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CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOR CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN STUDENTS

Dissertation in Practice by

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Abstract

Discussions in education today should focus on how schools can develop students who are critically thinking, ethical, and active citizens who contribute to creating a more just society. One way to frame the ability to think critically and act socially is what Freire (1993) described as *conscientização*, or critical consciousness. School leaders should work to cultivate communities that develop the critical consciousness of students.

This case study of a public school district in the Northeastern United States explores the leadership practices that foster the development of critical consciousness in students. Critical consciousness is conceptualized in this study as the ability to analyze systems of oppression, have agency in one's ability to make change, and take action for social change against injustice. Data sources include 13 interviews with administrators, teachers, and students, as well as a document review.

Findings indicate that the strategies and practices that leaders use to support students' critical consciousness can be categorized into the overarching groups of value and vision setting, attending to student voice, and instructional leadership that provides a critical perspective. These categories are not mutually exclusive or exhaustive. Leadership for

critical consciousness was also found to be particularly important during times of crisis related to injustice. Recommendations for leaders include building schools with a coherent and explicit vision around critical consciousness, exercising instructional leadership to support courses, curriculum, and professional development that promote critical consciousness, institutionalizing structures that amplify the voice of students, and preparing for challenges and crises that center around issues of justice.

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This work is dedicated to my two daughters, Ana Maria and Louisa. As members of the Passos Walker family, may you walk forward through life with the *passos* of social justice and charitable works. Walk one step at a time with God always at your side and know how much *mãe* and *pai* love you. *Caminhe um passo de cada vez com Deus sempre ao seu lado e saibam o quanto a mamãe e papai te amam.*

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CHAPTER ONE[1]

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 M. 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

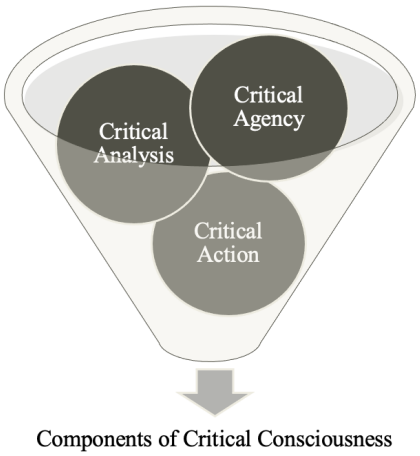
implemented within urban education… Critical Consciousness theory could help achieve a system of education that is just, equitable and liberating" (p. 602).

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 (1993) 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 (1993) 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 (1993) 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	Critical Consciousness Critical Professional Development

	educators of color experience and respond to these practices?	
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
Geoffrey Walker	What practices, if any, do school leaders implement to foster the development of critical consciousness in their **students**? How do students 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

[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

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 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

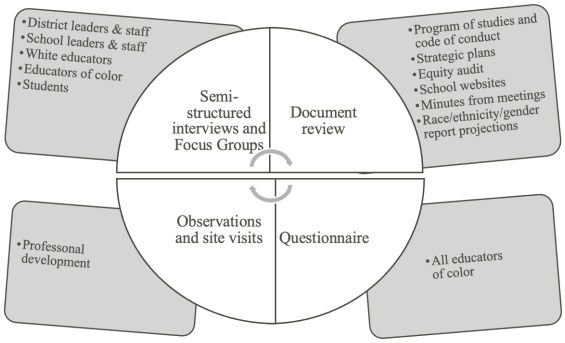
This study collected data through a case study of a particular district and practices within the district as a bounded system. As Yin (2009) describes, there are three reasons for a case study approach: “1. case studies are pertinent when your research addresses a descriptive question; 2. the case study 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 & Tisdall, 2016).

We also recognized that limitations existed when using focus groups such groupthink, power dynamics, and/or dominant, negative voices altering the responses (Merriam & Tisdall, 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 & Tisdall, 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 Tisdall (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 Tisdall, 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 & Tisdall (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]

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOR CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN STUDENTS

> "Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which (people) deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire, 1993, p. 34).

Objective and Purpose / Statement of the Problem

Education is foundational to a healthy democracy (Dewey, 1916). Historically in the United States schools aim to prepare students for civic, moral, and economic functions (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2008; Trujillo et al., 2021; Walker, 2006). While the means that schools should use to reinforce citizenship in our democracy is contested, one main view is that schools must continue the "daily struggle toward equity and social justice" (McMahon, 2013, p. 18). An equitable democracy depends on citizens who can recognize injustice, believe in their ability to impact change, and take social-political action (Seider & Graves, 2020). In an era of "fake-news" and a "post-facts" world, it is of particular importance that an educated electorate be able to critically engage with information (Kunnath & Jackson, 2019). The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results of 2018 demonstrated that over 90% of students tested could not distinguish between fact and opinion (OECD, 2019). After the murder of George Floyd, and that of other unarmed Black people and people of color, the United States is in a national reckoning with its long history of oppression and systemic racism. At the same time, Critical Race Theory (C.R.T.) is under attack and certain books with a critical perspective are

[3] This chapter was individually written by Geoffrey M. Walker

being banned in many states, districts, and schools at the precise time when we need our students to be able to deconstruct injustice (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). Schools in the U.S. are at an important juncture while functioning in a "triple pandemic" of COVID-19, racial inequity, and significant threats to democracy (Mehta, 2022). Taken together, critical thinking and action should be pillars of our public schooling (McGrew, 2020; Padmanabha, 2018; Rapa & Geldhof, 2020). One way to frame the ability to think critically and act socially is what Freire (1993) described as *conscientização*, or critical consciousness. Schools that effectively support critical consciousness in students have the potential to lay the foundation for a more just and equitable democracy (Jemal, 2017). Youth are the future of our democracy and investing in their abilities to recognize injustice, their belief in their potential to make change, and their knowledge and skills in taking social action, is essential for a more socially just future (Rapa & Geldhof, 2020).

Gap Statement

If one believes that schools should contribute to the building of a healthy and equitable democracy, then critical consciousness should be a bedrock of schooling and an essential educational process and outcome. Critical consciousness has also been tied to positive outcomes for students including academic engagement, enrollment in higher education, professional aspirations, civic and political engagement, resilience, mental health, and academic achievement (Seider et al., 2020). Still, research has yet to fully describe what district and school-wide leaders can do to support critical consciousness development (Muller, 2019). This individual study specifically investigates how school leaders understand and describe practices that foster critical consciousness in their students and how educators and youth perceive these practices. The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ#1: What practices, if any, do school leaders implement to foster the development of critical consciousness in their students?

RQ#2: How do students and faculty describe and understand their leaders' efforts to establish a school context that contributes to students' critical consciousness development?

Findings from this research provide educational leaders with guidance around practices that cultivate critical consciousness in students.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework of critical consciousness and subsequent conceptual frameworks that emerged from critical consciousness were used for this study. In addition, this individual study used Social Justice Educational Leadership as the leadership conceptual framework.

Critical Consciousness

The concept of critical consciousness derives from the work of the Brazilian educator/philosopher, Paulo Freire, who believed that the purpose of education was to liberate students from oppression. Critical consciousness is steeped in critical theory which focuses on recognizing and dismantling power structures. Freire (1993) theorized that a goal of education is to empower oppressed peoples to be able to understand and analyze the oppressive forces and injustices that impact their lives and then be able to act and work against those forces. In Freire's (1993) view, critical consciousness is "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51).

Components of Critical Consciousness

Watts et al. (2011) conceptualized critical consciousness as being able to recognize and analyze systems of injustice and oppression, having agency and belief in one's ability to create a

change, and taking action to promote social change. Similarly, Seider et al. (2020) operationalized critical consciousness as having three components: social analysis, political agency, and social action. For the purposes of this individual study, I will adopt Seider et al.'s (2020) three component conceptualization of critical consciousness.

Praxis

The various components of critical consciousness interact, reinforce each other, and come together in praxis. Freire (1993) defines praxis as, "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed" (p. 126). He theorized that reflection without action or action without reflection was problematic. Praxis is a reflective and action-oriented process at the heart of critical consciousness.

Social Justice Educational Leadership

Critical consciousness is a necessary skill for social justice leadership (Radd & Kramer, 2016). One definition of Social Justice Educational Leadership (SJEL) is offered by Theoharis (2007) as leadership that, "makes issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership, practice, and vision" (p. 223). SJEL is fundamentally about individually and collectively reducing inequities within schools, educational systems, and communities (Ryan, 2010; Scanlan, 2013). Furman (2012) defined SJEL, "as a *praxis*, in the Freireian sense, involving both reflection and action," (p. 202) and developed a framework for the aspects of SJEL as praxis. Other researchers have also claimed that social justice educational leadership is praxis or critical consciousness itself (Guillaume et al., 2020; Radd & Grosland, 2018).

School leaders play key roles in shaping cultures and creating and implementing policies including such work as hiring, community outreach, scheduling and selection of courses,

developing partnerships with community organizations, and vision and value setting. Executed through a social justice lens, educational leadership is about increasing equity and reducing oppression (Drago-Severson, 2019). Social justice leadership cannot be obtained without a leader being critically conscious, engaging in praxis, and leading teachers and students to develop their own critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is a subcomponent of SJEL.

Literature Review

The literature on critical consciousness demonstrates that practices by educational leaders can foster critical consciousness in students (Clark & Seider, 2017; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Seider et al., 2020). While there are few, if any, studies that specifically evaluate leadership practices that foster critical consciousness in students, a number of studies analyze practices that schools engage in to support students' critical consciousness. The findings show leaders play an important role in fostering critical consciousness in students by adopting three strategies: (1) value and vision setting; (2) attending to student voice; and (3) instructional leadership that provides a critical perspective. While these broad strategies are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, they are important to establishing a school culture that promotes critical consciousness in students.

Vision and Value Setting

Explicit expressions from the school leader about the value and vision around social justice and action were found in schools that foster critical consciousness in students (Seider & Graves, 2020). Seider and Graves (2020) conducted a longitudinal, mixed methods study that included more than 600 students from nine public high schools in four Northeastern cities. They described, in depth, five schools with different pedagogical approaches that all had predominantly Black and Latinx students and incorporated some aspect of youth civic

development as part of their missions. They presented descriptions of each school's model and its impact on students' critical consciousness of racial injustice. Seider and Graves (2020) found evidence that, "different schooling approaches... prove(d) adept at fostering different dimensions of youths' critical consciousness of racial injustice" (p. 12). While this study did not particularly study educational leadership practices that would support students' critical consciousness, it did describe some of the practices that school leaders engaged in that supported cultures that fostered students' critical consciousness. School principals and leaders in schools that promoted students' critical consciousness were found to explicitly talk about the goals and values of social analysis and social action. At events like opening day assemblies and graduation ceremonies, principals were quoted expressing a vision that supported aspects of critical consciousness. Principals said things like, "we talk about oppression in its many forms, and we try to do something about it" (p. 16). Schools and school leaders who have a clear focus on critical consciousness development are more likely to reach these outcomes for students (Mehta & Fine, 2019).

Student Voice

While espousing vision and values centered on equity is a key strategy to foster critical consciousness, school leaders further develop such capacity in students by attending to and amplifying student voice. Student voice is a general term that refers to students being involved in their own education through consultation, feedback and engagement (Pearce, 2016). It has also been defined as students' abilities to influence decisions that affect their lives (Lyons, 2020). Researchers have found that student voice with critical action is an important component of developing critical consciousness in students (Diemer et al., 2021), and they propose three levels of participation: conversation, involvement in doing, and, the deepest level, co-design (Caetano et al., 2020).

Some strategies that educational leaders engaged in to support student voice included: having a clear vision around student voice, engaging with teachers around student-adult relationships and pedagogy, and directly engaging with students to get feedback and co-design programs (Lac & Mansfield, 2017; Mitra, 2018). Mitra et al. (2012) studied the role of school leaders in fostering conditions that supported student voice. This qualitative case study of a single school and principal used interviews, surveys, and observations and found that the school leader's clearly and deeply enacted vision was key towards supporting student voice in the school.

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) is a form of direct engagement with students to get feedback and co-design programs that has proven to amplify student voice. . YPAR is a process in which students engage in research and action around a topic that is relevant to them (Bertrand, 2018). Students in YPAR identify an issue or problem in their community or school, collect information to form a better understanding, analyze the data, and finally design an action plan and take action to address the problem (Voight & Velez, 2018). YPAR has been linked to the development of critical consciousness in students (Cammarota, 2016; Kornbluh et al., 2015) and a number of scholars have researched how YPAR mirrors Freire's concept of praxis (Bertrand, 2018). Schools have been identified as places that can effectively engage in YPAR and support students' critical consciousness (Seider et al., 2020). One way that school leaders do this is by making sure that YPAR is being enacted in their schools through coursework or other means.

Instructional Leadership Promoting Social Analysis

YPAR is not only an example of a strategy that promotes student voice, it is also an instructional, programmatic, and curricular decision that school leaders make in educating their students. Two other critical instructional leadership choices that school leaders make to support

critical consciousness in students involve the courses offered in schools and the curricular design of courses, and their promotion of critical literacy and critical media literacy.

The courses and curriculum that students are exposed to have a major impact on their learning experiences and course selection, and curriculum design has been identified in the research as one way that leaders can impact the levels of critical consciousness in their students. Ethnic studies/social justice courses have been demonstrated to support students' critical consciousness. Ethnic Studies courses focus on the experiences, culture, intellectual scholarship, and perspectives of the lived experiences of ethnic or racial groups (Sleeter, 2011). Research has demonstrated the positive impact and improved academic performance that Ethnic Studies courses have on students (Cabrera et al., 2014; Sleeter, 2011). Scholars have found that these courses encourage social awareness, critical citizenship, and leadership for social change (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). Ethnic Studies courses have been shown to build critical consciousness in students (Cammarota, 2016; Nojan, 2020). Nojan (2020) found that ethnic studies have been shown to improve students' abilities to deconstruct social injustice, to increase their sense of agency, and to encourage their capacity for social action.

Along with Ethnic Studies courses, some schools offer courses on social justice or social engagement in an effort to support critical consciousness. In their longitudinal, mixed methods research, Seider and Graves (2020) described a number of schools that had offered courses that supported different aspects of students' critical consciousness. One school involved all ninth grade students in a Social Engagement course that studied issues of inequity. Another school offered civics in action courses and had students take a Sociology of Change course. Again, these courses were found to increase all three components of students' critical consciousness.

Leaders who promote critical literacy and critical media literacy through professional development and other strategies engage in creating an environment ripe for critical consciousness in students. The ability to read the word and the world are central strategies towards critical consciousness (Freire, 1993). Critical literacy is a theory and strategy that prepares students to be able to perceive forces of oppression from a variety of texts and resources (Kunnath & Jackson, 2019). Critical literacy is a method of teaching and learning that asks students to analyze various texts and dissect the language and the meaning of the texts in terms of equity, justice, and oppression.

Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008) theorized that "critical literacy is at the heart of (Freire's) vision for effective pedagogy" (p. 27) and a weapon that students can use to combat injustice they face in their lives. Rogers (2014) explored how leaders could coach teachers as they design critical literacy practices. She found that coaching critical literacy is "a dance of support and critique" (p. 257) and that long term professional development is needed to help teachers, "understand that critical literacy is a framework versus an additional skill that needs to be taught" (p. 258). To be most impactful, critical literacy needs to be infused into the entire curriculum for students. School leaders play an important role in supporting and prioritizing this as a means to support critical consciousness.

Research Gap

There are many ways that schools and educators support students' critical consciousness. While I've outlined several key tactics in this literature review, Seider et al. (2020) found that schools and educators use a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies to support critical consciousness in their students. The implications of the research previously conducted is that school leaders can impact the levels of critical consciousness in students and play an important

role in these efforts. However, there is little prior research focused directly on how leaders understand their own efforts to build critical consciousness in their schools and students. This study adds to the body of knowledge on strategies that school leaders use to develop critical consciousness in students and how students and teachers understand and experience those practices.

Methods

Researcher Positionality

As a critical researcher, I recognize that power dynamics and oppressive forces exist everywhere, including in my positionality which impacts this research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I identify as a Catholic, middle class, white and Multiracial male who speaks Brazilian Portuguese and Spanish. I am currently the Head of School of an urban public school. As a qualitative study, this work constitutes a "dialectical process that affects and changes both the participants and the researcher, at least to some extent" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.64). As Creswell & Guetterman (2019) note, my own "biases, values, and assumptions" (p. 18) impact the design and findings of this research. In an attempt to mitigate possible bias in the research process, I maintained a journal in which I recorded my own meta-observations about how my positionality might have impacted the research process.

Study Design

The purpose of this qualitative research is to examine the practices that educational leaders engage in to support and challenge the growth of critical consciousness in their students through a social justice lens. This study was a case study focusing on one public school district in Massachusetts. A case study is "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). In order to be able to effectively explore the research

questions, I selected a district that had a stated commitment to promoting equity and had implemented some practices designed to promote social justice. This district was identified as having some practices around critical consciousness and it served as the bounded system in this study. This district provided the opportunity to better understand leadership for critical consciousness in students (Mills & Gay, 2019). Data was collected from semi-structured interviews with school administrators, teachers, and students. The design of this individual study built upon the group research described in Chapter 2. I used similar methods to gather data to answer the research questions for this individual study.

Sampling

In order to identify participants for this study, I asked district leaders and others within the district for names of people who were engaging in work around critical consciousness. I asked using language that I thought would be more accessible with terms such as "equity work, social action, social analysis, and political agency development". Purposeful sampling, or criterion-based selection was used (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). More specifically, a combination of convenience sampling (sampling based in part on the availability of participants) and snowball or network sampling (sampling based on interviewing some people who refer you to others) was employed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Network sampling occurred as participants referred me to other participants who had experiences in the district around critical consciousness. In order to collect data about whether a school, leader, or educator was engaging in practices around critical consciousness, I asked about specific practices cited in the literature that could be related to critical consciousness such as student activism, social justice oriented teaching, student voice, political action, and other practices and common descriptions for social analysis, political agency, and social action.

Participants

I interviewed ten participants for approximately an hour each and three more participants in a focus group. I interviewed one principal, four assistant principals / deans, four teachers, three students and one recent alumni. Table 4 shows a table of the participants for this study.

Table 4

Summary of Participants

Name	**Method(s)**	**Number of Participants**
Students	semi-structured interviews	3 students 1 recent alum
School administrators	semi-structured interviews	4 Assistant Principals / Deans 1 Principal
Teachers	semi-structured interview & focus group	3 teachers in a focus group 1 teacher interview

The students were all at the high school and identified as one Black female, one White female, and one Latino male. All were high school seniors and were aged 18. The recent alum identified as a Black female. One of the school leaders interviewed identified as a Black male, three identified as White males, and one identified as a White female. Four of the teachers identified as White females. One was in high school and three were in middle school.

Data Collection

I employed a case study methodology, using numerous sources for data collection (Yin, 2009). I conducted interviews and collected documents for review and analysis, methods that Yin (2009) describes as comprising case study methods.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection. The interviews were conducted in about 60 minutes with a set list of questions. The semi-structured interview

allowed for flexibility to depart from strictly following the questions in the interview protocol in order to gain the most relevant information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Appendices A & B provide adapted protocols from Seider et al. (2016) that served as a starting point for my interview questions.

Teacher Focus Group

As this study asked how faculty describe and understand their leaders' efforts to create a school context that contributes to critical consciousness, interviewing teachers was an essential method of data collection. A focus group is "an interview on a topic with a group of people who have knowledge of the topic" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 114). A key benefit in data collection for focus groups is the interaction between the participants as they talk about a topic that might not come up frequently in their everyday lives (Wilson, 1997). The teachers who participated in this focus group were "not independent of each other, and the data collected from one participant cannot be considered separate from the social context in which it was collected" (Hollander, 2004, p. 631). Teachers sharing and listening to each other's experiences at school provided data about how they were experiencing schooling and if that experience was enhancing students' abilities around social analysis, political agency, and social action. I interviewed three teachers who were recommended by their school leader. I used questions found in Appendix A with the structure for the focus group found in Appendix C.

Document Review

While document reviews have limitations, the main advantage is that documents provide stable information that was authentically produced at the school or district level (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The types of documents that I reviewed included school & district improvement plans, meeting agendas, weekly family communications, professional development offerings, and

public facing documents such as websites and the school leader's newsletters to the community. I used a two phase document review process. The first phase involved reviewing publicly available documents describing the school including newspaper articles and school descriptions. The second phase involved a review of documents provided by the district that outlined work that faculty were involved in that related to leadership efforts to increase students' levels of critical consciousness.

Data Analysis

Data were organized by the interview transcripts and the documents that were reviewed. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed as stated. After reading and reviewing the transcripts, I coded the data using codes from the literature and previously used protocols as found in Seider et al. (2016), as well as codes I created to describe the theme. I coded and analyzed the interview data to search for patterns and findings of how school leaders encouraged critical consciousness and how students experienced it. As with many qualitative studies, the coding strategy was "inductive and comparative" meaning that data was read and interpreted and compared to develop broader themes and concepts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.227). I coded such things as quotes from the interviews that align with concepts around critical consciousness. While this study didn't use a traditional grounded theory approach, I did allow additional codes to emerge from the data and develop "themes of basic information identified in the data by the researcher and used to understand a process" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 443).

Findings

In accordance with my research questions, in this section I will describe the findings around what practices school leaders in this district implemented to foster the development of critical consciousness in their students. I also summarize how faculty and students described

their leaders' efforts to establish school contexts that contribute to students' critical consciousness development.

Leadership Practices that Foster Critical Consciousness in Students

As the literature described, leaders fostered the development of critical consciousness in students by engaging in practices associated with value and vision setting, instructional leadership, and fostering student voice. In the following sections, I describe these practices in detail and examine how students and faculty understand their leaders' efforts to establish a school culture that contributes to critical consciousness in students. The final section describes the importance of leadership practices for critical consciousness during challenging times or periods of crisis related to issues of oppression or injustice.

Table 5 lists the practices school leaders implemented to foster the development of critical consciousness in their students.

Table 5

Types of School Leadership Practices that Cultivate Critical Consciousness in Students

Value and Vision Setting	Instructional Leadership	Student Voice
Promoting Pluralism	Professional development	Student clubs / groups
District / School coherence	Coursework / Ethnic Studies	Student government
Response to crisis	Civics projects & YPAR	Student activism
local / national crises	Curriculum "equity audits"	Student participation

Vision and Value Setting

The school leaders, teachers, and students I interviewed all spoke of the importance of having a school vision and school values that are connected to justice. They described how these espoused values and vision, promoted by school leaders through their words (spoken and written), actions and policies, act as grounding principles that focus the purpose and work of the school.

District Level Support and Coherence. Most participants in this study also referenced the importance of district level leadership and alignment in support of a vision that supports a school culture of critical consciousness. A number of school level educators mentioned district level initiatives and documents as impacting their work. Students also named district level leadership as impacting their experiences in working to take action against injustice. School level leaders spoke about the district's new code of conduct, district level goals and district level mission and values as mostly helpful in their efforts to have a school engage in justice conversations. For example, the district stated mission was to be "a system that understands and values our diversity, educates each student to learn and live productively as a critically thinking, responsible citizen in a multicultural, democratic society." The district's "vision of a graduate" included one who "improves the school and community." The Superintendent set three main strategic goals for the school year in which this study took place and one of these goals was, "to become an anti-racist district." This goal in the strategic plan included measurable objectives that the Superintendent reported on to the School Committee on a regular basis. These are all examples of district leaders documenting their commitment to social justice and equity in writing in public facing documents. School leaders named these initiatives as supportive of their efforts to foster schools in which critical consciousness could flourish. Students relayed that there were

times when district level administrators supported their efforts to promote justice. For example, students expressed appreciation for being involved with teams of adults, like the DEI team, that were working on issues of justice. Two school leaders interviewed stated that their work to foster critical consciousness in their students and schools was made easier when they had district level support through a clear district vision around justice.

School leaders reported that the district's setting vision and values and following through with action empowered them to promote critical consciousness at their schools. . For example, one school leader shared, "I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the Superintendent who is doing work around diversity… The Superintendent is someone whose vision around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) I really believe in, but he is new and the power structures in this town have been around for a long time." In the same way interviewees expressed the important role Superintendents play in setting the vision, school principals were also noted as espousing visions to build cultures where people were to think critically and act to support more just communities. For example, the principal of the high school put out several statements following school and national events exposed racism expressing the school's efforts to be "anti-racist". Another leader explained, "I think it's important for students, and for us as administrators, to really talk about civic responsiveness in a way that students can understand." Several leaders spoke about work they did with students in expressing values of the importance of working for justice through civic engagement and action.

Promoting Pluralism. Students said that hearing directly from school leaders about supporting diversity in the school and raising topics of injustice and civic engagement, as well as posting inclusive messages in the hallways, were important to the school culture. One student said that when he arrived as a recent immigrant to the country and school that, "all of those

posters and flags everywhere– I got the explicit message that everyone in that building supports minorities or other social groups and that I don't have to be scared because you are always going to be included." This student also said hearing from the principal about welcoming immigrants and diversity as a strength of the school was important to him. These statements and messages came at a time when President Trump and other national leaders were promoting anti-immigrant sentiment and seeking to establish dehumanizing immigration policies.

Another student said that she was able to have a diverse friend group through meeting people in clubs and classes and that she learned about issues of injustice through her friends who identified differently than her. She said, "my favorite thing about my school is its diversity. I got to be friends with people who look different and have different experiences than me. I think that that allowed me to learn and grow as a person." Other students and faculty named the challenge of moving from diversity to pluralism as student social groups are often dominated by a particular demographic. Leaders worked in different ways to bring students from diverse backgrounds together in meaningful ways to promote pluralism or cultural coexistence.

Instructional Leadership for Social Analysis

In order to foster the development of critical consciousness in students, school leaders in the study engaged in instructional leadership in a variety of ways. Leaders in the study shared their perspective that instructional leadership impacted teachers' practice which impacted students' learning and critical consciousness. They reported engaging faculty in professional development, reviewing and revising coursework and course offerings, and supporting learning opportunities outside of core classes.

Professional Development. School leaders engaged educators in professional development to improve and expand their practice in strengthening students' abilities to analyze

systems of oppression and foster their belief in and capacity for resisting oppression. Participants described a number of examples of these types of professional development experiences. For example, through a partnership with a local university, the district offered high school teachers a racial equity course and the opportunity to engage in a curriculum redesign effort to be more culturally-responsive. The high school History department worked on a revision and rewrite of the scope and sequence to the two intro level US History classes in an effort to ensure a more critical and inclusive curriculum. The district contracted with the non-profit Learning for Justice to offer further professional development.. Teachers were provided the opportunity to take a free six week online course through the University of San Francisco on, “How to Talk about Race” with the objective of raising awareness about equity and racial justice. Participants reported that the Diversity Equity and Inclusion team at the high school had a curriculum sub-committee that focused on professional development. This group brought in Dr. Bettina Love to speak on, “Resistance, Creativity, Hip Hop Civics Education, Intersectionality, & Black Joy”. These examples were cited by both students and faculty as having a positive impact on creating a school context to support critical consciousness. School leaders who invested and prioritized these opportunities were crucial to the success of these practices.

Critical Coursework. School leaders supported and challenged the review and revision of coursework and course offerings. School leaders reported “curriculum equity audits” for Science, History, and English departments at the high school. For example, the United States History II course, taken by all high school students, was revised to include a civics project. While this project was prompted by a state law mandating such projects, leaders in the district and school promoted and implemented the change. The projects were essentially Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) in which students were asked to critically analyze

complex issues, engage in discourse with people around those issues and take action to make a change relevant to the issue. Other YPAR-like units were given to students including an assignment in which students "were instructed to write a letter to [their] representatives about something that [they] thought should be changed." Students reported these assignments as developing their critical consciousness specifically by helping them develop their lens to look critically at history and current social inequities, giving them a structured opportunity to take social action, and finally by increasing their sense of agency.

School leaders named the dependency and sometimes "over-reliance" on the History and English department to develop student critical consciousness. Many students also named analyzing oppression in courses such as A.P. U.S. Government and other History courses. Leaders and students noted that there was a high level of variance in teacher practice around cultivating critical consciousness in the classrooms. Many of the participants in the study believed that some teachers created fertile ground for critical consciousness development, while others much less so or not at all. One assistant principal said that critical consciousness development in school was very, "teacher specific". He said, "We rely on the classroom teacher a lot. Some teachers are really awesome at it, but it's a roll of the dice. If you get those teachers, you get a good foundation, and, if you don't, then you probably don't." Leaders spoke about the variability in classroom teachers' approaches to students' critical consciousness development. One leader cited this as evidence of the importance of instructional leadership in supporting quality and more consistent critical coursework in the school so that all students have the opportunity to develop their critical consciousness, regardless of the teachers or courses they are assigned.

Supporting Learning in the "Periphery". Leaders recognized that some of the structures and opportunities for students to develop their critical consciousness existed outside of their core classes. While faculty and students acknowledged that many of the opportunities to engage in critical analysis and social action were happening in the History and Humanities classes, many also pointed to electives during school hours and clubs after school. There were specific elective courses offered at the high school that encouraged students to examine issues through critical lenses. For example, the Peer Leadership elective trained students on diversity issues and established anti-bias curriculum. According to one school leader who founded the program, students in the course were asked to "create lessons and then go into all the freshmen classes and start to have these critical conversations and empowerment." Other courses included classes such as Theater for Social Change, African American History, Songs that Defined History, History of Hip Hop, Facing History, and Gender Studies. Facing History is a course that is described as concluding with an examination of social activism with a goal of providing students with the tools needed to empower them to make change in the world.

Outside of the school day, affinity groups and clubs were identified as powerful mechanisms to support the critical consciousness of students. One student said that since topics of racial and social injustice have been more prevalent this year, "there's been a lot more activity for clubs, like the Black Student Union, Latinx Student Union, Jewish Student Union and Asian Student Union. They've been holding talks, having guest speakers and trying to get the school community involved." These, and other clubs like the Environmental Club, were identified by students, teachers, and school leaders as spaces where students were engaging in critical reflection and activism. The National Honors Society was mentioned by several students as a place where students identify a community need and engage in community service volunteering.

The student-run news broadcast was also named by a student as a place where he engaged in meaningful conversations and decisions around issues of equity such as reflecting on the gender and race of who is anchoring the broadcast. School leaders also invited student club leaders to participate in a diversity and equity training which students reported as a positive experience for them. Thus, it was found that students and educators believed that learning spaces that Mehta and Fine (2019) called the "periphery" such as electives and student clubs, were actually central for students to develop their critical consciousness.

Student Voice and Action

Students reported that being engaged in analyzing and taking action about issues of injustice in school developed their sense of agency and their skills in working for social change. Leaders engaged and encouraged student voice in a variety of ways, including having students on leadership teams, meeting and communicating with students and student groups directly,, and encouraging student action. While some effective practices were found around amplifying student voice, administrators, teachers, and students all reported gaps and areas for improvement in engaging student voice.

The high school started a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee. A school leader described that the group had, "around 20 staff members and 5-6 students. The students started on the committee last year and that has been really great and powerful." Two students on the committee reported that participation in the committee fostered their sense of agency. There is also a student advisory council and student government at the high school that school leaders named as structures that aim to amplify student voice.

Leaders reported meeting with students and student groups directly in both formal and informal ways in an effort to listen, respond to, and encourage student voice, agency, and

engagement. Student groups such as teams, clubs and affinity groups were cited by teachers, leaders, and students as places where students were encouraged to work in groups to analyze injustice and take action Participants named groups like the Black Student Union, the Environmental Club, Gender and Sexuality Alliance, Student Government, and sports teams. One assistant principal reported, “There were some issues around some kids feeling marginalized. Collectively, as an administrative team, we invited the Black Student Union, and a couple of other affinity groups, to come talk to the whole faculty about their experiences.” A student said, “I wanted to change something so I emailed the Superintendent and principal and I was kind of surprised that I heard back from them. I actually got invited to talk about the issue so that got me into activism.” Another student said she went directly to the principal when she identified a serious equity issue in the school and was able to engage in a conversation with the principal and other school leaders.

Many participants cited student action around issues of injustice as meaningful learning experiences for students. Students participated in the planning and hosting of the first Juneteenth celebration. One leader reported, “it was great, BIPOC students got up and spoke about the significance of Black freedom.”

While participants identified several structures that were in place to promote student voice, both leaders and students recognized the need to improve in amplifying these voices as a way to increase student agency and encourage social action. Once assistant principal shared the following:

> The Black Student Union was trying to organize a school wide walkout. But we thought there were issues around safety because of the fights that were happening and we sort of reached out to the group to say, ‘we want you to have a voice, but if everybody leaves the

> building unsupervised at the same time right now - that isn't really safe'. Which they took as you're silencing our voice, because you won't let us do this.

Another assistant principal reported, "I think it's something we're trying to figure out and be more successful at right at the moment." One student reported that while there were venues for student voice, there were many times when she didn't feel listened to. The student shared that:

> I was in a lot of meetings last year with these people and it was very frustrating because I felt like they were making us do the work that they didn't want to do. And constantly asking us for what they should do…. But when we would tell them about what we thought needed to change in the school system, it felt like they weren't really listening or willing to change.

Another student reported school leaders having strengths and weaknesses in the area of student voice. She said, "when it's inconvenient or when it is politically polarizing, the leadership can sometimes just ignore the student voice." This student's perspective matches other student and faculty's analysis of school leadership both working to amplify and needing to continue to improve in the area of student voice.

Crisis Response

A school crisis has been defined as an, "unexpected, fundamental disruption to school functioning with potentially high consequences for the organization, its stakeholders, and its reputation"(Grissom & Concon, 2021, p. 315). In this study, during crises or challenging times, teachers and students reported looking towards leadership for their response. They described how the school leadership responded to crises having to do with injustice or oppression as being highly consequential to the school community. Leaders, teachers, and students spoke about recent crises in which leaders needed to take actions that foster critical consciousness in students.

This was true for both national and local crises. Students and teachers reported wanting to hear from leaders quickly and in clear communication around what was happening, what the school response was, and how it aligned with the school's values around justice.

Participants cited a number of crises that school leaders were forced to respond to, including the COVID-19 pandemic, students' high level of mental health needs, the national racial reckoning, and threats to democracy. Specifically, teachers and students looked to leaders for their responses to events like the murder of George Floyd. While some crises may were national events, people connected them to the local context because they raised issues of systemic oppression. These events offered school leaders a unique opportunity and challenge to encourage discourse and learning that could foster critical consciousness in students. One leader said:

> When George Floyd happened. I talked to our assistant superintendent and said, 'we got to open up the table.' And so we collaborated and I put out the invitation–it was a simple email to the whole staff and said, 'there's issues out there. We already know that racism has long existed and now we need to start talking about it'. And then, like organically, we came up with these four committees. So as time went on, we said we wanted to invite students into it.

Another leader relayed a story of how, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, a student elected to remain seated during the Pledge of Allegiance and was being threatened with disciplinary action by the teacher. He recalled:

> I had to have a conversation with a teacher who said [to the student], 'if you don't stand for the Pledge of Allegiance, you can either go in the hallway, or not participate in my

> class'. And I'm like, 'no, that's not how it works…. If they are choosing to sit, then then they have the right to do that, and you don't have to like it, but you have to respect it.'

This was an example of an administrator supporting the constitutional rights of the student and having to explain those rights to faculty. Other teachers reported feeling supported by administration to have the autonomy to engage in critical analysis when national events took place. One teacher said, "last week I did something around George Floyd's birthday. I think that, as teachers, we do have the flexibility to be able to do that, even if it's not necessarily within the curriculum." School leaders also talked about efforts to support teachers to have conversations with students in response to national events in which social justice was central.

The insurrection at the Capitol building on January 6, 2021, was another national event that school leaders felt called for a response. One assistant principal shared:

> For January 6th there was definitely a building leadership acknowledgement of what had happened, and the horror of it. Then we gave permission for the classroom teachers that were comfortable to discuss what had happened, but we asked people to please try to keep their own politics out of it, which is a hard thing for folks to do… So I think we always feel like it's our place to acknowledge when things of that magnitude happen, and try to acknowledge what students' feelings are, and to allow opportunities and places for students to be able to voice that. But some teachers just aren't comfortable doing that.

The assistant principal went on to describe how the school leadership fielded complaints from parents on both ends of the political spectrum.

Teachers also described getting emails from school leaders, "sharing resources for how to talk to students about it and encouraging us to address it and not to just say, let's open our science books." Teachers reported this encouragement to engage in critical conversations with students

as empowering and important for their practice. Students also reported that school leaders' emails about national issues related to critical consciousness as well as school based issues around injustice had an impact on them and the overall school culture.

While there was a challenging national context that called school leaders to respond to in order to cultivate critical consciousness, participants also named local crises around issues of justice that leaders were called to manage. Ten out of ten people involved with the high school that were interviewed for this study spoke about a racist incident that took place in the fall of 2021 and the leaders' response. The brief summary of the incident is that a student was wearing a Make America Great Again (MAGA) hat at a football game and a verbal argument ensued between groups of students and particularly between two students. The situation escalated and one student flipped the MAGA hat off the other student's head and was then called the N-word. After the incident, the school administration disciplined both students, and the victim of the racial slur engaged with other students and the Black Student Union to voice dissatisfaction with the school leadership's response to the incident and to racial injustice in general at the school. The BSU and the student advocated for time to speak on the student-run high school news television show and for students to walk out of the school. The administration cited safety and privacy concerns and did not allow the student to be on the news program nor did they allow or support a walk-out. One student reported:

> Something that [educational leaders] don't do well is not letting us use our voice in the way we want to use it… Like, they want us to have it in the realm of what they would like us to do. For example, there was this protest that was happening at our school, about hate speech and [the administration] directly came to me and told me to shut the whole protest off … they said that they would rather just have this whole meeting about hate

> speech,which never happened anyway, rather than just making a whole protest. So it's like they want us to stay in the realm of what they want, but don't let students partake in action against injustice and actually use our voice and tell people how we feel… So it's like they say they listen, but it's only when it works for them.

While crisis response was found to be very important for social justice leadership to support critical consciousness, it was also reported that leadership response to "positive" local or national happenings around social justice was also important. For example, three students mentioned that leaders supported an event around the first Juneteenth holiday in which student voice was prominently featured. The election of Kamala Harris as the first female and person of color as vice-president was also something that was recognized to the school community by some leaders. Thus, leadership response to happenings related to social justice was found to be important in cultivating spaces for critical consciousness development.

Summary of Findings

The focus of this study was on understanding what educational leaders do to foster schools that support students' critical consciousness, as well as examining how faculty and students experience school leaders' practices. Findings indicate that leaders in the study engaged in practices including setting goals, values, and vision, leading instructional improvements to support a critical lens, and fostering student voice. This study also highlighted the importance of leadership in times of crises in cultivating a culture of critical consciousness development. The impact of leaders' actions became amplified during crises as many people often look to leaders to set cultures that enable critical consciousness. Although leaders interviewed espoused a commitment to implementing practices that support critical consciousness, they also identified challenges that made it difficult at times. Educators and students also pointed out how at times,

leadership practices fell short. It is with these findings in mind that I will now explore the implications for educational leaders working to support environments that foster critical consciousness in students.

Discussion

This study set out to explore the questions: *What practices do school leaders implement to foster critical consciousness in students and how do students and faculty understand these practices?* Researchers argue critical consciousness is of fundamental importance in educating our students to ensure a healthy and just democracy (Seider & Graves, 2020). Educational leaders committed to social justice must work to ensure that all students are prepared to analyze and act against oppression in our democracy. This study found that leadership practices that support critical consciousness development in students vary, but can generally be divided into four main categories including: establishing vision and values, instructional leadership with attention to co-curriculars, student voice amplification, and leadership response during challenging times or crises.

While these results reinforce previous findings, they also raise the paramount importance of leadership in times of crisis in order to cultivate spaces where students can develop their critical consciousness. This was a key finding from this study and has not gotten ample attention in previous research around critical consciousness.

Limitations

While this study supports findings from previous research and presents some additional unique findings, there were many limitations. First, the study was small in scope and focused on one urban district in the Northeastern United States. The small sample size and data collected raises questions about to what extent the findings can be transferable. Second, the study was not

longitudinal in nature and did not measure levels of critical consciousness or how critical consciousness might develop over time. Finally, the study primarily focused on educators' self-reporting of strategies and, while there is student interview data, it was difficult to verify the validity of the practices or connect them directly to student experiences. While interviewing multiple participants from a variety of perspectives was an attempt to address this limitation, some limitations are fundamental to the design of this study.

Recommendations for School Leaders

This research leads to several recommendations for fellow practitioners in the field.

Cultivate Coherent Vision and Values around Critical Consciousness

This study's findings support researchers' claim that coherence is key to effective schools (Mehta & Fine, 2015). Schools that have a coherent vision and explicit values around critical consciousness are more likely to be places that deeply develop critical consciousness in students. School leaders' work is facilitated in this matter when the district vision aligns with the school vision around issues of critical consciousness. As the findings presented above illustrate, district leadership has an important role to play in setting a larger context. At the same time, data also shows that what happens at the school level is greatly impacted by building leaders such as principals, assistant principals, or deans. School administrators have many opportunities to exercise leadership and take actions that reflect their stated values. It was clear from this study that leaders impact school culture and how things are done at the school. Leaders interweaving the importance of cultivating students' social analysis skills, political agency, and social action experience into the vision and practice of the school is critical to building and upholding motivation to do the work of developing critical consciousness in students.

One important culture building tool is to make critical consciousness work visible in the school. Students, teachers, and leaders named the power of public displays of critical consciousness such as protests and statements, a Juneteenth public celebration, displays on the school's walls, student's presentations of civics projects, and more. Student work around critical consciousness should be shared publicly: on the walls of the school, on websites and social media, or through presentations and exhibitions. These demonstrations are a way to make the implicit values explicit and bring the vision and values into practice.

The last twenty years in education have focused greatly on accountability with schools implementing increased testing in efforts to measure students' math and literacy skills (Grissom et al., 2021). However, if an aim of a school is to develop critical consciousness then trying to measure students' levels of critical consciousness could provide leaders more evidence and data to inform their work. There are various critical consciousness scales that could be used by school administrators to gather evidence around where the school's strengths and weaknesses apply (Seider & Graves, 2020). Leaders expressed wondering how their school was doing in terms of critical consciousness development of students. Leaders should use tools to measure students' critical consciousness to collect data to allow them to set goals and plan interventions.

Instructional Leadership is Paramount

Similar to previous research, this study found that one paramount way to support critical consciousness in students is in the classroom and deeper learning opportunities. School leaders should support teachers through fostering a specific school wide vision for instructional practice, building a coherent professional development plan for critical consciousness development, developing similar learning strategies for adults and for students known as "learning symmetry",

collaboration and partnering with expert organizations, and investing in electives or co-curricular learning options that support critical consciousness.

It is primary for leaders to develop a specific vision and description of quality instruction that includes critical consciousness. With critical race theory and the reading of certain critical books under attack, school leaders need to be explicit about how critical consciousness development is an essential part of good instructional practice. Connected to the vision should be a coherent strategic plan that outlines professional learning for teachers. Often professional development in this area is reactive and lacks clarity, consistency and organization. Creating a multi-year educator practice learning plan to support critical consciousness in schools should improve teaching and learning over time.

School leaders should work to develop critical consciousness in teachers and educators in ways that are symmetrical and reflect the learning that would be expected in classrooms with students. For example, adults might engage in restorative justice circles themselves in order to build critical reflection and be empowered to then lead circles with students. This “learning symmetry” builds culture for all around critical consciousness. School leaders need to further build and sustain structures for professional development that continue to work on critical consciousness in a sustainable manner.

School leaders can outsource and partner with non-profit organizations, like Facing History or Learning for Justice, or with higher education to support critical consciousness in schools. Some of these partnerships could come through investing in the “periphery” of electives. Elective courses are often seen as not being in the core of learning in the school. However, as reported by students in this study, these courses are sometimes the places where the deepest learning and most critical consciousness development is happening. School leaders

should make sure Ethic Studies, Civics, and Social Justice courses are key components of all learners' experiences. Furthermore, curriculum audits and reviews should check to make sure units of study are aligned with supporting critical consciousness. Youth Participatory Action Research should be a mandatory part of the curriculum for every student. Finally, out-of-school hours programming like clubs can be one of the most important and powerful ways for students to develop critical consciousness. School leaders should see this time as of core importance to the student learning experience.

Amplify and Institutionalize Student Voice Mechanisms

Students develop critical consciousness by engaging in analysis, building agency, and practicing action (Seider & Graves, 2020). They learn by doing and then reflecting on the action. Student voice in the school is an essential way to model critical consciousness within the school. Students who start to analyze injustice and oppression will inevitably recognize some of these issues in their own school and community. Leaders need to be brave enough to engage and amplify student voices even when it may be uncomfortable.

School leaders should work to ensure that student voice is institutionalized within the design of the school. Ways to do this include a high functioning Student Council, student members on governing boards, a student leadership class that delegates decision making powers to students, students on hiring committees, and students on school leadership teams.

Be Prepared for Crises

This research was conducted in unprecedented times during the COVID-19 pandemic, a national youth mental health crises, a national racial reckoning, and serious threats to stable democracies. The crises that educators faced in 2020 and 2021 were, indeed, large and historic. One finding of this study that has clear implications for practitioners is the importance of

leadership during turbulent times on the cultivation of cultures that foster critical consciousness. This finding supports previous research on the importance of school leadership during times of crisis (Grissom & Condon, 2021). While effective crisis management is important for school leaders in general, it is also true for leaders who are aiming to foster systems that support critical consciousness in students.

We can't see the future and we do not know what crises, large or small, national or local, will occur. However, we know that challenging times that center around issues of justice and oppression will happen in our schools and districts in the future. Parents, students, and teachers will be looking to leadership for guidance to support students and teach them during turbulent times. Leaders and school systems should be prepared to lead through the unexpected. Leaders should prepare for the next time when an epithet is written on a school bathroom wall or a tragic hate crime happens in our country. Schools should have plans that outline general responses and protocols that include options and action steps such as: meeting with student government and affinity groups, communication to families, student assemblies, restorative justice circles, and more. Plans should include both short and long term crises response. These are moments when leaders demonstrate the vision and values through action and give meaning to the words on the walls or in the emails. Students and others watch because they want to know if leaders mean what they say. When actions align with espoused values during crises, it builds trust and re-energizes shared commitment. These difficult times can help to define the culture of the school and cultivate a culture that is ready to foster critical consciousness. While we can't predict how or when challenges around injustice will come, school leaders should expect them and be prepared to respond in ways that cultivate an environment ripe for critical consciousness.

Leading schools that foster critical consciousness is complex, difficult, and risky work. It is risky because it is fundamentally social justice leadership work that pushes people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors and forces people outside of their comfort zone. Leading this work will, inevitably, lead to resistance and school leaders who are effectively able to implement their practices to support critical consciousness must have the skill and willingness to be able to navigate the school as a political environment (Ryan & Higginbottom, 2017). School leaders must build and strengthen their political acumen as they lead the adaptive work of building schools that promote critical consciousness.

Recommendation for Future Research

This study backed up what researchers have found: leadership is a powerful mechanism for school improvement (Grissom, et al., 2021). While there is research on critical consciousness development in students in our schools, there is not enough research on effective leadership practices that cultivate environments where students are more likely to think critically and act to dismantle injustice. In particular, this study highlights the need for more research on how school leaders effectively respond to crises related to oppression and justice. More research is needed to support school leaders in their practice around building communities that develop critical consciousness in students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this individual study was to answer the questions: *What practices, if any, do school leaders implement to foster the development of critical consciousness in their students? How do students and faculty describe and understand their leaders' efforts to establish a school context that contributes to students' critical consciousness development?* This research intended to contribute to the overall group research by providing insight into how leaders within

the school district we studied support critical consciousness in their students. School leaders must cultivate cultures in their schools that create fertile ground for critical consciousness development through expressing clear vision and values around social justice, leading teaching and learning that promotes critical consciousness, amplifying student voice, and being responsive to crises related to injustice.

In times of a global pandemic, an endemic of systemic racism, and fundamental threats to our democracy, our schools are at a critical juncture in our history (Mehta, 2022). This is a moment for school leaders to reassess the purpose of schooling and rethink and redesign schools that foster critical consciousness. If we want to maintain our democracy and increase social justice, then a core goal of our educational system must be to foster the development of critical consciousness in students. Schools need to be places in which students learn to interrogate and dismantle systems of oppression and injustice. Education must challenge and support students to "deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire, 1993, p. 34).

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, 2022), school-based leaders (Bibbo & Lugira, 2022), educators (Bibbo, Daly, Lugira, 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 their identity in their school communities and will further examine how each tenet intersects to

[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

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 a tool that could measure the continuum on becoming an antiracist organization could provide check and balances for district leaders.

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

School Leader Interview Protocol

(Adapted from Seider et al., 2016, p. 46-53)

INTRO

Please share with me a little background information about yourself:

How long have you been working in this school and in what capacities?

As a leader, how do you express the vision and values of the school around issues of inequity, injustice, oppression and the need for students to understand and be agents of change?

As a leader, how do you amplify student voice at _____?

Do students have the opportunity at _____ to research a social issue and then take action to try to make a change in their community?

As a leader, have you taken any steps to start or improve Ethnic Studies or Social Justice courses?

What do leaders at your school do to support and challenge instructional improvements around critical literacy?

CONCLUSION

Is there anything else I should have asked you about how students' critical consciousness is strengthened here?

Appendix B

Student Interview Protocol Guide

(Adapted from Seider et al., 2016, p. 46-53)

BACKGROUND

1. Could you tell me yourself? (age and grade level)

SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES

2. What do you think about challenges like racism and social class inequity -- are those topics interesting to you? Are they things that you learn about in your school?

3. How has learning about these social issues impacted you?

4. What do you see school leaders doing or not doing to support the creation of a school where students think about issues of social justice?

5. How, if at all, does your school give you opportunities to learn about issues affecting your community? In a particular class? What does this look like?

6. Tell me how being a part of your school changed the way you think about the world? If so, how?

7. Tell me about how being a part of your school changed the way you think about your ability to impact your community? If so, how?

8. Tell me one thing you like about your school. Tell me one thing you'd change about your school if you could.

9. How, if at all, does your school give you opportunities to do something about an issue affecting your community (or another community)? In a particular class? How did that experience influence you?

10. How, if at all, does your school give you opportunities to talk about how social class or race? In a particular class?

CLOSING

11. Do you have anything to add or questions for me?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share?
13. Can I contact you if other questions come up?

Appendix C

Focus Group Structure

Time allotted	Activity
5 minutes	Welcome/Opening Remarks ● Introduce researchers ● This interview is strictly voluntary. At any time, you may ask to conclude the interview. ● All interview questions are optional. 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: "a person's ability to recognize and analyze oppressive forces shaping society and to take action against these forces" (Seider and Graves 2017, p. 2).
5 minutes 10 minutes	"Housekeeping" ● Describe focus group guidelines/norms ● Review consent form and discuss their rights as research participants ● Solicit and respond to any outstanding questions relevant to the consent form ● Collect signed consent forms
10 minutes 20 minutes	Introduction of participants ● Prompt - first name, years in the district, role in the district
10 minutes 30 minutes	Opening Question (round-robin) - need all to respond ● All questions will be printed out and posted on the newsprint prior to the session. Each question will be revealed in order and made visible by all participants.

10 minutes 40 minutes	Key Question 2 ● The goal is to elicit a response from all participants
10 minutes 50 minutes	Key Question 3 ● The goal is to elicit a response from all participants
10 minutes 60 minutes	Key Question 4 ● The goal is to elicit a response from all participants
10 minutes 70 minutes	Final question ● Reiterate the purpose of the study, review the RQs. ● Ask: "Have we missed anything that you feel is important for us to know?"
5 Minutes 75 minutes	Closing Remarks ● Thank the group for their participation ● Offer to share findings with them after the study is complete ● Share contact information ● Conduct a raffle for a $15 Amazon card

Adapted from (Krueger, 2002)