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CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP:

A STUDY OF WHITE SCHOOL LEADERS

Dissertation

by

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with

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Abstract

Critical Consciousness (CC) refers to a critical theory that recognizes oppressive systems and provides those oppressed with a framework to overcome and act against these structures. Although the theory's origin addressed illiterate adults and empowered them to become critically aware, critically reflective, and active agents of change, researchers have applied this theory to marginalized students in school and other oppressed communities.

This study focused on the development of white school leaders as active anti-racist leaders using critical consciousness as a framework for this growth. Exploring white school leaders as transformative leaders - ones who become aware of their whiteness and leverage their positions to address inequities in the face of opposition - may provide a blueprint for other white school leaders. This study lends to the current research because few studies exist on critical consciousness development in white school leaders, the specific leadership strategies they employ, and the seeming effectiveness to foster critical consciousness in their schools. Ultimately, this study explored the development of critical consciousness and the leadership practices white leaders utilized to develop critical consciousness and to nurture active anti-racist educators as a praxis against inequities and oppression.

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Introduction

Social justice demands that those with power challenge the stark realities of systemic racism and disparities in society. If the United States is ever truly to uphold its ideal of "justice for all," then it must confront the inequities it purports to oppose. However, confrontation will require leaders' development of critical analysis (awareness and reflection), critical agency (a belief in one's ability to be a change agent), and the willingness to act. Critical consciousness, the seminal work of Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire, provides a lens for this research team. Seider and Graves (2017) describe critical consciousness as a "person's ability to recognize and analyze oppressive forces shaping society and to take action against these forces" (p. 2). Accordingly, we believe that examining this philosophy within one Massachusetts school district may contribute to the knowledge base toward advancing the necessary work to disrupt oppressive forces existing in public education and society-at-large.

Although systemic racism has been interwoven into the U.S. since its founding, the combined impact of COVID 19 and the nation's racial reckoning is being referred to by some as a dual pandemic (Yip, 2020). For this group study, we defined systemic racism as "mutually reinforcing systems and policies that limit power and access to opportunities to generate and perpetuate inequity" (Yip, 2020). Moreover, there are those who believe the dual pandemic has thrust the nation into a moment of social awareness, precipitating an interrogation of the existing systems and practices (Yip, 2020). Among other events in our history, COVID-19 has illuminated and further exacerbated systemic racial inequities in the U.S. educational system. For

[1] The authors listed below collaboratively wrote this chapter which reflects the team approach of this project. Authors include: Tamatha L. Bibbo, Ceronne B. Daly, Pauline Lugira White, June Saba-Maguire, and Geoffrey Walker

example, millions of students in urban schools have little to no access to technology needed to access educational opportunities during school closures; whereas, in other more affluent districts, students have access to curriculum, teachers, and live instruction, resulting in far more time on learning than those learning from home (Yip, 2020).

Furthermore, studies have revealed that students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and their families are more likely to have less access to resources and receive little to no information from the school than their White counterparts (Yip, 2020). Given the current socio-political climate and these highlighted inequities, school districts and leaders must interrogate all aspects of equity work to assess the quality of experiences for all students, recognizing that racist systems still exist. These systems need to be acknowledged and dismantled so that all students, particularly our historically marginalized populations, experience learning without barriers. As a research team, we were curious to examine the efforts of district and school leaders to foster and advance the development of critical consciousness in order to mitigate and disrupt the cycle of inequity. An equitable democracy depends on having critically conscious citizens (Seider and Graves, 2020). This is currently a need that persists in schools, specifically for students of Color in (urban) public education. This work is essential for school leaders to undertake because, as the theory of critical consciousness details, inequity is sustained when the most affected people are unable to decode their social conditions (El-Amin et al., 2017). Furthermore, when educators and students identify oppressive systems and believe that they can make a change, they are better prepared to act to disrupt those systems.

This research team recognized that all levels of a school system are integral to promoting practices toward disrupting inequity and advancing equitable practices. Additionally, we asserted that leadership profoundly influences whether a district takes the meaningful and necessary steps

to enact effective practices addressing these inequities. We believe that developing an understanding of critical consciousness strengthens an educational leader's capacity and influence to enact equity-aligned practices and policies. Although there is limited empirical research on the intersection between critical consciousness and educational leadership, this group study added to the literature by examining the efforts of district and school leaders to foster and advance the development of critical consciousness. As such, our research question asked: How do educational leaders foster and cultivate the development of critical consciousness in schools? This qualitative case study researched the practices of district leaders, school leaders, and educators and sought evidence of the existence of the elements of critical consciousness, which included critical analysis (awareness and reflection), critical agency, and critical action. Additionally, one study examined how students experience and respond to leaders' practices. These elements informed the research team's analytical process.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of critical consciousness derives from the work of Paulo Freire, who believed that the purpose of education was to liberate students from oppression. Freire (2005) theorized that the goal of education is to empower oppressed peoples to understand and analyze the oppressive forces and injustices that impact their lives and then act to work against those forces. Freire believed the pedagogical approach to support critical consciousness is a model in which teachers and students co-investigate through a problem-posing method. This process leads to learners who can be critical of their oppressive conditions and be empowered to resist such forces. (Beckett, 2018).

Freire proposed a cycle of critical consciousness that involves gaining knowledge about systems and structures that create and sustain inequity (via critical analysis); developing a sense of power or capability (critical agency); and ultimately committing to taking action against

oppressive conditions (critical action) (El-Amin et al., 2017). As Freire suggested, we believe educators have the power and opportunity to impact the development of critical consciousness within a school system. Consequently, school leaders and educators, as change agents, must create the conditions where analysis and interactive discussions further their capacity to: (1) build their awareness; (2) develop a belief in one's political efficacy; and (3) determine and engage in authentic civic action (Abdullah, 2020). Therefore, this proposed group study examined leaders' efforts to advance critical consciousness in a school district focused on equity work.

While Freire (2000) is credited with *conscientização* or critical consciousness theory, he did not present a conceptual model for this theory (Jemal, 2017). Since Freire's work, researchers have studied critical consciousness as an overarching framework with interconnected components. Radd & Kramer (2016) describe critical consciousness as "an ongoing and growing awareness and knowledge of power, privilege, and oppression combined with a habit of openness and learning to disrupt injustice and create more just action, processes, structures, and circumstances" (p. 584). Watts et al. (2011) conceptualized critical consciousness as consisting of three distinct yet overlapping components: (a) critical reflection, (b) political efficacy, and (c) critical action. Similarly, Seider & Graves (2020) defined their components of critical consciousness as social analysis (awareness/ reflection), political agency (acting on/ belief one can alter the system), and social action (action). Though differing terms, these definitions are grounded in Freire's work, for "Freire viewed the relation between reflection and action as reciprocal. Critical reflection is generally considered a precursor to critical action—people do not act to change their social conditions without some consciousness or awareness that their social conditions are unjust" (Watts et al., 2011, p. 47). Furthermore, Jemal (2017) asserted that "If

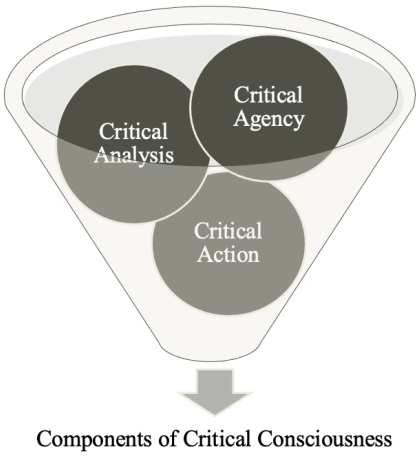
implemented within urban education… Critical Consciousness theory could help achieve a system of education that is just, equitable and liberating" (p. 602).

The critical consciousness framework is relevant to the United States as racial and economic inequities exist that impact the lives of students and their families. Scholars have augmented Freire's work towards developing a framework that conceptualizes critical consciousness as three overlapping elements in a Venn diagram. For this study, the research group operationalized critical consciousness through the Seider & Graves (2000) model: critical analysis, critical agency, and critical action. See Figure 1 below for a diagram of Seider & Graves' (2000) conceptualization of three distinct components that together create critical consciousness. These are not linear strands; thus, the funnel represents the continual overlap and need for each tenet in order for the outcome to be critical consciousness.

Concept Map of Conceptual Frameworks

Figure 1

Critical Consciousness Components



(Seider & Graves, 2020)

Literature Review

This research team's literature review started by exploring the development and fostering of critical analysis among district and school leaders. Next, the team examined the role of critical agency on school leaders and students. We finished with an analysis of the literature about critical action among school leaders, including youth development. We furthered the literature review by reviewing critical consciousness as being the nexus of equitable leadership and then correlated it with race.

Critical Analysis of School and District Leadership

Perhaps the tenet of critical analysis (awareness and reflection) serves as the most vital factor to becoming a truly critically conscious society. As Cooper (2009) states, "as demographic change alters the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic makeup of school populations throughout the United States, there is a dire need to reframe education accountability discourse and policies" (p. 694). Therefore, students need leaders who are aware of personal and collective ideologies and biases in schools. The next section examines leadership in school settings. We provide an example of how the critical analysis of school leaders impacts equity and social justice. Following this section, we discuss district-level leadership, specifically how the superintendent's critical analysis influences district-level commitments to equitable practice.

Superintendent and District Leadership

Research has consistently provided evidence that an organization's ability to change requires the organization and its leaders to be adaptive (Honig & Honsa, 2020). Accordingly, self-reflective leaders need to be reflexive and creative thinkers and direct their actions toward eliminating inequities (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). However, few studies demonstrate how superintendents or district leaders engage in opportunities that advance awareness of

oppressive structures and practices (Drago-Severson, 2012). Brown (2004) found this gap exists despite our knowledge that "increasing adult learner awareness of how we are all agents of change as educators is a vital part of development. Helping adults see how this new awareness and acknowledgment can be focused and acted on in a meaningful way in real schools and real communities is…critically important" (p. 97).

In her study, *Transformative Leadership: Working for Equity in Diverse Contexts*, Carolyn Shields (2011) assessed two principals and their abilities to affect educational and more significant social change. She found that awareness of justice and democracy is a crucial component of equitable leadership development. She posits the term "transformative leadership," which "recognizes the need to begin with critical reflection and analysis and to move through enlightened understanding to action—action to redress wrongs and to ensure that all members of the organization are provided with as level a playing field as possible—not only with respect to access but also with regard to academic, social, and civic outcomes" (p. 572). Shields claims that the first tenet of this theory to transform schools is to acknowledge power and privilege to confront inequity systems. Since superintendents and district leaders significantly influence student outcomes, there is a moral imperative to increase their consciousness. In turn, research demonstrates that this awareness will enable district leaders to engage in the personal critical reflection necessary to challenge and disrupt inequities and to support this awareness growth in others (Watts et al., 2011.)

School Principals

Consistently espoused throughout our study is that social inequities permeate public schools. Scholars recognize that school leaders are often unprepared for the difficulty of social justice leadership (Cooper, 2009). Furthermore, the principal as the primary school leader has a significant impact on perpetuating inequity and, conversely, promoting equity reform. Cooper's

(2009) research demonstrates that even equity-oriented school leaders are unaware of their blind spots. In her qualitative study of three elementary school principals in North Carolina, two of whom were White and one African American, she found contradictions between espoused commitments to equity and actual practice (Cooper, 2009). The schools included rapidly shifting demographics that represented increasing diversity. The principals felt they maintained equitable and inclusive environments by recognizing cultural differences (i.e., celebrations that acknowledge cultural groups), but they often "fell short of exemplifying cultural work" (Cooper, 2009, p. 718). While the study affirmed these principals were committed to serving their diverse student population, the findings indicate that in some instances, they were unaware "that their schools were becoming tense and separatist" (Cooper, 2009, p. 718).

Critical Reflection of School and District Leadership

In their findings, Watts et al. (2011) refer to critical reflection as the "social analysis and moral rejection of societal inequities" (p. 46). Diemer et al. (2016) defined this reflection as the ability to perceive inequalities and recognize dominant culture and privilege. The researchers continued by describing critical reflection as a process of analyzing historical dilemmas and practices that continue to persist in school districts (Diemer et al., 2016). Therefore, research argues that the development of critical consciousness through the tenet of critical reflection is a definitive practice for district leaders.

Moreover, research supports that the practice of critical reflection amongst school and district leadership contributes to the eradication of inequitable practices. Jemal's (2017) definition of critical consciousness includes an examination of everyday realities in order "to analyze the relationships between personal contexts and the wider social forces of structural oppression that restrict access to opportunity and resources and thus sustain inequity and

perpetuate injustice that limits well-being and human agency" (p. 608). He further delineated critical reflection as:

1. Thinking critically about accepted beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and assumptions;
2. Detecting the hidden interests underlying personal and social assumptions and beliefs;
3. Identifying how history impacts the present details of everyday life and how ways of thinking and feeling serve to maintain and perpetuate the existing system of inequality (p. 608).

Researchers identified that critical reflection has two separate components that must occur concurrently: perceiving inequalities and embracing egalitarian beliefs (defined as thinking about ideological social status). These researchers assert that inequality cannot be separated from the recognition of privilege and the systems and structures that uphold this oppression. Overall, becoming aware of one's privilege and power is necessary to critically reflect and determine action steps to disrupt inequities (Diemer, 2016; Jemal, 2017). In a longitudinal, mixed-methods study of five predominately Black and Latinx public charter schools, with different pedagogical approaches, Seider et al. (2020) found an increase in critical reflection in BIPOC students during their high school years “fueled by a desire to prove wrong the stereotypes embedded in racist structures and institutions” (p. 2). The study, however, did not examine the development of critical reflection among adults in the same school settings, so future research may prove valuable.

Critical Reflection as a Leadership Strategy

Although limited literature exists about the necessity of critical reflection as a fundamental aspect of leadership, studies suggest that in order to change social conditions, individuals must act upon oppressive environments and systems. Critical consciousness is often seen as cyclical and involves the three tenets of critical analysis (which includes awareness and

reflection), critical efficacy and critical action. Although most literature suggests that critical reflection often drives action toward necessary change, this can be an iterative process. Jemal's (2017) study of critical consciousness found that critical reflection requires a school leader to "go beyond a cognitive state to include capacity, ability, skill, or realization of one's power to conduct a critical analysis of structural oppression and potential actions to challenge inequities within socio-political environments (p. 607). Both Diemer (2016) and Jemal (2017) recognize critical reflection as a capacity-building exercise as one becomes aware of the social, political, and economic systems that exist to hold historically marginalized groups down. Diemer et al. (2017) report that "critical consciousness scholarship posits that critical action presupposes some degree of critical reflection—or that people do not blindly participate to change societal inequalities without first reflecting on what those inequities are" (p. 476). Finally, Jemal found (2017) that the critical awareness and critical reflection of educators "most likely would not result in Freire's goal of liberation from an oppressive reality… because analysis without action does not produce tangible change" (p. 606); thus, the need for critical action.

Critical Agency of Educational Leadership

Critical agency is the concept that describes the extent to which one believes in their ability to create or effect social or political change. It is the extent to which people feel that their actions will lead to results or consequences, as they strive against oppressive forces. Scholars have also used political agency as another term to describe the same concept (Seider & Graves, 2020). Critical agency is particularly important because a body of research has identified the connection between high levels of agency and activism. For example, people who think their actions have the power to create change are more likely to take action (Beaumont, 2010). Critical agency is an important component of critical consciousness because this concept can move a person from recognizing and analyzing injustice to taking action against injustice.

In educational leadership, critical agency is relevant and important in a number of ways. First, critical agency is an essential aspect of developing educational leaders' own critical consciousness. Second, educational leaders grapple with how they foster critical agency in their staff, teachers, parents, and community members in order to empower their community to implement change. Finally, schools must work to develop critical agency in youth, and educational leaders are responsible not only for fostering environments where efficacy can occur, but also for developing educators' ability to exhibit the three tenets of critical consciousness.

Critical Action of School and District Leadership

Critical action can be defined as an individual or collective action to produce social change (Rapa et al., 2018). We are living in a moment where some school districts have become incubators for critical action. In some civics and social studies classes, students learn about historical movements that have been catalysts for present-day movements like Black Lives Matter. These social movements may pave the way for students to engage in individual and mass action (Seider & Graves, 2020). Rapa et al. (2018) argued that critical action promotes positive occupational outcomes despite structural and social barriers. Opportunities to engage in activism during adolescence and exposure to activist mentors and organizations can profoundly affect an individual's self-concept and worldview (Seider & Graves, 2020). This participation fosters future civic and political involvement, thus dismantling the oppressive systems that perpetuate marginalization (Seider & Graves, 2020). As a result, districts and school leaders have a responsibility to create such conditions for critical action.

School leaders can take several steps to cultivate critical consciousness in their communities. Seider and Graves (2020) examined schooling for critical consciousness and reported that school leaders helped set the stage and create an environment where critical consciousness had the potential to flourish and grow. One important way leaders do this is by

establishing the values and vision of the learning community. Overt communication from the leader around critical thinking, social justice and action were found in schools that fostered critical consciousness in students (Seider & Graves, 2020). School leaders communicate the importance of critical action to students, families, teachers, and faculty. Another strategy used by leaders is to create learning spaces such as affinity groups and social/community service groups to foster critical action (Andrews & Leonard, 2018). Leaders can also use student voice and student activism to promote the importance of critical action (Diemer et al., 2021). Finally, leaders can select courses and coursework to engage people in participatory action research (PAR) or other curriculum focused on critical action (Bertrand, 2018).

Critical Action and Youth Development

A commitment to activism refers to an individual's propensity to engage in a wide range of social action behaviors (Seider & Graves, 2020). Through the work of school districts and school communities, Seider & Graves (2020) suggest that the actions of writing letters to newspapers, contributing to a political campaign, engaging in protests, or boycotting particular businesses or products are all actions that reflect critical action which is the ultimate goal of critical consciousness development. Furthermore, Godfrey and Grayman (2014) suggest that youth critical consciousness is important from a societal perspective, as it can play a central role in addressing unjust systems, challenging marginalization in society, and promoting positive community development. National and local communities rely on the awareness, reflection, efficacy, and action of their youth. During this time of cognitive development, adolescents can think abstractly about larger societal systems and their place in those systems to develop a coherent understanding of political and social structures for the first time (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). According to Godfrey & Grayman (2014), youth critical consciousness has significant

ramifications for developing other key outcomes and competencies in adolescence, such as mental health, occupational outcomes, and civic engagement.

Finally, Seider & Graves (2020) state that civic skills refer to the capacities necessary for genuine civic involvement, such as running a meeting, giving a speech, and writing a letter or email about a civic issue. Schools create the environment for students to practice these skills to develop an orientation for participation and leadership. Civics classrooms provide youth with the space to engage in experiential learning opportunities that foster critical action. Action fosters youth civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions by supplementing textbooks and lectures with more experiential approaches to civic learning such as simulations of democratic processes, classroom discussions, community service-learning projects, youth participatory action research, and meaningful student governance opportunities (Seider & Graves, 2020). Rapa et al. (2018) found a connection between critical action and career outcomes for students in their longitudinal study of 1,482 middle students from seventh grade until the age of 29. This study suggests that critical action plays a significant role in fostering career expectancies in late adolescence among marginalized African American youth by negotiating social identity threats and structural constraints, thereby providing them with a pathway to engagement and social mobility (Rapa et al., 2018). In short, when school leaders provide students with the opportunity to engage in critical action, they are preparing them for future endeavors. Although critical action is important, Diemer et al. (2017) assert that critical action must be in concert with critical reflection and (or) critical motivation in order to foster social mobility.

The Nexus of Critical Consciousness and Leadership

Radd & Kramer (2016) wrote that "the idea of critical consciousness is often attributed to Freire (1970) as a skill intended for those who are oppressed or marginalized, and it denotes the ability to recognize the myths, operations of power, and social relations that limit one's freedom

and full inclusion" (p. 583). In this group study, we contend that critical consciousness is a vital part of leadership. It is the praxis of critical awareness, critical reflection, and critical action that informs a critically conscious leader. As Radd & Kramer (2016) posit, "positional leadership (i.e., administration) involves both privilege and power, [and] we see critical consciousness as utterly essential in order to use that power justly, democratically, and humanely" (p. 586).

Schools are complex organizations that operate with both visible and invisible norms. The historical origins of American educational systems were designed and intended to sustain inequity. Over the last few years, many schools and school districts have expressed a commitment to becoming anti-racist and investing in diversity and inclusion. As a result, school leaders given their positionality and their responsibility to staff and students, have a heightened responsibility to lead these efforts. Capper et al. (2006) argue that "school leaders need to embody a social justice consciousness within their belief systems or values. Moreover, this requires a deep understanding of power relations and social construction including White privilege, heterosexism, poverty, misogyny, and ethnocentrism" (p. 213). Our study explored how leaders at various levels manifest the praxis of analysis, efficacy, and action.

In order for leaders to create these practices, they must value and embrace the discourse that various spaces could engender concurrently. For example, one of our studies relies on a transformative leadership framework to address the development of critical consciousness among White educators. In her book *Transformative Leadership: An Introduction*, Shields (2011) explains that "to be truly transformative, the processes of leadership must be linked to the ends of equity, inclusion, and social justice" (2011, p. 6). Additionally, Radd and Macey (2014) explore the practices leaders employ to support educators of color to develop critical consciousness. Radd & Macey (2014) note:

> Systemic equity change requires deep and broad assessments of our current practices and systems to discern which of our current structures, processes, beliefs, and norms contribute to ongoing inequities. This work is messy, complicated, and hard! It takes will, courage, and humility to unearth and articulate the assumptions that underlie our practice and our system. It takes commitment and critical reflection to deeply analyze the role each of those elements plays in either maintaining the status quo or creating meaningful change for equity (p 8).

Here Radd and Macey (2014) remind leaders to create and foster structures and practices that validate equity and embrace the challenges that are created when they attempt to disrupt the status quo and strive for transformation. This recognition is even more important when race and racist outcomes are ever-present.

Critical Consciousness and Race

In order to develop a more complete and nuanced understanding of how individuals develop critical consciousness, our team believed it was important to examine the intersections of critical consciousness and race (Marchand et al., 2019). Through the lens of race, critical consciousness highlights oppressive systems and structures (Bell, 2016) and provides a foundational context for critical race theory. Both frameworks are rooted in the oppressive conditions faced by historically marginalized people. Critical race theory (CRT) speaks to the specific constructs of race and racism in the United States. Solorzano (1997) defines the impacts of racism as follows: one group believes itself to be superior; the group which believes itself to be superior has the power to carry out the racist behavior, and racism affects multiple racial/ethnic groups. This definition assumes that racism is about institutional power, and BIPOC in the United States have never possessed this form of power (Solorzano, 1997).

According to Solorzano (1997), CRT centers on the lived experiences of BIPOC who have been victims of persistent stereotypes. In schools, these stereotypic traits can be used to justify: (1) having low educational and occupational expectations for BIPOC students; (2) placing BIPOC students in separate schools and, in some cases, separate classrooms within schools; (3) remediating the curriculum and pedagogy for BIPOC students; (4) maintaining segregated communities and facilities for BIPOC; and (5) expecting BIPOC students to one day occupy certain types and levels of occupations. Through critical awareness, critical reflection, and critical action, these stereotypes might be eradicated. Similar to Freire's definition of critical consciousness, critical race theory has an activist aspect, the end goal of which is to bring change that will increase social justice (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Critical consciousness has been used in various contexts to make sense of how oppressed people reflect on and act to change perceived inequities and how these same people "identify, navigate, and combat the structural constraints that limit human agency and well-being" (Diemer, 2017, p. 15). However, researchers who study critical consciousness seldom focus solely on race. Diemer et al. (2017) further espouse that critical consciousness is "informed by disparate strands of scholarship that frame how oppressed or marginalized people think about and respond to inequitable socio-political conditions" (p. 15), including how their identity impacts such conditions. In a longitudinal, mixed-methods study, El-Amin et al. (2017) analyzed five urban schools to describe how critical consciousness development can increase students' (particularly Black students') academic motivation and achievement. Fifty Black high school students were interviewed to understand how schools can develop student's critical consciousness and promote stronger academic achievement. In their study, El-Amin et al. note that "Black students can achieve at higher levels when schools teach them how to see, name, and challenge racial oppression" (p. 18). They further detail that "critical consciousness about racism specifically, can

motivate Black students to resist oppressive forces through persisting in school and achieving in academics" (p. 20).

Other researchers, Freire (1970) included, do not delineate race as the only oppressive factor in critical consciousness. In every relationship, power dynamics are fluid, depending on various factors such as gender, age, ableism, and socioeconomic status. Yet, if we acknowledge that 92% of today's educators in Massachusetts identify as White, while the student body is increasingly BIPOC, it is clear that race and racism maintain a power dynamic in our schools that must be addressed. El-Amin et al. (2017) challenge educators to conduct critical self-reflection, critical reflection, and personal and collective action, for we "cannot claim to be concerned with closing academic gaps without taking seriously the question of how to give Black students the language and skills they need to understand the social conditions working against them" (p. 22). Additionally, Seider et al. (2020) reported that they were not making a direct correlation between an awareness and understanding of racism and Freire's (1970) definition of critical reflection. Rather, they found that their research points to the potential of a relation between marginalized youths' academic achievement and their understanding of the roots and consequences of oppressive social forces such as racism" (p. 454). Ultimately, their study demonstrated a narrowing of racial and economic opportunity gaps as the result of incorporating critical consciousness programming into schools for BIPOC students.

In essence, critical consciousness is the realization and analysis of one's ability and power to improve schools, students, and the larger community. Moreover, critical consciousness in schools requires educators to analyze, question, and discuss access and opportunity in their schools and ways they may reinforce these current structures. In order to change these access points, directly addressing the need to develop critical analysis, give space for critical reflection, and foster critical action allows "dialogue [that] creates new possibilities and opportunities for

relationships and interconnections" (Jemal, 2017, p. 613). Whether critical consciousness can be applied to those who identify as White continues to be a debate among scholars (Seider, 2020), who note that a different framework may be better suited for those from a dominant racial group. However, for the purposes of this study we will be employing the fundamental tenets of critical consciousness as a universal framework.

In summary, studies support that critical analysis is a necessary first step to understanding the systemic and racial inequities present in public schools. Research indicates that this is true for all key stakeholders in this study – superintendents, district leaders, principals, and students. Following analysis (awareness and reflection), literature indicates that critical efficacy must occur in order to recognize and challenge the status quo and systems that perpetuate inequities. Finally, studies demonstrate that these tenets combined can lead to the critical actions that disrupt systems of inequity. However, little research exists that explores the role of district and school leadership through the complex lens of critical consciousness.

This group study sought to contribute to a much-needed body of research. Studying how school and district leaders develop critical consciousness in themselves and among the educators and the students they serve may prove valuable to transforming schools and disrupt systemic inequities. Additionally, findings from this study may help to identify effective leadership practices for promoting critical consciousness that leaders could use to strengthen and improve their practice. As a result, this team examined the research questions as stated in Table 1 below and applied the conceptual frameworks as we gathered and analyzed our data.

Table 1

Individual Research Questions

Name	Research Question(s)	Conceptual Framework
Tamatha Bibbo	How, if at all, do **white school leaders** develop critical consciousness in themselves? What leadership practices, if any, do white school leaders employ to engage their educators in critical consciousness?	Critical Consciousness Transformative Leadership
Ceronne B. Daly	What practices do district and/or school leaders employ to support the development of critical consciousness in educators of color (EOCs)? How do **educators of color** experience and respond to these practices?	Critical Consciousness Critical Professional Development
Pauline Lugira White	How do **adult learners** narrate their experiences that support critical consciousness? How does the race of educators impact the experience of adult learning?	Critical Consciousness Critical Race Theory
June Saba-Maguire	How, if at all, does a **superintendent** understand the tenets of critical consciousness? What role, if any, does a superintendent's participation in formal or informal networks have on developing critical consciousness and leadership?	Critical Consciousness
Geoff Walker	What practices, if any, do school leaders implement to foster the development of critical consciousness in their **students**? How do students / recent alumni and faculty describe and understand their leaders' efforts to establish a school context that contributes to students' critical consciousness development?	Critical Consciousness Social Justice Leadership

CHAPTER TWO[2]

Methods

This qualitative descriptive case study examined the efforts of district and school leaders to foster and advance the development of critical consciousness. As such, the sections below describe the overall study design, the data collection, and analysis procedures.

Design of the Study

Our team conducted a qualitative study because "our overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). This qualitative research study used both case study and a grounded theory approach because the case study method allowed a focus on in-depth analysis within a bounded system, and in our case, our bounded system or our unit of analysis was a single school district in Massachusetts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Grounded theory had us apply an inductive stance that required us to focus on the data and use our analysis to build a theory in response to our study's research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Sampling Selection

We employed purposive or purposeful sampling to select the district and participants we studied which allowed us to gather information-rich data. This data enabled us to pursue the analysis and substantial triangulation needed to answer each of our research questions. In order to locate district and school leaders engaged in critical consciousness, this team conducted pre-study interviews and inquiry meetings with various local experts and conducted a document review to learn more about leaders who may be engaging in one or more elements of critical consciousness. These interviews and meetings supported the team's ability to understand the

[2] The authors listed below collaboratively wrote this chapter which reflects the team approach of this project. Authors include: Tamatha L. Bibbo, Ceronne B. Daly, Pauline Lugira White, June Saba-Maguire, and Geoffrey Walker

context of potential sites for our research. We worked with the recommendations from college faculty and committee chairs and identified a site that provided rich and meaningful data that addressed our research questions and overall topic.

Given that our individual studies focused on different participants within the district, we determined the following criteria to be important in selecting a study site. We sought a K-12 suburban public district with a large enough population to include multiple school sites with a statistically significant number of BIPOC staff. The team identified a superintendent who participates in formal or informal social networks and has a reputation or proven record of engaging in or supporting anti-racism and equity-centered practices. Finally, we sought to observe a district that could serve as an example of anti-racism and equity-centered practices. As a result, we sought nominations through experts in the field and through peer networks. For this team's work, we have employed Ibram X. Kendi's definition: "One who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea" (Kendi, 2019. p. 13).

This criterion was designed to identify a purposeful sampling. Since we proposed that school leaders' equity-centered practices contribute to critical consciousness, selecting the right study site was critical. Consequently, our ability to gain access to people in our selected district who have been focused on social justice and equity-centered work ultimately determined the quality of our critical consciousness research (Creswell, 2019).

Participation/ Research Relationship

As a result of the team's reflective analysis and partnership with PSAP alumni, faculty, mentors, and committee chairs, we generated a list of districts for our research study. This list included districts focused on equity-centered work and elements of critical consciousness, such as opportunities for faculty and staff to build self-awareness, engage in critical reflection, and conduct critical action. Once our research site was confirmed, we identified our participants in

order to build and sustain our research relationship. As Maxwell (2013) explains: "the process of negotiating a relationship is much more complex than these phrases suggest; not only does it typically require ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of your relationships with those you study, but it rarely involves any approximation to total access" (p. 90). As Maxwell concedes, building relationships is complex, and with our study participants, this relationship has been further complicated by the restrictions in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Special care had been required of each of us as team members to carefully support participants' evolving needs, maintain flexibility, and focus on continually sustaining trust during our data collection processes.

The team was fortunate to engage with willing individuals for this study (Merriam, 2016). In Table 2 below, this list represents participants and their racial identities that were relevant to the research. Investigating these participants' perspectives supported our research by illuminating information that supported our understanding of the scope of critical consciousness work that currently exists in the district:

Table 2

Participant List

Method	**Participant and Race**
Semi-Structured Interviews	➔ Six BIPOC and two White teachers ➔ Three BIPOC Central Office Staff ➔ Two BIPOC and four White Superintendents ➔ One BIPOC and eleven White School Leaders (Principals, Assistant Principals, Deans, etc.) ➔ Four BIPOC students
Focus Group	➔ One BIPOC and five White educators in focus group

Questionnaire	➔ Forty-four BIPOC school based and central office staff
Observation - Professional Development	➔ Seventy-five school-based faculty and staff (teachers, staff, school leaders)

Data Sources

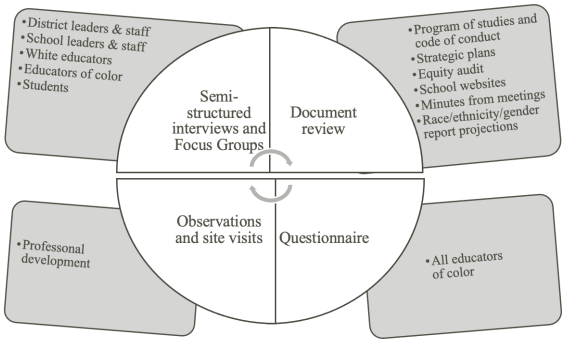
This study collected data through a case study of a particular district and practices within the district as a bounded system. As Yin (2009) describes, there are three reasons for a case study approach: “1. case studies are pertinent when your research addresses a descriptive question; 2. the case study method favors the collection of data in natural settings, compared with relying on derived data; and 3. the case study method is now commonly used in conducting evaluations" (p. 5). Acknowledging that "case study research involves systematic data collection and analysis procedures" (Yin, 2009, p. 6), we chose a case study approach to garner information that we examined to understand further our specific research topic in real-world contexts and situations.

This descriptive case study of a suburban district researched an equity-centered superintendent and his participation in formal and informal networks, and district and school leaders and staff engaged in critical consciousness practices. For example, whereas one member of the team examined the role of White educators, another member focused on examining what BIPOC staff felt about the support they received in the district. We applied various data sources (e.g., interviews- both individual and focus groups, a questionnaire, and district documents) to answer our research questions and provide documentation to code, triangulate, and confirm responses, for "good case studies benefit from having multiple sources of evidence" (Yin, 2009, p. 10). Figure 2 below represents the data sources we collected during our study. The arrows moving in a continuous pattern demonstrate that the data collection process occurred in cycles

and not linearly. These four processes were both concurrent and occurred at various times during the fall of 2021.

Figure 2

Data Sources



Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were employed to assess and gather data to answer our research questions about critical consciousness in the school district we studied. In this type of interview, because questions were flexibly worded, the team was able to respond to each situation and allow new ideas to emerge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a result, the responses provided authentic evidence to explain how/why some schools have been involved in critical consciousness, how critical consciousness has impacted relationships, leaders' mindsets and attitudes, and inclusive practices. As Figure 2 detailed above, we conducted several interviews with various stakeholders over time; both individually and in dyads or triads. These various interviews offered different perspectives and allowed the team to analyze findings at the district and school levels. When the team conducted semi-structured interviews, we used a co-constructed protocol which allowed for conversational follow-up and/or clarifying questions, as opposed to a static survey.

Focus Groups

In addition to individual interviews, the team was able to conduct focus groups (a variant of interviews) with small groups of role-alike participants such as school-based staff. The focus groups were able to verify and provide more insight into the critical consciousness work being promoted and/or fostered across the district or school settings and/or the structures in place that supported such work. One team member conducted two different focus groups of three educators each who reported to different White school leaders in order to better understand their perspectives and perceptions. The purpose was to hear from many voices and verify for accuracy, for focus groups have proven to be effective because the "nature of interactive discussions reveals information not available during individual interviews" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 114). These voluntary school-based focus groups provided important and relevant information about the communication about, participation in, and experience with critical consciousness. The focus groups worked well because there was an absence of a power differential and the topic was relevant and valuable to the group (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

We also recognized that limitations existed when using focus groups such groupthink, power dynamics, and/or dominant, negative voices altering the responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order for the researchers to focus on mitigating these potential barriers, we conducted focus groups in dyads which allowed one researcher to focus on asking the questions and the other managed note taking and recording.

Document Review

A review of district documents provided our team with information about the structures and policies that supported the development or implementation of critical consciousness. The school-based and/or district level documents that were collected were based on interview and focus group information (e.g., professional development plans, meeting notes/ minutes/ agendas,

School Improvement Plans, Strategic Plans, job satisfaction survey results, school committee presentations, annual budget) and were triangulated with other data sources to analyze the development or support of practices that developed critical consciousness. Collecting documents allows for a quick analysis of what exists, and what does not, in terms of policies and where these may be executed in practice. Although Merriam & Tisdell (2016) found that the documents may be incomplete or not useful because they have not been developed for research and may be "incongruent with emerging findings based on observational or interview data" (p. 181), document review can be completed efficiently and cover a breadth of material when studying a system. Our study relied on document review to check the information we learned about in interviews and focus groups, primarily reviewing documents our participants named as relevant.

Observations and Site Visits

This form of data collection provided the team an opportunity to identify participants' actual behavior, school environments, and/or events, rather than relying solely on individuals' self-perceptions shared through individual interviews and/or focus groups. As Merriam and Tisdell note, "An observer will notice things that have become routine to the participants themselves, things that may lead to understanding the context" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139). In this case study, our observations captured the processes and systems that continually fostered critical consciousness; and even demonstrated systems, structures, practices that did not function properly. These observations further supported the data collected from document review, interviews, and focus groups and provided contradictory information that we discuss in our findings. These observations and site visits were documented through field notes such as written notes and recorded dictation. Our field notes provided further evidence that was used to construct meaning and understanding of the district and schools studied. As Merriam and Tisdell (2017) describe, "observations are also conducted to triangulate emerging findings… they are

used in conjunction with interviewing and document analysis to substantiate findings" (p. 139). These triangulations of the data both confirmed and called into question what we learned from other data sources.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire of educators provided a broader range of responses from teachers and/or school/district leaders regarding critical consciousness understanding, perceptions, and implementation. Creswell & Guetterman (2019) write that "questionnaires are forms used in a survey design the participants in a study complete and return to the researcher" (p. 627). Our questionnaire served as a reliable tool to provide comprehensive, additional data from multiple voices across the district, which could be used as a cross-reference tool with other data sources. As we sought to gain a representative picture of the characteristics and attitudes of a large group of educators, we selected to use a survey method to supplement our other data collection methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Since we used the team-designed questionnaire protocol to capture descriptive data, we did not need to use a pre-designed instrument with a validated scale. According to Creswell & Guetterman (2019), "the advantage of this type of questioning is that your predetermined closed-ended responses can net useful information to support theories and concepts in the literature. The open-ended responses, however, permit you to explore reasons for the closed-ended responses and identify any comments people might have that are beyond the responses to the close-ended questions" (p. 220). Therefore, we administered the questionnaire to collect more detailed demographic information, solicit individual and focus group participants and invite BIPOC staff to share their knowledge of potential school or district level practices that supported their personal and collective development of critical consciousness.

Data Collection

Prior to our study, this team piloted our interview questions on a sample population. This allowed us to refine our questions with a similar population of interviewees from outside of the target district. This pilot process enabled the team to test our interview protocol so that our questions were more aligned to collecting the data we needed to inform our study's research questions. We not only collaborated to combine and share interview questions, but in order to avoid multiple interviews with similar participants, we also conducted these interviews and focus groups in dyads, when possible, and then shared our data.

Because race is a factor in three of our individual studies, whenever possible we also conducted individual interviews and focus groups in a mixed-race dyad. Another purpose of the semi-structured interview was to increase validity by comparing responses to other data sources as we moved through the coding and analysis stage (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Moreover, our interviews allowed for a depth of analysis between the district and school leaders and enabled the team to collaborate and share our data and responses. As Maxwell (2013) notes, "observation is often used to describe settings, behavior, and events while interviewing is used to understand the perspectives and goals of actors" (p. 102). As a result, our interview protocol detailed and ensured our participants remained anonymous and their responses confidential to "adhere to rigorous ethical standards" (Booth et al., 2016, p. 82).

Entering the Field

Our team finalized our site selection and started our research both in person and virtually in the Fall 2021. We conducted three months of research and engaged in more than twenty-seven semi-structured interviews, two focus groups, and received a total of 44 questionnaire responses from school based and central office BIPOC teachers and staff

Data Analysis

Our team used various data sources to examine the efforts of district and school leaders to foster the development of critical consciousness. We conducted our initial research by reviewing the documents we determined relevant to our individual studies. Following the document review, the team conducted interviews, observations/site visits, administered a questionnaire to all school based and central office BIPOC staff, and conducted focus groups using identified protocols. As Merriam & Tisdell (2016) explain, to complete intensive analysis, all materials need to be organized and easily accessible, and consequently we created a "systemic archive" (p. 233) of the data. This analysis led to emerging categories and themes that determined our findings and a theory to better understand our research.

The process we used to identify emerging trends involved several steps, including multiple rounds of coding our findings (Saldaña, 2013, p. 100), reviewing the data as a team to determine themes, and moving from "coding to theorizing" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 96). We utilized an online coding program Quirkos when completing our first and second coding cycles. In our first cycle, we individually constructed a word or phrase representing emerging ideas in our data and then compared and discussed our emerging codes. In our second round, we expanded and condensed these terms into larger categories (Saldaña, 2013).

Finally, cross-referencing these sources and our findings, the team triangulated the data and uncovered trends. We reviewed and reflected on the data to determine our key findings and conclusions to answer each of our research questions. The team maintained a detailed process memo that documented both individual and collective steps in the research process.

Positionality

The researcher's position impacts and affects the research process at every stage and in

every way. This includes *how* and *why* certain research questions are asked and how data is collected and analyzed. Positionality issues are "methodological issues particularly related to the researcher's role in conducting studies, that are theoretically grounded in any critical perspective analyzing power relations" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a qualitative study grounded in a critical perspective, it is important to acknowledge the positionality of this research group. Our group is made up of five members with a variety of backgrounds and identities. We are all currently in educational leadership positions in Massachusetts. As Table 3 details, four of our members work in urban public-school districts, and one works in a suburban district. Four of the members identify as female, and one as male. Two members identify as Black/African-American, and three members identify as White. While members may identify from different class backgrounds growing up, all members currently identify as "middle class."

All researchers share a collective commitment to active anti-racism and equity-centered leadership or disrupting inequities for our students and in our communities and country. We all bring this sense of purpose to this study. These intersections help us to make meaningful connections to the work of critical consciousness. Diverse perspectives and experiences allowed us to situate our analysis and research in critical consciousness through our deconstructed lens of critical analysis, critical agency, and social action.

In order to account for biases we bring to the research, each team member kept a journal of reflections about the research process as it related to their positionality. In this way, our goal was to proactively mitigate biases to the best of our abilities.

Table 3

DIP Team Positionality

Gender	**Race**	**Role**	**Urban/Suburban /Rural School District**
Female	Black/African American	Central Office Administrator	Urban
Female	Black/African American	School Leader	Urban
Female	White	School Leader	Suburban
Male	White	School Leader	Urban
Female	White	Central Office Administrator	Urban

Limitations

Fundamentally, limitations occur when conducting case study analysis, and our study poses several possible challenges (Creswell, 2019). Conducting a research study is arduous under normal circumstances, and the global pandemic has increased this challenge. We recognize that superintendents and school leaders are preoccupied with urgent matters, making it difficult for them to consider dedicating time to research that takes them away from daily demands. For example, we had to ensure that we could gain approval to access the various sites needed to conduct our research. Therefore, this process was complicated by the uncertainty of the pandemic's impact on the Fall 2021 and the reopening of schools.

Next, our overarching conceptual framework of critical consciousness may be unfamiliar to many practitioners in the field, making selecting a site that allows us to explore the phenomenon somewhat challenging. We needed to look for the tenets of critical consciousness by relying on our college faculty and committee chairs' knowledge of district and school leaders

who demonstrate a commitment to equity work. Further complicating our selection of a site was that our study topics required us to choose multiple forms of purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2019). Each study had a distinct factor that required finding a multi-faceted site. Therefore, it was critical that we had the assistance of those who have state-level knowledge in order to identify an appropriate study site.

While we had been optimistic about collecting data for our research, we were also conscious of qualitative studies' limitations of relying on human perspectives. Thus, we were constrained by the filter of the interviewer and the interviewee (Creswell, 2019). Therefore, to effectively answer our research questions with reliable data, we needed to clarify what information we desired by asking descriptive and relationship inquiries to elicit the necessary data to answer our research questions. Moreover, the two most popular methods in a qualitative study, observations and interviews, were challenging for an inexperienced research team (Creswell, 2019). As a result, we sought guidance and feedback to ensure the instruments we used (i.e., protocols for observations and interviews) were tightly constructed. Furthermore, each of us piloted our interview questions and adjusted as necessary.

As Massachusetts educators, researching a Massachusetts study site and participants with whom we may have professional relationships, we were vigilant about the ethical issues of confidentiality. We minimized this issue by working closely as a team to interpret results, ensuring we are lessening the effect of researcher bias. These limitations meant establishing a trusting rapport quickly so our participants were confident enough to share information freely and honestly. We accomplished this by being clear about our purpose and intentions, relying on past experience with Boston College, and building relationships through establishing friendly, professional relationships within the district.

Conclusion

With hate crimes on the rise, the storming of the United States Capitol Building by White supremacists, increasing assaults on BIPOC, and continued murders of unarmed Black men, the space between the espoused values of a just democracy and the reality are apparent to many school and district leaders (Seider & Graves, 2020). Critically conscious leaders want to act in ways that support justice and transform the school system and the broader community (Radd & Kramer, 2016). This research explored how educator practices contribute to critical consciousness and surfaced ways in which educators across levels enact critical consciousness in order to fulfill their espoused values. This study informs practitioners about effective ways to support critical consciousness in schools and educational systems in order to disrupt the inequities we still experience today in our school systems.

CHAPTER THREE[3]

Introduction

The demographic of teachers in the United States does not reflect that of the students. Scholars suggest that a lack of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic awareness in teachers contributes to disparities between white students and their non-white peers (Brown, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Leithwood, 2010; Theoharis, 2011, 2012). In 2010, 7% of educators identified as non-white, compared with 30% of students (Owens, 2010); in the school year 2020/2021, that number rose slightly to 10.5 % compared to 43.3% of students (DESE, 2020). Diversity in the teaching force matters. It matters when white teachers approach their practice from the knowledge and history of white dominant culture which often does not include the culture and history of students of color (Utt et al., 2020). To create welcoming school environments and be effective, educators must be cognizant of their own racial identities and the identities of their students (Utt et al., 2020). This study argues that one way to address this systemic issue is to study how critical consciousness is developed in individuals, schools, and districts. Freire (1970, 2000) defines critical consciousness (CC) as a process of awareness, highlighting the need to recognize oppression and one's position in order to improve their conditions. Further, Khalifa et al. (2016) assert that school leaders must engage in culturally responsive leadership so they may influence "school climate, school structure, teacher efficacy, and student outcomes" (p. 1274).

Although Freire's research is solely focused on developing literacy for adults in Brazil, I purport that in order to disrupt inequities, to partner with historically marginalized students and families, and to remove obstacles to access, school leaders must develop critical consciousness in themselves and in other educators in their respective school settings (Freire, 2000; Seider &

[3] Tamatha L. Bibbo authored this chapter.

Graves, 2020). Critical consciousness is pivotal to ensuring that students' experiences are transformed and oppressive structures will not endure over time (Shields, 2011, 2016). As Shields and Hesbol (2020) report, deep and equitable change requires knowing oneself, the organization, and the community. Consequently, this study specifically addressed the research questions: How, if at all, do white school leaders develop critical consciousness in themselves? And what leadership practices, if any, do these white school leaders employ to engage other educators in critical consciousness?

Conceptual Framework

Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness (CC) or *conscientizacao* explores a critical theory developed by Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. Based on his work with historically marginalized populations of illiterate adults, he expected his theory would guide them to "read the world" (Freire, 1970) and critique knowledge as a necessary condition of freedom (Weiner, 2003). Through his work, Freire identified critical consciousness as a cycle of development including three tenets that "involved gaining knowledge about the systems and structures that create and sustain inequity (critical analysis), developing a sense of power or capability (sense of agency), and ultimately committing to taking action against oppressive conditions (critical action) (El-Amin et al., 2017). In short, critical consciousness development empowers the oppressed to move society into "spheres of democratic authority, social justice, and political action" (Weiner, 2003). Although Freire's original definition of critical consciousness lacked a conceptual model for schools, scholars and researchers have determined that critical consciousness can be applied through two or three tenets in the educational setting (Jemal, 2017; Diemer et al., 2016; Seider & Graves, 2020). Critical consciousness is described by some scholars as critical awareness/ analysis,

political agency, and critical action (Seider & Graves, 2020); whereas other scholars refer to principles of critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action (Watts and Flanagan, 2007; Watts et al., 2011).

Fundamentally, in most research, the stages require an individual and collective group to become cognizant of inequitable systems, explore and critically analyze ways actively to disrupt these systems and structures, and then act. As Seider, Clark, and Graves (2020) found, "... scholars have posited that critical consciousness serves as the *antidote* to oppression by replacing marginalized adolescents' feelings of isolation and self-blame for challenges they are encountering with a sense of agency and engagement in a broader collective struggle for social justice" (p. 451). However, critical consciousness is separate from allyship as it is a personal, metacognitive journey, and not simply partnering with others or acting as a bystander for change. Jemal (2017) found that research seems to support a relationship between critical consciousness, positive outcomes, and "the reduction of negative consequences associated with oppression" (p. 605). As a result, educators who embrace critical consciousness are those who embody *critical awareness/analysis*: the ability to recognize one's oppressed status and one's relationship between self and society; *critical agency*: one's ability to recognize privilege, social conditions and systems that cause and maintain inequities; and *critical action:* engagement in political or social activities that disrupts inequalities (Diemer et al, 2016; Jemal, 2017; Seider & Graves, 2020). This framework functioned as a basis for this study to investigate questions about self-growth through awareness and analysis, opportunities for efficacy, and critical actions taken by white leaders to promote equity and social justice.

Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership leans on the argument that "education is not the ultimate lever for social transformation, but without it, transformation cannot occur" (Freire, 2000; Shields, 2010, p. 559). For leaders to impact students and disrupt systems of inequities, some scholars contend that engaging in only one of the three components of critical consciousness is not sufficient (Shields, 2010; Jemal, 2017). For leaders to interrupt bias, identify and address oppressive beliefs and structures, and create and sustain equitable opportunities and access in schools, leaders must invest in all aspects of critical consciousness; and transformative leadership theorizes how they can do so effectively.

Transformative Leadership (Shields, 2010, 2011, 2016) begins with identifying the qualities, beliefs (values), and practices of various school leaders related to justice and democracy. It further acknowledges power and privilege, deconstructs inequities, and actively works towards transformation by demonstrating moral courage and activism. Transformative Leadership, therefore, aligns with the three pillars of critical consciousness. In order to examine the ability of white leaders to develop critical consciousness and transform themselves and their schools, this study will use the leadership concepts below as part of the conceptual framework:

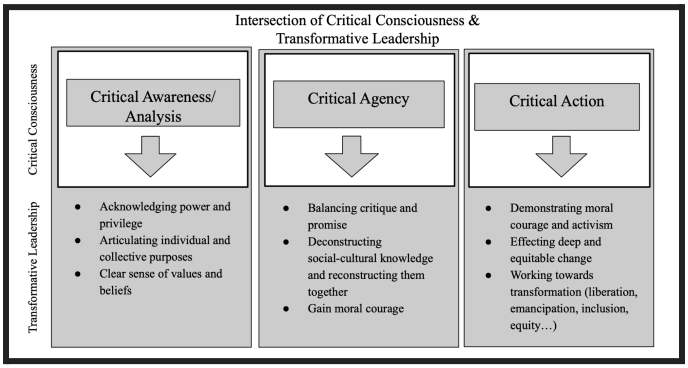
Table 4

Concepts of Transformative Leadership (Shields, 2011)

Transformative Leadership	acknowledging power and privilege
	articulating individual (private) and collective (public) purposes
	deconstructing social-cultural knowledge (that generate inequities) and reconstructing them together
	balancing critique and promise
	working towards transformation: liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity and excellence
	demonstrating moral courage and activism
	effecting deep and equitable change

As demonstrated in table 4, transformative leadership is grounded in social justice leadership principles. In Shields' view (2010, 2014), to be a transformative leader one is truly *transforming* the world for individuals and society as a whole (p. 5). In addition, Shields details that "transformative leadership requires the leader to have a clear sense of the values and beliefs that undergird his or her own identity, be willing to take stands that may require moral courage, to live with tension, and, to some degree, engage in activism and advocacy" (Shields, 2011, p. 3). Adults must recognize the existence of power dynamics and oppressive systems, for "Transformative leadership…helps leaders understand how to create educational organizations that combine excellence with equity, inclusion, and justice" (Shields, 2011, p. 4). School leaders must model this journey by conducting critical analysis and effecting change that empowers others (Jemal, 2017; Khalifa, 2018; El-Amin et al., 2017).

Figure 3



Note: Figure 3 displays the components of critical consciousness and the intersection with Shields' Transformative Leadership model.

Studying the critical consciousness framework in conjunction with transformative leadership provides a lens to study the practices of white school leaders and their impact on school settings. Both frameworks provide explicit language about the leader's internal journey in acknowledging awareness of power and privilege. Both also focus on the courage to act and the

demonstration of activism to promote change. This study explored how white educators understood critical consciousness and whether they adopted and applied its principles and/or acted as transformative leaders in addressing inequities in their schools.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I describe research that relates to the development of critical consciousness and transformative leadership in white leaders. In the sections that follow, I have related the three tenets of critical consciousness to research on the impact of Whiteness and color evasiveness (critical self-awareness/analysis); social agency, and anti-racist leadership practices (critical action).

Whiteness and its Importance

Critical Consciousness theory demands that the participant, in this case, the educational leader, becomes critically aware of the inequities that exist. In her study, *Critical Consciousness: A Critique and Critical Analysis of the Literature*, Alexis Jemal (2017) found that the educational leader must "seek opportunities to develop awareness and skills that facilitate effectively addressing issues of social injustice" (Jemal, 2017, p. 607). As such, educators who are white should also recognize their race and the impact whiteness has on the school community. In her qualitative study of ten white principals, Brenda McMahon (2007) found that race, in particular whiteness, is a very challenging subject for white leaders. In addition to defining whiteness through physical features and pigmentation of skin, she further presents it as a privileged state with its own "beliefs, policies and practices (often unarticulated) that enables whites to maintain power and control in society" (McMahon, 2007, p. 687).

In addition, some researchers argue that white educators should acknowledge the inherent power and privilege they have that impacts systems and structures. In order to become truly

anti-racist - a relationship of solidarity with people of color - “a White person would first have to interrogate her or his whiteness through understanding privilege” (Boucher, et al., 2009, p. 89). In their qualitative case study of a changing suburban district, Welton et al. (2015) detailed that although the school district was racially conscious, it functioned as race-neutral in programming and practices. In their findings, Welton, et al., (2015) explain that: “the ideology of whiteness works to protect White-centric power structures and perpetuate racial inequities. Thus, school leaders must have a strong anti-racist resolve to undo the inequitable influence of whiteness” (p. 629). Essentially white school leaders as members of a privileged group, must examine their whiteness and white privilege in order to act as critically-conscious educators.

Color evasiveness

In addition to understanding whiteness, an understanding of color evasiveness may prove pivotal as it serves as an essential skill to developing critical self-awareness. Color-evasiveness, formerly referred to as color-blindness, manifests itself in school districts when the adults, particularly white adults, remain silent about race and racism in their curricular choices, instructional strategies, and other facets of a student’s experience in the classroom. In his study of classroom management strategies in a diverse, urban classroom, Milner (2010) found that when educators disregard race as a complexity in the learning environment and use race-neutral approaches, they cause far more harm to students. Researchers have found that complacency and maintaining a color-evasive perspective can exacerbate inequities and unintentional discrimination (Milner, 2010; Khalifa, 2018).

To further Welton’s findings, Theoharis and Haddix (2011) found that school leaders who recognized issues of race as central to their work were able to create more equitable and just

schools. They described that effective leaders engage in five specific behaviors to understand their contributions to the dominant power structure, as detailed in table 5 below.

Table 5

Leadership Behaviors	Owning emotional and intellectual work about issues of race including work on whiteness.
	Talking about issues of race with their staff.
	Learning about race with their staff.
	Infusing race into their data-informed leadership.
	Connecting with families of color.

Leadership Behaviors (Theoharis and Haddix, 2011)

Welton et al. (2015) found that these five aspects of leadership alone were not sufficient to promote meaningful change and argue that an awareness of race can lead to deficit thinking and be harmful if a school system fails to "provide a socially just common language or framework for discussing racial politics and addressing inequities" (p. 718). Finally, in their book, *Despite the Best Intentions: How Racial Inequity Thrives in Good Schools*, Lewis and Diamond (2015) found that most white educators adopted a color evasive stance and/or subscribed to systemic policies and practices that favored white students, reinforcing stereotypes and school-based inequities. Although challenging color evasiveness is a critical part of the self-awareness journey, white leaders may miss this important step and underestimate their positionality as it relates to their race. Limited research exists that focuses on the impact of race on white school leaders' development of critical consciousness.

Social Analysis & Agency

Watts (2011), Diemer (2016), and Seider & Graves (2020), have pointed to critical analysis as a necessary step in the development of critical consciousness. As a metacognitive activity, critical self-reflection and analysis of unjust structures in society allow people to identify perceived inequalities and to recognize privilege (Diemer, et al., 2016; Jemal, 2017). Whether white leaders are able to deeply reflect and examine these inequities, if it is not a lived experience, is yet to be determined.

At times, literature purports that critical analysis and critical agency do not need to occur prior to critical action. For example, Diemer, et al. (2016), found that "although many programs assume that critical reflection is a precursor to action, fostering reflection alone may be of limited benefit" (p. 218). He cautioned that action first initiates critical analysis and engagement in action concurrently fosters critical reflection. As he explained, critical reflection and analysis is an interactive process that may occur during, before, or after critical awareness and critical action; it is not a set of linear tasks (Diemer, et al. 2016), for the tenets of reflection, analysis, and action may indeed prove a simultaneous effort (Diemer, et al. (2016). Being able to reflect upon and analyze the relationship between privilege and oppression is only a single step in the process for white educators; only when one can actually use that awareness and design a plan of action through active anti-racist practices, can one truly disrupt these inequities. The next section explores various ways for white educators to engage in meaningful critical action.

Anti-racist Leadership Practices as a form of Critical Action

In order to fully develop critical consciousness, leaders must take action, preferably, active anti-racist leadership practices. In their study of two white principals engaging in racial discussions, Swanson and Welton (2019) shared that dismantling systemic problems associated

with racism requires school leaders to do more than simply acknowledge it exists - school leaders must ultimately lead systemic action and inspire their staff to be anti-racist, for they consider "anti-racism to be a praxis of race consciousness" (p. 736). School leaders must have the courage to take systemic action directly through a race-conscious lens, for choosing not to directly confront race reproduces racial inequities (Welton et al. 2015). Leaders must work to "eradicate the structures and policies that entrench and reproduce racism…" (Swanson & Welton, 2019, p. 736) and confront inequitable power structures that safeguard whiteness and hinder equitable opportunities for historically marginalized populations at multiple levels - individual, school, and institutions (Swanson & Welton, 2019).

Race Talk

In the absence of direct conversations about race, racial inequities will never be disrupted, for color evasiveness and passive interventions will continue to be the status quo (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011; Welton et al. 2015). Studies found that engaging staff in conversations about race, racism, injustice, and systemic oppression prepared them to acquire facilitation skills and permission to discuss race openly and frequently with their students, thereby creating an enhanced sense of belonging and respect (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011; Welton et al. 2015). This type of deliberate engagement builds a community of learners who can lead and participate in difficult and critical conversations on race and also allows an open examination of structures and systems that perpetuate inequities and biases. As the Welton et al. (2015) study found, "sidestepping race only reproduces racial inequities" (p. 718). When schools do not provide an opportunity for open and honest discussions on race and racism, inequitable social conditions will remain.

Professional Learning Opportunities

Professional learning about race and culture must be ongoing, frequent, meaningful, and embedded within the practices of the school (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). In their study of six white urban school leaders, Theoharis & Haddix (2011) found that when school leaders completed intellectual and emotional professional development on the topic of race prior to planning and facilitating sessions with their faculty and staff, they achieved impressive results. In essence, they understood that learning about one's race and culture has been found to have a long-lasting impact, and professional learning opportunities such as book groups, sharing personal stories, or engaging in personal reflections about whiteness or white privilege have proven highly effective strategies (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

The Role of Relationships

As Diebold (2021) found, the role of relationships in equity-centered leadership is vital to navigating inevitable challenges and pushback that white anti-racists will encounter in the fight against white supremacy. In short, relationships among and between white anti-racists and those they are supporting are pivotal to fostering and developing anti-racist practices.

Another way to address systems of oppression is to remove barriers for families. Partnerships with families can increase student outcomes and provide another outlet to transform the conditions under which all students learn and grow. Both Lowenhaupt (2014) and Ishimaru (2019) found that schools and educators must shift their thinking and actions. Leaders ought to form a welcoming culture, build trust, and design spaces for parents to share experiences and concerns; these actions will lead to equitable collaboration (Ishimaru, 2019) and interrogation of biases and stereotypes leaders may be reinforcing. Making a concerted effort to connect with families of color proved a purposeful way to build these partnerships, remove barriers for

families, allow white leaders to concurrently build their own emotional and intellectual growth around race, and improve their ability to lead and facilitate discussions on race, or racially charged topics, with families and staff (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011; Ishimaru, 2019).

Positionality

As a researcher and educator in a Massachusetts public school, I often observe racial and linguistic disparities between and among myself, my colleagues, and the students we serve. As a researcher who is fairly familiar with the concept of critical consciousness, it was important that I clarified and recognized that not all educators or school leaders with whom I am interviewing possess the same familiarity, yet structures and practices that lend themselves to achieving the same purposes may be subsumed under this framework.

Today, as a white transformative school leader in a wealthy school community, I am acutely aware of the disparity between those who are granted access and opportunities, and those who are not, as a result of oppressive and inequitable systems. As a research team, we will need to recognize how our positions and our own implicit biases may impact and affect our data gathering and findings.

Methods

Data from multiple sources including interviews, two focus groups, and observations at a professional development opportunity were analyzed. The design of this study was informed by using a phenomenological methods approach; the phenomenon is the experience of white school leaders' development of critical self-awareness, critical efficacy, and critical action, and the impact their leadership practices have on others; both of which are praxis to transformative leadership. This section will summarize the methodology employed to answer the two research questions.

Participants

In the fall of 2021, using both in-person and online formats I interviewed nine school leaders who racially identified as white. Out of these nine interviews, five were completed as one-on-one interviews, whereas three interviews were conducted in dyads. The participants reflected the various levels of the district: one from the central office; two from high school; one from middle school; and five participants from the elementary level. In addition to these interviews, two focus groups with three teachers each were also conducted in person in dyads.

These focus groups reflected both elementary and middle school level teachers and were the results of a snowball approach to sampling. White school leaders selected for the study through interviews identified focus group participants. A unique factor in the focus groups was the selection of participants. For example, in one school, the school leader selected three participants who share similar characteristics: white, female, grade level teachers of core subject disciplines, tenure between 10-20 years, and reporting a positive relationship with the school leader. The other focus group participants demonstrated differences in characteristics: differences in gender, race, roles, years of service, and reporting of their school leader's development and fostering of critical consciousness in themselves and others.

A qualitative, in-depth, case study design was chosen to explore white school leaders' development of critical consciousness and the impact of their leadership practices on their staff. This approach seemed most appropriate due to the researcher's interest in seeking to understand the perspective, and under which conditions, adults are engaging in this work (Yin, 2009). Accordingly, I gathered data through a staged design process using a purposeful, snowball sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

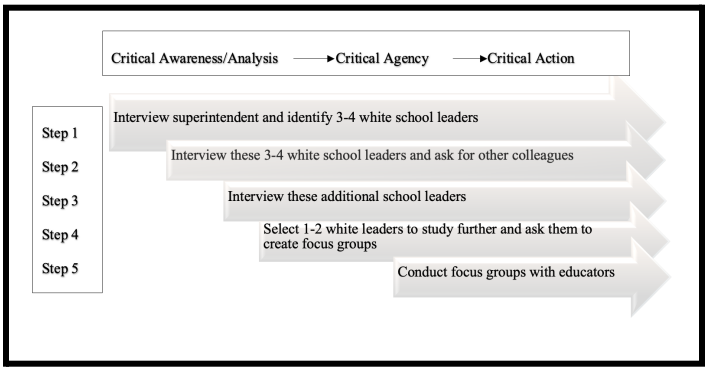
Study Design

This qualitative single case study, informed by the principle of narrative design, focused on semi-structured interviews using a co-constructed interview protocol. To examine the practices and structures in place that promote and allow for critical consciousness to grow and expand, the unit of analysis, one school district and nine white school leaders, was a bounded system structure (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This district case study provided an opportunity to examine the meaning of a particular phenomenon in order to better "understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to these experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). The use of semi-structured interviews with the district superintendent, white school leaders (recommended by the superintendent and colleagues), focus groups with teachers at multiple levels, and follow-up interviews with school leaders provided insight to address the research questions.

Sampling

The purpose of this study was to examine white school leaders' experiences in developing and fostering the three components of critical consciousness while serving as transformative leaders. Below figure 4 identifies the steps employed to study these leaders' critical awareness and analysis, agency, and actions.

Figure 4



Participants for the study were identified through a snowball sampling approach. In order to identify white school leaders who were engaged in some level of critical self-awareness and analysis, social agency, or critical action, I started with an interview with the superintendent.

Through this interview three additional white school leaders were identified as demonstrating a substantial commitment to equity work and who demonstrated tenets of critical consciousness and transformative leadership. From these additional three interviews, four more leaders emerged who met the study criteria.

In order to answer RQ #2, I was able to conduct two separate focus group interviews for educators who work for one of the white school leaders previously interviewed. One of the focus groups was self-selected after that school leader offered the interview to any interested party; whereas, the other focus group was leader-selected. Additionally, through these interviews, relevant information such as professional development opportunities and documents were revealed and used for data analysis.

Data Collection

Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

This study included the use of semi-structured interviews that occurred during the fall of 2021. During these interviews, I asked these school leaders questions, previously piloted on different white school leaders (Appendix A), and also asked whom they would recommend as transformative white school leaders for a similar interview. This strategy led to four additional interviews. Based on the interview responses, I reconnected with two of these school leaders in order to study their school setting and conduct a focus group with their staff. These small focus groups provided much-needed data in learning about critical consciousness work that their leader had been implementing, supporting, and fostering.

Focus Groups

To provide data to address the research question about leadership practices and how leaders engage other educators in the development of critical consciousness, I conducted two focus groups with three educators each who work directly with one of the school leaders I had previously interviewed. Both leaders assisted in identifying teachers for me to interview to gauge the impact of the leaders' own critical consciousness development and the development of others (Appendix B). Both focus groups, conducted in partnership with another team member, provided insight into the impact that their leader's practices have had in the school setting. As Hallas (2014) notes: "The purpose of the group is to bring people together in order to listen and capture their attitudes, experiences or perspectives on a focused topic, or a specific set of objectives… the focus group allows researchers to gain access to issues around a topic, particularly when not much is known about that topic" (p. 1).

A limitation of focus groups was the management of the group itself. One group was self-selected, and their perspective, at times, seemed critical. The other group was leader-selected and provided very positive views of their school leader's critical consciousness development and his/her leadership practices. For example, in one group, we experienced one particular dominant voice which did not allow for all opinions to be shared. We noticed a slight resistance to sharing personal experiences or opinions; this may have been a result of minority thinking or may have been a reflection of gaps in their principal's skills or abilities to lead critical consciousness work. Finally, a limitation may be the groupthink that occurs when being interviewed together and/or the public nature of group interviews.

Observations

During interview sessions, one school leader invited me to attend one 3-hour professional

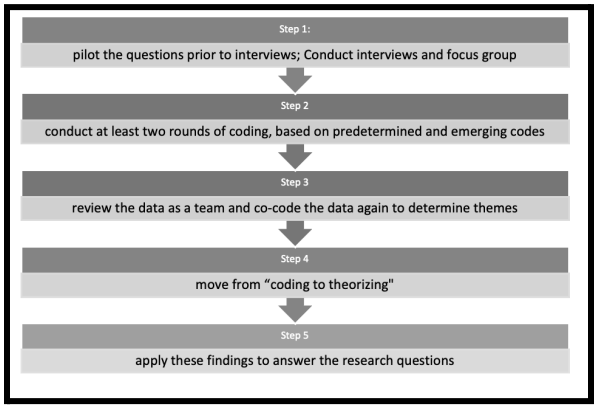
development opportunity on Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategies that was mandated for the school community. To provide a complete understanding of the structures and leadership practices that were implemented by this white leader, this observation was triangulated with a review of other data gathered. I used the observation protocol (Appendix C) to gather the data from the session (Merriam and Tisdale, p. 139).

Data Analysis

Interview responses, focus group responses, one observation, and document data were analyzed in order to understand the perspectives of white school leaders with regards to creating and sustaining critical consciousness in themselves and others. As Saldaña (2013) describes, the process utilized to analyze the data sources is shown in Table 6 below:

Table 6

Data Analysis Steps



(Saldaña, 2013)

To organize the data, I employed a codebook, using Quirkos, with codes specific to white leaders such as *privilege, whiteness, color evasiveness*, and leadership practices such as *race talk, intentionality, family partnerships, professional development for staff,* etc. which emerged from the interviews. In addition, codes such as *student voice, critical agency, staff empowerment,*

provided context for the two contextual frameworks. To strengthen my research findings, I triangulated my data (Merriam and Tisdale, 2016) from the interviews, the focus group, and my observation. As a group, we examined our findings, acknowledged and addressed our positions as investigators, and utilized our notes as a tool to create an audit trail for our study.

Findings

The following research questions drove the investigation of this study: (1) How, if at all, do white school leaders develop critical consciousness in themselves? (2) What leadership practices, if any, do white school leaders employ to engage other educators in critical consciousness?

Development of Critical Consciousness in White School Leaders

The first research question examined how white school leaders developed a sense of critical consciousness. As such, the following section will describe how leaders exhibited the three tenets of critical consciousness: critical analysis/awareness, critical agency, and critical action.

Critical awareness and analysis of race, power, and privilege

Awareness and analysis of race, privilege, and power are significant factors when developing critical consciousness. White school leaders in this study demonstrated three distinct patterns when discussing their awareness of these concepts. Their responses fell into the following categories: an awareness and analysis of race, privilege and power as all-encompassing or impacting all aspects of their lives; recognizing the impact strictly in relation to their professional goals and/or work as an educator; or not believing race, power and privilege impacted either their personal or professional life (color evasiveness). While most of the participants identified a limited awareness and analysis of their whiteness as a contributing

factor to their role in a diverse school community, two specific leaders demonstrated that their awareness was fully woven into all aspects of their lives, personally and professionally. These two leaders explicitly shared that an awareness and analysis of their race was part of every aspect of their lives. In their interviews, these leaders described being engaged in anti-racist experiences before, or in addition to, their positions as school leaders. These included engaging in long-standing group dialogue in their communities, book groups, both in school and in their communities, anti-racist job coaches and/or formal and informal mentors of color; and independent learning about identity. All of these opportunities were reported as assisting them to grow as school leaders as well as human beings. Both demonstrated the individual and collective purpose of awareness of power, privilege, and race while also articulating a clear sense of values and beliefs in their personal and professional lives. One explained that because she is bilingual and has lived abroad, many assume she is part of the BIPOC community. She describes herself as a "cultural and linguistics broker." She recalled a situation at school and shared, "they [colleagues] believe I belong to the minority group, and they say things to me like *your* people- 'how are *your* people?'" The other leader described himself as an "outspoken bystander" and is committed to recognizing how his race impacts his work because his wife identifies as BIPOC, and his children are multiracial and multilingual. He revealed, "I grew up a white male. Once you start actually looking for things, what do you see?...so we've had some really, really hard conversations, and that's a one-off, that's a one-off until it keeps becoming a one-off everywhere, so... I always fall back on the data." These two demonstrated a clear awareness and analysis of how this work is intertwined with all aspects of their lives; whereas most others demonstrated an awareness of the impact of their whiteness only within the context of their professional lives and school communities.

Five of the nine interviewed demonstrated awareness in terms of their professional work to engage in sustained commitment to anti-racist work for themselves and their schools. For example, when asked, “What experiences have you engaged in that focused on the awareness of your own racial identity?” These leaders described being white or their whiteness as a factor having an impact on their work, particularly when working with staff, students, and families who identified as BIPOC. As one school leader explained:

> I've always had an awareness of being white…And as a white person… I still have my privilege…but I learned a lot from it. And I'm glad it happened. And I think that getting called out has to happen. Although it feels awful in the moment, it does help you become aware…that's where I've grown. Because when I've been called out on my biases, and not even recognizing it and that privilege piece too and not having the white fragility.

This school leader detailed the awareness of her race and the privilege that has come from her race as a contributing factor to her professional role as a white school leader in a diverse school community.

In contrast to the majority of those interviewed who exhibited critical awareness and analysis of their race, privilege and power, two of the white school leaders interviewed demonstrated color evasiveness and shielded their racial identity when responding to questions that specifically asked about their racial identities. Doing so demonstrated their belief that as white leaders, their race does not have an impact on their leadership decisions or relationships. For example, one of the two white school leaders responded to a question that specifically asked about their racial identity’s impact without including race. The leader claimed, “My goal is always to look at people for, at their core, who they are, right. And so that's my goal;” or “It’s not who you are, it’s what you are, right? It’s not your color, or your race, or your experience. It’s

really like, how do you treat people and how do you expect to be treated…" Here, their color evasiveness was evident.

Critical Agency: Empowering others

One theme that emerged from the data was the leader's intentional empowerment of staff to speak up and get involved to make change. School leaders shared their efforts to question and challenge systems and structures that maintain current inequitable power structures. One example was ensuring various staff voices are valued, respected, and celebrated. As one school leader stated, "We're not going to use people as like, as the token XYZ. But you also want their voice to be heard. Yeah. I try to provide opportunities for you know, whether it be leadership roles, whether it be a voice on a committee." This trend was further validated when teachers reported the willingness of their leaders to discuss social justice issues with which their school communities are dealing. One teacher described her feelings of empowerment in her school setting: "I think it's a conscious choice on [school leader]'s part that then trickles down to everyone else. Our staff very much takes on issues and problem solves together. We figure out what to do next...She helps us in these situations instead of complaining…you know, everybody can bring things up." Furthermore, both focus groups detailed a concerted effort to alter their curricular materials and resources to better reflect their student population. Both groups reported that they often will take on issues and problem-solving together. One group described revamping their entire curriculum to include novels, texts, and units about social justice and change makers.

Although both groups described feeling empowered to make intentional alterations to their curriculum to better represent, support, and celebrate their students and communities, one teacher did report that she felt she could not go directly to her school leader to question or offer change efforts. It is possible that not all staff feel empowered, and a future study may wish to

explore factors that impact teachers' sense of efficacy and voice with regard to issues of race.

Appreciation for the opportunity to critically self-reflect

One tenet of critical consciousness development is critical analysis or the opportunity to reflect and analyze oneself and others. One unexpected finding was the acknowledgment that the interview process was a tool and opportunity for self-reflection and introspection. All participants shared that they were thankful for the time and opportunity to meet with another educator, have the chance to critically think about their work, and reflect on their efforts. In most interviews, at least five of the educators paused after a question and responded in ways that suggested humility and a desire to grow and learn more. For example, one leader stated, “that is a really great question…I should probably look into that more” and another exclaimed, “wow, you are really making me think now…that is something I should be doing!” In addition to reflecting, almost all interviewees demonstrated physical and emotional reactions to the process. A few cried and apologized for becoming emotional; in one focus group they hugged one another, and all provided verbal expressions of gratitude to the interview team. This display of humility and a desire to learn was evident in every interview setting and demonstrated a notable reaction to the process of self-reflection.

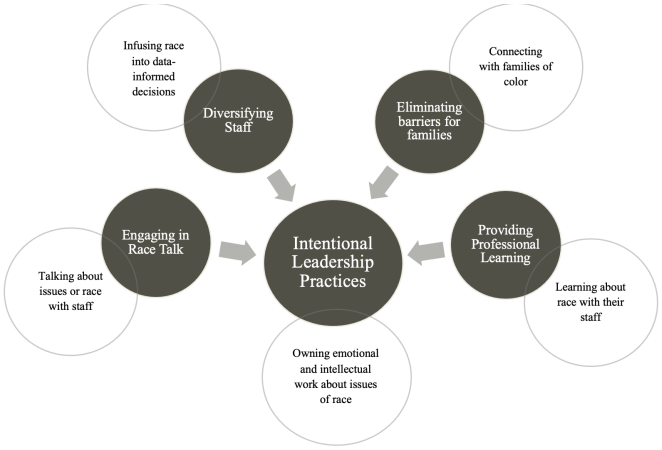
Leadership Practices of White School Leaders: Critical Action

The second research question examined the leadership practices that white school leaders employ to engage other educators in critical consciousness. As such, the following section will describe the common leadership practices that principals and their faculty/staff members identified.

In addition to providing relevant professional development opportunities both in school settings and district-wide, school leaders made several leadership decisions to engage their

faculty and staff in critical consciousness that aligns with Theoharis & Haddix's findings (2011). Figure 5 is a visual representation of the connection between prior research and the findings from this study. The shaded circles represent the intentional leadership practices that white leaders employed based on this study's findings; the transparent circles represent specific leadership decisions leaders employ from prior research.

Figure 5



Note: A graphic representation of these intentional leadership practices and its alignment with previous research findings from Theoharis and Haddix.

Intentionality

When asked about specific leadership practices leveraged by white school leaders, the term *intentional,* or deliberate, was frequently stated to describe the white school leaders' practice. The leaders' intentionality not only was applied to professional learning experiences, race talk, and staff empowerment, but also to examples such as diversifying staff and curricular changes.

Leading the critical conversation on Race (i.e.: race talk). From the interviews conducted, two school leaders stood out as intentionally offering an opportunity for race talk. As a result, during this study I conducted two focus groups with teachers from those two school leaders'

sites. During these focus group opportunities, teachers detailed that their white school leaders provided opportunities to discuss race and the impact of race on teaching and learning in their respective school communities. One teacher explained, “She [the school leader] has been doing this work for many years, talking about their whiteness...I give the district and my principal credit for making an effort to talk about race and its impact…the focus was on white privilege.” This explanation details that race talk had been included as formal training across the district. Moreover, in both settings teachers gave the school leaders credit for securing professional development with experts in the field. One school was engaging in the second year of a three-year study of Culturally Responsive Teaching, and the other had been engaged in various opportunities including studying active anti-racist texts, inviting various speakers to lead conversions on race with the staff, and securing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion coaches for the school leaders.

Educators in both schools not only described being empowered to discuss race and identity, but also commented on professional learning opportunities that allowed them to have further conversions on race. One shared, “We think about our own identities and how our identities affect the kids...we have affinity groups in the district too. Staff were empowered to start talking about race outside of these PD sessions because some people are very passionate and have a lot of background and wanted to lead a group and learn more.” This teacher explained that additional, optional opportunities for race talk existed in his school setting; his specific school leader encouraged him and his colleagues to continue this work in a teacher-led monthly setting. He shared: “...I feel like she [principal] is very much a learner alongside us.” Educator agency in continuing “race talk” was evident in both school settings and added to the formal training the district and school offered.

Despite these efforts to discuss race in voluntary and involuntary settings, some teachers reported that these efforts may have fallen short. One teacher exclaimed, “I think it's just not internalized for a lot of people…it's owned by a very small group of people. It's either people who want to be engaged or it’s people who are checking off the box.” In addition, although their leaders were seen as actively engaged in learning about race, less than half of the teachers felt when issues with a staff of color occurred or a perceived social injustice happened, their leaders did not consistently respond appropriately. For example, one teacher shared that when they brought a problem with a staff member of color to their administrator, the reaction they received was defensive. For a few particular educators, leaders’ efforts have not yet translated into meaningful, internalized actions in every setting.

Providing professional learning opportunities. During the interviews, white school leaders openly shared that one of the ways in which they engaged in critical action was through offering professional development opportunities or encouraging voluntary, interest-based collaboration like building-based equity teams. School leaders acknowledged that offering and supporting professional development opportunities for their staff to engage in deconstructing and reconstructing social/cultural knowledge together occurred.

All school leaders interviewed intentionally provided space and opportunity for the development of others’ awareness of race, power, and privilege. The interviews revealed that school leaders have shared investment in two opportunities to learn and grow: 1. engaging in mandated school leader professional development opportunities from the district; and 2. designing and participating in school-based learning opportunities alongside their school colleagues. Some principals were leading their schools in culturally responsive professional development, while others shared that they were invested in active anti-racism work but did not

dedicate specific professional learning time to this topic this school year. Teachers in both focus groups reported that although some schools offered professional learning opportunities in culturally responsive practices, this is not consistent or mandated for all.

All interviewees described supplemental opportunities, such as school-based equity teams or the Black Student Union, for those staff and students who want more engagement. In each of the schools where we interviewed leaders, we learned about these efforts and the equity team formation where any member of the faculty and staff may come and join in conversations or learn more about race, power, privilege, and inequities. As one teacher reported, "unfortunately, these equity conversations, they're only voluntary. I guess it should be mandatory because some people would really need to hear and be in these conversations…education of self is completely voluntary." This teacher validated that the district has attempted to empower them to take ownership of their learning, yet the teachers openly critiqued the district-led options stating that many teachers engaged because they were "checking off the box" or that the inconsistencies existed because "other schools have not even started…" School leaders shared that in addition to fostering an environment where the equity teams could flourish, these leaders independently and systemically invested their building-level professional development time and resources to similar adult learning opportunities. Some of these included partnering with outside consultants and equity coaches to lead their staff in culturally relevant learning experiences to enhance agency and engagement.

In these various school settings, most (two-thirds) of the school leaders shared that although they often led the programming and empowered others to do so, they demonstrated hesitancy in leading this work. They preferred to engage as participants alongside their peers and colleagues because they did not feel adequately prepared or expert. Participants reported that

these conversations were critical to offer and empower others to offer, and yet they claimed that the work was too important, and they felt ill equipped themselves. One school leader articulated why she, and possibly her peers, were not always leading this work: “I have not led discussions because I, myself, feel like I'm still a learner. Despite this, though, I have provided professional development last year that will continue this year…” In short, this leader reported that she did not feel qualified to lead these conversations, yet the schools were providing optional, additional opportunities to those who wanted to be empowered. Ultimately, some white leaders still demonstrated a color-evasive perspective which has an implication to preparation courses. Due to the critical need to dismantle inequities in education, leaders must be prepared to guide this work; this may not be is not possible for those who have a race-evasive perspective. As a result, all candidates for leadership positions should be required to engage in coursework on anti-racism in education and should be required to maintain professional growth and learning on this topic.

Finally, three school leaders reported that the level of critical analysis, critical agency, and critical engagement depended on individual personal investment. During the focus groups, teachers shared the same frustration. One explained: “I give the district credit for making an effort, but it’s owned by a very small group of people.” Consequently, the long-term effectiveness of professional development and interest-based collaboration as a way to develop critical agency is still to be determined and due to the voluntary nature of these professional learning opportunities, leaders achieved inconsistent results. In short, critical consciousness’ development of staff relied heavily on their individual commitment to the work.

Diversifying Staff. In one school the school leader and respective focus group highlighted the intentional efforts the school had invested into diversifying its faculty and staff. A teacher shared: “We are seeing more...our principal has made a conscious effort to hire people who are

more representative…to make sure our staff is better, is a mirror of our students." He further stated, however, "Whether they stay or not, that's necessarily out of his control." In another interview, another leader detailed: "I make a very concerted effort to hire more people of color so I interview everyone I find." This leader further explained that beyond scanning the resumes of those who have applied, his efforts have included intentionally recruiting and seeking out others who may not have even known to apply. From the interviews, this intentional effort to hire more staff of color and to actively recruit beyond the traditional application system seems to be a trend in the district among school leaders. And, although there have been intentional efforts made by most of the school leaders who discussed hiring efforts, they also reinforced that these efforts have fallen short in terms of retention, for many staff of color in leadership or teaching positions have left the district. As one staff person mentioned: "there's an effort to try to diversify his staff. But there's not been that retention piece around supporting, understanding, and changing the culture to be supportive of the people you are bringing in. We've had amazing teachers leave, like within a year or two." So, hiring efforts have been made and noticed by the school community; yet further study is needed to determine whether those efforts have rendered retention of staff of color.

Eliminating barriers for families. Another critical action that had become evident was the advocacy needed in order to address the power discrepancy for certain families in the school district. At least six school leaders described the impact that eliminating barriers set up by the school system, leveraging positive relationships with their families, and advocating for their needs, had on the success of their students. Although some of the adult learning opportunities had been deemed voluntary, it was clear that family support and advocacy against current systems that disadvantage certain families was non-negotiable. As one educator shared, "The

parent piece that comes down from [names of school leaders], that's mandatory. You must figure out a way to reach out to parents and use whatever you need, a translator, etc." Another teacher added, "...education of self is completely voluntary. The engagement around equity for families is much stronger. And that has a mandatory component." It was clear from the interviews and the focus groups that the district made intentional efforts to include, empower, and advocate for families. Participants described intentional efforts such as: traveling to families' homes for meetings rather than at the schoolhouse; altering student/family conferences to ensure families know the reason for this event; ensuring that language is never a barrier for any meeting or phone call; changing communication efforts (online, on paper, in emails); removing ineffective surveys - ones that only certain populations traditionally completed; and striving to ensure that the voices of all families are heard, considered, and welcomed, especially those who are not representatives of the dominant culture, race, or socioeconomic status. Consequently, recognizing the power structures, current policies and practices that uphold systemic barriers, and inequities while also engaging in critical action such as advocating for families and creating access and opportunity were priorities for white school leaders and their staff.

Discussion

Findings from this study revealed several themes. In response to the first research question, those leaders in the study who developed critical consciousness demonstrated awareness and analysis of race, power, and privilege; focused energy on staff agency through PD opportunities; and demonstrated an appreciation for self-reflection. In response to the second research question, several white school leaders used various intentional leadership practices to engage in, and foster the development of, critical consciousness in other educators. The following sections discuss the potential implications that these findings may have for white

school leaders who view critical consciousness as a means to disrupt inequities.

Establish a Culture of Critical Analysis

More recently, a great deal of research has been conducted on culturally responsive and anti-racist teaching and learning for schools (Swanson and Welton, 2019), yet former research showed that a gap persisted in regards to the development and implementation of critical consciousness in white educators in order to transform their school communities (Shields, 2011, 2016; Brown, 2004, Ladson-Billings, 2014). White educators traditionally have lacked cultural awareness, including awareness or analysis of their own race, power and privilege, or critical understanding of the oppressive systems in which they have power; thereby further contributing to the disparities between students of color and that of their white peers (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Fullan, 2003; Leithwood, 2010).

As found in this research, most of the white leaders exhibited identity awareness and analysis, appreciated self-reflection opportunities, empowered others, and implemented practices that will, in time, lead to systemic change. These white leaders shared anecdotes of their experiences and/or were exposed through multiple professional development offerings, both voluntary and involuntary. Further, providing an opportunity for educators to engage in self-reflection and analysis of their identity, and the subsequent impact on their decisions and/or relationships, has been a powerful tool that leaders could and should employ more frequently in order to continue to recognize inequities, transform their school settings, and become critically conscious educators (Brown, 2004, Brown et al., 2011; Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

Although most of the participants employed these practices to increase educators' critical consciousness, two demonstrated race-evasive behavior. As Helms points out in her White Racial

Identity Model, this avoidance of racial identification could be a demonstration of early stages of racial identity development of white people (Helms, 1992), whereas their BIPOC colleagues have not been afforded the opportunity to avoid race in their identity development. This race-evasive behavior may directly contribute to the inequitable structures and systems that impact students, staff, and families; however, exploration of this may be a topic for future studies.

In addition to awareness and analysis, participants in this study revealed the need and appreciation for critical reflective opportunities. Most, if not all, shared an understanding that this interview process, in and of itself, provided a time and place to think and reflect critically on personal and professional learning experiences as anti-racist educators. All participants longed for more opportunities to come together, cognitively awaken (uncover and identify assumptions), emotionally engage, and create intentions to take action (Watts et al., 2011). As found in research, the opportunity to engage in critical reflection is "a central component to critical consciousness development" and "people with greater levels of critical reflection make more structural attributions for social problems and group disparities" (Watts et al., 2011). Consequently, educators in this study are seeking more formal opportunities from their leaders to question currently accepted structures, practices, or systems and to recognize and realize that they may be actively contributing to the disparities that exist.

Empower Others: Critical Agency

During the study, participants expressed an appreciation for and desire to engage in strategies to effect change. Both school leaders and focus groups shared that they have been provided opportunities to recognize inequities, transform their school communities, and stop cycles of oppression by: engaging in race talk formally and informally; restructuring hiring

practices to attract more diverse candidates; participating in professional development; and partnering with historically marginalized families. The effectiveness of staff empowerment varied based on the culture of the school community and the support of the school leader. In short, school culture and relationships mattered. For example, a few leaders reported that empowering staff may be more nuanced than just providing space for open and honest dialogue; they longed for defined structures that provide opportunities for staff to "speak up and speak out" or impact change in meaningful ways.

Enhance Leadership Practices: Critical Action

This study reviewed several leadership actions that white leaders employed to foster critical consciousness among themselves and others. First, leaders offered multiple opportunities to become critically aware of and to analyze the impact of their personal identities within their school communities. As Khalifa et al. (2013) and Theoharis & Haddix (2011) found in their studies, when leaders engage in critical analysis, agency, and action, they combat color-evasive decision-making, deficit thinking, or even unintentionally reinforcing stereotypes that may promote inequitable results. One such example that embedded these practices was the three-year commitment to Culturally Relevant Responsive Teaching professional development at one of the schools. This formal training engaged the entire faculty and staff, but it was unclear whether similar training was present across the district. Those outliers who shared color-evasive responses did not deny that the district provided formal professional learning opportunities that explored their race and identities. Rather these school leaders chose not to share any personal or informal experiences that recognized race or their whiteness as a factor in their school setting.

Secondly, leaders discussed the importance of intentional hiring practices to diversify their staff. As research shows, hiring educators of color who reflect students and the larger

community is paramount, and is especially beneficial to students of color (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Furthermore, Wells (2020) found that in contrast to white educators, teachers of color hold their students of color to higher expectations and even recommend students of color to gifted programs at much higher rates than their white counterparts. Hiring educators of color - leaders and teachers in addition to paraprofessionals - will undoubtedly lead to a positive and affirming impact on students, staff, and families of color.

Although the findings demonstrated that white leaders implement intentional leadership actions like hiring practices focused on diversifying for BIPOC educators, developing strategies for retaining these educators remains an area of growth. Retention of BIPOC staff is essential to fostering the school climate and culture the leaders are striving to create. Further research may provide guidance on relevant and effective efforts for retaining these invaluable hires.

Finally, this study found that eliminating barriers in order to support and empower family and community partnerships matter. As Ishimaru (2019) found in her study to improve family connection to education, expanding the conception of *family involvement* to *family empowerment* moved parents into roles as "powerful actors in equity-based school change" (p. 353). She noted that rather than acting in a passive role, caregivers who *engaged* designated parents as citizens, or change agents, can transform their school settings (p. 353). Comparably participants in this study referred to parent empowerment and advocacy as non-negotiable expectations of an educator in the district. Many reported various unconventional ways they connected with families including advocating or dedicating time to assist families to champion for their particular needs. In their responses, these educators highlighted that despite the many efforts of the district, structures and systems still exist that maintain imbalances that certain, non-dominant families experience. In short, school leaders and educators are committed to enhancing family

partnerships and finding creative solutions for those families who may need more support and/or advocacy. Future research is needed to identify the most impactful and effective strategies to promote family empowerment.

Limitations

Studying white leaders provided a valuable in-depth perspective on the development and impact of critical consciousness. Although the study produced relevant findings, these may not be generalizable to other leaders or different settings due to the small sample size and specific context of a single suburban district. The study has also been impacted by the researcher's positionality, years of service, gender, and race, potentially influencing the results. Other unique factors such as conducting this study during a global pandemic and following long-term school closures may also have impacted the findings.

Finally, another variable that should be weighed in is the nature of the snowball interview process. Eight of the nine school leaders interviewed were recommended by the superintendent or their peers as leaders dedicated to critical consciousness, and as a result, the experiences and backgrounds of these white leaders may not be representative of white leaders in the field of education as a whole. As participants who volunteered their participation may have had a specific interest in the topic and may not have been reflective of the staff as a whole, it is possible that selection bias might have influenced the findings. In contrast, school leaders may have chosen participants due to their perceived commitment to equity work or due to their personal relationships. Future studies involving a larger number of white leaders, across diverse community settings, may provide further insight into whether or not these findings are replicable under different conditions. In addition, it would be interesting to explore whether the same tenets of critical consciousness are present when involving a larger number of white leaders across

diverse community settings.

Conclusion

This study examined how white school leaders develop critical consciousness in themselves and how they lead critical consciousness development in others. Findings provided insight into the practices with which white school leaders, as transformative leaders, engaged. In essence, critical consciousness provided a framework for white educators to engage in learning of self, introspection and agency, and action related to issues of racism in schools. Critical consciousness may not be widely implemented in school systems as of yet, so the three core tenets of critical analysis, social agency, and critical action may easily be applied to other school settings. These research findings may inform future pre-professional as well as professional development with white leaders and contribute to the body of research that exists on the development of critical consciousness and its implementation as a lever to high-quality access and opportunity for historically underserved, marginalized students.

CHAPTER FOUR[4]

Discussion

This team dissertation explored district and school-level leadership and its connection to Critical Consciousness. Our overarching research question was: How, if at all, do educational leaders foster and cultivate the development of critical consciousness in schools? Specifically, we sought to undertake a multi-faceted examination of critical consciousness at multiple levels of leadership. As such, we researched leadership and critical consciousness issues for superintendents (Saba-Maguire, 2022), district leaders (Daly & Lugira White, 2022), school-based leaders (Bibbo & Lugira White, 2022), educators (Bibbo, Daly, Lugira White, Walker, 2022), and students (Walker, 2022). Our study also addressed how critical consciousness interfaced with racial difference with a focus on both educators of color and white educators confronting injustice.

The primary focus of our study was one school district in Massachusetts that has been working in various ways toward critical consciousness and racial justice. Chapter Four begins with discussing the district's strengths toward working with the district leaders and school leaders to develop two of the tenets of critical consciousness, critical analysis and agency. Next, we will examine the final tenet of critical consciousness: critical action and consider how the district might further expand its efforts to enact this. In addition, we looked at how engineering and leveraging networks provided powerful opportunities for professional development and deeper understandings of the tenets of critical consciousness and the district's role in becoming an anti-racist organization. We will then discuss how leaders' positionality related to race influenced

[4] The authors listed below collaboratively wrote this chapter which reflects the team approach of this project. Authors include: Tamatha L. Bibbo, Ceronne B. Daly, Pauline Lugira White, June Saba-Maguire, and Geoffrey Walker

their identity in their school communities and will further examine how each tenet intersects to construct an organizational climate and culture committed to disrupting the inequitable systems and structures harming BIPOC students. We conclude this chapter by offering policy, practice, and research implications and recommendations for the district and the field of education.

Critical Analysis & Agency through Self-development

In our study of the Freetown* School System, we found that leaders, at both the district and school levels, have engaged in critical awareness and critical reflection as an act of personal growth. In order to accomplish this, they utilize networks, coaches, feedback, and effective professional development (individually and collectively). We discuss each in turn below along with our recommendations for implementation.

Expand Networks for District and School Leaders

Our collective studies revealed that regardless of positionality, race, or gender, having intentional networks of support is crucial to moving district and school leaders toward confronting institutionalized inequities. Our analyses revealed that developing the tenets of critical consciousness is not work that can be undertaken alone. For this reason, we assert that creating opportunities via networks, both informal and formal, can provide a foundation for this needed support. We further found that joining with other leaders who share similar beliefs and commitments offered the opportunity to cultivate racial equity commitments. Furthermore, networks that ground their work with critical consciousness in mind can have a broad impact on leadership development.

We uncovered that networks can take many forms and that frequently the composition and focus of a network dictates its impact. Literature purports that the characteristics of networks are directly impacted by those who construct them, who participate, and their objective (Paulsen

et al., 2016, p. 211); consequently, how and why networks form directly impact their ultimate purpose. Scholars have asserted the need to clarify a network's purpose otherwise the work of the network can be trivial (deLima, 2010). Accordingly, our research revealed that networks, for example, the Urban Superintendents' Network (USN), had a clear purpose and focus, and the work of this network aligned well with the tenets of critical consciousness and supported Superintendents in leading equity work.

We suggest that the intentional use of the essential language of consciousness might further assist superintendents with recognizing and challenging inequitable systems and practices in education across entire school systems. Research has demonstrated that having clear goals increases the likelihood for collaboration and new learning can occur (Leithwood & Azah, 2015). As a result of new learning, superintendents have the power to take their learning back to the district and influence other school leaders. Providing district and school leaders with the opportunities to engage in networks will only strengthen the work of equity within school districts and across the state, for networks provide the support system often needed to make equity a priority and an urgent focus.

Formal networks can serve as a springboard for other supports that will lead to critical consciousness development. For example, in the Freetown School District, because of network participation, the superintendent learned about equity based coaching opportunities. Understanding the value of this professional learning and networking, the superintendent was able to leverage this knowledge within the district and offer the same opportunity for coaching to other school and district leaders within the school community. Notably, the superintendent became aware of this support structure because of network participation. Having a forum for

information dissemination led to extending and furthering opportunities for others to seek self-development.

Not only do formal networks have an impact on a leader's ability to push forth an anti-racist focus, but we also found that informal networks emerge due to a desire and need to collaborate. The strength of informal networks should not be overlooked. In many ways, these informal connections provide the ongoing support that superintendents, district, and school leaders need to sustain them through the daily challenges of equity work. Therefore, in addition to establishing formal networks within their school districts that have a clear focus on equity, superintendents must also value the impact and power of informal networks between and among their school leaders. By designing intentional opportunities for collective learning and collaboration focused on developing critical consciousness, leaders inherently will build trust and relationships with colleagues that they can lean on when confronted with conflict. Through these connections, leaders can establish informal networks within their district that support their ability to lead for equity.

Implications/ Recommendations- Critical Consciousness Development by Expanding Networks. Overall, our study revealed that interpersonal relationships and connections among people dramatically influenced their confidence, focus and ability to engage in the challenging work of anti-racist leadership. Therefore, policies must be drafted and enacted with the specific purpose of ensuring that district and school leaders have the time and space to delve deeply into issues of systemic and structural racism. Building networks with this focus is one way to strengthen the commitment to this work. Additionally, state and district-level policymakers must consider embedding this work into teacher and leader preparation programs. Becoming an anti-racist educational organization cannot be left to chance and instead must be intentionally

designed, with an expectation that all district and school leaders participate in this work. At the same time, recognizing that support systems via formal networks offer a powerful way to develop this systematic understanding is necessary.

State and district level practices can serve to construct effective networks. Thus, those who plan agendas and the focus of networks must have a firm understanding of what being antiracist means. Furthermore, social justice and equity work cannot be achieved through “one and done” professional development. Accordingly, networks offer ongoing opportunities to develop relationships, create trust, establish rapport, and build ties that support the meaningful advancement of antiracist work.

Our study has demonstrated that networks have a positive and lasting impact on participants. There is a need to explore further how a district can become a racially just organization that develops district and school leaders' critical consciousness through purposefully constructed networks. Future research should investigate how network participation might directly strengthen a superintendent's commitment to this work and strengthen the will and skill of other leaders in school districts.

Expand Diversity Coaches focused on Anti-Racism for Leaders

Having a coach who has demonstrated expertise and a deep understanding of equity work is crucial to success. Scholars agree that individual coaching, as opposed to workshops and seminars, proves most effective in promoting adult educator growth (Knight, 2005). It was clear that the district and school-level leaders found great value in working with diversity coaches to help them to understand more confidently, and thereby, effectively navigate the work. In response to the nation’s racial reckoning, coaches often function as a thought partner and can guide district and school leaders grappling with rapidly evolving situations. Moreover, because

coaches are experts in this work, they can act as powerful allies when leaders confront the inevitable pushback present in this work (Knight, 2005). A potential added benefit is that the coaching relationship can provide a source of guidance and assistance that may last far beyond the formal association. For example, a number of white school leaders shared that having a BIPOC coach, secured through partnerships with local universities and outside organizations, provided them the necessary mentoring in order to engage in critical conversations about race and systemic inequities. Estrella-Henderson and Jessop (2015) conducted a research study that focused on the impact of coaching for school and district leaders who were working to eliminate racial achievement gaps between students. In their study, they showed that school and district leaders benefited greatly from the specific and individualized support of a professional coach and were motivated to set and achieve goals, as well as discuss how the results contribute to the success of all students.

Similarly, the white leaders we interviewed also referenced relying on their professional and personal coach. This was particularly important as they navigated the challenges that came as school leaders dedicated to anti-racism and anti-racist practices including recruiting and retaining BIPOC staff, leading and fostering professional development, gathering feedback from school community members who identify as marginalized, and making change.

Implications/ Recommendations- Critical Consciousness Development by Expanding Coaches for All Leaders. Coaches have had a meaningful impact on those leaders who have maintained this support system and invaluable resource. More formalized coaches are needed in the Freedom School System for all leaders, with a purposeful structure that allows for feedback and input of particular individuals. Research on the benefits of mentors and professional coaches for all school leaders, particularly white school leaders, may prove prudent. Furthermore, a need

exists for coordination and baseline understanding of the coaches' roles and responsibilities, alignment K-12 among the coaches' expectations, and expertise in mentoring leaders, particularly those white leaders who need more support, in order to become an active anti-racist organization. Furthermore, the role of race and coaching connections may impact the degree to which the relationships are successful. Therefore, future research should consider how race and coaching relationships intersect.

Foster Affinity Groups for BIPOC Staff

While many BIPOC staff valued the district's commitment to creating affinity groups, they had varying experiences across the district. The district's BIPOC staff reflect the rich intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and language; however, the current affinity groups are not as representative. Even though the district sanctions affinity groups, they are organized and facilitated by the participants, therefore the momentum and longevity of the groups vary depending on the availability of the "participant" facilitator. Leaders' professional networks require thoughtful, facilitated structures that allow leaders to be fully immersed in the experience. BIPOC staff also need to be only participants in order for them to take full advantage of the learning space.

Implications/ Recommendations- Critical Consciousness Development by Fostering Affinity Groups. As we affirm the value of networks and coaches for the development and sustenance of equity-focused work for superintendent, district and school leader affinity groups, leaders need to champion the development of a network structure for BIPOC affinity groups. BIPOC affinity groups need to be a combination of formal and informal networks both focused on professional learning and on personal healing. To that end, leaders need to allocate resources to convene multiple facilitated affinity groups across the district, assuring the opportunity for

consistent development of learning and healing spaces available for all BIPOC staff. In addition, BIPOC affinity groups should also be a formal part of new teacher induction programs, therefore institutionalizing the network and better supporting retention of BIPOC educators.

Create opportunities for leaders to receive critical feedback

Despite the above-mentioned support systems, the absence of agency for some leaders was a theme we uncovered. In most of our studies, agency or staff empowerment was limited to engagement in, or opportunities for, feedback. For example, district and school leaders could not provide explicit examples of educator, student, or family empowerment that shifted the power structures that have impacted historically marginalized communities of learners. Furthermore, despite interview questions that focused on agency as one of the main critical consciousness' components, responses were limited or nonexistent. Additionally, we found a disparity between what white leaders and BIPOC educators viewed as agency. Often white leaders shared that they provided staff "agency" by encouraging them to organize or lead anti-racist professional development or lead race talk; whereas, the BIPOC educators did not view this as agency, but rather as tokenizing or another example of representation. As a result, across our studies we found the lack of agency, or empowerment, as a theme.

Implications/ Recommendations- Critical Consciousness Development by Offering Opportunities for Feedback. Prior research has shown how social justice efforts by leaders can go wrong without active engagement and/or listening to the voices and perspectives of groups who have been traditionally marginalized by school systems, such as: people who identify as BIPOC, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+, people experiencing poverty or homelessness, students, and people with limited English proficiency (Radd & Grosland, 2018). The people who have, or are experiencing marginalization in and by the system, can provide valuable insight into

how to rectify some of these fundamental problems. Leaders should be strategic in ensuring that the voices of peoples who have experienced or are experiencing oppression from the system are present in decision and policy making. Listening to these perspectives will support leaders' abilities to analyze systems of oppression within districts and schools. Specifically, BIPOC staff insist on Leaders creating opportunities for voices to be heard, coupled with the power to influence decision making and action.

Require leaders to participate in effective leadership professional development

Leadership professional development is a key component in the effectiveness of a school district. District and school leaders, particularly the superintendent, cast the vision for district priorities, often made public through professional development offerings. Leaders facilitate the implementation of districtwide practices through these adult learning opportunities and staff accountability. The role of district leaders is critically important; therefore, the work of leadership professional development should be aligned with district priorities while simultaneously differentiated to meet the individual needs of diverse leaders. Understanding the experiences and needs of leaders creates an opportunity for strategic and intentional learning opportunities. This type of learning approach is not typical throughout the field of education. The tenets of critical consciousness provide a mechanism for a superintendent to engage district and school leaders in professional development that attends to diverse learning needs.

Scholars such as Swanson & Welton (2019) and Seider & Graves (2020) recognize that critical consciousness must occur at both a personal and institutional level. As the findings demonstrated, those white school leaders who had been engaged in their own identity journey, in conjunction with professional development offered in the district, demonstrated critical consciousness including critical analysis, agency, and action. Although school leaders detailed a

focus first on individual identity formation through critical analysis, they also understood that, as district and school leaders- most of them white- have positions of power and privilege, and therefore must provide transformative experiences for educators in their schools through promoting the agency of others and via specific leadership actions. At the district level, through engaging as participants in professional learning opportunities, leaders must examine and dismantle systems that uphold and reinforce racist structures and policies; similarly, at the school level, leaders are charged with confronting and changing inequitable practices that impact their staff, students, and families. As Swanson & Welton (2019) found "leaders must encourage their staff, both White and people of color, to take risks and be willing to lean in and engage in racial dialogue that is uncomfortable" (p. 736). Self-awareness and social analysis, core tenets of critical consciousness, required educators to commit to both personal and institutional learning experiences and opportunities.

Critical Action for Social Justice Leadership

A final tenet of Critical Consciousness is critical action, or the engagement in political or social activities, that disrupt inequalities (Diemer et al, 2016; Jemal, 2017; Seider & Graves, 2020). For leaders to be committed to social justice leadership, they are compelled to lead and take action steps towards more equitable outcomes for students. In our studies, we found that district and school leaders engaged in a number of leadership practices and critical actions that work towards a student experience that is equitable, transformative, and "a gateway to academic motivation and achievement for marginalized students" (El-Amin et al., 2017). These actions included, but were not limited to: amplifying and elevating voices of marginalized peoples; leading professional learning opportunities for faculty and staff; creating opportunities for

conversations on race; facilitating instructional leadership for critical consciousness; and diversifying their staff.

Leaders amplify and validate the voice and experiences of historically marginalized peoples

Understanding the voices of stakeholders across the district is critical in order to honor diverse experiences. The amplification of educator and student voice can bring clarity and direction to the work of becoming an antiracist in practice. Educators across the district have engaged in critical analysis, leading to critical actions that empower students. By validating voices that may regularly go unheard, those experiences create the conditions for a more unified district. District and school leaders have the opportunity to reflect on the implementation of professional development and practices that have been polarizing versus inclusive. Through the collection of data, the different types of experiences of BIPOC leaders and educators vary from those of white leaders and educators. The amplification of diverse voices builds awareness and understanding where these elements have not been considered. Leaders have the influence to create inclusive dynamics to support awareness and reflection. One finding that was common to some individual studies was that educational leaders who foster critical consciousness engage in the political process of schools and districts. One way is through engagement with and amplifying the voices of peoples who have been historically marginalized by schools and school districts. For example, it was found that one strategy school leaders used to engage in a critical consciousness was to engage with students in conversations about injustices within the schools and how to rectify them. School leaders met with students regularly to hear about their experiences and ideas on how to create a more just and equitable school community. The superintendent of this district also engaged directly with students in an effort to hear their perspectives on how to become a more equitable district.

Similarly, it was found that leaders needed to engage more deeply with educators of color in order to better understand how the district, at times, marginalized their voices and perspectives. Educators of color mentioned that while some school and district initiatives around increasing equity were well-intentioned, these initiatives fell short and could have been more effective if they had included the voices of educators of color. The district's core values center on respecting the diversity of thoughts and engaging in antiracist advocacy. Representation matters at all levels of the organization, especially when and where decisions are made. BIPOC representation should be considered essential in all decision-making processes such as: budgeting, hiring, and participating in family engagement, student discipline, and student support services teams. Leaders need to advocate for representation, thereby acknowledging the value that the diversity of perspectives BIPOC staff offer. Most notably to lead an anti-racist organization, one must create the conditions for all staff to feel valued in the organization.

Leaders who understand that race, ethnicity, and linguistic diversity coupled with professional training and their lived experiences makes BIPOC staff unequivocally valuable are then able to advocate for BIPOC representation throughout the organization.

Implications/ Recommendations- Critical Consciousness Development by Amplifying Voices. Overall, participants in our studies longed for more consistent, ongoing, meaningful opportunities for staff and students to be empowered. Seider and Graves (2020) claim that, "feelings of political agency represent a key dimension of critical consciousness that allows individuals to transform their ability to analyze oppressive social forces into meaningful social action challenging these forces" (p. 64). Participants expressed an appreciation for how they felt empowered to be involved in decision making and wanted more consistent, ongoing opportunities for themselves and their students. Findings suggest that agency is a critical

component of promoting school-wide change; therefore, district and school leaders should actively seek ways to empower staff and student voice, particularly those who have been defined as marginalized, and provide more opportunities for leading this work in order to address systemic biases. Future research on ways to generalize these findings in order to create more equitable systems may prove worthwhile. Additionally, research should further explore the implications for offering staff opportunities to provide feedback to determine its impact on increasing staff agency and efficacy.

While relationship building with a variety of stakeholders, and in particular those from traditionally marginalized communities, was found to be important, it was also found that leaders needed to be able to navigate the tumultuous political environment of education. Superintendents need to have the fortitude and ongoing support to navigate difficult conversations with board and community members. We suggest that to do this effectively, a superintendent needs internal and external systems of support. Furthermore, this support must be focused and intentional. The political landscape that superintendents navigate is often perilous. It is a position, much like an elected official, accountable to the public. Superintendents must be able to hear the diverse opinions and perspectives of the community and at the same time have the courage to challenge inequities often resisted by the most vocal, empowered members of a community.

Similarly, this study found that at times school leaders need to navigate parents and community members are on different ends of the political spectrum. For example, on January 7th, the day after the insurrection at the Capitol, leaders needed to listen to community members who were advocating for different approaches to communicating with students. All of this work requires leaders to have political acumen to be able to lead in ways that engage in the practice of critical consciousness.

Implications/ Recommendations- Critical Consciousness Development by Developing Political Acumen. It is difficult for educational leaders to lead for critical consciousness in schools and institutions that continue to engage in practices and traditions that are racist, classist, homophobic, and unjust. These challenges have increased in the last several years in some communities with the rise of far-right activists, an example of which are the attacks on the teaching of Critical Race Theory in schools. Opposing and changing oppressive practices not only requires the will and courage of educational leaders, but also the political skill and acumen to be able to navigate districts and schools as complex political organizations (Ryan & Higginbottom, 2017).

It is not enough for leaders just to listen to voices of those experiencing marginalization, leaders should take action to amplify the voices that are often drowned out by voices advocating for status quo. In systems, such as Freetown, where there is a disproportionality in the demographics between educators and students, it is essential that leaders work to rectify this imbalance. For example, in the district studied, 67% of the students are BIPOC and yet only 9% of the educators in the system are BIPOC (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2022). The implication of this disparity is that leaders have the responsibility to work to amplify the voices of BIPOC students and educators in an effort to be leaders who work towards equity and equitable outcomes.

Leaders implement effective professional development for all

The superintendent and district level leadership should create differentiated learning opportunities to support the intersectional and diverse needs of educators across the district, for effective professional development provides district staff with opportunities to engage in learning in a differentiated manner. Teachers and school leaders need to be aware of– and prepared to-

influence the structural conditions that determine the allocation of educational opportunities available within a school (Banks et al., 2005). To this end, Trivette et al. (2009) assert that professional development includes multiple opportunities to learn and master new knowledge, material, and practices, and that any one opportunity includes varied experiences to learn, practice, and process the target of training. In one study, we found that school leaders believe that professional development should be top down and compulsory. District leaders and school leaders should be afforded the opportunity to learn and master equitable practices in order to engage educators with learning opportunities at the school level, yet this is not enough. White school leaders reported that they had received professional development focused on antiracism and social justice in a manner that acknowledged and honored the intersections of race and the experiences of diverse learners, and yet reported that they did not feel ready to lead.

Most white leaders detailed that they had the content- awareness and analysis- yet lacked the belief that they are expert enough to function as the sole leader of this work. They claimed that they would defer to other experts, and instead, participate in the learning process; for as white leaders, they did not want to project an expert stance while also aware of their whiteness. This is a significant tension. We found that white leaders often default to experts or colleagues of color to lead this work so that they do not appear to be acting as the sole experts on race and racism. There is both an assumption that BIPOC educators are more able and have more lived experiences to deliver the professional development through an authentic lens; however, those who identity as BIPOC have reported that they want and need the white leaders to “step up” and thoughtfully and collaboratively lead the anti-racism work. Without breaking this cycle, the work will not fully be embedded, and this tension and frustration will linger (Welton et al. 2015).

Consequently, effective professional development for white leaders must include opportunities to practice leading these conversations about race and racism and building their confidence and skill in leading adult learning on these topics.

Leaders create opportunities for race talk

In order to develop and foster critical consciousness in schools, one leadership action in which district and school leaders engaged was discussion on race or "race talk." Critical awareness and analysis requires educators to reflect on their identities, including race, and be open and willing to engage in dialogue and discussion on race and its impact on teaching, learning, and leading. In each of our studies, we found that in order to foster critical consciousness in others, effective leaders facilitated, coordinated, and supported efforts to amplify staff and families' experiences including conversations on identity. We found that in order to engage in critical discussions on race, school leaders had to be race-conscious and become critically aware of the habits, practices, and behaviors they display and uphold.

As researchers found, race-consciousness involves ongoing self-reflection and internal exploration of identity in order to understand how educators consciously and subconsciously participate in a system of racism (Swanson & Welton, 2019). For example, "principals who engage in race conscious dialogue and practices should help their staff critically examine how the system of racism plays out in their school community" (Swanson & Welton, 2019, p. 736).

Openness to discussing race and its impact on policies and practices that uphold inequities must be a first step, particularly for white school leaders. Although research has found that leading race talk may be challenging for white educators, white leaders should be encouraged and empowered to move from a race-evasive stance and embrace the discomfort needed to lead and foster conversations about race openly and often (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

As a result, engaging in action such as race talk is a necessary step towards an anti-racist school and a critically conscious school community and leadership development programs should give thoughtful consideration to supporting white leaders in understanding their own racial identity and moving past white fragility and color evasiveness.

Implications/ Recommendations- Critical Consciousness Development by Creating and Maintaining Effective Professional Development. The role of district and school leaders in the creation and implementation of consistent and effective professional development is paramount. Trivette et al. (2009) assert that professional development includes multiple opportunities to learn and master new knowledge, material, and practices, and that any one opportunity includes varied experiences to learn, practice, and process the target of training.

Critical consciousness development supports educators with the awareness of the inequities within our society to meet the needs of diverse learners (King, 1991). Therefore, district leadership should determine district wide priorities and a multi-year professional development plan that addresses these priorities. This professional development should be part of a policy set forth by the superintendent in conjunction with other district offices. Professional development should be mandatory. Furthermore, all district and school leaders should participate in a specific leadership track to support their facilitation of professional development for central office staff and school-based staff. In addition, minimally the Professional development plan should be assessed on an annual basis for effectiveness and impact. The district can anonymize the survey but collect gender, race, ethnicity and linguistic diversity data and location either school based or central office. This process will allow for continuous improvement and opportunities for all voices to be valued. Lastly the Freetown district needs to consider how to incorporate this essential professional development into their mentoring and induction plans for

new staff members. This would provide staff who are new to the district the support they need during the onboarding and mentoring process.

Leaders engage in instructional leadership for critical consciousness

Ultimately, schools exist to educate students, and the job of leaders is to ensure the best conditions are in place for students to learn and develop. Leaders who aim to support the development of critical consciousness in their schools and in their students can do this by engaging in instructional leadership (City et al, 2009). Through instructional leadership, Leaders can positively impact the instructional core and support more equitable relationships and classroom experiences for all students. Instructional leadership for critical consciousness can come in a variety of forms. We found that some school and district leaders took action through involvement in courses and curriculum. Curricular equity audits that examined practices such as the diversity of texts and the level and quality of civics education was something in which both district and school leaders engaged. The district's Diversity Equity and Inclusion team had a curriculum subcommittee who was tasked with examining the material and assignments being presented to students. Both the middle and high schools recently launched state directed civics projects, or Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) projects. Some of these projects, presented to the school committee, were examples of self-directed learning opportunities supporting the development of student critical consciousness. While teachers, students, and school leaders named specific departments where topics of social justice were being examined, extracurricular and cocurricular activities such as the Black Student Union were also cited as critical to the student experience in their cultivation of their critical consciousness. One important action of educational leaders to support critical consciousness development was

through their work as instructional leaders.

Implications/Recommendations- Critical Consciousness Development by Growing Instructional Leadership Opportunities. While effective educational leadership has many aspects, it is important to note that the ultimate goal of our school systems is youth development, and thus instructional leadership is paramount (Grissom et al., 2021). In the myriad of challenges that educational leaders now face, we recommend that leaders make policies that support schools becoming places where students can develop their critical consciousness. Some of those policies may include curricular equity audits, implementing Ethnic Studies courses, expanding co-curricular opportunities for students such as affinity groups and other clubs, providing professional development for teachers, setting goals for and assessing critical consciousness, and embedding YPAR in schools' curricula. Leaders must maintain the practice of keeping an instructional lens as paramount to their practice. Finally, we recommend that more research is conducted to better understand which practices educational leaders, at both the district and the school level, should engage in order to positively impact the development of critical consciousness in students.

Leaders diversify and retain staff. We found that the school leaders with whom we studied made explicit efforts to recruit and retain a diverse staff in order to reflect the demographics of their students and families. Our research has uncovered that as challenging as it is to recruit BIPOC staff, it is much more difficult to create an environment that retains them. District and school leaders in our study have implemented intentional, systemic hiring practices focused on recruiting BIPOC educators. A few leaders shared strategies that have been put into place to

retain BIPOC educators including mentors, coaches, and affinity groups, yet this remains an area of growth. As research has shown retention of BIPOC staff is essential to creating and maintaining a school climate and culture that will allow students, particularly those who traditionally have been denied access and opportunity, to be successful in their educational experience. Further research is needed to provide guidance on relevant and effective efforts for retaining these invaluable hires.

Implications/Recommendations- Critical Consciousness Development by Diversifying Staff.

Increasing diversity at both the school level and the district level requires leaders to commit to both recruiting and retaining BIPOC staff. Retaining BIPOC staff is more complex because Leaders need to influence the culture of the schools or departments that BIPOC staff join, and that poses its own challenges. BIPOC staff interviewed for this study all described not feeling connected to the district. Some felt that they were not valued for their lived experiences even though they have taught in the district for many years, some felt that their knowledge of their students and families was dismissed even though they share similar racial or ethnic backgrounds, and others felt that they did not get invited to participate in any decision-making spaces. Therefore, for Leaders committed to diversifying the district, representation matters. BIPOC staff need to see themselves represented in all areas of the organization and specifically in the committees where policy and practices are developed and decided.

Final Recommendations for Critical Consciousness Development

In conclusion, it is critical to evaluate the systemic opportunities for the Freetown district. This research study has provided data that speaks to holistic and strategic steps that could strengthen the critical conscious work of district leaders. The superintendent has prioritized a relentless focus on post-pandemic recovery and rejuvenation, nurturing a sense of belonging for

the broader community and becoming an antiracist school district by focusing on the code of character, conduct and support. This work can be accomplished through the lens of critical conscious leadership. A cohesive and systemic approach will create opportunities for awareness, reflection and action throughout the district. The findings of this research study provide a variety of final recommendations in alignment with the superintendent's priorities.

Since our study encompassed a wide range of stakeholders and, therefore multiple data sources, we are confident in putting forth the claim that a superintendent plays a critical role in providing the school district the leadership needed to become an anti-racist organization. Moreover, clear data emerged supporting critical consciousness as a robust framework for a district to examine its understanding of and progress toward ensuring an equitable and inclusive school organization. As we learned, the positionality of a superintendent is influential in setting equity priorities and commitments at the district office and ultimately affects practices at the school level. Subsequently, ensuring strong, equity-minded, active anti-racist, anti-bias leadership over school districts must be prioritized.

As an initial step, Freetown district leaders should seek to understand the current methods for stakeholder engagement in order to create more effective and authentic opportunities for two-way communication and understanding. The exchange of ideas and experiences should involve the district leaders, school leaders, educators, students, and families. In addition, the district should seek to create spaces for educators of color to share their unique experiences as BIPOC, to voice their concerns about policies and practices, and to be valued as collaborative problem solvers and informed experts based on their lived experiences. As a result, the district will be able to collect data regarding the areas of strength and growth from all stakeholders that could support the priority areas, while simultaneously nurturing a sense of belonging for the

broader community. As Ishimaru (2019) found in her study, in order "to move beyond 'random acts of engagement' (Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010), systemic collaboration practices may need to shift from remediating families and staffing family engagement positions … to fuel collective organizational improvement and leveraging family expertise to foster professional learning and innovations in designing equitable educational environments (p. 31).

Next, the Freetown district should consider restructuring the work of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office. Although the majority of the equity centered learning and practices are supported through this office, in order to build capacity through all stakeholders a new approach could support the intent and impact of this office's work. Through shared responsibility and collective action, alignment of learning and practice could come to scale through district and school leaders. In order to become an antiracist school district that is focused on the code of character, conduct and support for students (who are the major stakeholders), creating a deliberate and measurable plan is paramount. Common languages and practices are critical to this planning. Therefore, the Freetown district should consider mandatory, districtwide learning grounded in the Path to Becoming an Antiracist Organization Framework (Tool Kit for Equity Project). This work lives with all district leaders and with uniformity should be practiced by leaders and educators throughout the district. In support of monitoring progress towards this district priority, the implementation of the Continuum for Becoming an Antiracist Organization as a tool could provide check and balances for district leaders (Crossroads Ministry).

Some white leaders still demonstrate a color-evasive perspective which has implications on preparation courses and ongoing professional development. Due to the critical need to dismantle inequities in education, leaders must be prepared to guide and lead this work; this may not be possible for those who have a race-evasive perspective. As a result, all candidates for

leadership positions should be required to engage in coursework on anti-racism in education and should be required to maintain professional growth and learning on this topic (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011; Welton et al. 2015). Capacity of leaders must be at the forefront of goals for the district and requiring coursework prior to hiring as well as continued development through professional workshops, relying on professional coaches, and expanding networks will prove invaluable in dismantling systemic inequities that remain.

Conclusion

This study was conducted at a pivotal time in our country's history. Not only is the United States in the midst of a global pandemic, but there is also a reckoning with racial injustice and significant threats to our democratic system. Public education has been theorized to have the power to support increasing social justice and strengthening democracy (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1993). While there are leaders and districts pushing to ban Critical Race Theory (CRT) and books about oppression, there are other leaders and districts pushing to become anti-racist and pro-social justice organizations (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). Now, more than ever, school leaders need to be leaders that cultivate critical consciousness if we are to build an anti-racist school setting in which access and opportunity are a reality for each of our students and families regardless of their racial, ethnic, or linguistic attributes.

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Appendix A

White School Leaders Interview Protocol and Questions

Opening Statements:

- This interview is strictly voluntary. At any time, you may ask to conclude the interview.
- All interview questions are options. Please feel free to not answer a question.
- All interview responses will be confidential. Although we plan to share our findings with our district, we will take measures to maintain your confidentiality and use pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants.
- We are here to listen and learn from you and your experiences. Our position is to examine, not judge; to learn from your expertise.
- We plan to record this interview. At any time, you may request for us to turn off the transcription device.
- We are studying a term entitled critical consciousness. Here is a working definition we will share for the purposes of this interview: "person's ability to recognize and analyze oppressive forces shaping society and to take action against these forces" (Seider & Graves 2017, p. 2).

To start: Please tell us a little about you. How long have you been a school leader at your present school? How long have you been a school leader in total?

1. To what extent have you engaged in learning opportunities focused on the awareness of your own racial identity?
2. To what extent have you engaged in conversations (or learning) about who you are as a white leader and its impact on your work with staff, students or families?
3. How often do you lead your staff and/or offer opportunities for your staff to engage in discussions about race, privilege, racism, and/or inequities and its impact on students?
4. In your role as a school leader, please share a time when you exhibited moral courage, or when you engaged in activism and advocacy on behalf of your marginalized students.
5. To what extent do you use data to inform your decisions in regards to equitable practices or policies?
6. Describe a time when you empowered staff to take action or make change towards a more equitable practice or policy.
7. How have you fostered relationships with your nonwhite colleagues/ staff as part of your equity-centered leadership?

Any final thoughts? Anything you may want to share with me that I did not ask?

Closing Statements: Thank you for your time and participation. I am grateful that you were willing and open to providing me this opportunity to meet and learn from you. As stated at the start, whatever is shared in this time together will remain confidential and used for my research findings as part of a larger dissertation project on the development of critical consciousness in white leaders. My sincerest thanks.

Appendix B

Educator Focus Group Protocol/ Questions

Opening Statements:

- This interview is strictly voluntary. At any time, you may ask to conclude the interview.
- All interview questions are options. Please feel free to not answer a question.
- All interview responses will be confidential. Although we plan to share our findings with our district, we will take measures to maintain your confidentiality and use pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants.
- We are here to listen and learn from you and your experiences. Our position is to examine, not judge; to learn from your expertise.
- We plan to record this interview. At any time, you may request for us to turn off the transcription device.
- We are studying a term entitled critical consciousness. Here is a working definition we will share for the purposes of this interview: "person's ability to recognize and analyze oppressive forces shaping society and to take action against these forces" (Seider & Graves 2017, p. 2).

To start: Please tell us a little about you. How long have you been a faculty member here?

1. How have you been supported to engage in conversations about who you are, and how it may impact your teaching and student learning?
2. Can you share a time when your principal demonstrated his/her awareness of his/her whiteness in the school community and how it may impact his/her/their work?
3. How often do you engage in discussions about race, privilege, racism, and/or inequities and its impact on your students?
4. How has your principal communicated and inspired a shared vision, focused on equity and social justice?
5. To what extent has your principal empowered you to take action or make change towards more equitable practices or policies?
6. How has your principal fostered relationships with his/her nonwhite colleagues/ staff?
7. Do you feel comfortable among colleagues or your principal to openly raise questions about inequitable policies, practices or systems and/or advocate on behalf of students belonging to marginalized groups?

Any final thoughts? Anything you may want to share with me that I did not ask?

Closing Statements:

Thank you for your time and participation. I am grateful that you were willing and open to providing me this opportunity to meet and learn from you. As stated at the start, whatever is shared in this time together will remain confidential and used for my research findings as part of a larger dissertation project on the development of critical consciousness in white leaders. My sincerest thanks.

Appendix C

Observation Protocol

Date:	Time:
Duration of Meeting:	Site:
Participants:	
Meeting Objectives:	
Discussion of CC (awareness/analysis, agency, action): ▢ critical awareness/ analysis ▢ critical agency ▢ critical action	
Descriptive: Examples of *whiteness, color evasiveness, race talk, anti-racist work*…	
Reflective: Questions to self, observations of nonverbal behavior, interpretations/inferences	
Questions	Answers

(Adapted from Merriam and Tisdell, 2016)

Appendix D

Field Notes Protocol

TEMPLATE FOR TAKING FIELD NOTES		
Date: Site: Activity: Participants: Length of Observation:		
	Observations	Observer Reflections/Comments
Physical Setting		
Participants		
Activities Observed		
Interactions Observed		
Conversations Observed		
Other		
Summary:		
Reflections:		

(Adapted from Merriam and Tisdell, 2016)