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CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: EDUCATORS OF COLOR (EOC): WHAT DO THEY THINK DISTRICTS SHOULD DO TO RETAIN THEM?

Dissertation

by

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with

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by
Ceronne B. Daly

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Abstract

School districts throughout the Commonwealth have engaged in initiatives to increase educators of color. Ingersoll et al. (2019) argue that while "many believe that the small number of minority teachers is caused by a lack of recruitment or intake" they concur with Pearson and Fuglei (2019) that recruitment is not the only problem. The issue is retention. Recent studies like these shed new light on the need for additional research on factors that increase the retention of educators of color. I posit that supporting the development of critical consciousness in Educators of Color can also support their retention in school districts. The purpose of this individual study is to identify the practices that Educators of Color (EOCs) report to be supportive, increase their critical consciousness, and/ or impact their retention in the district This study centers the experiences of Educators of Color (EOCs), and amplify their voices in order to learn about the impact of school-based and district-sponsored practices. This individual study is part of a group qualitative case study that examines the practices of district leaders, school leaders, educators, and students to foster and advance the development of critical consciousness.

Acknowledgement Page

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Finally, I would like to dedicate my diploma to my ancestors as a symbol of gratitude, for their shoulders that I stand on proudly: my maternal grandparents, Ena Dorothy Alexis and Jack Hamilton Alexis, my uncle Rex Byron Alexis and my aunt Hazel Alexis, my mother-in-law Marjorie White Daly and Cousin Peter John Gomes.

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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 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.

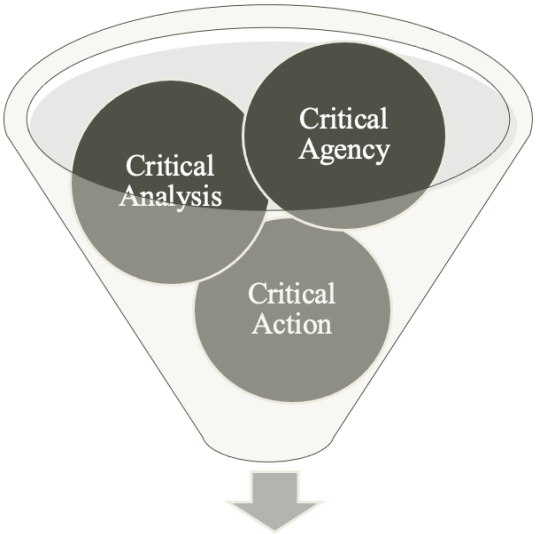
While Freire (2000) is credited with *conscientização* or critical consciousness theory, he did not present a conceptual model for this theory (Jemal, 2017). Since Freire's work, researchers have studied critical consciousness as an overarching framework with interconnected components. Radd & Kramer (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 refer to an individual's propensity to engage in a wide range of social action behaviors (Seider & Graves, 2020). Through the work of school districts and school communities, Seider & Graves (2020) suggest that the actions of writing letters to newspapers, contributing to a political campaign, engaging in protests, or boycotting particular businesses or products are all actions that reflect critical action which is the ultimate goal of critical consciousness development. Furthermore, Godfrey and Grayman (2014) suggest that youth critical consciousness is important from a societal perspective, as it can play a central role in addressing unjust systems, challenging marginalization in society, and promoting positive community development. National and local communities rely on the awareness, reflection, efficacy, and action of their youth. During this time of cognitive development, adolescents can think abstractly about larger societal systems and their place in those systems to develop a coherent understanding of political and social structures for the first time (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). According to Godfrey & Grayman (2014), youth critical consciousness has significant

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

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

The Nexus of Critical Consciousness and Leadership

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

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

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

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

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

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

Critical Consciousness and Race

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 1

Individual Research Questions

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

CHAPTER TWO[2]

Methods

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

Design of the Study

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

Sampling Selection

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

[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

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)

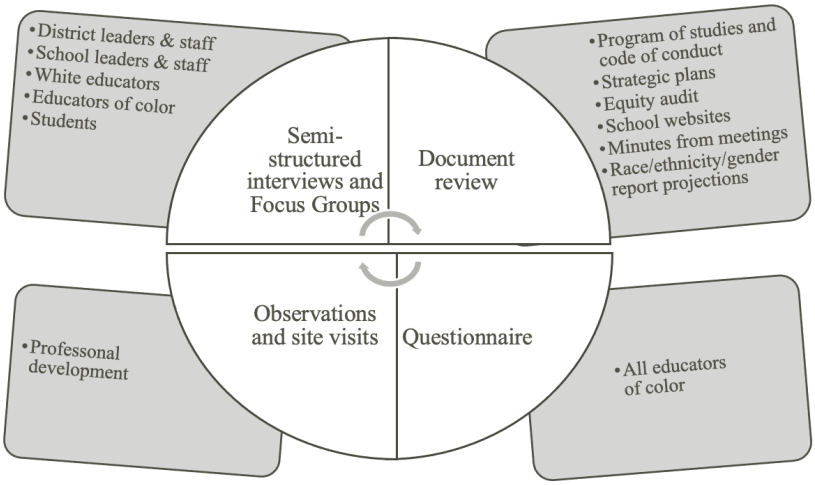
Data Sources

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]

Introduction

On March 17, 2020, K-12 public school education chand forever. Schools all over the Commonwealth and the nation closed to conduct all instruction remotely. All across the country, communities were engaged in a battle for truth. Collectively, we bore witness to a number of egregious violent incidents, many resulting in unexplainable deaths. These incidents were replayed in multimedia formats contributing to the nation's intense polarization between race and policing. People of all racial and ethnic backgrounds joined together in protests in cities across the nation. In the midst of all of this turmoil, students were attending school remotely. Suddenly more was needed from families and teachers to engage students in their learning. Some teachers used current events to activate and energize their learning. For many, a flashpoint existed at the intersection of whose life mattered more. Inequities were magnified during the pandemic. Teachers and administrators were looking to each other and the district for guidance and support as they navigated these nuanced conversations.

Educators of color bear an additional burden to their white colleagues. As evident in the current moment, "Long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put various groups of people at increased risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19, including many racial and ethnic minority groups and people with disabilities." (CDC, 2020). Pre-existing conditions such as cancer, chronic kidney disease, chronic lung diseases, diabetes, heart conditions, liver disease and overweight/obesity all disproportionately impact communities of color and are contributing comorbidities for COVID-19. Additionally, communities of color are also impacted by wealth disparities leading to financial, housing and food insecurity (Perry et al., 2021). Therefore, it is

[3] Ceronne B. Daly authored this chapter.

highly likely educators of color are either experiencing these challenges themselves or have members of their immediate family or friends group suffering.

Statement of Problem

As Carver-Thomas (2018) notes, “Over the past 30 years, the percentage of teachers of color in the workforce has grown from 12% to 20%. Incoming teachers, as a whole, are even more diverse. A quarter of first-year teachers in 2015 were non-White, up from 10% in the late 1980s. This all seems like a positive upward trend for teacher diversity. However, the teacher workforce still does not reflect the growing diversity of the nation, where people of color represent about 40% of the population and 50% of students” (p. 4). “Every state in the USA has a higher percentage of students of color than teachers of color” (Pearson & Fuglei, 2019, p.38). The retention of Educators of Color (EOCs) is of great importance to many school districts locally, regionally, and nationally. This disproportionality exists in the state of Massachusetts as well, 92% of all educators in the state of Massachusetts are White, and only 57% of the students are White. (2019-20 Race/Ethnicity and Gender Staffing Report - District - All, n.d.).

Egalite and Kisida (2018), Gershenson et al. (2016) and Egalite et al. (2015) all reflect on the negative impact of the growing teacher-student diversity gap. The racial background of K-12 teachers in the U.S. does not reflect the racial background of students today. This gap is problematic, not only because most students do not see themselves in the adults they interact with on a daily basis, but also because recent research shows that this gap impacts students’ school performance and achievement (Egalite et al., 2015). The term “Educators of Color” (EOC) is used to collectively reference those that have been racially minoritized in the United States. This includes people who identify as Asian-American, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Middle Eastern, and Pacific Islander (Kohli et al., 2019). This study intends to provide school and

district leaders with some insight into the type of practices they can implement that EOCs report to be supportive, increase their critical consciousness and/or impact their retention in the district.

Increasing teacher diversity should be a priority both nationally and in the state of Massachusetts. School districts throughout the Commonwealth have engaged in initiatives to increase the diversification of their workforce. Ingersoll et al. (2019) argue that while “many believe that the small number of minority teachers is caused by a lack of recruitment or intake” they concur with Pearson and Fuglei (2019) that recruitment is not the only problem. The issue is also retention. Ingersoll and May (2011) found that the organizational conditions in schools were strongly related to minority teacher retention. Pearson & Fuglei, 2019, concurred that “it’s important to note that the retention of teachers, particularly minority teachers, requires conditions that increase teacher autonomy and connectedness.” (p.39) Recent studies like these shed new light on the need for additional research on factors that increase the retention of teachers of color. I posit that supporting the development of critical consciousness in EOC can also support their retention in school districts. My study is focused on the following three research questions:

- RQ#1 - What practices do district and/or school leaders employ to support the development of critical consciousness in educators of color?"
- RQ#2 - What practices do district and/or school leaders employ to support the retention of educators of color?
- RQ#3 - How do educators of color experience and respond to these practices?

The significance of this study is that it centers the experiences of Educators of Color, and amplifies their voices in order to learn about the impact of school-based and district-sponsored practices. Given the importance of Educators of Color in K-12 education, learning more about what practices positively impact their experiences is invaluable.

Conceptual Framework

Critical Consciousness

The overarching conceptual framework that connects our group dissertation in practice is critical consciousness. According to Kohli et al. (2019), Freire (1970, 2018) frames critical consciousness "as a process not a state, through which one learns about prescribed social, political, and economic realities, enters into dialogue about liberating possibilities, and engages in transformative social action" (p. 31). My study builds on this with an added focus on critical professional development, as shown in Table 4 and discussed in detail below. I focus on district practices that support Educators of Color in general with a specific focus on the development of critical consciousness and retention in Educators of Color.

Table 4

Aligning Critical Consciousness and Critical Professional Development

Author(s)	Conceptual Frameworks	Awareness Analysis (reflection)	Reflection/Action (Praxis)	Action
Freire, (1970, 2018)	Critical Consciousness	Dialogical, Problem-Posing Education	Praxis Is The Coming Together Of Reflection And Action	Leads To Liberatory Transformation
Seider & Graves, (2020)	Critical Consciousness	Social Analysis (Awareness/ Reflection)	Political Agency (Acting On/ Belief One Can Alter The System)	Social Action (Action)
Radd & Kramer (2016)	Critical Consciousness	Ongoing And Growing Awareness And Knowledge (Of Power, Privilege, And Oppression)	A Habit Of Openness And Learning (To Disrupt Injustice)	Create More Just Action, Processes, Structures, And Circumstances'
Watts et al. (2011)	Critical Consciousness	Critical Reflection	Political Efficacy	Critical Action
Kohli et al., (2015)	Critical Professional Development	Dialogical Cooperative Dialogue Build Unity, Provides Leadership	Affords Space For Com-Plex Reflections On Their Role In The Reproduction Or Resistance Of Inequality	Offers Educators Agency In Their Own Development
Moseley, M. (2018)	Critical Professional Development	Dialogical Experiences: (Conversations that require deep listening for understanding)	Collectivity And Relationality (Brings "Humanity back to our professional interactions".)	Critical Consciousness And Transformation

				As An Ongoing Strengthening Racial Literacy Process

Critical Professional Development

In addition to critical consciousness, I use the Critical Professional Development (CPD) framework to analyze and make meaning of the district practices. Above in Table 4, I focus on making meaningful connections between the literature framing critical consciousness and critical professional development. In Kohli et al. 's (2015) conception, critical professional development maps onto “the tenets of dialogical action: it is designed to provoke cooperative dialogue, build unity, provide shared leadership, and meet the critical needs of teachers” (p. 11). Critical professional development creates a unique praxis, as it is an alternate space for teacher development where they are “able to (a) strengthen their racial literacy and (b) find critical community to support their retention in the profession” (Kohli, 2019, p. 40). Moseley (2018) states that “Critical Professional Development is (1) dialogical (2) honors relationality/collectivity (3) strengthens racial literacy and (4) recognizes critical consciousness and transformation as an ongoing process.” (p. 271) Both have a progressive commonality: Awareness or reflection begins the process, reflection and action sometimes forms a praxis and finally action is the final stage and may take on many forms such as social action and critical action. Both Kohli and Moseley describe the first phase of Dialogical Experiences as those that encourage teachers to engage in conversations that require deep listening for understanding (Kohli et al. 2015). Critical professional development uses Freire’s (2018) four aspects of dialogical action— cooperation, unity, organization and cultural synthesis. It is a coming together of reflection and action to create praxis.

Critical consciousness is the foundational conceptual framework that undergirds critical professional development. Though both frameworks at face value seem more complex and less

common, when used to define alternate spaces of teacher development the concepts become more accessible. As Kohli (2016) explains, “Critical professional development offers educators agency in their own development and affords space for complex reflections on their role in the reproduction or resistance of inequality, as well as tools to respond to intersectional oppression embedded within institutional policies and practices” (p. 41). It is in these dialogical learning spaces that the specific experiences or needs of educators of color are centered or discussed.

Literature Review

Building on the group framework of critical consciousness, my individual study focuses on educators of color and their experiences with professional development. Critical Professional Development provides a framework for my individual study however, there are many topics that inform and provide insight into my research questions. Drawing on prior literature about educators of color, I subdivided my literature review into the following subtopics: The value of educators of color (EOCs) in K-12 schools, and the types of practices that engage EOCs.

The Value of Educators of Color in K-12 schools

In order to investigate practices that support the development of EOCs in K-12 settings, I want to first attest to their value. There is a substantial amount of research affirming the positive impact an EOC can have on all students, particularly same race students. “Teachers of color are particularly suited to teaching students of color because they bring to their work an inherent understanding of the backgrounds and experiences of these learners” (Villegas et al., 2012, p 285). Dee (2005), Egalite et al. (2015), Ehrenberg et al. (1995), Gershenson et al. (2016) and Villegas et al. (2012) all confirm that teachers of the same race/ethnicity could narrow the performance gap between students of different races/ethnicities because they serve as academic role models or because they are more inclined to hold high expectations for a student’s potential.

Redding (2019) states that EOCs positively impact ratings of student behavior, student academic performance and performance on achievement tests. As Griffin and Tackie (2017) found in their study they can also be "warm demanders," holding all students to high expectations, both academically and as members of a disciplined learning community.

Types of practices that engage EOCs

In exploring the types of practices district and/or school leaders use to support EOCs, there are a number of learning spaces cultivated for this purpose. Moseley (2018), for example, describes the Black Teacher Program (BTP) as a racial affinity-based professional development that supports Black teachers in the San Francisco Bay Area and New York City. Nieto et al. (2002) describe the creation of their inquiry group of mostly EOCs teaching in an urban school district as one "informed by the ideas of Paulo Freire (1970, 1998), particularly his insistence that education is most effective when it is based on dialog and respect." Lisle-Johnson and Rita Kohli (2020) describe how critical professional development spaces provide like-minded EOCs a way to combat feelings of isolation, help them to navigate working in racially isolating institutions, and serve as networks to support their personal and professional health. Warren and Goodman (2018) noted that empathy is an efficacious tool for teachers working in multicultural and multiracial educational settings that facilitates cross-cultural and cross-racial interactions with students and their families (Carter, 2009; Dolby, 2012). Through a careful review of the literature, I identified a number of potential types of learning spaces to consider for EOCs: affinity groups, inquiry groups and critical professional development sessions. These spaces have the potential to provide for rejuvenation of EOCs, improved classroom instruction, improved practice, coping with racist spaces, and support to amplify students' voices.

My study contributes to the existing literature by focusing directly on practices district-level and school-based leaders employ to support educators of color. Support is defined from a critical consciousness framework, and my study seeks to determine whether these practices provide opportunities for critical awareness, reflection and action. The district we chose to study has practices that they believe support educators of color. My research documents the experiences of EOCs to learn what practices they value and whether the school-based or district sponsored practices do in fact help to develop their critical consciousness.

Methods

In this chapter, I will share the design of my study, research design method, participant/researcher relationship, my positionality, sample selection, data collection, and data analysis.

Design of the Study

This dissertation in practice uses a qualitative research design. Our unit of analysis is a suburban public school district in eastern Massachusetts. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) qualitative research is used when the researcher is seeking knowledge in order to make meaning of an activity, experience or phenomenon. The intended purpose is to document how each individual uniquely interprets and makes meaning of their experiences. This inductive stance allows me to stay “grounded in the data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 31). Our overarching theoretical framework is critical consciousness (CC) and critical professional development (CPD). My research questions require that I investigate whether district and/or school leaders offer practices to support the development of critical consciousness in EOCs. I first identified school based and district sponsored practices that were offered to support EOCs, then documented the experiences of EOCs who participate in these practices. My findings will

determine whether these practices support their development of critical consciousness and impact their retention.

Participant/Researcher Relationship

According to Maxwell (2013), “The relationships that you create with participants in your study (and also with others, sometimes called "gatekeepers," who can facilitate or interfere with your study) are an essential part of your methods, and how you initiate and negotiate these relationships is a key design decision” (p.90). I agree that relationships were key to my ability to successfully gather authentic data for my study. As a district-level educator of color, I was asked to contribute to a research study conducted on women leaders of color in my current school district. Before I agreed to participate, I needed to know more about the researcher and her study. Therefore, once our district liaison was identified, I prioritized establishing and maintaining a strong relationship with him. My study relied on his ability to get my questionnaire out to as many EOCs in the district as possible. As a snowball sampling instrument, I needed EOCs to both complete the questionnaire and agree to participate in my semi-structured individual interviews. In addition to maintaining my relationship with my district liaison, I was intentional about establishing a strong participant/researcher relationship. My district liaison sent out an introductory email (Appendix E) to all EOCs in the district inviting them to participate in my study. I highlighted the purpose of study, explicitly introduced myself as the researcher, and indicated the importance of educators of color in K-12 education. Following completion of the study, with the intent to preserve our researcher/participant relationship, I sent a parting note of gratitude (Appendix F), via email, to all EOCs who participated in semi-structured interviews.

Positionality

In conducting this study, my positionality as a researcher must be acknowledged and thoroughly evaluated to ensure the validity of the work (Milner, 2007). As the primary researcher, I am a Black, female, district-level administrator currently responsible for district wide workforce diversity in an urban public school district in the state of Massachusetts. In my professional role I am a district-level educator of color and I am responsible for implementing the very types of district sponsored practices I am studying. Both of those characteristics make me an insider. As introduced in Merriam and Tisdell (2016), I am aware of the duality of my emic perspective as an insider to the group I am studying and the need to intentionally focus on amplifying my etic perspective as a researcher. Great care was taken to mitigate any implicit bias during the collection and analysis of the data. Understanding that we cannot predict all that can inadvertently influence our data analysis, I will be attentive to dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen (Milner, 2007). Throughout, I kept a research log to monitor my own experiences and potential areas of bias.

Sample Selection

I used purposive or purposeful sampling strategies to inform my sample selection. This strategy was appropriate for my study because I wanted participants to self-select to participate in my semi-structured interviews. Given that my research questions focused on centering the voices of EOCs, and learning their perspective, purposeful sampling is well suited because it “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 96). Specifically my sample is simply derived from any school-based or central office educators who self-identify as educators of color. However, because I was trying to learn both about the existence of practices that support EOCs and their experience of these practices, I gathered some preliminary data. The questionnaire,which I

discuss in more detail below, served as the instrument to initiate the purposeful sampling strategy. It allowed me to gather more specific demographic information and data regarding past, current, or future practices.

Data Collection

In order to collect enough relevant data to be able to answer my research questions, I needed to be able to document school based and/or district level practices that support EOCs, determine whether these practices support the development of critical consciousness and finally learn how EOCs experienced/responded to these practices. I relied primarily on using the following data collection methods: document review, a questionnaire, and semi-structured individual interviews. As an individual, I was the primary instrument for data collection and I utilized triangulation of my varied sources to improve the validity of my findings. As stated by Maxwell (2013), “This strategy reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the biases of a specific method, and allows you to gain a more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating" (p. 102).

Document Review

We began our data collection in the summer of 2021. During the months of July and August, I reviewed documents that I retrieved from the district’s website and from the Massachusett Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s website. Once we connected with our district liaison, I was able to get district generated data on their recruitment and retention practices and data on the number and demographics of their EOCs. This data was valuable and enabled me to determine the potential outreach of my questionnaire and assuage my concerns of getting enough EOCs to volunteer to be interviewed.

Questionnaire

As stated above, my questionnaire served as the instrument to initiate a purposeful sampling strategy. This technique is useful because “it has the advantage of recruiting large numbers of participants for the study.” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p.143). I used the district's workforce roster to identify every school based and central office educator who self-identified as an EOC. My district liaison played a critical role of sponsorship by introducing my individual study and its importance to the district. My district liaison sent out an email (Appendix A) on my behalf, with a short professional bio, an abstract of my study, a few sentences describing our rationale for our choice of district selection and a link to my questionnaire (Appendix B). The questionnaire was administered using the Boston College Qualtrics account, a web-based questionnaire tool. It enabled me to gather more specific demographic information, solicit participants to identify any school-based or district-level practices and recruit candidates to participate in individual interviews. My district liaison sent my invitation with the qualtrics questionnaire to 321 school-based and district-level EOCs. The questionnaire was accessible from October 4, 2021, to November 9, 2021, for 31? days. As a result, I received a total of 49 responses, of which 90% or 44 consented to complete the questionnaire, with 10% or five who did not want to participate. The questionnaire collected data from 14% of all EOCs in the district. Of these, 53% were school-based, 20% were from the central office and 27% did not disclose their location. As a result, I received eight volunteers.

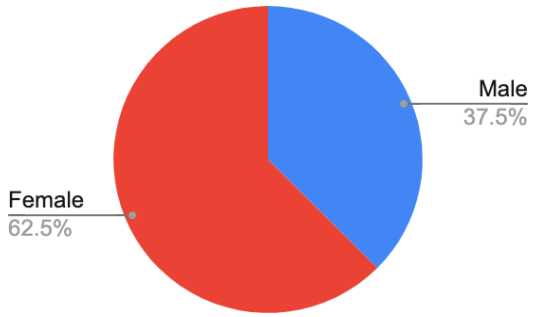
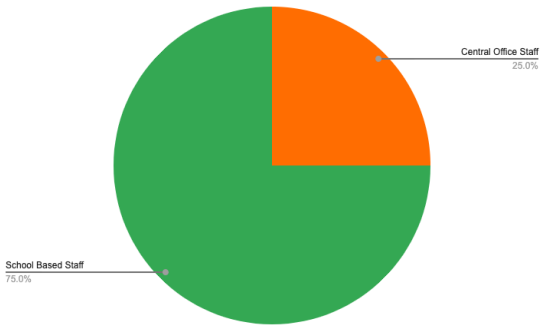
Semi-structured Interviews

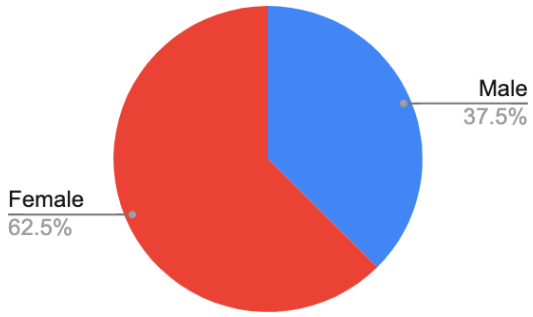
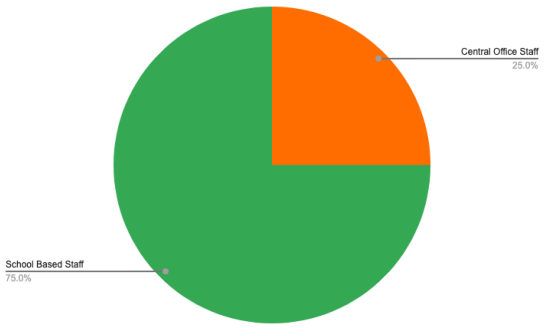
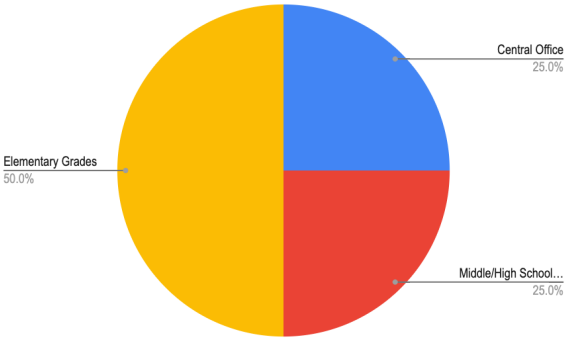
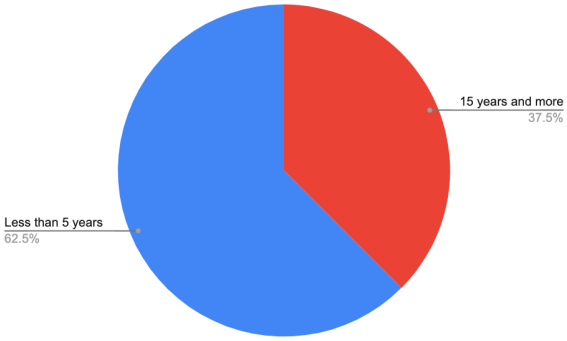
According to Maxwell (2013), “Your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask people to gain that understanding” (p.103). My primary data source was semi-structured individual interviews conducted with school-based and district-level EOCs. I used an interview protocol, (Appendix C) to provide

continuity and structure to my interviews. Because the interview is semi-structured, I ensured I addressed each question, but was able to adapt the questions slightly to fit the conversation. As Seidman (1998) suggests interviews are "designed to ask participants to reconstruct their experience and to explore their meaning" (p. 92). Keeping this guidance in mind, in Appendix D and E, you will find a question bank adapted from Panorama Education User Guide: Panorama Teacher and Staff Survey. (Education, n.d.) The questions are differentiated for school-based (Appendix D) and district (Appendix E) staff and focused on learning about the practices offered by school-based and or central office leaders to support the development of critical awareness, reflection and action in EOCs.

Figure 3

Descriptive Data of the Eight Semi-Structured Interview Candidates

<table>
<tr><td>Gender
Female - 62%, Male 38%</td><td>School Based (75%) vs.
Central Office Staff (25%)</td></tr>
<tr><td> 
</td><td> 
</td></tr>
<tr><td>Central Office (25%) Elementary (50%)
Middle, High School (25%)</td><td>Years in the District
Less than 5 years (62.5%)
15 Years or more (37.5%)</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Gender Female - 62%, Male 38%	School Based (75%) vs. Central Office Staff (25%)
	
	

Eight EOCs agreed to participate in the semi-structured interviews. Three of the eight interviewees asked me to take care to obscure their identity as much as possible because they were concerned that their comments may cause them professional harm. To that end, Figure 3 describes the eight interviewees in broad strokes. I can affirm that the eight interviewees represented four distinct racial ethnic groups and more than four of them spoke languages other than English.

I conducted the semi-structured interviews between November 5, 2021, to November 30, 2021. School districts were still experiencing the effects of Covid 19, therefore, I conducted my interviews remotely using the web-based video conferencing platform Zoom. Web-based video interviews provide tremendous opportunities and also pose unique challenges. Creswell and

Guetterman (2019), articulate that web-based video interviews can be challenging if either party is experiencing poor internet connection. Accounting for these potential adversities, my interview protocol required that all interviews be recorded via Zoom on two devices and also simultaneously recorded by Otter ai - a transcription software. Two distinct advantages of using a web based video platform were more flexibility for scheduling interview times and increased anonymity for interviewees. Three of the eight interviewees wanted to be interviewed without video, increasing their anonymity, and the Zoom platform allowed me to do so. Initially, as part of our group's study design, all individual team interviews were to be conducted with another member of the group, and when possible mixed gender or race. I conducted my first interview by myself, because I was unable to coordinate with an interview partner from our group. However, the first interview was successful because I was the only other individual present. Given the nature of my questions - learning what districts should do to support EOCs and my positionality, as a Black female district administrator, helped to put my interviewees at ease. Following this initial interview I made the decision to continue interviewing participants in a 1:1 format.

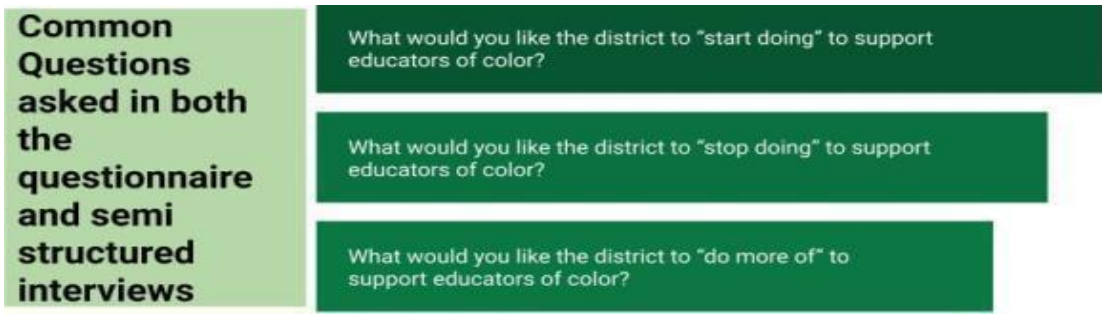
Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) advised us that, “Moreover, analysis is not a linear process of simply moving up something moving from one phase to the next. Instead, it is (a) more recursive process, their movement is back and forth as needed throughout the phases” (p.86). To that end, I used thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79). Fundamental to this methodology is coding and Saldana (2013) eloquently asserts its significance. “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). As a novice researcher,

I know I can run the risk of collecting too much data that may not contribute to answering my research questions. To mitigate against this possibility, I purposely used the following three identical questions outlined in Figure 4 in both my questionnaire and semi structured interviews, thereby assuring a connection between both data sets.

Figure 4

Common Questions to Align Data Collection



Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis process is listed below in Figure 5. I began the process by retrieving the data from my questionnaire and from my semi-structured interviews. The survey tool, Qualtrics, was used to administer my questionnaire. I then used Qualtrics to download the raw data into an excel file. In this format, I was able to complete some of the quantitative analysis I used above to describe the outcomes of the administration of the questionnaire. The narrative text that corresponded with the three identical questions was removed from the excel form and I placed all the answers from the 44 respondents into a Google Doc. All of my semi-structured interviews were recorded in Zoom and transcribed in Otter ai. and each one was downloaded into an individual Google Doc. After reviewing the document and making some preliminary notations, I uploaded both sets of narrative text into Quirkos, a CAQDAS software coding tool. My initial codes were divided into the following four categories: Critical Self Awareness, Critical Reflection, Professional Learning About Equity, and Critical

Action. Coding with Quirkos enabled me to search for themes across both sets of data and identify themes that ultimately led to my findings. The use of these two data sources was an intentional strategy to enhance my data credibility, (Baxter and Jack, 2008) and to increase validity.

Figure 5

The Phases of Thematic Analysis

(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87)

Findings

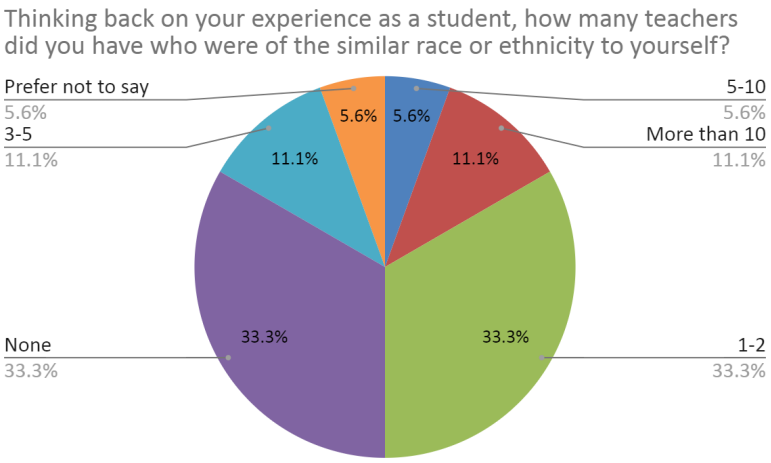
This individual study is intended to provide leaders with guidance from EOCs regarding what practices district leaders or school leaders can employ to promote belonging and empowerment. The findings presented in this study reflect the experiences of educators of color, including teachers, school-based and central office administrators from Freetown Public Schools. EOCs were candid in providing suggestions and four themes coalesced as a result of my thematic analysis of the data. These four themes are: Representation Matters: Value Voice, Professional Development: Intent and Impact, Affinity Groups as Healing Spaces, and Leaders need to be Upstanders.

Representation Matters: Value Voice

Representation matters, as stated earlier, students of color benefit from being taught by a teacher of color (Egalite et al., 2015). The teacher student diversity gap is a long standing challenge. In the questionnaire, I asked EOCs to reflect on their experience as a student and recall how many teachers of a similar race or ethnicity they encountered during their schooling (Figure 6). Over 65% indicated that they had two or less EOCs and almost 80% stated they had

Figure 6

EOCs Who Had Teachers of a Similar Race



five or less EOCs. Therefore, I was not surprised to learn that many EOCs in the questionnaire stated that they wanted the district to recruit more EOCs and to promote more EOCs to leadership roles across the organization. “Hire more coaches of color. Although administrators are of color, coaches who I work directly with and make many of the decisions for our grade are all white” (School-based questionnaire respondent). “Recruit more educators of color. Understand how very important this is to students of color and educators of color” (Central Office questionnaire respondent). EOCs interviewed also admonished the district “The staff doesn't reflect the diversity in the demographic of the students.” One EOC noted that given the student population in Freetown, linguistic diversity is just as important. They also note

that “Most of the people in power, from department heads to vice principals, to principals, are monolingual English speakers. We serve a very large multilingual diverse student population.” Hiring staff that represent the linguistic diversity of students is also an essential consideration for Freetown.

Value Voice

It is not enough to hire more staff if EOCs do not feel as if they belong in Freetown Public Schools. All EOCs interviewed expressed that they did not feel a sense of belonging in the district or in their schools. Table 5 illustrates the following: None of the EOCs interviewed felt connected to the district, not even those in the central office, yet all of them felt connected to the students. One out of the six teachers felt like they belonged in their school, and both central office EOCs did not feel as if they belonged in the central office.

Table 5

Data On Whether EOCs Feel Connected

EOCs	Feel connected with the district	Do not feel connected with the district	Feel connected with their school	Do not feel connected with their school	Feel connected to the students	Do not feel connected to the students
Central Office	None	All	N/A	N/A	All	None
School Based	None	All	One	Most	All	None

EOCs articulated that their feelings of a lack of belonging are also connected to their sense of not feeling valued nor their voice being important. As one teacher put it:

> I love Freetown. I would love to stay but I just don't feel like I belong anymore, which is sad. I plan to leave because I just do not feel valued. I don't feel like my voice is

> important as someone who's been in the district for a while. I'm kind of tired of it. I'm tired of fighting against the grain constantly.

EOCs interviewed felt devalued when their expertise was sought out after a policy was in crisis, but not when the policy was being considered. “I think the district needs to start listening and seeking out the voices of educators of color. They need to value those voices as much if not more than the other voices that they have been listening to”. One teacher exclaimed “if you really value [us] show that you value us by putting us in the places of power, where our voices are going to mean something.”

Professional Development - Intent vs. Impact

Intent

EOCs in the study said that they would like leaders to be explicit about the intent of the district’s equity-focused PD. If it is indeed intended to move the district towards its goal of becoming an anti-racist organization, then it should not be optional. One teacher shared this analogy, “If it is optional, I am not sure how we can measure growth. It’s like someone putting food on the table, but you don't have to eat it and no one cares if you do not eat.” In addition, the EOCs in the study wanted the leaders to further value the PD and reinforce expectations by convening follow up conversations to learn about the PD’s impact, this commitment to feedback would signify its importance to the district. If not, the EOCs in the study said it makes them wary to fully participate. One teacher stated,

> We need to follow through on implementation of our initiatives otherwise it feels as if we are putting [on] a band aid. We are really good at putting band aids on things and starting things. I am not going to waste my energy on things that are not anywhere.

Impact

If the equity-focused PD was also intended to support EOCs, leaders needed to know that it had the inverse impact. The district's equity-focused professional development does not specifically uplift and sustain EOCs. In their interviews, EOCs explained that they want to engage in PD that is centered on lived experiences, acknowledging the uniqueness of their experiences and focusing on sustaining them both professionally and personally. None of the EOCs interviewed identified either their school-based or central office professional development offerings as practices that supported their retention. As a matter of fact, when asked, one teacher responded "Specifically for educators of color, I don't think that we've had one." Similarly, another stated "I cannot think of any." In another example, a third teacher stated,

> That's a good question because like I can think of PDs that revolve around race and equity, but I can't really think about how they supported educators of color. The ones I have been to are centered around having white people learn about race and racism.

Most EOCs in the study felt the topics introduced were not relevant to them. One teacher stated "I feel like I'm forced to learn a whole bunch of things. But we're not forced to learn about our students or these courses on race." Another teacher concurred, "The PD is good for life to know. But the focus is not so much applicable to the classroom. Pedagogically, it does not vary. It doesn't help very much. It doesn't give me a lot of useful practices." In contrast, there was one district-sponsored PD that was offered that many teachers mentioned in their interviews, which was a recent program focused on the Afro-Latino experience. As one teacher put it,

> The one I remembered was the one about the Afro-Latino experience, the history of Afro-Latinos, as well as their visibility in the United States… really do help to ground me and remind me of some of our students' experiences.

The key difference in this PD was that it provided the teachers an opportunity to center their learning in the lives of their students. In individual schools and in individual departments, EOCs struggled to be both learners and advocates for equity-focused work. When I asked about the experience of PD, one teacher lamented, “I had to explain to my coworkers the importance of it. It would use up time and then we wouldn't have any time to brainstorm this year. A central office EOC wondered “if EOCs are constantly placed in a position to validate the learning, how can EOCs also have professional growth on the job?” These are the stressors that challenged EOCs in the study as they navigated the PD offered by the district.

Affinity Groups as Healing Spaces

Affinity groups for the adults was the only district-sponsored offering that EOCs mentioned when reflecting on support for EOCs in the district. They all felt they were learning spaces that were intended to support EOCs. They provide “more opportunities for educators of color, to be in community to feel heard [and] to feel validated.” Given the size of the district and the variation of the number of EOCs per school, most affinity groups were not organized at the school level. Therefore various affinity groups were organized over time with varying membership and longevity. In spite of the variations, the learning spaces created in these settings were much needed according to the EOCs in the study. One teacher advocated,

> We need a place where teachers of color can go to get support. That needs to be created here because believe it or not, you need it. You need it. There are days where it's really hard and you're having a struggle. I want to be sure that the person I'm going to open up to is going to understand what I'm saying, is going to care about what I'm saying and is not going to share it in a different context with someone else.

Affinity Groups provided EOCs with spaces for healing as they navigate the realities of a school and a district engaging in equity-focused work. The following teacher parceled out this statement intermittently between catching her breath and pausing to select her words:

> I don't think that the district understands the emotional toll that educators of color go through with the daily microaggressions that we receive from fellow staff members and also to watch my colleagues harm our students. It wears on me to see how teachers inequitably teach when they're not checking their own biases, or they're just overtly racist.

Affinity Groups serve as spaces where EOCs can find connection and belonging, something sometimes tacitly missing in their individual schools. One teacher reflected,

> If you're white, you can go anywhere in the school and be part of any club and feel like you belong. If you're a person of color, you can't do the same. I have a good working relationship with the adults. There is not any documented kind of strife between me and my colleagues. But I very much feel as an outsider, and I'm not exactly sure why that is.

However, while affinity groups are viewed as valuable by participants, the current structure is not working. Some EOCs expressed that they felt burdened by the task of both attending the convenings and organizing and facilitating the affinity groups. “I tried to lead one for a little bit, and because it was virtually and in the pandemic year, it was a little hard to get off the ground. And so I had to give that up” Affinity groups are impactful but they need to be organized and facilitated by the central office. It is too hard to be a teacher/participant and a teacher/facilitator.

Some wanted the flexibility to create different racial, ethnic, and linguistic diverse affinity groupings in addition to those that already exist. “I know we offer some language affinity groups for staff and students but it may also be helpful to offer affinity groups based on race and

culture since many POC do not share a language." They therefore recommended that in order to sustain the work, each affinity group needs to have dedicated co-facilitators. Finally, investing in these affinity groups seemed to have the potential to provide professional learning spaces where EOCs are able to reflect, build awareness, grow their collective and individual agency, and engage in proactive actions of self-care and affirmations.

Leaders should be Upstanders

EOCs recognized the effort the senior leadership made in moving the district along to becoming anti-racist by offering school-based and district-sponsored PD, but they needed more from their leaders. One teacher explained,

> Senior leadership and central office and school-based leaders need to do PD to understand culturally responsive and equity-focused leadership because they are not able to guide the teachers in these practices if they're not able to do it themselves.

In their interviews, several voiced that they need leaders to be prepared to lead uncomfortable conversations. EOCs in the study needed leaders to publicly engage in the work. They feel very vulnerable and need to know that their leaders are willing to risk discomfort in support of the creation and sustenance of this work. In reflecting on what they needed to see from leaders, central office EOC staff member poignantly stated:

> (we need)...courage from our white leaders, particularly central office staff level, that's what's needed. You have EOC staff that are courageous day in and day out, with, arguably way more to lose in a sense of the amount of resources and network they have available to them in comparison to their white colleagues. So to then see white colleagues that have a greater network and a greater amount of resources not be as courageous as those of us [EOCs] staff. That's troubling and again, impedes on the work as well.

Becoming an anti-racist organization requires a greater level of commitment, collaboration, and dialogue among and across senior leadership both at the schools and at the central office with the district's EOCs respondents. Interestingly enough, EOCs in the study said that they were also willing to extend some grace but within bounds. As one put it,

> Empathy, compassion, and courage are needed around our white leaders and white educators. When we think about advocacy, we need to also think about support. It's going to place individuals in very uncomfortable predicaments. Some folks don't want to necessarily ruffle other folks' feathers but that's what's needed in this work to support our families, our marginalized families, our most vulnerable families, and of course, our [EOCs] staff. That's troubling and again, impedes on the work as well.

Recognizing the work will make some staff uncomfortable, EOCs in the study want leaders to stay the course.

Discussion

The intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and language is a potential pain point for any district that is committed to increasing its workforce diversity. As Ingersoll et al. (2019) argued, to increase diversity it is not simply about recruitment, it is about retention. This study highlights that many EOCs feel a lack of belonging, therefore districts need to employ a systemic approach to creating and maintaining an environment that values them. One school-based and district policy that reflects a commitment to valuing the voices of EOCs is to require that all decision-making committees or committees that provide analysis for decisions be representative of the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the students. Student demographics vary from school to school, however, almost 60% of the students in Freetown are racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse.

Equity Focused PD needs to provide opportunities for all staff to learn about the students and their families. Therefore it is important that a portion of every school based PD focus on using sociolinguistics to help faculty and staff learn more about the lived experiences of their students and families.

The district's core values center on respecting the diversity of thoughts and engaging in antiracist advocacy. Therefore the district needs to create spaces for EOCs to share their unique experiences as EOCs, to voice their concerns about policies and practices and to be valued as collaborative problem solvers and informed experts based on their lived experiences. Affinity groups are learning spaces that support EOCs. However, more resources need to be allocated to this initiative in order for it to be institutionalized in a district. All Central office and school based affinity groups should be supported from the district. Each group should have dedicated co-facilitators and consistent regular convenings.

The entire organization's leadership needs to build their knowledge and skill in attending to issues of equity. Becoming an anti-racist organization requires a greater level of commitment, collaboration, and dialogue among and across senior leadership both at the schools and at the central office with EOCs. Anti-racist work requires school based and central office leaders engage in on-going shared district-wide professional development that supports their capacity to lead and sustain culturally responsive and equity focused schools or departments. Therefore the central office and school-based equity-centered PD must be mandatory and differentiated so all school-based and central office staff can learn and grow as anti-racist advocates.

In order for the district to become an anti-racist organization, central office and school-based leaders need to commit to implementing initiatives that are piloted for a minimum of two consecutive years with scheduled opportunities for reflection and feedback, culminating

in a publicly shared evaluative report with recommendations for improvement. This action and feedback cycle creates an opportunity for the district to engage EOCs in a hermeneutic process. It will also allow the district to report out to both internal and external stakeholders

Limitations

One formidable limitation was the unpredictable impact the Covid 19 pandemic has had on Freetown Public Schools. Originally I hoped to visit the district and conduct all individual interviews in person. However, cases from the Omicron variant began to spread and all schools employed restrictions, limiting contact to school personnel only. As a result, all of my interactions with representatives from the district were conducted remotely via Zoom. I was able to conduct a sufficient number of individual interviews, however, I would have been able to schedule many more had I been in person. At the conclusion of many of the interviews, participants gave me names of others I could interview. If I conducted my interview on site, I would have been able to interview these individuals. I also need to acknowledge that given that I interviewed the only eight participants who volunteered, I can not state for sure that these participants are necessarily representative of BIPOC staff as a whole. However, as a researcher, trust and openness were critical given the nature of the questions I was asking. It was important for participants to feel comfortable enough to be willing to be vulnerable and to honestly and candidly reflect on their experiences. Therefore it makes it difficult to generalize the findings more broadly but I can affirm that the interviews did yield deeper and richer data for my study's purposes.

Conclusion

Districts will need to take great care to attend to the needs of their EOCs because they will continue to be disproportionately impacted by the residual effects of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Now more than ever, the need to retain our EOCs is of critical importance. My study provides an opportunity to amplify the voices of EOCs teaching, administering and leading in our urban districts. My findings will contribute to the literature by documenting EOCs as they proffer important recommendations to school and district leaders regarding their development and retention. My findings will contribute to the field by collecting their reflections of what they need to stay in a district, and where possible, highlighting any existing or potential practices the district can implement to support them. This is an extraordinary time to be entering into conversations with EOCs to learn from them what practices they need in order to be sustained in their practice. I believe we are all living in the time that will be memorialized in history books as a significant inflection point in education both in this country and around the world. We are in a moment to reimagine schooling to be more just and increase the likelihood of success for all children.

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 the Continuum for Becoming an Antiracist Organization as a tool could provide check and balances for district leaders (Crossroads Ministry).

Some white leaders still demonstrate a color-evasive perspective which has implications on preparation courses and ongoing professional development. Due to the critical need to dismantle inequities in education, leaders must be prepared to guide and lead this work; this may not be possible for those who have a race-evasive perspective. As a result, all candidates for leadership positions should be required to engage in coursework on anti-racism in education and should be required to maintain professional growth and learning on this topic (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011; Welton et al. 2015). Capacity of leaders must be at the forefront of goals for the district and requiring coursework prior to hiring as well as continued development through professional workshops, relying on professional coaches, and expanding networks will prove invaluable in dismantling systemic inequities that remain.

Conclusion

This study was conducted at a pivotal time in our country's history. Not only is the United States in the midst of a global pandemic, but there is also a reckoning with racial injustice and significant threats to our democratic system. Public education has been theorized to have the power to support increasing social justice and strengthening democracy (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1993). While there are leaders and districts pushing to ban Critical Race Theory (CRT) and books about oppression, there are other leaders and districts pushing to become anti-racist and

pro-social justice organizations (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). Now, more than ever, school leaders need to be leaders that cultivate critical consciousness if we are to build an anti-racist school setting in which access and opportunity are a reality for each of our students and families regardless of their racial, ethnic, or linguistic attributes.

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Appendix A
Email sent by district liaison to invite EOCs to participate in study

BOSTON COLLEGE
Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch
School of Education and Human Development

Dear school-based and central office Educators of Color in Freetown Public Schools.

I am writing to invite you to participate in my doctoral research study - Educators of Color (EOC): What do they think districts should do to retain them?

I am a member of a five-person Boston College doctoral candidate research team working with the Freetown Public Schools System. Our team's research is focused on critical consciousness and Educational Leadership. Critical consciousness (CC) and the seminal work of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, provide 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 the oppressive forces existing in public education and society-at-large. We selected Freetown Public Schools because we wanted to work with a K-12 suburban public district with a large enough population to include multiple school sites with a statistically significant number of educators of color.

The purpose of my study is to center the experiences of educators of color and amplify their voices in order to learn about the impact of school-based and district-sponsored practices. Given the importance of educators of color in K-12 education, learning more about what practices positively impact their experiences is invaluable.

Let me tell you a little about myself: I am Ceronne (pronounced like "seren"dipity) Daly, the founder and Managing Director of the Boston Public Schools (BPS) Office of Recruitment, Cultivation, & Diversity Programs (RCD). My office combines talent acquisition & cultivation, teacher pipeline development, and diversity programs to better support candidates and employees from recruitment throughout their careers. The Office of RCD frames the work from the following Problem of Practice - Systemic racism forms a barrier to onboarding teachers of color at every phase of the process, from college enrollment to selection bias, to passage rates in our standardized teacher certification tests. Our goal as an office is to counteract the impacts of

racism by applying aggressive, innovative interventions at every stage. I launched this work nine years ago when I joined BPS.

I plan to collect data from school-based and central office educators of color by conducting individual interviews. This short questionnaire will enable me to gather preliminary information from all EOCs in Freetown Public Schools and enable educators of color to indicate their interest in contributing to this important research, by volunteering to participate.

Districts ought to take great care to attend to the needs of their EOCs because they will continue to be disproportionately impacted by the residual effects of the Covid 19 pandemic. Now more than ever, the need to retain our EOCs is of critical importance. Both our group study and my individual study provide an opportunity to learn from EOCs teaching, administering, and leading in our suburban districts.

Appendix B

Educators of Color Questionnaire

How would you best identify yourself?

- ❑ Male
- ❑ Female
- ❑ Non-binary/Third gender
- ❑ Prefer to self describe
- ❑ Prefer not to say

Are you Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

How would you describe your race/ethnicity? Please select all that apply.

- ❑ Black/African-American (Non-Hispanic)
- ❑ Asian
- ❑ Hispanic/Latinx
- ❑ Native American/American Indian
- ❑ Pacific Islander
- ❑ White/ (Non-Hispanic)
- ❑ Decline to Identify

How would you describe your cultural background? Please select all that apply.

- ❑ Alaskan Native
- ❑ Brazilian
- ❑ Cape Verdean
- ❑ Chinese
- ❑ Columbian
- ❑ Dominican
- ❑ German
- ❑ Guatemalan
- ❑ Haitian
- ❑ Honduran
- ❑ Indian
- ❑ Irish
- ❑ Italian
- ❑ Jamaican
- ❑ Kenyan
- ❑ Mexican
- ❑ Nigerian
- ❑ Puerto Rican
- ❑ Salvadoran
- ❑ Somali
- ❑ Trinidadian
- ❑ Vietnamese
- ❑ Other African_____
- ❑ Other Asian_____
- ❑ Other Caribbean_____
- ❑ Other European_____
- ❑ Other Hispanic/Latinx_____
- ❑ Other, please specify _____
- ❑ Decline to Identify

Which best describes the education level you have attained?

- ❑ Less than a high school diploma
- ❑ High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)
- ❑ Some college, no degree
- ❑ Associate degree (e.g. AA, AS)
- ❑ Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS)
- ❑ Master's degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd.)
- ❑ Doctorate or professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, PhD)

Are you a first-generation college graduate?

Yes No

Where did you earn your undergraduate degree? Please input your Undergraduate Institution's name, City, and State - i.e., - Trinity College, Hartford, CT - IF APPLICABLE, If not submit - N/A (not applicable)

What undergraduate degree did you earn? i.e., Bachelor of Arts in History or Bachelor of Science in Psychology - IF APPLICABLE, If not submit - N/A (not applicable)

*Please note, I have provided you a total of three opportunities for you to share information regarding your post-undergraduate experiences. If you have more than 3 post-undergraduate certificates/ degrees, please add to the last question in the questionnaire. * Where did you earn your graduate degree? Please input the name of the Institution that you earned your graduate degree.i.e., - Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA - IF APPLICABLE, If not submit - N/A (not applicable)

What graduate degree did you earn? i.e., Masters of Arts in History or Masters of Public Administration, Masters of Education

Where did you earn your graduate degree? Please input the name of the Institution that you earned your graduate degree.i.e., - Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA - IF APPLICABLE, If not submit - N/A (not applicable)

What graduate degree did you earn? i.e., Masters of Arts in History or Masters of Public Administration, Masters of Education - IF APPLICABLE

Where did you earn your graduate degree? Please input the name of the Institution that you earned your graduate degree.i.e., - Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA - IF APPLICABLE, If not submit - N/A (not applicable)

What graduate degree did you earn? i.e., Masters of Arts in History or Masters of Public Administration, Masters of Education. - IF APPLICABLE

At what age did you complete your teaching credential?

Under 21 22-24 25-30 31-35 36-40 Over 40

Including the current year, how many years of experience do you have as a classroom teacher?

1-2 3-5 6-8 9-11 12-14 15-17 18-20 21+

Including the current year, how many years of experience do you have as an administrator?

1-2 3-5 6-8 9-11 12-14 15-17 18-20 21+

Prior to teaching did you have a career outside of the education field?

Yes No

If you answered yes, in what field did you work?

_____

Thinking back on your experience as a student, how many teachers did you have who were of a similar race or ethnicity to yourself?

Did you grow up in Freetown MA?
Yes No

Did you attend Freetown Public Schools
Yes No

Did you graduate from Freetown Public Schools?
Yes No

Are you a school based Educator of color OR a central office Educator of color in Freetown Public Schools?
I am a school based Educator of color
I am a central office Educator of color

FOR CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF
The purpose of this study is to determine what school-based or district-level

practices support Educators of color (both school based and district level - instructional and non-instructional staff). As a central office/district level educator of color, does your central office department provide any professional development, professional learning spaces to support educators of color? If Yes, please list all that applies to your district

What would you like your central office department to “START DOING” to support educators of color? *
What would you like your central office department to “STOP DOING” to support educators of color? *
What would you like your central office department to “DO MORE OF” to support educators of color? *

FOR SCHOOL BASED STAFF
The purpose of this study is to determine what school-based or district-level practices support Educators of color (both school based and district level - instructional and non-instructional staff). As a school based educator of color, does your school provide any professional development, professional learning spaces to support educators of color? If Yes, please list all that applies.

What would you like the district to “start doing” to support educators of color?
What would you like the district to “stop doing” to support educators of color?
What would you like the district to “do more of” to support educators of color?

Finally, I will be conducting individual interviews with both school based and central office Educators of Color to learn more about their experiences in your district. All interviews will be conducted remotely using either of the following web based video conferencing platforms google meets or Zoom. If you are interested in being interviewed, please provide an email and I will reach out with available dates and times. Please note all interviews will be kept confidential and will be conducted up until November 12, 2021.

Your voice is important. Thank you for helping me to amplify your concerns and suggestions. My hope is that my findings will contribute to informing current and future school and district strategies/practices. Thank you so much for taking the time to share your ideas. If there is anything that you have not had a chance to share, please consider participating in an individual interview OR share in the text box below.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol - 60 minute Session

Time allotted	Activity
2 minutes	Introduction: My name is Ceronne Daly pronounced like (“Serin”) dipty Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. I want to take time to remind you about my study , talk about the consent process and then get right to my questions My study is focused on the following three research questions: ● RQ#1 –What practices do district and /or school leaders employ to support the development of critical consciousness in educators of color?" ● RQ#2 - What practices do district and /or school leaders employ to support the retention of Educators of color? ● RQ#3 -How do educators of color experience and respond to these practices? The significance of this study is that it centers the experiences of educators of color, and amplifies their voices in order to learn about the impact of school based and district sponsored practices. Given the importance of educators of color in k-12 education, learning more about what practices positively impact their experiences is invaluable.
2 minutes	Opening Statements: ● This interview is strictly voluntary. At any time, you may ask to conclude the interview. ● All interview questions are options. Please feel free to not answer a question. ● All interview responses will be confidential. Although we plan to share our findings with our district, we will take measures to maintain your confidentiality and use pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants. ● We are here to listen and learn from you and your experiences. Our position is to examine, not judge; to learn from your expertise. ● We plan to record this interview. At any time, you may request for us to turn off the transcription device. ● We are studying a term entitled critical consciousness. Here is a working definition we will share for the purposes of this interview: “person’s ability to recognize and analyze oppressive forces shapi
50 minutes	Questions ● All questions will be placed in the chat after verbally stating the question, so

	that each participant can focus on responding to the question, not trying to remember it.
5 minutes	Recite: ● The purpose of my study is to center the experiences of educators of color, and amplify their voices in order to learn about the impact of school based and district sponsored practices. Given the importance of educators of color in K-12 education, learning more about what practices positively impact their experiences is invaluable. ● Districts ought to take great care to attend to the needs of their EOCs because they will continue to be disproportionately impacted by the residual effects of the Covid 19 pandemic. Now more than ever, the need to retain our EOCs is of critical importance. Both our group study and my individual study provides an opportunity to learn from EOCs teaching, administering and leading in our urban districts. Final question ● Ask: “Have we missed anything that you feel is important for us to know?”
1 minutes	Closing Remarks ● Thank you for taking time to share with me your concerns and suggestions. Your voice is important and collectively our findings can contribute to informing current and future school and district strategies and practices.

Appendix D

Question Bank for School-based staff Interview

Adapted from (Education, n.d.)

Introduction

- What is your role, and how long have you been in your current position?
- How many years have you been in the district and in what capacity/ capacities?

Critical Self Awareness:

Belonging: *How much faculty and staff feel that they are valued members of the school community.*

- How connected do you feel to other adults at your school? -
- Overall, how much do you feel like you belong at your school?

Critical Reflection *How well a school or a school district supports faculty and staff in learning about, discussing, and confronting issues of race, ethnicity, and culture.*

- How confident are you that adults at your school can have honest conversations with each other about race?
- How often do adults at your school have important conversations about race, even when they might be uncomfortable?
- When there are major news events related to race, how often do adults at your school talk about them with each other?
- How comfortable are you discussing race-related topics with your colleagues?
- How comfortable are you having conversations with students about race?

Professional Learning About Equity: *Perceptions of the quantity and quality of equity-focused professional learning opportunities available to faculty and staff.*

- At your school, how valuable are the equity-focused professional development opportunities?
- How often do professional development opportunities help you explore new ways to promote equity in your practice?
- How helpful are your colleagues' ideas for improving your practice when it comes to promoting culturally responsive practices?
- Overall, how effective has your school administration been in helping you advance student equity?

Critical Action:

- Can you tell me about the last professional development, professional learning spaces that supported educators of color? Tell me more
- Does your school or district provide any professional development, professional learning spaces to support educators of color? Please list all that applies to your district.
- What would you like the district to "start doing" to support educators of color?
- What would you like the district to "stop doing" to support educators of color?
- What would you like the district to "do more of" to support educators of color?

Last Question: Have we missed anything that you feel is important for us to know?"

Appendix E

Question Bank for Central Office/District Staff Interview Questions

Adapted from (Education, n.d.)

Introduction

1. What is your role, and how long have you been in your current position?
2. How many years have you been in the district and in what capacity/ capacities?

Critical Self Awareness:

Belonging: *How much faculty and staff feel that they are valued members of the school community.*

1. How connected do you feel to other adults at your team, central and/or district wide?
2. Overall, how much do you feel like you belong at your team, central and/or district wide

Critical Reflection *How well a school or a school district supports faculty and staff in learning about, discussing, and confronting issues of race, ethnicity, and culture.*

- How confident are you that adults at your team, central and/or district wide can have honest conversations with each other about race?
- How often do adults at your team, central and district wide have important conversations about race, even when they might be uncomfortable?
- When there are major news events related to race, how often do adults at your team, central and district wide talk about them with each other?
- How comfortable are you discussing race-related topics with your colleagues on your team, central and/or district wide ?
- How comfortable are you having conversations with students about race?

Professional Learning About Equity: *Perceptions of the quantity and quality of equity-focused professional learning opportunities available to faculty and staff.*

- At your team, central and district wide, how valuable are the equity-focused professional development opportunities?
- How often do professional development opportunities help you explore new ways to promote equity in your practice?
- How helpful are your colleagues' ideas for improving your practice when it comes to promoting culturally responsive practices?
- Overall, how effective has your team's and central administration been in helping you advance student equity?

Critical Action:

- Can you tell me about the last professional development, and professional learning spaces that supported educators of color?
- Does your district provide any professional development, or professional learning spaces to support educators of color? Please list all that applies to your district.
- What would you like the district to "start doing" to support educators of color?
- What would you like the district to "stop doing" to support educators of color?
- What would you like the district to "do more of" to support educators of color?

Last Question: Have we missed anything that you feel is important for us to know?"

Appendix F

Thank you note to semi-structured interview participants

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **Ceronne Daly** <dalycr@bc.edu>
Date: Thu, Nov 11, 2021, 11:55 AM
Subject: Thank you AND a small token of my appreciation
To: First Name, Last Name <email address>

First Name,

I want to thank you again for taking time out of your very busy day to meet with me,

I am sure you may already have this text,(Baldwin, 1963) but I always like to share it with educators as both a reminder of their importance and with gratitude for their work

Please feel free to share anything you may not have had a chance to share via email up until November 30, 2021

Be well,

Ceronne pronounced ("serin") dipity

--

Ceronne B. Daly
PSAP Cohort VI
Ed.D Candidate May 2022
Boston College
dalycr@bc.edu