address issues of race if you never talk about race? Because it is so laden with so many things, there are protocols [that we use], there is a way to be able to talk about race, so it's a productive conversation.... So how do White folks talk about race in a productive way? And it has to do with the ability to recognize that you're not really getting any work done unless you're experiencing some discomfort. You're not getting at the core of the thing unless that comes up, and when it comes up, you need to stay engaged. It's ok that [discomfort] happens, that's actually a sign of progress.

One of the hallmarks of the effective principal with regard to equity work is a willingness to look at one's own biases, and to do it publically. Matt is willing to

take a critical look at his own assumptions, and also to share his learning with his teachers:

To reflect on that, was really powerful. It got at this thing of my own Catholic, liberal, save-the-other kind of thing, which caused me to feel good, but then to realize that I just made a statement about people's relative value. You can't possibly make it unless the Great White Hope – you know. So to let go of that was nice, really – to all of a sudden see things that I always thought were weaknesses [for students], as strengths. The idea that there are some kids for whom being in school – even as I say this it sounds like a diminishment - but authentically, the fact that you are here learning right now, is a sign of a level of strength that not very many people have. That foundation has led to, then, how do we do classroom observations? How do we do action research? How do we do engagement of all students, so that they can address this disparity in achievement that is pretty pointed in our district?

Matt is realistic about the challenge that the work presents for him and for his staff. He believes in staying the course, being courageous, and keeping a focus on racial achievement gaps. But he is aware that he does not push more than he is comfortable pushing. He tries to hold himself accountable, but admits that it's easy to back off under pressure:

My personal challenge is for me to stay engaged and to keep it the focus. I want to think that I'm a little more courageous than this, but I hear, 'When

are we going to stop talking about race?’ or, ‘How come we’re always talking about race?’ I don’t think I back off on it because of that, but what I’m aware of is, I back off on it. I’m totally aware of my privilege. My privilege is, I can choose when I talk about race. And I know I exercise that privilege, because there are times that I do talk about race and times that I don’t.

Context of Fear

The last decade has been a stressful time in public education. The expectation that public schools should be successful with every student is a relatively new idea in America, but it has taken hold, and schools have been branded “failing” if they don’t improve with all sub-groups of students. The charter movement has both challenged and threatened public school districts, and teachers unions are now under attack. The profession of teaching does not hold the status that it did even 20 years ago. Current estimates are that about one-third of all new teachers leave the profession within three years, and that as many as 46 percent leave within five years (Kopkowski, 2008).

In addition, an accountability movement has been growing out of the charter movement’s push against seniority in district schools, so teachers are now being evaluated more and in new ways. State legislatures are starting to require that a percent of a teacher’s evaluation be based directly on student achievement data.

On top of all this is the pressure of integration. In 1995, the local NAACP filed a lawsuit against the state of Minnesota, alleging that students in the state's largest city were being denied appropriate education because of segregation. The lawsuit was settled in 2000 for an inter-district school choice plan, through which eight suburban districts would provide 500 seats per year for four years (for a total of 2000 seats) to low-income students from the city. Thus the Choice Is Yours program was created, through which the state paid for transportation (Regan, 2011). And suddenly, big changes came to the suburbs. Teachers shared:

You know, before I got there, they were a school where they were predominantly White, affluent, highly educated, Harvard, Yale, Princeton-goers, and boom, overnight - I started 12 years ago, and within 5 years we were changing quickly. And our teachers were like deer in headlights. –
Social Studies teacher

I think what might have started it, and I'm speculating, was when we first had the Choice Is Yours program. We had kids of color in our school prior to that, but that was a gradual change. This was more of a sudden change where we had students busing in, and there were just some icky feelings out there. It doesn't feel good when people say, "Oh, it's one of those kids." I'm thinking that might have started the work, and just the fact that teachers were going to have classes that looked different than classes they had had in the past. – Science teacher

Equity Drivers

There were three significant drivers that participants perceived as leading to the choice to engage in equity work in their district: demographic changes, achievement concerns, and a district push.

Changing Demographics. Before the racial demographics of their schools began to change, these teachers had little experience teaching students of color, and the sudden changes were, at a minimum, jarring.

As Brad noted, “I came back to [this school] and the demographics are really different than when I was going to school here. And so that was really when my work with Equity began. Coming back and seeing a population that was totally different than what I had grown up with and was used to.” It is illustrative that he uses the phrase “totally different” to describe the change from 10% to 25% students of color. For teachers whose only experience had been in almost all-White contexts, this was a significant shift. Teachers in the other districts had similar reactions to a sudden shift in the racial make-up of their school’s student body:

I think for me the whole journey has been courageous, in that I’m from a small town in Iowa. There was not a lot of diversity. In terms of racial background it was just all White people. Then going to college I went to college at [a small liberal arts college in rural Minnesota], in a similar idea, it was not very diverse. More diversity for sure, more than what I was

exposed to in Iowa, but nothing compared to realities of the world. Then coming here, even just the progression [from] when I started I think 13 years ago, I think we were around seven percent students of color, and how we're much higher than that. We're over 30 [percent] and the high school's over 40 [percent], and so we've kind of lived this change. Which has actually been challenging... in terms of perspective, but also - I don't want to say lack of experience actually, [but] just interacting with different people. – Science teacher

We'd go in groups, and everyone's pretty much White, and has a White background, and grew up in a White area, and not a lot of outside knowledge of what's beyond [their experience]. – Special Education teacher

Because of the Choice Is Yours program, through which the state paid for busing students of color from the city into the suburbs, the demographic shift was sudden throughout the area suburbs. In addition to the challenge of students of color who had different ways of dressing, talking, and interacting, the districts were confronted with students who simply didn't have the skills they were used to expecting from their students. The rapid demographic changes led to significant stress for teachers and staff. As teachers explained:

When we first had open enrollment, we had, our kids, those kids. I haven't heard that in years, which is great. – Science teacher

There are definitely teachers in this building that, with an African American student, they'll never say it, but they're afraid of them. They don't know how to interact with them. They don't want to confront them on behavior issues because they're afraid – how do I react, how do I handle this situation? – Math teacher

One principal made the point that the teachers in his building meant well, but operated from a lack of knowledge about their new students:

You don't know what you don't know. I don't think there's a faculty member in the building that has ill intent. I just believe that all of us were educated in a specific manner – 'it worked for me'. [Now] your client is evolving in front of you. And how do you match up what you're doing, to better match that client, instead of saying the client better figure out how to absorb something from me? – Principal

One teacher told a story about a collegial interaction prior to the school's equity work, which shocked her but which she watched passively for lack of acceptable recourse, because the building culture at that time did not encourage confrontation:

And then there was a situation with a teacher talking to one of my students. Another Black student. She called him by the wrong student's name. And he was light-skinned, kind of heavy-set, and the student's name that she called him by was just a slight little thing, very dark skinned. And she called my student by the wrong name, and he was like, you're

always calling me so-and-so. She's like, oh, what am I supposed to do, you all look the same. And she walked away. And he looked at me, and said, did she really just say we all look the same? And I was just shocked. I didn't confront her on it. – Special Ed teacher

Achievement concerns. On the heels of the demographic changes came No Child Left Behind, proposed by President Bush just days after his inauguration in 2001, and signed into law as a Congressional reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2002. For the first time, the federal education law required schools and school districts to report Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) results to the public by sub-groups, including race. High-achieving suburban districts across the country were confronted, to their dismay, with data showing that they were not doing well with every group of students they served. The districts in this study were no exception.

Looking at achievement data helped to create a sense of urgency around the work, especially when the data was published on the state website for everyone in the community and the state to see. But this helped to drive leadership to prioritize the work. Teachers generally felt that the pressure of publicized test scores was a major motivator at the school and district level:

There wasn't really enthusiasm or passion behind [Equity work], until the AYP threat happened. And suddenly, it got real intentional real fast around, we need to address this.... We got a letter before we went into

school that had our data on it. Everyone got that letter. The shit has hit the fan, basically. So everybody came in just feeling devastated.... So all of a sudden, everybody was on board, and kind of going, what do we do? So [E-team leads] were invited to the data retreat that summer. We need you guys here, we need to start talking equity.

– Special Education teacher

Many respondents expressed some disdain for standardized testing, especially snapshot scores that measure only proficiency and not growth. But they also accepted the inevitable, and worked to raise them. As one principal put it: “these just happen to be test scores from a moment in time, but they have a significant impact on educational systems, whether they should or not.” The state of Minnesota did not start using a growth measure for its state-required tests until 2011.

District push. The two districts initially studied were chosen because they had moved further with implementation of staff development around talking about race than the other nine districts involved in the lawsuit, although the training was offered to all participating districts through the West Metro Education Program (WMEP) consortium. This happened in part because these two districts had superintendents who had an equity vision and were fearless in pursuing it.

The training involved in all three districts began under the leadership of the Pacific Educational Group (PEG) and Glenn Singleton. Principals and district staff in both of the districts initially studied were trained for a year prior to staff at the schools being required to participate. Then, teachers were all required to attend PEG's Beyond Diversity workshop, and to engage in staff development sessions at the building level on the topic of race over several years. In one district, the superintendent arranged for sessions that were delivered off-site but primarily for their district. In the other, the district hired PEG to bring the sessions right to the schools.

Participants from both of the original districts studied had a strong sense of the superintendent driving the work. In one district, a glossy brochure was mailed home to every teacher in August stating: "We will not narrow the gap, we will eliminate it." Teachers thought this was "a pretty bold statement", but appreciated that he brought in "some major training" as well, so the statement felt like there was weight and intention behind it.

It all started, district push. And that's before me. That came top down. The district said this is what we're doing, we're going to be one of the leaders in the state, in the nation, as it comes to that, and so you will follow suit. And so buildings just had to follow suit. I walk into it – and I enjoyed it – but that's just how it was. You had no choice. It's just what you were doing. – Principal

In the other district, the superintendent shared her passion with the district staff and site administration, and had them train with PEG before launching the initiative in the schools.

I think it starts out as a district commitment. Started there, and started with a number of principal trainings. And as we learned more – we being principals – more about equity, and about what our structure often does to kids of color and all the variety of issues connected to kids being successful, I think principals started to initiate, to talk differently, started to work with their staffs. – Principal

I know that our superintendent is a strong believer in it. I've been to *Beyond Diversity* training where she's been present there. I know that [our principal] is a strong believer in it as well, that it's important. I'm not sure how they came about making the decision. I assume, one thing, they are people that want to do the right thing, and secondly, you look at the data on the achievement gap, and it's there. – Social Studies teacher

Unfortunately, both superintendents were eventually pushed out because of controversies. In one district, the issue was spending, and in the other, elementary school boundary changes. Although both districts continue to employ an Equity Coordinator at the district level, the push that the teachers had felt and talked about in the beginning came from the superintendent's office, and

changed once the superintendent who initiated the push was no longer at the helm.

All of the sudden [the superintendent] was gone and he was the point man on this whole initiative and the energy behind it and the visionary behind it.

It began to pretty quickly evaporate. I was surprised how quickly.

Funding for the trainings started to evaporate, the relationship with PEG dissolved and it got left to true believers; anybody who was... well I don't know how else to say that.

– English teacher

Well, the genesis of it was from the superintendent's office. Our superintendent is passionate about this work. I mean, passionate to the point of some self-sacrifice. I mean, it's all over the paper. – Principal

The third district came to the work after several years of frustration with the changing demographics and sinking test scores. The superintendent who launched the work did so the same fall that she announced her impending retirement, so while teachers did hear a passionate speech from her in the fall, they did not experience the same passionate push from the superintendent's office over time that those in the other districts had experienced. However, the leadership did receive the same training from PEG.

Reticence to Engage

The district push was critical, because the teachers were generally not comfortable talking about race at the outset. All six buildings studied had some teachers who embraced the work, some teachers who came to it more hesitantly, and a few who objected outright. But even those who appreciated – or even enjoyed – the activities and conversations acknowledged that they had not engaged with it until invited or required to do so. And although the teachers interviewed uniformly expressed that they believe the training was necessary, they all shared feeling discomfort with discussing the topic of race with colleagues.

Not a single teacher found it easy to do in the beginning, and some were still hesitant even after several years of training:

I don't know how comfortable I am [talking about race]. I mean, I want to have open conversations, but I don't want to offend anybody either. And I kind of feel like I might say something, and put my foot in my mouth....

And for me, when I'm uncomfortable, I don't know why I'm uncomfortable.

Is it because I don't know? Is it because it's a stereotype that's been drilled into me over the years? – Special Ed teacher

Other teachers expressed coming to the work with a sense of hesitancy, but growing beyond that over time. Many started out defensive, but eventually accepted the notion that institutional racism does not require intention or malice.

Then they got very interested in what other teachers were doing to improve achievement of their students of color. Teachers needed to see other people take risks and not get hurt – both in the classroom and with talking about race in the professional development sessions – before they could comfortably do that themselves.

It took a while just to have that conversation without feeling judged. What also is awkward is that our staff is not diverse at all. And so the few people of color, that are employees of this building - I felt that at first, people were hesitant and staring at them a lot, or almost wanting to know their reaction to things. I think it was almost like this idea of having that person represent their entire race.... Actually that opened up some conversation that was really good and healthy, but at first it was just very awkward and protective. – Science teacher

Fear of Being Considered Racist

The theme that teachers talked about over and over was the fear of being viewed as racist, or of being called racist. This clearly slowed down the work, because it led some teachers to pull back, or to be reserved in their participation in the training. Teachers expressed that the fear led them to withhold comments or questions in the trainings, for concern about what others would think of them, or of being judged negatively.

As one middle school teacher put it: “One thing Equity taught me was that I don’t need to be afraid to say the word Black anymore.” Something as simple as the terms used to describe race had been fraught with tension from the fear of being considered racist.

Teachers also shared that, before the equity training, they had never confronted colleagues when they heard inappropriate comments about students, because the building culture did not support that kind of conversation. As will be discussed in Chapter 5 under research question number two, this is a significant change that teachers reported from the training: the change in the building culture that made space for conversations and challenges on the subject of race. As teachers put it:

I think as a White person, the hesitation sometimes is that I would be perceived as a racist and probably be called that, and that would be a hesitation because I don’t knowingly think I am. I think sometimes it’s tough for me to be willing to go there. If I really think I should react this way or act this way, I might not, for fear of that. – J.H./M.S. teacher

[I remember] a conversation on the fear of being called racist, and how we had to get over it. When a teacher made that comment, she said we have to get over the fear. I remember just the reaction in the room; it was like this kind of group gasp of recognition and like a relief. I think so many people had kind of felt that fear that when it was actually named, just the

group's reaction, the whole staff's reaction, it was kind of fascinating. Just the reaction of the people recognizing, I guess, of the fear. Then, too, recognizing the need that it was a piece that was holding the whole school back from doing as much as we could do because you just had that fear. People then got up after that, as I recall, and started sharing, agreeing with the speaker. Then sharing ways in which that was an issue for them. How scared they were of that word, how scared they were of being called that by students. I think at that moment there was a bit of a shift.... That was quoted again and again throughout the year, actually the next couple of years. It continues to be quoted quite honestly, and that was probably four years ago. – H.S. teacher

One of the most significant changes reported by participants was, in fact, getting over the fear of being called or considered racist. Almost every White teacher talked about this. Teachers who had eventually moved beyond the fear – which describes all of the respondents to some extent – talked openly about how fearful they were in the beginning, and their emotional evolution throughout the process.

Equity Inputs: The Work

“Equity work” refers to a range of activities and experiences that participants had at their schools related to talking about race. Appendix A includes definitions of the terms that participants used to describe “equity work” and its various facets,

as well as some of the specific activities that all of the different faculties engaged in.

Shock of the *Beyond Diversity* Workshop

Both districts initially studied began their equity work by providing Pacific Education Group's (PEG) *Beyond Diversity* two-day workshop content to all of their teachers. This workshop is designed to be an introduction for educators to talking about race, institutional racism, and White privilege.

Teachers uniformly reported that the training made a huge impact on them personally. As one teacher put it: "I don't remember all the little things we've done over time. I remember that big conference." However, the impact ranged from complete turn-on to complete turn-off, with only a few in between who expressed feeling some dismay at the beginning, but not hostility. Most responses fell into two general groups: enthusiastic or defensive, with a few teachers experiencing both emotions together.

We were so devastated and fired up at the same time after these trainings. It was consistent and it was strong. PEG training ignited great excitement, and we knew where to go with it, so it helped. – J.H./M.S. teacher

That was a nice, wonderful, brutal awakening at that conference for lots of reasons. – H.S. teacher

I wish I was more open to being really courageous in conversations, but I'm getting there. I think I never would have been even open to it without having that [Beyond Diversity] experience. Because once you have it, you see peoples' reactions to it, and often times they've thought the same thing or were thinking a similar thing, and then you can have a conversation about it. – J.H./M.S. teacher

Excitement and enthusiasm. More than half of the teachers interviewed expressed real excitement and enthusiasm about the experience they had at the Beyond Diversity workshop. Although some of the realizations they came to were discomfiting or even painful, they felt that the experience was not only worth it, but rich and powerful.

The teachers who responded enthusiastically, like Daniel, do not seem to have a lot in common on the surface. With the exception of a few who have people of color in their families or neighborhoods, there is no particular thread that seems to point at why they had a positive reaction and not a negative one.

Those who had a positive reaction characterized it in impactful terms, like “fired up” “energized” “eye-opener” and “powerful”.

I went... to the Beyond Diversity training and finally got what I'd been sort of seeking from SEED classes, which were just book studies that we had

in the district. Even my HR class in my master's program... didn't do it for me, which was to really bring me up against my own biases and show me where I'm cowardly around issues of race. ... I came back and I was teaching differently the next day, talking about race in class, talking about race with colleagues, creating those conversations and really energized and excited about it. – English teacher

It's been actually fun, my journey here. I've gotten more excited about it versus the opposite. I think because of some of the conversations we've had.... We had courageous conversations as a staff, which was good, and pushed people. – Science teacher

Defensiveness and anger. Other teachers reacted very negatively to the initial training, though they all expressed that they eventually saw the value in it after additional time and experience. Participants described strong feelings like “angry”, “frustrated,” “icky” “shocked” and “pissed”. The main concern was that the White participants did not see themselves as racist – and generally had little or no knowledge of Critical Race Theory – so they felt attacked and labeled as they were exposed to the concepts around institutional racism and White privilege.

Brad is one of the teachers who felt this way. He moved back and forth during the interview between speaking for himself, and speaking for his colleagues, as

he described the fear that was evoked in him by the training, and the anger he saw around him:

My fear afterward was] that I'm going to discipline a student, who has a different skin color than me, and that somehow it's going to be construed as being racist. That was, I think, the big fear in the building. If I do something, is it going to be construed as racist?"

Other teachers expressed similar concerns:

I just remember that there were times when it made you think and feel differently and you kind of felt icky inside, you felt guilt, sometimes a little bit of anger. I just think it's all important, because you want to know where's that anger coming from, where is the guilt coming from? I think it's important to know where that's coming from and even though it might take a long time to change or maybe you won't ever get completely over it, I think it's good to at least realize it. – Science teacher

The color line... was fascinating. That was really controversial as well. We had people who refused to participate, who sat in the middle and wouldn't get up. – J.H./M.S. teacher

Interestingly, all of the participants who expressed this viewpoint also said that it was worthwhile in the end. Even Brad prefaces his description of frustrations

with: “I’m not saying that we shouldn’t have gone,” and then articulates the negativity he saw in some of his colleagues:

Some people were just so angry.... It allowed people to behave badly, and react angrily, because of the make-up of the staff. I think people thought hey, we’re in a room of White people, they’re going to feel the same way I am about being attacked, and I think a lot of people did, but I think that allowed a lot of people to get a little sassy, how dare you, that sort of thing. I clearly remember people just being pissed. A couple people walked out. – Social Studies teacher

Some teachers recognized that the PEG leaders were natural targets for the naysayers because they were bringing concepts that some people simply did not want to dig into.

You know [PEG is] controversial, and they’re controversial because they’re saying the truth. You can’t say the truth [about race] and not be pissing people off. – H.S. teacher

Best Activities for Increasing Understanding and Decreasing Fear

The *Beyond Diversity* workshops stood out to almost all the teachers as one of the most powerful experiences in talking about race. In addition to working with the professionals, there were specific activities they engaged in with colleagues in their schools that were cited by a majority of respondents as making a positive impact on their learning and their practice: learning from colleagues, having

courageous conversations, and looking at data. Another source of learning was the students and parents of color, though this was only an intentional part of the professional development in two of the schools.

Learning from colleagues. Learning from colleagues was very important.

Hearing from colleagues touched people in a deeper way than learning from the professionals. There were three different aspects to this theme, and most respondents touched on more than one. Respondents cited both hearing colleagues' stories and discussions with colleagues as powerful and impactful on their own learning. In addition, learning classroom strategies from colleagues was appreciated as well.

I think just hearing the voices of the people that I know I think that makes it more personal for me rather than just a general speaker talking about something that maybe happened in a different state. Stuff that's really happening in my building was the most important stuff. – Math teacher

Testimonials. Hearing colleagues' stories in the form of testimonials – especially stories from colleagues of color – was an important part of the journey for many respondents. Teachers expressed that listening to a person they care about and respect made it more personal, which seemed to make the stories more resonant with the listeners. There was also an increased level of trust, in that, with people they knew, they were more willing to believe stories of racist experiences that they didn't really want to believe were still happening in America. It was

impossible to write off a story told by a teacher down the hall in the way that they expressed doubt about the stories of people they didn't know.

That's always interesting, because some staff, I didn't know their background, and then to learn that they're biracial. I had no idea. So that sticks out, and then when they share their personal story, or how things impacted them.... It was just surprising. It just kind of showed like I might have assumptions about people, and then there they are. And it just was right there in my face how you shouldn't assume things. So I thought it was good.

In particular, White participants found the stories of their colleagues of color to be impactful on their understanding of how racism still impacts people of color in America today.

But it did kind of open my eyes to see – when I started hearing stories from minority people that were talking about, 'Hey, I got pulled over, and for what reason, they wouldn't tell me, they couldn't tell me. They didn't have one.' At first, I was like, 'That would never happen,' but it does happen. I'm sitting there going, 'No, no way.' You know what? Who am I to say no? It happened to you. I wasn't there and you're telling me the story and, yeah, it happened. And it's like, okay, there're more to this than I realized. As a White male, I don't see it because it doesn't happen to me, so it's hard for me to believe it or wrap my brain around that. Until you

hear it from somebody and you start to think, wow, that's not right. – H.S. teacher

I'll just keep it personal, that's one of the agreements, when you hear brothers and sisters of color talking about unintended racism... you hear them talking about incidents where they're in restaurants, and maybe it's unintentional racism, but they experience something where they have to ask themselves, is it just me, or is it my skin color, or what is going on here? – Asst. Principal

Small group discussions. In addition to listening to stories, just having the opportunity for discussion in small groups with colleagues was cited repeatedly as an important activity that led to personal growth. All of the schools grouped teachers in small groups in different ways at different times. For example, at least two schools put teachers into groups that were intentionally mixed by criteria like team, department, and social friendships, so as to cross-pollinate the learning as teachers naturally discussed the sessions with their departments and close colleagues later. Teachers also cited department meetings, and sometimes smaller groups of departmental colleagues, as places where many conversations about race and instructional strategies took place.

In addition, most schools provided venues through which interested teachers could come together for learning and support beyond the regularly scheduled all-

staff sessions. At least two schools used Exemplary Grants to pay teachers for their time after school. One school offered drop-in “conversations” after school, led by E-Team members, where staff members could come and share issues concerns, or just talk about race in a safe space. Two schools offered the chance to read and discuss Beverly Daniel Tatum’s book Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? and one school offered other books at different times as well. At least three schools offered choices during staff development time, so that teachers could choose a session on equity or something else like technology.

Discussions in small groups, whether required or optional, gave teachers the chance to push back on ideas, ask questions, and figure things out. Teachers felt much more comfortable talking with a small group – even if the group had as many as 10 people in it – than they did speaking in front of the whole faculty. One large high school even broke up their faculty meetings for a year, so that every teacher was with a group of about 20 teachers, led by an E-Team member, rather than learning together in a group of 200.

Sharing instructional strategies. A third aspect to learning from colleagues was learning new instructional strategies. Several teachers shared that they appreciated the chance to learn strategies that were working down the hall with kids in their own school, with their own colleagues.

I think when they call upon people who are doing work in their classroom that really addresses it directly, cause I know just looking at observations of whatever, if we're doing NUA, or Equity or best practices, I'll look at what they're doing and say oh yeah, I'm doing that, ok, People who are actually planning on doing it, and I think those people sharing is the best thing, because it's like oh! And so many people are like oh my gosh, we have this big problem, we're all racist, what do we do, what do we do? And so, just having some moments like oh, ok, I can do that. – Social Studies teacher

Sharing instructional strategies was facilitated to an extent by the CARE Teams, though this varied a lot by school. The CARE Team as designed by PEG is a group of teachers who engage in action research in the classroom, and track the progress of students of color to see what results they get. Teachers usually choose about 5 students to focus on, and when they are getting meaningful results with those students, they share with the faculty what strategies were used to get those results. CARE Teams, like the E-Teams, received full-day off-site staff development workshops from PEG through WMEP each year.

In most schools, the CARE Team was a group of teachers who had either volunteered or been asked to join the team. In one school, teachers were strategically invited to be a part of the team; in most of the others, it was an open

invitation. In one middle school, a single interdisciplinary team volunteered to be the CARE Team.

Structured courageous conversations. Having paired one-on-one structured conversations with colleagues about race was also impactful for many. Pacific Educational Group (PEG) calls these *courageous conversations*. Practicing the *knee-to-knee protocol*, in which each participant has a chance to speak uninterrupted, followed by the listener paraphrasing back what they heard and then asking questions, is designed to ensure that multiple perspectives are equally heard. In addition, using the *mindful inquiry protocol*, which encourages questioning and listening rather than jumping in with one's own perspective, gave teachers specific questions they could ask to dig deeper in a tough conversation.

So this year, for all of our early staff meetings, we broke up into small groups, we had members of our E-team lead our staff through these sort of knee-to-knee conversations. So about the same kind of topics of equity, it was around this mindful inquiry. A question was posed, you listen to the other person talk, then reflect back what you heard, just that active listening thing. So we had a chance to not only be in conversation about race, but then also practice mindful inquiry, which we're hearing, and I agree, is a very powerful way to be involved in conversation about race. If halfway through what you're saying I start to heave my ideas in there, the speaker doesn't feel listened to. And if that's a multi-racial conversation, many times the White voice sort of subsumes any other voices. – Principal

These protocols, taught by PEG, were cited by many of the respondents as helping them to get more comfortable talking about race.

[Having] courageous conversations helped me to more honestly talk about things in the classroom, get out of my comfort zone, do it in a respectful manner. – Social Studies teacher

I think [the protocol] works for me. I think it allows me, even in my friendships sometimes when there is some kind of disagreement or discussion I'm having with a friend or whatever. Instead of me going, 'oh, that's not it, that's not how it is at all,' it's 'oh, all right, what do you mean by that?' or 'Tell me more.' If I'm with all my friends or whatever. Or I have a friend that teaches in [another] district and I talk to her a lot about equity, and when she gets heated or upset about something, I'll be like, 'Well, tell me more,' or 'Why do you feel that way?', instead of me just being like, 'No, that's not true at all,' which is very easy to say. You have no idea.
– Math teacher

Looking at data and learning how to use it. Though not mentioned as often as the protocols and discussions, looking at data about their own school's racial achievement gaps was cited by respondents in all six schools as a powerful experience that helped them really understand institutional racism as something different than people being racist. This is another place where moving into the

fear – in this case, fear of failure and confronting achievement gaps – helped teachers get beyond the fear of being considered racist.

Teachers in all of the buildings studied spent time together looking at student achievement data in the context of race and racial achievement gaps. In some cases, the staff looked at test scores, broken out by racial sub-groups by the state. This was particularly unnerving for teachers in schools that are considered excellent schools, as they were confronted with data showing that some segments of the student body were not doing as well as others.

So what we're seeing is this idea that when you focus on a small group, everybody benefits. And we sort of teed up that way. We showed 5 years of ACT data, 5 years of grade distribution, and we just said – the huge majority of our kids are very successful here, and there's a persistent group that isn't. And you can identify them by race. So if we persistently focus on a small group, maybe we can close some gaps. – H.S. Principal

How the principal handled sharing the data seemed to make a big difference to teachers. On the one hand, when the data came as a surprise, teachers had a harder time processing it:

We got a letter before we went into school that had our data on it.

Everyone got that letter. The shit has hit the fan, basically. So everybody came in just feeling devastated. – E-Team member

On the other hand, where the principal walked the staff through the data with support, teachers were better able to digest and be motivated by it. Teachers reported appreciating when someone in the school – usually the principal or other administrator – took the time to present data in a comprehensible way. As one teacher explained:

[Our principal] got us – district directive or not – she got us on the path [of equity] and then she also got us on the path of looking at data. I think her impact is still long lasting. She made it easy. I am not a data head. I am not at all, but she took the data and she made it easy to read. I didn't have to search it out. I think that for people that are not data people that made an impact. She also explained it well, to where I could follow it. I'm not a dummy, but you start talking numbers and data, I'm not a science person, I'm not a mathematician. But I follow it, and then once I'm into it, [I can see] yeah, that's not right. We could do something about that, because, yeah. So I was on board. But if I had to have comb through it all, or if I had to compile it, you would have lost me. I think that was a big deal. – H.S. teacher

In addition to looking at standardized test scores, teachers in several buildings also looked intentionally at grades, and the rates at which students of color were earning high and low grades compared with White students. The ways that schools approached this work varied, but it seemed to make it more personal for

teachers, especially those who teach disciplines outside of reading and math, the commonly tested areas.

One building had every teacher calculate the number of F grades that they gave over the school year, the number of F's that went to students of color, and also the number of students who received more than one F grade from that teacher, and the number of those who were students of color. They found that school-wide, there was a 17-point gap between the percent of students of color in the student body, and the (increased) percent of students of color in the group receiving F grades.

I am somewhat shocked when I see that 50% of my F's are my students of color. Another part of me knows the particular students' beliefs on the importance of doing well in school, [but] I could have done more. – English teacher

Another building challenged teachers to look at the bottom 15% of their students, according to grades each quarter, and to intentionally help those students raise their grades. Teachers appreciated this approach, as it gave them a very specific way to focus on increasing achievement.

This is the second full year [of] identifying them, and giving those names in, and charting progress.... And I think with some successes, that's made it easier too. When you see you've done some work, say with the 15% group, and you see some successes, and you realize oh, it's worth

the investment, I'm a better teacher for it. That helps. It gives you some momentum. – Social Studies teacher

Although looking at the “bottom 15%” was not about race per se, it quickly became apparent that students of color were earning a disproportionate number of the low grades. As the principal put it, “Here are all the F’s, and if Black kids make up 9% of the student population, why do they generate 45% of the F’s?”

In addition, as teachers became more aware of the data and increased their understanding of the problem, they began to do their own individual reviews of their classroom data. This seemed to happen more naturally and possibly more commonly with math teachers, but they were not the only teachers who mentioned doing this.

So I [am] going through and highlighting my kids of color. And looking specifically at their scores, and being like, oh, this is awesome, or ooh, gosh, what's happening with this kiddo? But I like data. So I am one to actually look at it, and try to figure out what's going on, and if there is anything I can do. So I would say that would be the other piece. And we've got plenty of data. There's plenty to look at. – Math teacher

Two of the schools studied had implemented Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) in such a way that teachers were using common assessments and then having conversations about the results. The teachers who talked about this work

from an equity perspective expressed positivity about it, but also acknowledged that it is not easy to do.

We did a lot of the practice of the protocols and practice of having these courageous conversations about when you truly look at the data, being okay having there be different results. Yeah, there might be times that my students maybe didn't do well on this one part, but in the end you have to get over that. We're really in this for all the kids, and wouldn't you want to know a better way of doing it, if something you're doing is not getting your kids there? I also found that at the same time there are other things that your kids perform better at than your colleagues, and you get in a conversation about it. It wasn't completely one-sided all the time, and we get over that and learn from each other. – Science teacher

Another way that teachers reported looking at data together in small groups – departments or interdisciplinary teams – was disaggregated standardized test data to see how their own students did compared with their colleagues, and then discussing what might be done differently to ensure that other teachers were able to reach that high level with their students. This was implemented at varying levels of depth, but reported at all three of the middle level/junior high schools.

Finally, teachers in all six schools spent time on their own or with colleagues looking at their grading systems and considering the extent to which students of color might be accidentally disenfranchised. As will be documented in Chapter 5,

many changes to grading scales came out of the equity work, especially in the middle/junior high schools.

Learning from students and families of color. One powerful learning experience that was not a part of most of the professionally-led plans, but was rich for some teachers, was learning from the students, and to an extent, from the parents as well. Several teachers reported having experiences through which their students taught them important lessons about what students of color needed from them. This sometimes pushed them out of their comfort zone, but they appreciated the learning.

It's fascinating. It's the most - the best, most exciting, life-changing work I have ever done. And if I could just do [this after-school program,] that's all I would do. It is life changing. I've grown as a teacher more than I've ever grown in any other area. I've learned more from parents, from kids, you know. It's pretty fun. – J.H./M.S. teacher

I think allowing kids' personalities, or what they think would make it exciting, to come out is a strategy. Because if we just went by my own experience, that wouldn't be part of it. Just being open to the idea that you can get to the goal in a lot of different ways, and sometimes the student themselves is the best source of how to get there. – Music teacher

One teacher told the story of how she learned a very unexpected lesson about the backgrounds of her students. It had never occurred to her that she might have students who had ever been homeless:

We were going to go volunteer at [a homeless shelter] downtown. And the day before we were going to volunteer, one of the girls forgot her permission form. So she calls her mom. This is a Black girl. She's talking to her mom on the phone, and all of a sudden she's holding the phone away from her ear. [Mom is screaming,] that's what I thought. Is your mom upset with you? And she goes no, she's laughing.... I asked her, why is that funny? And she said, cause we used to live there, and she thinks it's funny that I'm going back to volunteer. And it just didn't even occur to me that I'd be taking a kid from [our district] – it never crossed my mind that I would even be working with kids who used to live there. And on the bus the next day, one of the boys was like, I can't wait to see Ms. Mary! And I said, oh, have you volunteered here before? And he says, no, I used to live there. And I was like, how did this happen? I [have] two [students] who used to live [there]. But it was a really powerful moment for them. Because we went and stood in the place where they had gotten their meals, and gave meals to other people. And a lot of people recognized them. And said, how are you doing in school? I'm so proud of you that you're in school, and doing what you need to do. And that was a huge learning experience for me too, because it was people that I had looked at before as – (pause). They were being more empowering to these kids than I

could ever hope to be, because they knew where they were coming from.

– Teacher

Teachers also reported learning from parents. This often came in the form of a difficult phone conversation with an unhappy parent, but when teachers were able to understand the parent's perspective, they learned something about how to support their students of color. One teacher reported asking a parent to reflect with her on why an event had not gone well:

So after it was over, I made a phone call to one of the parents. He's got his pants hanging down to his knees, he's got the gold tooth, he's got the hat. But I called him, and I said, I just didn't feel that went well. And he said I don't think it went well either. I said what do you think I could do differently? He said, I'm gonna tell ya. You don't talk. You get the Black families who have been in this program to stand up there and talk. We'll say what you want us to say. We love the program. We're behind you. Let us do the talking. And it's the greatest learning I ever had. And now, every time I do the dessert bar, I get parents that have been in the program, they sit up there, parents ask them questions, they answer. I jump in a little bit.

– J.H./M.S. teacher

One school created a parent panel as a part of their equity work, and brought in a group of Black parents to talk with the whole staff about the challenges that their students faced. This activity was cited by two respondents from that school as

very meaningful for increasing their understanding, because the parents did not attack them, and were very supportive of the teachers and the school.

One teacher recalled reading the book *The Pact* with a small group as an after-school equity session, and then hearing from a Black parent as a part of that activity. The teacher appreciated that the parent spoke from his perspective about barriers to achievement for Black boys.

Two schools made videos of students talking about their experiences. In one school, this was mentioned as possibly the most powerful activity of all. Hearing the students talk about “what’s real to me” as a part of studying how to add “realness” to the curriculum gave teachers a window into their students’ experiences that they didn’t feel they otherwise had.

When they played the interviews with the kids, that was a huge thing of this is what the kids really think, I think that was an eye-opener.... There was something about listening to the kids, and it opened up a whole side of them that you didn’t see, especially when they were telling their stories, and all the things they were going through. It make you kind of appreciate how well they were doing. Like the one girl saying well, people always say I can go to the library to use the internet, but my parents don't see the value of going to the library, so I have to fight to go to the library.... Just different perspectives from the kids.... That’s something that should get replicated, because that was huge. – Math teacher

Unique Challenges

There were several challenges cited at all of the schools that are somewhat unique to the equity work compared with other staff development initiatives.

Some of the challenges were personal. First, talking about race is really hard.

Teachers were encouraged to “speak your truth” but found that very uncomfortable and difficult to do. They also had a hard time isolating race as a factor with regard to student achievement, with acknowledging that race is a barrier to academic achievement that is separate from poverty, language, and other factors. Finally, participants generally didn’t like getting emotional, and wanted to learn specific strategies to use with kids of color, rather than engaging with the topic of racism in general. “Just tell me what to do!” was a common refrain.

Other challenges were structural. The struggle to find time for learning amid all the other pressures on teachers’ time is common. All of the schools used a mix of required and voluntary sessions. Teachers’ opinions were strong with regard to the need to require the naysayers to engage, and also around the need for “safe space” for those who were engaged to explore tough topics without the stress of having the naysayers present.

Speak Truth and Experience Discomfort

PEG advocates using “Four Agreements for Courageous Conversations” which are like a set of ground rules for working together. The four agreements are: 1. Stay Engaged. 2. Speak Your Truth. 3. Experience Discomfort. 4. Accept Non-closure. Of the four agreements, the two that teachers struggled most with were “speak your truth” and “experience discomfort.” Teachers expressed over and over that it was good and important to do these things, but also that it was difficult, both for themselves, and for their colleagues.

The two were also reported to be closely linked. Teachers were uncomfortable listening to colleagues speak out, and they were uncomfortable speaking out themselves. They were uncomfortable just thinking about some of the topics that accompany meaningful conversations about racial achievement gaps, and even more uncomfortable sharing their personal perspectives, questions, and concerns. As above, teachers consistently asserted that they saw the value in it and believed they should engage, but they asserted that it is just difficult to do.

I think the ‘speak your truth’ part of it is something that I think a lot of us teachers want to, but I think we don’t want to be perceived as racist, so I think that’s the biggest hurdle, is getting people to be honest. – Social Studies teacher

I think that discomfort I felt is needed to start to have change, or just start to look at things differently. I think it is needed. Even if you're looking at a lot of different staff development opportunities around it, I think there has to be, either the beginning of it or somewhere, you have to feel that discomfort and you have to feel what that feels like in order to really change. – Science teacher

When I say something, that's how I truly feel, but they cringe. You're asking how my shit looks, but you don't want to hear the truth, that it's ugly. – Black Participant

The need to create safe space within which teachers could take risks speaking truth was paramount. Teachers took their cues from the principal's risk-taking, and from what happened when their colleagues took risks:

I think probably the first brave person said something, and everybody else watched how they reacted. They didn't get stomped on, they didn't get shut down, so it was more safe for the next person to speak. So people kind of watch what the reaction is, and you gauge what's going to happen.
– Math teacher

Isolate Race

In addition to the four agreements, PEG proposes a set of "Six Conditions for Courageous Conversations" that they assert should be entered and experienced

in order. Of the six conditions, the one that surfaced again and again was the challenge of isolating race. Teachers asserted that they grappled with the concept at some length and depth, both individually and with their colleagues.

Black folks talk about race all the time. White folks don't have to. White people can go through life without dealing with it. They can choose that, but people of color can't. – Black participant

We had a kid... he was like our poster child Black student, because he was smart, articulate, getting good grades. He was incredibly capable... [But] He still had so much that he was up against that White kids in the same shoes weren't, every single day. Just by being virtue of being Black and in this society. Even though he was so capable, and so ready to work, and so amazing in all these ways, he still wasn't doing as well as a White kid in the same spot. There's still a gap. There's still an achievement gap, even at that high level. [He] ended up going to Colorado College for a couple of years, and then he had to get out of there and had to transfer to Morehouse. I don't know if he would say it this way, but I think I would say it this way, he was done being smart 'for a Black kid'. – English teacher

Some teachers struggled with the notion of looking at race without also looking at poverty or home language. They felt that both are relevant, but taking poverty out

of the equation didn't make sense. Even teachers who admitted they were not convinced, also expressed some concern about the fact that they were not, showing that the challenge was one they were actively grappling with and not avoiding.

So then that's the focus on race – it's not socio-economic status, it's not family structure, it's race. And I think we have a really tough time with that. Where some of us want to believe it, but we just don't see how that's true. We just don't get it. How can it just be race? I bet if you were to poll everyone on those, which one is the hardest for you? Isolate the race.

– Social Studies teacher

I mean, race is definitely one of the things at the heart. To be honest with you, I'm not sure that I necessarily agree with PEG's statement that – if I remember right, they made the statement that it's all race. It's race, it has nothing social. Everything else aside, race is the issue. I think there are other pieces that come into a child's life that, aside from race, that do impact success in school. But I think race is a huge, huge key piece to it.

– English teacher

Other teachers struggled with the notion that their own or their ancestors' struggles were discounted in the process of isolating race. Teachers who had grown up poor had a hard time accepting the notion that someone of color "had it harder" than they did because of institutional racism.

I think it really opened up my eyes to having another perspective in trying to really be empathetic, and know where anyone's coming from, that everyone has their own story. Then I think the other thing that was hard for some is [not looking at] other groups of people, that the conversation was specifically about race. And then I think other things came out like, well what about people that are gay, or other sorts of groups that are discriminated against, and that couldn't enter the conversation. I think that was frustrating for some as well. – Science teacher

I can remember, at the first PEG session, sitting with a former teacher, she was very Scandinavian, and I can remember her crying as we were doing some small group processing, and what she shared was something that really all of us can identify with, and that was that her ancestors – well, let me keep it personal still, my ancestors, coming over on a ship from Norway, they didn't know what White privilege was. In fact, if anything, they suffered from – racism from other White people. And to kind of deny their struggle, or deny that fact that it was hard for them, and then, in her way I think she said “and then elevate someone else's struggle above my grandparents” – it's hard to do. Particularly folks of color, and the roots in slavery and racism way back then, it's hard to say that is more worthy of discussion than what her grandmother, my grandmother suffered, being a Norwegian, coming in through Ellis Island. You know that probably still is something that, I don't think about daily, but it probably

comes to mind as we talk about the whole idea of White privilege. – Asst. Principal

Emotional Work versus Concrete Strategies.

An early theme to arise and continue across interviews was the notion that while teachers felt that talking about race had value, they wanted something more. The expressed desire for concrete classroom strategies: “Just tell me what to do!” came across again and again. As one teacher noted, “Teachers are fix-it people.” And the emotional work is uncomfortable – they want to move on to something concrete.

And it’s really been frustrating as a staff, because you know as well as I do, teachers want - just tell me what to do and I will do it, and I will do it with a smile, just lay it out. And I don’t have that for you. – English teacher

I think we’re all looking for strategies. So at Beyond Diversity, OK, you just hammered on us for three hours about being racist, so, now what? The left a lot of people with a bad taste in their mouth. – Social Studies teacher

I think that conversation is important, and I think the conversation is ongoing, but I think if all you ever do is have the conversation, that alone is not going to solve the problem. I think there has to be action behind that. ... But I do think we work a lot and talk a lot about the achievement gaps in our district, and I think that we have very strong intentions

regarding narrowing that. And I think we've seen some success. I think the conversations have to occur, I just think they can't be the only thing that you do. – Music teacher

Required Participation

Most of the schools offered equity sessions through both required all-staff meetings and voluntary groups. Required sessions were usually either on staff workshop days, or during staff meetings. Voluntary sessions were usually after school. In some cases, they were casual, drop-in, “conversations.” In other cases, they were classes that teachers could take for credit or pay.

Teachers who participated in the voluntary groups expressed great satisfaction with them with regard to their own participation, but noted that the teachers who “most needed” to be there were not the ones who came voluntarily. While some teachers expressed appreciation for their absence and the resulting lower stress level, there was also strong sentiment from almost all respondents that principals had to require everyone to participate if racial achievement gaps were ever going to change.

Also, some teachers expressed reticence and fear about attending the voluntary sessions, which seems to amplify the need to require them to attend.

They're kind of realizing that you can't have a small cluster of people to focus on equity, and expect it to have this school-wide effect. You have to

get everyone – I don't want to say on board, because some people aren't, but at least make it a school emphasis so that there's a language, common protocol and things like that. At least get everyone aware of what's going on.... Cause not everyone's going to do it unless everyone has to do it. – Social Studies teacher

At our year-end equity celebration we have every year as a district, I get up and I'm like the wet blanket on the party, because all the equity leaders from around the district get up and showcase all the fabulous things they've done, and all the progress they've made, and every year I stand up and I say there's no accountability, so the same [people] who don't want to engage in this still don't have to, and therefore, I don't see a heck of a lot of progress. So now we are changing up our equity model... building in some accountability measures, and forcing teachers to have conversations about demographics and achievement on a regular basis, which we do not have to do right now – E-Team lead

I wish I was more open to being really courageous in conversations, but I'm getting there. – Science teacher

The Leadership Imperative

One of the great challenges to emerge in this study is how leaders are asked to simultaneously lead a faculty through a very difficult change process, and

navigate personal change for themselves as well. In all three districts studied, principals, superintendents and other administrators were trained for a year prior to engaging in the work with their teachers. This was clearly of benefit, though it did not remove the need for principals, in particular, to continue to grow alongside their teachers. This is a complicated process that some administrators navigated better than others. How does one unfreeze one's own practice, become open to new ways of doing, practice and get good at them, and re-freeze in a new place, all while leading others to do the same, *at the same time*?

The Equity Team or “E-Team” was the group responsible in each school for planning and delivering the professional development experiences through which teachers talked about race and confronted institutional racism. This group included the principal, two to twelve teachers depending on the size of the school and number of other participants, and in some cases, the assistant principal and/or a dean, counselor, social worker or other licensed staff.

In all six schools, the participants talked much more about principals than assistant principals. There is no question that the positional leadership role carries a unique weight around this very emotional subject. However, several teachers did cite the influence of assistant principals. One noted that the assistant principal had a conversation with him after a classroom observation that challenged him in the area of race, and he was grateful for that administrator's courage in helping him come to a new understanding.

So the associate principal watched me closely, and called me out on a few things. And I had a black kid on my class, and he always boasted about being in juvie, and stuff like that. Talked the talk. So we did the story Four Miles to Pinecone, and they talk about jail. So here I'm thinking I'm just having this conversation with a kid, and trying to connect with him on this level, about jail and things. I'm not even thinking black, I'm just thinking jail. And she says, that's kind of perpetuating the stereotype. And you know, I didn't really get it at first, I kind of had to think about it, well, shit. To be frank, that's not what I was thinking at the time, but it got me going and I started thinking about a lot of things, and how I do interact with him. I was kind of caught off guard because I didn't expect to hear that. And I'm glad she said something, because I never want to perpetuate a stereotype. I think we all do to some degree, and we have to go, whoops, I shouldn't do that, I shouldn't say that or act that way. It's part of the thinking and reflecting that we have to do. – H.S. teacher

Another teacher noted that the assistant principal provided a strong bridge between two principals, and ensured that the work continued:

[The first principal] definitely laid a strong equity foundation at school. And since then, you know [the assistant principal has] just really continued to hold the work to a place of importance. And we haven't had to argue for equity, because we've always had support from our principals on equity work. – M.S./J.H. teacher

The teachers who took on leadership within the E-Team were in many cases the most committed to the work. But although PEG provided general guidelines for how schools should form an E-Team, the groups were formed in different ways in each school, so participation varied. In some cases, teachers were invited to join the team by their principal. In other cases, they volunteered to join. In one district, they received some compensation in the first few years.

The extent to which the group remained intact and active over many years also varied. In two schools, the E-Team did not meet continuously over the years that the school was doing equity work. In schools with a consistent Equity Team, some of the E-Team members joined at the beginning and stuck with the work for years. Others joined, and left, and then other teachers joined. In one case, one of the founding teachers was reported to have been unable to stay with the work because it was too personally painful.

One school had very little principal involvement, while another had more administrators than teachers on their E-Team. The approach each school took, as reported by teachers and administrators, seems to be related most to the principal's orientation to the work, and to the number and skill level of the "true believers" on the staff.

The most successful approach, as measured by the combination of satisfaction of participants and growth at the school, seems to require a strong principal, very committed to the work, who also highly values involving the faculty in leadership, and clearly articulates this to them:

[Our principal] called me at home specifically in the summer, and asked me [to join the E-Team]. He thought I was a good leader, and he thought it would be a good fit, with how I work with students of color too. And so he asked me, and I was honored and gladly agreed to do that. I don't remember if there was an email, but I think it has been a pretty open process, whoever would like to become a part of the E-team. That's his style, too, very inclusive. I guess I shouldn't speak for him, but that's what I observed. That's his style. – E-Team teacher member

Not every school had consistent principal leadership, and it was difficult for a faculty to move forward without it. In one case, the E-Team disbanded. In another school, they formed a functional E-Team in spite of a principal who was not very interested. With district support, the E-Team was able to take some steps without the principal, who was replaced within a year.

Teachers on the Equity Teams reported that, while they appreciated the leadership roles that teachers were able to take, they felt it was most important for the principal to be engaged and seen as supportive of the work. Principals expressed that while they knew they had to be visible, it was important for

teachers to be in front of the initiative, so it wasn't perceived as the principal hitting folks over the head with it. This tension speaks both to the acknowledged power of shared leadership in any initiative, but also to the touchy nature of the subject of race and racial achievement gaps, and the extent to which no one wanted to be responsible for making everyone uncomfortable. As one principal reported:

Well, I lead it. And I've just this past month I turned to one of the members of the E-team and asked would you like to take on the leadership of the group. It's important that I keep leading it. I'm very aware of that. And I'm very much aware of the fact that if the place can only be as good as I can manage myself, we won't be very good. So I'm wanting to see if we can't get our E-team to that place of leadership. You know, to give them permission to go ahead and run with it. – Principal

Perspectives of Teacher Leaders

E-Team members reported that they received support from other members of the group, and received regular training over the first few years of the initiative.

Principals took on different levels of involvement in different buildings, but E-team members reported feeling that their principals were, with two notable exceptions, supportive of the work. The extent to which the principal was involved with planning and leading the professional development around equity, however, did vary from school to school.

Through the WMEP consortium, administrators and E-Team members received three or four off-site full-day trainings with PEG each year for several years.

Teachers reported that this was helpful not only for their own learning, but also for bonding as a leadership group. One school also arranged a one-day retreat, led by one of the E-Team members, which served to pull them together as a group and help the members become a source of support for each other.

This support was clearly a factor that allowed E-Team members to be vulnerable in front of their colleagues. Several talked about speaking in front of a large group – two high schools in the study have faculties of almost 200 – and the challenge of speaking their truth and modeling such an important action for others. But they were glad they were able to do it.

I think one of the first things I did when I got up in front of staff was I talked about some of my own – the tapes that play in my head that have impacted me, that have shown me that I have bias, and that there is some internalized racism that I carry with me, that I have to fight. I shared that, and I think for some that was great, and for others there was a real personal vulnerability to that that was - many didn't want to bring into school. And I really pushed that piece hard, that that was essential [for others to do too]. I think for some, that became a boundary issue that they wanted to maintain, for whatever reason. – E-Team lead

By the time of this study, the Equity Team members who were still involved in leadership tended to be the “true believers” in most of the schools. In one school, they were intentionally drawing in teachers who had initially been skeptics, but most of the groups were at least anchored by those who were enthusiastic about the work. These leaders felt good about the changes they had made in their own practice, and the extent to which they could help their colleagues.

Just the fact that I get one of my coworkers to come up to me and talk to me about it, whereas, [when] I taught in the other districts, staff didn't know that they could speak about certain things with me or whoever. We are kind of creating that conversation. Now I feel like the most positive thing about it is everybody realizes that there is work to be done, and people are out there [to help] if you are trying to do work about it. – E-Team member

Several E-Team members and leaders expressed some frustration with the pace of change at their school, however, and expressed disappointment with colleagues who did not seem to be responding to what they saw as an imperative. Two said that they were glad to be reminded of their school's progress through their reflections in the interview(s) for this study, because it was easy to focus on frustration instead.

I have been – the person in our school that's been driving the work, for a long time. And it's been socially isolating. And it has been – stressful. – E-Team lead

I'm frustrated that others don't have the same sort of personal commitment to it that I do. And I don't get it. I do get it, but I don't get it. Is your heart not in this job? Why are you doing it? It is hard. So that's my personal and professional frustration, I guess. – E-Team lead

It's so hard to keep the training fire burning, because money is the thing, and people tuning out, as we talked about before. I've heard it before, now give me some strategies, I've had it already.... [But] you have to still care, it's not gone yet, and until we have everybody achieving at the same level, you don't get to tune out. Guess what. – E-Team lead

E-Team members in several schools also expressed frustration with feeling that they had to “carry the weight” of the work, and wishing that they had more help and support, whether from colleagues or from administration. “I don't want to carry it” was expressed several times, most ardently by a Black E-Team member who had put a lot of energy into the work for several years, and questioned how much progress had been made. Others acknowledged doing good work and being appreciated, but still wished that their colleagues would join them at a deeper level. And all of the E-Team members interviewed expressed the need for the principal to be actively involved:

I think the administrator is necessary, just by virtue of the role. There's some point, you can't do as a colleague, I think. If it's an unpopular topic, it

really helps to have an administrator lead the charge, because it's not real fun to be linked with an unpopular cause among staff. It's hard. You don't like to hear the feedback people give, when people don't want to do equity work, you start to take it personally – I started to take it personally. I don't want that. – E-Team member

Perspectives of Other Teachers about the Leadership

Appreciation for the E-Team members was expressed repeatedly by other teachers, along with acknowledgment that they couldn't do it alone, and needed support from both administration and colleagues. Teachers saw that the E-Team members did a lot of the work, and that it wasn't always fun for them. One teacher expressed that it would have been better if the teachers had the chance to work with the E-team before attending the Beyond Diversity workshop, rather than the district sending everyone through that training before even putting E-teams together. At another school, they did just that, and the response to Beyond Diversity was more positive.

Teachers talked about the presenting that E-Team members did at staff development meetings, and how much they appreciated someone “breaking it down” and “making it relevant for the school” for them. Several of the E-Teams had regularly scheduled staff development time over the course of several years, so they did a lot of planning and presenting. Although PEG provided activities and guidance, each team still had to tailor it to their own school.

They also had to manage the colleagues who responded negatively to the initial training. In two schools, participants reported some drama around the “color line” activity, in which participants complete the “White privilege checklist” which is designed to reveal the extent to which that person has access to aspects of White privilege in America. Participants then gave themselves a score, and line up around the room according to score. As one teacher recalled:

The color line... was fascinating. That was really controversial as well. We had people who refused to participate, who sat in the middle and wouldn't get up. Three or four. Teachers kind of questioning each other, like why are you standing there on the line? It was really fascinating. The best part was, we had probably the calmest, doesn't-get-razzled, Equity team leader lead this, thank god. And she really walked them through it. So that helped. – Social Studies teacher

Respondents also noted that E-Team members supported conversations about race outside of staff development meetings. Within departments, or even at lunch, their presence meant: “we’re all able to have a little bit more of those courageous conversations”.

Only two teachers expressed neutral or negative sentiments about the E-Team. One teacher stated that she thought they did good work, but she couldn't remember who was on the team.

Nothing stands out [about what the E-Team did.] I think the – I mean they were always, they always plan together, so I don't think any one of them stands out because I can't [remember who they were.] They came up with the discussion questions, and then it was really in our teams. They'd facilitate that time. – Teacher

Another teacher just felt that the E-Team at his school wasn't doing anything that interesting – that administration was doing more of the organizing, and the E-Team members were just telling stories:

The E-team, to be honest, I feel I have not gotten anything. I don't know what they're bringing to the table. Maybe they are bringing something. Their stories, I'm bored listening to. I'm like, 'That sounds like a nice reflection about yourself that you're going through the process. I can't relate.' Maybe I already went through that or I didn't need to go through that. – Teacher

Perspectives on the Principal's Role

The principal's role was cited as significant across all of the schools, both as helpful and as a challenge. During the seven years studied that they were involved in the equity work, the six schools had a total of twelve principals. Only two schools had the same principal the whole time.

The most critical role for the principal in this work was as leader of the faculty. Giving them a vision and articulating a genuine belief in the importance of and ability to close racial achievement gaps were appreciated when they were present, and noted with frustration where they were absent. Teachers were especially complimentary of the principals who were passionate and consistent about it:

[Our] principal has it in his heart, it's not just the job to him. He steps out of the box, and addresses it on a personal level. It should start with the principal – we need more leadership to push people – that's the hard part, going beyond the personal. People have to be forced to do this harder work! It falls on those who live it, or are really committed, and that's generally a small group. – Social Worker

When a new principal came along, teachers were anxious to see where the new principal would take the work. Would they be committed? Would they back off? In only one case, the new principal was stronger on equity than the prior principal had been. In three cases, the new principal was equally strong, or close to it, though it sometimes took a year or so for teachers to decide that this was the case. In one case, the new principal was out of touch with his faculty, and was let go at the end of the year.

Then [our new principal] came, but again it was a different perspective because he had these stories [about experiences being Black] that we were like, "Whoa!" And he said, "Hey, we're taking this to this level. We're

going to go from here. This is where you've been. We're going here now."

Again, he was forceful about it, but at the same time, he didn't cram it down your throat or anything like that. We were excited about that. – H.S. teacher

Last time we met, my principal was still very new to me, and now I've been in enough circumstances with her that it's very exciting to me. I was really glad, as I went through equity work and other meetings... because you never know. In a tough year of transition, of advocating for a lot of people, she's kept her eye on equity. [She] doesn't allow the negative or the naysayers to win. We were worried on the equity team, what would it be like? Because [our old principal] was an advocate. She had a different leadership style – you *knew* she was an advocate. There was going to be a very strong, bulldozer kind of a message. And [our new principal] is different. She too has her passion, and she will get it across, but she just has a different way of doing it. And it's working. – E-Team lead

What teachers appreciated most was a principal who understood the work at a human level. They said repeatedly that the tone set by the principal, of showing that the work mattered personally to them, and they would grow along with the staff, was critical to getting buy-in from the staff.

Well, the principal spoke from the heart, the assistant principal spoke from the heart, people on the equity team, there were colleagues talking about

it – of different races, it wasn't just people of color – talking about, this is how it had an effect on my life, and this is why it's important, and this is why... and you know, people were sometimes on the verge of tears, and it was genuine, it wasn't just some put-on thing, and people had respect for them taking that risk. – Math teacher

Good support from administration. We have people in our administration who are just great humans, and they see the human element. They're great at all the data, and all the perfunctory tasks of being administrators, but they're all great human beings that really care, so that sets a tone. – Social Studies Teacher

On the other hand, participants reported feeling frustrated in situations in which a principal either didn't appear to understand faculty needs, or was not holding their colleagues accountable for doing the work. Teachers had a hard time moving forward with the work, even if they had a strong foundation in prior years, when they felt that the principal was not fully engaged.

Principals and Assistant Principals interviewed all expressed a deep understanding of the minefield that talking about race with staff presented to them. Some were more reflective and self-critical than others, but none glossed over the challenges that their teachers were talking about.

Reflecting on their own biases, challenges, and growth correlated with effective leadership. Principals who were more reflective in interviews tended to be viewed as accessible, positive leaders by their teachers.

For me, my view of race and equity and re-examining my beliefs about it started from a spot of not paying much attention to it at all.... And as I learned more, the more uncomfortable I got with my personal belief system. So that part of the learning process for me has been personally very significant. Just when I think I'm starting to feel comfort, I get dis comforted again. So the second part of it, connected to our staff here, if that's how I have been struggling-slash-challenged by it, how do I support staff who are struggling-slash-challenged by it, with everyone at a different starting point? - Principal

Principals also need to have empathy for their teachers in order to lead them effectively in this work. Several principals referenced the idea that teachers were not willfully ignorant, they just didn't have a lot of experience with communities of color, so were lacking information and skills:

We've talked a little about how our belief system may be the big variable.... There's this interesting thing, people saying 'well, I'm doing everything I can.' Or, maybe you're doing everything you know. What do you believe about these kids' capabilities? If everything is the same, and White kids do better in that environment.... What's that about? So I've said to our staff, many times, I hate to keep putting it this way, but either Black

kids are inherently dumber, or it's something else. I don't like to say it and we don't like to hear it, but what is it about our belief system, our approach, our attitude [that impacts racial achievement gaps]? - Principal

Supporting and empowering the teacher leaders is another critical role for the principal. Some principals were more intentional about this than others. As noted above, teachers felt that it was most important for the principal to be engaged and seen as supportive of the work. But teacher leaders also need the principal to actively support them as they work to lead their colleagues.

Teachers noticed and appreciated it when they received administrative support for their leadership, and it made a difference in the extent to which they felt able to carry on the work. They noticed when the principal took the time to attend E-Team meetings, and to help plan professional development activities. Those who felt that support on a regular basis generally expressed less frustration with both colleagues and with the work in general. Where the principal support was waning, teacher leaders chafed under the pressure.

And then obviously in our building, our head principal, he really supports equity and change, and really making that a known issue. And so in the sense that I sit in with our equity team, I feel like it is very open and very relevant... and our administration listens to what I have to say [and learns from me]. – E-Team member

Although a couple of E-Team leads expressed frustration with feeling that the principal didn't approach it at the pace that they wanted, they also expressed great appreciation for the ability to talk frankly with the principal, and to influence the direction of the work.

And the fact that I can walk into my principal's office and just throw down over something that is racist at its core, and we can be in there, swearing [about it], and going on - and the fact that I can do that, is a beautiful thing. So I feel like there is great support in this building around that sort of thing.
E-Team lead

And then later in that meeting, [the Assistant Principal] said, 'you may not feel that you've been influential, but you have been, to me, because you keep pushing me, and you push me and push me', and he said, 'I'm sure it's exhausting, to keep beating your head on the same wall, and have me not respond the way you want me to respond, but I'm starting to get it.' So that was really nice. – E-Team lead

This collaborative partnership had its moments of awkwardness, but when the principal was committed to the work, the partnership was very productive. Some of the principals were very intentional about empowering and supporting their teacher leaders along the way. They reported trying to give the teacher leaders support, encouragement, and even insight to help them navigate the work:

And strategically, I appear, at least my thought was – I never led it.

Because I felt that if I led it, I would have more resistance. But if I help the people that were supposedly leading it, if I gave them a little insight, that they could go farther than I could if I was leading it. And it's been pretty decent so far. – Principal

Several principals shared their concerns about the pace their faculty was moving, and their own perceived inability to move teachers forward. However, there was a strong correlation between how reflective and self-critical a principal was, and how much respect was expressed for that principal, in that the more self-reflective, the more respected they were reported to be. Matt, the principal whose faculty was most uniformly appreciative of his leadership, shared his vision:

I have a picture of - what would it be if it was just really permeating the building, and really we were living and breathing it, and I don't think we're there. And it's only been seven years, so why isn't that? ... It could be that one of the reasons that we aren't further along is that I might be taking care of us, as a building, a little too much. Pretty much everything that we do, I feel like we're ready. We haven't quite – maybe I haven't been enough out front to accelerate it – what's that called in Critical Race [Theory], that's called gradualism. So maybe I haven't been out in front enough. I certainly haven't made the decision that [our superintendent] made, of that magnitude, even scaled down. - Principal

Where the principal had not been supportive of the initiative, or was not in synch with the faculty, it created layers of difficulty. At one school, the story was told in two different interviews about how a principal once lost his temper in a meeting and hollered something to the effect of: “Damn it, I’m the principal of this building, not Glenn Singleton!” That principal retired soon after.

In another building, a new principal came in to a school that had been working on closing racial achievement gaps for several years under two strong prior principals. Unfortunately, while the staff felt they had made some progress and done some good learning, the principal treated them like they were beginners to the work. This created a great deal of hostility and resentment, and that principal only stayed for one year.

Two teachers referenced principals who said something like: “Our Equity Team has to do a training with you all about race. We have been charged with doing that by the district. So, we’re going to be training on race.” Teachers felt that this was a signal that the work was a waste of time, and they either resented having to participate, or they resented the principal’s cowardice.

It’s interesting having talked to people in different buildings too. It makes a difference on the tone that’s set when the conversations were had.

Whether the people think there’s a genuine emotional investment, or somebody’s just jumping through the hoops. If they think that they’re just jumping through the hoops because they were told to by the district office,

there's a whole different response from the staff than if they feel it's coming from an emotional place of honesty from the person doing the presenting. At [our school], people took it more seriously, because you could tell that people were honest and they told their own stories, and they said this is why it matters, and they knew that they were doing it because it was important, and not just because they'd been told by the superintendent you must do this. – J.H./M.S. teacher

On the other end of the spectrum, some of the principals approached the work in a way that led teachers to feel that the principal walked the journey with them, not trying to have all the answers, but learning alongside the faculty. "Living it" was cited multiple times by appreciative teachers. When they saw vulnerability and passion in their leader, they were more willing to engage in the work. As one math teacher reported: "I think the way you make something important to people is by living it yourself, and I really felt that [our principal] did a good job of that."

Where this was the case, teachers were quick to point out that the principal had that attitude, and how much they appreciated it and were motivated by it.

She also participated in everything we did. It was that whole leadership by example type thing. That was, again, one of those things that, "Hey, I can't skip out on this because [the principal is] going to be there and she's going to be part of the group." She went along with it and she made time to do

it, which was a good thing. She didn't let it die. She would follow up on things. – Science teacher

When principals shared emotion or personal stories, it resonated with their teachers. Several teachers shared stories their principals had told them that stuck in their memories, and moved them emotionally:

[Our Asst. Principal] shares her progress. Like she was – she had given a ride to the student this fall, the boy who killed the homeless man for a dollar, do you remember hearing about that? He had ridden in her car, she had driven him home, and people were like, “Well, weren't you scared of him?” She said, “No. Why would I be scared of him? I had a relationship with him. It was when he didn't have a relationship with people was when he would be violent.” She was never scared of him. – H.S. teacher

Sharing emotion and personal stories also created safe space for the faculty to do the same. This was cited many times as a prerequisite for full participation by teachers. Principals also created safe space by helping to ensure that people could disagree without animosity:

And also, when somebody disagreed, or said something that wasn't quote politically correct or whatever, nobody jumped on them or told them they were awful, so people could express what they wanted to say.... If somebody's feeling free to argue, that means it's a safe environment. Cause if everybody agrees with everybody, that means it's not safe.

Three of the six schools had a Black principal at some point during the work. The Black principals led this work very carefully and intentionally.

I walk in, and the resistance was there... the [prior] building administration was resisting it. And so then I appear on the scene. The Equity team, who were trying to do different things, now had a partner in it. I could help them navigate how to do that. You give them permission. That's what it really was, it was just giving people permission to do the work, to do what they felt needed to be done. So my role has really been to facilitate, coordinate. And let people do their thing. I had to be careful not to be the person bashing that over the head, but let other people run with it, and so I wasn't in the front of it, I wasn't leading it. Supposedly. – Principal

Although the Black principals were generally held up as successful equity leaders in their schools, teachers appreciated the successful White leaders a lot as well, because they modeled for the White staff members how to engage with the work on a personal level:

I think there's another reason [it's hard to isolate race]. I think there are far too few articulate White leaders who modeled that well. With that then, I don't think – you talked about having role models and mentors – if there's not that sort of mentorship or those sort of role models that show how that can be done well, then it's not going to be as valued, and it's also not going to be done. I mean, that's a reality. – E-Team lead

Perspectives on the Superintendent and District Role

In the two original districts studied, teachers had a strong sense that the district leadership was responsible for the push to close racial achievement gaps, and for the push to engage in equity work and talking about race. This was less true in the third district, which saw their superintendent launch the initiative with some passion, but do so in the same year that she was retiring.

The big push at our school came... when our then-superintendent said we're not going to close the achievement gap, we're going to eliminate the achievement gap. That was the word he used. He started a fairly aggressive program. He contacted Pacific Education Group, Glen Singleton's organization. – English teacher

Other influences beyond the superintendent paled in comparison in teacher's minds. Both of the original districts employ a full-time district-level equity coordinator, but that person's name was rarely mentioned in any of the interviews, and when it was, it was in the context of the position existing, not the person or the work. Similar to the influence of the principal being more significant for teachers than that of the E-Team, respondents were very aware of where the superintendent stood on the issue, and less so of other district leaders. In the district with less of a push from the superintendent, one teacher reported hearing about equity from other district leaders, but this was an isolated case.

Changes in Perspectives and Beliefs

Regardless of their initial reaction to the training or the topic, all of the teachers interviewed had engaged in the training over at least three years, and all of them reported resulting shifts in their perspective on and understanding of the issues of institutional racism and racial achievement gaps in schools. Those who were initially resistant or unbelieving noted that consistent attention to the topic over several years really made a difference in helping them to process their emotional reactions and center on the classroom.

The shifts in perspective became readily apparent as participants reflected on experiences and told stories:

What's made the difference for me, when I was going through that, [was] I saw things I'd never seen before, because I didn't have to. And now I can't stop seeing it. And I'm sure I'm missing a million things still, but I'm seeing more than I ever used to. And that changed my life. And that changed my teaching. – English teacher

Another example I would sometimes share at the staff development things, I live in a nice middle class neighborhood. There isn't a lot of diversity there. After one of the trainings, I was driving through, and I noticed this Black young man walking in my neighborhood, and my first thought was, I hope I shut the garage. And I had to identify in myself, I said... what in the world? It wasn't an intentional thought, but all of a

sudden, I flashed, I hope I shut my garage, because I don't want my tools stolen. And I had to [ask myself] what is it that caused you to think that? Because he probably goes to the same church that I do, and he probably has a 7-year-old daughter like I do... and all of a sudden I jumped to thinking that he might be criminal. And because he's not normally what I'm used to seeing in the neighborhood, I jumped to a judgment that was unfounded, and unfair, and really unethical. – Asst. Principal

They also expressed a mixed impression of their colleagues, and the extent to which the perspectives of the other teachers in their school had evolved as well. A few teachers in two schools believed that most of the staff was as far along as they were. Others felt that the majority of the staff was not very far along. Sometimes, two participants in the same building had different impressions. And some teachers just acknowledged that they only talked about it with a limited number of colleagues, so didn't know the extent to which others had embraced the work or not.

While the teachers, when speaking for themselves, all reported significant shifts in perspective on equity issues, it is unclear how representative they are of their faculties.

There were five primary changes in beliefs that a majority of participants reported in their own thinking and in their schools overall: moving beyond being

“colorblind;” moving away from seeing the new students of color as “those kids;” moving toward taking more responsibility for the achievement of students of color and not expecting them to just “get with the program;” learning about and confronting the ideas of White privilege and institutional racism; and coming to believe that talking about race was a necessary step toward closing racial achievement gaps.

Beyond Colorblind

“I don’t see race.” “I want all my kids to succeed.” Before equity training, these phrases were reportedly common in all three of these districts. Several teachers talked about moving away from the notion of colorblindness themselves. All teachers interviewed expressed an understanding that closing racial achievement gaps depended on being able to help and support students of color in ways that might be different from what they do for every student. But they took some time to come to this belief:

For me, coming in, my first comment was, why? They're just another student. Why do we have to talk about [students of color] specifically, when I want all my students to be successful? Why do they need special attention, when my goal is the same? That was initially hard for me to get past. – Math teacher

I always felt like, a kid is a kid. A lot of the other people were saying that, a kid is a kid, and it doesn't matter what color they are. I think that's one of

the things that a lot of people talked about, 'oh I don't race, I don't see color.' And I think that's the part that they're missing, is that you really do have to see it. A White male like myself isn't going to see things the way a Black male is going to see them. As much as I'd like to think that we kind of think similarly, the more you stop and analyze what you're doing, the more you realize that I'm never going to have a clue what it's like to be Black. I'm just not. And really, how I treat them, I think I want to treat each kid equally, but I have to take into consideration, if their colors are different, their backgrounds are going to be different, and that's just the way things are. – Special Ed teacher

One teacher noted that the NCLB law helped to push people out of this mindset, in that they were no longer able to look at student achievement in the aggregate, in averages.

And I think that race is such a complicated thing, that there are probably very few people that would say 'I've got it' about that, because even when you think you've got it, then something else happens that didn't you didn't anticipate. And so that might also be part of why there's a desire to focus on achievements of all kids, versus achievement of our kids of color. Because if we're just talking achievement of all kids, then we get to talk about averages, so then I get to say look at all these successes we've had, and we don't have to identify the failures. – Music teacher

From “Those Kids” to “Our Kids”

When the Choice Is Yours (CIY) program started, the influx of unprepared students of color was sudden and, for some teachers, shocking. In the first few years after the demographic shifts started but before equity training began, teachers in all three districts reported that they often heard the phrases “those kids” and “our kids,” from their colleagues, with “those kids” used to refer to students bused in from other districts, and “our kids” describing students who lived in the area. But because the CIY program was a racial desegregation program, “those kids” were also the students of color:

I talked early on about [the attitude of] “those kids” and “our kids.” And I haven’t heard that for years. That is gone. With the leadership, people were – they couldn’t do it anymore so they moved on to other districts then, or they retired. We probably still have a few on staff that maybe use it, but then they’ve changed. They went on their journey, I would say. Kids aren’t identified that way anymore. I think it’s just – it’s who we are. – H.S. teacher

One teacher explained how he moved toward realizing that “those kids” were actually all unique students, not necessarily similar just because they were the same race:

I know that my students are coming from many stories. And I’ve learned over the years that it’s not just Latino or Asian or Black or White, it’s stories within the stories, so if I have five Black students in my classroom,

I'm not putting them all in one category, which I think oftentimes happens. People are categorized by race. And you think oh, if they all come from [the nearby city], they all have this same background. No, not at all. They are all five different. And I've learned that more and more, just individualize things, customize my approach. – Social Studies teacher

Taking Responsibility: Beyond “Yeah, but...”

Like the shift away from using the terms “those kids” and “our kids,” many respondents reported a shift away from placing responsibility on the students and toward teachers taking responsibility for student success. The level of responsibility that individual teachers were willing to take on varied, and this was an area in which both teachers and principals in all three districts expressed feeling that their school still had a long way to go. But all of the White respondents expressed some personal understanding that they were doing things differently to better serve their students of color.

So that initially changed me as a teacher, in that, if I'm truly about support, then I've got to provide that support. And what does that support look like? That means I've got to figure out a way to get a computer in their hand. I've got to stay after school when they can stay after school. And I've got to make sure they get on the activity bus after school so they can get home. I've got to call the parents, and talk to them, and have really hard conversations about, you know, asking the questions, ‘do you have

access to this, and how can I help you?' You know how that is, oh my god, so hard. – J.H./M.S. teacher

You have to start with the base [training], and then you get into your classroom practice, like we've been talking about. If you didn't have that, how could you ever even notice that [institutional racism] existed?

Because you would say well, it's their fault. Or that old attitude of well, you know, at home they don't get support. They're not, la la la. Whatever that old attitude was. That has to be replaced with actual knowledge of the human race. Of looking at, well, why is that? Why are there less opportunities? Why are there North side kids who have to bus to [our district], who aren't given a school within their community that they feel that they want to send their kids to? Why is that? – English teacher

Administrators reported both significant growth in this area, and significant work yet to do. This is area was reported to be one of the toughest, to really move teachers from blaming students for being "lazy" or families for not participating, to a place of taking responsibility for motivating students and providing whatever the family can't:

It used to be that if you put discrepant data in front of our staff, they'd rail against it. 'Well yeah, but, well yeah, but.' And now they look at it and they think about what the next steps are. I never hear the, 'well yeah, but, what if you factor in this,' or any of that kind of stuff. It just isn't there anymore.

So despite the fact that there is this persistent, ‘ok, I get it, just tell me what to do next,’ there is [also] a real understanding that we have to keep looking at this, we have to address it. – Principal

Is it a will deficiency, or is it a skill deficiency? And when you ask teachers, guess what they say. Skills. Teachers will say skill. I don’t know what to do. I do not know what to do. – E-Team member

Teachers also became aware of stereotypes and biases that they were unconsciously carrying. Several expressed the need to “check myself” regularly to avoid acting on biases.

I think through those conversations, people have had maybe some “aha” moments or are challenged, I guess. Someone will make a comment of, ‘Well, it’s the transient people who are coming into my classroom. They’re not in our school district. They’re coming in halfway through. They don’t know the system. The families aren’t involved.’ It’s all of these external things, that it doesn’t place any kind of burden on me as a classroom teacher, what I do that can effect change. So in having some of those kinds of conversations, [we say] it’s not about that. What’s your thoughts when you look at this kid? What can you do? Kind of bringing it back to that responsibility. – Social Studies teacher

To me, what this all boils down to is, you can do all this work, but if you don't internalize it and really do kind of a self check on your own belief system, that this kid walking in, I'm not going to assume because they look like this, this means that, "oh, they're poor readers, they're low in math."

We need to really check that. – Science teacher

Facing White Privilege and Institutional Racism

White teachers consistently expressed that they had not known or understood the impact of institutional racism and White privilege on themselves or on their students until they participated in equity training and spent time talking about race and issues of race in school. Feeling guilty and then moving beyond the guilt were expressed repeatedly within this theme.

I feel like I was definitely uncomfortable. I think at first I was really insecure about it. I do feel like the equity work that we did really helped me understand that [my Whiteness] is just what I bring to the table, but that doesn't need to limit my work with students and my work here at the high school. – Math teacher

When I first got there and we went through that, the one thing that stuck in my mind was they talked about the idea of White privilege and I was just like, What? No, that's not me. I'm not – I remember we got up and had done some exercise where we had to spread out around the room and I couldn't wrap my brain around that going, "Wait a minute. No, that's not

me, I'm not like that." That's what struck me the most right off the bat is I was like, "Oh, it just never occurred to me." I came from this idea that we weren't rich or anything growing up by any means. We were actually rather a poor family, but I thought everybody kind of grew up the same way I did. I never thought that maybe some of the things that were happening to me in my life were maybe because of my skin color. It just never dawned on me. That was an eye-opener right there. – Science teacher

With regard to learning about White privilege, one teacher reported being “blown away” by the simple realization that band-aids only matched White skin tones. That example became the touchstone for her understanding of the very subtle ways that race is a factor in the lives of her students of color. Another teacher reported:

Just looking at [the idea that] it's just about work ethic. I work hard for everything I get, and if someone isn't doing that then it must be because they don't have the same work ethic. That was what I was thinking earlier, and now, through looking beyond the civil rights movement, looking at the GI bills, and looking at post World War II and the sprawl of suburbia and having some of those historical backgrounds, [I am] really starting to see that it's not just about [work ethic]... It's institutionalism. It's not just about my work ethic or my family. That's the “aha” moment for me to look at - don't discredit a kid when they're coming in from another district maybe,

being bused here to our school, or seeing someone of color and saying, 'Well, I'm not going to see their parents at conferences,' having those kinds of thoughts. – H.S. teacher

The education system in this country is so incredibly steeped in White middle class values, that... That dynamic that they talked about at the Black Boys seminar, about that Black child getting transferred on to by White women who are afraid of Black men. You know the psychological idea of transference? That kid going through that all through grade school and doesn't do well in school? Yeah. When the teacher's afraid of you? Then eventually coming to the high school, as a teacher of that kid I'm up against a lot. There's much to overcome in terms of getting that kid to like it, to trust it, and to be willing to engage it. – H.S. teacher

Teachers and principals reported making connections between prior feelings of discomfort around race, and new understandings of the system and how all educators operate within it. One Special Education teacher shared how her thinking evolved:

And then my staff, I had three paraprofessionals, and they were all always Black males. So how are the power structures looking to the kids, when these three grown Black men who are older than me have to answer to me, [a young White female.] That bothered me right away. I think at first because they were all older than I was, and had more experience than I

did. And then later because I started thinking about it in terms of race. –
Special Ed. teacher

And as I learned more, the more uncomfortable I got with my personal belief system. And for me the challenge has been personally accepting all the White privileges.... And becoming aware of them. I still miss a lot of them, but at least I still spend some time when I can reflecting back, going, oh. Usually not with an answer, but with, oh. – Principal

One teacher, also an elementary parent in the district, reported her high school colleagues supporting the superintendent's decision to change boundaries to better integrate the elementary schools in that district – a very controversial decision for the community. The teacher noted that: "I'd definitely say that the [equity] consciousness is something that people are working from," with regard to why they supported that decision.

The Equity Work Imperative

Teachers who found the equity work energizing uniformly expressed that it was also important to do. They wanted more time for equity work, because talking about race with colleagues was energizing and encouraging for them, and they felt there was so much student need yet to be addressed. They expressed a deep and emotional commitment to better serving students of color, and to improving their own practice to meet that goal.

Surprisingly, teachers who found the equity work stressful and unpleasant also expressed that they believed it was necessary for closing racial achievement gaps. Like going to the dentist, this group felt it was important to do, even though they found it difficult. As noted above, teachers generally resist discomfort. Some expressed understanding that growth comes through discomfort, and believed that the discomfort is actually part of the process.

You have to have the equity training in order to get people see the inequity in the first place. The racist practice that is in every public school. Whether we want to face it or not, it's there. It's in ourselves, and it's in the structure that was set up a long time ago, for a very different world. So are we willing to take that structure, as best we can, with the bureaucracy we've got, and do what we can to make it work for kids? Until my equity training, I didn't look at it with those same words, and with that same passion. It was, I just love the kids, and I love English class – and I did. And I still do. But it's got a whole other push to it now. – English teacher

I don't think the urgency or the personal commitment would be there if we weren't doing the equity work. I think a lot of people have gotten really passionate, to the point of crying during staff meetings, talking about if this was my kid, I would want you guys to do the work that you're doing, that sort of thing. It's made it a lot more personal, toward teachers, no longer defensive about the racist thing, but defensive that this school, these

teachers might be labeled as not proficient if the gap continues to exist. So it's more in defense of their profession and their personal pride. But also, that happened because it was shown to them. – J.H./M.S. teacher

Several teachers expressed that the reason it was important to address race is that it made them a better teacher, and that finding success in the classroom motivated them to continue the work. Being able to perceive students' actions in a different way freed teachers to react differently when students didn't cooperate, or didn't act in the ways the teacher was used to. As one teacher noted, "Things that I might have perceived as anger from students, or aggressive, I'm now more likely to perceive as anxiety, or fear."

And when teachers used new strategies and got good results, that was very affirming in their minds of the equity work in general:

And I think with some successes, that's made it easier too. When you see you've done some work... and you see some successes, and you realize oh, it's worth the investment, I'm a better teacher for it. That helps. It gives you some momentum. – Social Studies teacher

Some teachers expressed frustration with not getting enough support to keep the energy up – both their own and their colleagues' – around a topic they perceived to be so important, and sometimes not having enough personal support to fight

the frustration. One teacher noted, “There aren’t more accolades” for doing this kind of work. It takes a lot of time and energy, but there’s not more pay for it.

Teachers also noted that as energy waned from the leadership in the face of competing initiatives like technology, they had to seek out support in an intentional way:

When opportunities come to go to *Beyond Diversity 2* and have that conversation there, or to talk to someone like you, I’m almost always taking them because I need the juice. I need the energy, it does dissipate really fast when you’re not sure you’re making a difference, you’re not sure how worth it, it is. Then you find some stuff, [or] you have an interaction with a kid that makes it all worthwhile. – H.S. Teacher

There were several complaints about the pace of the work, especially from the E-Team leaders. But there was also acknowledgment that a slow and steady pace might be the most effective pace in the long run, despite short-term frustrations:

I think the impact has been slow, but because of that it will maintain itself better. I think when you do it too fast, you can end up - you've probably read about this, if you make a cultural shift too fast, it doesn't last, and you regress to a worse situation. So even though I hate that we're moving slow, when I think about it theoretically, I guess it's ok. – E-Team Lead

There was one school where this sentiment of frustration was not expressed by teachers at all. Although the staff doesn't appear to be significantly further along or more successful in their equity work, the teachers did not express frustration with their colleagues or administration the way teachers and leaders in others schools did. Even where they pointed to areas for growth in their own practice, they were less inclined to share any negative feelings about the equity work itself. This is correlated with uniformly high regard for the principal and other administrators, and a sense of possibility – even in the face of the firing of the superintendent they credited with leading the equity work – that their school really was making a difference for students of color.

Questions Remain

For all of the documented change, several teachers acknowledged that they were still not fully “on board” with all of the different tenets they were being taught about white privilege and institutional racism. Though they were making changes in how they are teaching, they shared some questions:

I'm still one of these people that believes very much in the effort that you put into it is going to get you more out of it, and that it's not skin color that chooses that effort. It's something inside them that wants to drive them to improve. So, you know, I still run into some of those conflicts when I'm doing diversity stuff and things like that. I don't know. – H.S. Teacher

So then that's the focus on race – it's not socio-economic status, it's not family structure, it's race. And I think we have a really tough time with that. Where some of us want to believe it, but we just don't see how that's true. We just don't get it. How can it just be race? ... It makes it hard, to just focus on race, at times when you go back & think, what's the difference between this black kid and this black kid... a family with parents together, both parents have job, a family from poverty, maybe the only similarity is their skin color. – Social Studies teacher

So I think there needs to be a balance. We need to keep doing it because yes, I think it's important. But how much time should we spend? – H.S. Teacher

Conclusion

The experiences that teachers had talking about race, looking at achievement data by race, and learning about White privilege and institutional racism were powerful and transformative for many. It is apparent that being willing to confront fear is not the same thing as being fearless. In fact, several respondents shared that they still held some fears, but were moving forward right through them.

In addition to confronting their own fears and biases, teachers also learned a lot about multiple perspectives and how their students of color might experience

their school. This led to some very specific and intentional changes in practice, which will be explored in Chapter 5.

But the journey has been a tough one. The fear of being considered racist made engagement with the work scary for many teachers, and challenging even for those who were excited by the work. Teachers are very aware that they are judged by their colleagues, and they are sensitive about the potential to either appear ignorant or to offend someone.

Small groups have offered some teachers a safer space in which to have the conversations. Teachers reported appreciating working with departments, interdisciplinary teams, PLC groups, and even small groups put together just for the equity work. The smaller – and sometimes more familiar – groups made the difficult discussions a little easier most of the time.

Principals walked the tightrope between pushing meaningful work, and not pushing too hard or too fast or too much. They expressed vulnerability with colleagues, and survived. Principals all took their own unique approach with the work, and this was imperative for their success. As one teacher noted:

They need to be honest. Because people can see through it if it's a bunch of baloney. If they're not honest, and they don't care about it, then it's a waste of time. People can spot it if you're just faking it. Just like the kids can. – J.H./M.S. teacher

This year, the district-level push has waned in all three districts, but the work continues. The discourse on race is happening, and it is changing. Chapter 4 presented results on teachers' experiences talking about race; Chapter 5 presents results on the changes teachers made as a result of the equity training and talking about race.

Chapter 5: Changing the Discourse on Race – The Impact

*We all read the articles and hear the news stories about teachers who don't care, and won't change if nobody makes them, so we have to pass a law, or whatever, and – I don't know them. I don't know those teachers.
– Assistant Principal*

Just Tell Me What to Do!

Prior to beginning this dissertation, I was unable to find any research on or evidence for changes happening as a result of this kind of professional development work. Although schools and districts across the country were investing and engaging in this work, the results were either not being measured, or not being published.

Going into the research, there was no hypothesis or expectation of what might be found. Although I had been involved in equity work at my own school for several years, I had only impressions of results, not a lot of data. The two research questions were written to provide for the possibility that the changes happening were primarily internal, and might not show up as impacting the classroom. But the data clearly documented meaningful changes in practice that happened across the board, in all schools and for all of the teachers interviewed.

This finding is notable in light of the strong theme from teachers of wanting to be given specific strategies rather than spend time talking about race: “Just tell me what to do!” Teachers generally resisted the discomfort that came with talking

about race with colleagues. But unexpectedly, the level of resistance had no correlation with the level of implementation of new curriculum, instructional strategies, assessment methods, classroom practices, or modes of interaction with students or colleagues.

Changes in Practice of Individual Teachers

Chapter 4 reported changes that teachers made in perspective and beliefs as a result of talking about race. Chapter 5 goes a step further to document changes in practice. interactions. Research Question 2 asked: In what ways has talking about race impacted teacher practice, both in terms of relationships and in terms of instructional strategies?

Brad, a teacher introduced in Chapter 4 who struggled with the equity work, still made significant changes in practice that he was quite enthusiastic about:

I think we've used some more culturally diverse texts. Trying to get other perspectives. It's not as simple as just putting a Tiger Woods poster up in the classroom. That doesn't cut it. Part of the [Equity] goal is to get it ingrained in what we do. And so the department's been leaning on each other a lot. So we split up into four groups and each took a quarter. Look at what do we usually do in these quarters, and where can we find some texts that have a different spin on them? Latin America, Spanish, Aztec, Inca, Maya – finding more texts on the perspective of the Spanish and how they viewed the Aztec, for example. And then we also brought in the

Aztec readings, this is why we do what we do, and this is how we perceived the Spanish. Social Studies is easy, in a way, to find texts [with multiple perspectives]. But you still have to do it. – Brad

Curriculum Changes

Changes in what is being taught happened across every discipline represented in the study. The math departments probably has the most prescribed curriculum and the least flexibility in this area, so math teachers tended to focus more on instructional strategies than curricular changes. Special Education teachers must teach to the specific needs of their current students, so they also tended to focus more on changes in strategy than in curriculum. Social Studies and English teachers, on the other hand, were better able to pull in new curricular resources from multiple perspectives, and that challenged their students' thinking in other ways.

The nature of the discipline, the relationships within the department, and the culture of the school seemed to determine the extent to which changes were made by individual teachers or whole departments. The Humanities disciplines seemed to have an easier time weaving in multiple perspectives and adding culturally relevant curriculum. In some schools, departments came together to look at their curriculum through an equity lens, and made choices together about changes. In others, a culture of independence was in place, and changes were predominantly made by individuals.

We don't necessarily have a unified curriculum. We do kind of have it, but we also have a lot of flexibility and individuality within our classrooms....

We do some universal assignments now that have their foundation in equity. So I guess, yeah, it has had some impact there. – H.S. Teacher

Two math teachers from different schools illustrate the different experiences of having a unified, supportive department, and having one that was fractured and in which talking about race was awkward:

I think we're all very open to talking about it, all very comfortable with talking about race. All have the same goal, which is for all kids to be successful, and work to their highest potential. We really do have an amazing department. And I'm sure all the departments say the same thing! But cohesiveness, working together, giving each other feedback, this worked, this didn't work, I would try this, but maybe change it a little bit, those types of things. We're all very open to discussing it. – Math teacher

My department especially was really negative about [talking about race]. There were definitely people that were all about it. There's some people in between. And then there was a really big chunk, I would say, of negativity. I think the pattern that I'm seeing in my head was that it was the teachers that had been around for a long time and had seen a lot of different initiatives coming through and were just kind of thinking this is

another initiative and it's going to change in two years anyway, I can tune this out. – Math teacher

While changes happened across the board, teachers also expressed some reservations and hesitancy about curricular changes as well. They were acutely aware of the limits of what their community would tolerate. As one teacher explained:

Now with 7th graders, you know, you can only go so far. They're so literal, they can't quite get a handle on it. So current events, I've used a lot of current events to bring in race, a little bit of white privilege, but that one's a little bit tougher, simply because 7th graders don't get it, and then they go home and talk about it, and you get the parent phone calls.... I had more phone calls as a Social Studies teacher when Obama wanted to talk to the students [by video at the beginning of the 2009 school year] than anything else I've ever done in 12 years. – J.H./M.S. teacher

The general themes of change from each department are included here.

Additional data, also organized by department, is included in Appendix D. Since teacher participants were chosen randomly, the number of teachers interviewed in each department varies. Written survey data from one high school and one junior high/middle schools also showed evidence of curricular changes, and is included as well.

Social Studies. Seven Social Studies teachers were interviewed, representing five of the six schools, two high schools and three junior high/middle schools. In three of the schools, including one high school, the department had developed common units and looked at curriculum together as part of the equity work. The other two schools shared ideas and discussed curriculum, but teachers did not report using common units or having an expectation that all teachers in the same grade level or teaching the same class would use the same materials.

Overall, the Social Studies department seems to have the most flexibility around curriculum, and teachers reported that significant curricular change was possible in response to the equity work. The most common changes reported were finding texts that represented multiple perspectives, and introducing information about institutional racism and white privilege directly into the curriculum.

North America we do an immigration unit. Usually it focuses on groups who settled here. We deal with push and pull factors, why people come, why people left, and... what we chose is more recent, what's happening with the border, down south, and then the influx of Somali immigrants in the last 10 years, so we kind of shifted the focus from the Irish settled here, the Germans settled here, to more relevant to what's going on right now. So that was fun. And we got to talk about the push and pull factors, you know, the process, it's just that it wasn't ancient history, it was recent.

– J.H./M.S. Teacher

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. The white privilege checklist - a modified version. I've modified for high school kids. I actually do that in all my classes. Oh yeah. The lasting impact of slavery and colonialism, so we talk about this stuff all the time. – H.S. Teacher

English/Language Arts. The teachers in this department category included positions in English, Language Arts, Reading, and Media. Four teachers were interviewed in three of the schools, one high school and two junior high/middle schools. Respondents from this department talked a lot about text selection and ensuring that kids were reading selections by and about people with similar backgrounds. They also commonly used text as a springboard from which to have classroom conversations about race-related topics.

Is a kid going to be able to relate to this story? Is there going to be that connection, but is there also merit in this story that from which they can draw? That's why I love stories like Raisin in the Sun, because you have people in really beautiful authentic struggles, not only with the exterior world, but with their inner family world. That's been probably one of the better texts I've been able to use. – H.S. Teacher

The other main theme from the English teachers was framing the learning of Standard English as code switching.

And then also with some of my students of color, saying, I realize this isn't the way you would hang out and talk with your friends, but we're going to

use [Standard English]. I talk about code switching with all of my students, but I talk about it specifically with some of my kids [of color], once we have a relationship. I can say, this time, we're going to use formal language, that's what colleges are looking for. I use it as college talk - college talk, college writing. Making sure that those messages are deliberately stated, that I realize that none of you would be writing like this or talking like this if I weren't telling you, now it's college talk time. –

J.H./M.S teacher

Science. Three Science teachers were interviewed from two of the six schools, one junior high/middle school and one high school. Written survey data from two other schools also showed evidence of curricular changes. A big theme in curricular changes in Science was around showing students that scientists are not all old White men. The Science teachers were also very intentional about ensuring that their students of color saw themselves as scientists, or that science was for them, not just white kids.

There's an astrophysicist named Neil deGrassi Tyson. I just showed a video clip and he is one of my favorite people. He's brilliant. He can talk down to earth and he's an African American male. I love showing clips because they're great. I like saying here's this astrophysicist who's known around the world, and here's what he looks like; taking those opportunities too, just for kids to see themselves. – J.H./M.S. teacher

Math. Six Math teachers from five schools, both junior high/middle and high schools, were interviewed. Math departments had the hardest time with curricular changes, because departments in all the districts studied used a district-wide textbook curriculum.

Right now, we have a very rote textbook, and many of our diverse students would be more successful with a more investigative type approach. So PLC [meeting time] focuses more on the curriculum piece, that we are constantly integrating the need for diversity into those pieces. We try. Again, math is – always potentially makes it difficult for us. But like doing metacognition frames, just trying to do different things. You can see over here, we did bubbles, were they had a person or thing that they cut out of a magazine, and they had to describe their vocabulary word from that individual's eyes. Just trying to do some different things like that. To break up that whole, correcting, notes, work time pattern that math so often gets in. – J.H./M.S. teacher

Electives. From the elective areas, one Music teacher and one Family and Consumer Science (FACS) teacher were interviewed. They seemed to have quite a bit of flexibility around content and curriculum selection, and both gave multiple examples of how their curriculum choices had evolved with their equity training.

The complicated aspect of the district in terms of music is that a lot of choral music tends to be religious in nature, and there's a large Jewish

population, and we have a growing population of students who are Muslim, and so religious music is sort of off the table, unless it's very innocuous, maybe is the word I'm looking for. It has to be pretty general. That being said, I think teachers before me had tried to avoid gospel or spirituals, and I don't do that, because I think kids love them. My African-American students often times already know them, and I think that's important, because there's other songs you do that other kids already know. I do songs that are in Hebrew, too, and then sometimes my kids who are Jewish already know those songs. – Music teacher

We used to make a very Midwestern taco salad. Very run of the mill. Now I've added quite a few options to that, where my Latino kids will love it. Actually all the kids love it. They're optional-type ingredients and I have three different dressing type toppings that they can pick and choose what they want and the kids love it. [I've added] Black beans, the avocados, the jalapenos, the different salsas. The toppings, they can do salsa and sour cream, or they can do guacamole. It used to be like this French dressing and taco seasoning. – FACS teacher

Special Education. The two Special Education teachers who were interviewed did not report specific curricular changes as a result of their equity work. However, both reported multiple changes in instructional strategies and other classroom practices.

See Appendix D for further data showing curricular changes by department.

Instructional Strategy Changes

Some of the most powerful changes happened in the area of instructional strategies. Where it didn't make sense to change the curriculum, teachers often found new ways to help their students access and work with it.

Daniel shared how learning about White privilege and talking about race with colleagues led to a small change in practice around how he approaches the “N-word” in literature that has had a profound impact on his students:

The first time I did the trial scene [in To Kill a Mockingbird as a play], I had a Black kid - and there weren't many at the school then - who, you know, had signed up for Sheriff Tate. He's going through the speech and we're acting it out. There was the N-word, right in his very first line. The kid got there and he looked up and he said, “I'm not saying that.” I remember thinking, “Well, what's the matter with that?” I didn't know. I didn't know what I didn't know. That was the words that they used in the thirties and it doesn't have anything to do with now. All right, yeah, say it but let's get on with the show here. Other kids were saying it as they were going through. The N-word is rolling off White lips in front of this poor Black kid, and I had no idea that there was any problem with that. Then I wonder why he doesn't want to do his homework, or was coming late to class and doesn't

really want anything to do with me. It's like I made a very unsafe environment for him.

Now, same work of literature, we don't do it as a trial. In fact, we read A Raisin the Sun first, and it only has one instance of the N-word in it, when the neighbor comes over, Mrs. Johnson, and she drops that word. As we approached that, we were reading out loud, and three words before the kid got there, I said, "Stop!" Everybody kind of looks up like, "What?" and I say we've got to stop before we get there. Get where? Get to what's coming. That's where we have the conversation about what the deal is with this word. How there is no word that a Black person can say to a White person that is going to have the same impact. Cracker, oh, ow. No, that's not going to hurt me. That is because of the racism in our society that is based on power structures that have been there for centuries. The word has centuries of history behind it. A White person saying the N-word to a Black person is like hurling a brick from a ten-story building. A Black person calling the White person a cracker is like him throwing the brick back.

That's just the way it is, and that's the power structure in the society. We have that conversation with the kids, and some agree and some disagree. Well, they get to call each other the N-word. I said, yeah, I'm not going to tell them not to. They can't do it in my classroom because I get to decide

how things are spoken here. That's operating on a level that we White folk can't understand and aren't going to begin to. You know what, if you can let them have that, I'll consider that very generous, but just the fact that you're offended that they can do something that you can't do – you're being a little sensitive, if you get right down to it. There's a power piece there too. That's White privilege. How come I don't get to? I should get to do anything anybody else gets to.

Being able to have the engagement and have those conversations with the White kids, in front of the Black kids, and have it be a proper level of tension and awkwardness is the result of this [equity] work, and it's really wonderful. – Daniel

Almost every teacher interviewed gave examples, across all of the different departments, of how their instructional strategies have changed as a result of the equity work. The only teacher who said, "It evolves," but didn't give specifics, was a black teacher who was very involved with the equity work at that school.

Specific strategies were shared in the areas of: planning, using visuals and manipulatives, differentiation, scaffolding, group work, multiple perspectives, relevance, participation and student voice, movement, and technology. Additional data, also organized by the following themes, is included in Appendix E.

Planning. Teachers shared that they changed the way they approached planning lessons. Examples included alerting students in advance to what was coming, and soliciting student feedback at the end of each unit to help them prepare the next unit.

Visuals and manipulatives. Several teachers are bringing in more visuals and manipulatives, not just to augment instruction, but as a part of first-time instruction for learners who preferred it. Teachers mentioned English language learners and students who respond to a more hands-on approach. This was a significant area of change for math teachers, in particular.

I always try to make sure I have auditory and a visual concept going on, with pictures as much as I can, especially in geometry. Then I try to bring in as many hands-on activities as I can, so students are engaged in some form of tactile learning, as well as some visual experiments, occasionally. I know when I get to volume, I bring in 3-dimensional shapes and pass them around, let the kids see them, touch them, explore the shapes, the way that they are. – H.S. teacher

Differentiation. Many teachers embraced new strategies around differentiation, both for ability level and learning style. Several teachers talked about the idea that different kids had different preferred ways to approach learning, and they had to juggle them all. While this was a source of stress for some respondents,

others expressed that the juggling was worth it for the results they were getting in improved student achievement.

Every lesson you say, now who is this one for? And it's just that simple question that you ask before you begin. So if this one is for the person who likes to be quiet and write, then this one needs to be for the person who needs to verbalize, and get up in front and act out. So I design my lessons with that question constantly going.... Every lesson I plan, there's me time, there's small group time, there's individual time, and there's whole group time. And I intentionally do that, so that there's voice time, there's written quiet time, there's reading time, there's time for me to lead, and set the example, and all those things. – English teacher

Scaffolding. Teachers report many strategies for helping students access content that they had not used prior to the equity work. Explicit vocabulary instruction, especially in math and science, was mentioned multiple times. Adding support for students while they worked on projects was another theme – whether staying after school, having kids start the project in class, or checking for understanding more often during the unit.

Group work. Teachers are adding more small group and partner work, both because students from collectivist cultures prefer it, and because it increases student voice and participation.

I certainly moved from you need to work by yourself, to let's figure out how we can work together. And some of that was from PEG, and some was from the National Urban Alliance too. And some of that was because my kids were like hey, we want to work together. And I kept saying no, and then I was like, why am I saying no all the time? You keep asking me, maybe you're telling me something. And they actually were working when they were together, so that was kind of a novelty to me - oh, you really are talking about it. – Special Ed teacher

Multiple perspectives. Building in ways to look at multiple perspectives without changing the curriculum was another change that surfaced repeatedly. Where they were not able to pull in other texts, teachers found ways to pull in other perspectives and connections about or from the text.

All those [PLC] conversations were conversations about race, with colleagues saying, all right I got this lesson, I'm teaching The Crucible and it's the one point in the curriculum where the Black kids tank out. There's no connection for them, it's not relevant to them. Do I ditch that piece of curriculum, or can I work with a couple other English teachers here and let's figure out what's the tweak or the change or the different way we need to present this book that is going to engage our Black kids, because right now they're not. White Jewish playwright writing about the Puritans, hmm. [But look at the issues in the novel.] False accusations. Anybody in here been falsely accused? – English teacher

Relevance. Teachers made efforts to connect the curriculum to their students' lives and interests in many ways. One PE teacher noted, "In archery safety instruction: 'After you're done shooting, stay on the line because Tenzin or Rahanna or Billy might not be done', instead of saying Jimmy or Suzie or Billy." Making examples more real-world was cited by teachers in several different departments:

The relevance piece has come in throughout everything. It comes in the way that we introduce things and trying to make things relevant to their lives and what they're interested in. Using pop culture, and that comes in in the assessments as well. It's funny how something like that can make someone tune in. Just the other day we were talking about simple interest and instead of saying, "Bob invested blah, blah, blah," we talked about Kanye West and what he invested, and there was a picture of him on one of our worksheets and it was engaging just to see that I think. – Math teacher

Participation and student voice. Moving away from sit-and-get lecture-and-notes style instruction toward more engaging ways to explore concepts was cited across every school. Teachers worked hard to increase student participation, and ensure that student voices were heard in the classroom.

I have increased my wait time and often have kids write down their answers [before sharing with the class] or share with a friend in order to

get more voices in the room. This has increased class participation for students of color. – English teacher

Movement. Some teachers are intentionally adding more movement to their lessons, for students who are kinesthetic learners or just don't care to sit still all period. This is still an area of discomfort for some teachers, but its use is clearly increasing. Two schools had introduced a template for making lessons more culturally responsive that included adding movement as one of four quadrants.

Trying to continually have kids speak about what they're seeing, have an opinion about something, and then not just doing it with the person next to them, but they get up. I want you to find someone with the same color shirt on or same color in their shirt as you, not just going to someone that they know or that's right next to them, but moving around, looking at different people. More interactive collaborative types of things where it's not just me spitting out information. It's a mind map or gallery walks.

– H.S. teacher

Technology. Many different ways of using technology to advance learning were mentioned, along with the ongoing concern about students of color not having as much access to technology outside of school. Several schools had intentionally worked around this, from issuing one-to-one iPads, to having ClearSpot modems available for students to check out in case they don't have wireless access at home. One teacher was proud that, attending a workshop on teaching math to

Black students, she found that her department was already doing most of what the presenter recommended:

And then [the workshop leader] was talking about doing a flipped classroom, and some of the 8th grade teachers are doing that. And then he talked about EdModo, and we're doing that. And then he was talking about these animation things, and [one colleague] is doing that. So there were people doing all these different things that he was saying would be really good with the kids. – Math teacher

See Appendix E for additional data documenting changes in instructional strategies.

Grading/Assessment Changes

Talking about race and looking at multiple perspectives led several teachers to make changes in their grading scales and policies. The biggest change was overall grade weights: ensuring that mastery, or what the student had learned, was the core of the grade, and that jumping hoops like turning work in on time or in certain formats was less of a factor. One teacher brought participation down to less than 5% of the grade. It continued as a category so parents could see how the student was doing in that area, but the bulk of the grade weight had changed to mastery of the material. Those who made these kinds of changes noted that they resulted in students of color getting better grades.

My grading has changed so that 10% is homework. [As opposed to] all of it. Everything was all total points. So 10% is homework, 40% is daily quizzes, and 50% are tests and projects. Homework is an equity issue. ... And because of that, I decided to do an experiment. So first quarter I had total points. And second quarter I had homework worth 10%. Changed it. All my kids of color passed. And I had some White kids really throw a fit, because now they had to pay attention in class, because mom's not doing their project. – Social Studies teacher

I did find more kids [of color] passing, mainly because I think I was giving them opportunities to show me ways that they've learned. ... The percentages of my grades changed. Last year only 20 percent of their grade was actual homework, turning it in, that kind of stuff, and 80 percent of their grade was truly more on mastery, did you learn it? – Science teacher

Teachers also shared specific strategies they had adopted to help improve students' grades. For example, Science teachers in three different schools talked about taking time to let students test orally, or to let them listen to a recording of the test questions being read out loud.

Sometimes when I give a test, if a kid bombs it, I'll have him come in after school and I'll sit down and just do the same basic task orally and just talk to him, and say, "Hey." Sometimes I make them come in. Sometimes I

say, "If you did really bad on it, you could come in and talk." Some kids do it on their own, but a few of them I have to actually make them come in. I'll do that. I'll just sit and talk with them orally and then we'll go through the same thing and then give credit. You can tell pretty quick whether they knew what was being asked. – Science teacher

I give more opportunities for students to assess their work and their learning. I am working on providing more "safety nets" for students when they are apprehensive about participating in an activity or a discussion. – J.H./M.S. teacher

A big topic with regard to grading was homework. In addition to lowering the weight of homework in the overall grade, teachers also talked about providing materials, and how to ensure that students all have access to whatever might be needed in order to complete the homework. This was a big concern, especially in the area of technology.

I can remember the days that I would grade kids based on what it looked like. Like the day of the poster board. And they'd come in with tape. And I used to think, how in the heck can you present something like that? Well, my training in all this stuff showed me – I grew up White middle class. I had glue. If I needed something, I went out to the store and got it. I had someone to drive me there. So that initially changed me as a teacher, in that, if I'm truly about support, then I've got to provide that support. And

what does that support look like? That means I've got to figure out a way to get a computer in their hand. I've got to stay after school when they can stay after school. I've got to call the parents, and talk to them, and have really hard conversations about, you know... Do you have access to this, and how can I help you? – Social Studies teacher

One school read a book together called “Rethinking Homework”, which led to significant discussions among the faculty about the role of homework and what reasonable expectations should be. Several teachers from that school referenced both the book and the discussions when the subject of assessment arose.

We read a book called “Rethinking Homework” and the piece of it I really liked – and not everyone loved that book – was the whole conversation around homework being an equity issue, and that when we say resources, time and adults are resources, but not all kids have that. Even that was an interesting conversation, because that was kind of poking people with a sharp stick sometimes, because people had really strong views about homework and late work. In the book it said, “Why do you have the late work policy you have?” and quite honestly, I didn’t know. Because that’s how the person did it before I came. Seriously, that’s the best I had. That’s how I thought other people did it. I changed my late work policy and that changed my grade book. It seems like people are moving in that direction. – Science teacher

Several teachers shared changes to late work policies, and how they were modifying their policies to better meet kids' needs by not having strict cut-off dates, or by extending cut-off dates longer.

I used to not take any late work. I used to have a very strict no late work policy. And I've changed that over the years, because as my students change – their lives are very different from the students that I had when I started. They work, they have to take care of siblings, they are gone a lot because of various reasons. Some of my kids are translating, so their parents are buying houses. They're taking care of their siblings because mom and dad are working. – FACS teacher

Classroom Practice Changes

Classroom practice changes mentioned by respondents that do not fall into the categories of curriculum, instructional strategies or assessment include making time to work with students outside of class, and ensuring that students have access to resources like technology when it is needed to complete assignments.

I would... pull those 8th graders and they would work on that project during that time. See, to me, that's what support looks like. Many of these kids don't have mom and dad at home saying hey, you need to sit down now and get going on your honors English project. So that's what support looks like to me. [Some colleagues] say... that I enable them. Are you kidding me? Some of the families are working three jobs. They don't have

time to sit down and see that Johnny or Marcus has got his honors project done. – Social Studies Teacher

I've found that with technology, if the students didn't have access, and that often seems to be our minority students, they are already at a disadvantage because they have to first learn how to use the technology before they can use the technology in the classroom. Where a lot of teachers have the assumption that all kids have the background on it, all kids have seen and used the computer, and can just get going on it. – Math teacher

Some teachers set goals for increasing achievement of their students of color. Each school or district had improvement goals that related to closing achievement gaps, and all of them had professional growth plans required for teachers, so it followed that several teachers were working specifically on targets for improvement of their students of color:

One of my targets for my students was Latino students and improving their math scores. I think before that, honestly, I hadn't really separated my students by race. One of my goals was that I was focusing on these specific students and just watching some of the patterns that would happen... and how to help them through it. Some of the students I was really focusing on weren't legal [documented immigrants], and it opened

all of this other stuff that came with it. Honestly I don't know if I would have gone down that road unless we had been encouraged to really target a specific racial group and think about how to improve their achievement.

– Math teacher

A significant “ah-ha” for several of the teachers was the realization that their students of color often didn't have the family support or background knowledge about academic success that their White classmates had. Coming to understand that all parents care about school, they just do not necessarily have time to monitor their kids, or know what their kids should do to be successful, was a new understanding for several of the respondents. Learning that parents are not involved because they are working, not because they are negligent, was an important realization:

That's what [colleagues] say to me too, all the time, that I enable them. Are you kidding me? Some of the families are working three jobs. They don't have time to sit down and see that Johnny or Marcus has got his honors project done. – J.H./M.S. teacher

[I am] being a lot more intentional about teaching the, “This is how you do school,” pieces. This is what college looks like, this is what you're going to need to be successful at – whatever level I'm at. – H.S. teacher

Changes in Collegial Interactions and Relationships

An area of change that was identified in all six schools was in collegial interactions and relationships. The ability to talk about race without fear led to different conversations than they had been having prior to the training, both among White colleagues, and between White teachers and teachers of color.

The fact that a member of our E-team, a Black woman, one of only a couple of Black women in the building, can come down to my office like she did yesterday, and just vent with me, you know, about stuff that has race at its core - she probably would have taken that home with her years ago. And maybe have the conversation on the home front instead of on the professional front. But the fact that we have colleagues, like-minded colleagues, and that we can have these conversations, that's huge. –
Social Studies teacher

There are a dozen people in the building I can walk up to and say, Do you notice the difference in the Black kids that they're not getting smacked down quite as hard for being smart. Have you sensed that too? I can go have those conversations. I think there are a lot of the schools where you could never say such a thing.... You said Black kids. You noticed they're Black. So I'm very grateful to be here, I'm very grateful our dynamic is changing. – English teacher

These conversations also involved reflection, and respondents noted how having time to talk about race with colleagues also gave them much-needed time to reflect on their own practice. They appreciated the time, and also the prompts and questions that the equity trainings provided for them to think about.

Teachers also reported that it got easier over time to have the tough conversations that might involve “calling out” a colleague, Though they were still wary of angering another teacher, most participants reported wading into difficult conversations anyway. Only one teacher reported still being unwilling to risk it.

I do see seasoned teachers challenging each other. There’s a broad range of where they are on their race and equity journey. There are some teachers that are very aware, and very understanding of what’s going on, and they are very willing to speak to other seasoned teachers that might not necessarily be on the same page. So as much as I know that I might have something to input, and I don’t always do it, I do know that I have seasoned teachers along with me who are having those conversations with the other seasoned teachers. So the conversations are happening in the school. – H.S. teacher

I feel embarrassed that I haven't done it more. I think I've done it a few times. I'm pretty diplomatic. I'm not an in-your-face type of person. I might just question it and just say, "What do you mean by that?" I think in just asking the question, "What do you mean by that," then people kind of

backpedal and have thought about it. I am not the type to say, "What you said is racist and I don't like it." I could probably do that, but my style is more, "What did you mean by that?" - J.H./M.S. teacher

Teachers also increased their willingness to express their own need for help. Instead of avoiding the problem or blaming the students, which several teachers reported their colleagues doing before the equity training, teachers started to say "I don't know how," and "What should I do?" more often in conversations with their colleagues.

It created an environment of safety, like it was safe to have these conversations, and it was safe to [address] the whole conflict behind the courageous conversation piece. They needed to have these conversations because they just make you feel vulnerable. It was safe, finally, which really helped them to say, I don't know, help, I don't know how to... [or] What do I do in this situation? Here's an issue that I have had, what should do I, how should I handle it differently? And it wasn't the fear of repercussion or professional consequence, that kind of thing. It was more of a dialogue, a conversation of let's work together. – H.S. teacher

The E-Team members interviewed reported that they felt that role was a "mixed blessing" in terms of relationships with colleagues. They all felt that it opened doors for colleagues to come to them with questions, and that many did. Several

reported that they loved this aspect of the leadership role. But they acknowledged that other colleagues probably stopped sharing negativity around them, so they were probably a bit cut off from the naysayers.

Particularly with this work there is that. I saw some staff coming to me more often and saying, Hey can we talk this through? Those that I had a relationship with, we had deeper professional and personal conversations that I had ever had before. For others, I saw them distancing themselves, isolating themselves from me. I felt more isolated. I feel like some people were more guarded with me. After that first meeting, I didn't have many White staff coming up to me bashing equity work anymore. I would hear that someone had bashed it through someone else. – E-Team lead

Changes in Interactions with Students

Most teachers reported some changes in how they are interacting with students of color. For example, increased understanding of the pressures students of color face resulted in some cases of teachers being more patient with them.

It's given me a lot more patience and a lot more compassion for the black students. All I have to do is, that kid comes into my class and he's steamed about something throwing his backpack down. Eight years ago, it was - go the office. And how it's like, oh boy what was that conversation? Should we go vent this in the hall, or do you want to do it here in front of everybody? Then we walk out in the hall and say get our backs up against the wall, that's my favorite posture, not face to face, and

what's going on? Got kicked out last night. Shit. You're probably not going to like my lecture then because you have a lot more to think about.

Being able to have a conversation like that. – H.S. teacher

Talking about race with colleagues also opened doors for teachers to have different conversations with their students. Most of the participants reported being more comfortable talking with their students of color than they had been prior to the training:

I'll ask kids more questions about their race or about why they do something or help me understand, and I don't know if I ever would have done that before. Some of it I have more knowledge is because I've taught longer now, more students and more races, so I have more background, but that would have just been [before], are you really going to ask a kid that? Now it's just like, I'm okay. I can ask a kid that. I can do that. So that's something. – H.S. teacher

Teachers also shared that as they changed their classroom practices, their interactions with students changed as well:

We were talking about racial profiling, and a couple of my colleagues of color have mentioned that they've been pulled over by police, for no apparent reason. And so I tell those stories to the students, and then last year one student in the back of the room raised his hand, a student of color, and he said, yep, DWB. And I said what's that? And he goes,

Driving While Black. And it kind of just lifted the heaviness of the room, because he could see the humor in that, but it was serious at the same time. Those kinds of things. That wouldn't have happened in my classroom 10 years ago because I would have been too uptight about it.

– H.S. teacher

The formal trainings do not often include activities through which teachers are learning from their students, though two schools had made videos of students talking about race and issues in their lives, and showed them to the faculty. Even so, many subjects reported significant equity lessons came through their students. From instructional strategies to a greater understanding of White privilege, some teachers reported that they learned the most from the kids. Chapter 4 includes a discussion of this theme in the context of learning from students.

Yes, I think - ultimately it was the experience of getting to work with students of color. That alone was helpful and I really found that I had to build a trust for them to be able to tell me what they were feeling or what wasn't working. I had to build that, so I'd ask a lot of questions about, was this helpful for you, was it not? I think that was helpful just to have that open conversation and so they began to feel comfortable in your classroom and comfortable telling you what it was that worked for them or not. I think the other thing is when I built a relationship with them they were more willing to put in the effort of the class. – J.H./M.S. teacher

The stuff I've learned, I've learned from the kids [of color]. One of the things is don't be afraid of us. I had one young man say, in the same sentence, sometimes they kick us out for absolutely nothing, and some, when we should have been kicked out, they don't kick us out. Just fascinating stuff like that. – JH/MN teacher

Changes in School-Wide Practices

All six schools studied made significant school-level changes in response to the equity training. In addition to changes in school-wide group norms, each school made changes in policy and practice as well.

Group Norms

Teachers reported that how colleagues interacted with each other was positively impacted in all six of the schools studied. The ability to talk about race without fear led to a more relaxed atmosphere of trust and collaboration, both among White colleagues, and between White teachers and teachers of color. Although the cultural norm of not causing conflict is still present, it has lessened, and teachers reported that they engaged in more conversations about how to help students of color, including confronting colleagues when needed.

Talking about race became more common in regular department meetings or team meeting as well. Sometimes this looked like routine conversation about

curriculum. Other times it involved spirited debate. But over and over, teachers reported that the conversations *were happening*, and that this was a significant shift that grew out of the equity training.

Ironically, experiencing discomfort together seemed in some cases to bring teachers together into collaborative relationships. This was not the case across the board, but participants in four of the schools reported that the shared discomfort of the equity work actually brought them to a new place with their colleagues that allowed them to talk about race outside of the professional development context.

Teachers are talking, they are discussing it more. It has changed in the building. I hear teachers talking about it all the time. Our staff have the option of doing peer observation as one of the [required] observations, and that is something that people will actively observe and be able to look for. Watch my interactions with this specific group, or this specific child. That feels safe now. I think our district has come a long way in that. I really do. I think they have really come to a point where there is safety in asking for help. – H.S. teacher

I think the staff is much more able to have conversations and deal with what the truths might be – they're over being angry that they were called racist, and it's not that big of a deal any more. – J.H./M.S. teacher

Even though they had some frustration with certain colleagues they perceived to be holdouts, respondents reported that helping students of color to achieve more had become the norm in the building, and that the majority of their colleagues were actively working to understand the needs of their students of color and help them succeed.

And seeing how that work can make it better for kids, and families – there is really a lot left to do, tons left to do, but I have personally seen it go better, I've seen kids feeling better about who they are, I've seen families happy to come back to [our district].... It's exciting to me that I'm really far from being the only one who feels this way. The main percentage of people I work with feel this way. And they see the importance. It's a no-brainer for them too, that this is exactly the work that we need to do, and it's why I love what I teach. People will step up, and they will question what they're doing, and they will try something different if they know it's going to be better for the kids. I really couldn't think of very many names of people that I wouldn't put on that list. – J.H./M.S. teacher

In addition to sharing questions, concerns and ideas, a new culture was created through which teachers could share “what works”. The equity training facilitated opportunities for teachers to implement strategies in the classroom, and then to share their good work with their colleagues. Although this could be a risky undertaking in some school cultures, the teachers who mentioned this reported that, in all schools, the teachers who shared were usually very well received.

The Critical Action Research for Equity (CARE) Team was designed by PEG to be an action research team of teachers, who would implement new practices and measure the impact on their students of color. Although all of the schools had a CARE Team as some point in the process, only two had teams that were cited by other respondents as having impacted their own practice by sharing with they had learned. This may relate to the extent to which a school used the “CARE Team” label, or just to the frequency of their involvement.

Policy Changes

Because the professional development activities are geared toward individual teachers, there is not a large focus on school-wide changes. That is not the point of the work. However, there were several notable policy or procedural changes that happened as a result of a faculty’s conversations about race, and many smaller but still meaningful changes across all six schools as well. These all happened because individual teachers, having learned more about White privilege and institutional racism, started to notice patterns and policies in their schools that were not serving their students of color as well as they could.

Coming in the back door. Most notably, staff at one of the high schools noticed that most of their White students, who walked, drove to school, or got rides, came in the beautiful front entrance. But most of their Black students, who were bussed to school, had to come in through the back entrance, which was

unattractive. When it became apparent that there was a perception of the Black kids literally coming in the “back door,” the school was able to get funding from the district to redesign the back entrance to make it just as attractive as the front. This was understood by the faculty as an equity issue.

Privilege. A notable policy change in another school came about when the faculty noticed, as a part of their equity work, that students were not allowed to bring juice or other beverages out of the cafeteria from breakfast, but kids who bought coffee shop drinks were allowed to carry those drinks through the halls. This manifested as a race issue, because the breakdown happened to be mostly kids of color eating breakfast in the cafeteria, and the White kids bringing in outside food and drinks.

And as we were learning about White privilege, one of our staff members who went through the training, identified something in the morning in the hallways, with kids not being able to take anything out of the cafeteria, and then kids coming in, being dropped off with their Caribou, and their Jamba Juices. So the affluent families have kind of free reign, and can bring in whatever they want, and because it doesn't come from our cafeteria, they can eat or drink whatever they want, and yet our kids of color, who are on free or reduced lunch, have to keep their stuff [in the cafeteria.] And so we identified that as a systemic thing that we needed to change. – Asst.

Principal

Understanding and addressing tardies. A third school-wide change happened at one of the high schools in response to the perception that lots of Black kids were coming late to class – much later than their White counterparts. At an equity session, teachers broke down and spoke about their frustrations that this was happening, which led to administration cracking down on all students in the halls during class time. In a separate but related initiative at the same school, they worked to get buses to arrive on time in the morning, so kids weren't late to class, because the majority of kids on the buses were students of color.

If you would go out in the halls 3-4 years ago, you would have seen mostly kids of color wandering in the halls.... I don't know if teachers just would let them - it's easier to not deal with this kid, so I'll just let them go to the hall. It was crazy. I remember the wife of a colleague of mine coming into the school and asking, what, don't Black kids have to go to class here? It was so terrible. So we have changed that now, and it's gotten much tighter. – H.S. teacher

We were having bus issues that were turning into equity issues, that were driving us crazy. We had some buses that were consistently getting here late in the morning, and they were coming from areas where a concentration of our kids of color were living, and then these were also... kids who needed to get breakfast too... who then were getting crunched for time to get their breakfast and get to class on time, so we're having hordes and hordes of kids of color coming to class late.... And so that was

our equity team focus last year, getting that ironed out... we collected data around that from teachers, how is it impacting your class? And from students, how is it impacting your academic experience? And we got that changed, so it's awesome this year. – H.S. teacher

Professional development. One significant change in practice that happened in multiple schools was the expectation that talking about race be woven through regular professional development time. Professional Learning Communities or Teams (PLC or PLT) also called School Improvement Teams or Groups (SIT or SIG) were in place in all six of the schools studied. Teachers reported that these small groups of teachers regularly talked about the achievement of students of color, and what they were doing in classrooms to help students improve.

In PLC, we talk about strategies that kids are more successful with. Right now, we have a very rote [math] textbook, and many of our diverse students would be more successful with a more investigative type approach. So PLC focuses more on the curriculum piece, that we are constantly integrating the need for diversity into those pieces. ... We just had one, actually, and we reviewed all the different [equity] things we had talked about throughout the year, and got together as a 7th grade math department, and talked about how we had integrated those different PLC topics into our curriculum. – Math teacher

Two schools took the additional step of encouraging teachers to use the PLC time to look together at the results of common formative assessments, to see where they were having success and what they could learn from each other.

And then [we are] looking at how race does impact assessments and then to get at that question that I don't know the answer to, How do we fix that? Is it about instruction? Is it about classroom practice? Is it about the assessment itself? It's probably all of those things. – Science teacher

It was addressed [by the PLC Lead] about just being open or being courageous and having these courageous conversations about when you truly look at the data, being okay having there being different results. In my PLC, we definitely looked at that. We looked at the overall assessment and we looked at item analysis.... What we found in the end is that we would have similar scores in terms of overall average, but some of the item analysis was really informative, like, your kids did really well on this question, mine did horribly, what did you do? What did you do to get them to understand that? And we had good conversations about that. – J.H./M.S. teacher

At a third school, plans were being made to try to introduce this work, but the principal and E-Team lead were taking a slow approach.

How do we get it so that, within our departments, we look at, let's say, a language arts course, Shakespeare or whatever. Your students of color –

look at it. How do they rate? How do they perform, compared to others? What are you doing? What can we do differently? And just start to chip away... and have each teacher self-reflect, what's going on in their room. And so we are starting out with departments. ... We're trying to figure out how we're going to – ease our way into this, getting faculty, or getting a department to actually look at what they do in their course and then what they could do differently. If I'm teaching Shakespeare and you're teaching Shakespeare, are you having more success than me? But you don't want teachers to think that they're the one - called on the carpet now, so that's where we're trying to figure out, how to do that. – Principal

Teacher observation and evaluation. Another professional development related change that happened in two districts was the addition of a “cultural competence” domain to teacher evaluation models. In one district, this means that every teacher has at least one conversation every year with a mentor and/or administrator that includes the topic of cultural competence. At one school in another district, the E-Team was involved in helping the principal revise the form used for informal drop-in observations, so that it includes cultural competence items.

Programmatic Changes

All six schools reported intentional programs that were created or adopted in response to the equity work. At the teacher level, all six schools created both E-

Teams to lead the professional development work, and CARE Teams to engage in action research around “what works” in the classroom. One school also created a PASS parent involvement group and Dare 2 B Real student leadership group as part of a wider network of support for the equity work. In addition, the schools implemented programmatic changes in the areas of student programs, schedule changes, entrance criteria, and more.

Student Programs. At the student level, all six schools had implemented some type of program, in response to the equity work, to support the achievement of students of color. Most schools had more than one.

Academic programs include: Math and Reading Academies after school, FRESH tutoring program for students of color, AVID college-prep classes, Students On Academic Rise (SOAR) after-school support program for students of color, and a targeted high school math support program after school.

[We] started this after-school group to try and get students to stay and get extra math help. These were students that would tell us that they never had done anything like that before. [We] got them there because we had food. [It] felt like they didn't have a lot of support other places. That was something that we could do for them, to kind of break that pattern of underachievement. I wouldn't say that they came in and did math right away and did math for a whole hour. That was the time where it was more relaxed. We would chat. We would eat. The kids that were coming

regularly we got super close with, and then we would get into the math once we did that. I feel like in a classroom setting it's hard to take the time to do that. – Math teacher

Extracurricular programs reported included: Latinas Unidas after-school group, a Dare 2 B Real student leadership group, a Muslim Student Association, and The Brotherhood for Black boys.

One principal noted that equity means not just providing after-school programs, but providing transportation as well. Each of the schools, as they looked at new programs, looked also at issues of access and how to ensure that students of color could fully participate.

Schedule changes. One middle-level school revised the master schedule to create more options for ESL, Special Ed and basic skills classes. A high school started actively encouraging all 10th graders to sign up for Advanced Placement (AP) courses in 11th grade, and was able to increase the number of students of color taking 11th grade AP classes to be proportionate with the percent of students of color in the school.

A middle-level school implemented an advisory program, and intentionally assigned students so that a Black, Latino or Asian student would have at least two other students of their own race in their advisory class. One high school

made sure that there were three or four students of color in every 9th grade core class, to avoid isolation. Another high school implemented a once-a-week advisory program with a curriculum around school success.

Unique changes. There were several other school-wide changes cited in just one or two schools. One middle level school revised the criteria for students to get into the honors program, to make it more accessible and less dependent on completing an independent project over the summer. One school focused their improvement efforts on the “bottom 15%” of students, measured by class grades, and linked meeting that goal with teachers’ Q-Comp performance pay.

Participants from two schools mentioned that the school provided some equity training for hall monitors and other non-teaching staff, to ensure that all students are treated with respect and high expectations everywhere in the school building.

Two principals reported hiring more faculty and staff of color as a strategy that was part of their personal commitment to increasing achievement for students of color. One principal is also conducting focus groups with students of color, and occasionally rides the bus with the students coming in from other districts, just to get a feel for their experience.

Hopes for the future. Several participants mentioned initiatives that they hoped were coming in the future, or were working on, but had not happened yet. Honors

and gifted classes were noted as areas for improvement with regard to participation by students of color, and one school had a group of teachers working on the issue.

Our next big project is to try to get our gifted program to be a little more open. I tell you what, talk about gate-keeper, holy Toledo, Batman. So trying to figure out ways to get them [kids of color] in there, [and so] they'll feel comfortable. – J.H./M.S. teacher

At the high school level, all of the high schools were concerned with or working on increasing the number of students of color taking AP and other advanced classes. One school had already shown significant success in this area in one department, but participants from all three high schools expressed a desire to improve in this area.

One teacher mentioned a wish for increased capacity to use interpreters for regular conversations with parents who do not speak English. Teachers at two schools expressed concern that new teachers were no longer being required to attend *Beyond Diversity* as they had been in years past.

Impact on Students

Although the intent of this study was to look at what happened with teachers, not students, evidence did arise of impacts on students. In addition to more readily

anticipated changes in relationships, student behavior, and school and classroom climate, data also showed positive impacts on student achievement.

All three districts were fighting “White flight” as their districts saw more families of color moving in. This impacted different schools in different ways. At the time of the study, three schools reported increases in student population as more families – both White and of color – were choosing their school.

We must be doing something right, as it relates to the relationship piece.

We must be doing something right as it relates to the environment. Our valedictorian last year was an African American female, who’s [now] at Duke, on a full scholarship. Data-wise, if you looked at Choice Is Yours, at the 5-year mark, where those students were choosing to go to school... we have the greatest increase. So some people will say why is that? I have my own thoughts. This is where they [students of color] want to be.

This is where their families have said, go. It’s that kind of data. – Principal

Behavior and Climate

Respondents from four of the schools reported that their work around talking about race had impacted their behavior infraction rates, both in a decreased number of out-of-school suspensions, and seeing the number of students sent out of class also dropping. This was attributed both to the ways that teachers interacted with students in class, and also to hall monitors and other staff being trained to interact more respectfully with students of color.

In addition to supporting student behavior, many participants noted efforts to create a more welcoming climate for students of color, especially in the large high schools.

But the other impact, and I know there are exceptions, but I absolutely know, that in general, the experience of our Black and brown kids, the experience of our immigrant kids, is different than it was when I first came here. ... If the ultimate popularity contest is the homecoming court, we had a Somali homecoming queen last year. – Principal

Three years ago, there was an 8th grade boy, a Black male. [They asked me to] come and talk to him, because he's really angry. And he was pacing up and down in front of the school, saying, "They might as well write Whites only on the door, because that's what they mean." And this year, I have another Black boy in 8th grade, and he came to school angry last year. He'd been expelled from his old school. And he walked into my class this year, and he went [chest thump] "this is my house." But he was only here for a month and a half last year, which is exactly what the other kid was. [The first boy] was here for a month and a half, and came back in 8th grade still defensive and angry, and stayed defensive and angry all year long. And this one came back, and he really feels like it's his [school]. I think in the hallway, even the hall monitors are greeting them

differently. I think they greeted the other boy with fear. - Special Ed teacher

Relationships

Most participants talked about their relationships changing with their students of color as they learned more about institutional racism, and came to see that the school, like society, throws up multiple barriers for their students of color. Several teachers talked about intentionally taking time to get to know their students of color and build relationships with them. Others noted that relationships developed as the teacher brought a different perspective to their interactions.

It's always easy to have good relationships with kids who do what they're supposed to do. You can bond with those kids very nicely. It's the kids who struggle, either academically or behaviorally, and often both, it's harder to love them, it's harder to be patient. I hope this equity work has made me step back, and really question, what is my problem with this kid's behavior right now? Is it really a problem? Is it something that he and I, or she and I, need to just sit down and have a conversation [about]? And usually when I've done that, the behaviors have gotten better. Just establishing humanity with that person, as opposed to top-down, these are the rules and you've got to do them. – J.H./M.S. teacher

I would say building relationships with the students [is most important] in terms of connecting with them, and seeing things from their cultural

perspective – not just letting the teacher’s culture dominate the room and environment. – H.S. teacher

Many of the teachers interviewed talked about particular students of color they had struggled with, and how building relationships with those students made it easier to deal with behaviors, and led to greater achievement.

So making him a larger piece of my class – which he wants to do anyway... I still get the attention-seeking behaviors, but now I can tell, he’s getting antsy, give him something, crack a joke, or call on him, or something, so he gets that’s fix. Alvin stop – it’s not the Alvin show.

Quarter one was more negative. Everything was correcting, redirection.

Now it’s alright, ok. Test scores – his buddies say oh my god, I did worse than Alvin. I say hey, Alvin’s not dumb. He just didn’t do his homework or study first quarter. And he’s fine with me saying that, he’s like, yeah.

That’s relationship. – Social Studies teacher

Being real. Not being afraid to be real simply because they’re black, because a lot of white teachers are. Teenagers have great radars for when you’re being fake and I think kids of color more so. You can’t fake them out. – H.S. teacher

Student Achievement

Participants talked about achievement in their own classes, and also in the school as a whole. In addition to being pleased with the changes they are making, teachers uniformly reported getting some positive results with student achievement, although the frustration of state test scores not rising as fast as they would like was still there.

Several teachers mentioned grades of students of color going up when they changed grade weights to put more emphasis on what was learned and less emphasis on homework or “doing school”. Teachers also saw grades go up when they made time to work with students after school or at other times outside of class.

Teachers who talked about changing curriculum to make it more relevant and culturally connected for students also reported increases in student participation in class, and in student work completion. One teacher made the point that she could not necessarily attribute changes directly to equity work, but she believed there was a correlation:

I’ve had years where I couldn’t get kids to hand in a piece of paper to save my life, and then this year has been a good year, where a lot of kids just did it. So I don’t know if it’s my teaching that impacted that, or just what was in the water that year. And I’m sure it’s both. But I’ve had less blank spots this year than I’ve had in the past. – J.H./M.S. teacher

Both teachers and principals shared whole-school data reflecting increases in student achievement. Respondents reported that principals shared data regularly with teachers, and four of the current principals are clearly working to create school cultures in which examination of student achievement data by teachers is becoming the norm.

Well, our test score data is obviously really positive. I think that's what [our principal] said - it was 1 [sub group] out of 10 [showed proficiency on the state test to meet progress goals], and then [the next year] 9 out of 10. And then last year, everything passed [all subgroups met goals] but ESL.
– E-Team member

We're really proud of our writing scores [on the state MCA test] here as a building. As our population has become more diverse we're still maintaining our scores in terms of writing, so we we're really proud of that. I think we had three kids not pass [the 9th grade state MCA Writing test last year] out of close to 300. – Science teacher

So as we track [bottom 15%] data, we have found that it's a high-leverage group. So the average grade increase for the kids in the focus group, is 9 percentage points. So depending where you are in the grading scale, that might be 3 grade increments. If you're a Black student in that group, the

average increase is 9.5 percent. For all kids, the percentage of A's and B's is up 2.5%. If you're a Black kid, it's up 8.5%. – H.S. Principal

The most important measure cited by respondents from all six schools was the state MCA test. Although many – especially principals – had a negative attitude toward standardized testing in general, they still placed a high priority on the test data, because it was reported out so publically to the community.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this study, what was known was only that professional development equity work was happening in schools, and that it had not been studied. There was no hypothesis going in, because there was no evidence to base it on. Now, there is evidence.

This study looked at six secondary schools in three districts that had implemented at least five years of professional development that involved talking about race as a step toward closing racial achievement gaps. Two districts embraced the goal of closing the gap with district-level commitment, resources, and energy. A third district got involved without district-level resources, but had committed principals who took advantage of external training opportunities to move the work forward.

Teachers and schools have made both large and small changes in response to what they have learned about institutional racism and White privilege. Changes were documented across many categories, from curriculum to assessment to communication to school rules. In addition to making changes, teachers report being very pleased with the changes they are making in their classrooms, and the results they are seeing with student success. The majority expressed still feeling that they have “a long way to go,” but that they are on the right path. Surprisingly, even the teachers who didn’t enjoy the equity work expressed that it is important to do.

Final Illustration: Brad’s Story

Brad’s story captures the heart of both the difficult journey and the positive changes made by many teachers. His experience is a testament to Thomas Guskey’s assertion that, with any professional development initiative, some teachers will need to be required to make changes, and will come to see the value of the changes only after they get positive results with their students (Guskey, 1982). Here, Brad reflects on the scope of his school’s experience in his own words:

I don’t think the urgency or the personal commitment would be there if we weren’t doing the equity work. I think a lot of people have gotten really passionate, to the point of crying during staff meetings, talking about if this was my kid, I would want you guys to do the work that you’re doing, that sort of thing. It’s made it a lot more personal, toward teachers, no longer

defensive about the racist thing, but defensive that this school, these teachers might be labeled as not proficient if the gap continues to exist. So it's more in defense of their profession and their personal pride, but also, that happened because it was shown to them.

I think there needs to be something concrete – this is what we're doing. We've addressed that with our advisory period, it looks different this year than it did last year. Mid-year last year in reaction to our MCA's and fall NWEA's, we switched advisory from the beginning of the day, more social, to the end of the day with a more academic tilt to it.

Classroom-wise... I think we've used some more culturally diverse texts. Trying to get other perspectives. It's not as simple as just putting a Tiger Woods poster up in the classroom. That doesn't cut it. Part of the [equity] goal is to get it ingrained in what we do. So if one person is an island and just tries to do it on their own, that doesn't really fly. And so the department's been leaning on each other a lot. So we split up into four groups and each took a quarter. Look at what do we usually do in these quarters, and where can we find some texts that have a different spin on them?

I think [the best staff development activity is] when they call upon people who are doing work in their classroom that really addresses it directly.

Because I'll look at what they're doing and say oh yeah, I'm doing that, ok.... I think those people sharing is the best thing, because it's like oh! So again, this isn't going to fix every kid, but not only are these things good for the equity kids, but they're good for all the kids, so where's the harm in trying? And so many people are like, oh my gosh, we have this big problem, we're all racist, what do we do, what do we do? And so, just having some moments [of colleagues sharing strategies] is like oh, ok, I can do that.

Watching what I say when I want to react to things, I need to stop and say, ok, just being fair, is it behavior that I'm getting frustrated with? Like the volume, for instance? Would I tell a group of White girls to be quiet if they were doing the same thing? ... I think in terms of discipline, just making sure that I'm consistent to everyone... You can't really control how you think, but you can control how you react. Immediately after Beyond Diversity, it was like, oh my god, I'm so scared, what am I doing in class? Now it's just like, real quick, am I being consistent?

So that's been the action. I think that's what we were looking for years ago – who's going to step up and create something, that we can all do? Cause not everyone's going to do it unless everyone has to do it. And so, who's going to – not do the work for us, but take all this stuff and focus it, and

let's just give it a shot and see what happens. Last year was very successful. This year, we'll find out.

Chapters 4 and 5 described the results that were obtained through this study. Chapter 6 discusses the implications of the results, and shows how the study was able to generate new grounded theory. Chapter 6 also includes conclusions, recommendations for schools, and implications for further research.

Ch. 6: Conclusions – Moving Through the Fear

A new theory of how principals lead a school faculty through a fear-inducing initiative has emerged from this study. The study set out to determine *whether* principals should invest in professional development around equity and talking about race as a strategy for addressing racial achievement gaps, and it answers that question with a strong affirmative. But in addition to determining the value of the training, the study has also generated data about *how* it can effectively be done. This is a conclusion that was unexpected going in to the study, but is borne out with significant saturation of the data.

It was expected that the data would reveal some changes in beliefs and relationships for teachers, as this is an emotionally charged topic. Learning about institutional racism and confronting one's own biases seemed likely to cause changes in understandings and beliefs about race, White privilege, institutional racism, and their own role as teachers in combating achievement gaps. But there was no research base to draw from to expect anything about either the causes of these changes, or what might have happened in classrooms as a result. While research clearly shows that teacher beliefs about students impact student achievement (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Rosenthal, 1987), and that teachers can learn more effective ways of working with students of color (Corbett et al., 2002; Oakes, 1986b), talking about race and the roadblocks that exist for teachers had not been studied much before this dissertation.

The study not only found changes in teachers' ability to talk about race and their understandings around institutional racism and White privilege, but also changes in practice happening in classrooms for every teacher. Unexpectedly, school-level changes were also found in every school studied, often driven by teachers who were seeing school procedures differently because of their equity training.

Beyond this, the study has generated new theory around how principals lead a faculty through fear. As part of findings around the fear of talking about race and the role of the principal in response to research question number one, it emerged that there was a strong correlation between what participants reported their principals or assistant principals did to help them through the fear, and the extent to which they overcome their fear and made changes in their teaching practice.

In answer to research question number one, "What are teachers' experiences talking about race in the context of racial achievement gaps?" the study revealed four different paths that teachers took on what many called "the equity journey." Data shows that which path a particular teacher took depended on two factors in addition to the inputs of the training itself: the teacher's own attitude toward the equity training at the outset, and their principal's approach and actions. A third factor, collegial interactions and support, was suggested as relevant, but not directly cited by teachers the way the first two factors were.

All White participants reported being impacted by the training, and by their principal’s approach to follow-up. Participants of color were enthusiastic about the training and the work happening in their schools, but reported that their own real learning came more through life experiences than school training. In every school, the initial training resulted in some teachers who were excited about change, and also in some who were wary, upset, sometimes angry. Then, the principal’s approach to supporting teachers over the coming years of equity training either brought the negative teachers to a more positive mindset, or left the positive teachers to move into a more negative, frustrated mindset. Teachers also reported that this trend reversed when support was added or withdrawn. Sometimes a new principal caused the staff to move in one direction or the other. The four paths are summarized in Table 5, below, and with more detail in the graphic in Appendix F.

Table 5: The Four Pathways

| | | Level of Principal Support | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| | | Significant and consistent | Minimal or inconsistent |
| Teacher attitude at the outset | Open, willing | Enthusiasm, less fear, individual change | Enthusiasm becomes frustration |
| | Offended, wary | Anger and fear transform with learning | Anger, fear and stasis, no change |

In answer to research question number two, “In what ways has talking about race impacted teacher practice, both in terms of relationships and in terms of instructional strategies?” the study found changes in teaching practice in the areas of curriculum selection, instructional strategies, classroom practices, collegial interactions, interactions with students, and school-wide policies and practices. All White respondents made changes in practice. These changes are discussed in Chapter 5, and additional data about them is also included in Appendices D and E.

Grounded Theory: Creating a Bridge from Fear to Deep Change

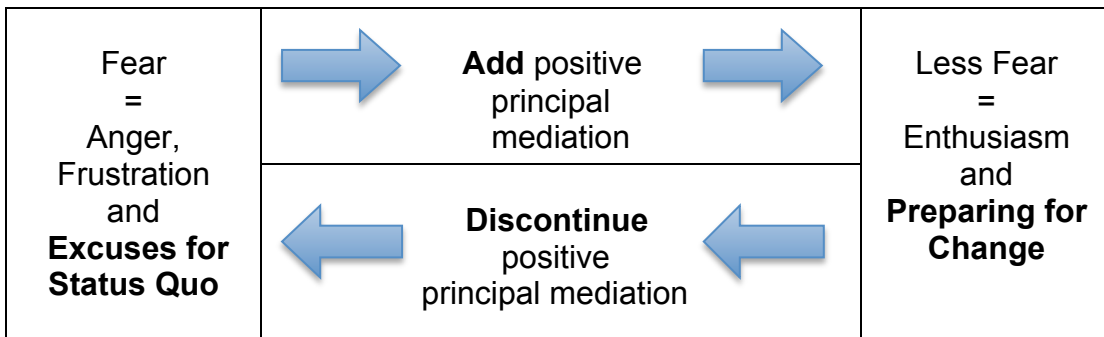
This study has generated new theory about effective principal mediation in the process of addressing a highly charged emotional topic. Specifically, the data reveals a potential bridge between teachers’ desire to close achievement gaps, and their willingness and ability to engage in the work of actually doing it. The bridge is created by principals who take particular actions to help teachers overcome their fears.

The study found that there is a common roadblock between teachers’ desire to close gaps and their ability to do it. That roadblock is fear of being considered racist. The sentiment to this effect was strong, and was present for every White respondent in some form. Teachers reported that this fear made it difficult to participate in the training, and often led to reticence to talk about race at all. The

fear also hindered effective teaching of students of color, in that teachers were wary about confrontation or saying the wrong thing to a student.

However, in all six schools, courageous leaders who were willing to be vulnerable and persistent were able to facilitate a process through which teachers confronted and addressed their own fear. Teachers reported two factors that facilitated this happening: specific activities that helped them come to new understandings, and a principal who walked the journey *with* them, mitigating their fear in the process of *sharing* it.

Table 6: The Bridge



There are many initiatives in schools that can be successfully implemented without direct principal leadership. This study seems to show that overcoming the fear of being considered racist is not one of them. Participants reported that a lack of emotional involvement by the principal on this topic contributed to teachers' fears, and thus their reticence to engage with needed reforms.

Study Conclusions

The three primary study conclusions are around the themes of learning about racial equity and overcoming the fear of being considered racist; principal leadership through the fear; and the resulting changes in practice to benefit students of color. This study shows that changes in practice happened when teachers had positive principal mediation to move through their fears as they learned about institutional racism and confronted their own biases and stereotypes.

Overcoming the Fear of Being Considered Racist

The first conclusion of this study is that teachers have to overcome the fear of being considered racist in order to effectively address racial achievement gaps, and that they probably cannot do it alone. Teachers shared that they wanted to “speak their truth,” about racial achievement issues in their school, but were afraid to do so at first, because they worried they might offend someone or be perceived as racist. This caused some distress in all White participants, and their colleagues’ distress made the work complicated for the participants of color as well. Further, in some participants, this distress was enough to cause them to hold back and resist the work.

But they could not just decide to do this, and have it happen. In the Introduction to Talking about Race: Alleviating the Fear, editor Julie Landsman says:

“Whatever the basis of the fear, it is up to all of us to set our fears aside and

plunge in.... It is up to us to become comfortable with being uncomfortable” (Grineski et al., 2013). This study shows that while it is true that individuals must choose to engage, it did not find any evidence that they can “set fears aside” without intentional assistance from their positional leaders.

Through intentional, structured professional development around talking about race, teachers reported that they did overcome the fear, to at least some extent. This happened for most respondents through a process of experiencing discomfort, speaking their truth and working through the fear in a structured professional development context with colleagues. The specific professional development activities that teachers found most helpful were discussed in Chapter 4. When principals and teacher leaders provided experiences that facilitated learning about White privilege and institutional racism, teachers learned to separate their contribution to racial achievement gaps as part of a racist institution from any personal blame on them as racist people. It was not a perfect process, and each teacher experienced their own unique emotional journey, but the roadblocks were slowly moved through intentional work.

Principal Leadership through the Fear

The second conclusion of this study is that principals must provide intentional, consistent leadership and model the equity journey in order for teachers to make much progress. Principals mediate and mitigate teachers’ fears in several specific ways. They can also add to fear and reticence with unsupportive actions.

Teachers reported that having principal who would “walk the journey” with them was an important component of the professional development that helped them get over their fears.

The role of the principal in this context is surprisingly substantial. This is a challenge for principals, especially those with a faculty that is mostly White. The model of servant leadership applies well to these findings. The data shows that in order to create the context for successful work, the principal must engage at a personal and vulnerable level. As a servant leader, the principal shares power and puts the needs of others first, as opposed to just giving direction. Teachers can be required to engage in equity work, but they cannot just be directed to do it; they must be supported by a positional leader who is engaged in the work with them.

In his work with Berkeley High School, Pedro Noguera and his team discovered that administration could be an obstacle to promoting change that would help to close racial achievement gaps there, because of organizational dysfunction and lack of leadership (Noguera, 2006). He asserted that when “basic operations” at the school were not under control – like working restrooms and copy machines – staff morale was affected and teachers were distracted from their work. Further, because of discipline problems, he found that “efforts to promote equity and achievement have to take a back seat to the effort to establish calm and order” (Noguera, 2006, p. 285). This implies that before spending significant time on

closing the achievement gap, administrators need to first ensure that the basic operations of the school are functioning well. But this study also shows that lack of leadership gets in the way even if the school is well managed.

There are four specific actions that were identified by teachers in all six schools as required from principals for the teachers' development around racial equity.

Model professional vulnerability. First, teachers needed administrators to model a professional approach to vulnerability. This is one area where assistant principals were mentioned regularly along with the principal. Where administrators were “on the journey with us,” teachers were more willing to engage in the work, particularly when it got difficult. The effective principals and assistant principals were well liked by their faculty, but beyond that, they were seen as really caring about their teachers, and engaging right alongside them. Teachers referred with great respect to administrators who “see the human element” or shed a tear in front of the staff. Engaging in public vulnerability “sets a tone” that allows teachers to follow suit.

Create safe space. Principals must create safe space for their teachers to speak truth and experience discomfort in order to have success with equity work. The extent to which this job rests on the shoulders of the principal, as opposed to teacher leaders, was a surprise, given that this is not the case for all types of professional development. Although every school had teacher leaders involved in

the work, and their colleagues had very positive attitudes toward their leadership, the level of safety teachers felt in which to “speak their truth” about race was directly and strongly related to the actions of the principal.

When the principal modeled vulnerability and showed a willingness to speak uncomfortable truths, teachers respected that and felt safer speaking their own truth. For example, one principal shared in the interview that his background included what he called a “Catholic, liberal, save-the-other kind of thing” that he needed to move beyond in order to value every student equally. This is a principal who was almost universally admired by his staff for his handling of equity. That he could admit the need to move beyond parts of his prior thinking was illustrative of his ability to lead with humility. In this way, the principal engages in authentic servant leadership: serving the staff by creating safe space through modeling a difficult emotional journey. On the other hand, teachers would not take risks when they felt that the principal was not actively supporting such risk-taking.

Empower shared leadership. Teachers on the Equity Teams reported that, while they appreciated the leadership roles that teachers were able to take, they felt it was most important for the principal to be engaged and seen as supportive of the work. Principals expressed that while they knew they had to be visible, it was important for teachers to be in front of the initiative, so it wasn’t perceived as the principal hitting folks over the head with it. This tension speaks both to the

acknowledged power of shared leadership in any initiative, but also to the touchy nature of the subject of race and racial achievement gaps, and the extent to which no one really wanted to be responsible for making everyone uncomfortable.

Teachers on the E-Team need the principal to be a visible part of the team. To listen and trust teachers to lead, but to be right there with them along the way. Unlike other initiatives, where the principal might rightly get it going and then trust it to other leaders, equity work seems to demand both an intentional model of teacher leadership, and consistently active engagement from the principal along the way.

Persist over many years. Possibly the most important thing for principals to do with equity is to help their faculty “keep the faith” and “keep the fire burning.” In all of the schools studied, students showed some test score gains and racial achievement gap closure, but not consistently over many years. Scores that were celebrated one year would drop the next year, even as teachers continued to address the issue in classrooms. This is frustrating for teachers and administrators alike, who have invested in what is clearly very difficult work, and are not seeing a consistent pay-off in the most public measure of success, the standardized test results.

Further, because emotionally difficult work is also exhausting, it is understandable for teachers to feel after a couple years that they have had “enough.” The call for “concrete strategies” instead of “more talk” came through in every school. The principal must prevent the focus from shifting to other initiatives, and prevent teachers from feeling that they have “done all I can.”

Table 7: Recommended Principal Actions

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Principal actions that facilitated teachers moving through fear to engage more directly with closing racial achievement gaps: | | | |
| Model Vulnerability: Teachers needed administrators to model a professional approach to vulnerability before they felt safe to be vulnerable themselves. | Create Safe Space: The principal’s actions were instrumental in creating safe space for teachers to experience discomfort and speak truth. | Empower Shared Leadership: Teacher leadership is imperative, but not enough. The principal must work in partnership with teacher leaders. | Persistence Over Many Years: The principal needs to help the faculty “keep the faith” and “keep the fire burning” in the face of natural exhaustion with a hard topic. |

Resulting Changes to Better Serve Students of Color

The third conclusion of this study is that when teachers have successful, mediated experiences of decreasing the fear of being considered racist, and training about institutional racism and white privilege, then they move forward and make meaningful changes in their teaching practice for the benefit of their students of color.

Teachers reported three things happening after their fear of being viewed as racist lessened and the roadblock of fear moved out of the way. First, they reported changes in their beliefs about students, responsibility, and how to address racial achievement gaps. Participants also reported that conversations about racial issues, along with collaboration with their colleagues on how to address them, increased as a result of talking about race in professional development contexts. Changes in these areas are documented in Chapter 4.

This is significant in light of Dick Corbett's research showing that the difference between high-achieving and lower-achieving schools "appeared to stem more from the teachers' attitudes than from any particular instructional method they used" (Corbett, 2005, p. 12). The professional development implications from this research are profound. Instead of learning a new math curriculum or better strategies for teaching reading, Corbett's research implies that schools should focus their professional development resources on changing teacher attitudes (Corbett, 2002). This is supported by other research on the impact of teacher attitudes on student achievement (Duncan, 1996; Noguera, 1996; Rosenthal, 1987). Teaching the teachers to move beyond these external excuses made a real difference for students, and this is exactly what equity work is about.

In this study, talking about race also led to an increase in the courage to try new strategies in the classroom. Teachers reported making specific changes in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and other general classroom practices,

which are documented in Chapter 5. The finding around all three areas of change was that while fear was high, teachers could not engage in these areas with any depth. But after the fear subsided, teachers were able to engage in more intentional and productive ways. See Table 4 in Chapter 4.

Implications and Recommendations for Schools and Districts

The goal of this study was to be able to speak to the need, or lack thereof, for teachers to talk about race as a step toward closing racial achievement gaps. A. Wade Boykin and other researchers have asserted in recent years that we cannot embrace and implement recommended reforms, or make other substantial improvement to closing racial achievement gaps, without talking about race, understanding White privilege, and unlearning our biases (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). But there did not appear to be evidence in the body of research to confirm this, or to show how this had been done. In fact, while education reformers have identified the need for teachers to bring both “will and skill” to the work of closing achievement gaps, there was no clear base for how teachers were expected to come by either will or skill. This study speaks to both, as well as how to build a bridge from one to the other.

There are four implications for schools and districts around how to approach the work, and also a set of specific recommendations from teachers about what worked well in their experiences and what didn't.

Superintendent and Principal Must Be Perceived to Embrace the Work

The first implication for schools taking on equity work is to be sure teachers see the principal and superintendent as engaged and supportive. Talking about race and racial achievement gaps is hard work. Like any other initiative, teachers both notice and care when and whether their positional leaders are also engaged as leaders of this difficult work. When the superintendent in one district said: “We’re not going to close the achievement gap, we’re going to eliminate it,” that resonated with teachers, and they reported that they took it seriously because they knew their district leader took it seriously. Similarly, when principals showed they valued the work by following up and holding people accountable for participating, teachers then valued it more as well. Teachers noticed and appreciated when the principal and/or superintendent attended E-Team leadership trainings with them. They appreciated the follow-up that the effective principals did with them.

Conversely, when positional leaders were perceived as not engaged or not “getting it,” then the teacher leaders got frustrated, and other teachers withdrew. Although the work is a collective journey, teachers reported consistently that they needed their positional leaders to be “on the journey” with them.

Prepare for Anger and Defensiveness at the Beginning

Respondents made it clear that in the beginning, there was anger. Several teachers reported that a few of their colleagues had a very hard time with the

initial training, and some teachers acknowledged that they had a hard time with it themselves. A commonly reported initial reaction was: “I’m not racist! How dare he call me racist?” But most teachers who felt this way did not share that sentiment openly with administrators or teacher leaders. Participants reported that if the leaders do not see this anger, it is probably underground. The second implication for schools is that, because school cultures vary with regard to the directness with which staff will share information with the principal, it is incumbent upon the principal to be prepared to address the challenges that some of the teachers are likely to have at the beginning.

As noted in Chapter 2, Harrison and Beyer’s research on organizational change predicts this phenomenon. Because understanding another racial group’s experience is often not often something that can be done from one’s existing expertise, it follows that efforts at expanding cultural competency among teachers are likely to be felt by them as a major change, and thus may be resisted unless they feel a sense of crisis driving them toward change. (M. Harrison & Beyer, 1991).

Carefully Construct the Equity Team (E-Team)

This is one of the most important tasks the principal faces, and it was not done with intentionality in all of the schools studied. Where it was done carefully, both the school and the principal fared better. Chapter 4 addressed the ways that principals put together their E-Teams, and what the perspectives on this were of

the teacher leaders and of other teachers. The four common lessons to come out of this study are:

1. Empower the “true believers,” because they have energy and they understand the concepts. A majority of the E-Team members should be teachers who “get it” and feel passionate about doing the work.
2. Ensure that the E-Team includes some informal faculty leaders, because they are the ‘translational leaders’ who are imperative to the implementation of any initiative.
3. Do not put the naysayers in charge. They should not be ignored, but they do not need roles on the E-Team. This is not good practice for staff development in any area.
4. The principal (and/or an assistant principal) should attend E-Team meetings and be a consistently participating member of the group.

The principals interviewed all expressed the importance of teacher leadership in equity work, and the E-Team members interviewed all emphasized the importance of the principal’s role at some point during the interview. The third implication of this study is that a high-functioning E-Team, involving both administrators and teacher leaders in meaningful ways, is imperative to movement for the faculty. Neither the principal nor the teachers can do it alone.

Specific Structural Recommendations

Teachers had a lot to say about the activities that were helpful to them, and those that, upon reflection, they might do differently. They also had lots of ideas about

what their school should and should not do. Those ideas that surfaced consistently in interviews from all six schools are included here:

Pacing. Pacing is important, and varies by school. The first recommendation is to pay attention to how fast or slowly the teachers need to go. The most effective principals were constantly “taking the temperature” of the building to see what their teachers were ready for next. Keeping up just the right amount of pressure for the unique context of their school was an important principal and E-Team leader role. Participants cautioned that leaders should not to be intimidated by teachers who were vocal naysayers, but also should not to push too much or fast, instead striking a balance of consistent movement with support.

Differentiation. Differentiation is a challenge, but must be intentionally considered. Teachers are all at different places in relation to the work, and their own racial identity. The second recommendation from participants is that principals must find a way to let those who are ready to learn more engage at a deeper level, and also to simultaneously support those who are reticent. Keeping the doors open to participation on the E-Team and CARE Team is important. Optional sessions and small groups, discussed more below, are also ways to address this challenge.

Requirement. Optional trainings were appreciated, but the third recommendation is that all teachers must be required to participate in some way. Teachers

expressed much ambivalence toward voluntary sessions. In some schools, the E-Team or CARE Team offered voluntary sessions, usually after school. In two schools, these sessions took the form of a class that met regularly for pay or credit toward lane changes. One school hosted drop-in “courageous conversations” after school that were open to everyone, trying to provide a safe space for conversations about classroom challenges. In general, teachers who participated liked the sessions, and appreciated that they were offered. They liked not having to worry about the naysayers, and felt that the voluntary sessions more easily created a safe space for difficult conversations. However, most teachers mentioned that, “those who really needed it weren’t there.” There was strong sentiment from participants that in order for the whole school to really be successful, the reticent must be required to participate.

Small groups. Small groups provided a safer context for courageous conversations than large groups like a staff meeting. Teachers are afraid to talk about race, because they are afraid to be judged. The fourth recommendation is that fear can be mitigated substantially simply by lowering the number of people in front of whom a teacher is speaking.

Some of the schools assigned teachers to small groups for discussion during staff development activities. With one exception where the groups were divided alphabetically, the general perception of teachers in these schools was that the groups were not randomly created, but that teachers were mixed together in

ways that would promote discussion. Teacher leaders in two schools reported that groups were intentionally mixed so that teachers were not with anyone from their own department, interdisciplinary team, or close friends. One teacher reported that they were careful not to put teachers together who didn't like each other. Regardless of how the groups were formed, teachers uniformly reported that it was easier to share thoughts in small groups than it was with the whole faculty.

Not embedding. The fifth recommendation is not to let equity be dropped by being “embedded” into other initiatives. All staff development initiatives compete for time. This is not unique to equity. However, four schools attempted to “embed” it at some point along the way, and respondents felt that this was generally not successful. In three of the four cases, participants expressed concern that embedding it would mean losing it because the focus shifted. One school used the metaphor, “it’s not one more thing on the plate, it is the plate.” Another called it “the umbrella over everything we do.” But despite the good intentions behind these phrases, with only one exception, when principals started talking about embedding equity, teachers felt they were walking away from it. The exception came with a new principal who was using equity language around other initiatives to illustrate the connection for teachers. This was positively received.

Learning from students and parents. Learning from students and parents was usually unplanned but often powerful, and the final recommendation is that it should be intentionally included. Two schools made videos of students talking about race and their experiences at school. One school put together a panel of parents of color to talk with staff. Beyond those initiatives, the experiences that teachers cited when discussing the ways they learned from students and parents were informal, but impactful. Teachers in all six schools reported that they believed the student and parent perspectives should be built into the training in more intentional ways.

Applying the Paradigm to Other Initiatives

The fourth implication for schools is that an unanticipated opportunity arises in the consideration that the steps successful principals are taking to mitigate fears around race might also be applied to other highly emotional initiatives, like teacher evaluation. While this study just focused on the topic of talking about race as a step toward closing racial achievement gaps, the findings on fear and principal role could potentially apply to other fear-inducing initiatives as well. It is reasonable to hypothesize that where a principal models vulnerability and an attitude of continuous improvement with regard to an issue like their own evaluation, they might help mitigate the fear that teachers will feel as states are mandating student scores to be part of formal evaluation.

Recommendations for Further Research

Because this topic is relatively new to formal study, there are many possibilities that arise for both qualitative and quantitative research.

Building Capacity

To what extent might participating in courageous conversations talking about race prepare a faculty to handle other fear-inducing changes? Given what is known about organizational learning (Guskey, 1982; Quinn, 1996), it is reasonable to hypothesize that the experience of moving through fear within one topic might increase the capacity of teachers to manage their fear around other changes. There are many school districts across the country that have already invested in talking about race and equity work; it is likely that most of them are also currently navigating new initiatives around topics like teacher evaluation.

The Link with Technology

As teachers talked about their experiences learning new technology – and the extent to which technology was demanding staff development time – it became apparent that there are some great similarities in the ways that staff approach both technology and equity. The dichotomy of adopters and resisters of technology among teachers looks very much like the dichotomy between the enthusiastic and the wary when talking about race. This leads to a new question: *To what extent could getting comfortable with being uncomfortable learning new*

technologies help teachers navigate the discomfort of addressing racial challenges and other fear-inducing topics?

Since schools are implementing new technologies almost annually, access to data might not be a challenge. If leaders invite teachers to experience discomfort as they are learning to use new technologies, and creates safe space for teachers in which to learn to use new technologies, how could this paradigm transfer into equity work? Could it potentially make that easier as well? This question could also be applied to arts integration initiatives, as this seems to be another area with which teachers experience discomfort with the unfamiliar, but without the feeling that they *should* be competent that accompanies areas like equity and literacy.

This question is almost the inverse of the question posed above about building capacity, in that the technology or arts work could be used to help navigate fears within the equity work, rather than the other way around.

Longevity in Principal Leadership

Principal turnover was generally a negative factor on the equity work in the schools studied, and the six schools combined had twelve principals over the course of the initiative. Only two of the six schools had one principal throughout six or more years of equity work. *Is there a connection between long-term,*

consistent principal leadership and progress toward closing racial achievement gaps?

In this study, the schools with only one principal over many years who took the journey with the staff were generally more successful than their neighbors. Is there more than a correlation? Of the ten principals in the other four schools, three were moved or fired by their superintendent, three left the district by choice, and four are currently in place. Although principal change was always disruptive to the equity work, it was worth it in the two cases where a principal was not advancing the work. But where the principal is moving the work forward, would it make sense for district leadership to keep them at that school, instead of moving them to another school within the district? What is the value of stable, long-term leadership on equity work?

Difference for Principals of Color

In what ways are principals of color differently able to lead equity work? There were two Black principals in the schools studied. Both were successful in moving equity work forward in their schools. Both were well liked and respected by the teacher leaders, and were successful with empowering teachers to lead the work, and of ensuring that the staff saw them as supportive, but not pushing too much. In what ways might the factor of being Black, or of color, relevant to this success?

Cultural Competence Component of Evaluation

Two of the six schools studied have already included cultural competence in their teacher evaluations in some form. Now that the state in which this study was conducted is moving toward 35% of a teacher's evaluation being determined by student progress, *will measuring cultural competence become more or less significant to schools?* A researcher could survey to learn the extent to which cultural competence is being included in evaluation, and also the extent to which leaders are discussing and considering the idea, even if it has not actually been included.

Quantifying Classroom Change

Now that the types of changes that teachers made in response to the training have been identified, a quantitative study might be undertaken to determine the extent of implementation of such changes in a given school. From the list of themes in Appendix C and/or the categories of changes documented in Appendices D and E, a researcher now has a starting point from which to survey to determine: *What is the level of implementation of particular strategies in a particular school?*

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to learn what the impact of participating in professional development around racial equity was, both on teachers and on their classroom practice. Because this does not seem to have ever been studied in this way, the

potential learning curve was significant. Closing racial achievement gaps is of great interest to administrators and teachers around the country, and some base of knowledge around the impact of this type of work will be very useful as districts and schools consider their options with regard to teacher training.

Teachers can do very little to change the racial make-up of their school, but research shows that they can learn to provide their students with both important academic skills and positive messages about who they are as capable learners (Davis, 2004; Aronson, 1998). This study discovered that the main reason teachers in this study had not fully engaged with best practices was that they were not talking about race, because the fear of being considered racist became a roadblock.

To the question of whether principals should invest time and resources in having their faculties engage in talking about race, this study has answered strongly in the affirmative. More significantly, the study data tells us *how* principals should do that. Engaging in the process, with appropriate mediation from the principal, clearly leads to positive changes in classroom practices for teachers. Conversely, engaging in the process with a principal who is perceived to be emotionally removed, imposing it without engaging, or standing to the side, leads teachers to frustration and stasis.

The finding of stasis fits with Robert Quinn's research on the fear of change. He finds that once a change effort fails, it is often ignored, and rarely is the failure analyzed, so little learning takes place. (Quinn, 1996). Quinn notes that: "Seldom have I heard anyone say: 'The change didn't happen because I failed to model the change process for everyone. I failed to reinvent myself. It was a failure of courage on my part'" (Quinn, 1996, p. 34). But he asserts: "One key to successful leadership is continuous personal change" (Quinn, 1996, p. 34). This is exactly what this study learned that principals need to do: model personal change, with courage.

This study concludes that two factors have been identified that must be addressed when attempting to close racial achievement gaps, and that when they are, real change happens in classrooms. These two factors are White educators' fear of being viewed as racist, and the principal's ability to lead the faculty beyond that fear. This chapter articulates several implications and recommendations for schools for addressing these factors.

This work is part of a larger picture with regard to closing racial achievement gaps. Cultural competence requires recognizing and unlearning our biases (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; E. Lee, 2008) before we actually get to practical school and classroom improvements. Thus, leaders must help teachers get over their fear of being viewed as racist, in order to confront the role of race in schools today. To do this, leaders must confront their own fears, walk the journey with the

staff, and be willing to change the discourse on race in the school from one of tentative nervousness to one of courageous empowerment. When this happens, the school will be well positioned to embrace specific reforms that are now being recommended by research, but that may be upsetting to traditional ways of schooling.

All over America, educators are attempting to close racial achievement gaps, and having mixed or marginal success. This study finds that until White educators – who make up the vast majority of K-12 public education teachers – move beyond the fear of being considered racist, that roadblock will prevent meaningful reform from being implemented, no matter how well-meaning everyone involved might be.

Bibliography

- Aronson, J., Lustina, M., Good, C., & Keough, K. (1998). When White men can't do math: necessary and sufficient factors in stereotype threat. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 35*, 29–46.
- Blau, J. R., Lamb, V. L., Stearns, E., & Pellerin, L. (2001). Cosmopolitan environments and adolescents' gains in Social Studies. *Sociology of Education, 74*(2), 121–138.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2003). *Racism without racists: color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Boyd, C. (2010). Making the case for hiring teachers of color. *MINNPOST*. Minneapolis, MN. Retrieved from <http://www.minnpost.com/community-sketchbook/2010/03/making-case-hiring-teachers-color>
- Boykin, A. W., & Noguera, P. (2011). *Creating the opportunity to learn: moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Brown, B. (2010). *The gifts of imperfection*. Center City, MN: Hazelden.
- Bryk, A. S., & Hermanson, K. L. (1993). Educational indicator systems: observations on their structure, interpretation, and use. *Review of Research in Education, 19*, 451–484. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1167348>
- Carbonaro, W. (2005). Tracking, students' effort, and academic achievement. *Sociology of Education, 78*(1), 27–49.
- Carbonaro, W. J., & Gamoran, A. (2002). The production of achievement inequality in high school English. *American Educational Research Journal, 39*(4), 801–827. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3202447>
- Casselius, B. (2013, April 4). It's time for a new testing regimen. *Minneapolis StarTribune*, p. A9.
- Chenoweth, K. (2007). *It's being done: academic success in unexpected schools* (Harvard Ed.). New Haven, CT.
- Chenoweth, K. (2009). *How it's being done: urgent lessons from unexpected schools*. New Haven, CT: Harvard Education Press.

- Collins, J. (2001). *From good to great: why some companies make the leap... and others don't*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Corbett, D., Wilson, B., & Williams, B. (2002). *Effort and excellence in urban classrooms: expecting - and getting - success with all students*. New York: Teacher's College Press, Columbia University.
- Corbett, D., Wilson, B., & Williams, B. (2005). No choice but success. *Educational Leadership*, 63(3), 8–12.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), 3–21.
- Corcoran, S. P., & Evans, W. N. (2008). The role of inequality in teacher quality. In K. A. Magnuson & J. Waldfogel (Eds.), *Steady gains and stalled progress: inequality and the Black-White test score gap*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cross, T. (Ed. . (1996). Stripping away myths: improving the lot of African Americans by changing the American racial stereotype. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, (11), 110. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2963329>
- Curto, V., Fryer, R. G., & Howard, M. L. (2010). *It may not take a village : increasing achievement among the poor* (pp. 1–35).
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1998). Unequal opportunity: race and education. *The Brookings Review*, 16(2), 28–32.
- Davis, D. M., & Thompson, S. C. (2004). Creating high-performing middle schools in segregated settings: 50 years after Brown. *Middle School Journal*, 36(2), 4–12.
- Delpit, L. (2002). *The skin that we speak*. New York: The New Press.
- Dobbie, W., & Fryer Jr., R. G. (2010). Are high-quality schools enough to increase achievement among the poor? evidence from the Harlem Children's Zone, (November).
- Downey, D. B., Hippel, P. T. Von, & Broh, B. A. (2004). Are schools the great equalizer? Cognitive inequality during the summer months and the school year. *American Sociological Review*, 69(5), 613–635.

- Downey, D. B., & Pribesh, S. (2004). When race matters: teachers' evaluations of students' classroom behavior. *Sociology of Education*, 77(4), 267–282.
- Duncan, Garrett A. (1996). Space, place and the problematic of race: Black adolescent discourse as mediated action. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 65(2), 133–150. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2967309>
- Duncan, Garrett Albert. (2002). Beyond love: A critical race ethnography of the schooling of adolescent Black males. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 35(2), 131–143. doi:10.1080/713845286
- ED.gov. (2009). Elementary and Secondary Education Act. US Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html#sec1111>
- Farid, M., & McMahan, D. (2004). *Accommodating and educating Somali students in Minnesota schools*. St Paul, MN: Hamline University Press.
- Ferguson, R. F. (2007). *Toward excellence with equity: An emerging vision for closing the achievement gap*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.
- Ferguson, R. F. (2008). What we've learned about stalled progress in closing the Black-White achievement gap. In K. A. and J. W. Magnuson (Ed.), *Steady gains and stalled progress: inequality and the Black-White test score gap*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Fleming, J. (2000). Affirmative action and standardized test scores. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 69(1/2), 27–37. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2696262>
- Ford, D. Y., & Harris, J. J. (1996). Perceptions and attitudes of black students toward school, achievement, and other educational variables. *Child Development*, 67(3), 1141–52. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8706514>
- Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the burden of "acting White". *Urban Review*, 18, 176–206.
- Fryer Jr, R. G. (2006). *An empirical analysis of "acting White"*. Harvard University.
- Glaser, B. G., & Holton, J. (2004). Remodeling grounded theory. *FQS: Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 5(2). Retrieved from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/viewArticle/607/1315>

- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Goldsmith, P. A. (2004). Schools' racial mix, students' optimism, and the Black-White and Latino-White achievement gaps. *Sociology of Education*, 77(2), 121–147.
- Good, C., Aronson, J., & Inzlicht, M. (2003). Improving adolescents' standardized test performance: An intervention to reduce the effects of stereotype threat. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 24, 645–662.
- Gorden, R. L. (1975). *Interviewing: Strategy, techniques, and tactics*. Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press.
- Grineski, S., Landsman, J., & Simmons III, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Talking about race: Alleviating the fear*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Grissmer, D., & Eiseman, E. (2008). Can gaps in the quality of early environments and nocognitive skills help explain persisting Black-White achievement gaps? In K. A. Magnuson & J. Waldfogel (Eds.), *Steady gains and stalled progress: inequality and the Black-White test score gap*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Grissmer, D., Flanagan, A., & Williamson, S. (1998). Why did the Black-White score gap narrow in the 1970's and 1980's? In C. Jencks (Ed.), *The Black-White test score gap*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Guskey, T. R. (1982). The effects of change in instructional effectiveness on the relationship of teacher expectations and student achievement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 75, 345–348.
- Harrison, M. T., & Beyer, J. M. (1991). Cultural leadership in organizations. *Organization Science*, 2(2), 149–169. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2635191>
- Harrison, F. V. (1998). Introduction : Expanding the discourse on “race”. *American Anthropologist*, 100(3), 609–631.
- Hedges, L. V, & Nowell, A. (1999). Changes in the Black-White gap in achievement test scores. *Sociology of Education*, 72(2), 111–135. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2673179>
- Hershberg, T. (2009). Value added assessment. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania. Retrieved from http://www.cgp.upenn.edu/ope_value.html

- Jencks, C. (1998). Racial bias in testing. In C. Jencks & M. Phillips (Eds.), *The Black-White test score gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1999). Making cooperative learning work. *Theory Into Practice*, 38(2), 67–73. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1477225>
- Kopkowski, C. (2008). Why they leave. *NEA Today*, (April). Retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/home/12630.htm>
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3–12. doi:10.3102/0013189X035007003
- Ladson-Billings, G. J. (1999). Preparing teachers for diverse student populations: A critical race theory perspective. *Review of Research in Education*, 24, 211–247.
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*. 34(3), 159–165.
- Landsman, J. (2004). Confronting the racism of low expectations. *Educational Leadership*, 62(3), 28–32.
- Lee, E. (2008). *Beyond heros and holidays: A practical guide to K-12 anti-racist, multicultural education and staff development* (Fourth Ed.). New York: Teaching for Change.
- Lee, J. (2002). Racial and ethnic achievement gap trends: Reversing the progress toward equity? *Educational Researcher*, 31(1), 3–12. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3594304>
- Lubienski, S. T. (2002). A closer look at Black-White mathematics gaps: intersections of race and SES in NAEP achievement and instructional practices data. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 71(4), 269–287. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3211180>
- Lundy, G. F. (2003). The myths of oppositional culture. *Journal of Black Studies*, 33(4), 450–467. doi:10.1177/0021934702250024
- Maeroff, G. I. (1991). Assessing alternative assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 73(4), 273–281.

- Magnuson, K. A., & Waldfogel, J. (2008). *Steady gains and stalled progress: inequality and the Black-White test score gap*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- McIntosh, P. (1990). *White Privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack*. *Independent School, Winter*.
- McKinsey. (2009). *The economic impact of the achievement gap in America's schools*. New York: McKinsey & Company, Social Sector Office. Retrieved from www.mckinsey.com/clientservice/socialsector
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Morgan, S. L., & Mehta, J. D. (2004). Beyond the laboratory: Evaluating the survey evidence for the disidentification explanation of Black-White differences in achievement. *Sociology of Education, 77*(1), 82–101.
- NCES, N. C. for E. S. (2008). *The nation's report card: 2008 trends in academic progress*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/main2008/2009479.asp>
- NCES, N. C. for E. S. (2011). *The nation's report card: 2011 trends in academic progress*. Retrieved April 6, 2013, from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/statecomparisons/Default.aspx?usrSelections=0,RED,1,5,within,0,0>
- NCES, N. C. for E. S. (2013). *National Assessment of Educational Progress*. Retrieved March 7, 2013, from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/current.asp>
- Noguera, P. (2009). *Conversation at a workshop*. *West Metro Education Partnership*. Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- Noguera, P. A. (1996). Responding to the crisis confronting California's Black male youth: providing support without furthering marginalization. *The Journal of Negro Education, 65*(2), 219–236.
- Noguera, P., & Wing, J. Y. (2006). *Unfinished business: Closing the racial achievement gap in our schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Oakes, J. (1986a). Keeping track, part 1: The policy and practice of curriculum inequality. *Phi Delta Kappan, 68*(1), 12–17.

- Oakes, J. (1986b). Keeping track , part 2 : Curriculum inequality and school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 68(2), 148–154.
- Oakes, J. (1989). What educational indicators? The case for assessing the school context. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 11(2), 181–199.
- Ogbu, J. U. (1992). Adaptation to minority status and impact on School Success. *Theory into Practice*, 31(4), 287–295. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1476310>
- Osborne, J. W. (1999). Unraveling Underachievement among African-American boys from an identification with academics perspective. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 68(4), 555–565.
- Pollock, M. (2004). *Colormute*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Pollock, M. (2008a). *Because of race: How Americans debate harm and opportunity in our schools*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Pollock, M. (Ed.). (2008b). *Everyday antiracism: Getting real about race in school*. New York: The New Press.
- Quinn, R. E. (1996). *Deep change: Discovering the leader within*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Reardon, S. F., Arshan, N., Kurlaender, M., & Atteberry, A. (2009). Effects of the California high school exit exam on student persistence, achievement, and graduation. Stanford University; University of California at Davis.
- Regan, S. (2011). How much longer for the Choice Is Yours school integration program in Minneapolis, suburbs? *Twin Cities Daily Planet*. Minneapolis: Twin Cities Media Alliance. Retrieved from <http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/news/2011/01/03/how-much-longer-choice-yours-school-integration-program-minneapolis-suburbs>
- Renzulli, J., & Reis, S. M. (2001). *The Schoolwide enrichment model*. Storrs, Connecticut: University of Connecticut.
- Rosenthal, R. (1987). “Pygmalion” effects: existence, magnitude, and social importance. *Educational Researcher*, 16(9), 37–41.
- Rumberger, R. W. (2003). The Causes and consequences of student mobility. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1), 6–21.

- Sanders, W., & Horn, S. P. (1995). Education assessment reassessed: The usefulness of standardized and alternative measures of student achievement as indicators for the assessment of education outcomes. *Education Policy Analysis, 3*(6).
- Sebring, P. B., & Bryk, A. S. (2000). School leadership and the bottom line in Chicago. *Phi Delta Kappan, 81*(6), 440–443.
- Singleton, G. (2013). *More courageous conversations about race*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Singleton, G., & Linton, C. (2006). *Courageous conversations about race*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Sirin, S. R. (2005). Socioeconomic status and academic achievement: A meta-analytic review of research. *Review of Educational Research, 75*(3), 417–453.
- Smrekar, C. E., & Owens, D. E. (2003). “It’s a way of life for us”: High mobility and high achievement in Department of Defense schools. *The Journal of Negro Education, 72*(1), 165–177.
- Steele, C. (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi: And other clues to how stereotypes affect us*. New York: Norton.
- Steele, C., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*(5), 797–811.
- Tatum, B. D. (1997). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? and other conversations about race*. New York: Basic Books.
- USDE. (2009). Race to the top program executive summary. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf>
- USDE. (2013). Race to the top: Results. Retrieved April 6, 2013, from <http://www.ed.gov/blog/2013/02/how-are-race-to-the-top-states-doing-in-year-two/>
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, Ontario, Canada: The University of Western Ontario.

- Vigdor, J., & Ludwig, J. (2008). Segregation and the test score gap. In K. A. and J. W. Magnuson (Ed.), *Steady gains and stalled progress: inequality and the Black-White test score gap*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Wilson, W. J. (1998). The role of the environment in the Black-White test score gap. In C. and M. P. Jencks (Ed.), *The Black-White test score gap* (pp. 501–510). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Appendix A: Definitions of Terms

Racial Achievement Gap: the difference between average scores of white students and the average scores of students of color, as measured by state or national-level standardized tests. Of particular interest in recent years have been gaps between black and white students, and between Latino and white students.

Racial Equity: The notion that the way to mitigate past and continuing racial oppression in America is to give black and brown students more support. This contrasts with the notion of equality, which calls for all students to get the same amount of support.

Equity/Equity Work: Broad terms that teachers and administrators used to refer to all of the professional development work that they did related to closing racial achievement gaps. This work included talking about race, institutional racism, white privilege, and racial achievement gaps. Staff participated in activities designed to increase their will, skill, knowledge and capacity to do the work. The label “equity” stems from the idea that equity is different from equality. While equality involves treating each student the same, equity requires that students who have more need receive more support.

Cultural Competence: A term used by Gloria Ladson-Billings and others to refer to skill sets that teachers can develop to better reach students who are from

different cultural backgrounds from the teacher. Based on the idea that all people operate from their own cultural understandings and experiences, and students are disadvantaged when they do not share the teacher's cultural understandings and assumptions. Rather than focusing on traditional measures of quality, Cultural Competency Theory posits that teachers who are very good at working with kids who are culturally similar to themselves may still have difficulty with students from unfamiliar cultural backgrounds, and will need to learn about those backgrounds in order to better serve those children (Ladson-Billings 1995). Also referred to as "Culturally Responsive Teaching."

Professional Development/Staff Development: These terms are often interchangeable and refer to any activity that is designed to facilitate teacher learning and improve teacher practice. Activities that may be considered professional development or staff development include workshops, collaboration with colleagues, curriculum development, peer coaching, etc.

Teaching Practice: In addition to curriculum, instruction and assessment, this term includes the relationships built, adult learning, and other aspects of a teacher's work that are not part of the traditional job description. The term is meant to be broad and encompassing.

Beyond Diversity: The title of a two-day workshop presented by Pacific Educational Group, (PEG,) which is led by Glenn Singleton. Singleton also

conducted several district-wide and school-specific sessions in one of the districts studied, so some teachers strongly associate the work with him, even though their district also worked with other presenters and other organizations over the years. The description of the workshop from PEG's website states:

Beyond Diversity is Pacific Educational Group's foundation seminar and a prerequisite for all subsequent phases of equity professional learning. Beyond Diversity is a powerful, personally transforming two-day seminar designed to help teachers, students, parents, and administrators understand the impact of race on student learning and investigate the role that racism plays in institutionalized academic achievement disparities. Participants will engage in thoughtful, compassionate exploration of race and racism, grapple with how each influences the culture and climate of our schools, and practice using the tools of Courageous Conversation to identify and address policies and practices that negatively impact achievement for students of color and serve as barriers to all students receiving a world-class education (PEG, 2013).

The Beyond Diversity workshop is offered several times a year free to districts that are members of the West Metro Education Program (WMEP) consortium. Both of the original districts studied spent additional money to bring PEG into their district to provide Beyond Diversity for all of their teachers, as well as additional leadership training.

Courageous Conversations: The process of using PEG's protocols for talking about personal experiences with race. The tools of Courageous Conversations

include specific approaches to communication that PEG teaches, listed below, which are referenced in participants' quotes.

The 4 Agreements: PEG advocates using “Four Agreements for Courageous Conversations” which are like a set of ground rules for working together. The four agreements are: 1. Stay Engaged. 2. Speak Your Truth. 3. Experience Discomfort. 4. Expect and Accept Non-closure.

The 6 Conditions: PEG teaches that there are six conditions, which should be established in order, that are required for effective conversations about race. They are: 1. Personal, local and immediate. 2. Isolate race. 3. See multiple perspectives. 4. Make space for missing perspectives. 5. Define race as separate from ethnicity and nationality. 6. Examine the presence and role of whiteness.

The Compass: Participants use the compass to consider how they are approaching the work through the four quadrants of thinking, feeling, action, and belief.

The Mindful Inquiry Protocol: This protocol is a set of questions that participants are encouraged to use to practice intentional listening and deepen relationships. They include: *What I heard you say was... Tell me more about what you meant by...* and *What angered you about what happened?*

The Knee-to-Knee Protocol: This protocol is for partners to practice intentional listening without interruption. The first participant speaks for 2 minutes (or 5) and the partner may only listen. Then the partner has 2 minutes to reflect back what they heard their partner say. Then the first participant has one more minute to add or clarify. Then the partners reverse and the second participant shares with the first participant listening and reflecting back what they heard.

Appendix B: Interview Protocols

For All Respondents:

Collect demographic information:

1. Respondent name and title/assignment
2. School, District, State
3. Number of years at this school, tenure status
4. Date
5. Interviewer

Introduction

1. Purpose and scope of study: “The purpose of this qualitative study is to learn the extent to which professional development activities through which teachers talk about race impact teachers and/or their classroom practice with regard to addressing racial achievement gaps. The dissertation looks to determine the need (or lack thereof) for teachers to talk about race as a step toward eliminating racial achievement gaps.”
2. Confidentiality: “To ensure anonymity, participants names will not be known to anyone but me throughout this process. I will keep your contact info so that you can review the transcript of this session. Beyond that, your name and contact info will not be used. Once the study is complete, your contact info will be deleted.”
3. Consent: “What do you understand about how anonymous you will be as a part of this study?”
4. Definitions of terms

Interview Questions for Administrators and Equity Leaders:

1. Tell me about the activities your staff has engaged in around Equity and talking about race.
2. How was the decision made to engage in professional development around Equity (or talking about race) at your school?
3. What has your personal role been with regard to planning and conducting the Equity professional development sessions?
4. What has been most challenging for you and/or for your faculty with regard to the Equity work?
5. What data have you collected about the results of your school's Equity work, and what conclusions have you drawn from it?
6. What impact do you believe the Equity work has had at this school? What evidence leads you to this belief?

Interview Questions for Randomly Selected Teachers: First Round, Initial Set

1. Tell me about your experiences at this school with talking about race.
2. What do you feel were the best or most effective Equity activities that your faculty has engaged in?
3. How have your conversations about race impacted your relationships with students and/or staff?
4. How have your conversations about race impacted your classroom practice?
5. What do you feel was the most important experience you have had around Equity or talking about race?

Interview Questions for Randomly Selected Teachers: First Round, Revised

Note: There were several iterations between the first and revised versions.

1. Tell me about your experiences at this school with courageous conversations, or talking about race.
2. What do you see changing as a result of courageous conversations, or the equity work?
3. How have your conversations about race impacted your relationships with students and/or staff?
4. How have your conversations about race impacted your classroom practice?
5. What do you feel was the most important experience you have had around Equity or talking about race?
6. What was the best thing about doing the equity work at your school? What was challenging, or the hardest thing?
7. Do you think equity work is important for closing achievement gaps, and if so, why?
8. What sustains you, or what would you need to be sustained in this work?
9. What avenues do you have for working with colleagues to share and learn together?
10. What has been the impact of the equity work on you, personally? On your school?

Interview Questions for Randomly Selected Teachers: Second Round

1. What sparked your district to engage in equity work?
 - To what extent were district push, student achievement, changing demographics involved?
2. Did you attend Beyond Diversity, and what was your personal response to that training?
 - To what extent was the fear of being called or considered racist a factor in the equity work?
3. What were the best equity activities you experienced, and what made them better than others?
 - To what extent were the chance to learn from colleagues, and/or structured conversations important?
4. What leaders or leadership was important in your own equity journey and for your school, both with regard to what worked, and what didn't?
 - Think about teachers, E-team, principal(s), and sup(s)
5. What changed in your own practice as a result of your equity work?
 - Consider instructional strategies, curriculum, assessment, interactions with colleagues, interactions with students, school-wide norms, school-wide practices
6. What challenges did you (and colleagues) experience?
 - To what extent did you grapple with speaking truth, experiencing discomfort, isolating race, seeing multiple perspectives, other SD initiatives competing for time, keeping the fire burning?
7. In what ways have you learned from students and/or parents of color as part of your equity journey?
 - How important or impactful has this been, comparatively?
8. What would you recommend to other schools who are just starting equity work?
 - To what extent are the following important: pacing, differentiation, required, prioritizing, embedding

Appendix C: Themes and Number of Respondents Citing Each

Themes were determined through the constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis, in a circular pattern of looking at data from each interview, along with artifacts and observation data, to see what concepts were repeated.

The following chart shows concepts that arose in all six schools, and with a critical mass of respondents. Themes that are common to other types of initiatives and not unique to this topic, like finding time, were excluded.

| Theme | Number (out of 29) |
|--|-----------------------|
| Driver: Achievement Concerns | 23 |
| Driver: Changing Demographics | 23 |
| Driver: District Push | 19 |
| Barrier: Fear of Being Considered Racist | 21 |
| Beyond Diversity: Excitement and Enthusiasm | 21 |
| Beyond Diversity: Defensiveness and Anger | 15 |
| Best: Learning from Colleagues | 17 |
| Best: Structured Courageous Conversations | 19 |
| Best: Looking at Data | 11 |
| Best: Learning from Students and Families | 23 |
| Challenge: Speak truth & experience discomfort | 21 |
| Challenge: Isolate race | 18 |
| Challenge: Emotional work before concrete strategies | 15 |
| Challenge: Required or voluntary | 16 |
| Leadership: Equity Team | 24 |
| Leadership: Other Teachers | 19 |
| Leadership: Principal | 25 |
| Leadership: Superintendent/District | 20 |
| Change in Beliefs: Beyond Colorblind | 23 |
| Change in Beliefs: “Those Kids” and “Our Kids” | 14 |
| Change in Beliefs: Taking Responsibility | 12 |
| Change in Beliefs: Facing White Privilege and Institutional Racism | 20 |
| Change in Beliefs: Equity Work Imperative | 25 |
| Changes in Collegial Interactions and Conversations | 25 |
| Changes in Student-Teacher Interactions | 25 |
| Changes in Curriculum | 19 |
| Changes in Instruction | 23 |
| Changes in Assessment | 11 |
| Changes in Classroom Practices | 24 |
| Changes in School Norms | 19 |
| Changes in School-wide Policies and Programs | 23 |

Appendix D: Sampling of Curriculum Changes

Following are direct quotes from interviews, organized by discipline.

Social Studies

And so the department's been leaning on each other a lot. So we split up into four groups and each took a quarter. Look at what do we usually do in these quarters, and where can we find some texts that have a different spin on them? [My group] used an immigration piece. North America we do an immigration unit. Usually it focuses on groups who settled here. We deal with push and pull factors, why people come, why people left, and... what we chose is more recent, what's happening with the border, down south, and then the influx of Somali immigrants in the last 10 years, so we kind of shifted the focus from the Irish settled here, the Germans settled here, to more relevant to what's going on right now. So that was fun. And we got to talk about the push and pull factors, you know, the process, it's just that it wasn't ancient history, it was recent. – J.H./M.S Teacher

Latin America, Spanish, Aztec, Inca, Maya – finding more texts on the perspective of the Spanish and how they viewed the Aztec, for example... and then we also brought in the Aztec readings, this is why we do what we do, and this is how we perceived the Spanish. – J.H./M.S Teacher

We have curriculum resources, and we get some information, and then you kind of tap into things that you learn over the years, like the Southern Poverty Law Center is amazing, the materials they have for free, it's great stuff, Teaching Tolerance. And then talking with colleagues. Beyond Diversity, just getting stuff from people. – H.S teacher

For example, they cover in the textbook, Cesar Chavez, just briefly, and we talk about Latinos fighting for their rights and this movement, and now from Teaching Tolerance, I've got this wonderful DVD with a full lesson that goes through it, and it's just much more direct and detailed. – H.S teacher

Again, like I said, current events are huge, anything that's on race I bring into the room, anything that's on equity, whether it be the gay marriage act, you know, I'm pretty gutsy. I get some push back, I'm not going to lie and say that everyone's like, oh, great. I had more phone calls as a social studies teacher when Obama wanted to talk to the students than anything else I've ever done in 12 years. – J.H./M.S Teacher

I teach one day, a Blues History day – it's a great way to show how segregated we were, and how this music has brought people together.

And is a foundation for a lot of the music that kids listen to today. You can hear hip-hop, you can hear jazz, you can hear rap in this. – H.S teacher

It's definitely more trying to have the kids have more conversations about a different perspective, a different thought. I have them reflect or be conscious of having a conversation about who writes the history books, who writes the stuff, and typically it's the victor. In the past, that has been the technologically advanced, the country that had money, and that wasn't the minorities. That wasn't the people of color. So having them have that framework before going in as a mindset, I think it's beneficial. That's something since I started teaching I've been trying to be mindful of that. – H.S teacher

I actually do [the white privilege checklist] in all my classes. Oh yeah. The lasting impact of slavery and colonialism, so we talk about this stuff all the time. – H.S teacher

We do some universal assignments now, that have their foundation in equity. So I guess, yeah, it has had some impact there. We do a document-based question essay on the Montgomery bus boycotts. – H.S teacher

I'm more cognizant in History of the importance of highlighting race, of highlighting the achievements of people of color, Latinos, people from different backgrounds and their stories, and the great things in history that they've done. And I feel that we as educators need to honor and emphasize that. Because it gets forgotten. Some dominant things in history that get taught – the economics, the political, the presidents and congress and all that. There's a lot of great stories about humanity, and I try to bring in people of color into those stories. – H.S teacher

I do a big unit with my Africa unit where my kids come as people of color, I did that out of the equity work, where they are strong people of color.... My philosophy around teaching Africa is that we can't ignore the problems of Africa, but our African American sitting in that audience need to know that there was a time when Africa was very powerful, very powerful people. – J.H./M.S teacher

I get some push back, I'm not going to lie and say that everyone's like, oh, great. I had more phone calls as a social studies teacher when Obama wanted to talk to the students than anything else I've ever done in 12 years. – J.H./M.S teacher

English/Language Arts/Reading

But it's been something that I've really focused on, especially with my equity work, to make sure that my curriculum is representing the students I teach.... We read novels about different groups of people that don't look like them. – J.H./M.S teacher

I did poetry. I did lots of poetry. I actually implemented a poetry unit where we looked at poetry from all different cultures, and then they wrote their own. We brought in – ninth grade, we brought in *Looking at the Lenses*, and we brought in more of the looking at the social lens, looking at the – through race, looking at media through the lens of race, having them write their own racial autobiographies. We talked a lot about that. – H.S teacher

I do short stories. We have some, and I brought in a lot. I make sure there is a Southeast Asian story, an African-American story, a white story, a girls story, a boys story, etc. And those change. ... I really am a proponent of common experience. I think we have given up on common experience too much. It's why people still have book clubs. It's fun to all read the same thing, and be able to share that. – J.H./M.S Teacher

Is a kid going to be able to relate to this story? Is there going to be that connection, but is there also merit in this story that from which they can draw? That's why I love stories like *Raisin in the Sun* because you have people in really beautiful authentic struggles, not only with the exterior world, but with their inner family world. That, that's been probably one of the better texts I've been able to... I didn't find it, but that I've been the most comfortable using. You don't want something—So even *[To Kill a Mockingbird]* isn't a book about black people. There's a point where there has to be a conversation in class about that. This isn't a book about black people; it's a book about white people trying to figure out black people. And all the black kids go, "Yeah." And the white kids go, "Huh?" You know, *Mockingbird* is core. It's going to be there. – H.S Teacher

Just in terms of whether or not this is going to be something that the black kids will see themselves in, will be engaged with and enjoy. A black kid in my room, looking at my curriculum – where are they seeing themselves? And it's way beyond windows and mirrors. Just in terms of we got kids coming up from north Minneapolis, the Choice is Yours Program. They're going to be looking for different images of themselves than our rich black suburban kids, just to be cognizant of that. – H.S teacher

I'm actively looking for authors of different races for Quick Writes, units, poems, etc. - J.H./M.S teacher

For example, being sure that every single culture in my classroom, that we read something or had something that somehow related – a substantial work to every single culture that was represented, and something spoke to that culture. So not that we necessarily read a novel from every culture, but it was an essential part of every unit in some shape or form. Whether it was a short story or poem, whether it was a text that we read – focusing on not just white literature. African-American literature became kind of a big push, [in our district], as we were doing all the equity work. Making sure that every child saw some piece of themselves in what we were doing, as opposed to just even those two main groups. – H.S teacher

I brought them Long Way Gone, a book on Africa specifically, about students that had been child soldiers and had been involved in Lost Boys, that kind of thing, that had been lost, involved in the wars. I brought in House on Mango Street. I had a girl from Haiti, so I brought in some of Danticot's work. I did Crick Crack. The Elco brother – Brother, I'm Dying. I did an excerpt from it. – H.S teacher

Science

I had them picture a scientist the first day of class. I have them draw what a scientist is to them, and they usually draw Albert Einstein-looking crazy white person that's a male that has chemicals. I just say how many people drew a woman and I have them stand up. How many people drew of person of color and I have them stand up. How many people drew a white person? So right away I'm kind of delineating that and pretty much it's always the same, it's usually white males that they draw. Then I always say, I see all of you as scientists, and I call them scientists all the time, that's how I greet them when I start the class. That even though deep down you don't feel that you are, I see you that way and there are scientists of all - then we look at some of the different scientists that are in the real world, of varying backgrounds. That's how I kind of start the year and start the class. – J.H./M.S teacher

We had a textbook one year we were piloting and they had a picture of an engineering conference, so it was a group of engineers sitting at a table and the idea was to talk about collaboration and brainstorming and I just stopped them and I said, "Look at this picture." They said, "What?" I said, "Who's in this picture?" One woman and her back was to you. I said it's all white men and one woman whose back is to you. It was sad. I am very aware of images. Actually the publisher of that book, I contacted them to say, "Hey look, I'm seeing pictures. It's 2011 here. There's no way this is

the best picture you can find. This is a problem.” We did not adopt the curriculum because it was great curriculum in terms of delivery, but their resources were so bad we just couldn’t spend thousands of dollars on that. – J.H./M.S teacher

We always taught about people like Isaac Newton and stuff, and I started to come up with activities that we were already doing but modifying them a little bit to either expand them or like in astronomy, "Hey, we're not going to just look at the European side of it. Let's look at the Chinese, how did that - because this was developed much further. They came out much more with it." I started really changing the way we taught or I taught about things and trying to expand. I like to just call it a more worldly view because there is - every culture added a little bit to it, and we just always focus on that European culture and never went outside of that. I think just that alone and broadening that, and it wasn't just minority. It was also with women in science and things like that. – H.S teacher

I just showed a video clip and he is one of my favorite people. There’s an astrophysicist named Neil deGrasse Tyson. He’s brilliant. He can talk down to earth and he’s an African American male. I love showing clips because they’re great. It’s just for earth science stuff. I like saying here’s this astrophysicist who’s known around the world, and here’s what he looks like; taking those opportunities too, just for kids to see themselves. – J.H./M.S teacher

Neil DeGrasse Tyson is wonderful. He's very articulate and he can take difficult concepts and bring them down to the everyday language and stuff, and I used to love having him. I used some videos and stuff with him in there. I also started noticing that the newer videos that we were getting, especially like in astronomy, they rarely ever even had a white person as one of the talkers. It was always somebody ... always a minority person. So I think it's starting to become more prevalent in education, they're starting to realize that, "Hey, we've got to do videos that fit with this stuff." ... I always think it's great when the kids can look up and see somebody of color in a position. It's big. It's saying, "Hey, you can do this." – H.S teacher

Like there was an assignment where I had them research a scientist of someone that really looked like them and from their background and have that reflected. I think that was a good experience for them to have to do that. – J.H./M.S teacher

That’s another thing; I think when you do these trainings that just becomes how you think, that when you look for a picture of kids talking, you’re looking for a picture of a diverse group of kids talking. – J.H./M.S teacher

Math

Right now, we have a very rote textbook, and many of our diverse students would be more successful with a more investigative type approach. So PLC focuses more on the curriculum piece, that we are constantly integrating the need for diversity into those pieces. – J.H./M.S teacher

With the new math curriculum, it pushed everyone, so I had to think of more interventions to close the gap. We sent home fact triangles for kids who were way behind, and had fraction camp to get kids up to speed. – J.H./M.S teacher

Electives

I intentionally program music from lots of sources. I would hope that would impact success, because kids see themselves in what they're doing. The reason I do it is because I feel like it's important for all kids to know about all backgrounds, and not just their own. – J.H./M.S Music teacher

The complicated aspect of the district in terms of music is that a lot of choral music tends to be religious in nature, and there's a large Jewish population, and we have a growing population of students who are Muslim, and so religious music is sort of off the table, unless it's very innocuous, maybe is the word I'm looking for. It has to be pretty general. That being said, I think teachers before me had tried to avoid gospel or spirituals, and I don't do that, because I think kids love them. My African-American students often times already know them, and I think that's important, because there's other songs you do that other kids already know, and I do songs that are in Hebrew, too, and then sometimes my kids who are Jewish already know those songs. – J.H./M.S Music teacher

We used to make a very Midwestern taco salad. Very run of the mill. Now I've added quite a few options to that, where my Latino kids will love it. Actually all the kids love it. They're optional-type ingredients and I have three different dressing type toppings that they can pick and choose what they want and the kids love it. [I've added] black beans, the avocados, the jalapenos, the different salsas. The toppings, they can do salsa and sour cream, or they can do guacamole. It used to be like this French dressing and taco seasoning. – H.S FACS teacher

When we do the turkey dinner, because we do a full turkey dinner, we've done collard greens a few times. Talk to a few grandmas. They bring the recipe from home because I have to approve it, and then figure out how we're going to make it over the three days and have it ready to serve.

When I get – “But you can talk to grandma. She makes it all the time,” so then I call grandma, “Okay, what do you mean by this?” “Well, this is what I do.” “Oh, okay. Well then, do you think it will work if I do this?” Just the connection and again the relationship that I’ll actually call grandma and figure it out. – H.S FACS teacher

Appendix E: Sampling of Instructional Strategies

Following are direct quotes from interviews, organized by strategy.

Planning

The next step was to think of a lesson that you have, that you like, and that you think you're pretty good at, that you've done the same way for the last eight years... and map it. How kinesthetic is it on a scale of zero to ten. How reflective, and this is kids being reflective, how reflective are you at having your students be? How interactive is it, where they're working together collaboratively and as a collective? Then how relevant is it and authentic? If it's BS in and BS out; if this is BS for the kids then be really honest about that.... Do one adjustment on your lesson. Pick which quadrant you're going to go for and go for it. Teach it. Think about a lesson you've got next week. – CARE Team member

If I give reading assignments, I help them pre-plan more than I used to. If you do just ten pages per week night, you don't even have to read on the weekends, and you can still get it done. – English teacher

So I prep them now. And I'll say – the book we read that hits the N-word is Raisin in The Sun. The neighbor lady comes over and drops it. And so I tell them, I pull the black kids aside and say, we're reading this play and the N-word is going to come up; we're not going to say it in class, nobody needs to hear that here. We're just going to say N-word, and here's why. I'm not going to tell you guys how to use it with each other when you're not in my room but I just want you to be aware that, that's coming up in the story, here's how I'm going to deal with it. Just that three or four minute conversation, it's like, "All right, we're good."

I definitely remember doing some things differently where I would have them start something in class, take ten minutes in class. I would also talk through scenarios like, okay when you leave here and you picture yourself doing this at home, what is it that's going to hang you up, and you should do that right now, in your ten minutes that's what you should be doing. To try to get them to really think responsibly and to regulate themselves in terms of what they need to do to be successful, because for some it might be different, but to realize if you need internet access then that's what you should be doing right now, you should be getting that piece done right now. – Science teacher

Whenever I had a session with Glenn or Jamie [from PEG], I would transfer an activity they did and use that instructional strategy that they used with us, and use it with my students the next day with my curriculum, and I would try things. I was constantly changing those things saying,

Well, they're modeling culturally responsive teaching. I'm going to take those things and use them. – Social Studies teacher

I use my ESL class to prepare them for intimidating assignments in their core classes. We go over test data until they can answer questions and write sentences. We practice presentations, help them get organized, give them a solid chance to stand before any class and not be terrified, ashamed or laughed at. – ESL teacher

[I am using a] UbD strategy of asking myself what I want them to know at the end of the unit and then I figure out how I am going to get there. Design lessons that give the students time to reflect, [opportunities to] write higher-order thinking questions, and share their knowledge.

Visuals and Manipulatives

At the end of the year, the kids are each going to get a little piece on the puzzle, and then they have to scale factor it to a larger board, butcher paper size, so from their paper on their desk to the butcher paper on the wall. Hands-on. And that's a collaborative piece too, because if one person's piece isn't right then it's not going to fit in. So trying to get as many of those strategies in as we can. – Math teacher

We used CMP prior to our current text, so there are a lot of resources and background knowledge that they have, that they're willing to share, so anytime we can get hands-on stuff, we absolutely do. For example, we were doing geometric figures, and we have nets, which means that the three-dimensional figure becomes a one-dimensional figure. Just that hands-on piece is what we're shooting for when we try to get away from the textbook and do activities in the classroom. – Math teacher

I show authors and artists instead of just reading them. – English teacher

I always try to make sure I have auditory and a visual concept going on, with pictures as much as I can, especially in geometry. Then I try to bring in as many hands-on activities as I can, so students are engaged in some form of tactile learning, as well as some visual experiments, occasionally. I know when I get to volume, I bring in 3-dimensional shapes and pass them around, let the kids see them, touch them, explore the shapes, the way that they are. – Math Teacher

I use a lot more pictures or videos before I would make something. Creative foods did roast chicken or it's called engagement chicken. I showed a three-minute video clip from the Food Network of how to make it, to truss it, to stuff the inside of it before they ever came in the lab room. Because I can show that in three minutes, whereas it would take me all

hour to demo it. They can all see it. They can't see me up here. – FACS teacher

[For] probability, we had dice, we had coins that we flipped, spinners that we spun, things like that. Fractions, we had pieces that we used to make the whole, and then try to understand, how do you divide a fraction? Any time we can get some hands-on things, we do. – Math teacher

Differentiation

I really am aware that to reach my students of color I need to be more active with how I teach, and I try to really implement things that are active. I'm also thinking about how some of my white students really like to have quiet work times, so some days we want to make sure that we also reach those types of learners. I think I try to think about a variety of what students bring to the classroom and how I can reach all of them. – Math teacher

I would say I definitely scatter my activities more. Every lesson I plan, there's [teacher-focused] me time, there's small group time, there's individual time, and there's whole group time. And I intentionally do that, so that there's voice time, there's written quiet time, there's reading time, there's time for me to lead, and set the example, and all those things. It's not just because they are junior high kids, and they have to get it switched up. It's because they are people, and they have to get it switched up. It's going to attach their learning differently. And I'm not saying this based on race, but I know that's a component now, which I didn't used to think about. I think it helps all kids learn better, which is what equity is all about. – English Teacher

[I am] continuing to modify my lessons and activities to really make sure that it's good for all kids in my class. For learning to take place, for understanding, for checking to make sure that understanding is happening, with a little formative test that we could take, or quizzes, or do little quicker quizzes, or do an activity that gets them moving and hands-on type of things, continually trying to reflect and change. – Social Studies Teacher

I find myself saying “stay with the group” less often, and “if you know what to do, go ahead and work on your own” more often. Also varied assessment strategies.

Now I think I'm extremely intentional of breaking down the data a lot more so as to, “Well, wait a minute. I've got three black boys that are doing – performing below the level that I think they should be performing at. What's going on? What do I need to do?” Then I think I've become a lot more intentional, too, about trying to focus on – and I guess part of it is

getting to know each kid, but focus on really differentiating instruction – [using] activities that would meet different learning styles. – Reading teacher

I know that every piece of curriculum, it's not just what I'm teaching, as far as the literature, but the way I deliver the lesson. Every lesson you say, now who is this one for? And it's just that simple question that you ask before you begin. So if this one is for the person who likes to be quiet and write, then this one needs to be for the person who needs to verbalize, and get up in front and act out. So I design my lessons with that question constantly going, and I've shared that with teachers. – English Teacher

When I [use] lecture, notes, individual work – 90 percent of my white kids are happy. Ten percent are more like, Ah, I have a different personality style. Most of my black kids are not happy. Some are, some actually like that style. When I teach like, we're going to make a rap about this, we're going to take vocabulary, we're going to change it and you can do – my African-American black students are just like, this is awesome! Totally into it. My shy white kids – especially I've seen it more with girls – are like, do I have to do this? My Latino students, they generally don't like that type of method either, where you're going to have to make a song or a rap or a play. They want to do group work, they don't want to work alone. I think it makes it more of a challenge to meet every type of learning style. – Math teacher

Scaffolding and support

I do a lot more scaffolding of testing, unit assessments, those kinds of things. Doing some more group tests, group or partner work... more scaffolding with that... I think I'm just more intentional about actually looking at each individual kid. And race plays a part in it as far as what am I going to do with Juwan today, what is going to – this activity is not going to reach this child, or this child isn't going to do well with it. What am I going to do? How am I going to scaffold that? – English/Reading teacher

I'll always have the key vocabulary of the day on the board. We talk about vocabulary a lot more. I have less assumptions about what they're coming with in terms of vocabulary or skills. Applying it to them so it's not so much you need to know the skill because that's not going to be relevant. How can I make a connection? Sometimes those connections can be really deep and some of those can be surface, to get buy-in. – Math teacher

[I am providing pathways for] attaching new knowledge to old knowledge, activating prior knowledge, [and] scaffolding with vocabulary instruction. – English teacher

I am teaching much more vocabulary terms than in the past. I am not assuming students are already familiar with the “jargon” or specialty words we routinely use in the classroom. – Science teacher

I’m more deliberate in telling them why I’m doing this, why this is important for them, and I’m not just laying it out. Today was a day where they needed to be quiet for like 45 minutes, and I would tell them, here is why you need to do this... and by explaining those things. ... I’ll lay it out. Those kinds of things. I never used to be that deliberate. – English teacher

I think our notebooks, our ISNs. [Interactive Science Notebooks]. It's good for everything. I think it's organizational, and it's just learning that there's a structure to do things and how it fits in and flows. At first, everybody will groan about doing it, Do we have to do Cornell notes? It's all about setting a routine, and I think our kids of color benefit from that routine, and knowing what's coming up. Now when we do notes, I don't even have to say, Take out your notebooks, Cornell note format. They're ready to go. – Science teacher

I remember some of my students of color saying, I never thought I would take an AP class, I never thought I belonged in an AP class, but I stuck it out and I'm so happy. We feel comfortable in this class, we feel supported, we know we can get the help we need, the scaffolding. Yeah. I think it's made a profound difference in my class. – Social Studies teacher

I'm giving word boxes to the Hispanic kids more than anybody else. Am I doing this because they don't know what it is? Is it more like of a language thing? As I sit and I think about it, I'm like, I'm doing it more because it's a language thing. Like the three boys that were in here, I can sit and talk to them one on one and I know they know what's going on and they can explain, but you have to get across the language. Roberto was working today on these maps that we're doing, and once I showed him - and it took 10 minutes to show him what we were doing. He's like, Oh, okay. He just whipped right through it, and I'm like, Yeah, the kid knows what to do. – Science teacher

Group work

I think doing a lot more group work. Doing some more group tests, group or partner work... more scaffolding with that. I’m much more intentional about the collaboration piece, doing much more collaborative work.

Having them do more collaborative tests, students collaborating with each other, doing much more with a lot of the NUA strategy stuff. – English/Reading teacher

Teams or groups [in PE] – I always use a diverse group [of students] to demonstrate, skilled or not. Team leaders are always [racially] diverse. – Phy Ed teacher

My kids were like, hey, we want to work together. And I kept saying no, and then I was like, why am I saying no all the time? You keep asking me, maybe you're telling me something. And they actually were working when they were together, so that was kind of a novelty to me - oh, you really are talking about it. – Special Ed teacher

I try to incorporate more team activities versus individual. – JH/MS teacher

Multiple perspectives and reflection

A lot more time for student reflection. Example: talking about Huck Finn and slavery, having the student think what it was like for the characters, then their ancestors, then themselves. I am trying to get them to “speak their truth”. – English teacher

[We are] doing metacognition frames, just trying to do different things. You can see over here, we did bubbles, were they had a person or thing that they cut out of a magazine, and they had to describe their vocabulary word from that individual's eyes. Just trying to do some different things like that. To break up that whole, correcting, notes, work time pattern that math so often gets in. – Math teacher

I'm more cognizant in History of the importance of highlighting race, of highlighting the achievements of people of color, Latinos, people from different backgrounds and their stories, and the great things in history that they've done. And I feel that we as educators need to honor and emphasize that. Because it gets forgotten. Some dominant things in history that get taught – the economics, the political, the presidents and congress and all that. There's a lot of great stories about humanity, and I try to bring in people of color into those stories. – Social Studies teacher

Talk about real world athletes or events, [and] kids share. – Phy Ed teacher

So even [To Kill a Mockingbird] isn't a book about black people. There's a point where there has to be a conversation in class about that. This isn't a book about black people; it's a book about white people trying to figure out black people. And all the black kids go, “Yeah.” And the white kids go,

“Huh?” You know, Mockingbird is core. It’s going to be there. – English teacher

When we talk about exploration and the European dominance, going into the different civilizations like the Aztecs and Incas and looking at the new imperialism of Africa, and looking at the state Africa is in today, we try to bring in more historical sense of things. People say, Oh, well, Africa just can’t get itself together. Why are we always having to give them money? I try in those classes to give them some more perspective of, Africa is screwed up the way it is today because of the white influence coming in and tearing it apart and raping these countries. So we try to talk about some of those things, to try to get them some light of some of the historical background. – Social Studies teacher

I even have them reflect at the end of that activity, like how many of them can really – do you see yourself as a scientist? I always just tell them, “Well you might not like it right now, but you know that my goal is to get you to at least give it a shot while you’re here. – Science teacher

I have improved on requiring students to reflect more and take responsibility for their learning in my classroom. [When they write,] more students feel comfortable telling me rather than the entire class that they don’t understand. Through their reflections I have been able to help all students better by knowing how comfortable they feel with the material.

Relevance

The relevance piece has come in throughout everything. It comes in the way that we introduce things and trying to make things relevant to their lives and what they’re interested in. Using pop culture and that comes in in the assessments as well. It’s funny how something like that can make someone tune in. Just the other day we were talking about simple interest and instead of saying, “Bob invested blah, blah, blah,” we talked about Kanye West and what he invested and there was a picture of him on one of our worksheets and it was engaging just to see that I think. – Math teacher

And then having the question, what in your experience would be like this? Just asking that question and letting them [say], Hey, I’ve never done anything like this at all, or it’s kind of like this, and then reading those [responses] and that gives you some ideas and things that you can work off of in future assignments, because you start to see where others are coming from that aren’t the same as you. – Science teacher

When I use multimedia to cover fitness (body composition, C.U. fit) I try to use pictures with people of color or [relevant] videos that share a story of fitness, i.e. O'Neill and Sunshine on *Biggest Loser*. – PE teacher

I play music that's a wide variety of music that tries to incorporate again many different genres of music that would again maybe start a conversation piece or relationship you could build with someone. The kids will share a song with me, and just that relationship is being built around that. – Social Studies teacher

I had a funny example last week where I'm teaching them how to identify if lines are parallel or perpendicular. It's a pretty dry subject matter for eighth graders who maybe have struggled in math and aren't as interested in math. There was a student with a Spiderman shirt on. I said, "Hey, I like your Spiderman shirt." Then a conversation broke out and it was, "Oh, I don't like Spiderman. Spiderman is blah..." I said, "Hey, we can do this conversation." When I began [teaching] I would say, "Stop doing that! We have work to do." Then I would lose those students. Now I said, "Well, let's settle this with some math." I pulled up some images of Spiderman and Batman, and we had a couple others. I said, "Every time you get one of the problems right today, we get to put a vote towards which superhero is the best." I had 100 percent engagement, and it was eighth graders. Some of the students that sometimes I lose, they were all over wanting to learn the content because somehow it related to them. – Math teacher

Participation, student voice

To encourage quiet Latinas to speak up... I've gone to saying "I want to hear from someone we haven't heard from yet" or "someone from this table/group, share with us..." It seems to empower kids to share their thoughts/answers but have someone else to rely on if need be. I have seen kids make great strides in their math confidence. – Math teacher

I do a lot more Socratic discussion, which I found extremely helpful. The kids just love it. – English/Reading teacher

I've noticed when I'm lecturing – I'd call it more interactive, I'm not a lecturer. It's like say this, say this. "Okay, what do you think?" "Who can explain this back?" It's not like, "Just take the notes and I'm talking at you." – Math teacher

I have increased my wait time and often have kids write down their answers or share with a friend in order to get more voices in the room. This has increased class participation for students of color. – English teacher

My teaching now involves more time for discussion and sharing both verbally and in writing. I spend more energy on daily writing and using think-pair-share. I love Socratic Seminars and Philosophical Chairs. – English teacher

Turn to your partner and tell them what you think about it. Think-pair-share. NUA strategies. Trying to continually have kids speak about what they're seeing, have an opinion about something, and then not just doing it with the person next to them, but they get up.... It's a mind map or gallery walks. – Social Studies Teacher

We made up a rap. The most recent one came out of [an] example at one of our staff meetings. When we're talking about adding and subtracting integers and it was adorable. The kids loved it and they remember it and I hear them teaching other kids that haven't learned it. It's something that lots of kids clung to. I think it was a fun way to get students. Especially I think of some of my black girls who don't necessarily get to stand out in a positive way, they got to be the ones that were up there leading the rap. – Math teacher

Movement

Moving around, looking at different people, more interactive collaborative types of things where it's not just me spitting out information. It's a mind map or gallery walks. – Social Studies teacher

I do a lot of up-down movement, and I think this year in particular I had a group of kids in seventh grade that ... there was a girl who just loved choreography, and just had to move, and she kind of had a little crew, and they all had to move, and I'm totally fine with that. We actually took that from just having to get their groove on in warm-ups to, there was a certain song that she really wanted movement to be a part of, and she would, the first concert of the year is more formal, and more our hands are at our sides, and she felt like that was boring, and so she asked in the spring, can we do some songs where we have some more movement? I said of course we can. And so then she kind of took charge. – Music teacher

We do step-ins... in big circles. – Social Studies teacher

In math I have used "Act it Out" to help demonstrate a concept or principle. – Math teacher

Providing greater opportunities for movement and mode of expression. Example: students can compose and perform a play, song, or rap incorporating key terms and concepts of plate tectonics. – Science teacher

I do a big unit with my Africa unit where my kids come as people of color. I did that out of the equity work, where they are strong people of color. And the only requirement is that [it's someone of their same gender.] They dress in character, and they have to research the person, and we have this big fun day. – Social Studies teacher

Technology

Instead of getting textbooks we wanted in our science department to have a classroom set of iPads, and I just wanted to have access in my room all the time to those sorts of things. I had a website, anything technology I always give it a shot, and so I saw the value in some of those things for all students in terms of having access to that information so that they can think more deeply in class, they have access to common things all the time. Like instead of asking, we'll look it up. – Science teacher

We saw results from reaching our Latino students through some flipped classroom work that [we] did. To be honest with you we weren't expecting to see that at all. We thought that maybe it would be more our high flyers that would be accessing the videos because they're highly motivated. But we found that especially with students who are learning the language, that they loved being able to pause the lessons, rewind them and do it in a non-threatening way. No one is watching them do it. That's something that we were able to correlate with test scores, and found huge improvements with that group of students. – Math teacher

I tried to have as many visual cues as I could. We were doing a lot of flipped stuff with YouTube clips and all this stuff. – Science teacher

Doing a lot more Google docs, using apps. – English/Reading teacher

Using Photostory for our environmental concerns project. This gave my ELL students a safe environment to present their ideas. Everyone needed to write a script & got to record their voices. Anyone could re-record until they were satisfied. I hear one "um" in all the presentations. The kids of color were especially proud of accomplishing this big project. – English teacher

We have Clear Spots that students can check out if they don't have Wi-Fi at home, so access is not an issue. That's our goal, it shouldn't be an issue. – JH/MS teacher

I did make some videos, but I'm not doing the model where they watch them at home. I think that's what [my colleagues] have done is they have the kids go home. They put them on their website. – Math teacher

I try to get more kids of color to search via the Internet (in class) specific cultural artifacts from art history and write a paragraph to show me understanding and solidify a response. I think by doing this I have raised expectations to think and explore that they do have a history [in Art], and it can relate to their day-to-day actions. – Art teacher

We tried the Senteo to see if technology made a difference [in testing] with students of color. – Science teacher

Then that got me into the more digital kinds of things as well, because I think it helps with access, but it also then this is where the world is going in terms of accessing information and collaboration and communicating. So I just see it as it could this be another thing that really divides people in terms of haves and have nots. So really trying to give them skills and using them in the class so that they're more comfortable down the road. – JH/MS teacher

All of my assessments were on line with the iPad. I made podcasts of me reading the questions. No one would know that you're listening to that or not, everyone had headphones, so whenever I had a podcast available I had some kids that just did. I read it and they answered the questions as a choice they could do that. I didn't say, You're in this reading class so you will do it. I definitely told the reading teacher that I was doing that, and they should. – Science teacher

And then [the workshop leader] was talking about doing a flipped classroom, and some of the 8th grade teachers are doing that. And then he talked about EdModo, and we're doing that. And then he was talking about these animation things, and [one colleague] is doing that. So there were people doing all these different things that he was saying would be really good with the kids. – Math teacher

Appendix F: Theory Graphic

Grounded Theory of How Principals Lead a Faculty through Fear

