ABSTRACT

Mary M. Yung. PORTRAITS OF RELENTLESS PROGRESSIVES: EQUITY WORK IN COMPLEX EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, May, 2021.

This study used portraiture to examine relentless progressives: three administrators who work for complex educational organizations. Portraiture is an ethnographic, qualitative study method that blends art and science, in this case to provide a story of administrators' equity leadership and reflective practice. I was simultaneously a participant and observer investigating my own equity along the way. Interviews, observations, and reflections were collected and analyzed from three administrators of County Offices of Education (COEs) in California. Findings indicated that individuals' equity work was impacted by deeply embedded cultural and institutional factors of the organizational structure. Administrators who maintain themselves as equity leaders are characterized by compassionate leadership attributes. More specifically, these equity leaders engaged in practices to break down silos that existed in their organizations. As a result of the study, I offer a new framework for understanding how equity leaders strategically navigate their organizations to support systemic change for equity. Study participants are relentless and progressive in their vision for change and seek to alter bureaucratic structures to effectively lead for equity. Implications for practice include storytelling and listening to the stories of the people within the organization in order to learn from each other, build relationships, and understand each other's work. Opportunities to collaborate with colleagues across departmental divisions support collective efforts for equity. Finally, I propose implications for policy to empower COE administrators in their efforts to broaden their impact as relentless progressives within their organizations.

PORTRAITS OF RELENTLESS PROGRESSIVES: EQUITY WORK IN COMPLEX EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfilment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Mary M. Yung

May, 2021

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my mother, grandmothers, and the generations of women before me who never had a chance to further their education; and to my father, who came to the United States to seek an education. They were the relentless progressives of their families, and taught me to fight for what I believe in: the voices of my students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lynda and Dr. Matt Militello—you taught me to be a better equity leader, to stand strong, that "once I know I cannot unknow." Thank you for pushing me on my journey as an equity warrior. Cohort II, thank you for lifelong friendship and collegiality, I would not have traded my learning experience with you all for anything. Bay Area Group, mi familia elegidia, you have been my inspiration continue the good trouble for every single student we work for. My writing group: Luis, Christina, and Norah thank you for the accountability and feedback throughout the writing process, I could not have finished this without your encouragement. This study would not have been possible without the three extraordinary women who shared their stories with me. Thank you for your vulnerability, and for walking this journey with me. I am deeply indebted to all of you, and I learned so much about myself through your stories. Finally, my deepest gratitude to my family and friends for their support throughout the entire process during some of the most difficult times of my life, for challenging me to keep going, and to continue learning—always.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together.
~Desmond Tutu

Each of us comes to our work in education with a story. We were changed by a relationship with a teacher, we overcame obstacles, or maybe education held the key for us that we could use to open doors for others. Our stories are what drive the work that we do and reflect the passion each one of us has for students. Our stories give us humanity and breathe life into the work that we do. Education is a platform for some of us, as we advocate for those who are not able to advocate for themselves. Advocacy spurs us to seek opportunities in which to impact the children and communities we serve because we are, as Desmond Tutu says, bound by each other's humanity. It is the opportunity to have a larger impact on humanity through education that brings many of us to work in County Offices of Education (COE) in California.

California's COEs provide technical assistance and resources for school districts and teachers, along with resources for statewide initiatives. They are the intermediary between the California Department of Education (CDE) and the Local Education Agency (LEA) or school district. There are 58 COEs serving California, divided into 11 service regions (see Figure 1). Each COE is responsible for the financial solvency of the school districts in their county, calling LEA elections, and providing instruction for students living in juvenile detention facilities. They may offer additional services for school districts that may be done more efficiently at the county level. Additionally, with the advent of California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the need for LEAs to develop their own Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), COEs are responsible for the preliminary approval of that plan. Finally, each COE defines their own vision and work, determined by the needs in their counties. Figure 2 illustrates these relationships.

Figure 1. COE region boundaries.

Figure 2. Relationship of CDE, COE, and LEAs.

COEs espouse equity as their vision for students. Each individual included in this study came to work at the COE drawn to the ideal that we would be able to make an impact in education by supporting equitable processes. Their reasons were varied: perhaps they could impact the field by providing training in state initiatives, or provide supports for students and teachers in alternative programs, or technical assistance for districts that may not be serving the needs of historically marginalized students (as identified by the California Dashboard). Each individual included in this study served as an administrator in their respective COE. They may have different titles, but each is a support provider to schools and districts within their county boundaries.

The purpose of the study was to explore three COE equity leaders' roles in supporting equity work and how the organization of the COE supported this work. This chapter provides an overview of the study. I begin with the focus of the study, the purpose, and research questions. I then discuss the significance of the study and implications for practice, policy, and research. Next, I provide rationale for the qualitative study methods used in the study, particularly case study and portraiture methods. I provide a brief outline of the research design and the contexts of the study. Finally, I consider confidentiality and ethical considerations for the study itself.

Focus of Study

The focus of the study was to understand deeply the stories of COE administrators and how they engaged in equity work within their contexts. This section reviews two ecological theories: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, and the ecology of knowing as described in the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) pedagogies (Guajardo et al., 2016). These theories informed the purpose of the study and the resulting research questions.

Ecologies of Knowing (Micro, Meso, Macro)

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed the ecological systems theory, a framework to understand the individual's development within the context of ecosystems surrounding the self, including: micro, meso, and macro systems. Each level impacts the self, with the closest system to the individual impacting development the most. In a similar manner, the CLE Ecologies of Knowing (Guajardo et al., 2016) examines the relationships between the self, the organization(s) one belongs to, and the larger community (see Figure 3). Guajardo et al.'s (2016) Ecologies of Knowing framework provides the significance for relationships and knowing each other's stories. It is this theory of relationship development specific to the education system that explains the reciprocal impact of the self, organization, and community. The relationships between each level provide the basis for the potential learning that happens when we take the time to listen to each other's stories.

The self (micro) provides the "basis of the world of knowing"—it explains the ability to filter information and make decisions in the best interest of the self and the organization (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 28). The self is exemplified by the equity leaders who participated in the study and me. As part of the COE, we have the opportunity to interact with our meso and macro levels, and are able to influence both. The organization (meso) defines the people, social collectives, and the mediation between the self and the larger society. COEs represent the meso level and are the organization and context within which the equity leaders enact their equity work. The community (macro) interacts with the self in reciprocal dialogue. The macro level is represented in the study as CDE. Administrators of the COE interact with the macro level of the CDE to inform statewide policy and interpret it for their constituents. The interaction between

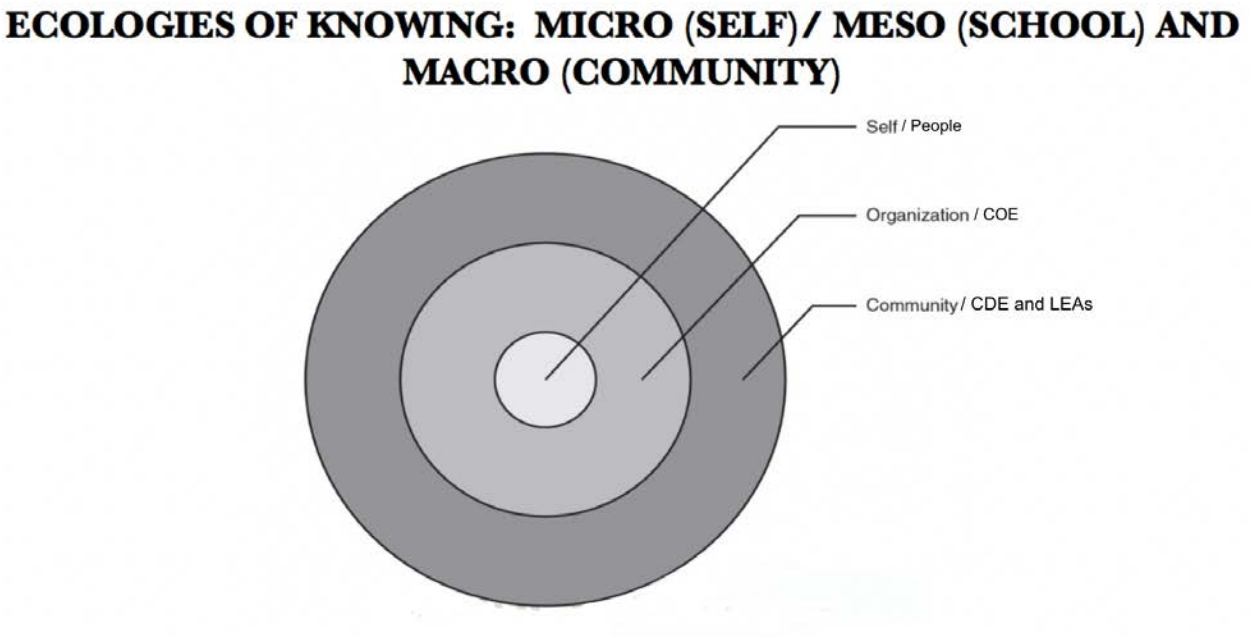


Figure 3. Ecologies of knowing.

the self and each of the ecological levels impact how we as administrators in COEs are able to engage in equity work. These were the tensions explored in the study.

Purpose of the Study

The understanding of these ecological theories provided the basis of the current study. As individuals who came to COEs with a vision of the impact we would have in these administrative roles, we are left to wonder how much the organization fosters or inhibits the ability to enact the equity work that caused us to choose to work at the COE. The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of leaders of equity within COEs, by using portraiture as a methodology to understand the people who work in these educational organizations and the influence of their contexts. I examined the equity work of equity leaders in complex educational organizations using the CLE axioms to guide the process. My positionality as an equity leader in a complex educational organization gave me the opportunity to act as a participant observer in the study. The CLE axioms are as follows:

- Learning and Leadership are a Dynamic Social Process;
- Conversations are Critical and Central Pedagogical Processes;
- The People Closest to the Issues are Best Situated to Discover Answers to Local Concerns;
- Crossing Boundaries Enriches the Development and Educational Process;
- Hope and Change are Built on Assets and Dreams of Locals and their Communities (Guajardo et al., 2016).

These CLE axioms provided the framework for the study. Table 1 describes the relationship between the axioms and how they guided the study design. Interviews, observations, and reflections collected from study participants included activities that prompted relationship

Table 1

CLE Axioms and Study Design

CLE Axioms	Study Design
Learning and Leadership are a Dynamic Social Process	Equity leaders collaborated in a participant action research study
Conversations are Critical and Central Pedagogical Processes	Equity leaders shared stories of their work to develop understanding
The People Closest to the Issues are Best Situated to Discover Answers to Local Concerns	Equity leaders were selected from COEs to understand the organizational structures
Crossing Boundaries Enriches the Development and Educational Process	Equity leaders were invited to participate and engage in active learning experiences with colleagues different from themselves
Hope and Change are Built on Assets and Dreams of Locals and their Communities	Equity leaders were asked to look for the assets of their work and the organization

building and storytelling. Participants collated and created artifacts that represented the work that they did within their COEs. Data collection was a co-constructed process. The Ecologies of Knowing support the understanding of the interactions between the administrators in the study and the tensions of their COE organization and the CDE. The structures of these complex educational organizations have an impact on the equity work that administrators are able to enact. The question is how much that tension fosters the equity work that they want to do, and how it might inhibit what they are able to do. Each of these ecological levels has inherent assets that might be constrained by the structures of the systems and their interactions. Figure 4 illustrates the assets and system tensions at each of the levels with the equity leaders in the study representing the micro level, the COE representing the meso level, and the CDE representing the macro level.

As seen in Figure 4, there are assets at each ecological level. Administrators bring expertise and experience that allows them to act as technical assistance providers who offer coaching and training. They also bring certain values to their work. Assets of COEs include supports and services for school districts, networks, and access to information and training. The CDE supports accountability and compliance, provides policy for state-wide alignment, and allocates funding across the state. These assets provide a foundation to support equity work within each level. However, there are some tensions at each level that may inhibit equity work. Some of the administrators who come to work at COEs may have come from district or site level positions which are characterized by competition, rules, and communication issues. The nature of their work may have been isolating, and they may have functioned in divisions. These structures are inherent in most educational organizations at any level. They are certainly part of

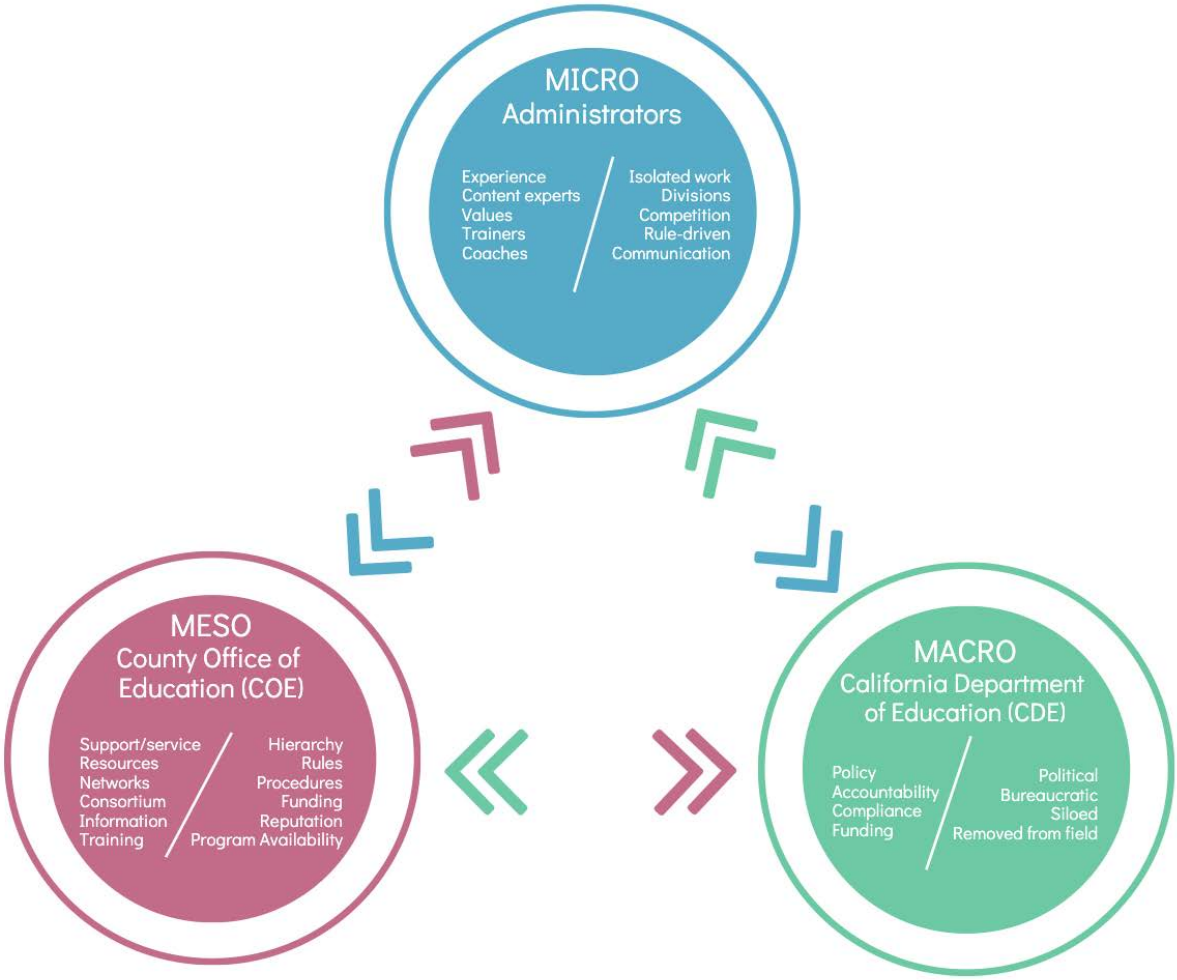


Figure 4. Tension of assets and structures at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

the tension that exists at the meso level of the COE and at the macro level of the CDE. Structures of hierarchy, rules, and procedures are the norm. The distance from the field might also impact both the meso level and the macro levels, changing the perspective of those who work within these organizations. Past experiences of administrators sometimes led to obstructive ways of communication at the COE amongst team members, preventing the ability to effectively engage with each other.

Research Questions

Equity leaders in complex educational organizations are affected by the different systems and structures that could support or inhibit equity work. It is important to understand how these systems and structures interact in order to promote the ability of equity warriors to maintain the ability to serve marginalized students. To this end, the study used the qualitative research methodology of portraiture to answer the overarching research question: *How do administrators in complex educational organizations support equity work?*

1. What organizational factors foster or inhibit the work of administrators in a county office?
2. How do administrators in a county office develop as reflective practitioners?
3. How do administrators maintain themselves as equity advocates?
4. How does this study inform my own leadership as a county office manager for equity?

Answering these research questions would support the ability of COEs to achieve the vision of equity. Understanding how these systems interact could support the ability of COEs to better foster equity work within the organization.

The previous section reviewed the focus of the study, purpose, and research questions for the study. The next section presents the significance of the study to practice, policy, and research.

Significance of the Study

Educational leaders in COEs have the potential to influence decision-making at the meso and macro levels. As Evans (2013) indicates, they can act as equity advocates or they can hinder the equity work happening in schools and districts. The following section provides implications to practice, policy, and research of the current study.

Significance to Practice

Equity has different meanings for different people. In an educational organization that claims to value equity, the word is rarely defined but is used often. COEs often have vision statements, department names, and position titles that include the word equity. But what does it mean to actually enact equity in a large educational organization with many layers of bureaucracy? It is not enough to just name equity, or hold events in the name of equity without actually walking the talk, by operationalizing equity work (Evans, 2013).

There is a need to understand what it means to work as equity warriors within complex educational organizations. The COE may espouse equity as the work of the organization, but potentially lack an operational definition. Additionally, those who work within it, including its administrators, may have varying ideas of what these definitions might be, and how their work aligns with the organization's vision. Equity warriors may find themselves marginalized and struggling to maintain themselves as such because of the ambiguity of expectations about equity.

This study identified what equity means to specific people within large educational organizations through a deep study of their equity work and how they came to do the work with

the hope of great impact. The study portrayed people who are "equity warriors—people who, regardless of their role in a school or district, passionately lead and embrace the mission of high levels of achievement and opportunity for all students, regardless of race, social class, ethnicity, culture, disability, or language proficiency" (Rigby & Tredway, 2015, p. 331). Seeking to deeply understand the stories of equity warriors and how they enacted equity within their COEs provided insight into how the organization could support these efforts. The hope is that these insights would empower those who fight for equity in complex organizations. Leaders in complex educational organizations want to learn how to enhance their equity work. This study has the opportunity to provide practical ideas to support their efforts. The study also provided an avenue for studying my own experiences alongside those of my colleagues in order to inform my own practice and leadership in equity.

Significance to Policy

California's COE system is in a prime position to affect the work of schools and their districts. California is one of the few states that has such a system to support the educational structure for the entire state. Equity leaders who work in COEs have access to teachers, administrators, and classrooms through the myriad of services they offer. They are often invited to participate in statewide workgroups to provide input on issues in education and advise legislators on policy changes. The individuals who work in COEs can significantly impact what happens at the macro level.

Policies have the potential to shape the work in complex educational organizations (Coburn, 2004; Drori & Honig, 2013; Rigby et al., 2016; Sherer & Spillane, 2011). The intent of educational policy is to support the students who have been historically marginalized. Often, policies are put in place and are not reviewed to determine if they are actually providing the

outcomes they were intended to produce. The study of equity leaders within the COE organizational structure has the potential of shedding light on the practices they enact for equitable outcomes of students.

The deep study of equity work with participants would also inform the organizational structure of the COE and create a pathway for those who work within these organizations to improve practice for equity. There is an urgency to ensure that educational leaders understand the complexity of equity work because of the significant impact it can have on outcomes for students, "especially poor students, or students of color" (Evans, 2013, p. 463). Understanding organizations and how they function provides the unique ability to shape the policies that undergird equity work. Researching complex educational organizations from the inside provides a unique vantage from which to define policies that could change an inequitable system.

Significance to Research

COEs are uniquely situated in California to support people who push for equitable outcomes for students. There is not a significant amount of research about COEs or complex educational organizations like it, or about the ability of their administrators to enact equity work within their contexts. Most research on equity and leadership provides information about school or district administrative leadership. California has a unique educational organization system with ancillary organizations like COEs due to the support needed for a variety of contexts and the sheer number of LEAs across the state (see Figure 5). COEs can be highly bureaucratic in urban areas and less so in rural areas of the state. The COE within California is an ideal study of a highly complex organization. The opportunity to study the organization from within guided by the deep understanding of equity leaders who work within the system provides validity to a lacking research base.

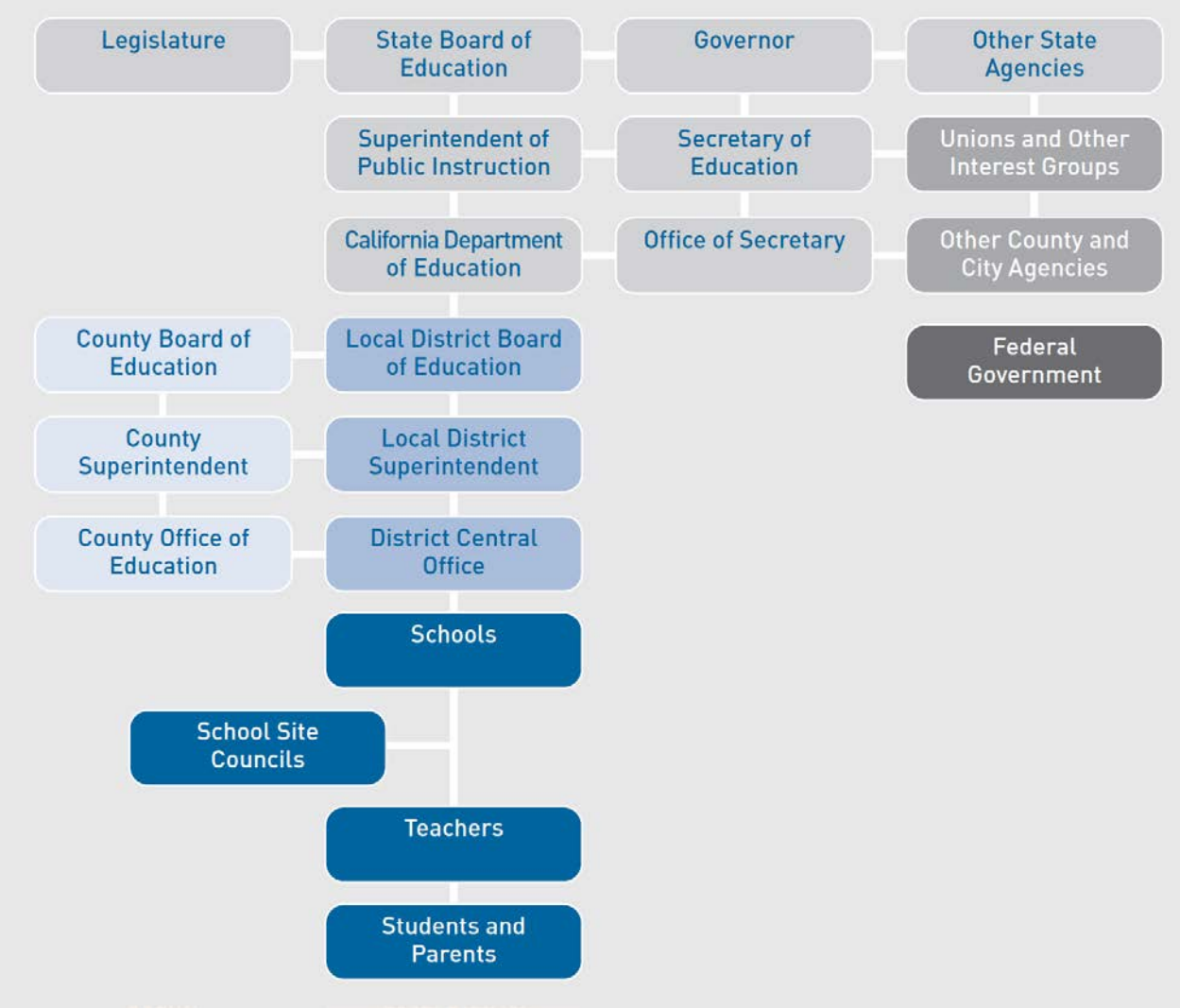


Figure 5. California's education system organization.

The hope of the study is to apply these results in order to establish what Evans (2013) calls "an equity principle as the unifying principle through which to channel all external and school level policy mandates, and the subsequent programmatic changes, decision-making, and outcome interpretations that follow" (p. 461). The study focused on multiple levels of the organizational structures. The study of the interaction of the micro, meso, and macro level of organization through the perspective of COE equity leaders allowed for the development of understanding of a highly bureaucratic structure. Investigating the structure through the stories of those closest to the context allowed for deep understanding and provided much needed research.

Equity leadership is the work of all educational leaders and those who work in organizations that support student outcomes. The previous section reviewed the significance of the study to practice, policy, and research. The next section presents the rationale of portraiture as a methodology, and the proposed project design.

Portraiture as a Qualitative Research Method

There are a significant number of equity leaders in COEs that see themselves as "equity warriors," as described by Rigby and Tredway (2015). The proposed project design discussed in this section demonstrates the rationale for portraiture as a qualitative research method. This methodology and research design allows for deep study of the participants by listening to their stories and using them to inform our understanding of equity work.

Qualitative studies are useful for in-depth inquiry and analysis. The current study began with a research question situated in the context of COEs. Through the initial process of inquiry, I was introduced to portraiture as a study method because of my desire to explore COEs and the people within them. Portraiture allowed for a deep probe of COE equity leaders and provided a thick ethnography of the organization and the people I wanted to study (Geertz, 1973). Deep

understanding of the person and their story, specifically drawing forth the personal, provided a deeper understanding than other qualitative study methods. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann Davis (1997) call this study method the blending of art and science, that inherently seeks the assets of the question posed and honors the voice of the people. Whereas some methodologies look for deficits to address, portraiture does not. It is this study methodology that sought to intertwine the personal experience into the study to enhance understanding.

Portraiture also requires deep exploration of culture, in this case the culture of an organization. It allows the researcher ‘‘to uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular work settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation’’ (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 540). The research questions posed in the current study required myself and the three participants of the study to delve into the “power of the place and the wisdom of the people” (Guajardo et al., 2016). Using portraiture through the lens of the CLE axioms, participants were asked to share their experiences and narratives in order to support deep analyzation of their roles and the culture of their organization. This is the method of portraiture that will be further explained in Chapter 3.

The qualitative methods of case study and portraiture used in this study allow for deep penetration and exploration of the participants. Brief discussion of the research design was provided. The next section briefly provides the contexts of each COE and the participants of the study.

Overview of Context

Portraiture allowed for deep analyzation of the people involved in the study. The following section provides an overview of the COEs and the persons from the organizations who participated in the study.

The study was conducted with three equity leaders and myself who work at two county offices located in densely populated, urban areas of California. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, COEs in California provide technical support and resources, manage fiscal oversight, and are dissemination centers of state statutes and guidance.

COE-A serves 23 school districts and houses its own schools serving students in alternative education programs, special education, and the juvenile court system. The smaller of the two COEs for the study allows for a basic organizational structure of four divisions. Each of the four divisions is managed by assistant superintendents who are part of the decision-making structure of the COE. They report directly to the Superintendent of Schools for the county. COE-A provides fiscal oversight to the schools and districts in the county. It also houses the county's office for the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA), the consortium for special education. SELPAs are consortiums that support the implementation of special education for geographic regions and collaborate with COEs in order to support the needs of students with disabilities and their families.

COE-B is located in the county next to COE-A. As one of the largest county offices in the state, they are known for the work they have done to create collaborative resources for inclusion. They are funded by numerous grants, including a broad equity grant intended to create support for equitable practices statewide. COE-B has 7 divisions, including the "Equity and Educational Progress Division." Two of the participants for the study work in this department. Both of these equity leaders have significant professional experiences that they use to support districts in developing resources for specific student groups. They have worked as educators, coaches, and LEA administrators prior to working in the COE system. Their work is somewhat

prompted by the accountability measures put in place by California's Department of Education (CDE). More information about each of the participants is provided in Chapter 4.

These participants for the study are the closest to the issues that are posed for the study's research question. This section gave a brief overview of the context and people involved in the study. Details are provided in Chapter 4 where the COE system is further described and portraits of the participants are illustrated. The next section reviews considerations for confidentiality, limitations of the study, and safeguards/ethical considerations for the study.

Confidentiality, Ethical Considerations, and Researcher Safeguards

Portraiture by nature is a personal, dynamic qualitative research methodology. In this section, I briefly review confidentiality considerations, security for data collection and analysis, researcher bias safeguards, and limitations of the study.

My role as the primary researcher with the participants in this study has been considered, as well as my role within my own COE. My positionality as a COE administrator allowed me to probe into my organization and it allowed me to find others who would be willing to join me as I explored our ability to enact equity work within a complex educational organization. Permission was requested and granted from each participant prior to the inception of the study using a signed consent form for approval to conduct research. Institutional Review Board Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (IRB CITI) certification was completed in January 2019 to comply with Human Research ethics and compliance. While these safeguards were established prior to the inception of the study, participants were able to terminate their participation at any time during the course of the study. Each group member is considered an administrator within their respective COEs. The research questions were provided to each of the participants at the beginning of the study to provide transparency. None of the information they provided was

shared without participants' permission. Confidentiality of the participants' identity was maintained throughout the study and member checks were used to ensure that each were comfortable with the information included as part of the study.

This research study and the data collected were reviewed with each participant over the course of the study. I wrote reflective memos to document my process and to capture data from my experiences within my COE. Analytic memos were used to document the coding process in order to counteract the possible researcher bias that might occur (Saldaña, 2016). Triangulation of the data was conducted through member checks with the participants. While the study cannot be completely objective, these controls allowed me to guard against the possibility of bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The significance of the participants' stories provided an experience of their truths. These truths lend credibility and confidence to the scope of the work provided in the study.

This study was established within the scope of the work of four individuals in administrative positions in the organizational structure of COEs. Because this study may be generalized to the scope of work within COEs, caution should be taken when applying these study results to schools, districts, and state level educational organizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The section above considered confidentiality considerations, security for data collection and analysis, researcher bias safeguards, and limitations of the study. The next section provides a summary of the chapter.

Summary

The dissertation for this study and the following chapters focuses on COE equity leaders and their experiences in these organizations. This chapter introduced the topic and focus of the study, purpose statement and research questions, portraiture and proposed design of the study,

and discussed confidentiality and ethical considerations. The literature review in Chapter 2 provides a way to examine the concepts, ideas, and empirical literature that inform this study. Chapter 3 provides the methodology and design of the study, while Chapter 4 introduces the context of the study by providing detailed information about the context of the COEs and the people who work within them. The stories of the participants are also shared through their portraits of equity. Chapter 5 details the data collected and its analysis, which led to the findings for the study. Finally, Chapter 6 describes the claims resulting from data analysis and the frameworks for understanding them. I share a new framework that emerged that supports the understanding of these claims, as well as its implications on policy, practice, and future research. I share my own leadership story as a result of the current study to conclude.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Fight for the things you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.
~ Ruth Bader Ginsberg

Equity leaders are advocates. They are fighters. On the frontline of the fight for students are teachers, who decided to enter a career to teach and support students not because of the pay, but because they care. They feel responsible for the learning of all the students who enter their classrooms and fight to ensure that students receive what they need to participate in society in the future. At the same time, we know that education reflects the disparities in our society yet we expect education to fix its problems (Labaree, 2008). Educational disparities indicate that students of Latinx and African American descent have opportunity gaps, achievement gaps, and are disproportionately referred for special education (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Grogan, 2017; Shields, 2011). Educators fight to change these disparities because they care.

Well-meaning educators and administrators want to be the levers that instigate change within the education system. However, can individual leaders make systemic changes? Will these changes be great enough to impact the welfare of children who have been historically marginalized? Educational leaders consistently face the work of ensuring student needs are met. For example, school principals are uniquely situated to build capacity, provide coherence, advocate for resources, and focus the school community on student learning while navigating competing demands (Militello et al., 2009). However, within the complex systems of education many children face achievement gaps, are disproportionately referred for special education, and are more often taught by underprepared teachers (Ahram et al., 2011; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Campbell et al., 2000; Olson, 1991; Reglins, 1992; Robertson et al., 1994; Skiba et al., 2008; Useem, 1990). Additionally, research indicates that many school leaders are not adequately prepared to serve the needs of their Latinx and African American students (Capper et al., 2006).

The following review of literature will explore the research about how managers in complex educational organizations support equity work.

This chapter will review the research about leaders of equity and provide a broad overview of organizational systems and frames (see Figure 6). The first half of the chapter reviews traditions of leadership, defines equity for the purpose of the study, and describes equity warriors: those who enact equity. Next, I define transformative leadership through the description of social justice and culturally responsive school leadership. Then I discuss the combination of community engagement and leadership which integrates equity and transformative leadership. The second half of the chapter provides a broad overview of organizational systems: rational, natural, and open systems. I discuss the relationship of complex educational systems and focus on bureaucratic organizations. Then I review four organizational frames: the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames. The political and symbolic frames are further explored as the context for the current study.

Leaders of Equity

Leaders of equity are the focus of the current study. In this section of the chapter, I review the traditions of leadership, equity leadership, and transformative leadership (see Figure 7). Then I define equity and equity warriors. Next, I discuss transformative approach and two components of this type of leadership: social justice leadership and culturally responsive school leadership. Finally, I discuss community engagement and leadership, the integration of equity and transformative leadership. This integration defines leaders of equity for the purpose of this study.

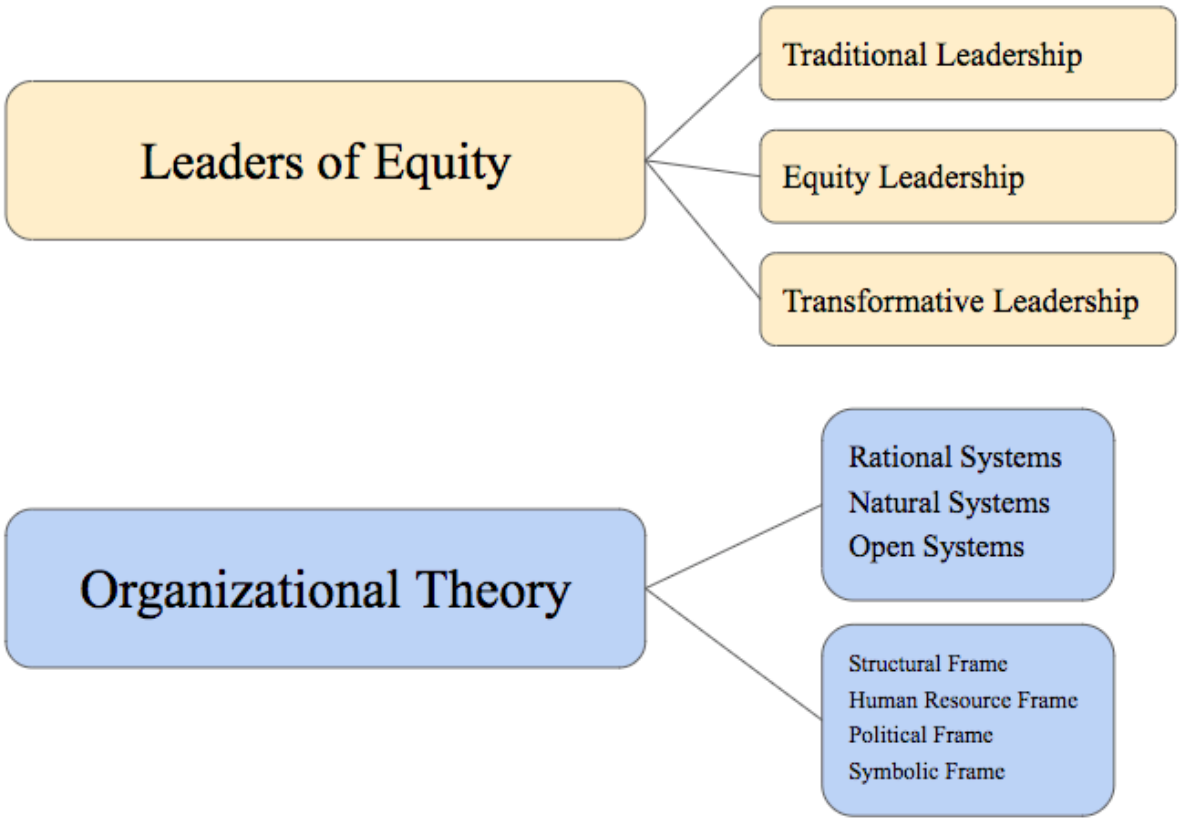


Figure 6. Organization of research sections.

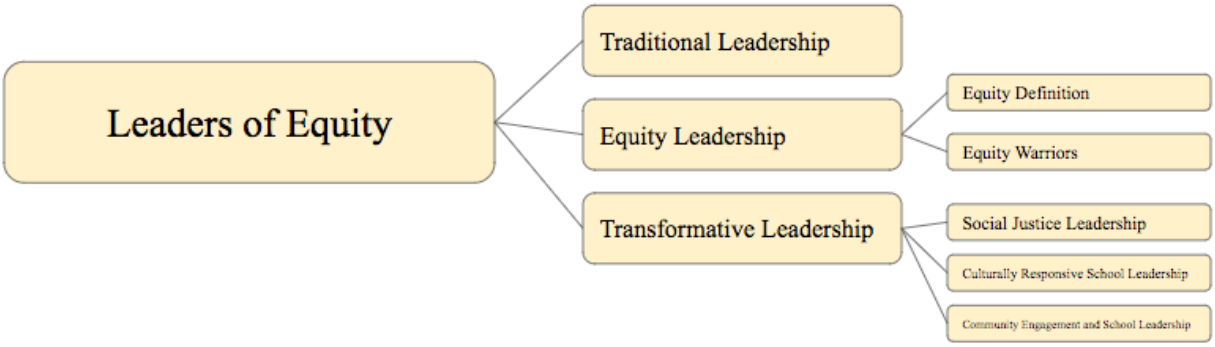


Figure 7. Leaders of equity.

Traditions of Leadership

Leadership is a cultural concept, and is described differently in fields other than education. In education, administrators are often seen as leaders and organizations are traditionally hierarchical. Rost (1991) describes traditional ideas of leadership developed during the 21st century. Organizational behavior theories and their alternatives were evident in the 1970s. The idea that leadership requires certain traits, has the power of influence, and is synonymous with management became popular in the 1980s with the emergence of business leadership and the examples of world leaders of the era (Rost, 1991). Gutiérrez (2016) cites her own research which seems to parallel Rost's (1991) description of traditional leadership. She describes cultures with "top-down control and few degrees of freedom" (Gutiérrez, 2016, p. 190). This type of leadership, according to Gutiérrez, undermines resilience and sustainability. Educational leadership has historically reflected the top-down model. This practice is still evident in the practice of state, county, and district educational administration in California. Communication, regulations, and "roll-out" of state initiatives are filtered from the state, to County Offices of Education (COEs), and then to school districts. This model has not changed the systemic inequities of the education system. What then would a different model of leadership look like?

Leadership, according to Benham (2002), requires understanding and incorporation of native/indigenous ways of knowing. There is a distinctive contrast between Western and native views of leadership. Western culture defines leadership as central to a single, dominant individual who influences others with a value of efficiency. The native view of leadership endows authority to a group of people and views leadership as a process. Leaders serve their communities (Benham, 2002).

While leadership is not a new concept, its interpretations are used in different contexts, and both styles are evident in the field of education. While there are many examples of hierarchical leadership in California's education system, there are rare instances that have broken away from this traditional model to become flatter in nature. One must ask how much these "flattened" organizations really include their communities in the work of their schools, or whether they sometimes invite them to provide input.

Equity Leadership

Leaders in education are charged with providing equity in a system that was designed to serve the privileged. Rigby and Tredway (2015) define equity as "conditions for learning that interrupt historically discriminatory practices, support democratic schooling, and achieve fair, inclusive, and just outcomes" (p. 330). Students from Latinx and African American descent are the students who face these equity gaps and the institutions that perpetuate them. Mills (1997) states that "we live in a world which has been foundationally shaped for the past five hundred years by the realities of European domination and the gradual consolidation of global white supremacy" (p. 20). Students cannot overcome these institutional barriers alone. They require the support of leaders who understand the gaps they face (Theoharis, 2010). Leaders who understand these gaps believe that students can achieve. They systematically make decisions, and collaborate with like-minded leaders to change conditions for historically marginalized students.

Equity and equality are not the same. The general definition of equity in education is often defined as providing what each child needs to access his or her education. Social justice often is the avenue for leaders to enact equity to shift historical inequities and marginalization (Theoharis, 2010). While the term is widely used (Evans, 2013; Rigby & Tredway, 2015), equity in this study borrows from Shields' (2004) definition of equity: the act of "making available to

all children programs that meet their cultural, social, and academic needs" (p. 124). Equity assumes that all children will receive what they need to access an educational system that was created to treat students unequally. However, not all leaders use this definition as a call to action. What then is an active definition of equity?

Equity is an abstract concept unless it is enacted by those who disrupt inequity. Leverett (2002) describes those in the field of education who actively disrupt inequities as "equity warriors" (p. 1). He defines equity warriors as those who hold high expectations of all students' levels of achievement, regardless of their labels. Additionally, he provides examples of what equity warriors do to disrupt inequities: act outside their formal roles; communicate effectively and persistently; participate in teams; continuously improve knowledge, skills, and disposition; take risks; and model all these values, beliefs, and behaviors (Leverett, 2002). Leverett's definition assumes that school leaders will enact equity in order for students to be held to high standards and achieve at a high level of rigor. Communicating this intent and the larger equity agenda requires continuous work of disrupting inequities. Evans' (2013) description of an equity agenda includes "decision-making, goal-setting, strategic planning, and purposeful action" (p. 463). Enacting equity requires thoughtful, intentional action to disrupt the pervasiveness of a system that was created inequitably.

Equity and those who enact it seek to disrupt a system in which certain populations of students will inherently fail. While there is a moral imperative to change the system that consistently fails certain students, a deeper understanding of what this leadership looks like is necessary. Leaders who enact equity, who advocate for students as equity warriors, are transformative leaders.

Transformative Leadership

A leader who seeks equity for students who have been historically marginalized in education is a transformative leader. According to Shields (2010), a transformative leader "takes account of the ways in which the inequities of the outside world affect the outcomes of what occurs internally in educational organizations" (p. 584). It is not enough to consider the societal inequities that affect students in educational systems. It requires a leader to start with themselves, to look at one's internal biases, identity, and privilege. Once leaders have reflected on their own selves, they must then "be willing to take stands that may require moral courage, to live with tension, and, to some degree, engage in activism and advocacy" (Shields, 2011, p. 3). This is no easy task, and it requires thoughtful understanding of one's own internal work and continuous learning. Additionally, disrupting inequities requires constant reflection, transformation, and communication (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2017). A transformational leader must also be able to take a step back to see the big picture, and act objectively to effect change. According to Heifetz and Linsky (2002), leadership is an iterative process in which the goal is to move back and forth between observing impact in real-time and returning to the action. This process is crucial to the work of equity, inclusion, and social justice (Shields, 2011).

Transformative leadership is transactional. A transformative leader cannot freely turn from learning about what is moral and right, without actively engaging in the work of trying to make system changes. A transformative leader must observe and look for patterns in the system, while also looking toward one's own actions for change (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). There is a civic challenge of recognizing and addressing inequities "that combines a rights-based theory that every individual is entitled to be treated with dignity, respect, and absolute regard, with a social justice theory of ethics that takes these rights to a societal level" (Shields, 2010, p. 571).

Education is sometimes seen as the vehicle in which society can fix policy for problems of poverty, economics, and inequality (Kantor & Lowe, 2016). Without conscious effort and significant advocacy for the needs of all students, change will not occur. Freire's (1998) contention "that education is not the ultimate lever for social transformation, but without it transformation cannot occur," speaks to the understanding that education cannot fix all of society's ills (p. 37). However, with transformative leadership in our schools, it is one step in the right direction. Transformative leadership can be further described through social justice and culturally responsive school leadership.

Social Justice Leadership

Previously in this chapter, social justice was described as the enacting of equity and the disruption of inequity. According to Bogotch (2002), social justice and educational leadership are not separate. Leaders in education must realize the inequities that students face. Theoharis (2007) situates social justice leadership in school site leaders or principals. His definition is based on addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools. School leaders who disrupt inequities have several common traits. First, they believe that equity is possible and that they have a moral obligation to eliminate marginalization in schools (Theoharis, 2007). Additionally, school leaders who are also social justice leaders challenge "the ways in which schools are run and teachers are perceived" (Theoharis, 2010, p. 366). They are active agents seeking to change the system of education in their schools. Social justice leadership requires "the recognition of the unequal circumstances of marginalized groups with actions directed toward eliminating inequalities" (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014, p. 846). This type of leadership is an active movement toward inclusion of all students regardless of how they identify themselves or are identified by historically distinguishing labels.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership

In addition to social justice leadership, transformative leadership incorporates what Khalifaet al. (2016) describe as Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL). This type of leadership requires educators to "understand, respond, incorporate, accommodate, and ultimately celebrate the entirety of the children they serve" (Khalifa, et al., 2016, p. 1,278). CRSL is described as a process. An educational leader must first seek to understand both themselves and others and, with that understanding, can respond to children from different backgrounds. The end goal of the CRSL process is to celebrate our students. However, the busy life of an educator or school leader does not often allow us to know our students well. We have "little real knowledge about our students, their home lives, their families, and their communities, and this space of ignorance is subsequently often occupied by prejudices and biases that are negative for the students" (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 612). The lack of CRSL in our schools perpetuates the inequities that we often say we are seeking to disrupt.

School leaders make decisions that perpetuate systems of inequity and do not respond to students' real needs when they act without understanding their students, their cultures, their backgrounds, and their stories. Leaders assume they make decisions in the best interest of students but do not adequately respond to the educational, social, political, and cultural needs of the students they seek to serve. Effective CRSL "requires leaders to learn about each community they serve, situate aspects of their schools so they celebrate all cultures, and seek to identify and institutionalize practices that affirm indigenous and authentic cultural practices of students" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1,278). When school leaders engage in the process of learning about students, their communities, their families, and their cultures, they may begin to serve and

change the landscape that has perpetuated systems of inequities for historically marginalized populations of students.

Khalifa (2018) further lists specific leadership behaviors that characterize CRSL:

a. Being critically self-reflective

b. Developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula

c. Promoting inclusive, anti-oppressive school contexts

d. Engaging students' indigenous (or local neighborhood) community contexts

These leadership behaviors move the process from the leader to the teachers and classrooms, then to the overall school climate, and outward to the community. Khalifa's model describes both the inclusion of the community and the collaborative effort a CRSL and the school team should use to empower children and families. This type of leadership "signals that an equitable power-sharing relationship between communities and schools is optimal" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 13). CRSL differs from traditional leadership in the sense that it is a reciprocal relationship between the school leader and the community.

Community Engagement and Leadership

A transformative leader engages in a process of self-reflection, activism, and continuous learning from within to the larger community. As described above, leaders of equity require the understanding and moral obligation to change what is happening to students in schools and the larger community in which they live. Leaders require an understanding of "the values, norms, and beliefs of the communities, families, and students" that their schools serve to engage the larger community (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012, p. 179). Relationships, therefore, are central to the development of this understanding and appreciation of differences. It is the basis of all social justice work (Shields, 2004).

School leaders often ask the community to come to meetings, provide input, or help communicate the message of equity beyond the school (Evans, 2013). However, these actions do not fully engage the community in the equity work transformative leaders need to do to disrupt inequity. "Social justice leaders connect groups, but in doing so strive to make engagement work meaningful, self-sustaining, and proactive" (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014, p. 848). Khalifa (2018) further explains that community voice needs to be generated by the community, with partnerships and collaborations that are equitable and power-sharing. Modeling the relationship between the school and community will further disrupt the institutional imbalance of power that is represented by the school system. The work of engaging communities in the change needed to provide students with the opportunities to thrive and succeed is process-driven and long term. It also requires changing the mindsets of our own students and families from a deficit model to a strengths based model that perceives students as "knowledgeable, caring, and being capable of high achievement and of full participation in every decision and activity of the organization" (Shields, 2011, p. 8). Authentic engagement of our communities in the work of changing our school systems requires transformative leadership founded in equity.

This section reviewed the research that formulates the idea of leaders of equity. First, I reviewed traditions of leadership, discussing the difference between Western and Indigenous types of leadership. Then I defined equity and described those who enact equity: equity warriors. Next, I discussed Shields's definition of transformative leadership, further exploring it through the lens of social justice and culturally responsive school leadership. Finally, I explored the merging of equity and transformative leadership that requires the understanding and incorporation of community. Leaders of equity understand equity and engage in the process of internal reflection and learning to incorporate the needs and contexts of the school and larger

community that they serve. The next section provides a broad overview of organizational theory as it relates to complex educational organizations.

Organizational Theory

Educational organizations are complex, becoming more bureaucratic as we pan out from the micro level of the Local Education Agency (LEA) or district; to the meso level of regional organization, the County Office of Education (COE); to the macro level of state organization, the California Department of Education (CDE). Additionally, all these organizations are dependent on federal funding, and are subject to the bureaucracy of the United States Department of Education (U.S. DOE). With multiple levels of organization (see Figure 8) for the education system in an already large state, attempts to manage the many moving parts of California's education systems requires an understanding of organizational theory. Each organization adds to its complexity with the number of individuals within it who control various processes to complete a task (Elmore, 1983). Registering for a training opportunity provides a clear example: registration could be completed by the individual who wants to attend the training; however, in a complex organization such as the COE, registration requires the approval of multiple managers in the individual's department. First the managers provide signatures for the request, which then is forwarded to the business department, where multiple managers in that department must sign off on the request before a check can be issued for the payment of the training, finally allowing the individual to register. Therefore, expecting changes in a school or district is impacted by the complexity of organizations that filter information from federal and state bureaucracies (Rowan, 1982).

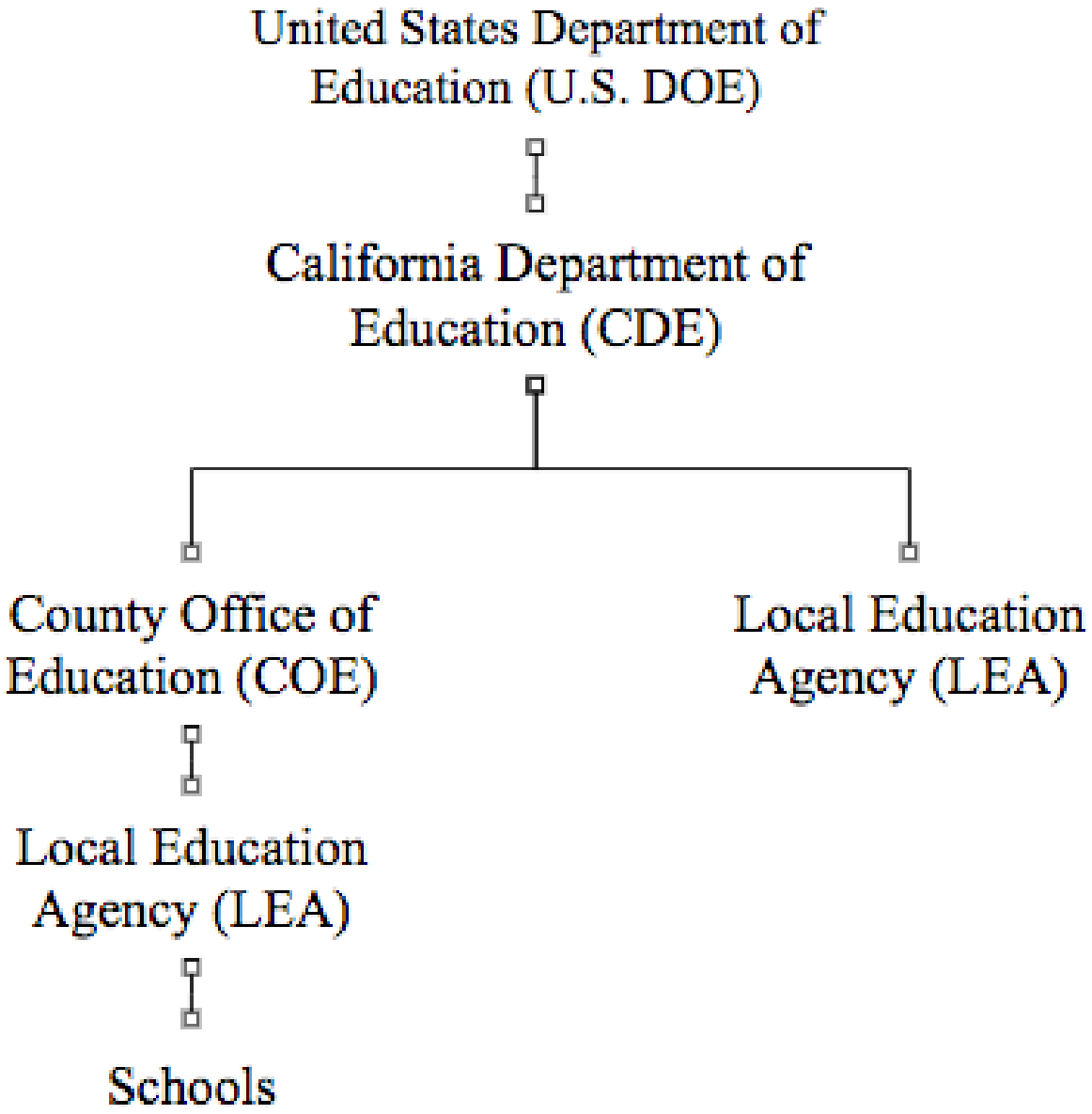


Figure 8. The multiple levels of educational organizations in California.

Scott and Davis (2007) define organizations as extensions of ourselves and the mechanism by which we pursue our goals by discussing them in the context of rational, natural, and open systems. Bolman and Deal (2017) offer four distinct frames to create a mental model of organizations: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Whether organizations are defined by systems or frames, it is the people within them that drive purpose and goals, just as in California's educational organizations. The complexity of educational organizations in California is compounded by the different levels of decision-making chains by the participants of these organizations. The vast size and diverse population of the state requires the management of an extensive statewide educational organization, the CDE, that reports to the U.S. DOE, and oversees both COEs and LEAs. COEs are situated between the CDE and the LEAs providing support communication and technical assistance to LEAs. Further discussion on the role of the COE and individuals composing the current study will be provided in Chapter 4. I construct the understanding of California's complex educational organizations by discussing the various theories of organizational systems and frames in the following sections of this chapter (see Figure 9). Then I discuss how one might generally analyze these ideas to understand the complex educational organizations that impact California's educational systems.

Rational Systems

Rational systems are highly structured and provide a guide for the behavior of people within an organization. Rational systems are typically more formalized by creating rules and goals. Performance toward the achievement of goals dictates the activities of the organization while providing a means of standardization and regulation. Reward systems are typically in place to support continued regulation of people's behavior toward the organization's rules and goals (Scott & Davis, 2007). The guidelines and structure of rational systems provide a formality to the

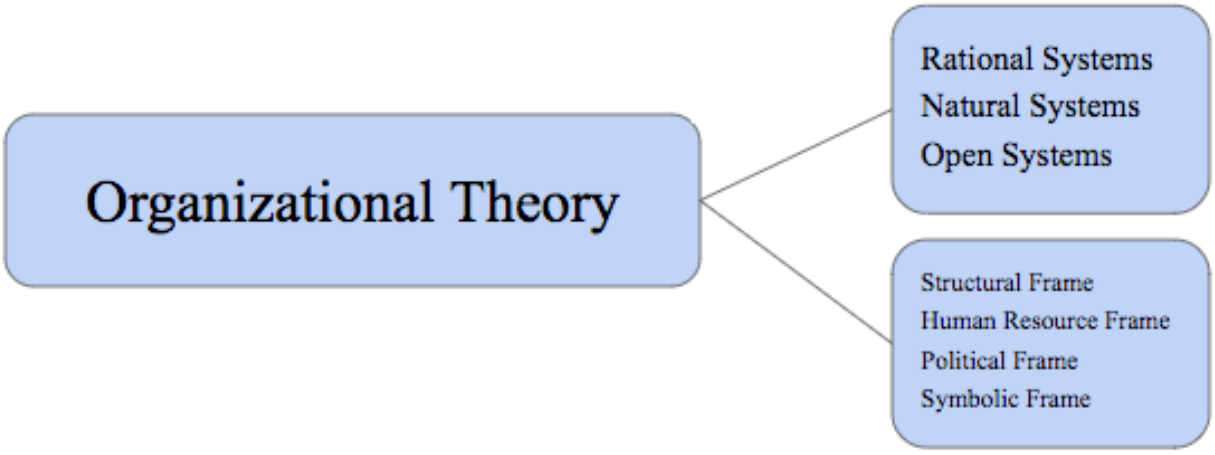


Figure 9. Organizational theory.

organization with set roles leading to the goal of "maximum efficiency" (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 35). Producing with maximum efficiency is the goal of these organizations.

Four main schools of thought provide greater understanding of rational systems. Taylor's Scientific Management, Fayol's Administrative Theory, Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy, and Simon's Theory of Administrative Behavior support the construction of this understanding. Frederick W. Taylor's (1911) Scientific Management theory stemmed from the idea that it is possible to methodically analyze individuals and their work to determine maximum efficiency. This theory originated in the United States and most likely was influenced by the industrialization of the age. Ideally, these processes would allow organizations to mass produce as efficiently as possible, with as little use of resources as possible. People could also be selected for specific roles within an organization that best suited their skills (Scott & Davis, 2007).

Henri Fayol (1949 trans.) was a French industrialist who placed emphasis on management, hierarchy, and specialization. His administrative theory proposed that coordination of management and hierarchy could provide the most control of the work, and the specialization of those within the organization would provide the basis for its effectiveness (Scott & Davis, 2007). Most K - 12 public educational organizations within California operate under this structure. The Superintendent of Schools is typically at the top of the hierarchy and the organizational chart. Multiple divisions exist under her with associate superintendents managing these groups, each specializing in specific work to meet the needs of constituents. Roles are specified and reviewed under a formalized structure.

The Bureaucratic model of organizations was based on Max Weber's understanding of a larger socio-political context. Although his work was not translated until later, it is necessary to

understand his work within a broader context because of his role as a sociologist and a political economist. Weber (1968 trans.) defines bureaucracy with specific characteristics:

- Division of labor
- Hierarchy of positions
- Rules that stipulate performance expectations
- Proprietary vs. personal rights
- Qualifications of positions based on specific skills
- Employment perceived as career

Weber further distinguishes the understanding of bureaucracy based on the idea of authority. Specific administrative characteristics of authority are "expected to provide more effective and efficient administration" (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 50). A leader exercises control over and through a hierarchy of officials who receive and give orders. This process is inherent in educational organizations, with superintendents typically relying on the expertise and work of "cabinets," usually made up of those at the top of the hierarchy who have administrative and managerial roles. Bureaucracy provides a stable and predictable administrative structure that provides subordinates greater independence and discretion for their work.

Bureaucracy and hierarchy can be further understood through Perrow's (1986) criticism of hierarchy. He describes hierarchy as a hindrance to the independence and creativity of an organization's participants. Lengthy processes that must follow a hierarchy cause inefficiency and ineffectiveness, which then flow into a series of complaints:

> About people in one department making decisions which affect other units without checking first with their respective superiors, and about the lack of clear lines of

> authority, the failure to exercise authority or to be decisive, and the lack of accountability (p. 36).

Meyer and Rowan (1977), on the other hand, suggest that a greater degree of hierarchy would lead to a greater degree of control. Perrow (1986) finds that greater hierarchy increases decentralization (p. 40). This idea of creating hierarchy to create a semblance of more control and greater organization is inherent in COEs. Structures of hierarchy such as adding titles, restructuring for more levels within an organization between a manager and the superintendent, and reorganizing the report structure, create more confusion and less control. Participants become more dissatisfied with their lack of voice and become disgruntled by the idea that leadership does not understand their roles or their work.

Herbert Simon (1997) contributed to the understanding of how an individual decides to participate in the work of the organization. His theory of administrative behavior focuses on the individual's decision to join and participate in that work, as well as the decisions one makes as a participant in the organization. The organization itself could affect individuals' behavior with the importance placed on rules and routines, and the connection of goals with subgoals. Simon's theory highlights the influence that organizations have on individuals' decisions with the espoused rules and routines. This creates the "unobtrusive control of participants" in the organization (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 55). Many participants in K - 12 educational organizations face such decisions daily. The idea of regulating behavior, standardizing practice, and setting goals offers the idea that teachers, educational leaders, and administrators could be controlled to provide quality educational opportunities for all students.

Rational systems are based on rules, structure, and organization so as to provide normative and formalized ways of working. Educational systems are responsible for the mass

instruction of millions of children, Teachers and school administrators are influenced by to maintain the "grammar of school" because they can be "labor-saving devices, ways to organize complex duties (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, pp. 85-86)." Most of the rational systems theories outlined above were developed in the environmental context of industrialization and follow the ideas of those eras, focusing on maximum output with efficiency, and utilizing minimal resources. The idea that educational systems could effectively meet the needs of all students with a rigid structure instead marginalizes the students who are not able to fit within the rules, structures, and formality of school. Innovations introduced to change the rules and structures of schooling were successful because they became ways to silo groups of students who might learn differently instead of incorporating new practices (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Natural Systems

While rational systems emphasize the formality and rule-driven nature of organizations, the natural systems theory of organizations focuses on relationships attempting to "adapt and survive in their particular circumstances" and the "complex interconnections between the normative and behavioral structures of organizations" (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 60). Natural systems describe participants as those who pursue multiple interests and thrive under the social nature of systems. While structure exists, importance is placed on the social nature and behavior of the organization. Participants typically value the move toward a common goal or objective, but also suppress outlier interests that the group may not be invested in. Natural systems also attempt to keep the organization running the way it is because it is a "source of power, or resources, or prestige, or pleasure" (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 61). Therefore, there is sometimes a disparity between the espoused and enacted goals pursued by organizations, beyond the goals that dictate participants' behavior. Participants in a natural systems organization are not only

governed by the rules, rewards, and structures of a rational system, but are part of the organization, and they bring all of who they are into the organization. These other components of individuals—their ideals, values, interests, agendas, and expectations—are the informal structures that make up the organization.

Natural systems theory then is neither formal nor informal. Along the continuum of structure in organizations, it is somewhere in the middle. There is some structure, there are certain rules, but participants within the organization may be bound by common interests and goals. Individual behavior impacts the organization, while the organization also impacts the behavior of the participants. Natural systems theory focuses on an organic, evolving, changing model of organization, based on human behavior but still tied to a slight structure. Educational organizations may in theory be rational systems, but in fact are more closely aligned with natural systems. Teachers, staff, and administrators often bring their hearts to their work—they are motivated to participate in educational organizations not because of the rules, regulations, or normative nature of schooling—but perhaps because of the value of education they hold.

Social Consensus

Natural systems theory contains the idea of social consensus. These subtypes of natural systems address human relations, cooperative systems, the institutional approach, and the Adaptation, Goal attainment, Integration, Latency (AGIL) model. Mayo (1945) addressed the complexity that individuals bring to organizations and stressed the emotions that guide their work. This motivation provides insight into how participants may be motivated to work within an organization. Mayo's research led to the discovery of the "Hawthorne effect," the collective change of participants' behavior as a result of observation (Scott & Davis, 2007). Mayo's research also led to a greater understanding of group processes, cohesiveness, and production

based on leadership. His theory maintained that leadership requires a certain relationship between a supervisor and the team—one that is based on trust, friendship, and respect. Additionally, varying leadership qualities are needed in different situations, requiring continuous modification and improvement of supervisors' skill sets. Chester Barnard's (1938) theory of cooperative systems combines the ideas that goals may be defined by the hierarchy, but achievement of goals requires the buy-in of participants within the organization. He suggested that organizations are dependent on psychological and social motivations, or a collective purpose. Philip Selznick's (1949) research postulated that people bring certain characteristics and core values to the organization and work based on those values, while incorporating other practices they have learned through the organization. Participants are moved to act in certain ways based on their internal motivations. These patterns of work based on individual motivations can develop systematically to the "personality" of the organization and lead to the institutionalization of certain practices (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 74). The organizational culture is built on the leadership's ability to focus the mission of the organization on specific values. Finally, Parson's (1960) AGIL (Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, Latency) model describes organizations as multi-layered systems, related to the larger society. Every organization has to have a way to serve its functional needs within its context, allowing it to "adapt to its environment" and "mobilize resources needed for its continued operation" (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 78).

These four subtypes describe the social consensus school of thought more clearly in complex bureaucratic organizational systems, such as California's COE system. Many individuals who engage in COEs enter the organization with their own ideals based on the work they did as educators in the field. Their work is guided by their motivations and values, they

have a collective purpose, they become enmeshed in the organizational culture of the COE, and they adapt to the needs of their constituents and the state educational organization.

Social Conflict

Dalton's (1959) theory of social conflict rose from his study of managers. He found that there were multiple ways that social conflict could occur in organizations: between managers and subordinates, between departments, between higher and lower ranking managers, and even between people's personalities. Additionally, Gouldner (1954) found that rational systems organizations could not solely depend on participants' agreement in all goals. Certain interests might be served over others, which cause conflict, or were caused by social conflict. Oftentimes, social conflicts arising from within an organization are hidden. "Organizational structures and the rules and ideologies that support them work to suppress and conceal the conflicts of interests among participants and constituencies" (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 84). This is clearly seen in COEs. The organizational structure of many COEs change regularly: when a new Superintendent is hired, a department receives a grant, or changes are made in the interest of adopting new organizational goals. These structures serve to hide the social conflicts that are present within the organization to preserve the appearance of the COE itself.

Open Systems

Open systems stand in contrast to rational and natural systems. Open systems tend to be interdependent upon flows and activities within an organization while linking shifting coalitions of participants in wider environments. An organization could look very formal and rule driven on paper, but a deeper dive into participants' activities could show a very loosely coupled system, one that de-emphasizes the formal structure that it displays. Open systems tend to value process over structure, leading to potential lack of control. However, open systems can be complex and

connected based on the adaptive nature of the organization. This may render unclear boundaries, depending on the adaptivity of the participants in the organization. An open system is available to respond to the needs of the environment, indicating a "close connection between the condition of the environment and the characteristics of the systems within it" (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 97). This theory points to the importance of understanding the organization in its context. The open system provides an idea of why COEs change their organization frequently. It responds to the demands of the state bureaucracy and is connected to the larger society. At the same time, it is driven by a hierarchy that creates subsystems to serve the needs of the LEAs. The division of work within COEs gives it a distinct hierarchy, which is also inherent in the California Department of Education (CDE), the organization that provides oversight to COEs and to LEAs—the organizations that COEs support. These systems, or hierarchies, which form a greater hierarchy, are an example of systems that respond to the needs of the greater societal context. One must first understand how these systems' interdependence to further understand how they might be viewed as open systems.

There are three schools of thought that support understanding of open systems: the systems design approach, contingency theory, and Weick's social psychological model of organizing. According to Scott and Davis (2007), systems design theorists "seek to change and improve organizations… not simply to describe and understand them" (p. 99). They focus on the operations of organizations and understand that a system is more than just a sum of its elements. Lawrence and Lorsch's (1967) contingency theory asserts the idea that contexts place different requirements on systems. Additionally, subunits within an organization might have different demands based on context, driving the need to adapt. This idea of coping requires open systems to create specialized subunits with different structural features with two different levels. These

two levels stipulate that the structural features of the organizational subunit should be "suited" to the environment, and differentiation should be based on the "complexity" of the environment (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 103). Weick's (1969) model of organizing is defined by how information is processed. He postulated that people organize to understand their environment, environmental influences, and their influence on their context. The purpose of organizations is a communal "sense making" and determination of how to make something a part of the organization (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 105). There is a need for balance between flexibility and stability for the organization to survive, but there is also semi-autonomy of individuals within open systems.

Structural Frame

The structural frame focuses on the outcome of a product. Organizations that function with a structural frame are susceptible to external influences and develop strategies to meet specific goals, usually tied to an end product. The structure of an organization is thought to support the achievement of the goals and drives the strategy behind the organization's functions. There is a focus on people within the organization having the right roles and relationships to provide the organization its structure. Bolman and Deal (2017) posit that organizations who operate with a structural frame:

- Exist to achieve goals and objectives
- Increase efficiency and performance
- Need coordination and control
- Favor rationality over personal agendas and external influences
- Tend to problem solve and restructure when issues arise (p. 48).

Much like rational systems theory, the structural mental model came from industrial analysts who sought efficiency and referred to scientific processes for management during the age of industrialization. Organizations must be able to adapt to changing circumstances even while there is a focus on alignment of strategy, structure, and environment.

Bolman and Deal's (2017) description of the structural frame discusses the division of labor, roles, and responsibilities as a "keystone" (p. 53). These divisions lead to specialization but require understanding of how to coordinate and control, or allocation of work. Lack of coordination and control leads to confusion, with participants working on their own instead of within the organization's purpose. Structural frames typically describe bureaucratic organizations, both enhancing and constraining what an organization can do (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 52). Though the name may imply rigidity, organizations with a structural frame could still be loosely or tightly coupled.

There are two types of coordination inherent in organizations who operate with a structural frame—vertical and lateral coordination. Vertical coordination typically describes a hierarchy where formal authority chains exist. Supervisors and managers determine permissions, make decisions, and supervise the work of subordinates. Rules and policies guide the standardization of processes and alignment to support efficient production. More planning and control in a vertically coordinated organization supports the achievement of goals and results. Lateral coordination is less formal, with participants engaging in both formal and informal meetings. There is more flexibility with the coordination of work that might seem simpler and faster. Participants in a laterally coordinated structural frame might coordinate through networks, movement between divisions, and matrices of communication. Team configurations allow for

leadership and communication but require a focused cohesive structure for the purpose of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017, pp. 55-60).

Human Resources Frame

The structural frame focuses more on the relationship between people and organizations. Bolman and Deal (2017) make several assumptions of organizations whose mental model leans on the human resource frame: they exist to serve human needs, one does not exist without the other, and there is an expected "fit" between the participant and the organization (p. 118). The organization with a human resources mindset believes that people who are motivated and have the ability to do the job, equal higher performance. Organizations that respond to the needs of their participants and invest in them build a workforce that is skilled and motivated to support the agenda of the organization. They may foster shared leadership, provide training and development, and support the overall human resource capital in the organization.

Developing the human resources of an organization requires specific actions. The philosophy of managing people within the organization, considering who to hire for positions, and sustaining employees who "fit," are functions of the human resources frame. Leadership and decision-making actions that provides direction and support for the function of the group are hallmarks of an organization that puts people first, and may lead to more satisfaction at work (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Communication methods and conflict resolution are also considerations. Both may contribute to participants' motivation to stay in the organization. Motivation may also be attributed to how closely participants align with organizational goals, especially those goals that are truly enacted. Argyris and Schön (1974) address espoused versus theories-in-use. Espoused theories of action are the ideas or values that people say they believe in and that guide their work. Theories-in-use are the actual practices of the organization. Argyris and Schön

(1974) found that there are discrepancies between espoused and theories-in-use which may affect participant motivation to stay with an organization.

Political Frame

The politics of an organization may influence its participants. Bolman and Deal (2017) describe politics as "the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests" (p. 179). There are many interests in a single organization, as there are in a complex educational organization such as COEs. The idea that politics is merely the process of making decisions requires some unpacking.

Bolman and Deal (2017) make several assumptions of the political frame. These assumptions include the ideas that:

- Organizations are coalitions of different individuals or groups
- Coalitions have differences in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality
- Important decisions involve allocating scarce resources
- Resources and differences put conflict at the center of dynamics and power is the most important asset
- Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation, often for the interests of those in power (p. 184).

Power is central to the idea of the political frame. Power is the capacity to make things happen, and those who have power are those within the organization with certain positions, who have control over needed resources, and may have specific information, expertise, or specializations. Personal power, or charisma, may give someone the ability to communicate a vision that others want to be a part of and follow. Those who have power within an organization find it expeditious

to form "coalitions," alliances that support common interests (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 185). These coalitions function because participants within an organization find it beneficial to work together toward a desired end. Power structures often include the amount of authority that is exerted on participants. The need to work together to achieve a goal creates power dynamics that are multi-directional. Power dynamics can shift horizontally between departments or divisions, or vertically (top down or bottom up) between the different levels of the organization.

Power dynamics are dependent upon relationships. Individuals and groups are interdependent, negotiating and bargaining with one another to achieve desired goals. Relationships arise from the need for alliances because participants believe that they "can do more together than apart" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 190). These alliances articulate and mobilize strategically and use different means to get what they want. Relationships are key to the strategy in the political frame, where "managers often fail to get things done because they rely too much on reason and too little on relationships" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 208). However, the juxtaposition of group and individual needs may collide and cause conflict, changing the power dynamic. Conflict itself is not inherently bad, despite that common connotation. It is important to note how conflict is managed. When conflict is handled positively, it stimulates creativity and innovation. Additionally, it defines politics as how participants might articulate and mobilize power to get what they want (Bolman & Deal, 2017). This individual or group agenda depends on interests and the scenario for attaining a goal.

Power and politics have a place in the COE. These complex educational organizations hire people based on their specializations, priding themselves on choosing the best of the best in their fields. The specific expertise of these individuals could make things difficult in the COE, when there is conflict due to lack of ability to form the relationships necessary to achieve

specific goals. COEs then are often hubs that contain very specialized expertise but may struggle with the "span of control" (Perrow, 1986, p. 38). These individuals will often strike out on their own using their own relationships with LEAs, constituents, and other organizations to limit the amount of control the COE can exert. At the same time, COEs are a publicly funded entity with a responsibility to external constituents. The value of appearance is high, along with the ability to understand and respond to demands of key external constituents (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Constituent support is vital to survival, requiring the organization to adjust and change to external pressure. The political frame describes the game and its players.

Symbolic Frame

As the political frame describes the game and its players, the symbolic frame describes the team mascot or symbols that participants can align with. Bolman and Deal (2017) describe symbols as "the basic materials of the meaning systems, or cultures" of the organizations we inhabit. There are several assumptions they make about the symbolic frame:

- What is most important is not what happens but what it means
- Activity and meaning are loosely coupled and could be interpreted many ways based on people's experiences
- Symbols arise in times of uncertainty to help people resolve confusion, find direction, and anchor to hope and faith
- Events and processes are more important than outcomes
- Culture is most important for binding the organization, uniting people, and helping them accomplish goals (Bolman & Deal, 2017, pp. 241-242)

The symbolic frame addresses the heart of the organization, the participants, who bring their experiences. Participants are not robots or machines and, therefore, bring their values, thoughts,

ideas, and loyalty with them. These emotions and values shape the culture of an organization, determining "what an organization stands for, qualities worthy of esteem or commitment. They define a unique character that helps people find meaning and feel special about what they do" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 243). Education is a person-driven business, and the end goal is development of young people. Therefore, educational organizations are made complex not just because of the various structures or ways that they are organized; they are complex because of the focus on transformation.

Organizational Theory and Education

At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed qualities of transformative leadership. People who come to work at COEs want to transform education as equity leaders, and to shift inequities in the educational system. To do so, they hold the value of equity as central to the work that they do, creating a vision of what could be. "A vision offers mental pictures linking historical legend and core precepts to future events. Shared, it imbues an organization with spirit, resolve, and élan" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 244). Participants in an organization with a mental model of the symbolic framework hold specific beliefs and look forward to what could be. These core values and beliefs support the work that they continue to do and drive their purpose. They create a culture based on these shared values and beliefs, creating a powerful form of organizational glue (Hofstede, 1984). Culture changes based on the people in the organization and its environmental context. It is "both a product and a process. As a product, it embodies wisdom accumulated from experience. As a process, it is renewed and recreated" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 258). Culture is also based on the actions of its participants. How groups and teams operate within the symbolic frame distinguish organizations from the structural, human resource, and political frames. How people form groups is important: specialized language fosters cohesion and commitment, stories

carry the history and values of the organization and reinforce group identity. At the heart, the soul of the organization is the secret to its success (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

The culture of an organization within the symbolic frame is portrayed through the stories, rituals, and ceremonies of the participants. Stories are "rooted" in the culture (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 247). They may be used to spur participants to action, provide a portrait of what the organization stands for, highlight the values of the organization, and build loyalty and support. Stories bind people to each other and create connection because of the natural curiosity to know and hear each other's stories. Stories belong to people, and can be "re-framed, re-told, and re-shaped to best support their empowerment, agency, and ultimately, their dreams" (Guajardo et. al., 2016, p. 34). Rituals and ceremonies are connected. Rituals happen during specific times of the year and their purpose is to solidify the bonds of the group, contribute to traditions, and underscore values of the organization. Ceremonies create order, clarity, and predictability. They reassure and convey messages of stability and reassurance to their external constituencies.

> When properly conducted and attuned to valued myths, both ritual and ceremony fire the imagination and deepen faith; otherwise, they become cold, empty forms that people resent and avoid. They can release creativity and transform meanings, but they can also cement the status quo and block adaptation and learning (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 256).

Education systems are prime examples of organizations that operate under a specific culture. In educational circles, one might hear about a school's "climate and culture," whether it is welcoming or exclusive. These ideas transfer to more bureaucratic and complex educational organizations, like COEs, who maintain rituals and ceremonies for the sake of appearance.

Appearances are integral to organizations who must answer to external constituencies. The organization may want to show only certain aspects of their culture, and potentially mimic

the values of perceived good organizations. Complex educational organizations are examples of institutional organizations, often mimicking cultural norms, values, and ideas of those in their field. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) use the term "isomorphism" to describe organizations that become similar to others like them, without necessarily becoming more efficient (p. 149). They describe bureaucratic organizations that worry more about how things appear, whose processes are homogenous. The symbolic frame provides a hopeful interpretation of the isomorphism that exists in bureaucratic organizations: institutionalized structures become the "expressive components of organizational theater… portraying the organization to itself and others" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 285). External pressures often drive these organizations to act this way to increase confidence and security in their purpose. Educational organizations are paid for by public dollars, answer to board members, and face societal pressures to fix societal problems (Kantor & Lowe, 2016). The survival of complex educational organizations depends on convincing the general public that they are making progress, creating a gap between an organization's formal structure and its actual work activities, forming a "loosely coupled" system (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 341). Complex educational organizations such as COEs will continue to operate under a symbolic frame as long as the control for education lies outside their organization.

Summary

The preceding discussion of organizational theory and equity leadership helps explain aspects of the people who are part of complex educational organizations. The heart of the current study lives in the overlap of this understanding, where we will begin to look deeply into three portraits of equity leaders who work in COEs (see Figure 10).

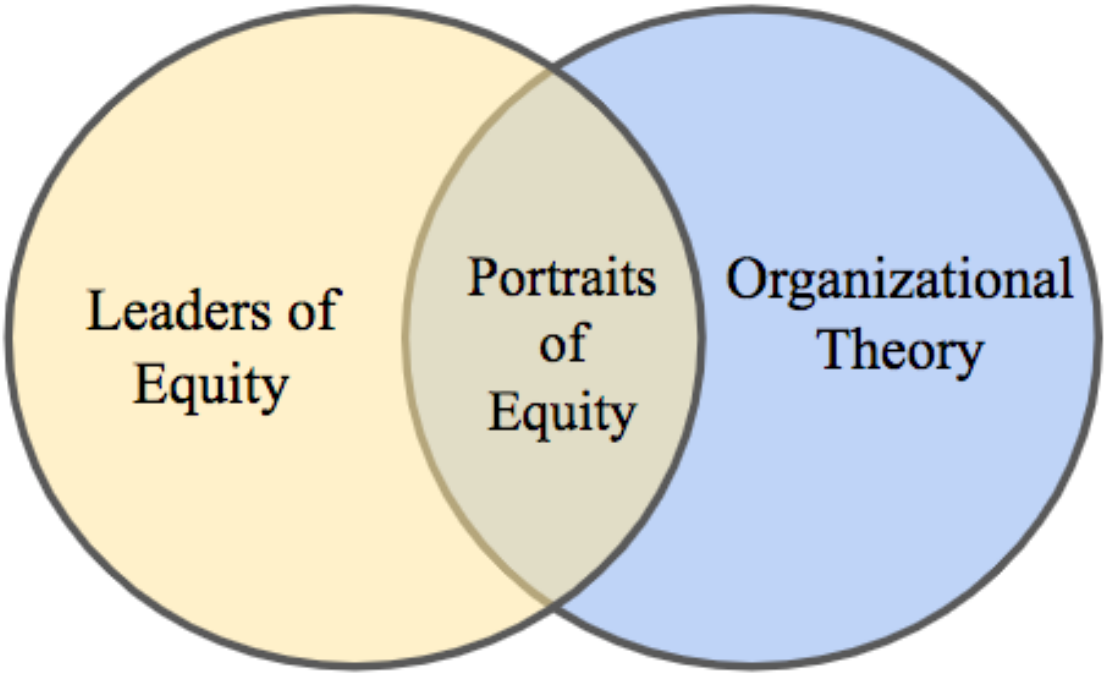


Figure 10. Portraits of equity leaders.

Leaders of equity are not traditional leaders. They are transformative leaders who enact social justice and culturally responsive school leadership. They do so within a context that is extremely complex, with numerous internal and external pressures, while holding on to a vision of equity. The following study attempts to discern how leaders in complex educational organizations reflect upon and enact equity work by answering the question: *How do managers in complex educational organizations support equity work?* Freire (1970) describes the theory of reflection and action as "praxis," putting theory into practice (p. 125). I study equity leaders of COEs to understand how the organization might influence their work and how they enact transformative work to influence what happens to marginalized students. The following chapter will dive into the stories of these equity leaders in COEs, uncovering their motivation for equity work and determining how they sustain this transformative work.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

If you don't understand, ask questions. If you're uncomfortable about asking questions, say you are uncomfortable asking questions and then ask anyway.
~ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Developing an understanding of people, their culture, and their experiences requires one to enter a space of discomfort. Equity work, which is based on the understanding that there are inherent inequities in the education system, requires the ability of educators to acknowledge their complicity in maintaining these institutionalized inequities. The work is not easy and is often exhausting. But it requires one to explore issues that educators would rather leave untouched because the issues are often very personal. The courage to ask questions and to seek understanding is a necessary vehicle to change, and requires the ability to ask questions, as the quote by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie states. Research is a way of posing and answering questions about the issues inherent in our education system. Through researching the question: *How do administrators in complex educational organizations support equity work?* I hope to understand the changes we would need to make to our complex educational organizations in order to interrupt the inherent institutional inequities we maintain. To answer the overarching research question, a set of sub-questions guided this research:

1. What organizational factors foster or inhibit the equity work of administrators in a county office of education?
2. How do administrators in a county office continue to develop as reflective practitioners?
3. How do administrators maintain themselves as equity advocates?
4. How does this study inform my own leadership as a county office manager for equity?

The research question is best answered using portraiture methodology, which allows for exploration and understanding through people's experiences and stories. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (2016) states that portraiture allows for deep study of an "individual's story, hoping to capture more universal themes" (p. 22). It allows the researcher to inquire and to question multiple sources of the participant's story: past and present context and experiences; intent and motivations; and relationships with others.

This chapter provides the research design to answer these questions. First, I discuss the qualitative design method used for this study: portraiture. Second, I discuss the selection of study participants and their contexts at County Offices of Education (COEs). Next, I discuss data collection methods and analyses of interviews, observations, reflections, and memos. Finally, I consider confidentiality and ethical considerations for the study itself and provide a summary of this chapter.

Study Design

The current study used the qualitative research design of portraiture as the research methodology. I review the qualitative study methods of case study and portraiture in the following section and describe why portraiture was selected for the purpose of the study.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe qualitative design as a research approach that allows for the exploration and understanding that people ascribe to a particular problem. It is based in inquiry and allows the researcher to pose open-ended questions about a specific issue, in a particular context. Data is collected and interpretation is based on the analysis of that data. Qualitative research "honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of reporting the complexity of a situation" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 4). The complexity of the COE system and the intricacies of participants' equity work requires deep

inquiry and exploration. Case study methodology allows for analysis of one or more individuals, making it a consideration of the research process for the current study. Stake (1994) and Yin (2013) describe case studies as bound by time and activity. Portraiture, on the other hand, is a type of methodology that allows for deeper exploration into the experiences of the participants in the study. This type of study allows for the ability to study participants' work and the experiences that led them to equity work without the limitations of case study methods.

Portraiture was first introduced by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) in her study, *The Good High School*, as a qualitative study methodology. She described portraiture methodology as a way to "bridge aesthetics and empiricism and appeal to intellect and emotion, and that seeks to inform and inspire and join the endeavors of documentation, interpretation, and intervention" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 7). The use of this method blends people's stories, describes who they are, and allows for deep understanding of their purpose in their work. It is this development of understanding through portraiture that allow for the exploration of why educators are invested in equity through their leadership as described in Chapter 2. Understanding the purpose of the work for each of the study's participants is key to answering the research question for the current study.

Portraiture is a type of "thick ethnography" described by Clifford Geertz (1973) that allows for dense exploration of a culture and context. Ethnographic study is a ''form of inquiry and writing that produces descriptions and accounts about the ways of life of the writer and those written about'' (Denzin, 1997, p. xi). Portraiture is different from ethnography because it inherently seeks the good, while most research methods seek why things are wrong (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016). The researcher studies not only the participants but reveals one's own understanding and development throughout the course of study. Portraiture allows the researcher

‘‘to uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular work settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation’’ (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 540). I used methods of portraiture to understand participants’ roles within the culture of their COE through observations of their work, interviews, and reflective activities. Understanding the context of the work was a necessary part of understanding how the COE environment may impact the equity work of its administrators. Additionally, my own experience and development of understanding was interwoven throughout the study to develop a fuller understanding of how we enact equity in our work at COEs as administrators. Portraiture as a qualitative study methodology allowed for all these components to be considered in order to answer the research questions posed.

The study design was developed as an ongoing inquiry of each participant over the course of several months. Each participant was introduced to the study and invited to join through an initial recruitment conversation. The type of study, expected activities, and timeline were explained to each participant separately. Each participant was told that they could leave the study at any time if they chose to. Participants identified specific equity work they wanted me to observe. They also agreed to participate in interviews and accompanying activities to share their experiences. Participants were also involved in ongoing monthly reflection activities during the study with a short break during the summer months. We embarked on a deep examination of why each participant entered the field of education, how she came to understand equity in her work, and why equity is a part of her work. The study also examined how the COE as a complex educational organization impacted the equity work of each participant.

Portraiture allows for deep inquiry into the past experiences of participants and reveals how those experiences led them to work at the COE. More importantly, it allows for the

exploration into the deeply personal work of equity: each participant has different reasons why equity work is important. Each participant also might have different ideas of what equity work means to them. Portraiture allows the researcher to "see, perceive, understand, and document in the ways that we need to," in ways that are less prescriptive than other qualitative research methodologies (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016, p. 26). It allows the researcher to bring forth genuine and sometimes deeply personal data for the purpose of developing understanding.

The qualitative study methods of portraiture as research methodology provided deep, rich, ethnographic information about the participants in the study. The purposeful selection of portraiture as the methodology to understand participants' equity work within the context of their COE supported the effort to learn from the experiences of those closest to the context of complex educational organizations (Guajardo et al., 2016). The next section describes the selection of participants for the purpose of the study.

Selection of Participants

Portraiture allows the researcher to study the "intentions, motivations, and meanings attached to people's behaviors," necessitating the intentional selection of participants for the study as a crucial element of its design (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016, p. 22). This section reviews the selection of participants for the study, and the purposeful sampling of the participants.

This study was conducted in the urban bay region located centrally in California. The three participants selected for the study work in County Offices of Education (COEs) that are close in proximity but vary in size and organization. The participants in the study were selected using purposeful sampling based on their roles in their respective COEs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Each participant is involved in statewide initiatives that purport to change the system of inequity for historically marginalized student groups. They are also considered

"middle management" or administrators: they do not have the power to make decisions on behalf of the organization, nor do they lack any positional power as discussed in the organizational theory section of Chapter 2. The COEs for which they are employed are close in proximity, therefore convenience sampling was also used. Each of the participants has worked in the COE system for some time, ranging from four to twenty years.

Each participant selected through purposeful sampling engages with equity work within their COE in various ways, but each feels that they are doing equity work within their position. Administrators served as a good foil to understand both the personal intentions and work as well as the systems that foster or inhibit their work. Common titles for these administrators in COEs across the state are Coordinators, Directors, and Executive Directors. One participant received the regional administrator leadership award. Another participant founded a non-profit for equity work. The third participant has worked in multiple school districts and COEs as an administrator at various levels. The participants agreed to participate in the study because of the value they place on equity work and their views of the limitations placed on them by the ecology of the system in which they work. Chapter 4 provides a deeper portrait of each of these participants, how they entered into equity work, and how they continue this work in the context of their respective COEs.

The study took a deep look at three administrators in two COEs through the qualitative study methodology of portraiture to understand how we work in a complex educational organization. How do we continue the equity work that we left our classrooms for? What is this impact? Is there an impact? Are we really enacting equity?

The participants in this study were selected based on their role in the COE, using purposeful sampling, and because of their equity practices. The next section discusses how the data was collected from these participants for the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection methods involved in portraiture require deep, layered, qualitative inquiry (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016). This section discusses the methods of data collection and analysis needed to develop rich portraits of each participant. Specifically, I discuss coding methods as part of the analysis process.

Data Collection

As mentioned in the research design section of this chapter, data was collected from participants over the course of several months. Interviews, observations, and reflections were collected. Interviews with each participant were completed throughout the data collection process. Observation data was used during shadowing of the participants in their contexts and work environments. These observation opportunities allowed me to determine the sequence of the study questions and additional areas of inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Reflections were collected monthly using an electronic platform called Flipgrid. Flipgrid is a virtual, asynchronous discussion tool that records short video responses to prompts and allows participants to upload artifacts to support discussion (Edwards, 2020). Artifacts of interviews, observations, and reflections were added to the body of research for analysis (see Table 2).
I maintained reflective memos based on my interactions with participants throughout the course of the study. These memos were collected after every meeting I observed and after every interview. I documented organization wide meetings, departmental meetings, team meetings and

Table 2

Research Methodology and Participant Activities

Activity	Activity Title	Collection Period	Evidence Collected
Interviews	Initial Meeting Self-portrait/Portraitist Work Caption Organizational Chart Mandala and Closure	February - September	Transcripts Artifacts Reflective Memos
Observations	Equity Work Observations (3) Debriefs (3)	January - May	Observation Notes Agendas Reflective Memos
Reflections	Monthly Flipgrids	January - September	Flipgrid Transcripts

Note. Data collection abbreviations listed next to activity title.

collection process were based on interactions with my participants through the data collection informal conversations with colleagues in weekly memos. My reflective memos about the data period. Reflective memo collection is documented in Table 3.

Scheduling time for observations and interviews proved to be the most difficult aspect of the data collection process. Each participant had varying schedules with different workloads which initially affected our ability to find time to meet. In March 2020, a worldwide pandemic caused state-wide COE building closures because of a shelter-in-place order. All COE staff were mandated to work from home, shifting how each participant did their equity work. During one equity work observation, the session stopped 15 minutes into the observation and required rescheduling because staff were called into an emergency district meeting that resulted in school closures. Fortunately, the shift to virtual meetings and equity work happened almost seamlessly and did not affect the data collected for the purpose of the study.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data happened almost simultaneously or in tandem with the process of data collection itself. During the interview and observation process, there was a concurrent analysis of participant responses to determine the areas that needed further exploration and probing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Personal reflective memos were part of the personal, iterative, reflective process that informed the deliberate actions taken during the research study and were analyzed alongside participant data (Hunter et al., 2013). Analytic memos documented the coding process. The data collected was analyzed using first and second level coding (Saldaña, 2016). First level coding was used to understand initial patterns of data collected from participants. The data was organized into initial, or open codes. Open codes were organized into

Table 3

Reflective Memo Collection

Reflective Memos	Activity Title	Collection Period
COE A Meetings	Organizational Meetings Departmental Meetings Team Meetings Informal Conversations	Weekly from November 2019 - January 2021
Participant Meetings Memos	Initial Meeting	February 3, 2020 February 12, 2020 May 15, 2020
	Self-Portrait/Portraitist Meeting	February 19, 2020 March 23, 2020 May 15, 2020
	Work Caption	March 4, 2020 April 6, 2020 May 26, 2020
	Equity Work	January 8, 2020 January 31, 2020 February 28, 2020 March 5, 2020 March 13, 2020 March 20, 2020 March 24, 2020 March 26, 2020 April 10, 2020
	Organizational Chart Representation Meeting	September 14, 2020 September 15, 2020 September 29, 2020
	Mandala and Closure	September 18, 2020 September 29, 2020

categories and themes. The second cycle of coding included a reconfiguration of the codes, using axial coding to develop categories (Saldaña, 2016). Some of the codes, categories, and their definitions were developed based on the conceptual ideas derived from research. These codes, categories, and themes were recorded in a codebook with the source column listing the type of coding used (see Appendix B). Data was coded and tallied on a separate sheet for each participant. The research questions determined how the categories were organized into themes. Data was analyzed in relationship to the research questions. High frequency of tallies for codes and categories that answered research questions were grouped into categories and themes for each participant. Codes and categories analyzed across participant data led to the findings for the study and are further discussed in Chapter 5. Table 4 shows the research questions and how the data collected informed the answers to the questions.

Additionally, member checks were conducted throughout the study. Participants were provided sections of the dissertation that contained the data analysis to limit researcher bias. Participants were contacted through emails to clarify questions that arose from data collected. These communications provided written feedback for triangulation of data analysis.

Data collection and analysis in portraiture occurs almost simultaneously as described in this section. I discussed the data collection methods and initial process of data analysis, including coding methods. In the next section, I consider confidentiality of participation, ethics of the study, and my own positionality as a researcher in portraiture.

Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

Portraiture by nature is a personal, dynamic, qualitative research methodology. In this section, I review confidentiality considerations, security for data collection and analysis, researcher bias safeguards, and limitations of the study.

Table 4

Data Collected for Research Questions

Research Question	Data Collected
Question 1: Organizational Impact	- Initial Meeting - Organizational Chart Representation - Work Caption - Equity Work Observations - Reflective Memos
Question 2: Reflection	- Flipgrids - Work Caption - Equity Work Debrief - Reflective Memos
Question 3: Equity Advocacy	- Flipgrids - Self-Portrait Interview - Equity Work Observations - Mandala - Reflective Memos
Question 4: Leadership Development	- Self-Portrait/Journey Line - Organizational Chart Representation - Mandala - Reflective Memos

My role as the primary researcher in this study has been considered, as well as my role within my own COE. Permission was requested and granted from each participant prior to the inception of the study using a signed consent form for approval to conduct research. Institutional Review Board Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (IRB CITI) certification was completed in January 2019 to comply with Human Research ethics and compliance. In addition to accepting these safeguards, participants were further informed that they could stop at any point during the course of the study. None of the participants did so. One of the participants changed positions from the COE to a district level position, but completed the study based on her experience with COEs. Each group member was considered an administrator within their respective COEs. Study questions and processes were shared with administrators at each step of the research process to provide transparency while protecting participants' privacy and reflection. No information was shared without participants' permission.

Researcher Bias Safeguards

This research study and the data collected was reviewed with each participant over the course of the study and during data analysis to triangulate the results. Reflective and analytic memos were written throughout the course of the study, which counteracted possible researcher bias that might have occurred (Saldaña, 2016). While the study could not be completely objective, these controls allowed me to guard against bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Portraiture's generalizability is different from other forms of social science research. By documenting and illustrating the study participants, portraiture attempts to reflect the audience's own experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). The participants' stories were their truths and lent to the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The depth of portraiture as a qualitative study method documented the complexity and

detail of working in educational organizations such as California's COE organizations in order that those who work in these places would see themselves reflected in it. The researcher's own perspective adds depth to portraiture because it admits the role of the portraitist in telling the stories of the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997).

Limitations

This study was established within the scope of the work of four individuals who work in administrator positions in the organizational structure of COEs. This study was purposefully specific to the scope of work within COEs, and caution should be taken when applying these study results to schools, districts, and other state level educational organizations. Additionally, COEs are uniquely a part of California's state-wide educational organization system. The participants studied were part of large, urban educational organizations which also may be different from rural COEs found within the state.

The section above considered confidentiality considerations, security for data collection and analysis, researcher bias safeguards, and limitations of the study. The next section provides a summary of the chapter.

Summary

Portraiture was the qualitative research approach used to answer the overarching question: *How do administrators in complex educational organizations support equity work*? Deep understanding of the participants in the study was developed by answering the following sub-questions:

1. What organizational factors foster or inhibit the equity work of administrators in a county office of education?

2. How do administrators in a county office continue to develop as reflective practitioners?
3. How do administrators maintain themselves as equity advocates?

I discussed selection of study participants, data collection, and initial analysis methodology. Confidentiality and ethical considerations were reviewed. The next chapter provides the context of the study by explaining the COE system in California and providing a portrait of each of the study participants.

CHAPTER 4: CONTEXT AND PORTRAITS OF EQUITY

If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.
~ Sir Isaac Newton

Educational organizations are complex reflections of society, often seen as the remedy to social ills. Evans (2013) offers the idea that educational equity could provide the opportunity for all to benefit from a democratic society. However, education only provides advantage to the individuals who succeed in the education system—it sustains the inequities of society by replicating the social problems of class, race, culture, and gender (Labaree, 2008). Many educational leaders work tirelessly to ensure educational equity in order that all students have the opportunity to benefit from their education. These "equity warriors… passionately lead and embrace the mission of high levels of achievement for all students regardless of race, social class, ethnicity, culture, disability, or language proficiency" (Leverett, 2002).

I begin this journey of understanding equity leadership in County Offices of Education (COEs) by first developing an understanding about how TK – 12 education systems in California are organized. The sheer size of the state of California, the third largest in the United States, requires structures to manage alignment. Additionally, the state serves a variety of local school structures, from the rural one room schoolhouse with a superintendent acting as school principal, to large groups of schools serving thousands of students. The COE vantage point provides the philosophy and objectives of COEs as educational agencies who are situated to understand the local context and the larger state and federal landscape. Almost like a brokerage, COEs act as liaisons between local schools and districts and the state bureaucracy. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the functionality of COEs, I interview individuals working within this complex system, housed within two county offices. These individuals are self-proclaimed equity leaders. They focus on equity work at their respective COEs, determining different ways of doing so

based on their own definitions of equity. My study of these individuals provides an understanding of equity leadership as COE employees. Listening to each of my participants' stories reminded me of what Sir Isaac Newton meant when he wrote in a 1675 letter to Robert Hooke, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." Each of the individuals whose portraits I will share in this chapter is a "giant" in the world of education. Our paths cross, we learn from each other, and we lift each other up in order that we might more effectively do the important work of changing our education system to eradicate its inherent inequities.

This chapter introduces the participants selected for the current study. First, I describe the context of two COEs and their organization to highlight the complexity of California's vast public education system. Next, I discuss the data collection I used to learn about my participants. Then, I provide a portrait of each participant and their journeys to equity leadership. Finally, I conduct a cross-analysis of these portraits to arrive at an initial understanding of common motivations and practice.

Overview of Context

Public educational organizations in the United States had the historical goal of educating students in American values and morality (Goldstein, 2014). As the field grew, the expectation was that society's ills could be fixed within the public education system, leading to accountability that illuminated how the education system was serving certain students over the needs of others (Kantor & Lowe, 2016). The need for accountability and reform led to the development of bureaucratic organizations that determined funding, laws, and guidance for the instruction of all students. California realized this task by developing layers of structure to handle the demands of the federal government and local school demands. The following section

will provide an overview of the COEs and the persons from their organizations who have made it their life's work to ensure equity in the system.

California has the largest public school system in the country. The state department of education, the California Department of Education (CDE), reports to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and attempts to organize the public school system within the state by splitting up into multiple departments. For example, the Instruction and Measurement Branch provides guidance for content delivered in schools, while the Opportunities for All branch has divisions that address the needs of English Learners, Special Education, and Child Development. Additionally, the CDE uses ancillary organizations such as COEs to support local education efforts and connect the state and the Local Education Agencies (LEAs)—school districts and public charter schools (see Figure 11).

California organizes the public education system to provide local autonomy. The state department of education, CDE, provides oversight and guidance for the state's education system by utilizing County Offices of Education (COEs). There are 58 COEs in California's education system, divided into 11 service regions. Each COE provides oversight and guidance to the Local Education Agencies (LEAs) within their geographic area. Each COE is responsible for the financial solvency of the LEAs in their county, calling local elections, and providing instruction for students living in juvenile detention facilities. They may offer additional services for school districts that may be done more efficiently at the county level, provide technical assistance or resources, and disseminate state guidance and information locally. Additionally, with the advent of California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the need for LEAs to develop their own Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), COEs are responsible for the preliminary approval of the LCAP. Each COE defines their own vision and work determined by the needs in

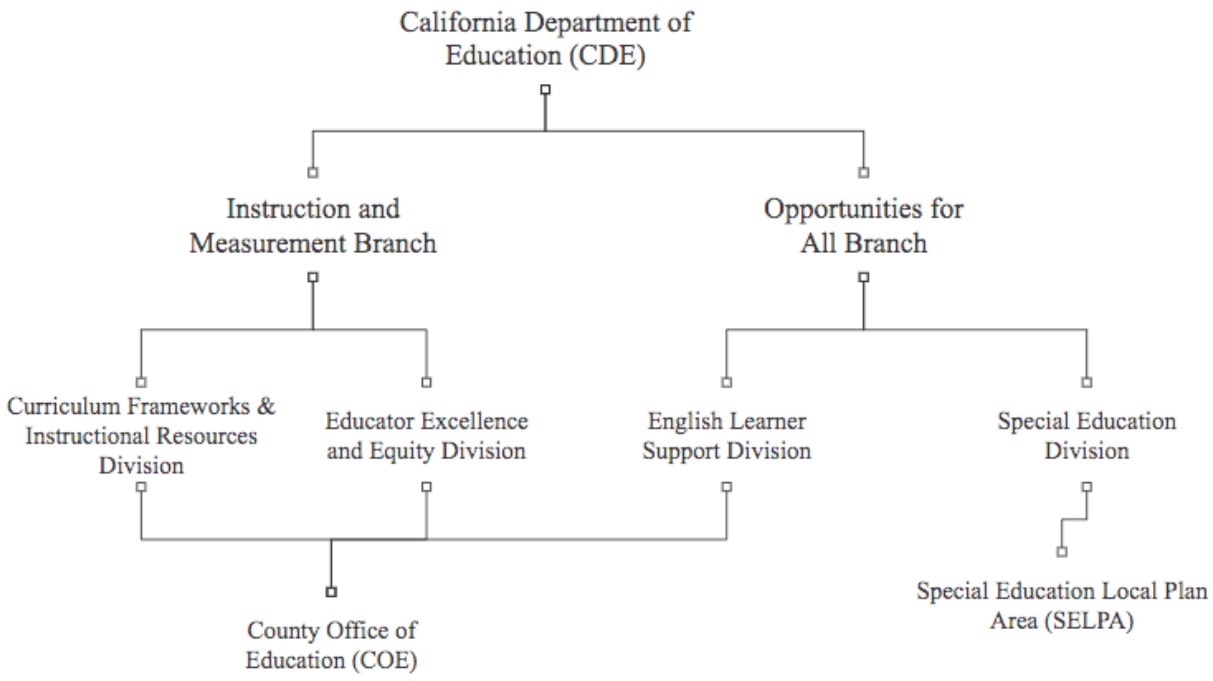


Figure 11. Selected branches and divisions of the California Department of Education (CDE), the relationship of County Offices of Education (COEs), and Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs).

their counties. Each COE may organize their work according to the needs of the local context. Funding is apportioned to each COE annually on a per pupil allocation in their county. Increases to the COE budget are dependent on the successful award of grants for funding specialized projects. Grants may be provided by private or non-profit organizations, or competitively distributed by CDE directly, affecting the operations and organization of a COE. Funding supports the positions and programs that a COE is able to offer to the LEAs in their local jurisdiction, their region, or even statewide. Therefore, the organizational structure of the COE is dependent on the amount of funding it is able to acquire. More funding allows for more programs and support to LEAs, and the positions to support these programs.

The organization of a COE in California is generally defined by a hierarchical structure. Each COE's highest ranking member is the Superintendent of Schools who may be locally appointed by a County Board of Education that oversees the COE, or elected by the general public. Depending on the size of the COE, there may be any number of associate superintendents in charge of the different divisions or departments within the organization. Many superintendents of COEs appoint these administrators to the superintendent's cabinet, or the decision-making body of the organization. Below these leaders are additional levels of managers, or "administrators" whose roles may be defined by the work they do or the funding source that pays their salaries. These administrators have direct contact with teachers and administrators of LEAs and are the focus of the current study (see Figure 12).

California also has separate consortiums for Special Education called Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs) that are responsible for supporting state and federal mandates to address the educational needs of all children with disabilities for LEAs as shown in figure 10. SELPAs were created to implement the provisions of PL 94-142, the Education of Handicapped

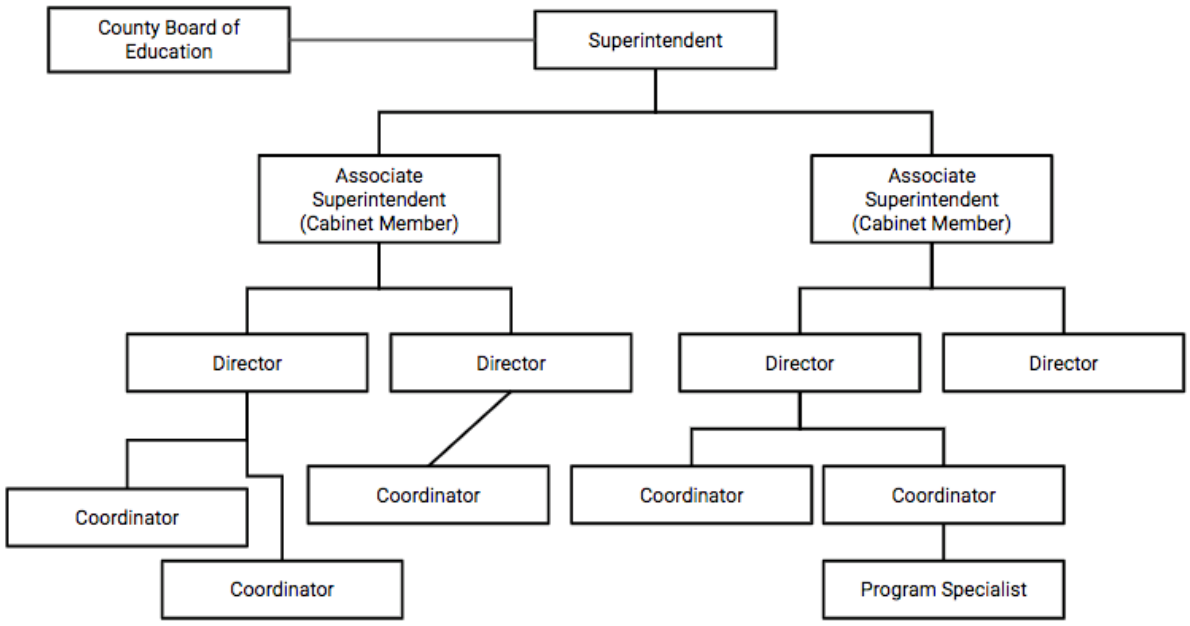


Figure 12. Sample organization of a County Office of Education (COE) in California.

Act of 1974, renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 through California's Master Plan for Special Education. SELPAs are formed within geographical areas with agreements between COEs and LEAs in order to ensure the adequate provision of educational access for their students with disabilities. Currently, there are about 153 SELPAs in California that operate with a separate governing board and staff from COEs and LEAs. Larger COEs might have multiple SELPAs while smaller COEs might have a single SELPA serving the geographic area. Though SELPAs and COEs operate separately, they sometimes share the same buildings, and some are attempting to work collaboratively.

There are many nuances to the organization of COEs in California. The size of the county, as well as the number of grants awarded, affects the number of people and positions in the COE. These factors affect the overall organization of any COE in California. The focus of this particular study is how COE administrators carry out equity work. The questions the current study seeks to answer are:

1. What organizational factors foster or inhibit the work of administrators in a county office?
2. How do administrators in a county office develop as reflective practitioners?
3. How do administrators maintain themselves as equity advocates?
4. How does this study inform my own leadership as a county office administrator for equity?

This study is focused on three administrators and me, who work in two county offices in an urban location of California. Both COEs have vision statements that include the word equity. The question is: *How do administrators in complex educational organizations support equity work?*

COE-A

COE-A is located in an urban area and is smaller than surrounding COEs. Like most of the other COEs around the state, COE-A houses its own schools serving students in alternative education programs, special education, and the juvenile court system. There are four major divisions that serve local school districts within COE-A, and a SELPA that coordinates local school districts and charter schools within the county boundaries. The COE divisions include the Superintendent's office, Teacher and Administrative Development, Student Services, Instructional Services, and Business Services. The Student Services arm of COE-A provides direct services to students in the juvenile court system, alternative education, and county special education services. Recently, additional areas of technical support for LEAs have been added to this division to address the social and emotional needs of students, focusing on the culture and climate of schools. The Instructional Services arm provides direct professional development, training, technical assistance, and coaching support for curriculum and content development. The Business Services arm provides fiscal oversight for LEA budgets, and the Superintendent's office houses the Teacher and Administrative Development division which provides LEAs with credentialing and administrative services. Midway through the course of the study, the organization of the divisions within COE-A changed. The Instructional Services and Student Services divisions merged to form a single division with a new name: Educational Services Division. Roles were merged or not replaced as individuals left due to natural attrition. COE-A also has a SELPA housed within the same building, but outside of its organizational structure (see Figure 13).

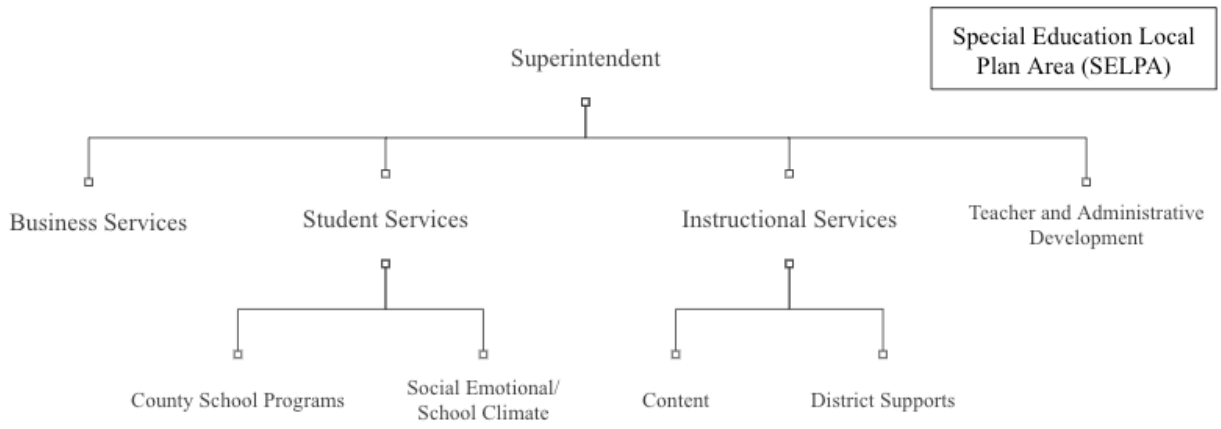


Figure 13. COE-A organization.

This year, I am part of the SELPA team, and am part of its organizational structure. My position was created to address the issue that half of the school districts in our county were identified by the CDE as significantly disproportionately identifying Black and Latinx students for Special Education. The school districts and the SELPA director identified a need for someone to help school districts identify the root causes of this significant disproportionality and develop plans to address the issue. The move to this position became the fourth time I changed positions within COE-A within five years of working there. I began my work at COE-A as part of the Instructional Services Division. After my first year at COE-A, my division split and my position became part of the newly formed Teacher and Administrative Development division. After two years on the same team, I moved back into the Instructional Services division in order to support LEAs with Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs), Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). The following year, the PBIS portion of my position was moved to the Student Services Division and I joined that team. The dynamics of a changing organization and how that has impacted my ability to do equity leadership has been both rewarding and frustrating over the last five years. At the core of the work is the desire to meet the needs of all students. However, while most agree with this ideal, the work of individuals within the COE does not always reflect this attitude.

COE-B

COE-B is located in the southern part of a large urban area. The larger of the two county offices in this study, COE-B is known across the state for its work to create collaborative resources for inclusion. It has received numerous grants, including a broad equity grant intended to create support for equitable practices statewide. COE-B has seven divisions, including the

"Equity and Educational Progress Division." It also has seven SELPAs within its geographical area and two SELPA directors serving the north and south counties.

California's COE system is in a prime position to affect the work of schools and their LEAs. It is one of the few states that has a COE system to support the educational structure. COEs have access to teachers, administrators, and classrooms through the myriad of services they offer to LEAs. Individuals are often invited to participate in statewide workgroups to provide input on statewide issues in education, and can significantly impact what happens at the LEA and the state level.

The deep study of equity leadership in this study could inform the organizational structure of the COE and lead to more effective support for equity leadership. There is an urgency to ensure that educational leaders understand the complexity of equity leadership and recognize the limitations that they place on themselves that affect outcomes for students, "especially poor students, or students of color" (Evans, 2013, p. 463). The two participants in the current study from COE-B have significant professional experiences that they use to develop supports for specific student groups. They have worked as educators, coaches, and LEA administrators prior to working in the COE system. Their work is somewhat prompted by the accountability measures put in place by California's Department of Education (CDE).

Equitable practices, leadership in schools, and the actions that affect practice through the study of county office administrators are the focus of the study. While most research on equity and leadership provides information about school or district administrative leadership, there is a significant lack of research for COE effectiveness in supporting equity leadership. The aim of the current study is to closely examine equity leadership at the COE level and provide insight about how these complex educational organizations could more effectively support the equity

leadership of those who have direct contact with schools and districts. The following section provides three portraits of administrators at COE-A and COE-B who are engaged in equity leadership through their COE.

Initial Data Collection

The significance of story and developing relationships allow for the deep understanding of what motivates people to do their work. At the heart of equity work are leaders of equity, people who are motivated to do transformative work in order to benefit students. Leaders of equity, as described in Chapter 2, are educators who understand equity, engage in the process of internal reflection, and learn to incorporate the needs and contexts of the school and larger community that they serve. To fully understand leaders of equity, I used "Ecologies of Knowing" as described by Guajardo et al. (2016) to examine the relationships of the organizations and the larger community of my participants. Answering the overarching research question, "*How do administrators in complex educational organizations support equity work,"* requires developing a relationship with each participant. The data described in the following section reflects the initial data collection, in which each participant shared their story with me so that I might understand how they became a leader of equity in a COE.

Data collection began in January 2020 after I had received approval for the study and recruited participants. I spent the month of December 2019 meeting with prospective participants and obtaining informed consent to begin data collection. I already had a relationship with one of my participants, an educational leader I had known in different environments. She had worked for school districts and two different COEs in varying leadership positions, and had relationships with other educational leaders who worked for COEs across the state. After she agreed to be part of my study, I asked her for recommendations of others who might be interested in talking to me

about their equity work in COEs. I met with each of the individuals she suggested, all of whom were part of various COEs across different parts of the state. Eventually, three participants were selected because of their proximity, their roles within their respective COEs, and their self-identification as leaders of equity. I formed an initial relationship with each of them, told them about my study, and gained their permission to participate. Once the study began, I quickly learned that each of these three individuals had amazing stories that came to life as I met with them, watched them work, and listened to them reflect on their work as outlined in the methodology section of Chapter 3. The following section describes each of these participants and the journeys that led them to the equity leadership that they chose to do.

Portraits of Equity

Portraiture is a blend of art and science. A portraitist dives into understanding each of her subjects and learns about each one of them in order to portray their essence. As described in Chapter 1, portraiture is a type of thick ethnography that allows for deep penetration and analysis of the participants. The three portraits described in the following section were examined through the lens of Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms as described in Chapter 1. While all of the CLE axioms are used to frame the understanding of each participant, the three axioms that inform this initial part of data collection are: learning and leadership are a dynamic social process, conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes, and the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns (Guajardo et al., 2016). Observations and interviews included CLE activities to gather the data presented in the following portraits of equity.

Amelie

The water bottle thumps against the table as Amelie sits down and proceeds to take out note-taking materials from her bag. She pulls out a fat book strung together at the seam and filled with clippings of various magazines, pictures, mailings, and cardboard containers glued at various angles on blank paper. Next, she unties and unrolls a long piece of fabric with pockets for various markers, pens, and colored pencils. Throughout this whole process, Amelie carries on a conversation with me. She asks me how I am, shares how she's doing, and talks about whatever is going on in the office and in life. After the flurry of getting settled, we start to talk about her life, learning, and "musings."

I met Amelie two years ago, when she started at COE-A part-time as the Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Coordinator. Outspoken and exuberant, she joined our lunchtime crew that would gather as a group to eat. We were all part of the same department then; we knew each other, but our work rarely brought us together. We made an effort to sit together for a meal a couple times a week to build relationships and to take a break from the monotony of office life. A year and a half later, Amelie and I were attendees at a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Conference (MTSS) focused on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). During a networking event, Amelie found me and excitedly grabbed my hand to get my attention. She gushed about how much she was learning and loving the conference. She told me that she never knew that SEL was such an important component of MTSS. She also told me that we had a friend in common, a fellow equity warrior and, suddenly, I began to learn more about Amelie and her equity lens.

Amelie's story begins as a child of blind parents. She describes a life of poverty, lacking material possessions. "There was love, but there was not money" (Amelie, self-portrait interview, February 19, 2020). She grew up with both parents, and a younger brother who passed

away when Amelie was 20. Creatively problem solving throughout her young life, Amelie describes how she navigated the difficulties she faced. Her optimism shines through as she describes ways she makes things work out for her. This attitude has carried through her life—she chooses to make new pathways when she encounters a roadblock. She optimistically determines other ways to continue to do what she loves: "I'm just going to take a different path to get there. It doesn't mean I can't get there. I'm just not going to drive that freeway" (Amelie, self-portrait interview, February 19, 2020). Finding different avenues to "blaze her own path," Amelie says that she creates opportunities where none exist. She created "Arts Ed Matters," a non-profit organization, that advocates for the integration of arts in public school curriculum. Using this platform, Amelie brings arts to the curriculum for students she feels need it most, students she has labeled the "Forgotten Populations." It is here that Amelie's social justice and equity leadership lies.

According to Amelie, the "Forgotten Populations" are those students who are typically labeled in the education system—incarcerated youth, socioeconomically disadvantaged, special needs, developmentally disabled, pregnant teens, or English learners. She first started working with these students after high school and prior to starting college through a theater company in Washington DC. Her exposure to this group of students proved pivotal, shaping her college career. Because of this work, Amelie created her own major in her freshman year of college: Total Drama and Human Development. She believed that drama could provide a platform for serving students who did not typically have access to the arts or arts education. One example of her commitment is that she learned sign language and taught drama to deaf students.

"Forgotten Populations" are also the students least likely to receive a typical education, but also are unlikely to have access to the arts. Amelie believes that these students need the arts

the most and that arts could be a transformative tool for their education. Amelie believes that low performing schools could raise test scores by incorporating arts into the core curriculum for their students. Her goal is to provide opportunities for arts education for the students who do not have access to it, thereby changing their learning trajectory and providing them an equitable education.

The most recent iteration of how Amelie advocates for equity is through her workshop called "Art of Self-Care." Amelie has brought this workshop to various departments within the COE, districts and schools within San Mateo County, and to local teacher preparation programs. This workshop starts with the idea that equity begins with self-love. Equity leadership requires individuals to know and love themselves. It results in an outpouring of their own understanding and love of self. Without this basic understanding, individuals would not be able to love others nor advocate on their behalf. Amelie's initial self-portrait of equity is an image of a spider web. In the center of the web are the words Equity = Love (see Figure 14).

The spider web is a symbol and metaphor of connectedness and relationships. A spider spins a web to trap other insects by connecting threads to the frames of the web. Amelie uses the web to illustrate her self-portrait. She traps ideas, or people to work with, because she believes that "equity is not a solo act" (Amelie, self-portrait interview, February 19, 2020). Amelie believes that equity is a collaborative effort, with collective impact. All of the words listed on the threads of her web incorporate the ingredients for equity. She purposely used a white writing tool on black paper to juxtapose the idea that equity is not black and white and that it is based on the overflow of one's self-love. This idea of equity as a collective action also exhibits itself in the choice of artist she would want to complete her portrait. Amelie chose JR, a French revolutionary artist. She chose JR because he portrays the essence of people and their

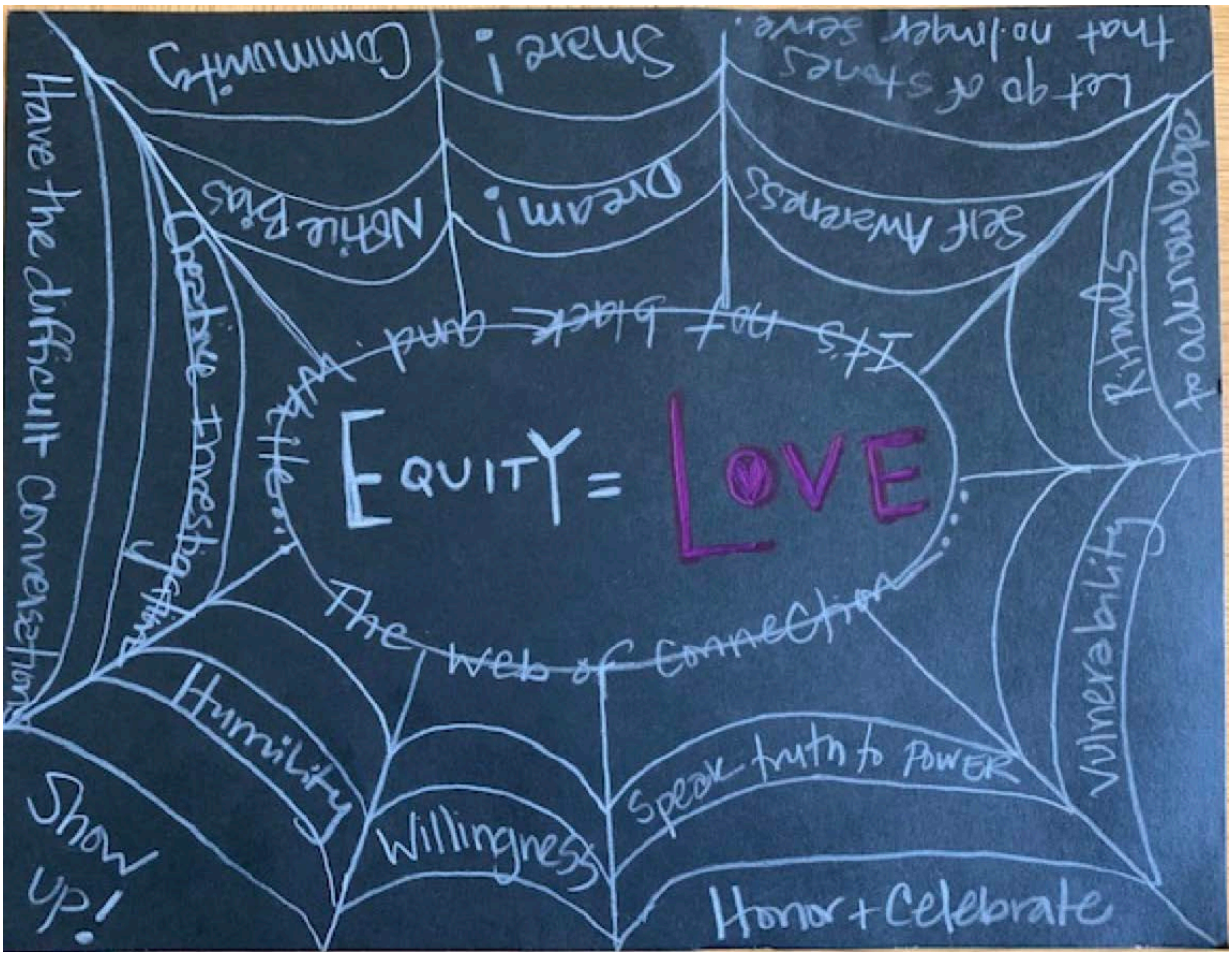


Figure 14. Amelie's initial equity self-portrait.

communities. She talked about two major pieces of art that JR completed recently: one of the U.S./Mexican border and one of San Francisco. Both portraits are collective portraits of people in community. JR's mural of San Francisco is currently displayed at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. It was based on the interviews he collected and a collage of photos he selected to reflect the essence of the communities in San Francisco.

Amelie's advocacy for equity is based on her understanding of what needs to be fixed in education and who needs to benefit from what education could offer. The lack of equity in education is highlighted by who receives arts education. Amelie believes that the education system labels students "not good enough," through biased measures and those are the students who typically do not receive arts education (Amelie, Initial Interview, February 3, 2020). Therefore, Amelie's focus is on providing equitable arts education for students of color and low socioeconomic status. Her belief is that an arts-embedded education is a transformative tool for achievement. She admits that she has not directly referred to equity in her memoir (Amelie, Initial Interview, February 3, 2020), but she does speak about it in her advocacy work and the non-profit she founded.

Over the course of the interviews and observations I completed with Amelie, I noticed that her language began to shift. She began to identify specific actions that she took to advocate for equity. She noticed the need to call out equity actions with colleagues when they discussed ways to address student needs. During professional development opportunities that she provided, she directly referred to self-awareness, self-love, and how the extension of these competencies allows us to address others' needs. As educators shifted to distance learning following the public health orders addressing the coronavirus, Amelie's turned her work around self-love into supporting wellness of all educators so they could continue to support the needs of their students

(Amelie, Equity Work Observation, March 26, 2020). Whereas Amelie's educational equity work is in the beginning stages, Sofia has actively sought equity throughout her career.

Sofia

Many educators speak of teachers who influenced their desire to become teachers themselves, but Sofia had no desire to be a teacher as a young girl. Yet, when she finally entered the field, she found that she loved teaching, and thus began a career of over thirty years. Sofia's experience as a bilingual teacher, a principal, an assistant superintendent, an English Language coordinator, the Director of Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment, and the Director of District Supports are only a few of the roles that she has held. At the heart of her work is the desire to serve students who are English learners, students living in poverty, and students' families. This desire to serve started as a young child—with a pivotal experience in San Jose, Costa Rica.

Sofia grew up in what she called a very white, suburban neighborhood of Sacramento, California, in the early 1960s. She describes a community of people who were very similar to each other, sharing a similar culture and religion, Catholicism. In 1966, a volcano erupted in Costa Rica that prompted their government to ask the US for aid. Sofia's father responded to the call for help and was sent to support rebuilding efforts in Costa Rica (see Figure 15). With her father expected to be gone for several months, the entire family moved to San Jose, Costa Rica, when Sofia was in 7th grade. "For the first time in my whole life, people didn't look like me, and didn't speak English, and it was my first encounter with poverty" (Sofia, self-portrait interview, March 23, 2020). This experience prompted Sofia to learn Spanish and begin to think about joining the Peace Corps so that she could go back to Costa Rica to end their poverty. Her entire goal throughout high school and college was to master Spanish so that she could return to the

Figure 15. Sofia and her family in Costa Rica.

place that changed her perspective of life. However, when she was ready to join the Peace Corps, she found that they were looking for people trained in medicine and agricultural skills. Liz was offered a position teaching English in Uganda because she had taken classes in Teaching English as a Second Language.

Instead of accepting that position, Sofia found a different opportunity to use the Spanish she had learned to help the people that touched her heart. After graduating from college, she traveled to Tijuana to help at a local orphanage (see Figure 16). She stayed at a local resource organization, Casa De Los Pobres, run by nuns. With this as her home base, Liz took trips to the garbage dump where she helped build a school. She also visited a jail where she went to talk to prisoners and helped connect them with their families who often did not know where they were. She realized that she wanted to do more "to support Spanish-speaking children to have more opportunities in their lives through education" (Sofia, self-portrait interview, March 23, 2020). This opportunity had an even greater impact than Costa Rica, and Sofia would spend the next few years volunteering here while working for an airline.

Sofia soon found herself looking for a career that would give her more meaning and provide an opportunity to work with the people who had touched her. That aspiration led her to earn her teaching credential. She taught for a year in the South San Francisco Unified School District before moving on to a position in Redwood City teaching a Kindergarten/First grade bilingual classroom. Sofia maintained her volunteer work in Tijuana periodically. She also found that she loved to teach: she was good at it, and she learned about the community she served, a mostly poor community with many undocumented families, and many who could not speak English. She reached out to families through home visits to get to know them and understand

Figure 16. Sofia at Tijuana Orphanage.

their situation (Sofia, self-portrait interview, March 23, 2020). Sofia eventually became a principal of a bilingual school in Redwood City where she would have the opportunity to bring families of different communities within Redwood City together.

As a school site leader, Sofia found herself less able to connect with families with the familiarity she had as a teacher. She had to think about the school as a whole, or people might think that she practiced favoritism. An opportunity arose for Sofia to join the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program through a family member of one of the students at her school. In addition, because of her fluent Spanish, she was given three children with significant needs in the same family to support on a weekly basis instead of the usual assignment of one student who she still supports today. This family reinforced her understanding that children with significant needs were not being served by the school system and social services. The children had been abused by their father and were highly traumatized. Through her support of this family, Sofia learned about the court system, and that "the cycle of poverty was not going to end with these children" (Sofia, self-portrait interview, March 23, 2020).

Through her different roles in the education system, Sofia sought to advocate to end the cycle of poverty, providing support and love to the communities she served. During her tenure as a principal, she sought to bring communities together by teaching children to value bilingualism and biculturalism, and to share their assets with each other. She found that children would help each other with languages and would become friends. Reflecting on all the roles she had, Sofia felt that being a principal was the most meaningful. She was able to interact with families and work with their children, and she still carries those relationships with her long after she has left the school community. Sofia continues to practice her advocacy for students not fully served by the education system inequity leadership roles she has had as a district and county administrator,

particularly with "Unduplicated Pupils," student groups that California has identified for additional funding.

Over the years, Sofia has focused on how to support the students who need the most help in her school, in her district, and in the county. She leads people who want to make a difference, adapting mandates in a way that makes sense to get the job done. At her school, she worked to ensure high-quality instruction and access to materials. It was evident that the parents of the white children felt comfortable with their privilege to advocate for their white child in all aspects of the school (Sofia, self-portrait interview, March 23, 2020). Sofia worked to ensure that the Spanish-speaking families would also have their voice and place at the table even if the White parents were more vocal. She made sure that her teachers worked together collaboratively so that rigor was programmed into the day and instruction would not happen by chance. As a district administrator, she supported this same type of programming at all of her schools, to ensure that these same opportunities were available throughout the district. Through her work as an administrator in the COE system, Sofia continues to support school districts working to serve the students who need it most. She shows district administrators that she and her team care about them. For example, they take the time to celebrate successes when districts "graduate" from Differentiated Assistance because they worked hard to change outcomes for students. Sofia said, "We really make a personal connection with them" (Sofia, self-portrait interview, March 23, 2020). She expanded on how her department wanted to make a difference when she said, "We want to help them do what's right for the kids who need more help. And *they* want to do what's right for the kids who need more" (Sofia, self-portrait interview, March 23, 2020). This is the crux of her equity leadership—always making sure that she is doing what she can for the

students who need more. Beyoncé goes a step further, and actively calls out race and ethnicity as part of her equity leadership.

Beyoncé

Beyoncé grew up in the country of Trinidad and immigrated to the US when she was 14 years old. She grew up with cousins who were like brothers and sisters to her, and aunts and uncles who were her second parents. Beyoncé describes Trinidad as sort of a utopia where everyone was taught to love their country and all their people. There was an assumption that people would just fit in: everyone came from different cultures that made up Trinidad's own unique culture: you helped people who needed help, and families were very close-knit. Beyoncé describes her own family as representing "every single shade of the rainbow" (see Figure 17) (Beyoncé, self-portrait interview, May 15, 2020). Children were told that they were the best of everything and they believed that they could do anything. Trinidad's leaders represented these ideals because they were also people of color, so Beyoncé never felt limited by the color of her skin. To her understanding at the time, there was no racial inequity; any inequity might have been due to classism. She described the Trinidadian culture as accepting and communal. As Beyoncé prepared to move to California at 14, her grandfather sat her down for a conversation about the changes she was about to experience.

Beyoncé describes this conversation with her grandfather as a pivotal moment in her life. He told her that she would encounter racism for the first time in the United States from Americans and Black Americans, distinguishing themselves from Black immigrants. She did not understand exactly what he meant and was therefore surprised when she encountered the separatist culture created by inherent racism, even though California was purported to be more accepting than other states. Beyoncé noticed that while there was acceptance, it was not very

Figure 17. Beyoncé's family representing "every single shade of the rainbow."

deep, and there was still a very racist culture prevalent in her new community. This was very different than the country she had come from, where that the fact that all her leaders were people of color meant that she "didn't see them as people of color, because [she] wasn't taught to see that" (Beyoncé, self-portrait interview, March 15, 2020). There was no need to recognize this difference in a place that appreciated these differences and where the color of her skin was represented by her country's leaders. The realization of these racial differences and the recognition that she needed to advocate for Black students led her to create the Black Student Union (BSU) at her high school. After the first few years of college, Beyoncé felt compelled to become an activist for her people. She created Ujima, a Pan-African Students' Union, to advocate for the Black voice at a college in an elite, White-dominant community. She also realized that she had to collectively advocate for other students of color, so she led Ujima to partner with the Latinx and Asian student unions to advocate for their student needs. Beyoncé realized that she needed to become an advocate working collectively with others to create access and opportunity in the absence of the equal rights she knew growing up.

After graduating college, Beyoncé took a short detour, but soon went back to her dream of being a teacher. When she started teaching, she taught in an area where families were of very low socioeconomic status and students were mostly English learners. Beyoncé empathized with many of the stories of the families she served because she "understood their journey as immigrants because [she] had immigrated myself, and [she] understood the difference of involvement in schools because in Trinidad parents wouldn't have to be involved in schools. [They] fully trusted teachers to make the best decisions for kids, and whatever the teacher said went" (Beyoncé, self-portrait interview, May 15, 2020). Beyoncé's goal was to ensure that her students had equal access and that they would have the same utopian experience that she had

growing up. She wanted to create partnerships with parents to provide the best education for her students, and invited herself into their homes. These invitations to her students' homes taught Beyoncé humility—the families she visited "laid out their best for [her]... they want the best for their kids" and strengthened her commitment to provide her students the best education she could give them (Beyoncé, self-portrait interview, May 15, 2020). To do so, Beyoncé pored over her curriculum, as she planned for the learning of every single student in her classroom. She would name children as she planned, thinking about what supports they would need to access the curriculum, or about what extensions she could provide for those who were able to exceed the expectations of the curriculum. Ensuring that she met the needs of all of her students was Beyoncé's primary goal as a teacher, the center of her equity leadership, and her passion.

Years later, when Beyoncé became a mother, her focus changed. She gave birth in March 2012, to her son, less than a month after Trayvon Martin was murdered by George Zimmerman "essentially for wearing a hoodie" (Beyoncé, self-portrait interview, May 15, 2020). Beyoncé specifically recalled watching the story unfold on the news as she sat with her mother and a woman from her church who had delivered food for their family. As the three women sat watching the news, she recalled the woman saying that she felt sorry for George Zimmerman. Beyoncé sat there angrily thinking about what to say to the guest who had cared enough to bring food for their family, when her mother responded with, "Sorry for him? What about the boy who was killed? What about his family?" (Beyoncé, self-portrait interview, May 15, 2020). Beyoncé suddenly felt the impact of all these events: she realized that "[She] had just given birth to a Black boy in America" (Beyoncé, self-portrait interview, May 15, 2020). Trayvon Martin's story was first to impact Beyoncé as a mother of her Black son. A few months later, another story had an even greater impact—the story of Jordan Davis.

Jordan Davis was murdered on November 23, 2012, at the age of 17. Seven months after the birth of her first son, Beyoncé watched the news recount the death of another Black boy, murdered this time for playing his music too loud. This death hit even harder as she watched the parents of Jordan Davis talk about everything that they had done in order to prevent their son from being killed. Beyoncé recounted listening to Davis' parents talk about how they worked hard, they moved to an upper middle class neighborhood, and they provided a "good life" for their children. She detailed how Davis' father "had the talk" with his son: telling him how to respond when he was stopped by the cops, telling him how to behave with people of authority so that his son would be safe. She remembered him saying, "I just never thought I had to prepare him for what to do when someone doesn't like your music." Watching Davis' parents, Beyoncé turned to her husband and said, "This is us; we're trying to do everything right like them… but they still lost their son" (Beyoncé, self-portrait interview, May 15, 2020). This series of events further shaped how Beyoncé perceived her equity work. She knew that she had to push people to confront their biases, to address them, to see them as just children because now "I have my own. And I want you to see him as just a kid" (see Figure 18) (Beyoncé, self-portrait interview, May 15, 2020).

Beyoncé's equity leadership changed once she began to see what she would need to do to change the education system for her sons. On the one hand, the murders of these Black boys by White men prompted her reaction as a mother—Beyoncé did not want her sons to stand out, she wanted them to blend into their environment, to be able to code switch from their identity as Black boys to boys who could interact in a White dominant society. As a parent, she struggles with the injustices that would cause her to tell her children to hide their identity, but "you have kids, you have something else that's outside of you, that's really worth more. And you start to

Figure 18. Beyoncé's two sons: The purpose for her equity leadership.

realize, I just want you to be alive. So what do I need to do, for you to just stay alive" (Beyoncé, self-portrait interview, May 15, 2020)? On the other hand, Beyoncé fights for equity for all in her work, not only for her sons. Her "drive for equity is so that those things don't happen and [she] sees that it won't happen if we address the system. It creates a better system that all kids can benefit from. And hopefully mine" (Beyoncé, self-portrait interview, May 15, 2020).

Beyoncé's drive for equity is the reason that she works at the COE, to change the education system through the work she does. She weaves in opportunities for teams to "have those conversations around race, building a system to look at data" so that African-American students might have a different experience of education (Beyoncé, self-portrait interview, May 15, 2020). A significant amount of her equity leadership now is focused on working internally with COE divisions and other community agencies to define cohesive support systems to serve youth, especially youth at risk of heading down the school-to-prison pipeline. Additionally, Beyoncé focuses on helping LEAs with understand how to better serve their vulnerable youth, such their foster youth, by working collaboratively with their COE liaisons.

Amelie, Sofia, and Beyoncé are all tenacious women whose individual journeys led them to the equity leadership they do through their COEs. Their desire to disrupt inequity is described in each of their portraits, driven by the impact of specific events in their narratives. The next section will discuss commonalities between each of their stories to determine an emerging theme that will highlight how equity leaders might come to understand the importance of their work.

Forgotten Populations, Unduplicated Students, Black Boys

Each participant's story shows how they started the journey to their equity leadership in COEs. Taking the time to stop, look, and listen to each participant's story provided the "why" to their work. While each story is different, there is a common thread woven throughout, the thread

that drives Amelie, Sofia, and Beyoncé to put their words into action. I provide a cross analysis of their stories to identify the underlying reason for equity leadership and the implications to the study.

Amelie, Sofia, and Beyoncé all have a deeply personal connection to the work they are doing that started when they were young. Amelie grew up in a family where she learned not only to survive, but to understand that love was necessary to that survival. Sofia and Beyoncé both had pivotal experiences as young teens that shifted their thinking about the cultures that they knew: they both moved to completely different countries and had entirely new cultural experiences. Whether they knew it at the time, these experiences shaped how they chose their futures.

Amelie, Sofia, and Beyoncé all talk about students who impacted their work when they were young adults. Amelie worked with students she called "Forgotten Populations" in college. Sofia's desire to work in the Peace Corps led to work with children from an orphanage and poverty stricken families in Tijuana immediately after college. Beyoncé advocated for students of color in a predominately White university. Amelie, Sofia, and Beyoncé all started their equity leadership in college, or soon after college. As they continued their work with the specific groups of children who propelled them into education, they also continued to advocate for marginalized students—The Forgotten Populations, The Unduplicated Students, and The Black Boys.

The deeply personal connection to specific groups of children, along with their experiences, honed the equity leadership that developed into the passion that Amelie, Sofia, and Beyoncé bring to their COEs. They are all extremely passionate about their work, hoping that their actions provide a positive impact for the children who have not been served within the

educational system. Each of them uses the position of the COE to extend their reach beyond what they could have done as teachers in their own individual classrooms.

The portraits of Amelie, Sofia, and Beyoncé provide the foundations and the setting for the equity leadership that each of them brought to the COE. Their passion drives their work, keeping them grounded and motivated to continue to work in the field of education regardless of the potential local, state, and federal bureaucratic barriers. One wonders how each of them sustains their work. How do they execute their equity leadership? What are the organizational impacts on their equity leadership?

Summary

The equity leaders portrayed in this chapter illustrate not only the immense burden that individuals take in order to disrupt inequities in educational systems, but they also provide a foundation for understanding how the personal passion for equity drives leadership to serve marginalized children. Each of the participants in the current study are "giants" in the field of education (as cited by Newton in 1675). The equity work they shoulder is immense and the opportunity for impact is great. The chapter opened with a description of the organization of California's education system. Then I discussed the macro level of organization, the County Offices of Education and their unique place in the state's complex educational bureaucracy. Finally, I provided a portrait of three individuals who work in two COEs while they continue their equity leadership that started at a young age. The following chapter discusses the participants' specific equity work and how they maintain that work in the midst of both supportive and impeding demands of the COE's organizational structure.

CHAPTER 5: DATA FINDINGS

I'm no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I'm changing the things I cannot accept.
~Angela Davis

The stories of the participants selected for the study provide intimate portraits of the experiences, values, and beliefs of a handful of equity leaders in the vast organization of California's County Office of Education system (COE). These individuals came to the COE with expertise in the field of education, but beyond that, each came to the work with a core value of equity and social justice. Like Angela Davis, each of them refused to accept structural inequities of education systems and continue to strive for change in order that each and every student will be served.

Data collection for the current study began in January 2020 as detailed in Chapter 3. I started scheduling observations of meetings that were flexible enough for me to observe the equity work led by my participants. I collected data through individual interviews with participants utilizing Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms as described in Chapter 1. In the midst of this process, County Offices of Education (COEs) across California dramatically changed the way they worked because of a world-wide pandemic, COVID-19, that resulted in a statewide shelter in place order that began on March 17, 2020. All COE employees across the state were ordered to work from home. Instead of meeting with each participant and attending meetings, activities, or professional learning opportunities that exhibited equity work in person, I had to complete the rest of my data collection virtually during Zoom meetings. Core data collection was completed from January through June 2020, with final pieces of data collected in August and September of the same year (see Table 5 for details).

The data collected during the course of the seven months addressed the overarching research question for this study: *How do administrators in complex educational*

Table 5

Participant Data Collection Activities and Dates

Participant/Activity	Sofia	Beyoncé	Amelie
Initial Meeting	February 12, 2020	May 15, 2020	February 3, 2020
Self-Portrait/Portraitist (interview)	March 23, 2020	May 15, 2020	February 19, 2020
Work Caption	April 6, 2020	May 26, 2020	March 4, 2020
Equity Work Observation /Debrief 1	March 5, 2020	January 8, 2020	March 20, 2020
Equity Work Observation/Debrief 2	March 13, 2020	January 31, 2020	March 24, 2020
Equity Work Observation/Debrief 3	April 10, 2020	February 28, 2020	March 26, 2020
Flipgrids (Monthly)	Ongoing January - October 2020 - January - February - March - April - May - August - September	Ongoing January - October 2020 - January - February - March - April - May - August - September	Ongoing January - October 2020 - January - February - March - April - May - August - September
Org Chart Representation	September 29, 2020	September 15, 2020	September 14, 2020
Mandala and Closure	September 29, 2020	September 18, 2020	September 18, 2020

organizations support equity work? Each of the administrators in the study abruptly changed how they worked during the months of shelter in place: all their work took place virtually, and from home. Each of the participants found themselves adapting; their work environment was different, but it did not affect the organizational structures of their work, or inhibit the type of work they could or were expected to do. Therefore, the study continued as planned and the following sub-questions were addressed:

1. What organizational factors foster or inhibit the equity work of administrators in a county office?
2. How do administrators in a county office continue to develop as reflective practitioners?
3. How do administrators maintain themselves as equity advocates?
4. How does this study inform my own leadership as a county office manager for equity?

Research was designed to collect and analyze data to better understand these questions. The purpose of this chapter is to report on the findings from this 9 month study.

Portraiture is a qualitative research methodology that encapsulates art and science, multiple stories, and a depth to the research that seeks inherent goodness. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) explained that the portraitist also holds a part of the story and determines how to interpret the story based on her own experiences. The data that were collected includes my own reflective memos throughout the study about our interactions and my own experiences as an equity leader in the COE organization. These memos, along with the data collected from participants, allowed me to select the themes that tell the story of organizational impact on equity

work and the ability of administrators to maintain themselves within this work as they continue to develop as reflective practitioners.

As described in Chapter 3, data was analyzed in tandem with data collection. The research design and methodology required constant, concurrent analysis and reflection of participant responses in order to determine areas that needed further exploration and probing. Open codes were determined based on first level coding, and then reconfigured using axial coding (Saldaña, 2016). Codes and categories were based on conceptual ideas derived from research after the second cycle of coding. This process was recorded in a codebook that lists the definitions of codes, categories, and themes (see Appendix B). The high frequency of tallies for codes and categories that answered research questions were grouped into categories and themes to determine the findings for the study. Additionally, findings were supported by categories noted across all participants.

The empirical evidence gathered from participants determined the findings of compassionate leadership and breaking down silos. Warrants for the two claims were based on codes, their organization into categories, and the determination of themes based on the sub-questions to the overarching research question. I discuss these findings in the following sections of this chapter.

Findings

The administrators in the study who do equity work are characterized by compassionate leadership. COEs are complex bureaucratic organizations with structures that may foster or inhibit the work, but administrators find ways to navigate these structures. I discuss the two findings of the study. First, I review the finding of compassionate leadership. Then I demonstrate how these equity leaders break down the silos that exist in COEs.

Compassionate Leadership

Compassionate leadership was the first finding determined through categories found across data collected from all three participants. These categories were scrutinized with the research sub-questions and the literature. High frequency of codes and relevance to the research questions established the categories that provide evidence for the finding. These categories include:

- experience with poverty
- values and beliefs
- ongoing learning
- relationships with communities
- advocacy

Code totals for each category that characterize compassionate leadership are found in Table 6 and labeled according to data culled from each participant. The inspection of the data and development of categories reflects what Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) calls the "effort to reach coherence… from the data and from the interpretive witness of the portraitist" (p. 10). The categories that formed the finding of compassionate leadership were selected because they answered the questions of how equity leaders continue to develop as reflective practitioners and how they maintain themselves as equity advocates. The categories offer the idea that equity work of administrators is developed and sustained by compassionate leadership.

Experience with Poverty

The data collected from all three participants suggest why each participant developed a passion for equity work. Each of the participants experienced poverty during different times in

Table 6

Code Totals for Each Category Leading to Compassionate Leadership

Categories	Sofia	Beyoncé	Amelie	Total
Experience with Poverty	21	23	22	66
Values and Beliefs	62	43	61	166
Relationship and Community	96	61	70	227
Advocacy	40	51	60	151
Ongoing Learning	54	79	83	216

their lives. Their data showed experiences with poverty across their childhood, throughout their formative years of college and early adulthood, and during their career. Each of the participants had experiences with students who did not have any resources, and taught in areas where people of low socio-economic status lived. All of them spoke of their experiences with poverty and how they helped children living in poverty.

Experience with poverty was derived from the codes of poor/welfare, home visits/going to the community, low socio-economic status, and lack of access to resources. Table 7 summarizes the total number of times these codes were found in the data collected from the participants and the number of times the codes were found in each participants' data. Sofia's data had 21 instances of poverty, Beyoncé's data had 23 codes for poverty, and Amelie's data had 22 codes. The total number of codes for poverty that led to the theme of experience with poverty was 66. Codes such as home visits, or going to student homes, defined what the participants did to learn about people who were living in poverty. Each participant shared about their exposure to class structures as young children and their work in the early years of their careers in education during the self-portrait interviews. The data shown here was significant because it showed the commonality of experience across all three participants. The experience with poverty was found through the interview process with each of the participants during the self-portrait interview. Each of them stated that the experiences that led to this category provided Sofia, Beyoncé, and Amelie the compassion toward their students' experiences later on in their careers.

Sofia, Beyoncé, and Amelie all had experiences with socio-economic class structures growing up. For Amelie, it was how she lived. Neither Sofia nor Beyoncé grew up with poverty but were exposed to it during their childhood. Sofia was exposed to people who were very

Table 7

Number of Instances Codes Appeared for Experience with Poverty

Codes	Sofia	Beyoncé	Amelie	Total
Poor/welfare	7	11	9	27
Home visits/Going to community	2	4	2	8
Low socio-economic status	3	6	6	15
Lack of access to resources	9	2	7	18
Total	21	23	24	68

different from the white, middle class, Catholic neighborhood she grew up in when her family moved to Costa Rica (Sofia, self-portrait, March 23, 2020). She met people who lived outside the city, or who brought wares to the marketplace. Beyoncé's family helped the poor in their community by offering rides to church every Sunday, and providing ice for those who did not have a refrigerator in their homes. Amelie grew up on welfare, and her family subsisted on the monthly government check that arrived every month. Amelie recalled that her family did not even have money for luxuries such as potato chips (Amelie, self-portrait, February 19, 2020). During the early years of their careers in education, all three participants worked with students and families that did not have many resources. Each of them worked with students and families who had limited English and did not have access to many resources. Sofia worked at a school where some of her students lived in single family homes with multiple families. Beyoncé's co-workers questioned her safety when she told them she visited her students' homes (Beyoncé, self-portrait, May 15, 2020). Amelie interviewed students at the New Mexico border who came to the United States (US) with coyotes, the name given to those who brought immigrants illegally over the border. Each participant voluntarily went to their students and their communities to get to know them and to understand their needs. These experiences of growing up poor and working with students who were very poor early on in their careers were foundational to the equity work that characterizes their careers.

Values and Beliefs

Throughout the study, each participant shared their values and beliefs. During the closing activity, Beyoncé spoke about how her beliefs were the reason behind everything she did. Sofia and Amelie also spoke about their motivation stemming from their values and beliefs. When coding for values and beliefs, each of them talked about similar values and beliefs of social

justice, love, care, and commitment. The codes of social justice, love, care, and commitment and the number of times they were in the data from each participant are shown in Table 8. Sofia's data showed these codes 62 times, Beyoncé's data showed these codes 43 times, and Amelie's data showed these codes 61 times. The total number of times all three participants spoke about values and beliefs across all data was 166 times. The beliefs of social justice and commitment were consistent across all three participants when they discussed what motivates, or *drives*, each of them to continue their equity work. The core values of love and care were also evident across all three participants, but as one can see in Figure 19, Amelie was grounded more in her value of love, while Sofia spoke more or gave more examples of care. During the coding process, the code of drive for equity work characterized the attribute of the participant, but it also was the motivation for their equity work. The nuance of these codes was separated and the motivation component of equity work was documented as the code for social justice under the category of values and beliefs. This nuance is best illustrated by Beyoncé's story.

Beyoncé's values and beliefs are grounded in her Christian upbringing. Her ideas of social justice come from the idea that every child is ensured access to education. Growing up in Trinidad gave Beyoncé the opportunity to attend a school which felt like a utopia to her. Her teachers and leaders looked like her, her aunts were like second mothers to her and her brother, and her family helped provide for the needs of the community. Beyoncé arrived in the US in her freshman year of high school and quickly noticed differences between the schooling she received in Trinidad and school in the US. She identified a need for Black representation at her school and created a Black Student Union. When she went to college, she thought she would step back from her social justice work. But she soon joined the Black Student Association and partnered with other ethnic student unions to highlight the needs of minorities. As a young teacher, Beyoncé

Table 8

Number of Instances Codes Appeared for Values and Beliefs

Codes	Sofia	Beyoncé	Amelie	Total
Social Justice	18	16	19	53
Love	6	7	15	28
Care	18	11	3	32
Commitment	20	9	24	53
Total	62	43	61	166

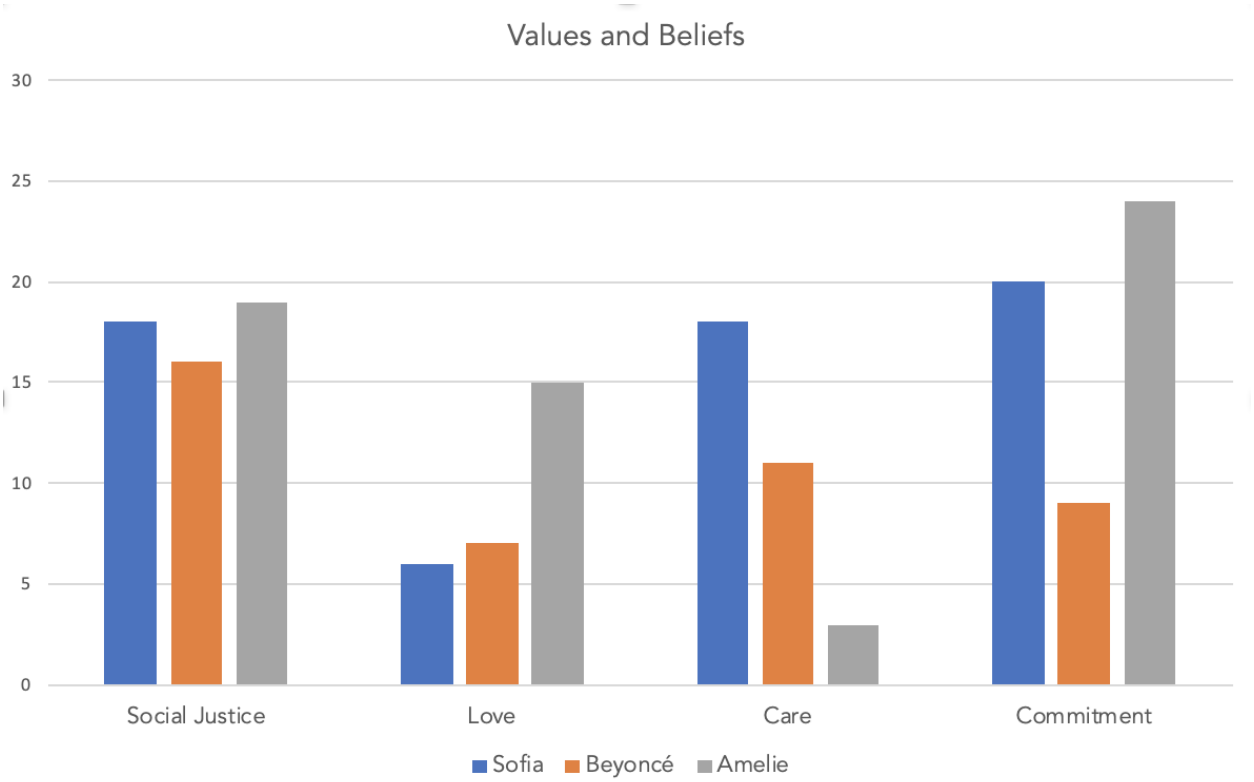


Figure 19. Values and beliefs for equity work.

partnered with her students' families in order to serve their needs. These families invited her into their homes, where she learned humility in her work. She saw parents' love for their children. They wanted the best for them, and they extended that love to her by putting out their best for her (Beyoncé, self-portrait, May 15, 2020).

Prior to being a parent, Beyoncé referenced her own experience of school to determine how to provide an equitable experience for her students. When she became a mother, she understood the parents she had served on a level that she had not experienced before. She wants her sons to succeed, but she realized that the odds were stacked against them as Black boys. This realization led her to put her sons in private school where she could keep a closer eye on the education they received even as she worked for equity for all Black boys in public schools. The love she has for her sons transfers to all children: "when I think of what I want for my kids, I then demand that for all kids" (Beyoncé, self-portrait, May 15, 2020). This lens of social justice is the motivation for her work at her COE, and drives her desire for better outcomes for every student.

Relationship and Community

Relationships and community were important aspects of how the participants maintained themselves as equity leaders. Each of the participants spent time with the communities that they worked in before coming to the COE. They developed relationships with students and their families. They maintained themselves as equity advocates through relationships with other like-minded individuals, developing a community in which they could maintain themselves in their work. Each of them talked about a *village* of people, the people in the community who took care of them and allowed them to continue with their equity work. These relationships kept them from the exhaustion of equity work. Sofia, Beyoncé, and Amelie talked about these ideas 227 times

across the data collected (see Table 9). The codes for relationship and community were learning about the community, relationships with students' families, care for community, relationships with like-minded people, and village. Each of the participants created artifacts representing the community that surrounded them with care. Beyoncé's mandala, collected during our closure interview, illustrates this idea best (see Figure 20). At the top right hand corner of her mandala, she drew a picture of her village. Beyoncé's community is made up of her biological family and her chosen family. She considers her extended family members part of her immediate family—she calls them her sisters and brothers and her children call them aunties and uncles. Her sons have two moms: Beyoncé, and her sister-in-law, their auntie (Beyoncé, Mandala, September 18, 2020). Beyoncé's village supports her with whatever she needs. If she calls them with a request there are no questions asked; they drop everything to support her. Her chosen family is made up of her closest friends that are like sisters and brothers to her. Beyoncé considers her best friend a sister as well. She considers her best friend's children her own, and her best friend considers Beyoncé's children part of their family. They build a community around shared beliefs, values, and love. Beyoncé's village is made up of people who do anything for each other. For example, she spoke of how her children are cared for by their two aunties and see them as another mother.

One of the most important concepts that emerged from the category of relationship and community was the idea that equity work could not be sustained unless there were like-minded people to work with, and a community of care around the person doing the equity work. These two ideas were coded as relationships with like-minded people and village. Across all participants, these ideas were coded 104 times, almost half of the coded instances evident in the category of relationship and community. These codes were evident in the statements made by each participant. During the closure activity, each participant spoke about doing work in

Table 9

Number of Instances Codes Appeared for Relationship and Community

Codes	Sofia	Beyoncé	Amelie	Total
Learning about the Community	17	10	10	37
Relationships with Students' Families	13	13	7	33
Care for Community	18	16	19	53
Relationships with Like-Minded People	22	10	17	49
"Village"	26	12	17	55
Total	96	61	70	227

Figure 20. Illustration of a village of care.

community with others. Sofia said, "So, I don't think you can be an equity leader all by yourself" (Sofia, Mandala, September 29, 2020). Beyoncé mentioned her family support, "I always hear, 'What do you need? I'm there no matter what'" (Beyoncé, Mandala, September 18, 2020). Amelie used a metaphor of a jazz band to describe these ideas, "they know when it's their turn to play and be the one who's sort of highlighted, like when they're improvising…. I thrive in those kinds of relationships… because there's so much trust and connection" (Amelie, Mandala, September 18, 2020).

Advocacy

Relationships and community supported each of the participants to be advocates and to advocate for students and families. Each of the participants spoke about how important advocacy was in their work. Advocacy as a category emerged from the codes of speaking for others, a fighting spirit, and love or care for other people. Each of the participants talked about equity as a fight: it required them to stand up and speak out, make demands on the behalf of those who could not, and to amplify the voices of students. These codes appeared a total of 151 times across all three participants (see Table 10). Some of these codes emerged when the participants spoke about experiences that defined how they became advocates for others. Sofia's desire and love for people came from her early experience of moving to Costa Rica when her father volunteered in an aid effort to help rebuild (Sofia, self-portrait, March 23, 2020). Beyoncé's advocacy roots were determined in her high school years when she created the Black Student Union after immigrating to the United States (Beyoncé, self-portrait, May 15, 2020). Amelie attributed her ideas of social justice to her early Quaker education (Amelie, self-portrait, February 19, 2020). These formative experiences defined later career experiences of advocating for students that Amelie labeled as *forgotten populations* during her Self-Portrait Interview (Amelie, self-portrait,

Table 10

Number of Instances Codes Appeared for Advocacy

Codes	Sofia	Beyoncé	Amelie	Total
Speaking for Others	13	17	20	50
Fighting Spirit	3	16	21	40
Love/care	24	18	19	61
Total	40	51	60	151

February 19, 2020). The category of advocacy was also evident across all participants when they spoke about the work they currently do. Each of the participants spoke about advocating for underserved student groups: Sofia advocated for those learning to speak English, Beyoncé advocated for Black and African American students, and Amelie advocated for students from low socio-economic areas who did not have access to the arts. As an equity leader, each participant had the opportunity to advocate for students. Each advocated in different ways, for students of different backgrounds. But the ability and desire to advocate was inherent in each participant and each could use their position within the COE to support the change of outcomes for students. I saw each of the participants advocate for student needs during all of their equity work observations. They created opportunities during these meetings, trainings, and professional learning events that allowed their constituents to explore equity issues. They used their positions and their relationships to advocate for marginalized students. Sofia said it best when she stated, "We are all in the position to make things different" (Sofia, Mandala, September 29, 2020). She illustrated this when she described an equity pause during a student simulation that she and her team did with a school district. The team selected a student and simulated his first weeks of school by posing questions about possible issues that he might encounter based on his race or aspects of his learning needs (see Figure 21). During the equity pause, Sofia and her team had the opportunity to ask tough questions of school and district leaders. They advocated for changes in their district systems that would typically lead to adverse experiences. In the example illustrated by the figure, the district chose a male, Filipino student, who was an English Learner. Walking in this student's shoes allowed Sofia and her team to point out and advocate for the student groups that this student represented: Asian Pacific Islanders and English Learners. The equity pauses that Sofia and her team used to help push district administrators' thinking and help

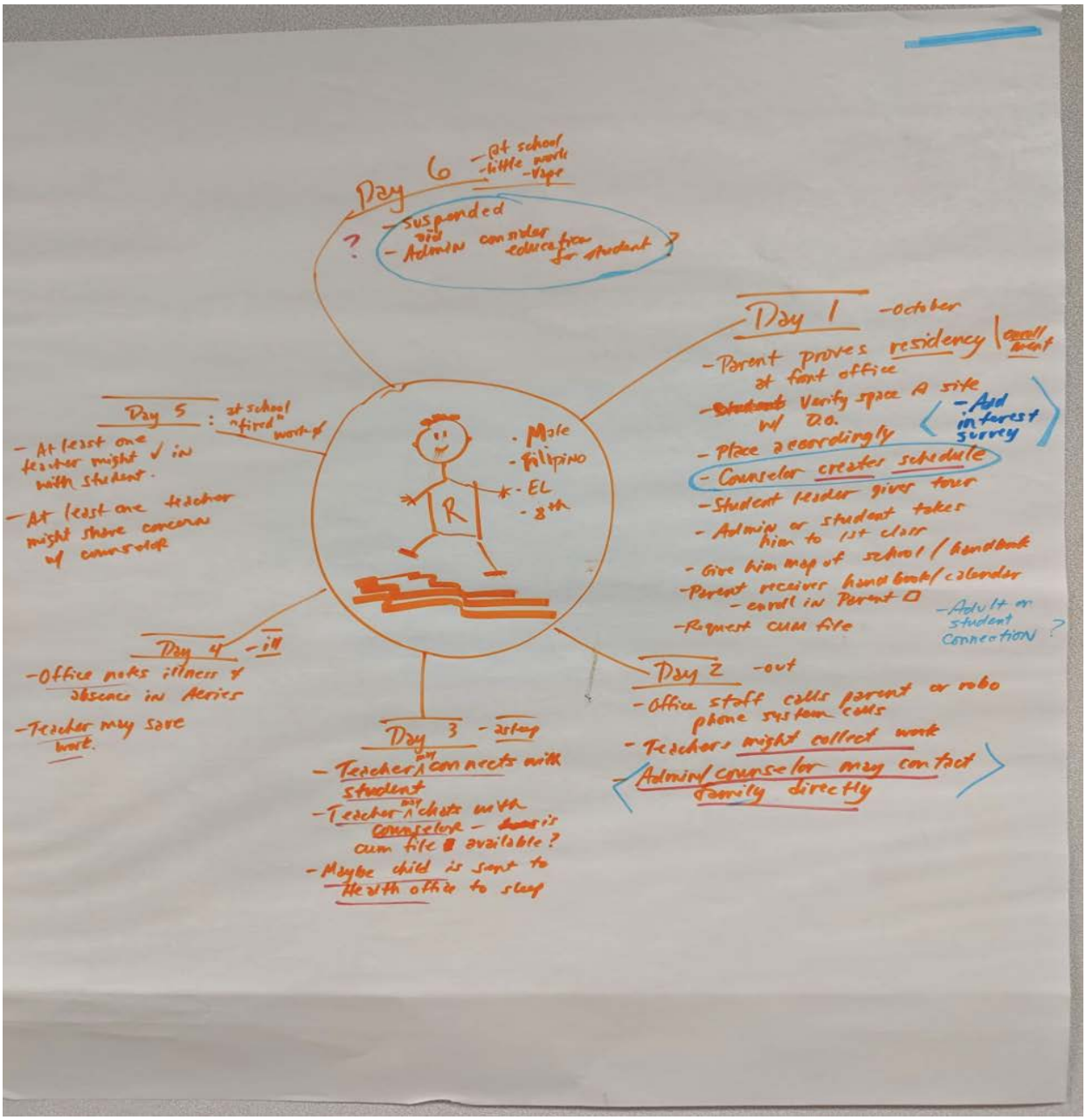


Figure 21. Equity pause during student simulation.

them advocate for students were an idea that they experienced through their own professional learning.

Ongoing Learning

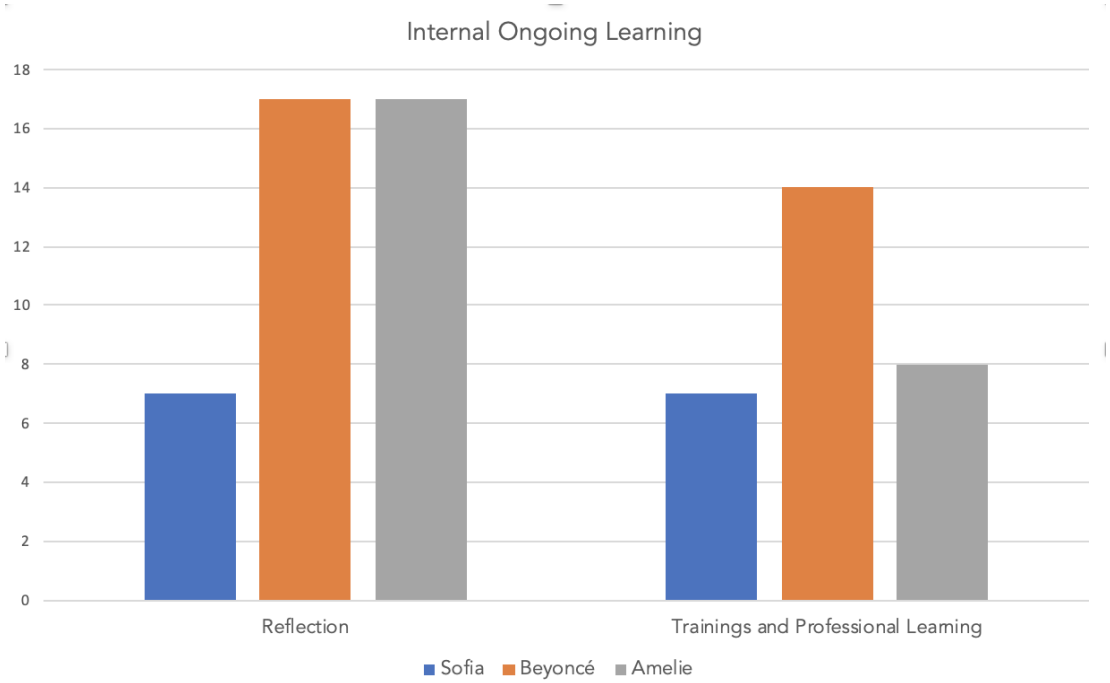
Ongoing learning was part of each participant's ability to reflect and support their equity work. They discussed ways that they maintained their own equity knowledge and journey through self-reflection, attending ongoing training and professional learning, having meetings with others, and interacting with like-minded people. Each participant also maintained interactions with like-minded people that were formal or informal. Table 11 lists the number of codes for the category of ongoing learning. The total number of codes that supported the category of ongoing learning was 216. The category could be further separated into internal learning and communal learning opportunities. Internal learning would include the codes of reflection and training, or professional learning. These codes showed how the participants sought out professional learning opportunities, and how they were able to learn new skills. Each participant also spoke about exploring research to ground their equity work. Reflection was also a significant part of their internal learning—each of them talked about the different ways that they reflected upon their understanding of equity, how they were thinking about what they were presenting while they were presenting, and thinking about their own belief systems. These codes of internal ongoing learning appeared in the data 70 times compared to the 146 times that codes referred to communal ongoing learning (see Figure 22).

Ongoing learning through reflection is concretely illustrated by Amelie. While all three participants shared how they reflect on their work in different ways during our various interactions and during their Flipgrids, Amelie makes art journals. She uses them to capture her

Table 11

Number of Instances Codes Appeared for Ongoing Learning

Codes	Sofia	Beyoncé	Amelie	Total
Reflection	7	17	17	41
Trainings and Professional Learning	7	14	8	29
Meetings	18	38	41	97
Interactions with Like-Minded people	22	10	17	49
Total	54	79	83	216



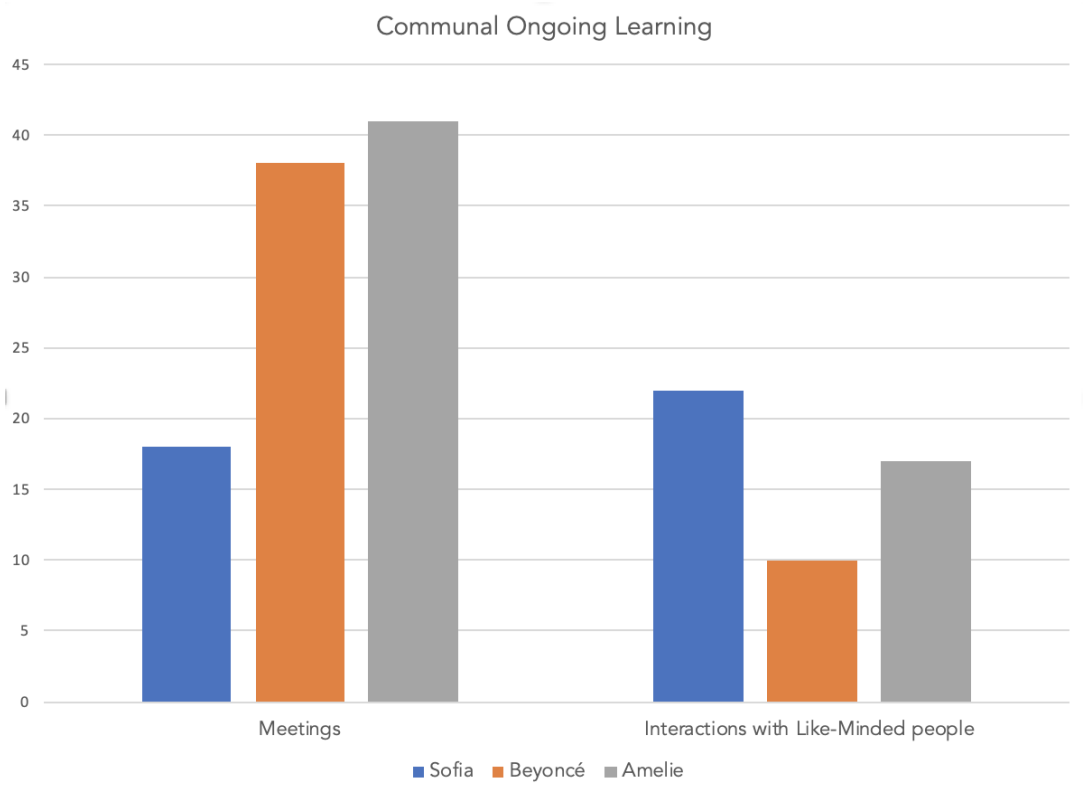


Figure 22. Internal and communal ongoing learning categories.

thoughts, to take notes, and to reflect. Figure 23 is an example of a page out of one of her journals. Amelie cuts out pictures that represent her thinking during a learning opportunity, or even a conversation with someone, and glues it into her journal. Watching her, someone might think that she is not paying attention to what the speaker is saying. For Amelie, this is the way she thinks about thinking (Amelie, PC, February 4, 2021). She calls this idea of reflecting on her thinking, *meta*. She captures information by taking notes directly onto or around the pictures she cut out. Amelie makes meaning with her hands by creating collages in an art journal, capturing her thoughts through selected words, and in her own writing (Amelie, Flipgrid, August 31, 2020).

It is important to note that equity leadership, as mentioned previously, cannot occur without ongoing learning and relationships. Each of the participants mentioned difficulty measuring their own growth through ongoing learning, but each of them talked about the fact that these components of ongoing learning were part of how they were able to continue equity work. The codes of reflection and training or professional learning were less apparent in the data than those of meetings and interactions with like-minded people. The meetings and informal interactions were documented in the observations I completed of equity work. For example, Beyoncé and Sofia were part of an inter-department meeting where a representative from each department who worked directly with school districts attended. The goal of the meeting was to determine how to better understand each other's work in order to support students' equitable outcomes by better aligning with each other to deliver a "common message" (Beyoncé, Observation 1, January 8, 2020). This result indicates that ongoing learning of equity work happens frequently through meetings and interactions with people. This result might suggest that in order to sustain equity work with individuals in an organization, the ongoing learning of

Figure 23. Sample of page from art journal for reflection.

equity work requires ongoing learning through interactions with like-minded people and meetings where equity work can be discussed and shared, and may be less impactful if it is done through only internal investigation and trainings or professional learning.

My Data Convergence

The data from the three participants intersects with the data collected from my own reflective memos and participation as an action researcher. Similar to the participants, my experiences and data collected from reflective memos reinforce the finding of compassionate leadership through the same categories of experience with poverty, values and beliefs, relationship and community, advocacy, and ongoing learning. The integral experiences of my career are shown through a journey line that aligns with the categories that support the compassionate leadership finding (see Figure 24). Each circle represents experiences of my career in education that coincide with the shared categories that emerged from our data. Like all of the participants in the study, I also sought ongoing learning throughout my career, which is illustrated by the connecting lines for the category at the bottom of the figure. The learning was continuous and allowed me to grow throughout each of the milestones of my career. I describe how those experiences relate to each of the defined categories that made up the finding of compassionate leadership.

I started as a teacher in a Head Start program on the east side of Redwood City, California. At the time, I had no idea about the economic disparities in the city or what kind of teaching position I had accepted. This teaching experience set the course of my career in education. My first day on the job at Head Start was different from anything I had known growing up in the sheltered bubble of my family. Most of the families who entered the gates protecting our school site were from Central or South America—they were immigrants

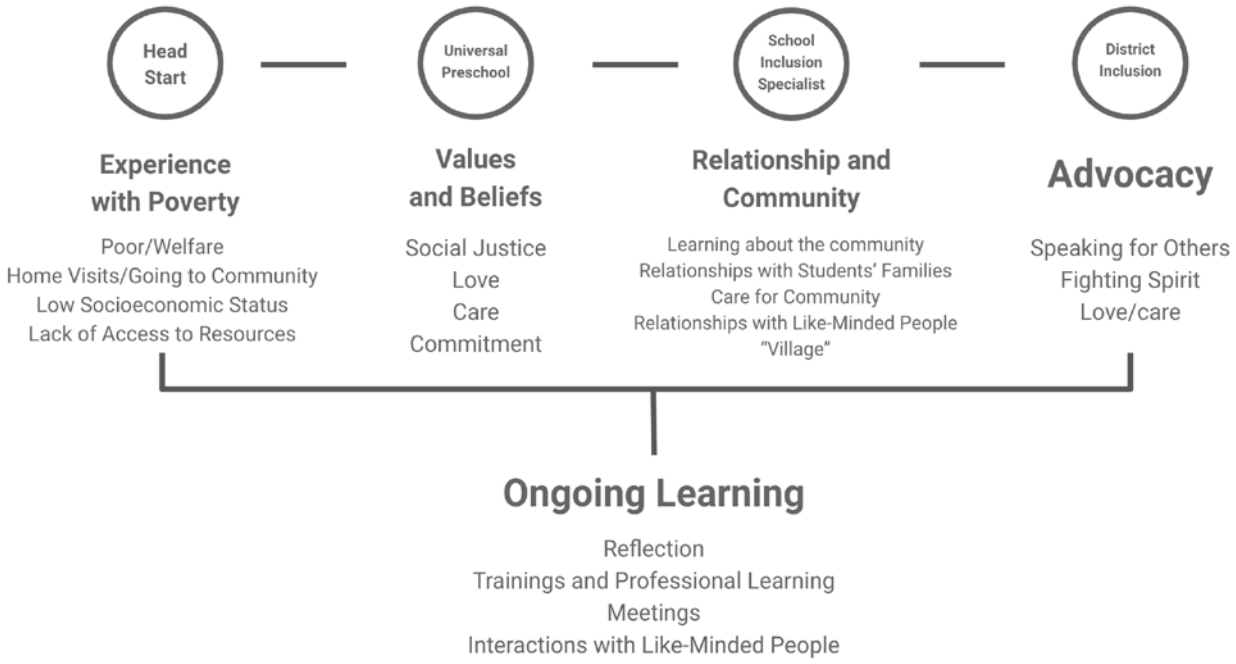


Figure 24. Journey line and categories of compassionate leadership.

struggling to survive with multiple jobs and still did not make enough money to make ends meet. They spoke languages that I did not understand, and I had difficulty communicating with them. In order to learn how to serve my students and families, I had to learn about their needs and how to support them in ways that I had never been taught to do. I went on home visits where families set out their best for me as we communicated through gestures and translators. Families brought their best to our classroom events: they dressed their children in their best clothing, they thanked us effusively for providing bags filled with books every week so they could read together, and they tried their best to follow suggestions we gave for activities to support learning at home. I also learned what it meant to serve families experiencing trauma and stress. I became adept at reporting suspected abuse to Child Protective Services. My roommates got used to me keeping garbage bags next to the front door of our house so that I could tie up all my clothes in them for 72 hours on days I was exposed to lice. These experiences helped me to learn what my students' families and lives were like below the poverty line.

My colleagues and I used to joke that our experiences teaching in Head Start programs would allow us to teach anywhere and in any situation. The high standards of the program, along with the daily stresses that we faced, prepared us for anything. When I was recruited to pilot an inclusive, universal preschool program with state funding, I was pretty sure I knew how to teach in an inclusive setting. Little did I know what I was getting into. During the interview, I was asked whether I had experience teaching students with disabilities. My answer was affirmative because Head Start programs did serve students who had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Most of the students in our Head Start programs had IEPs that addressed speech and language eligibility. Nothing prepared me for the students I taught in my Preschool For All program (PFA). The students with IEPs in the PFA program had significant disabilities: autism,

Down syndrome, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) to name a few. They also had challenging behaviors that stemmed from the frustration of navigating their environment and disability. This was also their first school experience and, in a class of 20 students and three adults, it could be extremely overwhelming for them when they could not communicate their needs or follow along with the expectations of peers and staff. During my years teaching for PFA, I developed the values and beliefs that shaped my equity work. PFA also changed my trajectory toward special education and I learned how different my teaching experience in an inclusive classroom was, compared to the typical experience for students who required an IEP. Many of the PFA students were never able to access grade-level curriculum and peer interaction.

A couple years later, I was tapped to take the skills I learned teaching an inclusive class to a Kindergarten–8th grade school. Again, I thought I knew what I was getting into, and again I was stretched. I found myself teaching a first grader returning to our school who was eligible for special education under emotional disturbance. I had no idea how a first grader would qualify under emotional disturbance. When I met Eddie, I got the impression that he was shy and reserved. He kept pace academically with students that were several grade levels above him; he had been sent to a county based program with other students with similar eligibility who were not able to be served within their home school district. My job was to transition him back to our school and fully include him in our Kindergarten classrooms, even though he was a first grader, to ensure success. His teacher had recommended that he come back, and his parents agreed. His mother taught in our school district. Eddie's transition to school started unremarkably—he was able to meet the expectations of his teacher, and we did not see any signs of the emotions, behaviors, or self-harm behavior he had exhibited before he left our district. He moved on to first grade a couple months after his return. We were strategic with the teacher we placed Eddie with

even though he had not exhibited any of the behaviors that were reported in the past. We knew that Eddie's relationship with his first grade teacher would be crucial for his success. We worked together as a team: Eddie's first grade teacher, his mother, his grandmother, me, the school principal, two instructional aides, and the district special education director. The demands of first grade became difficult after the first few months. Eddie began to show self-harming behaviors, he ran away from school breaking windows on cars, or screamed while threatening to throw himself into the creek near the school. Our team was crucial for Eddie's support. We maintained a close relationship between home and school. We communicated, we tried different behavior supports, and we all pulled together to help each other help Eddie. Colleagues took over my small groups when Eddie went rogue, or my principal sat in the room while we worked to calm Eddie down. We were a village that supported each other, so that we could support Eddie. I still have a good relationship with Eddie's family and the staff 10 years later because we partnered together and supported each other.

All of these teaching opportunities built my ability to become a district coach for inclusion. Several years after working with Eddie and his family, I began speaking up for other students who were products of exclusionary school practices. I was tasked to help set up a therapeutic classroom for third through fifth graders at a school with highly privileged teachers who made it clear that they did not want such a class at their school. The principal and the staff made it difficult for us to set up this class by refusing to share school resources, curriculum, and materials. The principal's response was that "special ed is supposed to pay for it" and he would not use any portion of his budget for the students in this class. When confronting him did not work, I went to other school principals with whom I had relationships, and asked for support. I

also went to our district administrators and fought for a budget for the students so that they would have the resources they needed to learn.

My career in education took me from the classroom to the larger educational bureaucratic system of the COE. During the course of my career, I learned that special education was not only a way to exclude students from the classroom because of their disabilities, but was also a place to send students who did not fit the mold of how students were supposed to learn. Watching district practices from the viewpoint of the COE, I identified the need to continue my learning in order to support the needs of all students. Over the course of my career, I continued to go to school and earned three teaching credentials, an administrative credential, and a master's degree. It seemed like I was always in school, but I was continually reflecting on what I could learn next to find ways to change the system from within for the benefit of constantly marginalized students. Within the larger COE context, I sought out ways that I could learn more to interrupt inequitable practices. I also sought out people within the organization, in other COEs, and other school districts who shared my values and beliefs. Sofia, Beyoncé, and Amelie are some of the kindred spirits I have found in COEs who share these ideals. We collaborate with each other, support each other, and just laugh together, in order to maintain our work as equity advocates.

Each of our experiences led all of us in this study to the COE for the purpose of continuing to grow as compassionate leaders. An emerging issue is how individuals with specific gifts and assets work within an organizational structure that at times fosters and inhibits their work. While these isomorphic organizations are meant to support efficiency, they could negatively impact equity work by their entrenched systems, discussed through the second finding of the study.

Breaking Down Silos

There were several different ways to articulate the second finding of the study. Identifying the categories for the finding was based on the same process described for the first finding: initial categories assigned to codes were redefined using literature and a process of reaching coherence and interpretation of the data (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). These categories answered the research question by describing how the organizational factors fostered or inhibited administrators' ability to do equity work within the COE. The category of bureaucracy stood out as the major factor inhibiting equity work. This idea brought to mind the images of silos, cogs in a wheel, or gears of a machine. Those who work in COEs often speak of the silos that compose our organizations. Even with the constraints, people have found ways to work around the bureaucratic structures of the COE, which I reveal through the results of the data that led to this finding. People who have learned to strategically navigate the organizational structures of the COE might have determined how to play the political game. All these ideas provided ways to articulate the finding: breaking down silos, stuck in the middle, not just a cog in the machine, and strategically navigating organizational systems. Breaking down silos seemed to be the best way to express the factors that fostered or inhibited equity work, and the finding was supported by the following categories gleaned from participants' data:

- bureaucracy;
- shared knowledge;
- informal interactions; and
- teaming.

Code totals for each category that characterize breaking down silos are found in Table 12 and labeled according to code totals from each participant's data.

Table 12

Category Totals for Breaking Down Silos

Categories	Sofia	Beyoncé	Amelie	Total
Bureaucracy	41	37	130	208
Shared Knowledge	38	51	40	129
Informal Interactions	28	35	45	108
Teaming	41	56	57	154

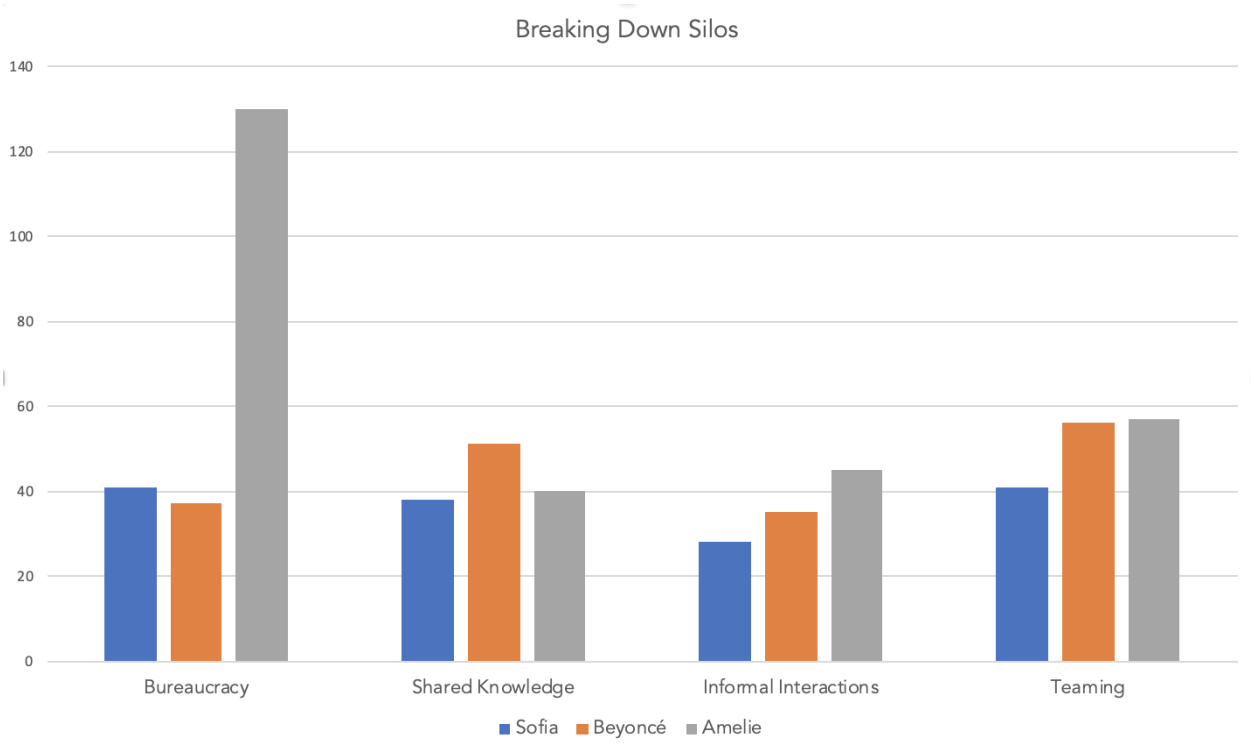


Figure 25. Breaking down silos category totals.

The categories for breaking down silos had code totals that were significant across all the participants except for bureaucracy (see Figure 12). Amelie's data showed more frequency for codes that fell under bureaucracy than any other participant. The visual representation of the data illustrates the marked difference in the data. Amelie was probably the most affected by the bureaucracy that was inherent in the COE system perhaps because of her experiences.

Bureaucracy

Data collected from each of the participants highlighted the prevalence of bureaucracy in the COE. The category of bureaucracy was identified through the codes of hierarchy, rules and procedures, practices, authority, and perception. These codes occurred a total of 198 times throughout the data collected from the participants (see Table 13). Rules and procedures were coded more than any other code—107 times. This code indicated the expectations of the organization, whether written or unwritten, that dictated employee behavior. Amelie referred to this code the most often. One example that she brought up was about posting things on her office window. Right after moving into her new office space, Amelie was told that she could not have anything hanging on her window. She took it down but asked, "Why am I not allowed to have something in the window?" (Amelie, organizational chart, September 14, 2020). While the code Rules and Procedures indicated the aspects of how the organization operated, the code of Practices refers to the messaging of these processes and the degree of knowledge people had of them. Amelie spoke of this again when she referred to a meeting she attended. At the meeting, everyone was asked how they communicate with school districts. The answers varied, but when decision makers in the meeting were asked what they wanted everyone to use, they responded, "we don't have an answer to that yet" (Amelie, organizational chart, September 14, 2020). The codes of Authority and Perception refer to the ability of administrators to make decisions and

Table 13

Number of Instances Codes Appeared for Bureaucracy

Codes	Sofia	Beyoncé	Amelie	Total
Hierarchy	13	11	3	27
Rules and Procedures	11	6	90	107
Practices	3	6	7	16
Authority	6	5	8	19
Perception	8	9	12	29
Total	41	37	120	198

Figure 26. Amelie's organizational chart representation.

how the COE is perceived, respectively. Hierarchy refers to the importance of titles, levels, and positions.

Amelie illustrated the hierarchy that she felt was represented in the titles and authority given to various members of the organization through her representation of the organization. The birds in Figure 27 illustrate the inherent hierarchy, and during our interview, Amelie described how each functioned in maintaining the bureaucracy of the organization. The top bird represented the superintendent who had one wing open and one closed. There was a sense that she was open to some changes, but also maintained certain practices that kept her place in the organization's hierarchy. While the superintendent talked about how she wanted things to function differently, to have a more "flattened organization," Amelie's representation indicated that certain people continued to keep bureaucratic practices in place (Amelie, organizational chart, September 14, 2020). The large bird with open wings was her representation of these people. They were the ones who were the loudest and most able to keep the COE operating under the status quo. She represented the COE with the bottom image: the snow covered landscape. Amelie intimated that the landscape was similar to the cold, bureaucratic, rule driven nature of the COE. Sofia and Beyoncé's organizational charts were also very hierarchical, with the superintendent at the top. All of the participants talked about how communication had to go up, but none of them talked about how communication flowed among the people doing the work.

Each participant operated under the bureaucratic systems of the COE, and data collected identified it as an aspect of the organizational structure. Bureaucracy was inherent in the organizational system of the COE and these components affected participants' ability to share knowledge, interact with each other, and work as a part of a team. Sofia spoke matter-of-factly about not allowing bureaucracy to impact her work but also realizing that she "could not really

push the limits too much" or there would be negative consequences (Sofia, organizational chart, September 29, 2020). Beyoncé reflected that abiding by the bureaucracy made her complicit with the organization, and determined that she needed to take a stand and go back to doing "what's right" (Beyoncé, Flipgrid, June 8, 2020). Amelie was most vocal about what she saw as aspects of bureaucracy and determined that "sometimes bureaucratic agencies get in the way of doing good work… people are getting in the way" (Amelie, Work Caption, March 4, 2020). She talked about not being able to move forward with equity work. Values were espoused, but they were just "lip service." She did not want to name the people who were barriers to equity work for fear of the repercussions (Amelie, organizational chart, September 14, 2020).

The participants of the current study determined that they were not going to accept what they could not change, but that they would change the things they could not accept, embracing the Angela Davis quote at the beginning of this chapter. Developing shared knowledge was one way that participants navigated around the bureaucracy to break down organizational silos.

Shared Knowledge

Shared knowledge was revealed in the data collected from each of the participants as one of the keys to breaking down silos. Sofia, Beyoncé, and Amelie all spoke to the idea of communication within their teams, and with the teams or departments they did not work with on a regular basis. Building shared knowledge was a category that was developed through the organization of the following codes: communication with other departments, sharing information, learning from each other, and representation of departments. The total number of times these codes were evidenced in the data was 129 times (see Table 14).

Communication was identified through the data for each participant as the act of deliberately sharing ideas, chatting, and talking with each other. This aspect of the category

Table 14

Number of Instances Codes Appeared for Shared Knowledge

Codes	Sofia	Beyoncé	Amelie	Total
Communicate with Other Departments	11	4	6	21
Sharing Information	4	10	5	19
Learning from Each Other	5	10	8	23
Representation of Departments	18	27	21	66
Total	38	51	40	129

described the informality of sharing information that supported the relationship between departmental communication. Communicating and sharing information with each other were key aspects of how Beyoncé created opportunities to break down silos. She facilitated meetings where many different departments were represented, in order to discuss the equity work that they were doing with the school districts. This was part of the effort to support clear communication and understand how departments could work together to support equity work. To accomplish this, Beyoncé sent reminders and offered each department an opportunity to send a representative to her meetings (Beyoncé, Observation 2, January 31, 2020). These codes were evident in all of the participants' data and an example is represented here in data collected from Beyoncé of a meeting where representatives from every department were invited to a conversation about organizational alignment (see Figure 27). This code of shared knowledge was defined as the meeting of individuals, but not just any individuals in the organization. Each participant spoke of the idea that representation of people from each department in meetings was necessary for shared knowledge to develop. The total number of times these codes occurred across participants was 66 times, almost half of the total number of codes for the entire category. Getting the right people to the table was an idea that Beyoncé referred to often when she spoke of the internal work that was occurring within her COE (Beyoncé, Observation 1, January 8, 2020). One of Beyoncé's goals was to improve the communication within the departments of her COE. Meetings were held twice a month at which this team of representatives would share information about how they supported school districts in their county. Every meeting began with a review of action items from the last meeting, and ended with a review of action items that surfaced during the meeting. The collegial attitude (i.e., informal conversations, respectful disagreement, etc.) around the table was observed and documented during every meeting I observed (Beyoncé,

X	MTSS	X	Differentiated Assistance	X	LCAP	X	Research		Data Analyst
X	PBIS		Assistant Supe	X	Safe and Supportive	X	Instruction	X	Professional Learning
	SELPA		Inclusion	X	Special Projects		Ed Tech	X	Data Department
X	Foster Youth								

Figure 27. Representation across the COE for shared knowledge development.

Observation 3, February 28, 2020). These meetings developed shared knowledge when representation during meetings was intentional and meeting outcomes were defined (Sofia, organizational chart, September 29, 2020).

Informal Interactions

Developing shared knowledge was important to breaking down silos, but as mentioned previously in the chapter, bureaucracy got in the way even though there was a desire for developing shared knowledge. What then would support the development of shared knowledge within a bureaucratic organization? The answer revealed through the data indicated that informal interactions might be the key. Throughout my observations of each of the participants in their equity work, interviews, and activities, I saw evidence of informal interactions that could support the ability for teams to share knowledge. The codes that supported the category of informal interactions were relationships, dialogue or conversations, and check-ins. The total number of times these codes occurred was 108 (see Table 15). Informal interactions occurred during scheduled activities that I observed, as well as during unscheduled opportunities between my participants and me. The informal interactions that happened outside of scheduled activities with participants were difficult to include in the codes offered for the purpose of the current study. One such example happened after I had conducted an interview with Sofia. She led me through a labyrinth of hallways to Beyoncé's office for another meeting. One hallway entrance had a table laden with food and drinks and was decorated with balloons. Another hallway opened up to a cubicle which was decorated for someone's birthday. Sofia told me about all the fun ways that the people on her team would celebrate together, and gather informally. This was hard to capture in my observations but was coded in my reflective memo (M. Yung, Reflective Memo, January 8, 2020). Inevitably some of the conversations would lead into work they were doing. Thus,

Table 15

Number of Instances Codes Appeared for Informal Interactions

Codes	Sofia	Beyoncé	Amelie	Total
Relationships	22	10	17	49
Dialogue/ Conversations	13	4	8	25
Check-ins	3	11	20	34
Total	38	25	45	108

information shared inadvertently supported the building of relationships that allowed for better communication during formal meetings.

Sofia saw informal interactions as opportunities to connect people while breaking down silos in the COE. She called herself a "convener" and illustrated this in her mandala (see Figure 28). The top right hand corner of the illustration shows all the groups that Sofia convenes. She's worked in two different COEs, but in each place she's created strong teams with shared leadership through informal interactions. These informal opportunities may seem unimportant, but they have a place in breaking down silos across an organization in order to help people develop relationships, learn to trust each other, and create community. "Building community" is the label to the right of Sofia's illustration of the groups she convenes (Sofia, Mandala, September 29, 2020).

Teaming

People-focused organizations, such as complex educational organizations, are dependent on culture. The core of an organization's culture is based on the internal and external community. Building a community requires informal opportunities of interaction as well as intentional teaming. The category of teaming is defined by the codes of transparency, taking turns, decision-making, and collaboration. The codes that were identified for the category of teaming were evident in the data across all participants 154 times (see Table 16). The data shown in the table indicate that transparency and taking turns, or shared leadership, are most important for developing a team. The group is united, they have a common purpose, and they feel that they have the agency and authority to do their work together. It is interesting to note that decision-making was coded least frequently. Decision-making was actually limited to decisions that could be made by the group, or the team. There seemed to be less importance based on the ability or

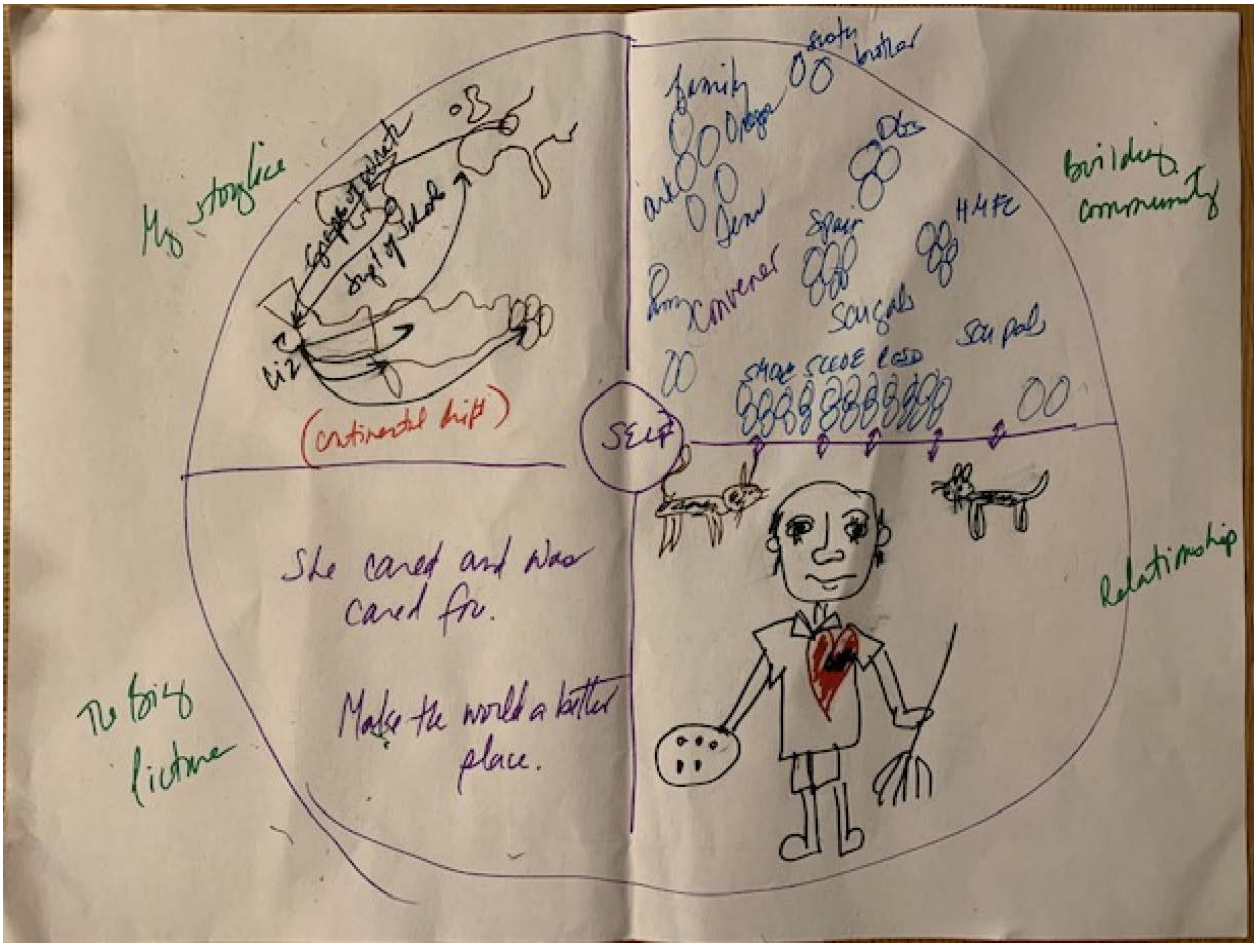


Figure 28. Sofia's mandala.

Table 16

Number of Instances Codes Appeared for Teaming

Codes	Sofia	Beyoncé	Amelie	Total
Transparency	8	30	15	53
Take Turns/Shared Leadership	26	12	17	55
Decision-Making	4	3	5	12
Collaborating	3	11	20	34
Total	41	56	57	154

authority to make decisions when part of a team, and more emphasis on collaborating with one another. Collaboration was defined here as planning, working, and spending time together for a common purpose.

Although I have observed and experienced instances in which a person's ego has disrupted work occurring in teams across my COE, the data gathered from these three participants indicated that importance should be placed on collaborative practices, shared leadership, and transparency (M. Yung, Reflective Memo, November 22, 2019), ideas that would be difficult if one person's ego were to seem more important on a team. Sofia spoke about teaming as the idea of "a shared collaborative, where together we made decisions in the best interest of the promotion of equity" (Sofia, Organizational Chart, September 29, 2020). Sofia's title gave her the leadership role. She signed paperwork, she received a higher paycheck, and she reported to the deputy superintendent when no one else on the team really interacted with him (Sofia, Organizational Chart, September 29, 2020). If Sofia and her team operated in pattern common to some departmental meetings in COEs, teaming would not exist. Observations of how Sofia's team worked revealed that she did not have to be the one running the meeting all the time. I saw her sit and participate in a meeting, offering resources when she had them, and following the lead of her team members. She did not have to say anything to open the meeting for her team when they met with a school district, and she did not step into the front of the room until all the members of her team had already presented portions of the session (Sofia, Observation 2, March 13, 2020). She sat at the back of the room and took notes. The teaming structure that I observed caused me to think about my own experiences within the COE.

My Data Convergence

Data collected from each participant intersected with my own experiences for the current finding. I maintained reflective memos about my activities with participants and my experiences within my context during the course of the study. The memos reinforce the finding of breaking down silos through the same categories that were defined through analyzation of participants' data without significant differences: bureaucracy, shared knowledge, informal interactions, and teaming.

The COE supports the communication of state level statute with local school districts because of the difficulties of meeting the varying needs across such a large state. Chapter 4 details the structure of the COE in relationship with the state educational organization and local school districts. These structures require an isomorphic system of communication that adapts somewhat to the local context, resulting in a bureaucratic system of organization. I referred to holding four different positions within the last five years of employment at my COE in Chapter 4. I started working at the COE as part of the Induction program and, after my second year, changed to a role that offered direct support to school district administrators in the systems work of Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP), Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS), and Differentiated Assistance (DA). After my third year with the COE, I found out through an email that a portion of my position, PBIS, had been switched to a different department. The email was an employment posting, and a colleague had pointed it out to me. This change to my position was never discussed with me. During my fourth year with the COE, while I was working as the PBIS coordinator, I was offered a position on the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) team as a coordinator to support the work of decreasing significant disproportionality in our county. SELPA shared the

same space as the COE, but was technically not a part of the organization. SELPA "borrowed" my services toward the end of my fourth year and I officially became a part of that team at the start of my fifth year at the COE. Throughout the last five years, I experienced four organizational restructures. These experiences provide an example of hierarchical practices in our COE. One district administrator once told me: "You guys change titles so often that I can't even keep track of who does what, and I'm not even going to try" (M. Yung, Reflective Memo, January 25, 2019).

There are numerous other examples of rules and procedures that are followed: we're not allowed to sign contracts, we are required to complete a calendar every month of the days we worked, and we have a piece of paper that requires signatures of our supervisors and division heads to change our absence reporting if we forgot to report an absence. Practices are nebulous and unspoken; some divisions require contracts with schools or districts to provide a service, but others can provide a service without the contract. The cost for the services is also unknown to some. During my onboarding meeting, I was given specific costs that I was to charge schools or districts for provision of professional learning opportunities. When I switched departments, I was told to hold off on charging anything because my new department did not typically create contracts for service. For all the attempts to be consistent to support the perception that the COE is an organized model of service to schools and districts, we often hear that district administrators are aware of the dysfunction.

While it is clear that dysfunction happens within the COE, there have been attempts to support shared knowledge. These attempts, initiated by well-meaning administrators in the organization, often have erratic starts and stops. The different positions that I have held have allowed me to participate in meetings to support different initiatives at the core of my values and

beliefs. In one example, I worked across departments to attain a grant to provide dyslexia training in our region. I worked with two other departments to apply for a small grant, and we received what we asked for. However, upon receipt of the grant, I was told that I could not participate in the grant execution because it was not part of my role. I handed the grant money to our SELPA, and asked a new administrator in our curriculum department to serve as the point person while I continued to do the work. By working together between the three departments, we were able to create two symposiums for our regional school districts. We asked other coordinators to share their content expertise and successfully created resources for educators serving students with dyslexia. Key to the process was cross-department collaboration that was representative of different areas of expertise, fueled by the desire to learn from each other. The collaboration happened as a result of relationships built over time through informal interactions.

The ability to work together in the COE and to break down the silos that exist in the organization requires the ability to have informal interactions with each other. Through conversations and dialogue with one another, I often learn about opportunities to partner with other administrators. Recently, I had a conversation with a colleague about the work I was doing for significant disproportionality with our school districts. We talked about how some teachers believed they did not know what else they could do to serve their English learners, so they referred them to special education. We talked about the fact that so many district administrators were not aware of their English learner data, and their teachers had no idea what support they could offer them. This conversation led to the two of us co-leading a professional learning session for a school district identified as significantly and disproportionately referring their Latino students for special education. The entire process started out with our relationship to each other. We had randomly decided to check-in and had conversations about our work, leading to a

relevant experience to support one of our school districts. Informal interactions were also part of the reason I landed my most recent position working on the SELPA team.

Over the course of the four years that I had been with my COE, I developed a basic understanding of the organizational chart. Navigating the changes within the organization was sometimes difficult because the organizational chart kept changing. Additionally, the transition to the COE was difficult because the environment shifted to one that was very rule-driven, and I did not have the chance to interact with students and their families on a daily basis. It also seemed as if I was constantly getting reprimanded for breaking one rule or the other without knowing that I did so. During one of the interviews with a participant, I shared our COE's organizational chart and how I perceived my work within it (see Figure 29). In my various roles as part of COE-A, I had the opportunity to work with many of the departments and was invited to consult on various projects. However, it was not until I joined SELPA that I witnessed the categories that defined teaming: transparency, shared leadership, decision-making, and collaborating. During the response to COVID, the team's administrator shared information she learned from the different meetings she attended to keep the team abreast of communication that changed almost daily. Instead of requiring specific actions about how we were to work, she asked us to share in the decision of returning to work after the state-wide shelter-in-place order. We met when it was necessary to collaborate or check in, and not just for the sake of meeting. The team worked to be part of the overall COE organization, but did not follow along just because that's what was required. Teaming was at the core of decisions: we were presented with information, provided opportunities to lead and make decisions together, and asked to collaborate to support each other's work.

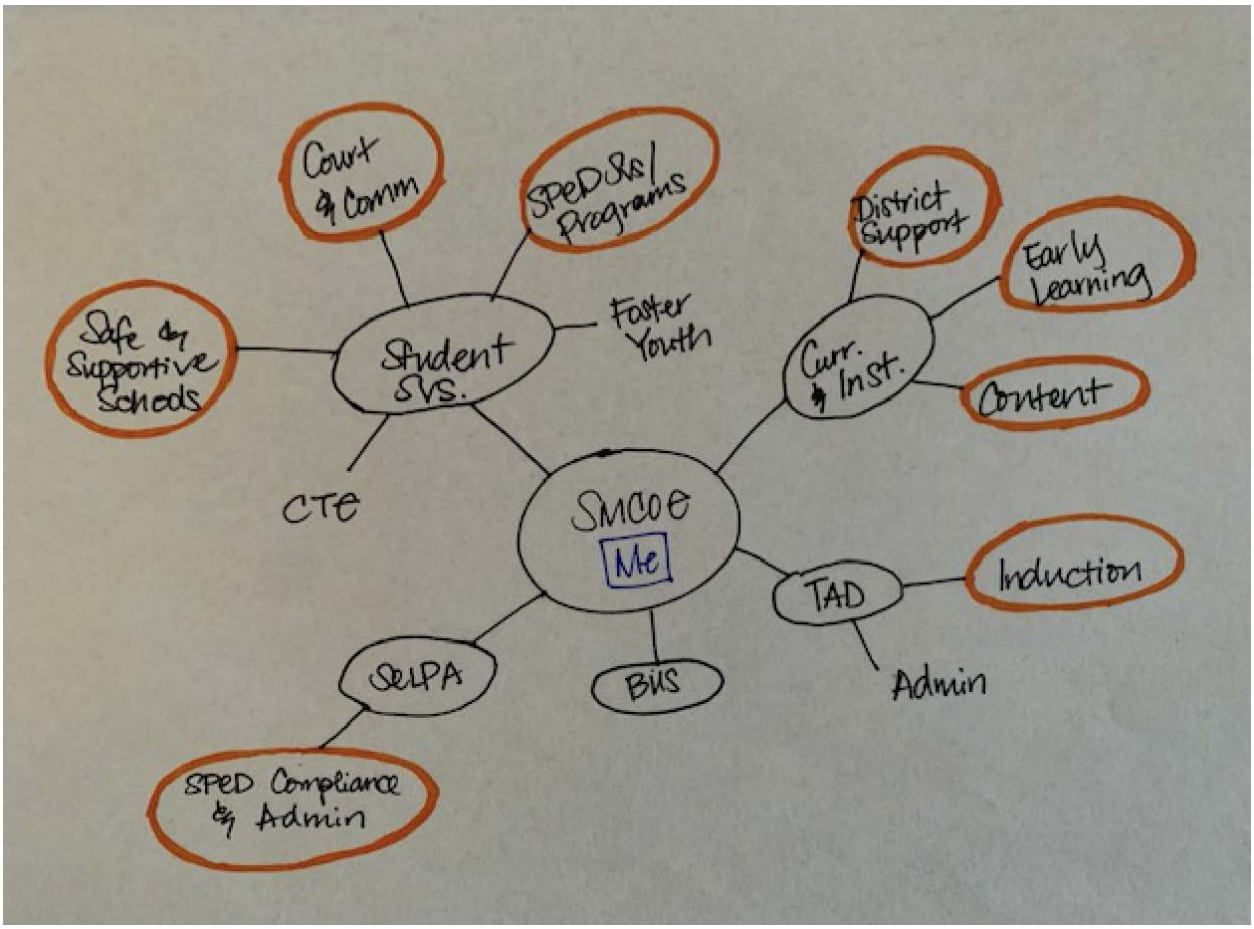


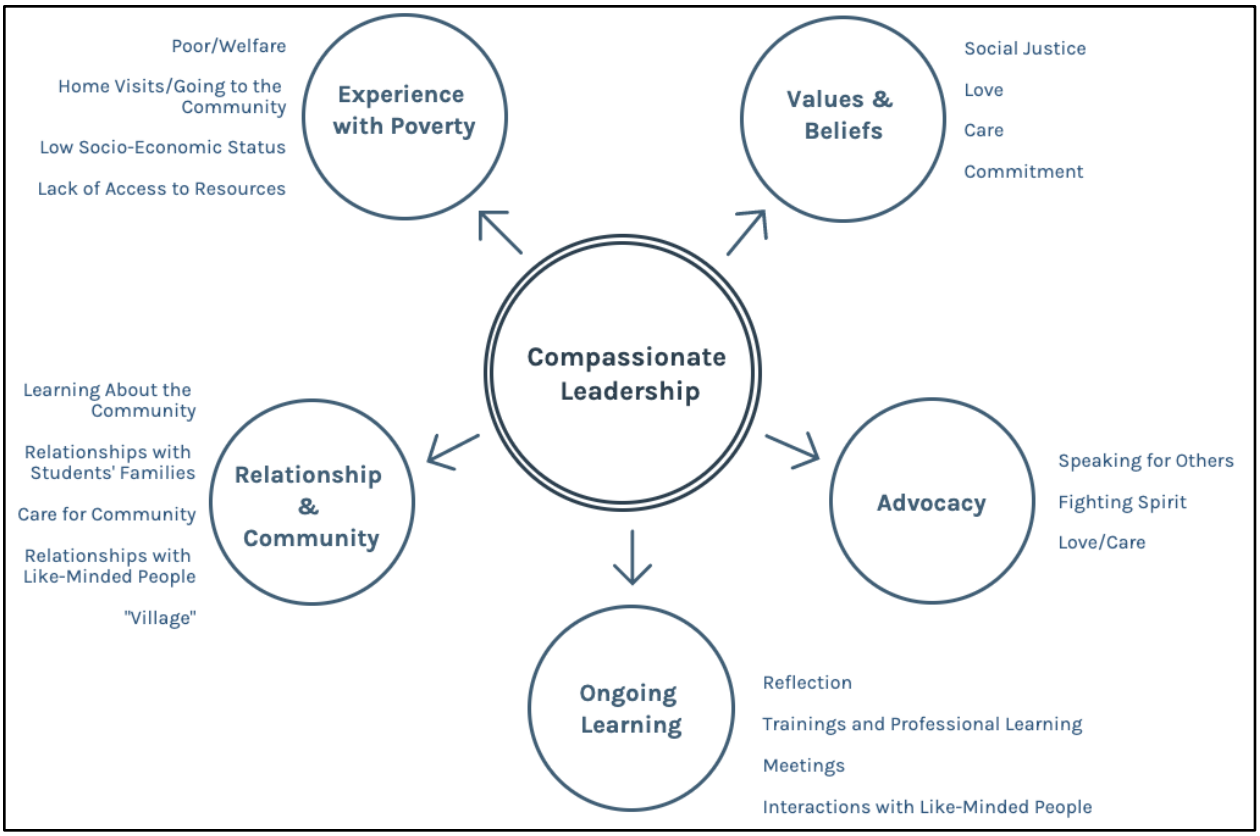
Figure 29. Role in organization of COE-A.

The organization of COEs is best illustrated through the bureaucracy that is inherent in these complex educational systems. However, the hope of developing shared knowledge, supporting informal interactions, and examples of teaming demonstrate ways of breaking down the silos that exist. The stories shared by the participants and attested through my own experiences indicated that equity work could be achieved by changing the impact of bureaucratic structures. The ability to navigate bureaucracy stemmed from experiences that shaped these compassionate leaders.

Summary

The results of the current study indicate two major findings that support the research question of how administrators in complex educational organizations support equity work. Compassionate leadership and breaking down silos are both necessary for equity work to occur in complex educational organizations such as a COE. These two findings are illustrated in Figure 30. Woven throughout this chapter are stories of the three participants who manage to navigate the bureaucracy of the organization. To do so, they rely on experiences that led them to become compassionate leaders who enact equity in their daily work in support of student outcomes. They also maintain their ability to do this work by engaging in processes that help them break down the silos inherent in COEs.

The two findings for the current study point to aspects of equity leadership in COEs, but they also point to how administrators should engage in the work. The results of the data from these three participants confirm the experiences that I have had within my COE. The work is hard; it is exhausting. Yet we all continue to work as equity warriors in a place that challenges our ability to advocate for the students and families who are not offered equitable educational opportunities. The stories of our youth gave us the passion to advocate and work for social



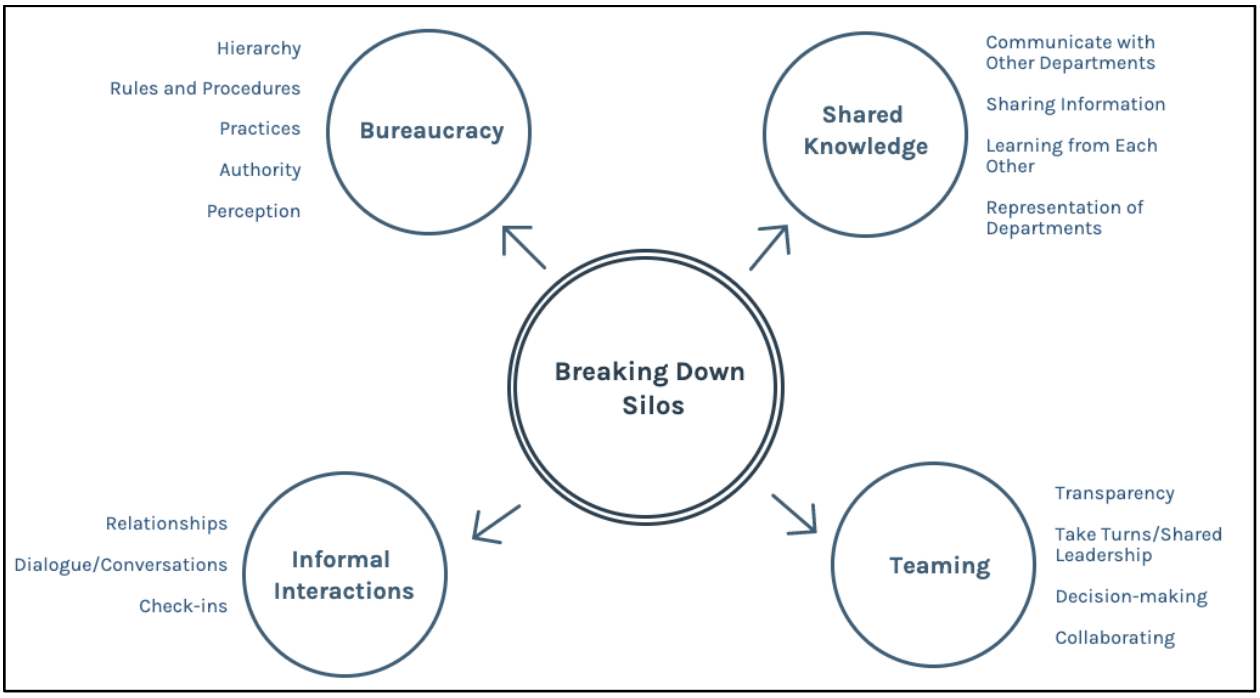


Figure 30. Compassionate leadership and breaking down silos.

justice. We all maintained our ability to carry out equity work even when others in our organizations did not seem to see or care about the issues within (Kania et al., 2018). We all continue to cross boundaries and seek ways to get around the system that sometimes inhibits the equity work that we are trying to do. We often do so under the radar and report the nuggets of positive results that we see to those who are in charge of us (Sofia, Organizational Chart, September 29, 2020). It is important for us to keep our higher management informed of positive impacts in order that the external perception of the COE is maintained. But is this really what we want our educational organizations to stand for? Would we not want all of our organizations to push for what we know is the right thing to do for kids?

In this chapter, we find ways in which equity leaders navigate the roadblocks they face on a daily basis from isomorphic organizations such as the COE. There is a light that shines in the work that is done. Districts are led through simulations that help them see how students are really being served in their system. Conversations take place to share what people are working on without the barrier of egos. Teaming occurs so that impact is possible. People enjoy working together as part of a team where they take turns facilitating communication and creating a community of ongoing learning. What is the responsibility of the COE to foster ways in which equity work can be done? What are the possibilities that could be achieved if people were given the opportunity to create channels of communication, to get rid of the way things were always run, to change the structure from a hierarchy that is not dependent on titles? What if we were to change what we cannot accept instead of accepting what we cannot change?

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world.
And you have to do it all the time.
~Angela Davis

Portraits are stories captured as an image. The portraits of the equity warriors portrayed in this study highlight the journeys and experiences that have shaped our work. Stories bring our purpose to life and they show our motivation to serve. We believe that we can change the world, we act as if we are, and we lift each other up when we feel beaten. It is a never ending fight, but it is one that we share. Stories need to be memorialized so others can learn from them.

This study focused on three administrators who work in County Offices of Education (COEs) in California who share my vision of achieving equality through equity, to understand how they conducted equity work within their organizations. The study was conducted at two urban COEs within close proximity, with varying sizes and organizational structures. Using portraiture as the methodology for the study, participants were asked to share experiences and narratives that allowed me to understand the role and culture of their organization and probe deeply into the equity work of administrators in complex educational organizations. The deep analysis of the stories each participant shared supported the understanding of how organizations impacted them and identified supportive structures for equity work.

The findings for this study indicate that equity leadership is enacted by administrators while they strategically maneuver around the organizational barriers that inhibit their work. COEs are complex, bureaucratic organizations that maintain structural and procedural practices in the name of efficiency. Yet the equity warriors whose portraits revealed compassionate leadership maintain their ability to engage in, and push for equity work, by engaging in processes that break down silos in COEs. In this concluding chapter, I first review

how the findings led to the idea that administrators have the ability to navigate educational organizations to sustain equity vis-à-vis the literature in Chapter 2. Here I describe a new framework for understanding the pursuit of equity for students in the midst of organizations such as the COE. Then I discuss the implications of the study on policy, practice, and future research. The last section of the chapter reviews my leadership development and learning throughout the study.

Enacting Equity in Complex Educational Organizations

The two findings of the study underscore the importance of understanding people through their stories and how they work in an organizational system for equity. Portraits of the participants in previous chapters identified compassionate leadership attributes, and their ability to navigate the bureaucratic system of the COE by breaking down silos. These findings led to the following claims:

1. Equity leaders use reflection and action to engage in social justice and culturally responsive leadership.
2. Equity leaders navigate the system to support change within COEs.

I discuss these two claims in the following section using the extant literature as a foil.

Re-Analyzing the Findings

The findings from the data analyzed in Chapter 5 indicated that equity leaders have attributes of compassionate leadership. The participants were shaped by their experiences and they continue to learn. In the following section, I discuss the two claims through the re-analyzation of the findings. I first discuss how compassionate leadership is transformative and radical. Then I explore organizational culture and how administrators enact equity within them.

Compassionate Leadership is Transformative and Radical

Compassionate leaders are equity warriors who have been shaped by their experiences. They fight for equity because it is the core of who they are as individuals. They are leaders who actively engage with their context to transform the inequities they see. The actions of these leaders may seem radical within a complex educational organization such as the COE. However, they are fundamental to changing the educational system to address inequitable outcomes for students. In this section, I first discuss how compassionate leadership is transformative. Then I demonstrate the connection between compassionate leaders and tempered radicals.

Compassionate Leadership is Transformative

Sofia, Beyoncé, and Amelie's portraits provided the basis for compassionate leadership. All three participants had experiences with poverty which led to the development of their core values and beliefs. These components of their early lives and careers supported how they developed as educators and then as administrators. They formed relationships with their communities and engaged with others who held similar ideals to maintain their advocacy for equity. They learned, as Bateson (1994) calls it, "the shared construction and conservation of meaning and compassion that exist only as they are lived" (p. 63). All of them continued their work through ongoing learning, never thinking that they were done with their work. Figure 30 in Chapter 5 shows the components of their leadership. Their equity vision was built on these components and the transformative aspects of their work. The motivation for equity work that each of the participants hold as part of their values and beliefs are examples of Selznick's (1949) research. Just as he postulated, they all brought their advocacy for marginalized students to the COE and they also incorporated other commitments they learned through the organization (Selznick, 1949).

Similarly, Aguilar (2018) further defines these values and beliefs as part of a development of self-awareness. Sofia, Beyoncé, and Amelie consistently engage in ongoing learning, an aspect of compassionate leadership. Part of the development of self-awareness is the ability to reflect on one's own bias (Aguilar, 2018). The ongoing journey to examine oneself for bias, engaging in vulnerable self-reflection, and considering one's own humanity are also a part of transformative leadership as described by Shields (2010). All of the participants in the study hold core values of equity. As discussed in Chapter 5, all of the participants discussed the various ways that they reflected, especially how their belief systems changed because of what they learned. Internal equity work is defined by the journey of acknowledging bias and privilege and defining one's purpose or passion, but it is also based on the interaction that the equity leader engages in with the external context.

Transformative leaders learn from those closest to issues of equity, usually those in communities who experience inequities of educational systems on a daily basis (Guajardo et al., 2016; Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018). These ideas support the compassionate and transformative attributes necessary for an equity leader. The equity warrior advocates by giving voice to those who cannot: she fights for equity, demands it for those who do not have it, and amplifies the voices that may not be heard in the organization and within the field. They have reciprocal partnerships with their communities. Khalifa (2018) notes that this is an important feature for leaders of equity. Leaders for equity are compassionate and transformative because they are grounded in their values and beliefs, advocate for others by learning from those closest to the issues, and engage in ongoing learning that includes reflective action (Aguilar, 2018; Guajardo et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018). These attributes of leadership define compassionate and transformative leaders of equity (Shields, 2010).

Tempered Radicals

Compassionate and transformative leaders within COEs are not necessarily the norm in their organizations. The participants in the current study are three individuals who engage in equity work and provide an understanding of the attributes of equity warriors who continue to fight for what is morally right. Inequitable systems in education are maintained by people who accept the status quo or the bureaucratic aspects of the organizations. Contrary to those who maintain systemic inequities are those who Meyerson and Scully (1995) call *tempered radicals*, the change agents who see the bigger picture and resist the status quo. Tempered radicals are the individuals within an organization who "behave as committed and productive members and act as vital sources of resistance, alternative ideas, and transformation" (Myerson & Scully, 1995, p. 586). Tempered radicals may operate on a continuum from psychological resistance to collective action. They are the individuals who are aware of dissonance between their values and beliefs and the theories-in-use of their organizations (Argyris, 1976; Argyris & Schön, 1978). Through this realization, they often become the people who instigate and support transformation. They often find themselves navigating the tension of working for the organization and working to change it (Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Shields, 2011). Sofia, Beyoncé, and Amelie are examples of tempered radicals within the COE. Each of them continues to work within the organizational conditions of the COE, working within the rules and procedures that exist. However, they also find ways to work with others to change the organization from within. They support the development of shared knowledge, engage in ways to build relationships through informal interactions, and seek opportunities to work in teams.

The participants of the current study act for equity based on their values and beliefs by advocating for students who face inequities within the educational system. They speak on behalf

of what Amelie called *forgotten populations,* the students who have been marginalized by our educational systems as explained in Chapter 4 (Amelie, Initial Interview, February 3, 2020). All three of the participants maintain relationships with people who have similar values and beliefs in order to sustain equity work within their COEs, but they also require these relationships to maintain their equity lens. Meyerson and Scully (1995) assert the "importance of maintaining affiliations with colleagues and friends" for collective impact (p. 598). The participants all continued to meet with each other in order to maintain themselves as equity advocates. Extensive time was spent in relationship and community with those who shared their values and beliefs. They engaged in ongoing dialogue with each other to support each other and to sharpen each other's reflective processes (Freire, 1970). Sustaining relationships and interactions with those who share the same values and beliefs supports compassionate leadership in order to change the structures of bureaucracy inherent in complex educational organizations. Compassionate leaders who engage in social justice and culturally responsive leadership actively reflect with those who share the same mindset. Additionally, navigating the COE organization as a compassionate leader requires the understanding of the culture of the COE in order to maintain oneself as an equity leader. The participants found people who were like them within their COEs to talk to, collaborate with, and spend time with both formally during meetings and during informal interactions. They needed to sustain themselves with people who were "more and less radical" than themselves to keep doing the work as an equity leader (Meyerson & Scully, 1995, p. 598).

Organizational Culture of COEs

The blend of Martin's (2002) three perspective theory of culture and Bolman and Deal's (2017) Symbolic Frame allows us to better understand the organizational culture that impacts the work of administrators in the COE. This section describes the way the two theories together help

give a broad understanding of the COE by describing their intersection. Then I discuss how the theories help us understand the organizational impact of the COE on the work of administrators. Finally, I examine the overlap of these two organizational frames with Weiss's Four I's Framework to understand the COE's organizational culture.

The Symbolic Frame and Culture

One of the theories that represents the organization of the COEs in which the participants of this study work is the symbolic frame (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The symbolic frame is derived from ideas of various disciplines in organizational theory and sociology. Bolman and Deal (2017) distill the symbolic frame into five main tenets:

- What is most important is not what happens but what it means
- Activity and meaning are loosely coupled
- People create symbols to resolve confusion, find direction, and anchor hope and faith
- Events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than for what is produced
- Culture forms the superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise accomplish desired ends (p. 253).

The symbolic frame delineates organizations into three main components: the symbols that represent the organization, how people or teams operate within the organization, and the dramaturgical and institutional perspectives of an organization. Throughout the frame is the thread of culture—the way that an organization is structured, how people within an organization work together, and how people perceive it both internally and externally. Amelie's descriptions of the COE hierarchy, decision-making, and divisional structure in which she works are very similar to the loosely-coupled structural framework of an organization deeply established in its

cultural aspects and how it is perceived by external constituents (Weick, 1969). Martin (2002) describes three perspectives of culture that, together with the symbolic frame, support the understanding of the COE culture. The integration perspective describes an organizational culture where most of the people are mostly unified in their understanding of their purpose and work. The differentiation perspective defines an organization with many parts or subdivisions where, within those subdivisions, there may be consensus or unity amongst smaller groups. Finally, the fragmentation perspective presents organizations as neither consistent nor inconsistent, with ambiguity and confusion at the core of the organization, but possible consensus derived for specific issues within the organization. Taken together, the symbolic frame and the perspectives of culture support the understanding of the COE organizational structure (see Figure 31). The COEs were described throughout the study as loosely-coupled based on the experiences the participants had. They were often left to figure things out or make decisions on their own, unless there was a negative response to the actions they took.

The culture of the organization within the symbolic frame is both "a product and a process" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 269). The symbols that represent the two COEs in this study are images of light—the lighthouse and a torch. Both organizations are branded and recognized by these symbols, and each has a symbolic phrase. "Equity and Excellence in Education" is familiar in one COE and "Investing in Impact" is familiar to those of the other COE. These symbols and phrases are used as templates for both internal and external communications, found on email signatures, letterheads, and presentations. Each employee is told to use these images and taglines on information created for the office. It is expected, but not enforced. There is no policing of employees to see if they are doing so on the materials created and shared. However,

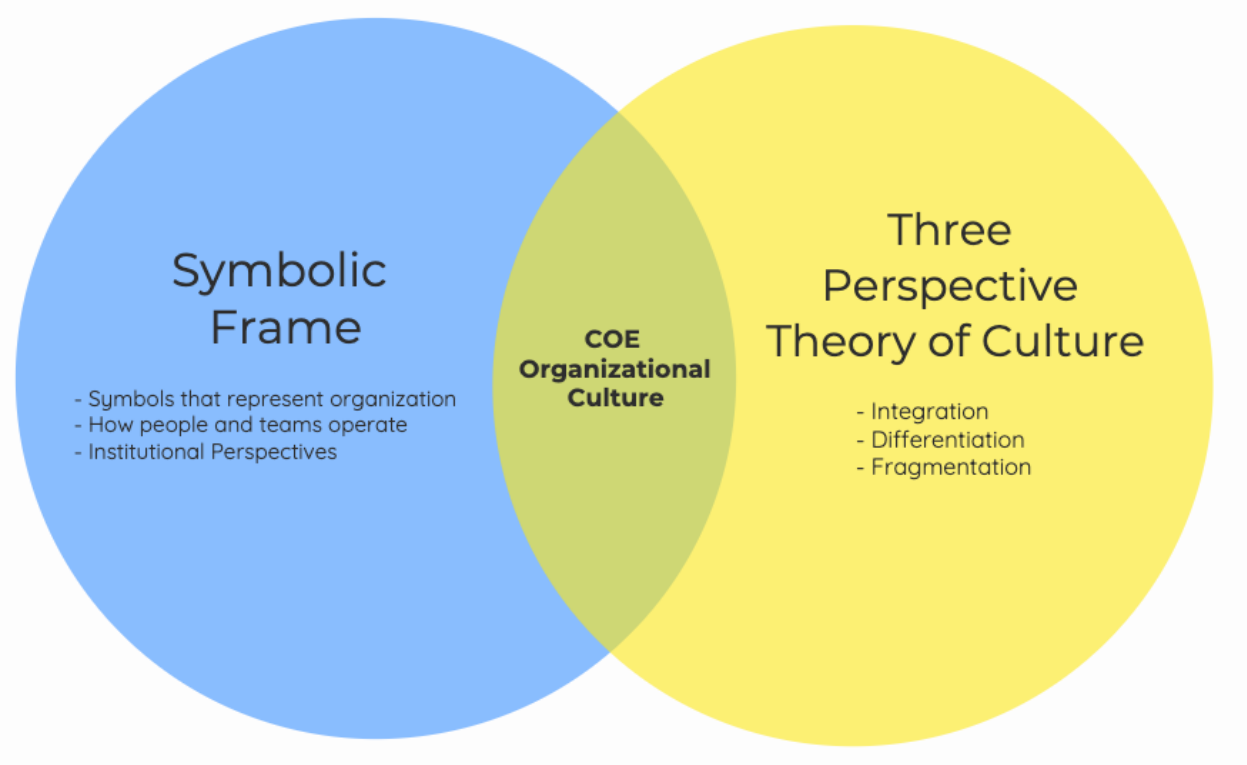


Figure 31. Symbolic Frame and Three Perspective Theory of Culture.

an entire department at each COE is devoted to "communications" and ensures these images are publicly displayed.

People are what make up an organization, and without them, an organization would not exist. Bolman and Deal (2017) discuss the way people work within the organization as another component of the symbolic frame. The aspects of group membership in the symbolic frame are delineated by how someone becomes a group member, the diversity of group, how the group communicates, the stories and values that they share, and the camaraderie of the group (Bolman & Deal, 2017). An organization is held together by the distinctive rules of the culture. These rules both seek to control internal behavior and attempt to provide some cohesion within the organization. These rules are probably the only pieces of integration (Martin, 2002) within both COEs. However, when you investigate people's reactions to the rules, you might find many who question the reasonability of these rules, or rebel against them. For example, when I first started at my COE, my supervisor informed me of several rules that I needed to follow. An example of one of these rules was that I could not wear jeans to work. The expectation was that we were to always dress professionally because we represented the COE. Jeans were only allowed on Fridays, if you had no outside meetings, and only if you paid $1. The rule—especially of paying $1 to wear jeans—did not make any difference to the quality of work that was done, and it did not affect equity or excellence in education. Yet the rule was followed because of the cultural norms of the people working in the organization and the belief that professionalism was based on the way that an employee dressed and not on their specific expertise or how they comported themselves. People may have questioned the rule, but in the end almost everyone paid the dollar to wear jeans. Those who learned how to navigate the system did not pay, until eventually the rule was adapted to suit current circumstances (Weick, 1969).

"Equity and Excellence in Education" is a mantra and core value of one of the COEs. However, when you ask members of the organization what this phrase means, there are many different answers. There have been attempts within the organization to provide a unified definition of this phrase, but within each department and division, each team defines the phrase in a different way. While there is the belief that everyone in the organization subscribes to this phrase and their work is aligned to it, what "Equity and Excellence in Education" means is vague. Attempts to provide cohesive definitions within the departments about how this phrase may define the work that is done by those groups meet with dissension, providing more of a fragmented and fluctuating view (Martin, 2002). During my first year with SMCOE, our department sought to define *equity* and landed on the following definition: "Equity exists when every learner receives the developmental, social, emotional, and academic support to thrive in life, college, and career. We support educators to identify and assess their beliefs and practices for how they impact student learning" (M. Yung, Reflective Memo, March 17, 2017). Our COE created a different definition for the entire organization, while the rest of the departments and divisions within the organization also created their own definitions. With all the different definitions and all the different understandings of equity within the organization, each division defined and aligned their work within their own understanding of "Equity and Excellence in Education." While it may seem that the differentiation of the definitions fostered ambiguity, it instead provided a way for a large educational organization to align their work with the core value of the organization.

The third aspect of Bolman and Deal's (2017) description of the symbolic frame is the dramaturgical/institutional perspective that it offers. This third aspect of the framework provides the metaphor of the organization as a theater. As the theater is focused on how things are

perceived, such is life at the COE. Appearance is important to outside community partners and other educational agencies. Problems arise when school district administrators or other outside entities say negative things about the work of individuals within the COE, or when complaints are sent to the COE superintendent (Sofia, Organizational Chart, September 29, 2020). Many meetings are held within the organization to discuss efficiency, but the meetings themselves are the opposite of efficient (M. Yung, Reflective Memo, October 22, 2020). The organization is pressured from both internal and external forces such as the community, the County Board of Education, and California Department of Education (CDE). Employees seek to influence the decision makers of the organization to adopt their own ideas of what is important. These ideas may be title changes and workflow, or it could be the idea of providing better guidance to schools and district offices within the COE's purview (M. Yung, Reflective Memo, December 14, 2020). School district administrators often contact COE employees and ask them to tell their district administrators they can or cannot do something. The Board of Education provides oversight to the COE, similar to the Board of Education for a school district. And because California is such a large state, the CDE uses the COEs as a go-between to communicate statewide statutes.

It is interesting to note that many COEs operate similarly. They pride themselves on their appearance and efficiency to suggest that they are an indispensable organizational entity. This aspect of the organization relates to DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) definition of isomorphism, in that each of them looks like the other. They posit that organizations that are bureaucratic in nature become more like each other not because of efficiency but because of the culture of the profession (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The similarities between the COEs in the way meetings were held, how professional learning opportunities were provided, and how communication was

disseminated were not surprising. Interviews, observations, and reflections provided evidence that the hierarchy, rules, processes, and procedures were the same at each of the COEs. There were often even comparisons between offices about how things were done in order that a COE did not deviate from what other COEs were doing (M. Yung, Reflective Memo, December 3, 2020).

The symbolic frame provides a platform for understanding the organization of the COE as an "ongoing drama that entertains, creates meaning, and portrays the organization to itself and outsiders" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 299). Each COE has a common structure; specific processes, such as meetings, planning, evaluation, and bargaining; and attributes of power. Planning and meetings occur with no clear action plans, there is no measure of effectiveness or efficiency, and positive visibility of employees is key. The impressions and perceptions of the organization are emphasized and are often more important than the work itself. For example, during a meeting, one of my participants said of her superintendent, "and Anna is a stickler for how the County Office looks" (Beyoncé, Organizational Chart, September 15, 2020). Perhaps the reason perception is important could be explained through the Four I's Framework (Weiss, 1995).

The Power of the Institution

Weiss (1995) proposed that organizations maintained the aspects of interests, ideology, and information based on institutional rules and culture in her Four I's Framework. Weiss's framework complements the symbolic frame and the three perspective theory of culture to provide a comprehensive understanding of organizations such as the COE (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Martin, 2002). Weiss defines interest as self-interest, ideology as values, and the information as access to knowledge (Weiss, 1995). These three I's drive the rules and procedures

inherent in an organization that make up the institutional culture: the fourth I. Weiss's (1995) framework describes decisions as the "product of the interplay among ideology, interests, and information" within the institution (p. 577). Each of the participants found ways to navigate the barriers set up by the bureaucratic structures of the COE. While COEs set up departments in the hopes of achieving efficiency, the participants all found ways to bridge the divisions that arose. They found ways to collaborate with each other to achieve their goals, often without the knowledge of those with decision-making authority (Beyoncé, Observation 2, January 31, 2020). These necessary collaborative structures allowed for representation across departments to share information and interact with people who have similar values and want to achieve the same goals. Figure 32 illustrates the intersection of the three frames that represent the organizational culture of COEs.

The intersection of the three frameworks—Symbolic, Three Perspective Theory of Culture, and the Four I's—provides a deeper and broader understanding of the current study by providing a new framework for understanding how the organization and its people function (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Martin, 2002; Weiss, 1995). These frameworks, along with the findings of the study, lead to a new understanding of how those in COEs work within the structures of the organization to enact equity, as discussed in the next section.

Relentless Pursuit of Equity in Complex Educational Organizations

The portraits of equity leaders in COEs contained here highlight the past, present, and future of leadership in educational administrators. Sofia, Beyoncé, and Amelie were all impacted by their experiences with poverty and with society's impact on the socioeconomic structures of the students they served. These impacts were a call to action for social justice and responsiveness to students and communities. They continuously engaged in reflective action in order to maintain

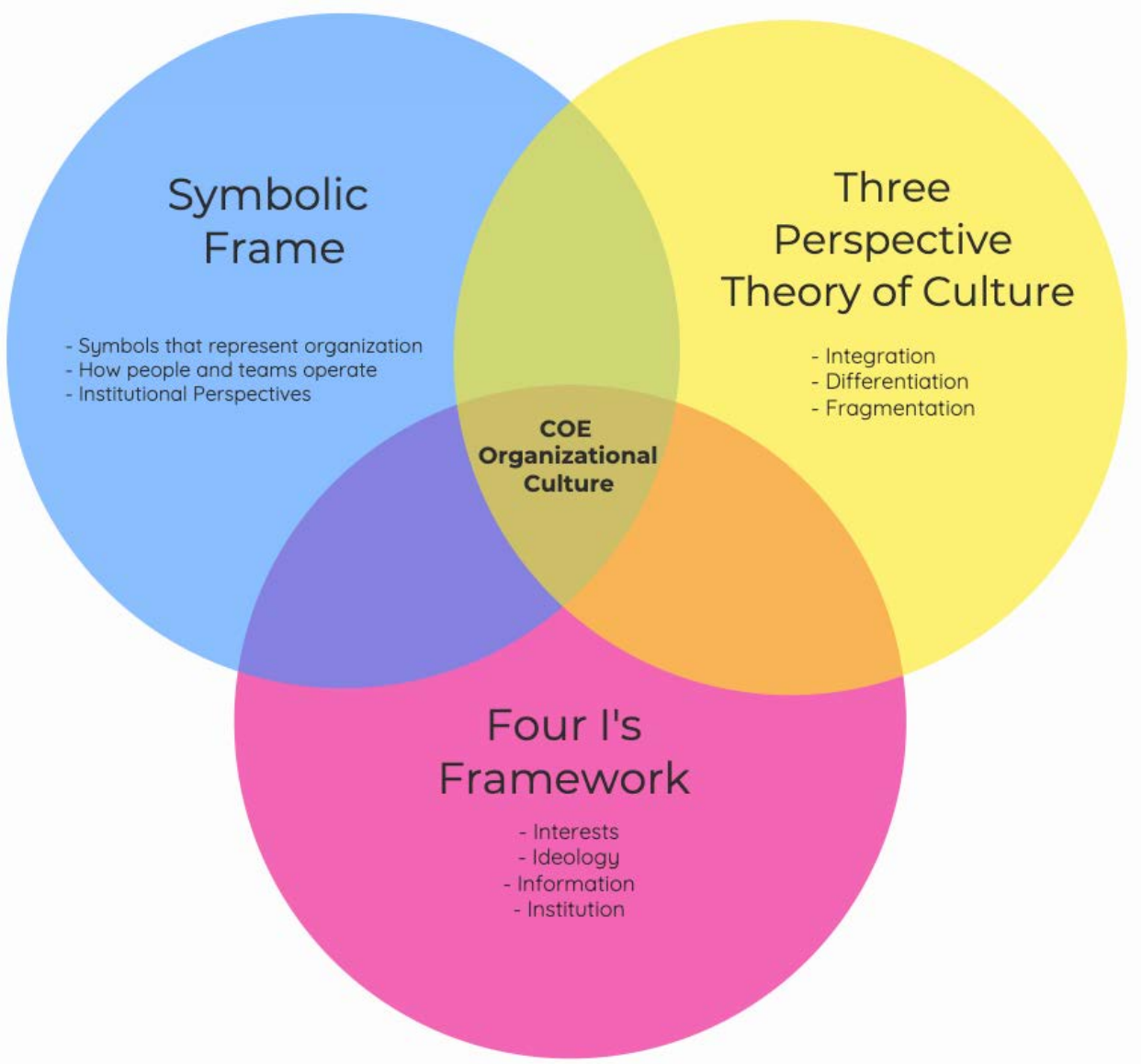


Figure 32. Intersection of the frames representing COE organizational culture.

themselves as equity leaders. They also straddle the edge of bureaucracy by working within it, seeking to understand it, and changing it from within. Similar to Weiss's framework of interaction between ideology, interests, information, and institution, the participants in this study navigate the organization of the COE to change the system (Weiss, 1995).

Sofia, Beyoncé, Amelie, and I are immersed in the organizational culture of the COE. There are some who say that we chose the work, and we chose where we work. But we would say that we were called to the field of education, and we stay in it to fight for those who cannot. The COE is the place where we thought we could best fight the good fight. From our vantage at the COE, we have access to district administrators and we hear about state-level decisions. Our relationships with people within the COE, with district administrators, and with state level leaders put us in a position where we could make a difference. We are allowed to continue our equity work uninhibited as long as it does not disrupt the organizational culture, upset our constituents, or impact the ambition of our superiors.

The idea that leaders within the COE must have certain qualities to support equity work, and that they strategically navigate the organization to support systems change, resulted in a new framework that illustrates these ideas (see Figure 33). The framework illustrated in Figure 33 shows that there is an intersection of compassionate leaders and the ways in which they work in order to navigate the bureaucratic structures of the COE. The intersection here results in what I call relentless progressives: individuals such as Sofia, Beyoncé, Amelie, and myself, who found each other and continue to do the equity work that we were called to do. We found ourselves working on issues of equity and were bound by our values and beliefs. We created a community among ourselves to support each other, collaborate, and sustain the equity work for the students who taught us how to support their needs. Our work and the ability to do the equity work we

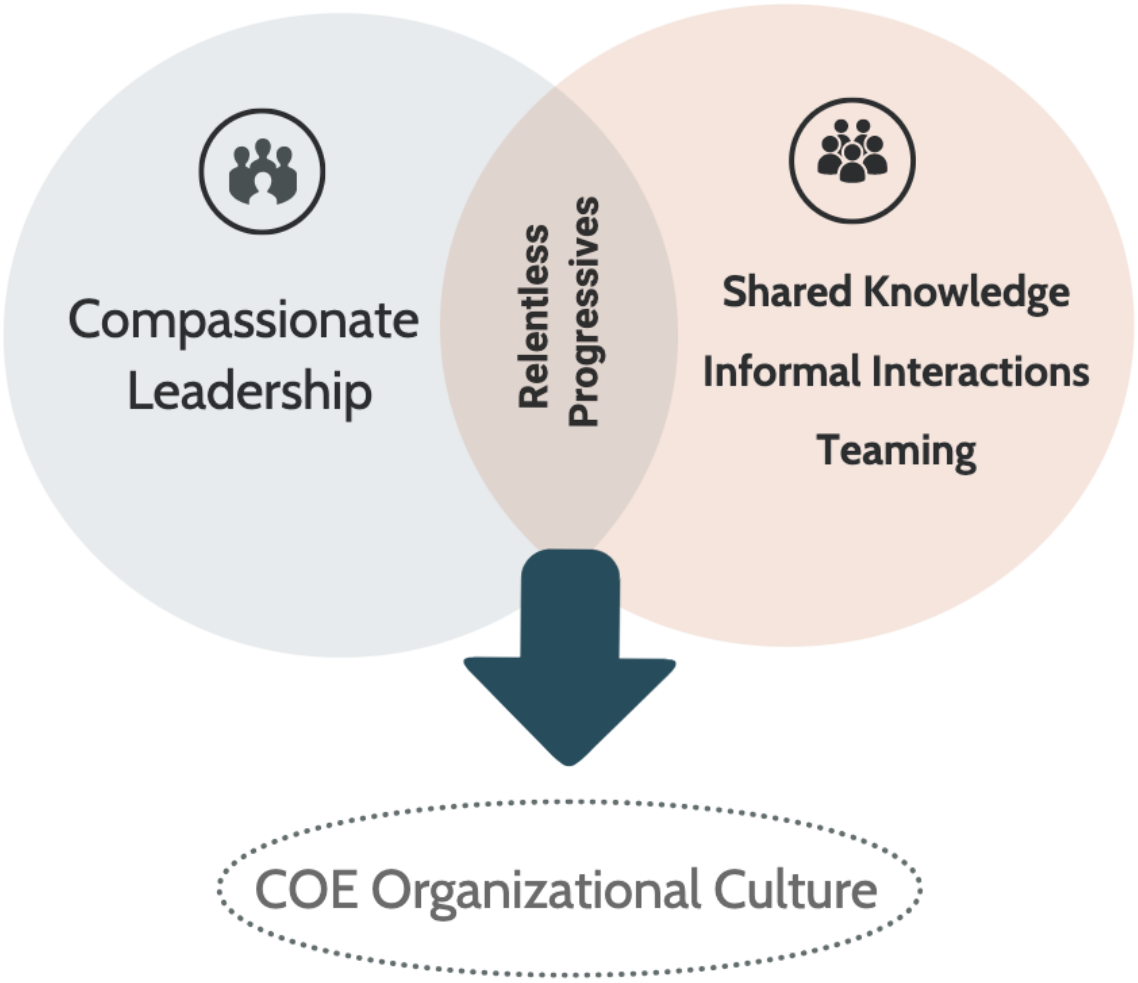


Figure 33. Relentless pursuit of equity impacts COE organizational culture.

wanted to do has been impacted by the organization and the values, beliefs, and customs of our COE. Understanding the COE through the lens of the symbolic frame, perspectives of culture, and the Four I's allows us to better understand how to navigate and seek the changes from within the organization to be able to do equity work effectively. Acting a role according to organizational expectations allows us to be in an organization focused on perception, but it also allows us to continue the equity work that is important to each of us.

The framework of transforming educational organizations to sustain equity incorporates the ideas of compassionate leadership and aspects of breaking down silos. The people within the organization relentlessly pursue equity and are considered more progressive than those who work within bureaucratic structures. The integration of developing shared knowledge, informal interactions, and teaming between compassionate leaders creates relentless progressives, and allows them to navigate the educational organizations that are bureaucratic in nature. These leaders may be seen as tempered radicals at times, but they are the people who, through collective impact, sustain change for equity.

Transforming educational organizations from bureaucratic entities that maintain systemic inequities requires a concerted effort by individuals within the system who are committed to change. These leaders share certain attributes of transformational equity leadership. They sustain the work by crossing organizational boundaries, seeking collaboration, and keeping the students who face these inequities at the core of their work. All of us were relentless in our pursuit of equity for marginalized students. Equity work is an uphill battle because the system was not set up to benefit all students (Evans, 2013). Not everyone within the system shared our beliefs, making us seem like radicals at times. However, seeking progressive change within an imperfect system requires constant monitoring and support, though not everyone shares our perspectives

(Kania et al., 2018). Without people like Sofia, Beyoncé, and Amelie, the work would be impossible because to do the work alone would cause us to admit defeat. We have found ways to navigate the system as relentless progressives, but we recognize that there is so much more that needs to be done. The following section explores the implications of the study on practice, policy, and further research.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

Within the educational community, we often hear the phrase, "That's the way we've always done it." Creating and sustaining transformative change within a bureaucratic system involves people who are willing to change the way things have always been done. Policy and practice implications discussed in this section provide recommendations for COEs focused on equitable outcomes for students.

Policy

The importance of policy, as Kendi (2019) suggests, is likened to removing the cancer of institutional, structural, and systemic racism in our educational organizations. Equity is the process by which people are treated differently in order that equality may be achieved (Kendi, 2019). He asserts that changing practice requires changing policy; it is the way to attack the underlying cause of issues of inequity. The findings from the study suggest that policy changes for equity within the COE require several actions. The Four I's framework, Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms, and double-loop learning model provide a way to understand the policy implications for enacting equity policy and practice (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Guajardo et al., 2016; Weiss, 1995).

First, the review and restructuring of organizational norms require understanding the people within the organization (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Guajardo et al., 2016; Weiss, 1995).

Leaders should spend time understanding the organizational values, interests, and knowledge of the people and gain insight from the people closest to the problems the organization is trying to solve. All of the portraits in the study examine how participants learned about the students in the community they served. They are in networks with school site staff, district administrators, state-wide workgroups, and professional organizations in their respective fields, enabling them to learn from people closest to the issues (Amelie, Work Caption, March 4, 2020).

Secondly, organizational norms incompatible with transformative equity practice should be addressed by changing incentive and reward systems, and by engaging in education and persuasion (Weiss, 1995). For example, I learned that the structures and policies in educational systems maintain the status quo in order that those who try to do equity work alone never get beyond the limited impact that a single person can make. The structure of the COE may inhibit people's ability to collaborate if silos are in place. Dismantling these silos, allowing for time to collaborate with each other, and shifting the paradigm of telling people what to do to are Dewey's (1938) ideas of co-constructing understanding through cross team learning. Creating opportunities to work together would better allow teams instead of individuals to tackle the work of inequities in the organization. The importance of equity as theory-in-use, the "theory that governs actions," is evident in the stories of the participants in the current study (Argyris & Schön, 1978, p.7). The portraits show how equity work is enacted by tempered radicals—those who "challenge the status quo, both through their intentional acts and also just by being who they are" (Meyerson & Scully, 1995, p. 586). Each of the participants in the study was actively involved in operationalizing equity in their work. They identified activities such as equity pauses to point out how systems affected students (Sofia, Work Caption, April 6, 2020).

Thirdly, decision-makers in a COE should reevaluate how authority is utilized to shape the equity work to engage cross-collaborative and collective teaming (Weiss, 1995). Those in the study who did the equity work in teams with shared leadership were able to achieve greater impact than those trying to do equity work individually. Therefore, it is important for a bureaucratic educational organization to strategically create an atmosphere for change with collaborative structures with shared authority and ability to make decisions as a team. It requires theory-in-action by a group of people dedicated to interrupting systemic barriers to equity and who have shared authority (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Changing the structure of the COE requires leadership that Freire (1970) calls *conscientização*, reflection in action that leads them to criticize what is and work to change it. It is necessary for managers within the COE to understand transformative equity leadership and social justice leadership to shape the equity work. Ultimately, COE leaders have to name inequities in COEs, districts, state, and federal educational organizations, and work together to dismantle the policies that sustain the existing inequities.

Finally, leadership requires humility to consider other ideas than what was previously accepted. If leadership has a true desire to understand the people within the organization and to value their expertise, they must agree that plans will change based on the values and needs of the people closest to the work. All the participants indicated that bureaucratic structures of the COE were maintained by the people with certain political power within the organization. The participants learned how to navigate the system to work for equitable outcomes without active support of COE leadership. Changing these structures would require an organization to transparently express a desire to change. Taking the action to do so fosters trust (Meyerson & Scully, 1995).

The results of the current study indicate that superintendents of COEs, COE boards of education, and the larger consortium of COEs across the state should consider reorganizing and changing the structure of the COE to prioritize opportunities for trust building by listening to a broad representation of their constituents and acting on their recommendations. Doing so would make a difference in how equity work is enacted, from an espoused theory to a theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1974). There is extensive opportunity for COEs to impact the micro level of school districts and the macro level of state and federal policy by collaborating, reviewing organizational structures, and considering the experiences of those closest to the issues. COEs must be aligned to equity work to affect change and overcome barriers to remove the cancer of institutional, structural, and systemic racism.

Practice

Practices change based on policy first, according to Kendi (2019), but practices also inform policy. The first impact of changing the structures and rules of the organization such as the COE would be what people do in practice. The administrators in the current study found ways around the bureaucracy that existed within the organization. They met with each other, shared information, and created communication between each other based on relationships that already existed. This intentional dialogue established trust (Freire, 1970). Administrators should not expect to work alone to support equitable practices within COEs. They should find people who share their values and beliefs, who hold similar ideals, and seek to institute change. Together, they could support collective impact as tempered radicals who change the system from within (Meyerson & Scully, 1995).

The study was conducted in two urban COEs: one of the largest in the state, and the other significantly smaller. They were close in proximity to each other. This context provided the

ability to understand the study participants and the internal impact of the organizational structure of the COE. Administrators in the study showed how shared leadership and authority based on trusting relationships shift the practices within the organization and allow for better alignment of the work (Freire, 1970). The portraits of the participants in the study suggest that those within the COE are best situated to address the organizational practices that inhibit equity work (Guajardo et al., 2016). They represent people within the organization who could work together relentlessly to find progressive ways to address equity issues. Working together as a collective, collaborative group, they could bring forth policy changes. It requires people who are committed to ongoing learning with each other, who take the time to learn about each other's stories, reflect with each other, and engage in equity work together (Freire, 1970; Guajardo et al., 2016; Khalifa et al., 2016; Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Additionally, decision-making should be a shared process that engages the voices of representative groups within the organization instead of through the ideas of a few leaders (Weiss, 1995).

The implications for practice were defined by the findings from the participants in the study. Building on relationships, collaboration, and understanding affirm the work that Sofia, Beyoncé, and Amelie are trying to do on a daily basis. The infusion of communication and shared leadership across their organizations would magnify their change efforts, potentially creating a bureaucratic system that supports equity-in-action and dismantles barriers to the work. Further research would support greater understanding and development of policy and practice.

Further Research

The current study highlights ways in which equity practices within COEs may be informed by understanding the stories of those closest to the problem (Guajardo et al., 2016). Administrators in COEs work within the confines of bureaucracy in order to change educational

systems that sustain inequitable outcomes for students. Taking the time to seek and understand the experiences of the people who are enacting equity in their work at the COE is a necessary step to supporting them in order to understand the impact of the bureaucratic practices that occur. The deep study and analysis using portraiture methodology provided a lens through which to fully understand the historical, biological, cultural, and sociological conditions that brought three participants to equity work in the COE. However, it is not only the administrators who could provide insight to the institutional culture of the organization. Sofia shared briefly about some of the staff on her team who were not allowed to join organization wide leadership meetings because of their role classification and the rules about who could be invited (Sofia, Organizational Chart, September 29, 2020). My interactions with different staff from the two COEs confirmed these experiences, with one of them stating that "doing things differently barely pushed the barriers even a millimeter" (M. Yung, Reflective Memo, July 29, 2020). Specifically, power was held in the hands of a few and equity was merely a symbolic idea within the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The participants of the study were people who had equity mindsets firmly in place. Further research might include those who do not seem to have similar mindsets to determine how and why they came to work at the COE, and whether there is potential for engaging them in equity work.

This Participant Action Research (PAR) study was conducted in two urban COEs. California has 58 COEs across the state with varying contexts. Some COEs serve extremely rural areas with a consortium of single school districts, while others serve large areas of densely populated urban schools. Study of COEs serving rural areas should be considered in order to determine how equity work is enacted with smaller organizations. Other methodology might be considered for a PAR study of this nature in order to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Additionally, the research questions may have to be adjusted and methodology might include options for anonymity.

Portraiture methodology may be an effective way to study those who work in other complex educational organizations such as school districts, and state departments of education in order to understand the organizational impacts on equity work within their systems. The reflective process of the study supported the ability of participants to consider their systems and the conditions of the organization that affected their ability to enact equity (Kania et al., 2018). The implications of the current study indicate that it is important to spend time understanding the experiences that led administrators to their work in education, determine why they stay, and ascertain how they sustain equity work (Aguilar, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2016). This study was conducted by studying individuals and analyzing data across participants. Another way to understand complex educational organizations and the people within them doing equity work is by studying groups and teams within and across COEs. Engaging participants in co-practitioner research would allow for constructed learning about the organization that would support a collaborative effort for change (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Application of the framework that emerged from the study through professional learning opportunities across COEs would support transferability of the findings. Utilizing the framework to understand various complex educational organizations would develop understanding of organizational systems of leaders to shift how they work in order to support equitable student outcomes. The portraits contained in the current study reflect the experiences of those who are committed to equity work for marginalized populations of young people. They are examples of how individuals are shaped by their experiences, and how these translate to their equity work.

Reflective Action: My Leadership Journey

I decided in fourth grade that I was going to be a math teacher when I grew up. My mother insisted that I had decided to be a school principal. Perhaps that is what my mother hoped for me to be. It was no matter, though, because I had such a hard time with Algebra in the eighth grade, I decided I no longer wanted to teach math. I would just be a regular teacher. Keeping my eye on that goal, I purposefully selected internships in college that allowed me to work with children. My experiences with the parents of the children I worked with shifted my goal yet again. The amount of pressure the parents were able to exert on my program caused me to change course. I decided I was going to get as far away from teaching as I possibly could and landed a position in Human Resources for an internet-based publishing company. Less than two years later I was laid off because of the dot com bust of the early 2000s. Looking for any job that I would be qualified for, I found myself talking one weekend to a hiring manager for Head Start programs in our region. By the end of that conversation, I was a lead teacher for a Head Start preschool program.

Teaching in Head Start programs fulfilled me. It opened my eyes to a community and people that I had never interacted with. The children I taught came from diverse backgrounds that were very different from the one I grew up in. I could not fathom the traumas that some of my students faced on a daily basis, but I had found my purpose. I loved teaching preschoolers in a job that allowed me to focus on their entire well-being, not just for academics. A few years later, I was tapped to pilot a statewide universal preschool program. I did not want or need that job. When they offered me the position I remember talking to my mentor about it. She gave me a piece of advice that has helped me navigate my career since: “If you can move forward knowing you can always go back, take the opportunity.”

I took the opportunity and started working in an inclusive preschool program, not knowing what I was doing. I realized that I was part of an entrenched system that did not provide adequate support to the students that I served, nor did it provide me the support that I needed to teach these students with significant needs in an inclusive setting. I went back to school so I could learn how to advocate for my students and I started asking for meetings with my district administrators to try and find ways to collaborate. I was able to talk to the administrators separately, but one of them did not want to hear what the other had to say. Hours of conversations resulted in the end of the program because of a shift in funding, and an offer for me to take a step back to teaching in a regular preschool program. Not giving up, I approached the director of special education to determine if anything else could be done, and I left her office that day with an offer to teach in an elementary special day class.

The next decade of my career led me from a special day class to a position as an inclusion specialist for an entire school, then back to revamp a preschool program that allowed for a continuum of placements for students with varying needs, then to a district-wide position as an inclusion and program specialist, and finally to the County Office of Education (COE). During the last five years of my employment at the COE, I changed positions four times. My path has never been direct—I never know which direction I am headed or where my destination will be. Throughout it all I have learned to "act as if it were possible to radically transform the world" for our students with the most significant needs: all the time, and with people who share my vision (Davis, 2014).

Kindred Spirits

When I first started working at the COE, the specific values and beliefs that led me to work in the field of education seemed to be dissonant with the theories-in-use of working within

it. The distance that I had from daily interaction with children seemed to exacerbate these feelings and caused me to question whether I had made the right decision. However, I met kindred spirits at the COE who seemed to share the same mindset—that we should work to change the educational system for marginalized youth. The internal conflict and relationship with like-minded colleagues initiated my journey of studying complex educational organizations and their impact on equity work by the people who work in them.

Within the first few weeks of joining the COE, I met several veteran educators who took me under their wing. While I struggled with adapting to the loss of student interaction, these kindred spirits invited me to lunch, shared their stories with me, and supported my work. We created a network that allowed us to share information about each other's work and identified avenues for collaboration. We found that we shared similar experiences in our early careers and bonded over the systemic issues we saw from our vantage point of the COE. We commiserated over the rules, processes, and procedures purportedly made in the name of equity but confounding our understanding of it. Finding each other and sharing our stories kept us grounded in our core values and the equity work that we wanted to do.

Organizational Theory

Understanding organizational theory and studying the work of equity leaders within COEs informed and supported my leadership growth. I have become an organizational nerd. Every decision that is communicated through our organization now passes through an analysis of how the organization might have affected the decision. I consider who has power, what the politics are, and how I might strategize around them to achieve my goals. My thinking has changed from strategically getting what I need to do equity work as an individual, to strategically thinking about who I can collaborate with in order to do equity work together (Meyerson &

Scully, 1995). People come to me so that we can "talk strategy" when we see barriers to projects we know would provide better outcomes for historically marginalized students. I no longer look at the organization as just a chart of who's who. Instead, I see what the titles and roles mean, who I need to go to if I want help to move a decision forward, and who I need to meet with to sustain the tiring work of considering student outcomes at the center.

Equity work must be aligned across an organization to create sustainable systems to change inequitable student outcomes. Collaboration with others across divisions, across county offices, and across school districts to support equity efforts is more effective than competing with each other. I've learned through organizational theory that there are structures and policies in place within educational systems and organizations that maintain the status quo so that those who try to do equity work alone never get beyond the impact that single person can make (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Changing these structures and policies are necessary to allow for collective impact. These alliances would help us to keep going, limit the level of frustration, and also support sustaining equity work beyond a single individual within the organization. Bateson (1994) states that "esoteric knowledge—knowledge that is not shared—is one of the sources of power over others" (p. 201). I have seen some leaders share knowledge with everyone and I have seen others hold knowledge among themselves. Withholding information seemed to wield a semblance of control and power. I learned from watching the differences of the actions of these leaders that sharing knowledge allows for collaboration and shared understanding. Transparency in decision-making is rare. I've watched as leaders have made decisions about and for the organization that do not change the systemic issues within, an action that maintains equity as an espoused theory. In this way, leaders continue to hold the power within the organization. While there is a certain amount of pride in having specific

expertise, there is no way to ensure that equity work is done unless that expertise is shared with a group of people. I see no value in withholding information if all of us are working toward the same goal.

Agency

Prior to engaging in the learning over the last two years as part of the study, I made assumptions about how people learn and what people understood. My job required me to create opportunities for ongoing professional learning for district staff at every level, and I am ashamed to say that I used to assume that they needed the information that only I could provide. The process of constructing research by focusing on the experiences of the participants using an iterative process, taught me that co-constructing learning is an important aspect of the research process (Freire, 1970; Little, 2006). It is also necessary for transformation of the inequitable systems inherent in our education systems. However, I can only co-construct learning with people by spending the time to get to know them and their stories (Guajardo et al., 2016).

The results of the study supported the idea that I have agency, and that others in positions similar to mine also have agency to do equity work. Building shared knowledge is part of the agency that I have as an administrator in a COE as evidenced by the results in Chapter 5. How and when we choose to participate in opportunities for collaboration was also determined through analyzing the results of reflective memos about leadership. Ongoing collaboration with equity warriors in COEs also enabled us to create collective impact by sharing information, creating alignment, and strategizing about how to navigate the COE system in order to change practices from within (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Working with and having conversations with people to support our shared understanding and leadership for equity is part of transforming educational organizations to sustain equity (Freire, 1970). Finally, the reflective practices that I

engage in as a practitioner support what I learn and how I learn as well as the actions I take (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Data collected through these analyses could inform future work and support collaborative efforts for systemic change. This data also supports equity as theory-in-use versus an espoused theory (Argyris, 1976).

Reflection

I also learned how to ground my theories and actions in empirical data. I became diligent about documenting the different ways people interacted within the COE, political actions that I saw, and organizational changes. My colleagues would laugh at me as I collected "data" from our conversations that I would memo, and then code. I provided commentary during our informal, virtual gatherings about organizational changes that I had learned during my study. The skills that I learned through conducting my study supported the strategic conversations of my colleagues as they sought to promote the equity projects that required collaborative effort. We discussed different angles of the work, whose support we would need, and how to remove barriers for the work to move forward.

My leadership journey was a reflective process in understanding and coming to terms with working in a complex educational organization with complex people. A colleague recently noted the changes she saw reflected in me as a result of engaging in this research study: deep reflection of equity and how it is enacted, the pursuit of empirical data to address issues, the understanding of how an organization works, developing alliances for collaboration with like-minded colleagues, and pushing for co-construction of learning when providing professional learning opportunities. Throughout the process I learned from each of the participants as they learned from me (Amelie, Flipgrid, October 7, 2020). We continue to learn, as we continue to support each other as relentless progressives.

Portraits of Relentless Progressives

My career in education was not one that my family could brag about in a culture where prestige was conferred upon those with certain careers. Education was not one of them. It would have been fine if I had gone the typical route and become a teacher, and then a principal, like my mother wanted. Instead, my parents never knew what to tell family and friends about what I did, or what I taught. I didn't even tell my family that I was going to school to learn how to serve students with special needs until I had finished because of the perception held within our culture about people with disabilities. I was afraid they would not let me finish school. When I told them that I was going back to school again for my doctorate, I expected them to ask me why. Instead, for the first time in my life, my father told me he was proud of me. You see, we don't talk about our feelings in my family, and I had never heard my parents say they were proud of me.

My journey in education is not over, nor have I reached my destination. I represent generations of women who were expected to marry and raise a family instead of going to school or having a career. My mother graduated from high school, both my grandmothers never made it beyond elementary school, and my great-grandmothers never went to school. Despite this, they all protected my desire to learn and serve others through my education. They are part of my story; part of the reason I am a relentless progressive. There are those within my family who do not understand why I fight for equity for my students, why I am so "liberal" or "radical." There is an old Chinese proverb that helps us understand relentless progressives: 人心隔肚皮, "To see one's heart, you have to look beneath the skin." Each of the portraits illustrated in the study teaches us to look deep into a person's story, into the heart of who they are, to discover their passion for equity work. This is where you will find the reason for their work and their ability to persevere.

Conclusion

The stories contained within this study are the stories of women who continue to fight the good fight. They are people who are filled with heart, who deeply understand the stories of young people, and who advocate to ensure that young people have a fighting chance to live as contributing members of their communities. They are relentless in their pursuit, and they may seem more progressive than their colleagues in their educational organizations. Regardless, they continue to seek others like them to collaborate and engage with them in the work. They are not bound by the structures in which they work. They find ways to exert their agency. They maintain themselves through their relationships with those who have similar mindsets. They will not be deterred.

Relentless progressives come to the work at COEs in California navigating the tension of the systems at play. We juggle the responsibilities that we have, while striving to determine ways to get around the barriers that may prevent us from enacting the equity work that is integral to who we are. The deep study of equity leaders in COEs shows the ability that we have to make a difference even when stymied by the bureaucracy that we encounter. We find ways to stand together, unified by our passion to serve. We are shaped by our experiences, and we seek to transform an education system to ensure that marginalized youth are not an afterthought, but deeply centered in our work. We are relentless progressives.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
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Notification of Amendment Approval

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Mary Yung
CC: Matthew Militello
Date: 12/21/2020
Re: Ame1 UMCIRB 19-001611
UMCIRB 19-001611
Equity Portraits of County Office Managers

Your Amendment has been reviewed and approved using expedited review on 12/18/2020. It was the determination of the UMCIRB Chairperson (or designee) that this revision does not impact the overall risk/benefit ratio of the study and is appropriate for the population and procedures proposed.

Please note that any further changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a Final Report application to the UMCIRB prior to the Expected End Date provided in the IRB application. If the study is not completed by this date, an Amendment will need to be submitted to extend the Expected End Date. The investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Description
Study expected end date extended to 6/30/2021

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: CODEBOOK

CATEGORY	CODE	DEFINITION/EXPLANATION	Source
collaboration	conversations	sharing ideas, chatting, talking, conversations	Open coding
collaboration	meetings	check-ins, time together, work together	Open coding
collaboration	meetings	meeting together, rep diff divisions, breakdown silos, merge work, work together, planning	Open coding
collaboration	information	share information, communicate, learn from each other	Open coding
collaboration	teaming	cohesion, open, flexible, adaptive	Open coding
collaboration	changing practice	doing something different (like equity pause), doing something different than what COE was trained on, additional work taken on together (book chat)	Open coding
collaboration	learning together	study together, develop new understanding, empathy interviews	Shields (2011) p. 3
collaboration	create resources	professional development, protocols	Open coding
collaboration	brainstorm	working together to develop new ideas	Open coding
collaboration	shared leadership	people take turns, united, same level, common purpose, team, community	Shields (2011) p. 3
collaboration	interactions with like-minded people	people with similar mindset, meeting together, maintaining relationships	Shields (2011) p. 3
collaboration	village	working in community, supporting each other, helping each other, similar mindset	Open coding
collaboration	disrupt silo	meeting together, rep diff divisions, breakdown silos, merge work	Open coding
collaboration	transparency	honest communication, trust, enthusiasm	Open coding
collaboration	support	leadership support, not upper management but from direct supervisor	Open coding
internal work	outreach	reach out to districts to check if they have needs	Open coding
internal work	lack of decisions	ability to make decisions, fear of making the wrong decision, needing to check with multiple people to make decisions	Open coding

emotions	love	healing, self-love, heart, love for people	Open coding
emotions	love/care	attention, responsibility, obligation, motivation, love,	Open coding
emotions	stress	feeling of pressure from outside force	Open coding
emotions	upset	frustration, annoyance, mad, upset, overwhelmed	Open coding
emotions	fear	worry, scared, anxious	Open coding
emotions	exhaustion	tired, exhausted from fight,	Open coding
emotions	logic	free from emotion, intellectual	Open coding
org structure	hierarchy	levels, processes, titles, exclusionary practices	Scott & Davis (2016)
org structure	bureaucracy	processes (check boxes, paperwork), rules, control, fear of change, fear driven, micromanage	Scott & Davis (2016)
org impact	feedback	surface praise, good work, great job	Open coding
org impact	interference	pushback or administrative block, stopping the work	Open coding
org impact	representing stakeholders	those closest to the problem, students, stakeholders,	Guajardo, et al. (2016)
org impact	expectations	management, monitoring	Open coding
org impact	sustainability	work based on person vs. system, when person leaves the work is not carried on, leadership support, lack of guidance, lack of direction	Open coding
org impact	interest	lack of interest, too much interest, basic knowledge	Open coding
org impact	agency	ability to do work, freedom to make decisions, no barrier	Open coding
org impact	information	degree of knowledge of what is going on, learnings	Open coding
org impact	politics	keeping information, getting ahead	Bolman & Deal (2017)
org impact	lack of support	lack of knowledge of what's going on, understanding of purpose, lack of alignment, support, inhibit equity work	Open coding
org impact	division	silos, different departments, blame, stay in lane	Scott & Davis (2016)
org impact	authority	ability to make decisions (or lack thereof)	Open coding

COVID	trauma	remembered events, memories, causes anxiety, depression	Open coding
COVID	stress	emotional toll, trauma, suffering, loss (academic, social), mental health	Open coding
COVID	work	expectations, working more, impact of work from home	Open coding
COVID	access	resource availability	Open coding
COVID	decisions	bringing kids back to school, when to return to office	Open coding
addressing student needs during COVID	check ins	conversations with kids, communicating, engaging	Open coding
addressing student needs during COVID	connecting	reaching out to families, availability of staff, relationship	Freire (1970)
differences	looks	how people see each other, what they look like	Open coding
differences	language	languages other than English, ways of communicating	Open coding
differences	community	family community, ontology, importance of family, connections to family, who is part of the family, culture, ecology, relationship	Guajardo, et al. (2016)
differences	race	seeing color, different races, mixed races,	Open coding
differences	ability/disability	blind, "mentally retarded",	Open coding
differences	belonging	whether or not someone fits in	Open coding
differences	code switching	person of color (POC), learning to blend, fit societal rules	Open coding
differences	privilege	skin color allowances, ability to risk	Shields (2011) p. 5
differences	student self-view	effects of bias, implicit bias, culturally relevant	Open coding
differences	student behavior	compliance, cultural, engagement, regulation	Open coding
poverty	market people	people who were very poor, different from family, children without parents, government reliant, working class, class system	Open coding

poverty	people who live outside	people who were very poor, different from family, children without parents, government reliant, working class, class system	Open coding
poverty	orphanage	people who were very poor, different from family, children without parents, government reliant, working class, class system	Open coding
poverty	no resources	lack of food, clothing, money, resources	Open coding
poverty	low SES	poor, Mexican kids at border, urban, low income	Open coding
poverty	welfare	people who were very poor, different from family, children without parents, government reliant, working class, class system	Open coding
poverty	blue collar	people who were very poor, different from family, children without parents, government reliant, working class, class system	Open coding
poverty	poor	differences in resources, system of class	Open coding
supports	commitment	united, shared purpose, dedication, responsibility	Shields (2011) p. 5
supports	advocate	notice, pay attention, use position to support	Shields (2011) p. 3
supports	home visits	going to the community, meeting families where they were	Open coding
trauma	stress	relating to trauma	Open coding
equity work	policy	policy and mandates, procedure, practice, structure, systems, MTSS	Open coding
equity work	equity pause	stop and reflect on the equity issue, investigate equity issue, simulation about what happens to kids	Open coding
equity work	acknowledging inequity	intent vs. impact	Open coding
equity work	conversations/dialogue	talk about what is happening to kids, simulation, take risks	Open coding
equity work	reflect on belief/mindset	examine bias, beliefs, mindset, assumptions, perspective	Argyris & Schon (1996)
equity work	initiatives	new ideas to support equity work	Open coding

equity work	practice of sorting kids	may be positive or negative, dependent on whether student supports are provided and what happens to students when identified, SPED ID, gifted programs,	Open coding
equity work	supporting change	change of mindsets, beliefs, building systems,	Shields (2011) p. 5
equity work	low SES	concrete things that help people with equity work (protocols, readings, PD, etc.)	Open coding
equity work	speaking for others	speak up, speak out, on behalf of people who cannot, using position, advocate	Shields (2011) p. 3
equity work	consider race	talk about racial issues, white fragility	Open coding
equity work	underserved kids	kids of color, "Bayside kids," poor kids, Latinx	Open coding
equity work	acknowledge bias and privilege	self-awareness, journey, ally, humble, authentic	Shields (2011) p. 5
equity work	negative responses	pushback, discomfort, defensiveness, question purpose,	Open coding
equity work	community	going to the community, learning about community, learning about students, partnering with families, student voice	Guajardo, et al. (2016)
equity work	develop understanding	interview people closest to problem, look at processes, analyze data	Open coding
equity work	centering	putting students, specific student groups at the center of the work that needs to be done	Open coding
equity work	"drive"	focus on students, families, children, purpose for equity work	Shields (2011) p. 5
equity work	equity definition	common understanding	Open coding
equity work	provide resources	concrete things that help people with equity work (protocols, readings, PD, etc.), time for reflection, building resources	Open coding
equity work	school to prison	disrupt school to prison pipeline	Open coding
equity work	justice	doing what is right vs. wrong, making the choice	Shields (2011) p. 3
equity work	surface equity	black history month, multi-cult week, food, trainings (spray and pray)	Open coding

equity work	system work	impact students, build systems, measures, impact system	Open coding
equity work	cause discomfort	push buttons, have difficult conversations, speak mind, conversations about race	Open coding
equity work	access	resources, availability, having what others have	Open coding
external supports	planning	professional learning, DA, coaching, feedback, training, learning sessions	Open coding
external supports	review results	make connections with data, suspension, attendance, placement	Open coding
external supports	understanding district context	adapted to districts, individualized, for districts and COE programs, different from other bureaucratic organizations	Open coding
external supports	care	care, people oriented, help, relationship, partnership	Freire (1970)
external supports	serve	provide services, make people happy, don't upset constituents	Open coding
external supports	perception	importance of how COE looks	Open coding
external supports	requests	district requests for support, direct support, direct contact, funding, cost recovery	Open coding
external supports	external agencies	community partnerships, DCFS, public health, social services,	Open coding
external supports	reform	school reform, turnaround, fix, failing	Tyack & Cuban (1995)
student groups	black, AA	black or African American	Open coding
student groups	ELs	school based identified English learners	Open coding
student groups	unduplicated pupils	homeless, foster youth	Open coding
student groups	kids not served	incarcerated youth, pregnant teens, low SES	Open coding
student groups	SPED	identified for special education, students with IEPs	Open coding
student groups	POC	person of color, anyone that does not identify as white	Open coding
accountability	outcomes	grad rates, how students perform based on data	Open coding

accountability	data	facts and figures gathered for analysis and accountability	Open coding
accountability	high quality instruction	rigorous instruction based on state standards	Open coding
support for students	small group instruction	ELD, designated ELD, targeted (TIG)	Open coding
support for students	student needs	based on assessment, right for kids, what kids need, access	Open coding
support for students	humanity	common person, honest, working people,	Open coding
support for students	strength based	assets, beautiful	Open coding
support for students	space for learning	utopia, refuge, safe	Tyack & Cuban (1995)
attributes of equity leadership	outreach	home visits	Open coding
attributes of equity leadership	social justice	wanting to help, commitment, passionate, care, "drive", fairness, the "why", service	Shields (2010) p. 579, Selznick (1949)
attributes of equity leadership	fighting spirit	fight for equity, demand rights for those who can't, demand for students, voice, amplify, advocate	Shields (2011) p. 3
attributes of equity leadership	relationship	trust, no judgement	Freire (1970)
attributes of equity leadership	appreciation	understanding	Open coding
attributes of equity leadership	management	provide guidance, organization, provide info, clarity	Kotter (2001)
attributes of equity leadership	feedback	accepting and receiving feedback	Open coding
attributes of equity leadership	conversation/ dialogue	hard conversations, take risks	Open coding

attributes of equity leadership	representation	leaders who look like "me"	Open coding
attributes of equity leadership	asset mindset	wholistic, whole person, SEL, emotions, passion, interest	Open coding
attributes of equity leadership	relational	connect people, develop relationships, create community, connection	Freire (1970), Guajardo, et al. (2016)
attributes of equity leadership	self-care	breathing, yoga, mindfulness	Open coding
attributes of equity leadership	team	shared leadership, commitment	Open coding
attributes of equity leadership	self-awareness	examination of bias, vulnerability, journey, humanity, humility, self-reflect	Open coding
attributes of equity leadership	build capacity	delegate, build leadership, build ability, support	Open coding
attributes of equity leadership	integrity	honesty, true to self, boundary	Open coding
reflection	review	rethink, change, revise, think	Open coding
reflection	document	take notes	Open coding
reflection	observe	predict behavior, respond,	Open coding
reflection	conversation/ dialogue	talk to people, share ideas, plan,	Open coding
reflection	question	ask questions, learn, of others, of self	Open coding
reflection	mental model	belief system, reflect on belief system,	Open coding
reflection	trainings and professional learning	seek professional growth, learning new skills, research	Open coding
reflection	ongoing learning	rethink, change, revise, think, in the moment, constant, process, introspection, reflect on reflecting, reflect on belief system	Argyris & Schon (1996)
reflection	space	time, safety, space,	Open coding