The Role of District Leaders in Improving Achievement and Equity: How Leaders Generate Will

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THE ROLE OF DISTRICT LEADERS IN IMPROVING ACHIEVEMENT AND EQUITY: HOW LEADERS GENERATE WILL

Dissertation in Practice by

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by

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Abstract

District leaders are under tremendous pressure to narrow persisting achievement disparities with a dearth of guidance from existing literature. Rorrer, Skrla, and Scheurich (2008) proposed a theory that district leaders enact four essential roles when engaging in systemic reform that improves achievement and equity: (1) providing instructional leadership which consists of building capacity and generating will, (2) reorienting the organization, (3) establishing policy coherence, and (4) maintaining an equity focus. However, these roles are not well understood. Therefore, this qualitative case study contributed to research and practice by exploring how leaders in a Massachusetts public school district that made gains in improving achievement and equity attempted to generate will, defined as intrinsic motivation, when enacting the role of instructional leadership.

Drawing upon semi-structured interviews and a review of documents, this study concluded that leaders enacted the role to varying degrees in ways that were consistent with Rorrer, et al. (2008). Data revealed that leaders attempted to act as transformational

leaders and distribute leadership in a manner that connected with individual's values, beliefs, and desires. Furthermore, when enacting these leadership constructs, leaders attempted to use extrinsic motivators, including recognition, data, and resources such as time for collaboration and professional learning, to promote autonomy and self-determination. Recommendations include how district leaders can enact this role in a more informed, proactive and deliberate manner.

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem and Purpose

District leaders are charged with the formidable yet important task of improving achievement for all students. On one hand, federal and state high stakes accountability policies provide a sense of urgency to improve schools systemically. On the other hand, district leaders feel internal and societal pressures to reform in an effort to realize higher and more equitable educational outcomes.

Progress along these fronts has been uneven. Although nationwide achievement has increased across the board, the achievement gap remains pervasive (Chudowsky, Chudowsky & Kober, 2009). Low-income, Black and Latino students and students with disabilities (SWD) continue to experience inequitable learning opportunities, higher discipline rates, lower standardized test scores and higher dropout rates as compared to Asian and White students (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Hardman & Dawson, 2008; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Underachievement not only affects one's ability to be a productive member of a democratic society, but also threatens the overall ability of the United States to maintain a well-informed citizenry and compete in the global marketplace (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Koski & Reich, 2006).

In response to such issues, districts are often considered critical to sustainable, systemic change in achievement among all students (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010; Leithwood, 2010; Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008). In these efforts to

[1] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Peter J. Botelho, Peter J. Cushing, Catherine L. Lawson, Lindsa C. McIntyre, and Zachary J. McLaughlin

increase achievement and advance equity systemically, the functions of superintendents and their district leadership teams have evolved significantly (Rorrer, et al., 2008). District leaders have shifted from managerial and monitoring functions to taking on complex new roles as leaders of learning (Honig et al, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003).

However, there is limited support from policy and research for district leaders regarding how to enact these important new roles (Leithwood, 2010; Weinbaum, Weiss, & Beaver, 2012). First, accountability policies call for districts to close the achievement gap, yet provide little practical guidance for district leaders. Instead of useful guidance, these policies rely on testing, sanctions and public shaming as the main instruments for improvement (Goertz, 2001; Mintrop, & Sunderman, 2009; Weinbaum, et al., 2012). Secondly, educational research on district efforts to improve achievement and equity fails to address the complexity of district reform and, as a result, is limited in its usefulness (Leithwood, 2010; Trujillo, 2013). For example, research primarily offers lists of characteristics of effective reform districts without being able to determine which particular characteristics actually result in achievement gains. Consequently, it is difficult to apply these general findings to very different contexts with a high likelihood of success (Leithwood, 2010). Additionally, although some of the research has strived to provide more specific and practical guidance for district leaders, these studies tend to be overly simplified and decontextualized (Trujillo, 2013). For example, they tend to concentrate simply on raising standardized test scores as an indicator of success. Furthermore, these studies largely ignore the social and political context within the district as well as the historical, social and political realities surrounding the district, all which impact the

district leaders' reform efforts. Consequently, district leaders risk responding to policy pressures and interpreting and applying research guidance in a manner that fails to meet the current complex needs of the particular districts in which they serve.

Thus lies the problem: district leaders are responsible for designing and implementing complex systemic change aimed at improving achievement for all and advancing equity, but with a dearth of useful guidance from policymakers and researchers. Accordingly, the main purpose of this project was to explore the work of district leaders in improving achievement and advancing equity system-wide. In doing so, we explored to what degree the actions of a district leadership team reflect an enactment of the four essential roles for district leaders in educational reform as conceived by Rorrer et al. (2008).

Rorrer et al. (2008) highlight four key dimensions of district leadership: providing instructional leadership; reorienting the organization; establishing policy coherence; and maintaining an equity focus. In order to address this purpose, the individual studies (Botehlo, 2016; Cushing, 2016; Lawson, 2016; McIntyre, 2016; McLaughlin, 2016) of this research team were organized according to this framework (See Table 1).

Table 1.1

Individual Studies According to Dimensions of District Leadership

Dimensions	Focus Area	Investigator
Instructional Leadership	Generating Will Building Capacity	Lawson Cushing
Reorienting the Organization	District Culture	McLaughlin
Establishing Policy Coherence	Policy Coherence	Botelho
Maintaining an Equity Focus	Equity Focus	McIntyre

In the final dissertation in practice, each of these individual studies posed unique research questions, reviewed literature and methodologies unique to the individual study and reported findings and discussion related to the individual study.

Literature Review

The goal of narrowing achievement disparities across the nation has been a central focus of educational reform for decades. This review will briefly discuss issues relating to district leaders' work in narrowing achievement disparities and advancing equity. First, we describe student achievement and its importance. Second, we discuss the importance of equity, the relationship between inequity and achievement disparities, and how public school districts can inadvertently promote inequitable practices. Third, we discuss why district leaders are important actors in improving achievement and equity and how they are currently working to narrow disparities. Lastly, we will review the theoretical framework that informed this study.

The Importance of Student Achievement

Often measured by test scores, student achievement is viewed as a predictor of other educational attainments, including: grades, graduation rates, and college acceptance rates (Cassidy & Lynn, 1991; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia & Nolly, 2004). Achievement can serve as a gateway or a barrier to social and occupational mobility (Brown, 2003; Cassidy & Lynn, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Skrla, et al., 2004). Some researchers have illustrated the importance of achievement by examining the outcomes of students from disadvantaged demographic groups who have experienced persistently low achievement levels (Ewert, Sykes, & Petit, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Holmes, & Zajakova, 2014; Xia & Glennie, 2005). Many of these studies found that low achieving students are more

likely than higher achieving students to drop out of high school, and are in turn more likely to attain unskilled, low-wage jobs, be unemployed, on welfare, and/or incarcerated (Brown, 2003; Ewert et al., 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Penfield, 2010; Xia & Glennie, 2005).

Darling-Hammond (2010) extends the importance of achievement to a broader level. She claims that persistently low achievement jeopardizes our nation's position as a competitor in a globalized economy that is increasingly dependent on a professionally skilled workforce. Policy makers and scholars who share Darling-Hammond's concern have engaged in long-standing debates about why some student groups are consistently outperforming others and what can be done to remedy this problem (Brown, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2010; NRC, 1997). At the forefront of these debates is the concept of equity (Noguera, 2007; Ready & Hawley, 2003).

The Importance of Equity

Equity is believed by some scholars to play an important role in supporting student achievement (Noguera, 2007). While educational equity is defined in many different ways (Espinosa, 2008), it generally involves the fair and just (Green, 1983; Gottfried & Johnson, 2014) distribution of educational resources in order to ensure learning opportunities that support *optimal* achievement outcomes for all students (Kahle, 1998; Kelly, 2012; Noguera, 2007; Springer, Houck, & Guthrie, 2007). To best understand the role of equity in supporting achievement, it is first important to understand the relationship between inequity and disparities in achievement, commonly referred to as the achievement gap.

Achievement disparities as a reflection of inequity. A substantial amount of research on the achievement gap suggests that existing disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged students is a reflection of educational inequity (Dentith, Frattura, & Kaylor, 2013; Dunn, 1968; Oakes, Rogers, Lipton & Morrell, 2002; Steinberg & Quinn, 2015). The achievement gap first became apparent in the 1960s when public schools began to publish the results of achievement tests (Harris & Herrington, 2006; Ipka, 2003). Access to test scores provided scholars with a mechanism for discerning discrepancies in student achievement patterns among different demographic groups. Findings revealed a gap in performance between White, advantaged students and students from disadvantaged and different racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds (Brown, 2003).

At the same time, the release of the *Equality of Equal Opportunity Study* (Coleman, et al., 1966), known as the *Coleman Report*, highlighted the relationship between equity and achievement by exposing the existence of racial inequities regarding the educational opportunities afforded to students in public schools (Kober, 2001; Wong & Nicotera, 2004). Despite significant efforts to eliminate educational inequities (*Brown v. The Board of Education,* 1954; The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), 1965), the achievement gap not only continues to persist but has also grown to include students with disabilities (SWD) and English Language Learners (ELL) (Brown, 2003, Chudowsky, et al., 2009).

For example, recent NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) scores (NCES, 2013) indicate that students who performed at proficient or above on the eighth-grade mathematics test vary significantly by race (45% of white students; 21% of

Hispanic students; 14% of Black students; 5% of ELL students), eligibility for free and reduced lunch (19% of eligible students; 48% of non-eligible students) and disability status (8% of disabled students; 49% non-disabled students).

The eighth-grade NAEP Reading test revealed similar trends in performances at or above proficient by race (46% of White students, 22% of Hispanic students, and 17% of Black students), eligibility for free and reduced lunch (19% eligible; 48% non-eligible) and disability status (9% of students with disabilities; 40% of students non-disabled students). Furthermore, Ingels and Dalton (2013) found that between 2009-2011 dropout rates for Black students (4.3%) were four times higher than Asian students (0.3%) and almost twice as high as White students (2.1%).

District practices that create inequity. There is some disagreement among scholars about whether achievement disparities are more strongly affected by educational inequity or inequities that exist outside of school (Carter & Welner, 2013; Coleman et al., 1966; Holmes & Zajakova, 2014). Nevertheless, there is common agreement that public school districts can perpetuate, sometimes unknowingly, disparities in student achievement by supporting inequitable practices (Kahle, 1998; Gregory, et al., 2010). The ways districts promote inequitable practices can be determined by the prevalence of opportunity gaps (Dentith et al., 2013; Hehir, Grindal & Eidelman, 2012) and outcome gaps (Ewert, et al, 2014; NCES, 2014) between different groups of students.

According to Noguera (2007), learning inequities create opportunity gaps that lead to low levels of achievement for certain students. Opportunity gaps span educational resources, school conditions, school curriculum and the level and intensity of instruction (Dentith et al., 2013; Dunn, 1968; Oakes et al., 2002; Steinberg & Quinn, 2015; Wang,

1998). Opportunity gaps can be seen by examining who has access to quality teachers, enrollment in honors, advanced placement and "gifted" classes and who does not (Albano & Rodriquez, 2013; Burris & Welner, 2005; Hehir et al., 2012; Jaafar, 2006; Lee, 2012; Welner, Burris, Wiley & Murphy, 2008). Isenberg et al. (2013) in the study, *Access to Effective Teaching for Disadvantaged Students,* found that free lunch students do not have the same level of access to effective teachers compared to non-free lunch students. Findings further suggested that inequitable access to quality teachers contributed two percentile points to the difference in student achievement scores between the two groups.

One way to determine the presence of opportunity gaps is to look at whether or not various educational data is proportionately or disproportionately represented by different groups of students (Gregory et al., 2010; Noguera, 2007). Disproportionality occurs when data is underrepresented, or overrepresented by a certain student demographic relative to the overall student population (Gregory et al., 2010; Lee & Ransom 2011; Noguera, Hurtado & Fergus, 2012; Penfield, 2010). For example, minority children and children from economically challenged homes are disproportionately overrepresented in special education programs compared to other groups of students (Dunn, 1968; Holtzman & Messick, 1982; Kunjufu, 2007; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013; Piechura-Couture, 2013). Students with disabilities and minority students receive discipline at disproportionately higher rates when compared to White students (Noguera, et al., 2012). Minority and Special Education students also have disproportionately higher dropout rates than White and Asian students (Darling-Hammond, 2010; NCES, 2014). On the other hand, rates of admission to undergraduate, graduate and professional programs are disproportionately underrepresented by Black, Hispanic and Special

Education students compared to White and Asian students (Holme, Richards, Jimerson, & Cohen, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006, NCES, 2013).

Some scholars have illustrated the relationship between inequity and achievement disparities by examining outcome gaps, or group differences in measurable school outcomes such as graduation rates and test scores (Carter & Welner, 2013; Ladson-Billing, 2006). Ewert et al. (2014) examined demographic and educational attainment data of incarcerated populations across the country and found that the majority of inmates between the ages of twenty and thirty-four were high school dropouts, male and Black. By adjusting data to include incarcerated populations, Ewert et al. further concluded that conventional educational attainment data, which typically omits incarcerated individuals, creates an illusion of progress that "not only underestimate[s] the high school dropout rate but also underestimate[s] racial inequality in educational outcomes" (p.36). Despite the ways school districts reinforce achievement disparities, many district leaders are attempting to remedy the problem by instituting practices that will promote achievement and equity for all students.

The Importance of District Leaders in Improving Achievement and Equity

The belief that district leaders are important actors in promoting student achievement and narrowing disparities is a viewpoint that emerged in literature during the same time period as the standards-based reform (SBR) movement (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). Prior to SBR, educational reform scholars viewed district leaders as either inconsequential or an impediment to student learning and school improvement (Firestone, 1989; Heller & Firestone, 1995; McLaughlin, 1990). District leaders functioned primarily as regulators and monitors of compliance (Firestone, 1989; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson,

& Wahlstrom, 2004). Additionally, widespread views that principals and school-level factors had the greatest impact on student achievement caused many scholars to focus their energy on school-based reform (Leithwood, 1994; Ogawa, 1994), leaving a gap in educational research on district leadership (Honig, 2007).

In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education released *A Nation at Risk* (NAR), which claimed, "the educational foundations of our society are being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (p.9). The release of NAR led to the enactment of standards-based reform legislation known as The Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994 and the publication of Goals 2000. IASA focused on high standards for disadvantaged children and Goals 2000 aimed at becoming "first in the world in science and math performance by 2000" (IASA, 1994, §102 (5) (a)). Standards-based reform legislation sought to improve student achievement by requiring districts to implement rigorous academic standards for *all* students tied to performance assessments, monitoring student achievement and holding schools accountable for student progress (IASA, 1994; Linn, 2008; NRC, 1997).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), reauthorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind Act, brought standards-based reform and the role of district leaders in school improvement efforts, to a new level. Districts were required to report student test scores by subgroup and were accountable for meeting student achievement targets through the use of sanctions and rewards. Standards-based legislation extended responsibility from the school to the school district, shifting the research lens from school-based reform to systemic reform, and from the role of principals to the role of

district leaders in improving student achievement (Leithwood, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). As a result, research began to acknowledge district leaders as important actors in improving achievement and narrowing disparities across the system (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

For example, McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) sought to determine what successful reform districts do to achieve systemic change across fifteen urban school districts in the San Francisco Bay area. Their findings suggested that districts leaders play an important role in creating systemic change and that a weak district leadership team limits schools' reform progress. Current research continues to echo the importance of district leadership in large-scale reform (Bird, Dunaway, Hancock, & Wang, 2013; Honig et al., 2010; Honig, Lorton, & Copland, 2009; Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2010).

Current leadership actions to improve achievement and narrow disparities. There are many ways district leaders are currently working to improve student achievement and narrow disparities. Some district leaders are focusing solely on increasing high stakes test scores (Srikantaiah, 2009), while others are engaging in complex large-scale efforts to improve teaching and learning (O'Dougherty & Ovando, 2010; Rorrer, et al., 2008) and advance equity (Wright & Harris, 2010). This work is described below.

Improving standardized test scores. Pressure from federal and state accountability policies have caused some district leaders to concentrate on improving student test scores without necessarily improving student learning opportunities (Booher-Jennings, 2005). Many district leaders are attempting to raise test scores by supporting the use of educational triage practices, narrowing the curriculum and teaching to the test

(Berliner, 2011; Elmore, 2004; Jacob, 2005; McLaughlin, Artiles, & Pullin, 2001; Weinbaum, et al., 2012). Districts are also using gaming tactics such as retention, minimizing subgroups, and disproportionately identifying disadvantaged learners.

Jacob (2005) studied the impact of high stakes tests on the Chicago Public School System. Findings suggested that the district raised test scores by supporting increases in special education placements and preemptively retaining students. The district furthermore narrowed the curriculum by steering away from low stake subjects like science and social studies. Improvement strategies that narrowly focus on quickly increasing standardized test scores without also improving instruction in substantive ways can have unintended consequences. Districts can inadvertently reinforce educational inequity, further marginalize underperforming students by restricting opportunities to learn and lead to increases in student dropout rates (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Penfield, 2010). The next section will review how district leaders are working to increase achievement scores and improve educational outcomes for all students by focusing on more substantive improvements in teaching and learning.

Improving teaching and learning. A promising way to improve both student achievement and educational outcomes is to improve teaching and learning (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Louis, 2008). This section will discuss three common leadership moves the literature suggests district leaders in underperforming districts are making to improve teaching and learning. These moves include: evidenced-based decision making; practicing and promoting instructional leadership; and advancing equity throughout the school system.

Evidenced-based decision making. The literature on large-scale reform suggests there are many ways district leaders are using evidence to improve achievement. Some are using evidence to set strategic goals and motivate change (O'Dougherty & Ovando, 2010; Wright & Harris, 2010), while others are using it to inform instructional practice (Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, & Koschoreck, 2001; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). For example, O'Dougherty and Ovando (2010) found that district leaders in an urban California school district making progress towards narrowing achievement disparities used data to expose the problem of underachievement. As a result, the leadership team was able to create a sense of urgency and gain stakeholders' support for reform.

While it is widely understood that the use of data can lead to improved practice, most scholars agree that data provides only the opportunity to inform leadership decisions (Coburn, Toure, & Yamashita, 2009; Farley-Ripple & Cho, 2014; Wayman, Jimerson, & Cho, 2012). District leaders must know how to make deep and meaningful contextual connections with data if they are to effectively inform educational practice in a way that leads to improvement. This point is illustrated by Finnigan, Daly and Che (2013), who found that district leaders in a consistently underperforming school district did not appear to see the benefit of using evidence, narrowly defined evidence as student test scores and based improvement decisions on primarily affective information.

Wayman et al. (2012) provides guidance to district leaders by identifying four factors that can build, or limit, a district's capacity for effectively using data to improve student achievement: (a) how data is used, (b) attitudes toward data, (c) principal leadership for data use, and (d) the use of computer data systems. Accordingly, Wayman et al. suggests that districts can work towards becoming a data-informed district by

focusing on developing common understandings throughout the system, engaging in professional learning and by investing in computer data systems.

Practicing and promoting instructional leadership. The achievement gap is considered a complex problem of learning that requires educators to make substantive changes to their instructional practice (Gallucci, 2008; Knapp et al., 2010). Many scholars of the NCLB reform era posit that district leaders are most likely to support student learning by acting as instructional leaders (Burch & Spillane, 2004; Honig, 2007; 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004).

There are many ways district leaders are attempting to transform their roles from monitors of compliance to instructional leaders. District leaders are establishing learning-focused partnerships with principals and schools (Burch & Spillane, 2004; Honig et al., 2010; Knapp et. al, 2010). Central office administrators are cultivating the exchange of information across and between multiple levels of the organization by spanning boundaries and acting as brokers of information (Burch & Spillane, 2004). They are promoting a culture of high expectations and continuous learning (Honig, 2012; Leithwood, 2010), while reorganizing and re-culturing central office to support teaching and learning at all levels of the organization (Honig et al., 2010; Knapp et al., 2010). Additionally, district leaders are using evidence as a medium for leadership (Honig et al., 2010; Knapp et al., 2010). Honig et al. (2010) subsequently found that district administrators are investing in instructional leadership by allocating resources to sustain instructional improvement efforts, supporting ongoing professional learning and responding to operational needs.

Another way effective reform district leaders are executing their role as instructional leaders is to build professional capacity by creating a coherent instructional guidance system while providing ongoing professional learning opportunities for both administrators and teachers (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010; Skrla, McKenzie, Scheurich, & Dickerson, 2011). Nevertheless, despite the wealth of research on the impact effective instructional leadership can have on improving student achievement outcomes (Leithwood, et al., 2004), the problem of inequitable access to quality instruction must be addressed if achievement disparities are to be narrowed (Isenberg et al., 2013; Kahle, 1998).

Advancing equity throughout the school system. Education is often referred to as the Great Equalizer (Scutari, 2008) and some scholars suggest that public school districts can improve achievement by attending to equity (Hewson, Butler, Kahle, Scantlebury, & Davies, 2001; Rorrer et al, 2008; Theoharis & Brooks, 2012; Turner, 2014). Datnow (2005) contends that the advancement of equity requires systems that support good learning (parent support, equitable OTL, multicultural education strategies); district level involvement; efforts to also build the community's capacity; and linkages between districts and the state.

Studies on effective reform districts illustrate a variety of strategies district leaders are using to advance equity (Leithwood, 2010; Rorrer et al., 2008). By acknowledging past inequities explicitly, reform-focused leaders are providing opportunities and empowering administrators and teachers to apply potential solutions (O'Doherty & Ovando, 2010; Turner, 2014). Leaders are also attempting to advance equity by developing and clearly communicating a vision of all children graduating

proficient and college ready (Bryk et al., 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Wright & Harris, 2010).

Wright and Harris (2010) found that eight superintendents in small, culturally diverse districts experienced a 10% reduction in the achievement gap by promoting cultural proficiency throughout the district. Strategies enacted by these superintendents included: developing a culture of high expectations and promoting individualized instruction; interpreting and communicating achievement data through a cultural lens; and implementing targeted professional development and mechanisms for evaluating progress towards goals.

District leaders are furthermore attempting to advance equity by creating socially just and culturally proficient learning communities (O'Doherty & Ovando, 2010; Scanlan, 2013; Skrla, et al., 2001; Theoharis, 2007; Wright & Harris, 2010). Leaders who maintain a lens toward social justice can provide the opportunity for all children to perform at uniformly high academic levels by creating a safe and secure school environment for children, regardless of their race and family background (Skrla et al., 2001). For example, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2012) studied the educational experiences of 900 at-risk first grade students from diverse backgrounds who displayed multiple challenges in behavior, attention, academic and social development throughout kindergarten. Findings indicated that after being placed in a first-grade classroom characterized by strong instructional and emotional support systems, the students' "achievement scores and student-teacher relationships [were] commensurate with their low-risk peers" (p.125). Conversely, at risk

students placed in less equitable classroom environments had lower achievement and noticeably more conflict with their teachers.

A Theory of District Leaders Improving Achievement and Advancing Equity as Institutional Actors

Previous scholarly work includes a lack of developed theory and is based largely on district effectiveness, which poses oversimplified measures of effectiveness and makes weak causal claims (Leithwood, 2010; Trujillo, 2013). Rorrer et al. (2008) addresses these limitations by proposing a theory of districts as institutional actors in systemic reform. In this view, district leaders affect the organization by assuming four central roles: providing instructional leadership; reorienting the organization; establishing policy coherence; and maintaining an equity focus. The individual studies of this research team were organized according to this framework (See Table 1.2) and responded to limitations in the literature by applying Rorrer et al.'s theory to a specific district in Massachusetts that was attempting to improve achievement and advance equity.

A synthesis of these individual inquiries will not only illustrate how leaders are currently working to improve achievement and advance equity, but it will also provide a an example of how Rorrer et al.'s (2008) theory can be applied to the complex work of systemic reform.

Table 1.2

Framework of Individual Studies

Individual Study	Role	Research Questions
Lawson, 2016	Instructional Leadership: Generating Will	1. How do district leaders build will? 2. How do district leaders then sustain will?
Cushing, 2016	Instructional Leadership: Building Capacity	1. What actions do leaders take to build capacity in the district to improve student learning? 2. How do district leaders prioritize their efforts to build capacity toward advancing equity?
McLaughlin, 2016	Reorienting the Organization: District Culture	1. How do district leaders work to understand culture? 2. How do district leaders work to shape culture?
Botelho, 2016	Establishing Policy Coherence: Mediating Policy	1. What policies are districts likely to enact? 2. How do district leaders make sense of policy challenges that exist in light of local needs and context? 3. In what ways do district leaders work to mediate these policies in order to best serve the goals of the district?
McIntyre, 2016	Maintaining a Focus on Equity	1. What is equity to district leaders? 2. How do district leaders foreground equity for other educators?

CHAPTER TWO[2]

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In conducting this research project, team members shared common procedures for collecting and analyzing data. All team members contributed to the work of data collection, but worked independently when analyzing data for individual studies. Procedures that were unique to particular independent studies are reported in those chapters respectively. The sections below describe the overall study design, procedures for data collection, procedures for data analysis and study limitations.

Study Design

To explore the work of district leaders in improving achievement and advancing equity system wide, this study utilized a qualitative methodology. Understanding that this work is complex and multifaceted, this type of open-ended question is best answered by an approach that does not see a finite set of variables (Creswell, 2013). This study ultimately looked to answer a series of "how" questions concerning the actions of district leaders. To give a holistic answer to these questions, the study methodology needed to be open to multiple data sources and needed to be adaptable to possible new interpretations of data (Stake, 2005).

Specifically, the research team used a case study approach. Case studies have origins in the work of sociologists and anthropologists (Creswell, 2013). These researchers used case study approaches to try to understand the interactions of people within specific contexts. Merriam (2009) defines case study as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system." The bounded system makes up the case to be studied.

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[2] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Peter J. Botelho, Peter J. Cushing, Catherine L. Lawson, Lindsa C. McIntyre, and Zachary J. McLaughlin

Rather trying to understand "leadership" in general, a case study narrowly focuses on subjects like "leadership in XYZ High School." A single school district delineated the boundaries of our study.

Our study created a "thick description" of one school district that is improving achievement and advancing equity system-wide (Geertz, 1973). This description sifted through layers of details to come to a fuller understanding of the district in its unique context. During this investigative process, researchers paid careful attention to the details of environment as they tried to interpret the meaning of the data they collect. Successful districts, and their leadership teams, are by their nature constantly planning and adjusting their approach based on their staffs, their students and their community. Bounding our study by a single district allowed the research to explore the complex interchange of variables and actors that may be impossible to fully isolate from one another (Yin, 2013).

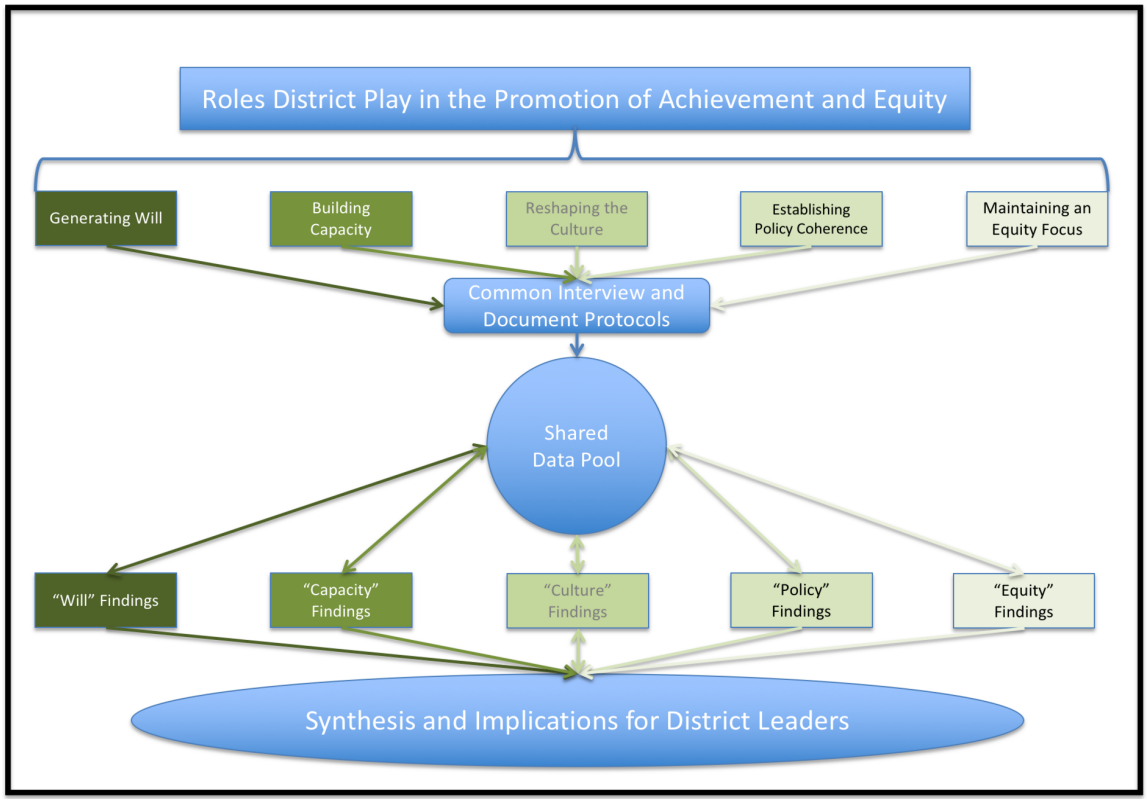

Figure 2.1 Overall study methodological map

Guided by our theoretical framework, this project examined the selected district's efforts to increase student achievement and equity. The work of the district was examined through district leaders that, for our purposes, include the superintendent, mid-level central office administrators and principals. The roles of these leaders were examined through a variety of perspectives (See Figure 2.1).

Site Selection

A study site was selected based on three criteria: a diverse student body, a visible district-wide effort to narrow the achievement gap and a mid-sized student population. To examine the work of district leaders improving achievement and equity system-wide, our district had to have a student body with a large enough population of students from groups that have traditionally demonstrated lower levels of achievement than their peers in order to able to determine if the achievement gap has been narrowed. As such, we used a district with two or more subgroups identifiable on NCLB reporting. The district had shown positive gains in the achievement scores of these groups and a reduction in the achievement gap between these groups and their more affluent, White and/or Asian peers.

Making progress with these groups was not enough. This study sought to understand a district whose improvement appeared to be by design rather than chance. Therefore, the next step in our selection process was to further cull from the districts with a diverse student body by identifying which of those districts publicly recognized improving achievement and equity as a district-wide effort. The site needed to have a district vision, mission, and, or improvement plan that speaks to the desire to accomplish these two goals.

The final step in our selection process was to narrow our focus to mid-sized districts in our state of study (5,000-15,000 students). Due to the heavy emphasis on large urban districts in recent district-level research, the research community has missed the opportunity to obtain rich data from a more manageable site. In particular, studying a comparatively smaller district provided an opportunity to study the district more deeply and examine a higher percentage of district leaders.

Unlike the large urban districts more commonly studied, districts of this size typically have fewer bureaucratic layers separating instructional decision makers and the teachers implementing those decisions; nevertheless, these districts are large enough to have multiple member central office leadership teams. These teams allowed the study to view district leadership collectively through the eyes of several different categories of professionals. Given the manageability of targeted participant groups, the study was able to include a high percentage of staff members who constitute key leadership groups. This strategic choice increased the possibility that the findings could inform theory and guide future research. Furthermore, together with a variety of other theoretically guided studies, this study contributes to literature that can provide district leaders with more relevant and useful guidance as they engage in complex systemic reform efforts.

Contextual background of Wyoma School District. Wyoma is a historically significant suburb of Boston with deeply rooted economic tensions. Wyoma began as a maritime community. Textile factories supplanted this economy in the late 19th century. These factories employed scores of immigrant workers who starkly contrasted the generations of American aristocrats who built estates and lavish summer homes here. These wealthy few attempted to divide the municipality along class lines, an action that

was narrowly defeated. Wyoma remains a disparate community even as innovative companies fill the once dormant factories with highly skilled workers.

During the first decade of this century, Wyoma Public Schools faced severe financial constraints as voters resoundingly rejected operational tax overrides that forced school closures and staffing cuts. Teachers were reduced in force by 18% between 2004 and 2012 while the student population decreased by under 6%. Student to teacher ratios increased by over 15%. Recent enrollment increases have not been matched with teacher hires: the student to teacher ratio is currently behind the state by over 10%. Wyoma voters have supported over $200 million of school construction throughout the past decade.

Data examined from the decennial census reveals stability in demographics and population growth. While Wyoma's population has grown by approximately 3% since 2010, the school district has seen enrollments grow by 6% over the same time period. Since 2001, the White enrollments decreased by 13% while Hispanic enrollments increased by 500%. Students who are Hispanic and Limited English Proficiency are 80% more likely to drop out of high school when compared to their white peers. Thirty percent of district students receive either free or reduced meals. These students are more than twice as likely to drop out of high school than their peers. Asian and African American enrollments have remained static with insignificant annual changes of under 3%.

Data Collection

Case study data included interviews and reviews of documents collected from July to October 2015.

Interviews. In order to understand the perspectives of district leaders, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from the district. Respondents included the superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of special education and pupil personnel services, finance director, principals and instructional coaches (see Table 2). Each participant was individually interviewed for 45-90 minutes.

The interview protocol explored respondent perceptions of district leaders improving achievement and advancing equity system-wide. Flowing from each unique conceptual framework, our protocol specifically studied the ways district leaders generate will, build capacity, reshape culture, establish coherent policy and maintain a focus on equity while pursuing those goals (See Appendix A).

In order to support question validity, cognitive interviews were employed to identify problems in the interview protocol and design stronger questions (Singleton & Straits, 2012). Specifically, think-aloud interviews and probing techniques were used to understand the way a respondent may process a particular question (Beatty & Willis, 2007).

Table 2.1

Interview Subjects

District Assigned Title	*Sub-Group Pseudonym*	*Overarching Pseudonym*
Superintendent of Schools Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction Assistant Superintendent for Student Services Finance Director Child Welfare & Community Support Director	Central Office Leaders	District Leaders
3 Elementary Coaches 5 Elementary Principals Middle School Principal High School Principal	School Level Leaders	

Note: This table represents the leadership structure of Wyoma Public Schools.

These think-alouds were piloted with four central office leaders, principals and other school professionals from outside districts to gauge question effectiveness. This process involved asking the initial question, receiving an answer and asking a variety of follow up probes (Conrad & Blair, 2009). For example, the cognitive interview subject was asked one of our protocol questions, "In what ways has the vision for teaching and learning been used to generate buy-in from staff?" The subject answered the question, then the cognitive interview team asked the subject probing questions such as, "What did you think I meant by 'vision'?" and "I said that I was trying to understand 'generating will. What would be indications that will had occurred?" These reflections influenced the team's process concerning possible instrument adjustments.

Table 2.2

Respondent Characteristics

Job Category	*Gender*		*Years in the District*		*Years in Current Role*	
District Leaders	Female	4	1-3 years	1	1-3 years	2
	Male	1	4-5 years	1	4-5 years	2
			5-10 years	1	5-10 years	1
			More than 10 years		More than 10 years	0
Building Leaders	Female	8	1-3 years	2	1-3 years	4
	Male	2	4-5 years	3	4-5 years	4
			5-10 years	2	5-10 years	1
			More than 10 years	3	More than 10 years	1

Document review. The research team member also reviewed documents to triangulate interview answers. All team members used the district's most recent strategic plan. Individual team members used additional documents, as appropriate, to their investigation. These documents were selected to help shed light additional light on efforts to improve achievement and equity in the district.

Data Analysis

Dedoose software was used to code all data. As transcripts and documents were added to Dedoose, individual researchers did an initial wave of descriptive coding. This first cycle approach summarized the topic of passages with a short phrase (Saldaña, 2013). During this process, individual team members made passes starting from an *a priori* list (Miles et al., 2014) developed from their review of literature concerning their specific role. The goal of this first wave of coding was to chunk data into initial categories. The categories used in this initial stage of analysis consisted of the roles being examined by each researcher: generating will, building capacity, aligning structures, reshaping culture, policy coherence and equity focus.

Additional coding cycles were completed by all of the researchers; however, each team member made the choices of which coding techniques and how many cycles were needed individually (see chapter 3). Second (and further) cycles were designed to create a more narrowed thematic organization of the initial descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013). While the first round of coding identified a variety of concepts to explore, additional cycles were for the purpose of coming to some more generalizable themes.

The study built trustworthiness by completing pair checks, developing analytic memos and focusing on reflectivity (Merriam, 2014). Team members reviewed each other's coding cycles. The research team also shared a single Google document as a repository for reflection on their ongoing process of understanding the case. This journaling included commentary on "reflexivity" which is the process of reflecting on the impact of their role as a human instrument in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

CHAPTER 3[3]

HOW DISTRICT LEADERS GENERATE WILL TO IMPROVE ACHIEVEMENT AND EQUITY

Problem Purpose and Research Questions

District leaders face the formidable, yet important, task of motivating their stakeholders to take on and carry out the work of improving achievement and equity for all students. Research has taught us that low achievement affects one's ability to be a productive member of a democratic society (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Low achievement, furthermore, affects the ability of the United States to compete in the global marketplace. As a result, current federal and state policies hold districts accountable for improving students' achievement through the use of inducements and sanctions. The consequences of low achievement, coupled with today's accountability system, create a sense of urgency and underscore the moral imperative of closing the achievement gap (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Skrla, et al., 2004). However, they provide leaders with limited guidance on how to sustainably improve student outcomes. The task becomes even more daunting when resources are sparse, learning conditions are outdated and the student body is diverse, disenfranchised and underperforming (Gregory, et al., 2010; Wallace, et al., 2008). Furthermore, the unique political, cultural and socio-economic forces that affect an organization's change process can further overwhelm leaders and their districts. Thus, district leaders must motivate stakeholders to carry out a reform effort that is uninformed, requires a sharp change in practice (Floden, Goertz, & O'Day, 1995) and is not certain to achieve scale.

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[3] Chapter 3 was authored by Catherine L. Lawson

Consequently, many reform efforts have failed because district leaders have quickly enacted reform strategies without first taking the steps to generate the organization's *will* (Hubbard, Meehan, & Stein, 2006). Will, which is characterized by the desire to do something because one believes in it or for its own intrinsic reward, is often referred to as the cornerstone of reform (McLaughlin, 1987; Rorrer, et al., 2008). In fact, many researchers argue that systemic change cannot happen without will (Firestone, 1989; Fullan, 2011; Honig, 2012). However, there is little support available to guide district leaders regarding how to go about motivating their districts to participate in reform. Therefore, this qualitative case study contributed to research and practice by exploring what district leaders did to build and maintain will when attempting to improve achievement and equity system-wide. Specifically, this study was guided by two questions: How do district leaders motivate stakeholders across the system to take on the work of improving achievement and equity? How do they then sustain the district's motivation to carry out this work?

Literature Review

This review briefly discusses issues relating to district leaders' attempts to generate and maintain organizational *will* to carry out reform strategies aimed at improving achievement and advancing equity. The first section describes will and its importance by discussing how will is defined within the context of educational reform and its impact on reform. The second section examines the work district leaders are doing to generate and sustain will.

Understanding Will and Its Importance

In order to understand why will matters, one must first understand how will is defined in the context of educational reform. For the purpose of this study, will is defined as the values, beliefs and attitudes that influence an individual's motivation to take action (McLaughlin, 1987). Many scholars refer to this type of internal drive as intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivational theorists have traditionally focused on two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic (Deci, et al., 2001). Intrinsic motivation is based on an innate psychological need for competence and self-determination; it reflects our dispositions (kindness, care, self-efficacy and views about learning) and desires (aspirations to improve practice or to better the world) (Rutherford, 2009; Spillane & Thompson, 1997), unlike extrinsic motivation, which is driven by a desire for a separate, or external, outcome (Deci, 1972). Increased status, a pay raise and avoiding policy sanctions are examples of extrinsic motivators (Deci, 1972; Firestone, 1989).

Some literature suggests that while extrinsic motivators can lead to job satisfaction and increased performance, they do not necessarily lead to the high levels of performance typically derived from intrinsic motivators such as commitment, purpose, meaningfulness and engagement (Sherman & Smith, 1984; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Motivation driven by extrinsic outcomes can be controlled (Deci, et al., 2001) instead of autonomous (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Controlled motivation can lead to shallow and rigid behaviors, unlike autonomous motivation, which is associated with behaviors that are flexible and more profound (Sheldon, et al., 2003).

For example, Rutherford (2009) found that when leaders increased teacher authority and created environments based on shared beliefs and values with set goals, cultural controls (i.e. school mission) became the basis of teachers' commitment to improving achievement, instead of loyalty to superiors, which was found to be less sustainable.

For this reason, intrinsic motivation is viewed by scholars as the optimum motivation for action (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Spillane & Thompson, 1997) and has, thus, been the focus of many scholars concerned with organizational behavior and social change (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; Goffman, 1974; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). For example, "Frame Analysis" (Goffman, 1974) is a theoretical framework often used by social scientists to examine how leaders of Social Movement Organization (SMO) have used *frames* to intrinsically motivate and then mobilize people to carry out reform efforts such as the civil rights movement. Derived from the work of Goffman, Frame Analysis is a way of making sense of information, organizing our experiences and guiding action (Snow, et al., 1986). Leaders of SMOs often use three collective action frames to gain the commitment necessary for mobilizing action by creating connections between individual's interests, values and beliefs, and the social movement organizations (SMO) goals and ideology (Benford & Snow, 2000). The first is "diagnostic framing," which SMO leaders use to diagnose and frame a problem, usually by attaching the problem to a form of injustice. The second is *"*prognostic framing," which is used to propose a solution and a plan that will remedy the injustice. The third is "motivational framing," which is the call to arms. SMO leaders use the diagnostic frame to create a rationale for taking action. According to Park, Daly, and

Guerra (2013), effective framing resonates with individuals by creating action or shaping beliefs.

Scholars of organizational behavior have also focused attention on the relationship between intrinsic motivation and employee performance/productivity (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; Deci, et al., 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Chalofsky and Krishna (2009) found when studying meaningfulness (a deeper level of intrinsic motivation), that people with the highest level of productivity and fulfillment were intrinsically motivated by the work itself and professionally engaged with the organization. Similarly, Wollard and Shuck (2011) concluded that physical, mental and emotional investment in an organization's success was the hallmark of employee engagement.

Given the strong relationship between intrinsic motivation (will) and action, it is not surprising that educational scholars concerned with issues of achievement and equity emphasize the importance of will (Fullan, 2010; Leithwood, 2010; Levin, 2008; Rorrer, et al., 2008; Rutherford, 2009). For example, McLaughlin (1987) claims that successful reform can't happen without will. Similarly, Fullan (1994), when discussing why policy-driven reform fails, posits that "local motivation, skill, know-how and commitment" are what matter most (p.8).

Lastly, the importance of will in improving student achievement is also recognized at the policy level. Guided by the belief that under-performing schools suffer from a lack of will, policymakers have imposed unprecedented levels of accountability (see No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), 2001) on public school districts in an attempt to motivate educators to work harder, change and improve educational practice (AERA,

2000; Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2012; NRC, 1999). The next section will review literature that discusses the ways leaders engaged in systemic reform are making efforts to generate and sustain will across their districts.

How District Leaders Work to Generate and Sustain Will

Research has found that district leaders attempting to begin and carry out the work of improving achievement and equity use many different strategies to generate their stakeholders' will (Floden, et al.,1995; Honig, 2012; Rutherford, 2009). Strategies used to create will are typically employed during the initiation phase of reform and involve building the capacity *for* change (Harris, 2001; Knapp, et al., 2010; Spillane & Thompson, 1997). During this phase, leaders typically work to garner support and develop the district's readiness for change by enacting strategies that create inspiration and shape individual's thinking and beliefs (Rutherford, 2009). On the other hand, strategies used to sustain will typically occur during the implementation phase of reform (Harris, 2001). During this phase, district leaders are often working to maintain focus and momentum, sometimes in the face of obstacles that can lead to abandonment of the work. Such obstacles can include budget restrictions, personnel changes, the emergence of competing urgent priorities, and the onset of fatigue that can afflict any individual engaged in a change process that does not yield immediate results. What follows is a discussion about the different ways leaders use specific leadership constructs and extrinsic motivators to build and sustain will.

Leadership constructs. Education reform literature often includes discussions about two common leadership constructs leaders use to build and sustain will. These

constructs include transformational leadership (Geijsel, Sleegers, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2002) and distributed leadership (Leithwood, et al., 2004).

Transformational leadership. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership occurs "when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 382). Transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intended, or thought possible, by empowering people and encouraging autonomous thinking (Aviolo & Bass, 1995).

Transformational leaders stimulate change and innovation by setting directions; developing people; and redesigning the organization (Geijsel, et al., 2003). They set direction by building and selling a vision that can be operationalized by creating measurable goals (Geijsel, et al., 2003; Firestone, 1989; Rorrer, et al., 2008; Wright and Harris, 2010). Transformational leaders develop their vision by creating a shared system of beliefs (Firestone, 1989; Rutherford, 2009), which is done, for example, by using evidence and the accountability systems to create urgency and pressure (O'Dougherty & Ovando, 2010); by engaging stakeholders to understand their values and beliefs prior to taking action (Hubbard, et al., 2006); and by assertively communicating their own values and beliefs with conviction (Dinham & Crowther, 2011).

At the same time, transformational leaders sustain will by working to continuously promote a culture of high expectations (Honig, 2012; Leithwood, 2010). They continue to communicate the mission and values associated with the change process, revisit goals annually, celebrate successes and attempt to strike the balance of providing ongoing support and pressure (Harris, 2011; Rutherford, 2009).

Transformational leaders also make ongoing efforts to earn and maintain the trust of others (Celep & Yilmatzurk, 2012).

Many scholars believe the effectiveness and sustainability of transformational leadership is highly dependent on the extent to which followers trust their leader (Celep & Yilmatzuruk, 2012; MacKenzie, & Bommer 1996; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). Podsakoff et al. (1996) found employee trust was higher when leaders provided appropriate modeling, individual support and fostered acceptance of group goals. Furthermore, employees who trusted their leaders tended to reciprocate care and concern for the leader. When leaders are trusted, employees tend to exhibit more organizational citizenship, are more likely to have confidence in their leader's character and typically believe their interests are not being abused (Colquitt, Scott & LePine, 2007; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

Distributed leadership. While there are many different ideas about the meaning of distributed leadership (Harris, 2011; Leithwood, et al., 2004), it generally pertains to direction-setting practices in an organization where leadership is shared and many people have the potential to exercise leadership (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003). According to Harris (2008), the key to distributed leadership is the way it is facilitated.

There are many ways district leaders distribute leadership to build and sustain will (Floden, et al. 1995; Honig, 2012; Knapp et al. 2010; Skerrett & Hargreaves, 2008). District leaders can build will by developing the leadership capabilities of others and by working collaboratively with committed teachers across the district (Dinham & Crowther, 2011). By engaging and working collaboratively with coalitions of key interest groups, leaders can neutralize resistance and gain stakeholders' acceptance at the

initiation phase of reform (Firestone, 1989; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008). Furthermore, teacher mentor programs, communities of practice and ongoing opportunities to collaborate (study groups and teacher networks) that focus intensely on improving instruction are all structures that can inspire teachers, changing the way they see themselves, both as practitioners and as learners (Floden et al., 1995; Skerrett & Hargreaves, 2008).

Focused networks can also provide opportunities for leaders to sustain will. For example, leaders are able to use the forums to conduct ongoing assessments regarding progress of the work and monitor momentum (Burch & Spillane, 2004). Leaders can work to maintain the focus of the work by using networks to continuously broker and communicate information (Knapp, et al., 2010). Additionally, if facilitated appropriately, networks can provide the resources that are known to reinforce motivation, including: opportunities for professional learning and social engagement, support and opportunities for teachers to shape thinking by challenging each other's understandings (Floden et al., 1995; Honig, 2012). Lastly, during turnaround work, when leaders involve high levels of staff in developing the school's mission, the mission can become widespread, deeply valued, and, as a result, sustainable (Dinham & Crowther, 2011).

Extrinsic motivators. Many educational leaders also utilize a variety of extrinsic motivators to build and sustain will. There are three common types of extrinsic motivators discussed often in educational reform literature: (1) inducements *(i.e.* rewards and recognition) and sanctions (i.e. the consequences of the accountability system and poor evaluations) (Honig, 2012; Leithwood, 2010); (2) data, including test scores, discipline and college acceptance rates, etc. (Wright & Harris, 2010); and (3) resources,

including social capital, infrastructure, curriculum, time and professional learning opportunities (Bryk et al., 2010; Cosner, 2009; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Spillane & Thompson, 1997).

Some scholars argue that extrinsic motivators have either no effect or a negative effect on will (Arnold, 1976; Gagne & Deci, 2005). These scholars believe extrinsic motivators can diminish will if the motivator is contingent on behavior, or is presented in a way (i.e. feedback) that negatively affects feelings of competence and self-determination (Gagne & Deci, 2005). For example, transactional leadership and management by exceptions (when leaders get involved only to correct employees' behaviors) can lead to "controlled motivation" and hinder self-determination, which in turn can diminish will (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Gagne & Deci, 2005; Sheldon, Arndt, & Houser-Marko, 2003). Similarly, Hamilton, Stecher, Marsh, McCombs, and Robyn (2007) found that teachers' will to improve student outcomes was diminished by certain extrinsic factors, including a lack of consistency between state accountability requirements and available local resources.

On the other hand, some scholars suggest extrinsic motivators can increase will (Cameron & Pierce, 1994; Eisenberger, Pierce, & Cameron, 1999). Sherman and Smith (1984) found organizational structures that promote autonomy and self-determination (i.e decentralized authority and decision making processes), and place a decreased emphasis on bureaucratic formalization, can positively affect will. O'Doherty & Ovando (2010) discovered that one California school district's decision to implement professional learning networks that focused on reviewing student data in collaborative groups

(extrinsic motivators that promote autonomy) increased teachers' sense of competency and desire to learn new strategies (intrinsic motivation).

Methods

A full discussion of the methods employed during our overarching study can be found in Chapter 2. Unique to this individual study is how qualitative data was collected and analyzed.

Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews. In order to gain insight into the types of efforts leaders were making to build and sustain will, all interview respondents identified in Chapter 2 were interviewed using questions that pertained to motivation (See Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Interview Questions Pertaining to Will

Research Questions	Interview Questions
How do district leaders motivate stakeholders across the system to take on the work of improving achievement and equity?	1. What is the district's vision for teaching and learning? 2. What strategic goals and initiatives exist? 3. How did people react when you first proposed the initiatives? 4. How did you get people to want to do the work?
How do they sustain the district's motivation to carry out this work?	1. How did you keep the initiatives going once started? 2. How did you keep people focused on the work? 3. Are there any key people you rely on to keep the work going?

Interview questions relative to both research questions were developed n accordance with existing scholarship pertaining to motivation theory, as it applies to organizational will, and the prominent leadership constructs literature suggest leaders use to generate organizational will. All questions were intended to uncover (1) the motivational strategies leaders used when attempting to create and sustain motivation, and (2) the extent to which the motivational strategies identified by leaders were connected to individuals' values, beliefs, and attitudes. Interviewees were not provided with a definition of will or of the different types of motivation in advance.

Document Review. The district's strategic plan (2011) and district mission and vision statements were reviewed. These documents were selected because they shed light on how, and if, leaders set direction and created a purpose for the work. While interviews were the focus of data collection because they were found to be more central to answering the study's research questions, the documents were reviewed to triangulate interview data.

Data Analysis

Both research questions were initially coded for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the type of leadership construct used by the leader, and whether the leadership action was used to build will or sustain will. Data was then sub-coded for transformational leadership moves (i.e. communication of vision and beliefs and efforts to create a shared system of beliefs) distributed leadership moves (i.e. coaching model, use of data-teams, peer-peer learning opportunities and professional learning networks), and use of extrinsic motivators to externally reinforce will (rewards, feedback, sanctions). The last level of analysis involved coding for evidence of motivational strategies that connected to

individuals' values, beliefs and desires. For example, when examining excerpts related to leaders' use of a distributed leadership construct, I considered if leaders described using evidence of student learning during data team meetings with the *intention* of interacting with individual' values, beliefs, and desires. I also considered their perceived *impact* of data team meetings on individuals' beliefs, desires, and values.

Findings

In what follows, I describe the ways district leaders went about generating and sustaining will for improving achievement and equity, which the leaders approached in a similar manner. First, I describe the ways leaders attempted to build will. Second, I describe how leaders attempted to sustain will. Third, I discuss these findings and their implications for practice in light of current scholarship.

Attempts to Build Will

The first research question pertained to how district leaders attempted to develop the districts' will *for* change. As described below, almost all [4]leaders leveraged extrinsic motivators while employing both transformational and distributed leadership constructs when attempting to build will.

Transformational Leadership. Almost all central office leaders and all school-based leaders attempted to build will for achievement and equity by acting as transformational leaders in two key ways. First, they attempted to create a shared system of beliefs by creating a purpose for the work and by using evidence to both communicate their beliefs and to shape others' beliefs about student learning potential. Second, respondents attempted to build trusting relationships with teachers.

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[4] Responses are categorized as All; Almost all = more than ¾ of the whole or one group; Most = more than half of the whole or half of one group; Some=more than one; One=None

Creating a shared system of beliefs. When asked how they went about getting people to want to do the work of improving achievement and equity, almost all central office and almost all school-based leaders described attempts to create a shared system of beliefs that involved (1) creating a purpose for the work and (2) shaping beliefs about learning potential.

Creating a purpose for the work. Analysis of interview data and a document review found that leaders attempted to create a purpose for the work by developing common goals with a plan for reaching those goals, and by communicating their beliefs to stakeholders. When describing why they believed people wanted to improve achievement and equity, some leaders described an "urgency" triggered by accountability systems several years back. For example, some leaders identified one elementary school's designation as "Level 3[5]," some referenced the threat of accreditation loss at the high school, while some referenced the district's decision to begin looking more closely at student performance data, which was described as variable.

All of these events reportedly informed the goals that were written into the strategic plan. The strategic plan identified goals for improving achievement and equity for all students. The goals outlined in the plan appeared to create purpose by providing a reason for doing the work. For example, the plan identified the mission of maximizing "academic achievement and personal growth for every student." The plan identified goals that were directly connected to student achievement, such as the goal of preparing "students for higher education and a 21st century workforce" and the goal of providing

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[5] The Massachusetts' accountability system uses aggregate high stakes test scores to designate districts as level 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. A Level 1 district is the highest performing level, where Level 5, are performing at levels low enough to be placed in receivership by the state. Level 3 districts are considered in need of improvement and qualify for targeted support from the state.

"equitable and engaging opportunities for students to enhance and sustain learning." Furthermore, when asked about the district's plan for improving teaching and learning, all leaders appeared to have a common understanding of the district's goals. Each respondent echoed the goals of the strategic plan by referencing either 21st century learning and/or supporting the academic growth of every student. Leaders also described current and recent initiatives the district was undertaking in pursuit of the goals.

In addition to developing common goals, almost all school-based leaders and some central office respondents described attempts to establish purpose by communicating their beliefs and vision for student learning to others. Social media, public forums and staff meetings were identified as platforms for communicating their messages. For example, the district published a mission statement and goals for student learning on the district's website and the school committee reportedly began their meetings by reciting the district's mission.

Most central office and all school-based leaders identified the use of faculty and team meetings to communicate their beliefs and vision. Some leaders reported using meeting times to talk about the importance of "high expectations" for "all" students. One leader communicated his vision for project-based learning at faculty meetings by "really looking at what project-based learning is and clarifying what it is for teachers."

Some central office and most school based leaders attempted to communicate their beliefs during formal and informal "conversations" with stakeholders. One leader attempted to connect with people's "hearts" by engaging them in "conversations about why they got into the profession." When experiencing resistance or rolling out a new initiative, one leader tried to focus conversations on "doing what's best for kids."

Another leader attempted to communicate her beliefs by approaching conversations "as a teacher who wanted to lead the learning."

Use of evidence to shape beliefs about learning potential. Some central office and most school based leaders discussed using evidence in an attempt to shape staff members' beliefs about student learning potential. One leader used evidence to "change the conversation" about student learning by requiring staff to talk about low performance areas as a skill issue rather than a student issue. Another leader described how she compared the school's accountability data to the data of a higher performing school that had a similar demographic to illustrate that "it's being done, so it can be done." Similarly, another leader described the impact of reviewing student-writing samples on teachers' beliefs. According to this respondent:

> I read [writing samples] out loud… I said, I just want to ask you…just take a guess what grade level these pieces came from. They were guessing high school, middle school . . . I said . . . this is from a special ed. third grader… All of a sudden everyone's like, so can you come in now?

Building trusting relationships. Almost all central office and school-based leaders identified "relationships" and "trust" as key when attempting to build will. When describing their efforts to gain trust, some leaders stated they would "listen" to staff, while some took a "partnership" approach. Some leaders attempted to show they have "staff's back" by "taking hard falls" on their behalf. One leader practiced total transparency at meetings, so "everybody knows everything on the team, and that we are all part of the same situation." Another leader in an effort to gain credibility purposefully targeted the "low hanging fruit" by utilizing her data knowledge and math background to

"help" analyze student performance data. One leader characterized staff as a "family" and, during the opening day speech would communicate that, "as a family we take care of each other...we support each other." Another leader tried to make herself "vulnerable" by taking "ownership" over mistakes and talking "openly" about her mistakes with staff.

Distributed Leadership. When describing strategies used to build will, almost all central office and all school-based leaders discussed attempts to create opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles. In some instances, the leadership opportunities were distributed as a way to empower teachers, and foster autonomy and self-determination; in other instances leadership opportunities were used to reward teachers efforts and good work.

Use of peer-to-peer learning to create self-determination. Some central office and most school-based leaders expressed the belief that "teachers learn best from other teachers." According to one leader, "when it's peer-to -peer and when it's something they can actually take away right away, there's value." Some of the leaders who used peer-to-peer learning opportunities as a motivational strategy described their perception of the impact it had on teachers' autonomy and sense of self-determination. For example, when describing the impact of teacher-led learning walks (when teachers observe each other during a lesson and then offer feedback) one leader stated, "Eventually all teachers visited each other. They very quickly realize what's going on next door…you could tell they took away what they needed to take away because then they started pulling other people in." Similarly, another leader noted, "once something works in their classroom, they'll talk about it during their planning time…then it slowly trickles down." Additionally, when beginning an 1:1 laptop initiative at the high school, leaders set up a

PLC for teachers that offered college credit. One requirement of the PLC was to demonstrate a "technology wise" practice. When reflecting on this model, the leader recalled how "learn[ing] from each other...got people interested" and "not afraid" to use technology.

Peer leadership opportunities as a reward. Some respondents described how they created opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles as a form of positive reinforcement. One leader had staff "present the good things that we see through observations" as a way to give staff "credit." Some "leveraged" staffs that were "intrinsically motivated" and "naturally excited" about the work by having staff try new instructional interventions and then share those interventions that were successful with peers. One leader attempted to provide leadership opportunities to staff that weren't motivated, by calling upon them, as "the resident experts," to give "input and help plan."

District Leaders' Attempts to Sustain Will

The second research question pertains to how district leaders attempted to keep the momentum going during the implementation phase of change. Similar to leaders' efforts to build will, when attempting to sustain will almost all central office and school-based leaders used extrinsic motivators such as inducements, data and resources while employing both transformational and distributed leadership constructs. These findings are described below.

Transformational Leadership. Leaders utilized the transformational construct when sustaining will by providing ongoing support, continuously revisiting and resetting goals and by bringing the vision for student learning to life.

Ongoing Support. When acting as transformational leaders, almost all central office and school-based leaders used extrinsic motivators such as inducements and resources to provide ongoing support. For example, one leader sent "positive emails each week" and consistently gave staff praise for "taking a risk and trying new things." Another respondent gave praise and recognition to staff by acting as a "cheerleader," which she described as efforts to show "excitement" and provide "encouragement." Furthermore, as described earlier, in some instances teachers received college credit for participating in professional learning opportunities.

Many leaders attempted to support staff by providing resources. Some central office leaders provided support by "securing the funds" for instructional coaches and professional learning opportunities that were tied to established goals. For example, the district recently brought in Yong Zhao as a motivational speaker to reinforce the district's goal of promoting 21st century skills because he specializes in globalized education. Similarly, many school-based leaders described using the coaching model to provide ongoing support. Coaches reportedly reviewed data on an ongoing basis with teachers during common planning time. They provided support by doing "a lot of team teaching and re-teaching," "modeling" of instructional interventions and by "developing scope and sequences" when rolling out curriculum-based initiatives.

Bringing the vision for student learning to life. Many leaders attempted to sustain will by continuously seizing opportunities to bring the vision to life. This strategy was similar to the will-building strategies leaders used when attempting to create a shared system of beliefs. However, when attempting to sustain will, leaders did not attempt to create a vision of what could be, rather they attempted to show what was. They did this

by showing the outcomes of the vision. For example, one leader attempted to "show the work we are trying to do" by bringing a robot to a school committee meeting. Another leader invited the public to attend the senior intern fair, which provided opportunities for the public to hear directly from students the impact of the internship on their learning experiences and plans for the future. Similarly, another leader showed videotapes of model lessons at vertical team meetings so the teachers could "watch in action" the work that was happening in each other's grades.

Revisiting goals. Some central office and most school-based leaders discussed relying on different accountability systems and goal setting practices to keep the focus of the working going. For example, one leader viewed the annual goal setting process as a way to prevent the work from losing "traction." This leader used the goal setting process to "focus the agenda on what really matters," by revisiting previously set goals and asking, "are we still committed to these goals and how does that play out as we move forward?" One leader described using the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accreditation process as a way to keep the work from "getting stale."

Distributing Leadership. Almost all central office and school-based leaders attempted to sustain will by distributing leadership. Leaders identified existing structures and resources that promote collaboration, such as common planning time, PLCs, data teams, teaching teams and department meetings, as key for sustaining will. Many leaders attempted to focus common planning and data review time on improving instruction. According to one leader, the time used for data review, "reminds us what students can do and what we can do." One leader used collaboration time to "continually take the temperature of how we are doing" and "to figure out what I need to do keep the teachers

moving forward." Another leader used PLC meetings and department meetings to "talk about best practices … and recent articles...to keep some of the education that's going on in the forefront." One leader designated time at data team meetings to review and "celebrate student growth," while another focused conversations on understanding "what the data is telling us?" and "why . . . that is?" Similarly, when data results were concerning, one leader used the time to "problem solve together," while others described focusing the conversation on "opportunities" and "strategies" for improving student performance.

Some school-based leaders focused their energy on creating "teams that work effectively together" during collaboration time. For example, some leaders had coaches "run the meetings." One leader tried to strategically place a "strong teacher" on each team, while another leader attempted to make sure there was at least one person on the team who would "motivate others" to get the work done.

Discussion

This study describes the ways leaders in one district went about generating and sustaining the will for improving achievement and equity for all students. Analysis of data found that leaders attempted to build and sustain will by employing both transformational and distributed leadership constructs. Findings further noted that leaders used similar extrinsic motivators (inducements, data and resources) when employing both constructs. At the same time, leaders used the strategies in different ways. Leaders used transformational leadership to build will by attempting to create a shared system of beliefs and by building trusting relationships, where when sustaining will they focused on illustrating the results of the vision, providing ongoing support and continuously

revisiting established goals. Leaders distributed leadership when building will by creating opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles and used systems and structures that supported professional learning and collaboration opportunities to sustain will. While enacting both constructs, leaders used extrinsic motivators that spanned the accountability system; praise and rewards, data and resources, such as time, curriculum and professional learning opportunities. The following sections discuss the potential implications these findings may have on practice in light of current research.

Generating Will by Acting as Transformational Leaders and Distributing Leadership

Extant research on educational reform suggests that many leaders attempt to build and sustain will by acting as transformational leaders (O'Dougherty & Ovando, 2010; Rorrer, et al., 2008, Wright & Harris, 2010) and by distributing leadership opportunities (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003). Consistent with research, leaders in the Wyoma Public School District acted as transformational leaders when communicating and illustrating a vision for student learning and when attempting to create and sustain a system of shared beliefs.

Leaders' efforts to distribute leadership were also consistent with research about direction-setting practices (e.g., shared leadership, working collaboratively) (Dinham & Crowther, 2011). For example, when building will, leaders created teacher leadership positions, called coaches, in all schools, they had teachers take on leadership roles, and they a "partnership approach" when building trust. When sustaining will, leaders provided ongoing opportunities to collaborate by maintaining the use of professional learning networks and structured times for common planning and data review. Many leaders also used collaboration time to keep the focus on improving instruction, which

can lead to "inspiration" and change the way teachers see learners and the way they see themselves as practitioners (Floden et al., 1995; Hargreaves & Skerrett, 2008).

Given that important role will plays in reform (Fullan, 2010; Rorrer, et al., 2008), it will be important for leaders to think explicitly about will when preparing to make large scale changes. This can be done by providing leaders with training in both the concept of will and effective practices for building will as it relates to equity and achievement prior to initiating the development of an improvement plan. Training that provides leaders with a conceptual understanding of will and its role in the improvement process will enable leaders to enter the planning process with a uniform definition of will and a common understanding of how to go about generating will. At the same time, given that a lack of will can lead to disengagement (Wollard, 2011) and, thus, interfere with leaders' efforts to create change, part of this training should focus on employee engagement (Hamilton, et al., 2007). A theoretical understanding of why and how people become both engaged and disengaged, and knowledge of effective strategies for both preventing and neutralizing disengagement will allow leaders to anticipate and be proactive when planning for change. Furthermore, prior to beginning the change process, it will also benefit leaders to develop a plan that includes a method for assessing and then monitoring will on an ongoing basis. Information gathered from the assessment should be used to inform explicit will-generating strategies to aid leaders in beginning and sustaining the change process. By making a strategic and systemic effort to embed strategies for building and sustaining will into the organizational change process, leaders will be more likely to improve outcomes for all students (Rowan, 1990).

Generating Will by Interacting with People's Desires, Beliefs and Values

Consistent with research (McLaughlin, 1987), leaders attempted to create and sustain will by connecting with people's beliefs, values and desires. These types of efforts were illustrated when leaders communicated and illustrated their vision for learning, worked to create a system of shared beliefs and when teacher leadership opportunities were distributed with the goal of developing teachers' sense of competency and self-determination.

In many instances, leaders also appeared to utilize extrinsic motivators to create and sustain will. For example, in some instances, leaders provided teachers with leadership opportunities as way of recognizing and rewarding teachers' good work. While these types of motivators can positively affect will, they can also reinforce extrinsic motivation (Deci,1972; Honig, 2012). For example, the teacher could become motivated by the desire to receive recognition from his/her boss. Recognition can lead to job satisfaction and improved job performance, however, it does not necessarily lead to the level of commitment and engagement required for large scale reform efforts to reach scale (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sherman & Smith, 1984).

Given the critical role of will in reform, leaders will be well served, when preparing for change, to recognize that staff must be motivated by an internal desire to improve student achievement and equity. Thus, they must find meaning in, and be driven by, the work (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009) if they are to have the level of commitment required for change to occur. Leaders should, therefore, receive training in motivation theory, so they understand the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Furthermore, an understanding of how both types of motivation can be externally

reinforced will help leaders avoid accidentally reinforcing extrinsic motivation when they are trying to reinforce will.

Moving forward, it will benefit leaders to develop an understanding of their values and beliefs, as well as those of staff before attempting to make large-scale changes; this is a critical condition for addressing issues of equity, which must be addressed in an explicit manner. Training on cultural proficiency can support leaders in developing their understanding of inequity as well as the potential role leaders play in both perpetuating inequity and promoting equity. Knowledge gained from this type of work can strengthen leaders' capacity to develop a vision and plan for improving achievement that focuses on creating equitable opportunities for all students to learn. An understanding of Frame Analysis (Goffman, 1974) can further aid leaders in developing a plan for improving achievement and equity that connects organizational goals with individuals' interests, values and beliefs (Benford & Snow, 2000). The works of and Snow et al. (1986) and Park, Daly and Guerra (2013) illustrates how Frame Analysis can be applied to educational settings and used as a framework for creating the level of collective action required for systemic reform to achieve scale.

Conclusion

This individual study explored the ways district leaders, in one public school district that was making gains at closing the achievement gap, went about generating stakeholders' will for improving achievement and advancing equity. This individual study concluded that leaders attempted to build and sustain will for achievement and equity by acting as transformational leaders, distributing leadership and by extrinsically reinforcing motivation through the use of data, inducements, resources and support. The work of

improving achievement and equity is complex. Achievement disparities are a symptom of longstanding systemic inequities (Brown, 2003), and as with any effort that aims to improve the human condition, the work is deeply personal; connected to our beliefs and values; and requires perseverance driven by will. This study's findings can serve as a guide for the practice of district leaders who are working to generate and sustain the district's will to create the complex level of systemic change required for improving achievement and equity system-wide.

CHAPTER FOUR[6]

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the work of district leaders in improving achievement and advancing equity system-wide. In doing so, our research team examined the degree to which the actions of a district leadership team reflected an enactment of the four essential roles of district leaders in educational reform as conceived by Rorrer et al. (2008). Cushing (2016) and Lawson (2016) focused on how leaders attempted to build capacity and generate will when providing instructional leadership. McLaughlin (2016) focused on how leaders strived to reorient the organization's culture. Botelho (2016) focused on how leaders worked to establish policy coherence. McIntyre (2016) focused on the extent to which leaders maintained an equity focus in their efforts to improve achievement and equity system-wide.

Two central findings emerged following a synthesis of our individual lines of inquiry. First, consistent with research on standards based systemic reform (Leithwood, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003), our studies found that district leaders played an important role in efforts to improve achievement and equity system-wide. Second, we found the actions of district leaders were consistent with Rorrer et al.'s (2008) theory of districts as institutional actors. Albeit to varying degrees, in their efforts to improve student outcomes, all district leaders were attempting to enact the four reform roles conceived by Rorrer et al.

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[6] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Peter J. Botelho, Peter J. Cushing, Catherine L. Lawson, Lindsa C. McIntyre, and Zachary J. McLaughlin

The following sections will discuss these findings and their implications for both practice and research in light of current scholarship. First, we discuss the three prominent leadership moves leaders made when attempting to improve achievement and equity. Second, we discuss how leaders enacted the four leadership roles as conceived by Rorrer, et al.'s theory. Third, we provide recommendations for practice that can be used to guide the future efforts of leaders seeking to improve achievement and equity system-wide. Lastly, we discuss the limitations of this study and provide recommendations for future research.

Leaders Played an Important Role in Efforts to Improve Achievement and Equity

Consistent with current educational reform research (Bird, et al., 2013; Honig, et al., 2009; Knapp, et al., 2010), our studies suggest that Wyoma Public Schools district leaders played an important role in efforts to improve student achievement and equity across the system. Public reporting of the district's high stakes test scores, which revealed existing achievement disparities (Brown, 2003), and the Level 3 status[7] of one elementary school incentivized district leaders to implement large-scale instructional improvements. A synthesis of findings from individual lines of inquiry revealed three prominent leadership moves when attempting to improve achievement and equity: leaders (1) provided and supported instructional leadership; (2) implemented evidenced based decision making practices; and, (3) promoted equity across the system. In the next sections we discuss these leadership moves and the potential implications our findings may have on practice in light of current scholarship.

[7] The Massachusetts accountability system uses aggregate high stakes test scores to designate districts as level 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. A Level 1 district is the highest performing level, where Level 5, are performing at levels low enough to be placed in receivership by the state. Level 3 districts are considered in need of improvement and qualify for targeted support from the state.

Leaders attempted to provide and support instructional leadership. Similar to Galucci (2008), who considers underachievement a "problem of learning," leaders in Wyoma recognized the need for new knowledge and changes in instructional practice for improving student achievement. In order to realize these types of improvements, foremost, district leaders emphasized the importance of high expectations for learning for all students. This value of high expectations for all students was communicated using a variety of mediums and leaders sought to maintain high expectations by balancing support (professional learning and resources) with accountability (observations and evaluations). In addition to promoting high expectations, district leaders prioritized the development of instructional leadership throughout the district. Our data suggests leaders attempted to provide support by establishing "learning-focused partnerships (Honig, 2012)." These partnerships appeared to exist on and across many levels, (i.e. among central office, principals, coaches, and teachers) and were fostered through professional learning communities (PLCs), data teams, use of common goals and by allotting time for collaboration and planning.

Specifically, central office administrators attempted to partner with schools to develop and deepen the principals' instructional practice by providing job-embedded supports. This was evidenced by the leadership coaching support provided to the principal of the Level 3 elementary school and the addition of a literacy coach[8] position to her school budget. Similarly, a multi-year federal grant program was used to provide

[8] The coaching model was first implemented at the elementary school designated as level 3, then expanded to another elementary school experiencing an increase of low SES students due to a change in student demographics. The coaching model was expanded over time to include a literacy coach and math coach at all elementary schools and the middle school. Additionally, there are 7 facilitators at the high school who provide curricular leadership without also formally evaluating staff.

resources and professional development to support the high school principal in initiating standards-based instruction and establishing PLCs.

Furthermore, the recent efforts to provide instructional coaches with their own coaching support demonstrated an awareness that investments in the learning of instructional leaders should extend beyond the principals to include other formal and informal leaders (Spillane et al., 2009). Similarly, principals, all of whom identified themselves as instructional leaders, described efforts to motivate and support positive changes in teaching and learning by working in "partnership" with coaches and teachers in their schools. In these efforts, they distributed leadership through both formal (coaches) and informal (peer-peer learning) ways. In addition, principals structured PLCs, data team meetings and collaboration time to support formal OTL, while recognizing how conversations and interactions during these forums created opportunities for incidental learning to occur during social interactions throughout the school day. Furthermore, principals described explicit attempts to differentiate support for their teachers (Knapp et al., 2010), including how they negotiated pacing and access to necessary supports when setting expectations. Lastly, similar to Anrig (2015), who found trust and time as essential for developing the levels of deep collaboration between administrators and teachers that led to significant improvements in low-income districts, leaders in Wyoma identified trust and time as critical to supporting and building their staff's capacity.

Nevertheless, despite clear attempts to "lead the learning" (Honig, 2012), our data suggests some leaders at the elementary level attempted to improve achievement scores by narrowing the curriculum. In these schools, social studies and science were neglected

to provide opportunities for longer instructional blocks in literacy and mathematics. Similarly, some leaders focused on improving test scores of the "bubble students" (Booher-Jennings, 2005), who were on the border of being proficient on the state exam, and focused instruction on explicit test preparation strategies).

While these types of test gain strategies are commonly used by schools with varying achievement levels and different types of subgroup failures (Weinbaum, et al., 2012), there are costs associated with relying primarily on this strategy. A focus on test gain without improving opportunities to learn (OTL) can create an illusion of improvement (Pullin & Haertel, 2008). In these circumstances, for example, instruction typically does not focus on developing student's critical thinking skills. Instead, instruction focuses on developing students' test taking skills and skills that cannot be generalized beyond the test or the academic setting (Jacob, 2005). An emphasis on test gain strategies can also lead to over-classification of students as Limited English Proficient (LEP) and special needs, thereby inadvertently reinforcing educational inequity and further marginalizing underperforming students (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Dentith, et al., 2013).

Leaders implemented evidence based decision-making practices. Evidence-based decision-making was infused throughout almost all leaders' efforts to improve achievement and equity. Multiple forms of data, including surveys, observational data, assessment scores and evaluation trends were used to make systemic change imperative (Wright & Harris, 2010); set direction, prioritize improvement and strategically allocate resources (O'Dogherty & Ovando, 2010). Survey and observational data were also used to understand and shape beliefs and culture.

A synthesis of our data suggests the district was in the beginning phases of effectively using evidence to inform educational practice in a way that leads to improved achievement For example, central office personnel, principals and coaches appeared to value evidence and were attempting to use data to inform decisions about instruction Furthermore, leaders allotted time for staff to collaboratively review multiple measures of achievement data on an ongoing basis and attempted to focus collaborative conversations on understanding data These moves reflect efforts to foster the types of meaningful conversations that Wayman et al. (2012) suggest can lead to common understandings about teaching, learning and data; an important aspect of organizational improvement. However, while use of data was apparent throughout the district, clarity surrounding buy-in, effectiveness and consistency of use among leaders was unclear (Finnegan, et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, while findings suggest leaders had a common preliminary understanding of how data can inform instructional practices that lead to improved student achievement scores, there did not appear to be a common understanding of the potential of data to also inform the opportunities students were given to learn (Pullin & Haertel, 2008; Wayman et al. 2012). In this respect, a strict focus on achievement-related data at the classroom level appeared to eclipse other types of educational data that could be used to detect potential learning inequities. For example, leaders did not appear to be examining discipline, attainment, or advanced placement data for proportionality across subgroups, or for the prevalence of "opportunity gaps" which can lead to underachievement.

Leaders promoted equity through responsiveness. Education is often referred to as the Great Equalizer (Scutari, 2008) and many scholars suggest that public school districts can improve achievement by attending to equity (Hewson et al., 2006; McIntyre, 2016; Rorrer et. al, 2008; Theoharis & Brooks, 2012; Turner, 2014). Our data found that leaders were attempting to attend to equity by owning past inequities relative to the larger student subgroups, and by making efforts to correct past inequities by responding to the needs of individual students.

Leaders acknowledged past inequities by explicitly identifying and owning that achievement disparities did exist between SWDs, ELLs, and economically-challenged students and their white and economically advantaged peers In their attempts to correct past inequities, leaders focused on providing opportunities and empowering both administrators and teachers to apply potential solutions (O'Doherty & Ovando, 2010; Turner, 2014), which they did by promoting both high expectations and a student-centered learning environment. For example, the district invested in instructional and emotional support systems (OECD, 2012) by strategically designating instructional coaches, equity coordinators and adjustment counselors for every building, over time. In addition, the district invested in research-based instructional programs at the elementary level, such as the responsive classroom and a research-based literacy program based on the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. Lastly, in an attempt to respond to students' individualized needs, the district employed a multi-faceted approach to professional development in ways that were equity oriented (i.e. co-teaching, responsive classroom, data-driven instructional interventions).

Many scholars of social justice leadership (Capper & Young, 2014; Orosco & Klinger, 2010; Scanlan, 2013) caution that leaders must be mindful of important factors such as inclusion and integration when attempting to narrow the achievement gap. For example, on one hand, RTI models provide "interventions" designed to support struggling learners, and they can prevent the over-identification of students for special education (Capper and Young, 2014). On the other hand, RTI can often remove students from general education classes, which has been found to increase segregation, particularly along race and class lines (Orosco & Klinger, 2010). Similarly, counselors are an important resource for students, but without the proper understanding of inclusion, leaders can unknowingly reinforce exclusion and restrict OTL for students if they must miss class time in order to access counseling services.

Additionally, in their efforts to be responsive, leaders described attempts to create socially just learning communities (Theoharis, 2007; Wright & Harris, 2010). For example, adjustment counselors' efforts to ensure students had warm coats and turkey to eat during Thanksgiving reflected an understanding of the importance of attending to the needs of the whole child (McIntyre, 2016). These kinds of efforts were consistent with those made by certain social justice leaders when attempting to "strengthen school culture and community" in Theoharis' (2007) study on social justice leadership.

Although leaders were attempting to implement socially-just practices that were responsive to the needs of students, leaders did not appear to be promoting cultural proficiency throughout the district, which Wright and Harris (2010) found to be a key strategy used in districts that reduced the achievement gap. Leaders appeared to understand language and special education needs and the impact of poverty but had not

appeared to acknowledge or unpack how race and ethnicity impacted achievement. There also did not appear to be a complex level of understanding of the historical struggles pertaining to race, ethnicity and culture that might inhibit students' opportunity to learn. For example, when describing their efforts to improve learning for ELL students, one of the larger student subgroups, there was no clear acknowledgement of how cultural and ethnic factors that are tied to language differences affected children. The next section will discuss how leaders enacted the four essential roles as conceived by Rorrer et al. (2008) during their efforts to improve achievement and equity.

Leaders Enacted Rorrer et al.'s (2008) Four Essential Roles to varying Degrees

While exploring district leaders' efforts to improve achievement, we explored in-depth the degree to which the actions of a district leadership team reflected an enactment of the four essential roles for district leaders in educational reform as conceived by Rorrer et al. (2008). Our data confirms Rorrer et al.'s assertion: district leaders in Wyoma were enacting these roles, albeit to varying degrees (see Table 4.1), in their effort to improve achievement and advance equity across the district. At the same time, data also suggests leaders did not have a common definition or understanding of these roles, nor did they have a common understanding of what implementation of these roles should look like. Similarly, enactment of these roles varied in degree, according to position and setting. Two possible explanations for these findings are the fact that the district's improvement process initially began at the school level (the level 3 school) and that here has been turnover in leadership positions over the past several years. The following expands on these findings by describing how the individual roles were enacted.

Table 4.1

How District Leaders' enacted the four roles as conceived by Rorrer, et al., (2008)

Individual Study	Role	Key Findings
Lawson, 2016	Instructional Leadership: Generating Will	Used transformational leadership and distributed leadership to build and sustain will; used resources, inducements and data to reinforce will.
Cushing, 2016	Instructional Leaders Building Capacity	Used observation, ongoing review of data, supervision and evaluation system to monitor instruction and efforts to improve instruction; procured fiscal and human resources to deploy an instructional coaching model.
McLaughlin, 2016	Reorienting the Organization: District Culture	Made efforts to decipher their organizational culture; used subgroups dynamics to influence culture change; empowered early the desired change.
Botelho, 2016	Establishing Policy Coherence: Mediating Policy	Response to policies was not proactive or deliberate; crafted policy by attempting to understand policy requirements and flexibility for implementing; reflected on the degree to which policy reinforced and/or conflicted with district goals and needs. Mediated policy by bridging and buffering implementation to serve local interests.
McIntyre, 2016	Maintaining a Focus on Equity	Owned past inequities and established vision and plan for correcting past inequities; allocated resources by adding positions that support "the whole child" by investing in positions, professional learning and curriculum that supports equity-oriented practice.

Providing instructional leadership. As described in the previous section, Rorrer et al. (2008) identified providing instructional leadership as the first role in a district's efforts to reform. This study confirmed that all leaders engaged in the "proactive administrative behavior" of providing instructional leadership by generating will and building capacity in ways that were supported by research (Daresh, 1991; Firestone, 1989; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). The two sub-roles of Instructional Leadership, Generating Will and Building Capacity, were examined independently.

Generating Will. Conclusions drawn from Lawson's (2016) inquiry were consistent with Rorrer et al.'s (2008) findings on two levels. First, the role of generating will was an "element" of leaders' efforts to provide instructional leadership. The second finding builds off of their assertion that the type of will necessary to initiate or sustain improvement, "does not arise automatically nor simply in response to external environments" (p. 315). The study concluded that leaders attempted to intrinsically motivate staff by acting as transformational leaders and distributing leadership in many ways that connected with an individual's values, beliefs and desires. Furthermore, when enacting these leadership constructs, leaders sought to use extrinsic motivators (praise and recognition, data to show growth, and resources such as time and professional learning opportunities) in ways that promoted individual's feelings of competence and sense of self-determination, which are the factors most strongly associated with employee engagement and the high levels of commitment required to realize sustainable improvements (Deci & Ryan, 2000; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003).

Furthermore, leaders enacted this role while contending with economic, political, and cultural forces that played out differently depending on position (superintendent versus coach; new leader v. long term leader) and context (elementary or. high school). In this respect, it is not surprising that although leaders utilized the same leadership constructs, many leaders employed them in different ways. For example, some leaders used transformational strategies that focused on shaping beliefs by reviewing data, where others concentrated on building trusting relationships. Despite these types of differences, all attempts to generate will reflected a strong commitment to improving teaching and

learning (Daresh, 1991) by attempting to intrinsically motivate stakeholders to engage in the work of improving achievement and equity.

Building capacity. Rorrer et al. (2008) illustrated the fundamental importance of building capacity to maintain reform efforts as new challenges arise. Cushing (2016) explored district leaders' specific actions to build capacity as well as how district leaders prioritized capacity-building actions to improve student achievement.

According to Rorrer et al. (2008), there are three main strategies that proactive district leaders use to build capacity: (a) using communication, planning, and collaboration to coordinate and align constituent's work; (b) monitoring teacher and leader goals, classroom instruction, and efforts to improve instruction through transparent use of available data for accountability; and (c) procuring the necessary resources focused on improving instruction.

In regard to how district leaders are building capacity to improve achievement and advance equity district-wide, Cushing (2016) found that district leaders were primarily consistent with the last two of the three strategies enumerated by Rorrer et al (2008). First, school and district leaders observed instruction while checking to see that efforts to improve instruction were being implemented by teachers. They were also effectively using the new supervision and evaluation system as part of this monitoring. Second, district leaders procured the fiscal and human resources to deploy an instructional coaching model across the district. They recognized that past professional development was largely ineffective and worked to rectify that reality. Coaches modeled lessons for teachers, monitored progress of instructional changes, and provided resources for teachers.

Despite this, implementation variations surfaced relative to the communication and collaboration necessary to align the work. For example, leaders varied in how they used coaches. Complicating this were teaching duties that had been added to coaches' responsibilities. Some leaders explicitly stated that the district was undertaking too many initiatives without clear communication or an understanding of what actions were effective. A lack of communication and alignment between district leaders resulted in fragmentation and a lack of clear vision for capacity-building efforts. In conclusion, while Wyoma district leaders were found to be building capacity in ways that were largely consistent with Rorrer et al (2008), many of their efforts were in the beginning stages and required monitoring.

Reorienting the organization: district culture. Rorrer et al. (2008) argue that two sub-roles exist beneath the role of reorienting the organization: refining and aligning organizational structures and processes and changing the district culture. McLaughlin (2016) explored the latter. That exploration discovered a need for a clearer conceptualization of culture shaping within Rorrer et al.'s framework, a push by Wyoma's district leaders to change their culture, and disconnectedness in their approaches.

In their brief discussion of the shaping of district culture, Rorrer et al. makes three main points: (a) culture is made up of norms, expectations, and values; (b) culture that supports reform is important for districts to create; (c) normative expectations are necessary to promote reform. This study attempted to add structure and depth to Rorrer et al.'s framework.

Many Wyoma leaders expressed the importance of beliefs in impacting positive change for students. After applying a conceptual framework based on Schein (2010) to exploring the culture shaping efforts of district leaders, McLaughlin (2016) confirmed that Wyoma leaders were working to shape their culture to help improve both achievement and equity. Attempts to shape culture included: making efforts to decipher their organizational culture, using subgroup dynamics to influence culture change, and empowering early adopters of the desired change.

While efforts were being made by the district to create these positive cultural shifts, the type of tactics utilized generally varied between leaders. There was no singular, or even primary, approach to shifting the district's culture. Based on their own unique experiences and training, individual leaders implemented different methods. In addition to not having a common approach, interview data indicated that these leaders also did not have a common framework or language to think about or discuss culture shaping.

While exploring the role of reorienting culture, this study discovered two notable findings about leaders efforts to shape district culture. First, district leaders believed in the need to shape their culture. Second, their efforts to shape culture demonstrated a disjointed, inconsistent approach. These leaders met Rorrer et al.'s expectations of working to create a culture supportive of improvement. They also had been trying to develop norms and values that support change (Deal & Peterson, 2009). In order to assess the level to which that is occurring, future researchers will also need to apply their own conceptual frameworks due to the the limited description of district culture provided in Rorrer et al.'s study.

Establishing policy coherence. Establishing policy coherence emerged as a third essential dimension. According to Rorrer et al. (2008), district leaders are critical to establishing policy coherence. This role has two subcomponents: mediating federal, state, and local policy; and aligning resources with district needs. In doing so, district leaders take on a "pro-active policy making stance" (Spillane, 1996, p. 65) adapting state and federal policies to serve local goals and needs and allocating resources in a strategic fashion.

With respect to how district leaders were attempting to establish policy coherence, Botelho (2016) found that district leaders were clearly working to navigate federal and state policies in a manner that was somewhat consistent with the role described by Rorrer et al. At times, they explicitly considered their crafting policy coherence role and took on this role fully. In doing so, they discussed how they worked to understand what a particular policy required and how much flexibility existed in implementation. They then explicitly reflected upon the degree to which the policy reinforced and, or conflicted with the goals and needs of the district. Finally, leaders mediated the policy by implementing it in a manner that best met those local needs (Honig & Hatch, 2004). This part of the process involved bridging or buffering policies to serve local interests.

However, this role of establishing policy coherence was enacted inconsistently. Most leaders did not seem to craft coherence in a proactive and deliberate manner. This was especially true of building leaders who typically failed to be able to speak explicitly of this role. Others employed bridging and buffering strategies but did not seem to be able to reflect clearly upon the reasons for doing so. Additionally, building leaders seemed inclined to bridge, and not buffer, policies thus making it difficult for them to

protect schools, teachers and students from negative unintended consequences that might result from some policies. Regardless of how individual leaders enacted the role, a clear and consistent understanding of the role of establishing coherence did not appear to exist.

Maintaining an equity focus. According to Rorrer et al. a focus on equity is a "pivot point for reform" (p. 329). In exploring this role, McIntyre (2016) sought to understand the ways in which leaders enacted the two subcomponents, which includes owning past inequities and foregrounding equity for other leaders. This study found that district leaders in Wyoma enacted each subcomponent to varying degrees. How they went about enacting each subcomponent is described previously in greater detail. In general, leaders owned past inequities by making equity an explicit value in their reform agenda (strategic plan), which laid the "foundation on which members of the school community construct common ground and the school culture" (Ancess & Ort, 1999, p.3).

Consistent with Rorrer et al.'s assertion that successful districts operationalize an equity plan that fosters the belief that all students can learn, leaders foregrounded equity by employing a calculated process for achieving equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students. Specifically, the leaders process for foregrounding equity involved acknowledging their limitations in teaching to many of the diverse populations and attempts to address prior inequities through collaboration and partnerships.

Recommendations for Practice

In light of our findings and current research on systemic reform, the following section provides recommendations for practice that can be used to guide the future efforts of district leaders seeking to improve achievement and equity system-wide. In this section we discuss how district leaders can fulfill the following recommendations for

practice: make equity and explicit and defining collective value; focus instructional leadership efforts on improving educational outcomes; become "data-informed;" and last, but not least, use Rorrer et al.'s (2008) theoretical framework to guide systemic reform efforts.

Make Equity an Explicit and Defining Collective Value

Rorrer et al. (2008) contend that districts that successfully improve achievement and equity do so by demonstrating a "value commitment" that involves making equity a "defining, explicit value, and a desired outcome" (p.334). The following sections discuss how leaders can make equity a defining value by developing their understanding of equity and by foregrounding equity.

Develop an understanding of equity. While acknowledging past inequities and making allowances for correction are important steps in the improvement process (O'Doherty & Ovando, 2010), it will serve district leaders well to make equity an explicit and defining collective value in the district. First and foremost, leaders must understand that there is a relationship between achievement and educational equity (Brown, 2004). Educational equity involves the distribution of educational resources towards learning opportunities that support optimal achievement outcomes for all students (Kahle,1998; Noguera, 2007), where inequity, creates opportunity gaps and leads to low levels of achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The works of Kahle (1998) and Noguera et al. (2012) can deepen leaders' understanding of how inequitable educational practices perpetuate achievement disparities. Capper and Young (2014) can further deepen leaders understanding of not only what inclusion/integration means, but also the importance of

making this understanding the "central, visible, unambiguous anchoring feature of all . . . practices" (Capper & Young, 2014, p.162).

Second, leaders' understanding of achievement disparities must not be limited to the context of education. Leaders must be mindful of the fact that school systems do not exist in isolation from the community. Therefore, the community's social and economic capacity must also be understood and potential linkages between the school and community that aim to build the capacity of both should be explored (Datnow, et al. 2005). Leaders must also understand the broader context, including but not limited to, the history of inequity and factors such as the economic and social capacity within a community that can perpetuate inequity (Datnow et al., 2005; Johnson, 2007). Furthermore, leaders understanding should include the impact of inequity on educational attainment, social and occupational mobility, and our nation's position in the global economy (Darling- Hammond, 2010; NRC, 1997). By understanding the factors and forces that contribute to inequity, leaders will be better equipped to foreground equity as a defining value.

Foreground equity. One way to begin foregrounding is to determine if leaders are inadvertently promoting inequitable practices by evaluating how learning opportunities are distributed among students across the district. Equity audits are one way to assess for both opportunity and outcome gaps (Hehir, 2012; Skrla, et al., 2011). Equity audits are used to examine the extent to which access to quality teachers and enrollment in honors classes, discipline rates, dropout rates, college acceptance rates, and representation in special education is proportionately represented by different groups of

students (Noguera, et al., 2012; Skrla et al., 2011). Results of the equity audit should inform a plan for instituting equitable practices and close existing opportunity gaps.

Professional learning opportunities for leaders (Brown, 2003; Johnson, 2007) that focus on culturally-responsive instructional leadership will develop leaders' ability to understand their role and responsibility when it comes to supporting equity. For example, training in culturally proficient leadership can enable leaders to gain insight into how individual biases and often-unconscious "blind-spots" reinforce leadership practices that reinforce inequity. At the same time, training in social justice leadership can increase leaders' knowledge and awareness of the history and traditions of a diverse student body (Theoharis, 2007). By developing the ability to practice culturally-responsive instructional leadership, district leaders will be able to recognize their own critical consciousness, biases, assumptions and privileges, and understand how they impact the learning environment. As a result, leaders will increase their ability to proactively develop policies and practices that support equitable learning opportunities, and pedagogy and community based partnerships that are culturally responsive (Johnson, 2007).

Focus Instructional Leadership Efforts on Improving Educational Outcomes

District leaders play an important role in improving achievement and equity across the system (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Spillane & Thompson, 1997) and are most likely to support student learning by providing instructional leadership (Honig, 2007; 2012). Thus, it will serve leaders well to focus their attention on improving teaching and learning in ways that leads not only to improved achievement scores, but also to improved educational *outcomes* (Datnow, et al. 2005). Knapp et al.'s (2010)

study, *Leadership for Learning Improvement*, can assist leaders in positively affecting student outcomes by providing guidance on how to (1) invest in staffing and other resources that support equitable learning improvements, (2) develop and exercise distributed instructional leadership within the school, and (3) and transform central office work practices and the district-school relationship in order to develop and sustain instructional leadership capacity. Honig (2012) and Burch & Spillane (2004) provide further guidance by illustrating how leaders can sustain instructional leadership capacity by acting as brokers of information and boundary spanners.

Support and develop principals' capacities to provide instructional leadership. The principal's capacity to provide instructional leadership is another critical aspect of district leaders work to support student learning (Honig, 2010). Findings from this study noted that all principals identified themselves as instructional leaders and viewed the work of improving both teachers' capacity and student learning as a priority. District leaders attempting to bring systemic improvements to scale should nurture this mindset in principals. Additionally, principals (and all formal and informal leaders) should be provided with ongoing job-embedded professional supports and OTL that strengthen their capacity to provide instructional leadership. Of particular importance is the ability of principals to effectively examine evidence that reflects the "quality of teaching" and how to use that evidence to support teachers in improving how they teach (Leithwood, et al., 2004).

Provide high quality opportunities for ongoing professional learning across all levels of the system. Formal opportunities to learn through workshops and courses play an important role in supporting improvement. However, reform efforts are more

likely to achieve scale if professional learning opportunities: are closely connected to the content of classroom practice; are sustained over time; and involve modeling, mentoring and coaching (Datnow, et al. 2005). Thus, it will serve leaders well to focus efforts on providing both leaders and teachers opportunities to learn "during and from" the daily work (Bryk, Camburn & Louis, 1999; Spillane, et al., 2009). Instructional coaching models and the collaboration structures implemented in Wyoma public school district are examples of ongoing, job-embedded OTL, which relied on social interactions for the transfer of information.

The transfer of information through social interactions is essential to learning and knowledge development (Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004). Therefore, it will benefit district leaders to be mindful of the power of conversation when planning to make large-scale changes in practice (Datnow, et al. 2005. The casual and informal conversations that occur throughout the workday and that result from accidental encounters among and across stakeholders have a tremendous influence on both the success and failure of reform (Datnow et al. 2005; Scanlan, 2013).

Although this study did not focus on sociocultural learning perspectives (Gee, 2008), an understanding of the theory can aid leaders in creating the conditions that will enable social processes to serve as a valuable tool for professional learning and for garnering the commitment needed for improvement to occur. Sociocultural learning theory underscores that actions and interactions between and among individuals and their environment are fundamental to learning and knowledge. Many scholars of this theory view schools as "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998) comprised of groups who share a common practice and learn how to pursue this purpose "with and from" each

other (Scanlan, 2013). PLCs, vertical teams, and data review teams are also examples of communities of practice that can provoke new ideas and the rethinking of old mindsets (Mezirow, 2000); they can further be used to promote socially just learning communities (see Scanlan, 2013). Additionally, communities of practice that occur across grade levels and settings create opportunities for boundary spanning, which can minimize conformity and groupthink (Burch & Spillane, 2004). Lastly, communities of practice can also foster trusting professional relationships and the kinds of "relational linkages" that Datnow et al. (2005) posit are essential to reform. The works of Wenger (1998), Gee (2008), Knapp (2008) and Scanlan (2013) can provide a lens for understanding sociocultural perspectives of learning and inform practices that promote continuous professional learning afforded by the social processes that occur within and between communities.

Become "data-informed." When planning for data use, leaders must not only develop the capacity to use data, they must be able to use it wisely and make meaningful connections with data (Wayman et al., 2012) in ways that support both achievement and equity. Beyond developing their own capacity to use data effectively, leaders must know how to build the district's capacity. Therefore, leaders should be informed, not driven by data. Capacity building efforts to become data-informed should be developed for both leaders and teachers. According to Wayman et al. (2012), three important steps to cultivate a data-informed district are: (1) developing shared district-wide understandings of the continuous process of data analysis as opposed to quick outcomes; (2) providing a content-focused collaborative environment for job-embedded professional learning opportunities, similar to the Wyoma Public School District data team model; and (3)

leveraging computer systems that are easily accessed and supported district-wide that support rather than overwhelm collegiality and professional community.

Leaders should, furthermore, develop data-related district policies to build capacity for data use (Wayman, et al., 2012). Specifically, leaders should develop policies that: (1) address context and how data is used; (2) foster positive attitudes toward data by mitigating structural barriers, (3) mandate that principals develop data strategies and act (e.g. computer data systems professional development and collaboration time); and (4) seamlessly integrate data systems for educators to improve rather than impede instructional outcomes with minimal technical skill. Using the aforementioned actionable steps, district leaders can implement improvement strategies for both achievement and equity by being data-informed.

Use Rorrer et al's (2008) Theoretical Framework to Guide Systemic Reform Efforts

Rorrer et al.'s framework regarding the four critical dimensions of leadership provides not only a promising theoretical framework for future studies (Leithwood, 2010), but also a propitious guide for the practice of district leaders who are working to improve achievement and equity system-wide. The team found that district leaders in Wyoma were enacting all four roles, to varying degrees, in ways that were consistent with Rorrer et al.'s theory. However, in Wyoma and districts throughout the nation involved in the complex and challenging work of systemic reform, enacting the roles in a more informed, proactive and deliberate manner can have tremendous value.

For this reason, leadership teams should be introduced to Rorrer et al.'s (2008) framework in an explicit and constructive manner. Because this framework is not a prescriptive process, when preparing for reform, leaders should think about the respective

context in which they will be implementing the four roles and how to implement the framework accordingly. Leaders should also develop a common definition of each role. A common understanding of both the district context and the four roles can aid leaders in determining what implementation should look and what strategies could be used to successfully implement each role. Furthermore, given that the composition of all leadership teams will inevitably change over time, it will serve leaders well to incorporate strategies for orienting new leaders (formal and informal) to Rorrer et al.'s framework into respective improvement plans. In taking these steps, the hope is that leaders would come to deeply understand the four roles so they could proactively enact them and continuously monitor the application of each of the roles in a systematic way while reflecting upon their progress towards improving achievement and equity in the district.

This type of research-based, multi-dimensional leadership approach would provide a unified practical framework for reform that all central office and building leaders could share. At the same time, it provides the necessary flexibility for leaders to focus more directly on certain roles and subsequent relevant goals and initiatives based upon the current context of the district. The individual studies associated with this research project can provide specific guidance on how district leaders can effectively enact each of the four roles in service to improvements in achievement and equity system-wide.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The heavy reliance on interview data and the lack of existing case study research using the full model created potential weaknesses in the study's reliability and transferability. While this study provides detailed insight into the perceptions of leaders

in the mid-sized district, there are inherent limitations to the transferability of its conclusions. The core of this study's data is composed of self-reported interviews gathered over the course of several months. While some documents were examined to create context and confirm espoused beliefs and values, the bulk of the data consists of the unverified views of participants. The lack of additional data forms to further triangulate conclusions and lack of longitudinal data limit the extent to which the researcher is able to confirm the actual implementation of the roles addressed in the study.

The second of our challenges was the lack of empirical studies that attempted to test Rorrer et al.'s full theory. The researchers found the theory to be a compelling conceptualization of the complexity of the task of raising student achievement while focusing on equity. On the surface that may to appear to present challenges to the study's transferability; however, this study's intent was not to create a set of universal responses to its research questions. Rather the researchers desire was to begin the process of detailed examinations of bounded cases. At the conclusion of their work, Rorrer et al. called for future research to build a series of case studies to examine the roles that district's play. This study represents one of the building blocks of that comparative process.

Future researchers can overcome these concerns with the benefit of time. First, with additional site time researchers could pair large amounts of observational data with the perceptions of respondents over a longer period of time. Second, with the passage of time, future research teams will likely have produced numerous additional case studies

using the framework. This will give future studies an opportunity to place itself within a growing body of research that will both reinforce and challenge its own findings.

Conclusion

The persistence of the achievement gap continues to pose a significant threat to the overall stability of the United States. As a result, district leaders are faced with tremendous pressure to improve achievement and equity for all students with little to no guidance. Rorrer, et al. (2008) proposed a theory of district leaders as institutional actors that involves the enactment of four essential roles leaders play in reform, however these roles are not well understood.

This qualitative case study explored the degree to which a district leadership team, attempted to enact the four essential roles as conceived by Rorrer et al. (2008), while working to improve achievement and equity. This study's conclusion is that leaders were attempting to (1) Provide Instructional Leadership (2) Reorient the Organization, (3) Establish Policy Coherence, and (4) Maintain an Equity Focus to varying degrees, as conceived by Rorrer et al. Furthermore, findings revealed that district leaders' support of ongoing, job-embedded professional learning and efforts to improve teaching and learning in a data-informed and equity-oriented way were prominent components of their reform work.

Overall, this study suggests that the implementation of the essential roles of Rorrer et al. (2008) can serve as a promising guide for the practice of district leaders who are working to create the complex changes required for improving achievement and equity system-wide. Synchronously, our study serves as a call for additional case study research of districts' efforts using Rorrer et al.'s framework.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Question alignment key

OAQ = Overarching Questions	**RC** = Reshaping Culture
GW = Generating Will	**PC** = Establishing Policy Coherence
BC = Building Capacity	**MEF** = Maintaining an Equity Focus

***** *Probes in italics*

1. Please describe your current role in the district? And how long have you worked here? **(OAQ)**
    a. *What does this work look like day-to-day?*
2. How are you (along with other leaders in the district) working to improve achievement for ALL students in the district?
    a. *What's happening?* And *what is your involvement/role in this work?*
    b. Are you making efforts to improve outcomes for groups of students that are struggling? What does that look like?
3. What is the district's vision for teaching and learning?
    a. *How is it communicated? And how do you feel about it?*
4. What strategic goals and initiatives is the district currently pursuing?
5. How did you get (motivate) people to want to do the initiatives/work? **(GW)**
    a. *Was there resistance?*
    b. *How did you respond?*
6. What strategies were most effective in motivating people? Which were least effective? **(**
    a. For example, ...
7. How did you keep the initiatives going once started?
    a. *What got in the way?*
    b. *How did you handle it?*
    c. *How did you keep people motivated?*
8. Are there any key people you rely(ied) on to keep the work going?
    a. *Who? Why?*
9. What are you doing to help your staff to improve their practice? **(BC)**
    a. *Encourage experimentation*
    b. Structured settings/time to discuss teaching and learning

    c. *Professional development*
10. How did you decide what to do? What was your process for deciding what to focus?
    a. *In terms of structured PD, how do you decide what you do?*
11. Districts are often full of staff who have deeply held beliefs. Tell me about how you go about trying to understand what your staff really believes. **(RC)**
    a. *How did you come to that judgment (about their beliefs)?*
    b. *Do the staff's beliefs aligned with your desired beliefs for the district? How?*
    c. *Do the beliefs your staff speak about truly reflect what they believe? Artifacts*
    d. *Can you give a specific example of a way you approached trying to understand your staff's beliefs? How did it go?*
12. So, can you tell me about a time when you have tried to shape these beliefs?
    a. *Can you give a specific example of a way you approached trying to shape your staff's beliefs? How did it go?*
    b. *Is it possible to shape a district's beliefs?*
    c. *How important is culture-shaping in relation to other leadership tasks?*
13. What federal and state policies/mandates are you most focused on implementing? **(PC)**
14. How do you think these policies reinforce the goals and needs of the district?
15. In what ways do you think these policies conflict with the goals and needs of the district?
16. How do you implement these policies in a way that addresses local goals and needs? What does that look like?
    a. *How have you leveraged these policies to meet local goals?*
    b. *How have you adapted policies to meet local goals?*
    c. *How do you implement policies that conflict with the current needs and goals of the district?*
    d. *If there were no mandates to fulfill, how might the efforts of the district to improve achievement and equity look different?*
17. Currently, who are the students that you are struggling with? Why do you think they are not doing well in school? **(MEF)**
    a. *What makes you say that*
    b. *What are the barriers impeding their academic, social and/or emotional growth?*
    c. *What processes structures and/or practices need to be examined in order to remove the barriers?*
18. Are their any students you think might fall through the cracks?
    a. *Who are they? And what makes you say that?*

19. What have leaders done to improve the outcomes for those students?
    a. *If you were to change anything to further improve achievement of those students, what would that change look like?*
    b. *What changes might the school implement on its own to support those students?*
    c. *What would be the nature of district level change necessary to improve outcomes for those students?*