ABSTRACT

Myra Quadros Meis, CULTIVATING BRAVE SPACE: HOW NETWORKS FORTIFY SCHOOLS LEADERS TO ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS FOR BLACK YOUTH (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2021.

School leaders regularly receive district mandates with little support or opportunities to engage the community that the policy is meant to serve. In a participatory action research (PAR) project and study, I analyzed how school leaders made decisions and took actions to address the persistent academic opportunity gap between Black students and their White and Asian counterparts. With four school leaders from three San Francisco middle schools, who participated as Co-Practitioner Researchers in an equity-centered professional learning community (EC-PLC), we had regular meetings over three cycles of inquiry. We co-developed a brave space that included pedagogy of care and authentic space for vulnerability, trust, and reflection. We planned, co-facilitated, and gathered data from Student and Family Wisdom Circles using Community Learning Exchange (CLE) methodologies. In each school, the staff met with Black students and parents to hear how Black students and families experienced schooling. School leaders used evidence from each cycle of inquiry to inform subsequent actions and gained confidence in their ability to be equity leaders. Findings indicate that transformative, culturally responsive leaders need a brave space with outside facilitation in order to authentically reflect on their power and privilege and build racial literacy, take risks, and make sustainable change. When leaders ask questions of constituents with the intent to build relationships, strengthen community, and deepen understanding, school leaders' beliefs and actions shift (Guajardo et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018). The framework for culturally responsive school leadership that resulted from our work is a support for school leaders interested in changing their practices as social justice leaders.

CULTIVATING BRAVE SPACE: HOW NETWORKS FORTIFY SCHOOL LEADERS TO ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS FOR BLACK YOUTH

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Myra Quadros Meis

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by

Myra Quadros Meis

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF DISSERTATION:_____
Matthew Militello, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER:_____
David Siegel, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER:_____
Lawrence Hodgkins, EdD

COMMITTEE MEMBER:_____
Lynda Tredway, MA

CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP:

_____
Marjorie Ringler, EdD

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL:

_____
Paul Gemperline, PhD

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CHAPTER 1: NAMING AND FRAMING FOCUS OF PRACTICE

This is not a small voice you hear this is a large voice coming out of these cities.
This is the voice of LaTanya. Kadesha. Shaniqua.
This is the voice of Antoine. Darryl. Shaquille.
Running over waters navigating the hallways of our schools spilling out
on the corners of our cities and no epitaphs spill out of their river mouths.
This is not a small love you hear this is a large love,
a passion for kissing learning on its face.
This is a love that crowns the feet with hands that nourishes, conceives,
feels the water sails mends the children,
folds them inside our history where they toast more than the flesh
where they suck the bones of the alphabet and spit out closed vowels.
This is a love colored with iron and lace.
This is a love initialed Black Genius.
This is not a small voice you hear.
(Sanchez, 1995)

The educational system in the United States, like most aspects of a democracy, is well-intentioned. Our aims for educational accessibility and student achievement for all are laudable goals. However, as the poem describes, too many of our students do not fully feel a part of the schools they are in; their voices are diminished, instead of heard. Thus, we are missing an opportunity to draw on the genius of each student. Because our system has historically failed to meet the needs of all students, we need to re-examine how we teach Students of Color. I use the term and intentionally capitalize "Students of Color" as a grammatical move to reject the grammatical norm and move towards empowerment and social justice as Perez-Huber and Cueva (2012) suggest. Therefore, throughout this dissertation, I intentionally capitalize the terms "People of Color," "Students of Color," "Communities of Color," and "Families of Color." To clarify terminology, I use the term "African American" when referring specifically to the work of the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) because that is the term they use. In all other instances, I use the term "Black" because it is the term used most frequently in educational research and is my term of preference. Further, I use the term "achievement gap" when referring

to the work of SFUSD; I use the term "opportunity gap" as my preferred term as I believe, the adults, not the students, must do the work to improve outcomes for student populations who have been placed at risk by our school systems (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

The United States has a long history of attempting to address inequities. Court cases have been won (e.g., Brown v Board of Education of Topeka, 1954); policies enacted (e.g., California Proposition 58, 2016); and classroom practices altered (e.g., culturally linguistic response pedagogy). Yet, inequalities and inequities remain. The opportunity gap among Students of Color, specifically in urban schools, has become predictable. However, the outcomes are not rooted in fate, mysticism, or physics; they are created by humans. As such, they can be changed.

Despite years of best efforts, the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), like many urban districts across the country, has consistently failed its most vulnerable students. Across the nation, Black learners in both racially segregated and integrated schools have the lowest proficiency rates on standardized tests, highest absence rates, and disproportionate suspension rates (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Steele 2010). The participatory action research (PAR) project and study seeks to identify ways that school leaders can address the disparate treatment and experiences of Black youth in urban public schools. It began with the creation of a partnership of four co-practitioner researcher (CPR) school leaders at three different middle schools in SFUSD, with me as lead researcher. The leaders work at schools identified by the district as schools that underserve African American students. Through a mandate called **P**rofessional Capacity, **I**nstructional Guidance, **T**ransformative Mindsets, **C**ollaborative Culture, and **H**igh-Quality Staff, or PITCH, the district has charged schools to decrease the historical and/or persistent achievement gap among and within schools. The PAR project specifically focused on three schools identified as high equity gap or PITCH schools. The

PAR study addressed the following questions: What decisions and actions can school leaders at PITCH schools make to improve the academic and social-emotional learning of African American students? What role does collaborative engagement in an equity-centered professional learning community play on the decisions, actions, and commitments of these leaders?

In this chapter, I briefly summarize the PAR study by articulating the study background. Then I discuss the focus of practice of the PAR study, including the assets and challenges, purpose of the work, and the research questions. Finally, I address the significance of the project and the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Study Background

The California Department of Education (CDE) in July 2012 sent a formal notification to SFUSD about the significant disproportionality pursuant to the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for 2010- 2011. As a result, SFUSD hired a consultant to explore the root causes of the significant disproportionality. The final draft of the root cause analysis, presented to the SFUSD school board in February 2013 (CD-SIS Plan 2012-2013, n.d.), indicated a number of specific issues in special education and in SFUSD generally.
Relevant to the study, the report documented how African American students are over-represented in special education and, as a result, they are removed from mainstream courses at higher rates. The report indicated that the over-referral and the subsequent lower graduation rates of African American students may be influenced by the implicit bias of educators in schools. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the San Francisco Educators Alliance expressed urgency in addressing the identified inequities. The report became the catalyst for an action plan to address the experiences of African American students in SFUSD schools.

In 2012, SFUSD began to create supports to focus on increasing the academic achievement and social-emotional learning of African American students. In 2015, one such support, African American Alliance Leadership Initiative (AAALI), had the sole responsibility of improving the systems and structures at the district level to support increased African American student achievement performance. Despite their efforts, according to data collected through 2018, SFUSD continued to experience a persistent and broad achievement gap.

At the start of the 2018-2019 school year, the SFUSD superintendent recommitted the district to prioritizing the achievement and success of African American students. The superintendent named twenty elementary and middle schools that had significant achievement gaps with African American students underperforming when compared to grade level peers. Ten of the schools were identified as historically the lowest performing schools in the last fifteen years, and ten were identified as having a persistent gap (three years or more) between White and Asian students and African American students (California School Dashboard, 2018). Using a framework for school reform developed by Bryk et al. (2010), the district called on the twenty schools to focus on **P**rofessional Capacity, **I**nstructional Guidance, **T**ransformative Mindsets, **C**ollaborative Culture, and **H**igh-Quality Staff (PITCH) to address the persistent inequities in their schools. The requirements and deliverables for PITCH schools are described in more detail in Chapter 3.

In my role as a central office administrator, I provided academic college and career supports for middle and high school focal student populations. Several of the identified PITCH schools had programs that I supported before engaging in the PAR. I invited interested school leaders at PITCH schools to form an administrators' group, which we subsequently called an Equity-Centered Professional Learning Community (EC-PLC), to analyze the experiences of

Black students at their schools and collectively determine potential responses to address the PITCH components. Thus, we had contextual support for addressing the focus of practice, which I discuss next.

Focus of Practice: Data, Assets and Challenge

The need for this project and study is evident from the study background, the superintendent's PITCH mandate, and the data from the 2018 California School Dashboard. While I share disparate performance data, data alone do not change outcomes for Black students. At the onset, four school administrators in the district were committed to improving academic and social-emotional outcomes for Black students. Therefore, in the PAR project, the focus of practice was to examine how school leaders made decisions and took actions to address the persistent academic opportunity gap. In explaining the rationale for the focus of practice, data support the need for such a project and study.

Data Support Focus of Practice

The annual suite of assessment data presented as contextual support for the study is from the spring of 2018 (see Appendix D). I reviewed the district data in the areas of academic performance (in English Language Arts (ELA), and Mathematics), academic engagement (chronic absenteeism), and conditions and climate (indicated by suspension rate). In the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment, an annual statewide assessment for grades 3–8, Black students in SFUSD scored below standard and constituted one of the subgroups with the largest gap in the areas of academic performance (in ELA and Mathematics) compared to overall district performance.

The California data dashboard defined chronic absenteeism as the percentage of students in kindergarten through grade 8 who are absent 10% or more of the instructional days they were

enrolled (Retrieved from https://www.caschooldashboard.org). SFUSD had just over 38,000 students in kindergarten through grade 8. The chronic absenteeism rate for the overall group of students was 11.2%, a problematic rate compared to other districts. The chronic absentee rate for African American students in kindergarten through grade 8 was substantially higher at 34%.

The suspension rate is another variable that is used to examine disproportionality and includes the percentage of students in kindergarten through grade 12 who have been suspended at least once in a given school year. Students who are suspended multiple times are only counted once. In the 2017-18 school year, only 1.9% of all SFUSD students were suspended. However, African American students had a suspension rate of 8.7%, a rate higher than any other subgroup and higher than the district average.

As the district data indicates, in all categories or academic performance, academic engagement, and conditions and climate, SFUSD has not supported Black students. The achievement data for the three PITCH schools (see Appendix E) in the PAR study demonstrate data that is parallel to the district data; there is a large opportunity gap between school level proficiency and that of Black students.

Our examination of the quantitative data as evidence of the academic performance gap, academic engagement gap (attendance rates), and climate gap (suspension rates) between Black students and their White and Asian peers, revealed the urgency to address the intractability of the twin problems of underachievement and overrepresentation was apparent. To further discuss the focus of practice, I introduce the aim statement, a statement that shares the goal of what the PAR study hopes to achieve, as well as potential assets and challenges for the project.

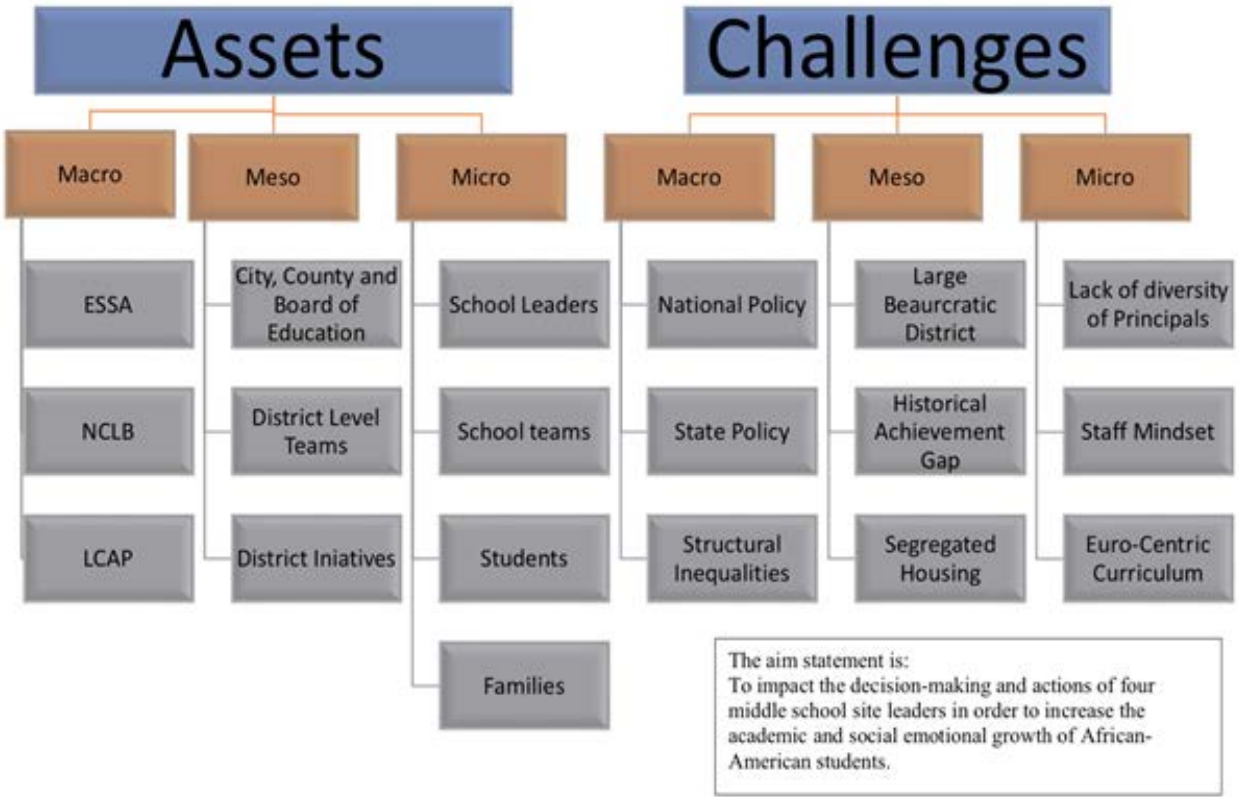
Analysis of Assets and Challenges

Rosenthal (2019) adapted the Bryk et al. (2017) fishbone tool to identify the assets in addition to the challenges at the macro (state and federal), meso (district), and micro (school) levels. In addressing the assets and challenges (see Figure 1), I present the aim statement for the study: To impact the decision-making and actions of four middle school site leaders in order to increase the academic and social emotional growth of African American students. Assets are essential considerations, in addition to challenges, as only including challenges is deficit language and is not solution-based.

Assets

Several identified assets supported the focus of practice. The school leaders and I built on the macro assets of policies highlighting focal student groups, the meso assets of the district articulating and enacting an equity vision, and micro assets of the schools, specifically, listening to Black students and families, who provided significant input on the project.

At the macro level, assets for this project included education policy at the federal and state level. Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) stressed the need to close the achievement gap. At the state level, the policy was augmented by the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), which provided equitable resources to districts to address achievement gaps. All three policies created accountability expectations for historically underserved student populations (such as Black students). A goal of ESSA was to better prepare all students for college and career. NCLB enforced accountability and emphasized the inequitable education Students of Color received across the country. The California LCAP positively influenced the need to provide more attention and equitable resources to marginalized



Note. (Adapted from Bryk et al., 2017; Rosenthal, 2019).

Figure 1. Fishbone identifying assets and challenges with the focus of practice.

Students of Color. These policies, like the PITCH mandate, signal to school districts that they need to serve vulnerable student populations better.

The meso assets included the SFUSD school board, district level teams, and district initiatives. These centralized supports to all schools in the district are tasked to allocate resources to schools with the highest needs. Although school leaders felt challenged by the school board, district level teams, and district initiatives, I identified these as assets because they articulated concrete support for efforts to improve the achievement of Black students in SFUSD. For example, the SFUSD school board, in partnership with the superintendent, prioritized a call to action to improve the academic performance and social emotional learning of African American students through the PITCH initiative. The PITCH initiative itself, as a district initiative, was an asset as it provided direct support and accountability to twenty identified schools and provided internal leverage for the PAR project.

The micro levels were the three PITCH middle school sites, the school leaders, teachers and school teams, and students and families. The four school leaders and administrative teams had an urgency and desire to focus on the academic and social-emotional growth of Black students. Their commitment was evidenced by professional development plans, leadership team agendas, and voluntary participation in this PAR project. The schools were already addressing the PITCH initiative before I connected with them about the PAR study. Each school had a climate team or leadership team that focused on Black students as a priority for team agendas. The school leaders, with their school teams, referred to the school data to make informed decisions about school improvement. Other essential assets were the schools' Black students and families. The students and families offered their knowledge, experiences, and resources. They know best what Black students need. Hearing from students and their families was an essential

part of this PAR project. And, as we moved through the project, an unexpected crisis altered our actions to connect with families in ways that otherwise might never have happened. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis of Spring 2020 propelled the principals into closer contact with Black families and students, and the relationships forged in this situation contributed to our collective abilities to act on our principles in the last two cycles of inquiry.

Challenges

Despite the many assets available to address the focus of practice, significant challenges remained. At the macro level, educational policy, lack of funding, as well as neoliberal and market-driven solutions, were challenges related to this project. Neoliberal and market-driven solutions negatively impact public education. These solutions combine economics, social structures, political movements, and education with an attempt show that this integration is good for public education. The result are inequalities and marginalization policies within the educational system had negative impacts on the quality of teaching (Nasir et al., 2016).

Another challenge came from competing state mandates that were often unfunded. For example, seventeen years of accountability, as a result of the federal and state No Child Left Behind remedies, seriously disrupted our ability to address what should have been the opportunity to learn standards that were never enacted with the standards movement of the 1990s (Labaree, 2008). Limited Title I federal funding for targeted groups led to band-aid solutions that had never addressed systemic issues. Simultaneously, the federal administration of 2016-2020 decreased federal attention to and funding to for public education.

Several challenges at the meso level for the PAR study influenced the project and study. First, SFUSD is a large urban district with a corresponding large bureaucracy. As a result, SFUSD has had challenges with moving policy to practice in district-to-school alignment,

communication, and consistency. Working in a large district often means that departments are siloed, and supports to school sites are exceptionally slow. Secondly, SFUSD's historical data showed a long-term opportunity gap. For example, in the area of academic achievement alone, data demonstrate that, in the last three decades, "SFUSD's achievement gap based on race has fluctuated but not systematically decreased. Although the state assessment has gone through major changes, the gaps in student achievement have persisted" (Rising to the Equity Challenge in SFUSD, 2018). School leaders received a mandate of in the form the PITCH initiative, but there were limited resources and direction for enacting programs.

Finally, a serious housing crisis in San Francisco forced the most marginalized students and families out of the city. Black families are one of several groups that moved out of San Francisco to more affordable Bay Area suburbs. The number of Black students in the district has continuously declined, from 16.0% (1998-1999) to less than 7.0% (2016-2017). This was relevant to this project because the Black students left in the district are concentrated in a small number of schools leading to an unexpected increase in racial segregation (Rising to the Equity Challenge in SFUSD, 2018). This trend was exacerbated by the increased housing segregation in San Francisco, as school placement is driven by student address. The schools highlighted in this PAR study had larger Black student populations than other schools in the district, but the Black population in each school was small compared to the numbers of other racial groups.

The schools and the school leaders, teachers, families, and students are situated at the micro level of the focus of practice. One challenge apparent at this level is a lack of racial diversity in the leadership, teaching force, and staff at the three schools. In fact, the school leaders and majority of teachers and staff at the schools participating in the PAR are White. As I discuss in the literature review, the racial diversity of administration and staff is related to higher

performance by Students of Color (Khalifa, 2018). Thus, it is important that the CPR team in the study recognized their positionality, power, and privilege. Another micro challenge was evident: some staff contributed to the observed and persistent microaggressions and implicit biases (Hammond, 2015; Khalifa, 2018). At all three schools, as shown in earlier data, the suspension rates were disproportionate to other student demographic groups. The same disproportionality was consistent for disciplinary referrals. A final micro challenge was the lack of culturally responsive curriculum in the classroom as evidenced by the standard textbooks. As noted in research, the lack of culturally relevant or responsive curriculum and instruction prohibited Students of Color from connecting to and engaging in their learning (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The assets and challenges had various effects on our ability to move the study forward; however, we concentrated on our sphere of control, which was the school level. We received a mini grant from the district, giving us the resources to convene and to address the challenges at three middle schools, as well as host an evening with families and students to engage them in CLE axioms. In the end, the greatest asset was the Black families and students, giving further credence to the community learning exchange axiom: the people closest to an issue are best situated to discover answers to local concerns (Guajardo et al., 2016). As school leaders learned from families and students, they gained more confidence in their actions with teachers and staff in the schools. The methodology and cycles of inquiry that I introduce next offered a process in which the school leaders and I enacted our values of addressing persistent inequities for Black students.

Participatory Action Research Project and Study

The PAR is both a project and a study. As a participatory action project, it provided the

CPR team a platform to engage in equity-centered dialogue to address the substantial challenges that Students of Color faced in the four middle schools over eighteen months. As a study, during the three cycles of inquiry, it allowed us to use iterative evidence to make decisions about leadership actions. In describing the purpose statement and research questions and explaining the theory of action, I provide a driver diagram that describes the primary and secondary drivers for change and the proposed project design.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the PAR project and study was to change outcomes for Black students. The four school leaders as activist co-researcher practitioners engaged in a collaborative administrator network that we termed an equity-centered professional learning community (EC-PLC, focused on social justice change (hunter et al., 2013). Using an EC-PLC as a vehicle for our connection, we addressed the persistent academic and social-emotional outcomes for Black students. We altered our leadership moves—specifically actions that school leaders take to address the achievement and social-emotional needs of African American students as identified in the SFUSD's PITCH Continuum of Effective Practices for Supporting African American Students (2018-19). The results we achieved went well beyond identifying a practice on a rubric; they caused us to shift our practice toward being culturally responsive transformative leaders (Khalifa, 2018).

Research Questions and Theory of Action

One overarching question and four sub-questions guided this study. In Chapter 4, I review each research question, the data I collected to address each question, and how I analyzed the data.

The overarching question is**:** How do school leaders make decisions and take actions that

support the academic and social-emotional growth of African American students?

The sub-questions that were the focus of the data collection and analysis for this participatory action research included:

1. To what extent do PITCH school leaders change their beliefs?
2. To what extent do PITCH school leaders change their practices?
3. How do the school leaders in the EC-PLC use a networked improvement community to build their capacity for change?
4. How does the work with PITCH school leaders inform and transform my leadership?

These questions stayed at the forefront of my concern as we moved through the process, and they guided the data collection and analysis for the PAR project and study.

We co-developed this theory of action: If school leaders focus on the academic and social-emotional growth of Black students by participating in an EC-PLC with authentic dialogue and use community learning exchange as a process and a methodology, then the leaders can make decisions and take actions that increased the academic and social-emotional growth of Black students. To determine how to accomplish this, I developed an aim statement and driver diagram to guide us in the work.

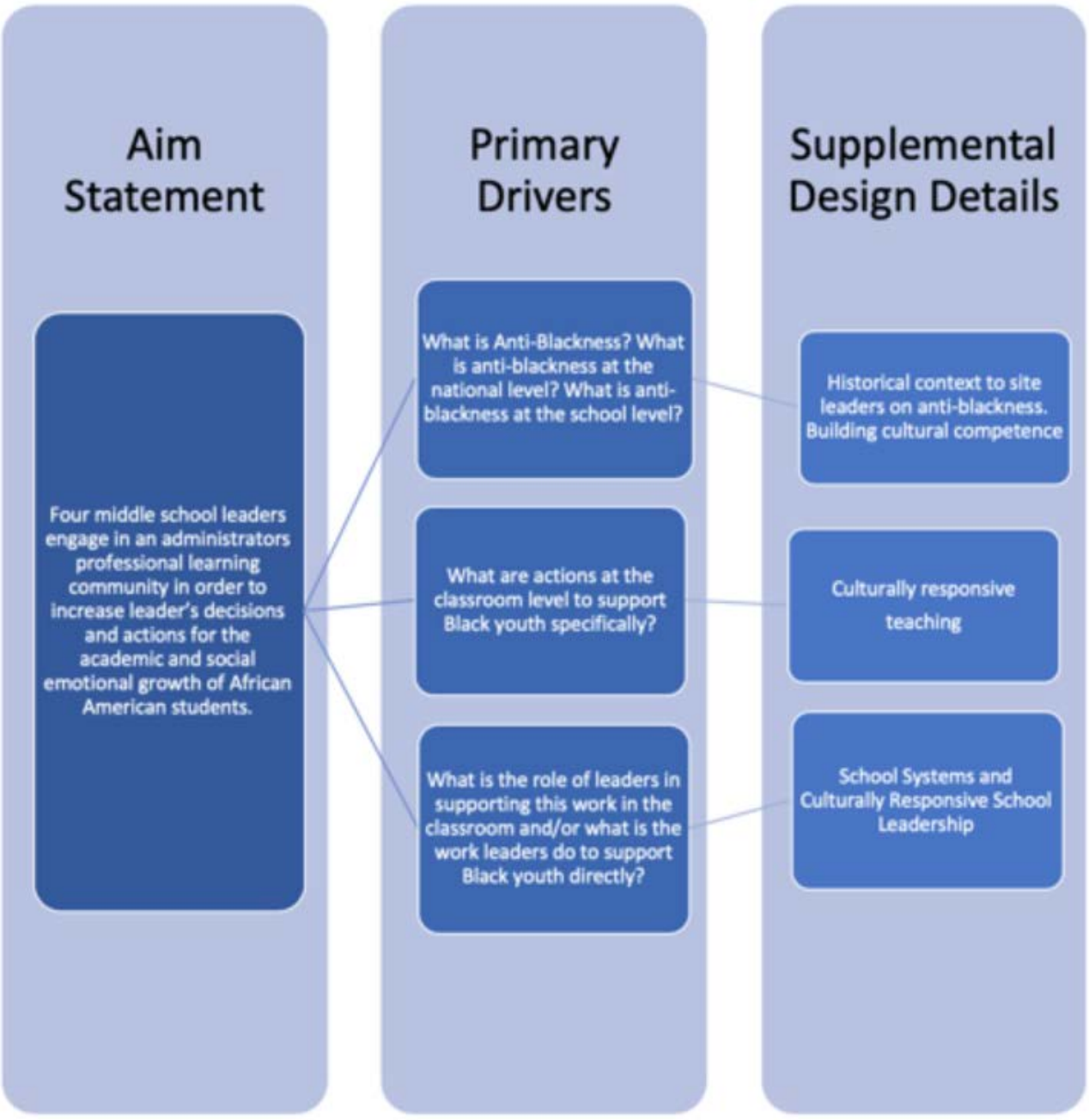
Aim Statement and Driver Diagram

Key features of the process in improvement sciences and PAR are the aim statement and the driver diagram (Bryk et al., 2017). The aim statement for this focus of practice is articulated here. The aim statement is: To impact the decision-making and actions of four middle school site leaders in order to increase the academic and social emotional growth of African American students.

A driver diagram is a logic model that organizes the change that the team is working to improve. Using this tool, participants develop a common language toward a solution to a shared problem (Bryk et al., 2017). The CPR team co-developed the driver diagram (see Figure 2). The driver diagram started with an AIM statement in which the three primary drivers were stated, reflecting areas of literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The supplemental design responded to the primary drivers. The areas of the literature review included a focus on anti-blackness at the school level, a focus on practices at the classroom level that address the negative effects of racism on African American youth, and a focus on culturally relevant and critical race leadership.

Project Design

The PAR project took place with four site administrators at three middle schools. Chapter 3 provides more context of each school and the co-researchers. The four site administrators met as a CPR team at minimum three times a semester and used improvement science principles to build an EC-PLC and engage in culturally responsive decision-making practices. The four school administrators met with me individually each semester for coaching and reflection sessions so I could learn the context of each site, the culturally responsive focal area each school chose to enact, provide support services to the sites, and build trust. We participated in a pre-cycle in the 2018-2019 school year to learn the context of each site and developed relationships with the site leaders individually to gain their agreement to participate in the PAR as the CPR team. This first year determined what culturally responsive decisions the school leaders wanted to implement for their PITCH plans in school year 2019-2010, which included data points and accountability measures. We read culturally responsive literature to guide us in the process. In addition, my



Note. (Bryk et al., 2017).

Figure 2. Driver diagram.

participation on school leadership teams assisted in my learning about the different school contexts, school communities, and levels of relational trust in the school settings.

The PAR project and study continued in three iterative cycles in Fall 2019, Spring 2020, and Fall 2020. We held a community learning exchange (CLE) in the first cycle of inquiry that included participants from all schools, as described in detail in Chapter 5 (Guajardo et al., 2016). We collected and analyzed iterative evidence in each cycle that informed our actions and decisions in subsequent cycles.

Significance

In discussing the significance of the PAR study and its attention to increasing the academic and social-emotional success of Black students, I focus on the following areas. First, I discuss the significance related to the specific schools of the study and the district in which the three schools are situated. I then consider the significance of the study to practice, policy, and educational research.

The project brought administrators together with a common dilemma: the four school leaders all led school sites that had been identified as PITCH schools, requiring the schools to be more intentional about supporting Black students. The CPR team volunteered to participate in an EC-PLC, with the hope that together we were strong enough to guide improvement and shift towards culturally responsive leaders (Bryk et al., 2017; Khalifa, 2018). SFUSD has had a commitment to equity and improving outcomes for all students. The PAR project and study demonstrated to school and district leaders a different way to support school leaders in professional learning and decision making.

In order for school administrators to be more effective practitioners and lead reform efforts, they must have specific elements: a commitment to equity and a willingness to more

deeply understand their contexts, participation in an equity-centered peer network, and community and family partnerships. I engaged the CPR school leaders in a PAR study, utilizing strategies in improvement science inquiry cycles and CLE axioms as both a process of engagement and a methodology for collecting evidence (Bryk et al., 2017; Guajardo et al., 2016). The focus of practice strengthened the knowledge of the EC-PLC by providing opportunities for learning together through meaningful professional development and collaboration opportunities. Together, as a team, we acted as co-practitioner researchers, and shifted from transactional leaders towards transformative leaders ready to lead anti-racist professional development, partner with traditionally marginalized Communities of Color, and interrupt and change oppressive school systems. I co-developed an EC-PLC model with brave space for school leaders to engage in dialogue that informed changes in practice in a safe space to discuss their leadership actions and issues in open dialogue.

Both federal and state policy over the last decade has focused on groups of students who are systematically underserved. California, in particular, focused multiple state efforts on equity and closing the achievement gap for Students of Color, students from low income families, English Learners, and students with disabilities. State policies, such as the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), provide funding for California public schools, and each district's Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) requires Local Education Agency (LEAs) to plan and demonstrate how they intend to use funding to address specific subgroups that are identified as low- performing. However, the focus on subgroups rather than school needs offers another type of challenge, since each school context is different. The research focused not only on subgroup needs, but on school needs, thus addressing a shortcoming of the focus at the federal and state

levels. The one size fits all approach with national and state policies within education has led to unequal and marginalized school systems (Nasir et al., 2016).

Our research has contributed to a deeper understanding of culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa, 2018). In Chapter 2, I provide a full discussion of the literature related to improving the achievement and experiences of Black youth. In the literature review, I first examined the literature and theory related to anti-blackness. I shared the literature of anti-blackness at the national and school levels. I then looked at pedagogies and curricula at the classroom level that support the success of Black youth. Finally, I reviewed literature that looked at how school leaders supported this work in the classroom and/or in support Black youth directly.

The PAR study generated empirical research on concrete actions of school leaders. We documented how school leaders can transition from transactional administrators carrying out a district mandate to transformative culturally responsive leaders (Shields, 2010). By working collaboratively in an EC-PLC with what we identified as brave space, the leaders supported each other to address the educational outcomes for Students of Color. Leaders collaboratively developed the confidence to enact culturally responsive behaviors. School leaders in a PAR study in which they are co-researchers connected with Black students and families differently throughout the cycles. Our research added a unique perspective about how school leaders can engage in an administrative network and make decisions and take actions that lead to substantive changes for equitable outcomes in their schools. In addition, as a result of the study, I created a framework for culturally responsive school leadership that may be useful to other school leaders and researchers, which I present in Chapter 8.

The focus of practice was embedded with a Black critical race equity lens. The term equity is overused and too often appropriated; however, in the PAR study, equity was rooted in the aim, process, and the context. That is, the PAR focused on enacting practices that made real changes in the outcomes for Black students. In other words, this PAR project and study was about turning equity talk to equity action. The narrative about how we have mis-served, underserved, and driven out Black students persists and is unjust, and the principals and I were committed to writing a different story (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Rigby & Tredway, 2015). The close-in research effort, documenting the daily actions of school leaders, offers alternative ways to structure professional learning in practice, policy, and research to address inequities.

Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

An equity-centered professional learning community, acting as co-practitioner researchers, co-constructed the project. The participants were school-based practitioners committed to serving marginalized student groups and changing student outcomes. The participants were purposely recruited for the PAR study from the group of school leaders identified by the PITCH process, and all school leaders in that group who were approached agreed to participate in this study; four persons volunteered to join. Each member signed a consent form to participate in the study. All appropriate consent for the study, including district considerations and approval, was in place prior to initiating the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Disclosure of data, research, budget, and other information was disclosed with fidelity. The code of ethics provided by our educational institution was considered prior to the beginning of the study.

The study has several delimitations. First, the PAR project was delimited to four participants at three schools for two years. Therefore, external validity was a challenge; this study is not necessarily generalizable to other school populations. Second, the findings may not hold beyond the scope of the study as I did not collect data for more than two years; thus, we do not know how this experience affected the leaders beyond the scope of this study. Lastly, because I had a previous professional relationship with the leaders and am a district leader, that relationship and my position of power may have influenced evidence from leaders.

The school leaders met with me because they wanted to do the work and wanted thoughtful partners whom they could trust. However, I was not their supervisor, and the process was not mandated nor did I have resources to provide funds to the sites. The successes of the PAR project depended in part on the school leaders voluntarily continuing to prioritize the collaborative work in this EC-PLC.

As an outsider to the schools and an insider in the school district, I recognized my positionality within the PAR study. I am no longer a school leader, although the participants all have a history with me when I was. While there was a level of trust already established with the school leaders, I recognized that my positionality may have intersections that conflicted with competing interests and district initiatives. I had to maintain confidentiality and trust as a co-participant in this action research project (Herr & Anderson, 2014).

Conclusion

The chapter introduced the PAR project by framing the context, the focus of practice, the purpose, research questions, and the project design. To summarize, SFUSD has had a historical and persistent achievement gap as illustrated by the district and school data. The focus of practice for the PAR study was to examine principals' culturally responsive decisions and

actions to address this persistent gap. Through an administrative network, using an EC-PLC model, four site leaders co-constructed and implemented leadership actions to improve the academic and social emotional growth of Black students. In successive cycles of inquiry, the leaders utilized evidence from the cycle to reflect, inform, and improve leadership responses. I started this chapter with the poem, *This is Not a Small Voice You Hear,* by Sonia Sanchez. As discussed in this chapter, the student voices of our Black students must be heard. It is time for us, school leaders, to listen and act.

This next chapter discusses the extant research on the experiences of Black youth in the educational system at the macro, meso and micro levels. The first literature section defines anti-blackness and how it has historically manifested at the national and school levels. The second section examines research on what has already been done to support Black youth in the classroom. The third and final literature section examines the literature around the role of leaders and culturally responsive leadership. These three areas are important to setting the literature foundation for this PAR study.

The subsequent chapters include the context of setting and participants and a discussion of methodology. The final chapters address the outcomes of the design study, results and findings, and provide an overall project summary with conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Black students in school report that they often feel alone, isolated, and misunderstood (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Given the systemic barriers that marginalize and demoralize Black students in education and most American institutions, it is unsurprising that an achievement gap between Black students and non-Black students has persisted. In the review of the literature, I identify the sources of anti-Blackness in education, at the local and national levels, that present significant barriers to Black students' academic success. The root causes of the achievement gap suggest that the long history of oppression and educational malpractice do indeed lead to an educational debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006). On a more optimistic note, there are critical practices that can create improved possibilities for Black students.

Throughout this chapter, I use the term "African American" when referring specifically to the work of the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) because that is the term they use. In all other instances, I use the term "Black" because it is the term used most frequently in educational research and is my term of preference.

As is true of many districts across the United States, SFUSD has long faced a persistent gap in student performance between demographic subgroups based on race and ethnicity. Specifically, the achievement gap in literacy between Black and White students continues to be the largest racial achievement gap in the district (Rising to the Equity Challenge in SFUSD, 2018). The participatory action research (PAR) study centers on collaborative work with school- and district-level leadership to improve the academic learning and social-emotional growth of Black students in the district. Therefore, in this literature review, I concentrate on research documenting the racist and oppressive experiences of Black students at the structural, historical

national, and school levels. Finally, I address how classroom and school leaders affect the experiences of Black youth in education.

First, I explore the literature defining anti-Blackness and explaining how anti-Blackness manifests at the local and national levels. I specifically focus on how and why schools have historically underserved Black youth at the macro-level. Next, in reviewing the literature on what best supports of Black youth are in the classroom, I examine the studies of seminal researchers known for research on strategies for teaching Black youth. In the third and final section of the literature review on the role of school leaders, I explore research about culturally responsive and critical race leadership that seeks to serve Black students who persistently score lower on literacy and math than their white peers. Figure 3 graphically represents the three sections of the chapter, the first section highlighted in yellow.

To better understand anti-Blackness, I provide historical context for three attributes of anti-Blackness. I present these attributes for two reasons: to demonstrate how anti-Blackness is carved from historical racial policies at the national level and to clarify how anti-Blackness manifests in schools. In explaining how anti-Blackness and anti-pessimism is connected to critical race theory, I describe anti-Blackness at the national level and highlight some anti-Black historical effects, legislation, and policies in American history that were actively anti-Black or perpetuated anti-Blackness. I conclude with looking at anti-Blackness at the school level with a focus on how anti-Blackness appears in education and how anti-Blackness affects youth.

Anti-Blackness and Afro-Pessimism

The theoretical foundations of anti-Blackness and Afro-pessimism with disparate outcomes for Black youth frame the PAR study. In defining the terms anti-Blackness and Afro-

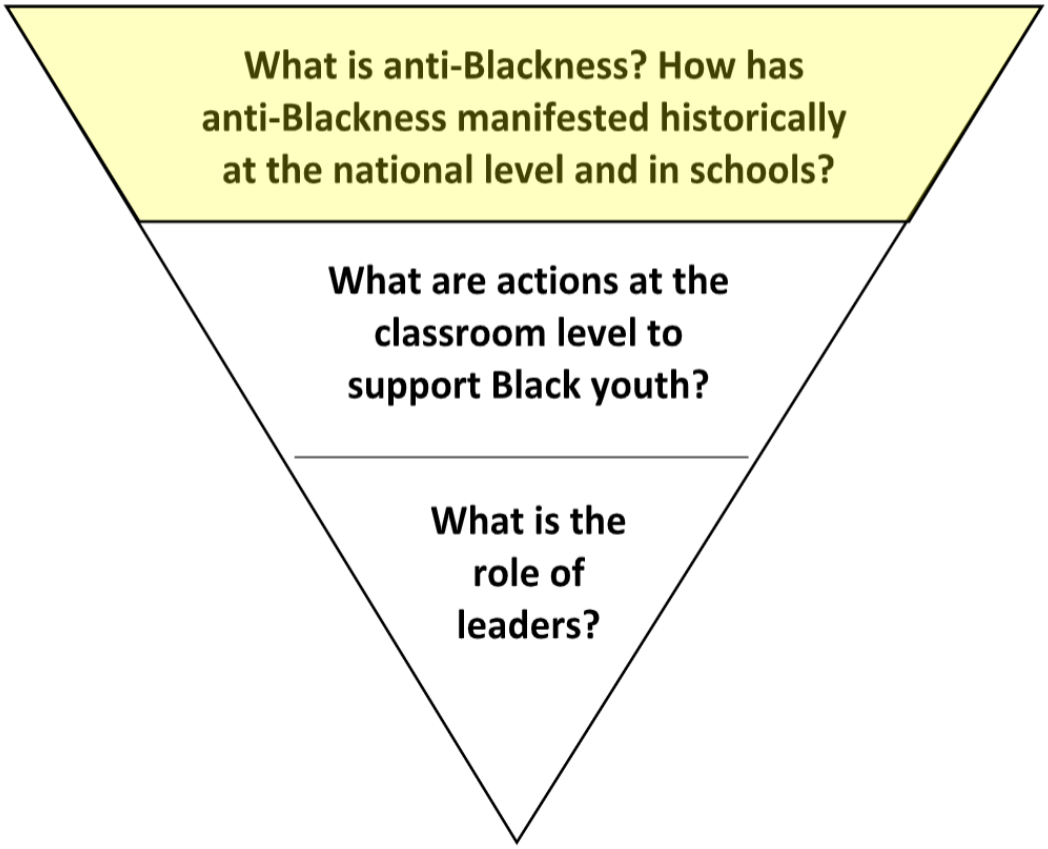


Figure 3. Literature review overview. The first section of the literature review addresses anti-Blackness and how it influences schools and students.

pessimism, I provide a brief overview of critical race theory (CRT) and its relationship to Black critical theory (BlackCrit) and discuss the importance of these structural elements in understanding how and why Black students are underserved in educational settings.

> Dumas (2016) defined anti-Blackness and connected it to Afro-pessimism:
>
> Antiblackness is the central concern and proposition within an intellectual project known as Afro-pessimism. Afro-pessimism theorizes that Black people exist in a structurally antagonistic relationship with humanity. That is, the very technologies and imaginations that allow a social recognition of the humanness of others systematically exclude this possibility for the Black. The Black cannot be human, is not simply an Other, but is other than human. Thus, antiblackness does not signify a mere racial conflict that might be resolved through organized political struggle and appeals to the state and to the citizenry for redress. Instead, antiblackness marks an irreconcilability between the Black and any sense of social or cultural regard. The aim of theorizing antiblackness is not to offer solutions to racial inequality, but to come to a deeper understanding of the Black condition within a context of utter contempt for, and acceptance of violence against the Black. (p. 13)

Afro-pessimism argues that present day anti-Blackness is rooted in historical and present-day manifestations of an enslavement system that dehumanizes Black people. Afro-pessimism insists that anti-Blackness is a distinct form of racism experienced by Black people (Sexton, 2016). The foundational concepts of anti-Blackness and Afro-pessimism as seen through critical race theory and BlackCrit help explain how Black families experience racism in the US at the macro- and meso-levels. The theories are historically rooted.

Critical race theory (CRT) is a body of legal scholarship that emerged in the mid-1980s to explain racial inequality and injustice (Matsuda et al., 1993). Critical race theorists combine empirical research and narrative to examine racial inequities as they manifest in law, policy, and societal institutions (Moore, 2008). While critical race theory draws from and extends to a broad literature base in law, sociology, and history, critical race theory finds its home in the field of education. It emerges as a framework, methodology, and pedagogy to identify and change the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain inferior and dominant racial positions. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) identify five tenets of critical race theory in education: intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination; challenge to dominant ideology; commitment to social justice; centrality of experiential knowledge; and transdisciplinary perspective. The five elements provide those injured by racism and other forms of oppression an opportunity to share their stories and be empowered participants, to be heard, and to discover they are not alone.

A number of "Crit" theories (BlackCrit, LatCrit, AsianCrit and TribalCrit) resulted from and are built on CRT. These theories focus on the experiences of specific racial populations (Dumas & Ross, 2016). For example, BlackCrit theory advanced to capture the Black experience with racism in the United States. BlackCrit deepens our understanding by providing a theoretical framework to analyze how anti-Blackness matters in justifying how and why students are ignored, marginalized, and oppressed in schools and other institutions (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Evidence includes the dehumanization of Black students in the federal, state, and district education policies that deprived Black communities and children of resources, the absence of ethnic studies (Sleeter, 2011), the lack of culturally relevant curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1994),

and the systemic mismanagement of school discipline policies (Dumas & Ross, 2016; Noguera, 2003).

Anti-Blackness at the National Level: Historical Effects on the Black Population

The historical examples of anti-Blackness are rooted in a history of oppression. In six major eras of post-Civil War American history, there is steady legacy of racism that systematically undermined the civil rights of Black Americans – supposedly guaranteed in the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution in the Reconstruction era. This retracing provides historical and theoretical foundations that frame that disparate outcomes for Black youth in education. The six major eras are post-civil war, Black codes and the Jim Crow era, school desegregation, the civil rights movement, the new Jim Crow, and the current era of uprisings, which issue call to action in the Black Lives Matter movement.

During Reconstruction after the Civil War, agriculture was the main driver of the southern economy, and land owners complained of the labor shortage "created by" abolition. Sharecropping emerged as the dominant labor system in the rural south. Black families entered into arrangements with former owners to work individual plots of land and share the profits. Typically, the land owners set up a system in which former enslaved people accumulated increasing debt, thus bound to land owners though a different form of enslavement. Black sharecroppers could not afford to leave until their debt was paid in full; yet, the contract almost always ensured increasing, rather than decreasing, debt.

Black Codes emerged during post Reconstruction and were developed to limit activity of Black people (Black Codes, 2010). Vagrancy laws, one example of Black Codes instituted in 1866, allowed police to arrest Black men for activities that were deemed "mischief," such as not working. Then, as newly imprisoned men, Black men could be "rented" out as convict labor.

Convict leasing forced Black people to stay in subordinate positions providing free labor to an economy dependent on low-cost labor. Between 1877 and 1879 the percentage of imprisoned Black men reached an all-time high of 67% (Alexander, 2010; Randall, 2007).

The Jim Crow era, which enforced racial segregation in the southern United Stated, launched with the 1896 Supreme Court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The courts heard the New Orleans case of a Black man, Homer Plessy, who tried to sit in a Whites-only railway car. Plessy violated the Separate Car Act and was arrested (Burrell & Walsh, 2001). Plessy's lawyer, Albion Tourgee, argued that Plessy had the right to sit in the car since his light skin allowed him to pass as a White man. The courts ruled that he violated the Separate Car Act, a decision that started the policy of "separate, but equal."

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954), the historical landmark case, overturned the Jim Crow legal principle of "separate but equal" with the desegregation of public schools. This case was accompanied by troubling complications, including a job crisis caused by the closing and consolidation of Black schools, in which Black teachers and administrators were disproportionately dismissed or demoted (Goldstein, 2014). Specifically, during the Civil Rights era in the South, tens of thousands of Black teachers and administrators were fired, leading to a lack of racial diversity in the teaching force, which continues today. This undermined the status of Black educators who traditionally held a valued position in their communities. In particular, Black principals were community leaders and their removal from an esteemed position not only personally affected them but also the communities they served (Karpinski, 2006). During this time, a rising national school population presaged an imminent teacher shortage. Despite this concern, the "slowdown" in the hiring of Black educators continued and non-certified and/or inexperienced White candidates advanced into vacancies in integrated schools. Any remaining

Black principals were either assigned to predominantly Black schools or central offices, away from school-level decision making (*Displacement and present status of black school principals in desegregated school districts*, 1971). Most school leaders, school board members, and state officials—those determining student placement, staffing, curricular, textbooks, and other educational policies—were White (Karpinski, 2006). The removal and displacement of Black educators, specifically Black principals, was an adverse result of desegregation. The irreversible consequences not only resulted in the reduction of Black administrators' influence, but also had long-term effects for Black teachers, students, and communities.

However, with the decision in 1954, the Civil Rights Movement began yet another fight for the rights of Black citizens at the national level. By invoking the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, the battle for voting rights, literacy, and desegregation of public buildings, transportation, and schools led to legal challenges and changes. However, in Martin Luther King Jr.'s words, "the black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws—racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society" (Hall, 2007, p. 235). While the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s fought for justice and equal rights, anti-Blackness persisted and is still evident today through systemic inequities, perhaps most visible in the American prison industrial complex, a backlash to the gains made during the Civil Rights movement (Desai & Abeita, 2017), ushering in what Alexander (2010) the "new Jim Crow". She proposed that a manifestation of the racial caste system is the prison industrial complex system, a system that keeps Black people in subordinate positions, allowing industry to profit from Black labor. Anti-Blackness is persistent and necessary to justify the American prison industrial complex. Just as the convict lease program was a backlash to the Civil War, the

prison industrial complex is seen as a backlash to the Civil Rights movement (Desai & Abeita, 2017). Alexander (2010) wrote, “[m]ass incarceration in the United States had, in fact, emerged as a stunning comprehensive and well-designed system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow” (p. 4). The United States is the leading country in incarcerations with a 500% increase over the past 40 years. Black people are five times as likely to be jailed as White people. One in three young Black men are currently "under control of the criminal justice system—in prison, in jail, on probation, or on parole” (Alexander, 2010, p. 9). Prior to the backlash, the majority of imprisoned men were White.

These incessant attacks on Black people culminated in a period of uprisings in communities across America. In 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement reinstated a call to action demanding a “renewed critical imagining and praxis of blackness” (Dumas & Ross, 2016). #BlackLivesMatter began as “a call to action in response to state-sanctioned violence and anti-Black racism” (Black Lives Matter, 2013). Enraged by the death of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal of his killer, George Zimmerman, three Black organizers, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, created a Black-centered political and ideological movement called #BlackLivesMatter. Their first action was the Black Lives Matter Freedom Ride to Ferguson, Missouri, in search of justice for Mike Brown and others killed by state-sanctioned violence and anti-Black racism. That ride began building the infrastructure for the Black Lives Matter Global Network. Their intent was to connect Black people across the world in their shared desire for justice and their commitment to action in their communities to stop the rampant and deliberate violence inflicted on the Black community by the state. Alicia Garza (2014), one of the founders of #BlackLivesMatter, explains:

> When we say Black Lives Matter, we are talking about the ways in which Black people are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. It is an acknowledgement [that] Black poverty and genocide is state violence. It is an acknowledgement that 1 million Black people locked in cages in this country—one half of all people in prisons or jails—is an act of state violence. It is an acknowledgement that Black women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families and that assault is an act of state violence. Black queer and trans folks bearing a unique burden in a hetero-patriarchal society that disposes of us like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes us and profits off of us is state violence. (Black Lives Matter, 2013)

State-sanctioned violence and policing are the focus of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in this historic moment, but there are also countless examples of anti-Blackness in the field of education (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Schools systematically perpetuate the criminalization of young Students of Color, especially Black boys and girls, using surveillance and punishment, and it wears on Black and Brown students. The most well-documented examples are suspensions and expulsions, a clear, exclusionary discipline action leading to dropping out—or what others better describe as being pushed out (Spector, 2020).

In examining the historical and theoretical foundations that frame disparate outcomes for Black youth, I have detailed the racial history of oppression. In this milieu, Black students in public schools feel oppressed both historically and currently. Next, I explore school level that connects to anti-Blackness. Noguera (2003) argues that discipline in schools mimics the strategies used to discipline adults. Just as laws targeting Black people have increased the Black imprisonment rate, punishments used to control Black student behavior have increased the Black suspension rate.

Anti-Blackness and the Impact on Black Youth

Anti-Blackness manifests in educational contexts and has adverse and cumulative effects on Black youth. First, the education debt underscores how anti-Blackness appears at the school level (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Secondly, anti-Blackness surfaces at the school level in classroom practices through racial microaggressions (Sue, 2010). Finally, anti-Black racism affects Black youth and other Students of Color, causing stereotype threat and racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2006; Steele, 2010).

How Anti-Blackness Manifests in Education

The federal Department of Education frames the achievement gap as a persistent gap in academic achievement specifically between Students of Color and their White peers in reading/language arts and mathematics as measured by statewide assessments. Ladson-Billings (2006) argued, by contrast, that using the term "achievement gap" does not address what happens to Students of Color. Ladson-Billings uses the term "education debt" to describe the historic and persistent underservice to Students of Color.

What follows is a brief history of Black education that provides the rationale for the educational, economic, socio-political, and moral debt American society owes to Black families. Historically, during the time of enslavement Black youth and adults were not allowed to attend school or learn to read as mandated by Compulsory Ignorance Laws which made it illegal for Black to be educated (Staples, 1999). These laws laid the groundwork for a legacy of neglecting the education of Black youth, a legacy that has a lingering effect on Black achievement. When allowed, Black youth attended schools that were under-resourced. Even after *Brown v. Board of Education*, which promised to increase access to resources through desegregation, schools were not actually permanently desegregated; white resistance to school desegregation resulted in open

defiance and violent confrontations (Goldstein, 2014). Black students, therefore, continue to attend schools that are more segregated today than in the past. Even when they did attend desegregated schools, these schools were under-resourced and understaffed more than before (Kozol, 2005).

The economic structure of the education debt was apparent from the disparities of Jim Crow laws in the South. These laws allowed armed robbery to take animals, farm resources, and bales of cotton from Black families, preventing both class advancement and access to school. The fight for reparations for Black Americans has been discussed since the end of the Civil War, including an existing bill about reparations that has been sitting in Congress for thirty years (Coates, 2014). Current funding discrepancies between urban schools serving mostly Students of Color and suburban counterpart schools clearly define how we serve different groups of students unequally (Kozol, 2005).

While the economic structure was visible, the sociopolitical context was more nuanced to discern. According to the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, the gap between the number of Black and White registered voters decreased after the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Families of Color were excluded from the decision-making groups that ensure all students have a high-quality education. Furthermore, when they advocated for improvement in schooling or participation in parent groups such as PTAs, they were excluded, marginalized, and silenced (Hampton, 1986; Ladson-Billings, 2004).

Another component of the education debt was the moral debt. Moral debt is described as the disparity between what we know is the right thing to do and what people actually do. In examining the moral debt, Ladson-Billings (2006) asks the questions, “What do we owe citizens who have been historically excluded from social benefits and opportunities? What do we owe

their descendants?" (p. 8). School leaders and teachers must address the moral debt to Black students and families by examining and interrupting oppressive structures and systems in schools.

Anti-Black actions and policies such as these have created what Ladson-Billings (2006) calls the "education debt" created by "the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize [a racist] society" (p. 5). Like the national debt, the education debt continues to increase when policies that defund schools are enacted. The education debt therefore divests from Black students' educational opportunities simply by the schools they attend.

How Anti-Blackness Manifests at the School Level

Anti-Blackness manifests in schools in the stereotypes and single narratives that school-level actors ascribe to Black students. In a year-long ethnography on the treatment of Black boys at an urban elementary school, Ferguson (2001) provided evidence that teachers and school leaders had limiting beliefs of Black students. She described how teachers tended to treat the actions of Black students in schools as if they were making adult decisions–a process she calls "adultification." Black males are pervasively depicted in mainstream society as either criminals or marginalized to the point of not being present (incarcerated or deceased), and these depictions become mainstream beliefs that lead to treatment of students consistent with these perceptions. The assumption that Black adults and Black youth are criminals even leads to the use of criminal and police language when talking about their behavior in schools. For example, a White teacher referred to Black students who had not returned books as "looters." Acts of interpersonal racism based on implicit biases like those observed by Ferguson are termed microaggressions by Sue (2010).

Sue (2010) defined microaggressions as "the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" (p. 3). Racial microaggressions, as explained by Sue (2010), may take three forms: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation.

Microassaults are overt and intentional actions that come from conscious bias beliefs towards a marginalized person or group. The bias differs from the other two forms of microaggressions because the perpetrator harbors conscious bias that can be directly expressed through racial statements or acted out in other ways.

Microinsults, although still microaggressions, are significantly different from microassaults. The perpetrator has an unconscious awareness of their metacommunication. Racial microinsults communicate racial insults and insensitivity through environmental cues or interpersonal communications (Sue, 2010). Microinsults that occur environmentally are generally hidden to the majority group while quite visible to the victimized groups. When a teacher regularly chooses White and Asian students as student of the month, there is a larger message being communicated to students not from those selected demographic groups. The verbal and nonverbal microinsult interactions are often disguised as praise but comprise negative metacommunication. Microinsults are the most common form of microaggression and the most difficult microaggression to identify (Sue, 2010).

Microvalidations (in addition to microinsults) may be the most damaging form of microaggression because they occur outside the consciousness of the perpetrator and directly deny the experiences of belittled groups (Sue, 2010). This is done through interpersonal and environmental signals that invalidate and exclude the targeted group's opinions, feelings, beliefs,

and experiences. The most common example of microinvalidations is color blindness. It is defined as the unwillingness to acknowledge or to see race or a person's color (Nasir et al., 2016). Sue (2010) suggests, "The denial of differences is really a denial of power and privilege. The denial of power and privilege is really a denial of personal benefits that accrue to certain privileged groups by virtue of inequities" (p. 11).

Racial microaggressions, while seemingly small individual acts, have major consequences for Persons of Color. Microaggressions can create an aggressive, unsafe, and invalidating climate, specifically for Black youth and other Students of Color. Microaggressions in mainstream life, but particularly in schools, enforce the marginalization of oppressed groups. Microaggressions delivered by well-intentioned teachers often reflect a belief that Black people are less capable and lack motivation; the teachers "do not understand that their perceptions of African American students interfere with their ability to be effective teachers for them" (Sue, 2010, p. 23). These collective microaggressions have long-term effects on student performance and behavior and create an environment of anti-Black racism for many young people in our schools.

How Anti-Black Racism Affects Youth

Persistent anti-Black racism adversely affects Black youth and other Students of Color. Specifically, stereotype threat and racial battle fatigue have deleterious impacts on Black students and other Students of Color. Stereotype threat is defined as identity contingencies–the things you have to deal with in a situation because you have a given social identity. Racial battle fatigue is, as the term suggests, an accumulation of negative psychological effects from feeling assaulted by microagressions.

Steele (2010) conducted multiple psychological experiments with university students to determine how social contingencies shape our lives and how stereotype threat emerges as a result of one's identity contingencies. In each of these experiments, while all persons felt some stereotype threat in a certain situation because they were a numerical minority in a setting (e.g., a White male on an urban basketball court, a woman in a law firm), the evidence suggested that Persons of Color were consistently subjected to more instances of stereotype threat. Stereotype threat often appears as a microaggression and the threats become cumulative.

In a school setting, stereotype threat is most often used as a "deficit model" to explain academic struggle and place focus on the individual, not the setting. School staffs often focus on deficiencies and underachieving Black youth and Students of Color to help explain poor outcomes. Repeated exposure sends cues to students that the setting has possible threatening contingencies of identity and that the setting is unsafe. The low expectations and negative experiences at school can cause these images to be "internalized" implicitly, accepted as true of the group and, tragically, also perhaps of oneself. No amount of instruction, even high quality instruction, can engage students in their learning unless the identity threat is low. Black university students proved this to be true when they underperformed because they were not valued in the setting. They are forced to overcome the pressure of group stereotypes, to assimilate, in order to have academic success (Steele, 2010).

Students experience anti-Blackness in schools as racial battle fatigue, the cumulative stress from racial microaggressions (Smith et al., 2006). As racism is pervasive in institutions and society, Black youth are always on alert to cope with chronic racial microaggressions. Smith (2004) explained that this constant exposure causes microaggression extreme environmental stress (MEES). The stress connected with exposure to racial microaggressions can cause various

forms of mental, emotional, and physical tension as much of the attention center of the brain is geared toward self-protection (Steele, 2010). People of Color endure a lifetime of everyday environmental stress, due to a society plagued by racism. The effects of racial battle fatigue can lead to lower self-esteem, social withdrawal from the stressors, and negative health complications. For Students of Color, racism in schools increases the stress that one endures, and directly correlates to the psychological consequences of racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2006).

In detailing how anti-Blackness in society and schools affects Black youth, I provide a theoretical understanding of race and how anti-Blackness is still present and undermines the best efforts of Black student success. In reviewing the historical context of anti-Blackness in the education system, I capture how Black youths' access to education has been systematically undermined resulting in the educational debt and generational issues of dealing with systemic oppression. Anti-Black racism continues to exist at the school level as Black youth experiences microaggressions, stereotype threat, and racial battle fatigue. However, we have responses to the classroom and school level issues that I explore next (see Figure 4). We can take actions to mitigate and improve the educational experiences and outcomes of Black youth.

Useful Actions at the Classroom Level to Support Black Youth

Foundational researchers in culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy give us hope that we can change the academic and social-emotional outcomes specifically for Black youth (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994). While the researchers recognize that culturally responsive teaching alone does not solve all problems for marginalized Students of Color, their research demonstrates that culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching offers some solutions. I then turn to studies that build on the research by offering additional strategies and solutions for educators to consider in supporting Black students (Hammond, 2015; Howard,

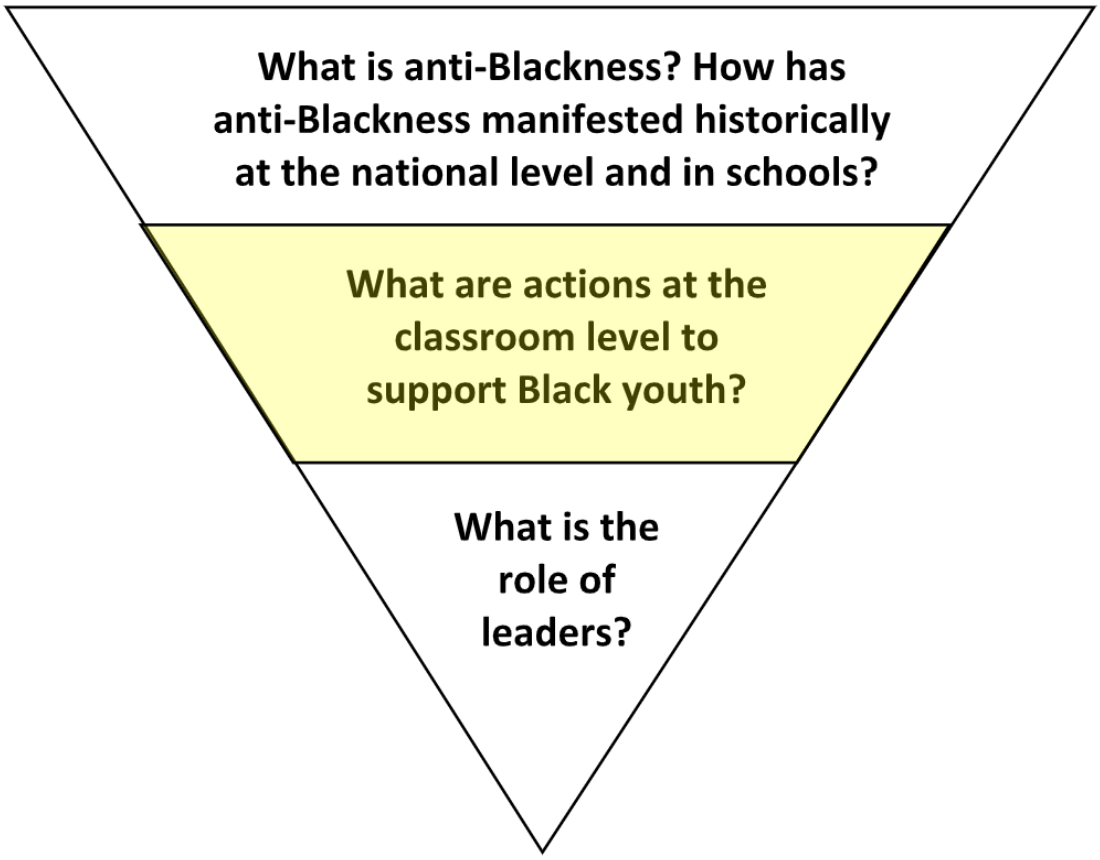


Figure 4. Literature review overview: The second section focuses on what actions at the classroom level better support Black youth.

2014; Love, 2019; Ware, 2006). Figure 5 is a heuristic or advanced organizer for how the literature is presented.

Culturally Relevant Teaching Change Makers

The seminal work of key scholars and teacher educators Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), Geneva Gay (2018), and Lisa Delpit (1995) is a necessary starting place when discussing culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching. Their research contributed to the initial development of several frameworks for culturally responsive approaches (e.g., culturally responsive education, culturally relevant teaching, and the culture of power, respectively), each outlining multiple components. Their work is expansive yet has overlapping recommendations.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), in her influential book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, introduced the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* to describe a form of teaching that calls for engaging learners whose experiences and cultures are traditionally excluded from mainstream settings. Based on her research of effective teachers of Black students, Ladson-Billings learned that the teachers in her study shared a common respect for the community in which they teach, a respect for the culture of all students, a belief that all students can succeed, and a belief that students have valuable knowledge that can be explored and used in the classroom. She identified their practices and beliefs as strong examples of culturally relevant pedagogy, stating that "[c]ulturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 20). Moreover, teachers were seen as coaches; like coaches, they acknowledged the students' strengths and worked to build those strengths in collaboration with a number of other supporting adults (such as members

of the community and parents). Students were encouraged to learn collaboratively and build relationships with their peers beyond the classroom.

Adding to the work of Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay (2018) created a framework with a greater emphasis on teachers' strategies and practices. Gay (2018) initiated the term *culturally responsive teaching* to define a method that highlights "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 36). Her work is grounded in the asset-based belief that cultural heritages of Students of Color were beneficial to classroom learning. Educators committed to culturally responsive teaching, she contends, must be direct and transparent about their commitment to these practices. Gay called on practitioners to make positive changes to instructional techniques and materials, student-teacher relationships, classroom climate, and self-awareness to improve learning for students. In line with Ladson-Billings' research findings, Gay showed the importance of providing opportunities for students to think critically about inequities.

Lisa Delpit (1995), known as an advocate for Youth of Color, chronicled her journey as an educator in her book, *Other People's Children*. Her nine essays challenged pedagogies that do not match student cultural and linguistic needs, especially reminding persons who are teaching other people's children of their responsibilities to fully understand cultural and family cultures, especially those from different racial backgrounds. Delpit discussed the role of power in setting the agenda for educational reform and how the needs of those with less power from marginalized communities are often overlooked. Building on Ladson-Billings' research, Delpit (1995) argued that teachers must have some knowledge of students' lives outside the classroom, outside of school, in order to know their strengths. Teachers must be curious about who the students are in

order to understand the wealth of knowledge in their families and communities. Without knowledge about family and community, teachers cannot understand the student, cannot see the student's strengths, and cannot serve that student well. Such a connection allows the teachers to build curricula that represents the background and heritage of the students they teach.

Extensions of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Hammond (2015), Ware (2006), Howard (2014), and Love (2019) built on the work of Delpit (1995), Gay (2018), and Ladson-Billings (1994). Their research contributes to understanding more about culturally responsive teaching and how to support Black youth at the classroom level.

Hammond (2015) grounds brain-based learning strategies in neuroscience. She connects culturally responsive practices to how those practices fit with our knowledge of cognitive science. In particular, she discusses how cognition and high order thinking have been at the core of culturally responsive teaching, which makes them a natural partner for neuroscience in the classroom. Educators who aim to be both culturally responsive and emotionally conscious of Black students in the classroom must first learn what culturally responsive practices are and how they fit into brain-based science. Hammond (2015) encourages educators to reflect on their own backgrounds and their own implicit biases. In doing so, they can come to understand how their own cultural frames of reference are realized in their teaching. Such reflection allows them to be more successful in their work with Youth of Color in the classroom.

The term warm demander, coined by Judith Kleinfeld (1975), is used to describe teachers who prioritized building rapport and trust with students before focusing on academics and high expectations of students. Once a student-teacher connection is built, teacher demands could be accompanied by a warm smile, gentle teasing, and other forms of support to push students to

higher levels of academic rigor and thinking. Ware (2006) built upon Kleinfield's original work by interviewing and observing two Black teachers known for their successful strategies with Black students. She found that both teachers used what she terms a "warm demander" pedagogy as a part of their culturally responsive approach to working with Black youth. In this context, warm demanders have high expectations for Black youth and, most importantly, provide the support necessary for Black youth to meet those expectations. Teachers who identify as warm demanders in the study were considered caregivers to their students. They cared for their students' personal success and physical health. These teachers also taught their students to care about their communities and be global citizens. Most importantly, the teachers were labeled warm demanders because they took responsibility for their students' learning and expected that every student could and would learn.

Howard (2014) offers a new narrative for academic success of Black male youth through a set of strategies and supports that sustain their success. Howard draws from the experiences of students and captures important insights into Black male schooling experiences to inform ways to improve educational outcomes for them. First, he highlights how Black male students experience school in a different way from other racial groups. In analyzing the students' stories, he showed ways in which Black male students experience being silenced and stereotyped. According to Howard, Black males typically succeed in spite of schools and teachers, not because of them.

In addition to capturing the experiences of Black, male youth, Howard provides support strategies. The strategies include processes for improving teacher-student relationships, classroom practices, and relationships with community-based programs. He noted, however, that most of the young men observed who overcame adversity demonstrated a resiliency that allowed

them to persevere. Further, students who excelled in schools had a support structure. The identifiable system might include friends, family, or school personnel. The young men described the support of their important people as instrumental in helping them achieve. And, finally, many of the young men who experienced academic success exhibited hope.

Love (2019) brings an activist viewpoint to her proposals of an abolitionist pedagogy. She argues that the U.S. educational system profits from low-income Students of Color, rather than contributing to their growth. She contends that schools teach Black youth to survive and that these survival tactics focus on character education and test-taking strategies, instead of strategies that help them thrive.

Instead of teaching Black youth to simply survive, schools should, she believes, partner with Black youth to achieve true freedom. All constituents must approach education with the persistence of abolitionists, who fought for the end of slavery. In Love's approach, educators are called to fight for social justice, battle supremacist assumptions, challenge systematic oppression, and account for the experiences of the marginalized. She provides an alternative to traditional educational reform; her approach encouraged considerations of community engagement, participatory democracy, and intersectional justice.

Competencies of Culturally Responsive Educators

Muñiz (2019) organized eight common competencies of culturally responsive educators to summarize the research on culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogies (see Figure 6). These competencies interconnect the common skills and knowledge that research and theory suggest are critical to enacting culturally responsive teaching with fidelity.

While all eight competencies are necessary for equity centered, culturally responsive teaching, I highlight three that are most relevant to the study: draw on students' culture to share

Note. (Muñiz, 2019, p. 12).

Figure 6. Eight competencies for culturally responsive teaching.

curriculum and instruction, promote respect for student differences, and collaborate with families and the local community.

Students' Culture to Share Curriculum and Instruction

This competency asserts that a student's cultural background is an asset to learning. Teachers must learn about how students can succeed, and a belief that students have valuable knowledge that can be explored build a relationship with each student. With this knowledge, culturally responsive teachers supplement or replace traditional curriculum to reflect student backgrounds and build connections between academic content and experiences familiar to students (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994). They evaluate traditional textbooks to ensure they do not perpetuate stereotypes or fail to represent diverse groups. Ladson-Billings (1994) explicitly states that we must honor and respect the students' home cultures. Typically, there is a deficit view of Black culture in existing curricula and textbooks. The historical contributions of Black people are ignored or trivialized. Teachers can provide opportunities for students to connect and see themselves in their learning when they present curricula that provides diverse history, culture, and traditions of other cultures and groups.

> Students are taught how to apply new knowledge generated by various ethnic scholars to their analyses of social histories, issues, problems, and experiences. These learning engagements encourage and enable students to find their own voices, to contextualize an issue in multiple cultural perspectives, to engage in more ways of knowing and thinking, and to become more active participants in shaping their own learning. (Gay, 2018, p. 43)

Culturally responsive teachers provide connection and validation for each student's culture and identity.

Respect for Student Differences

For culturally responsive practices to be most effective, the environment in the classroom must be inclusive and respectful, and each student's culture must be valued; in other words, teachers must promote respect for differences. Culturally responsive educators advocate for students to be cooperative, engage across difference, and value social, cultural, and linguistic difference. Students in the classroom learn they are not successful without the assistance of others or without being helpful to others. Working together and holding each other accountable for one another's success is the expectation. A collaborative environment, rather than a competitive space (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Muñiz, 2019) creates opportunity for learning. The competency focuses on the importance of the peer relationship:

> Research finds that when students face discrimination, they may develop feelings of frustration, anger, and unworthiness that can result in low achievement, dropout tendencies, and behavioral problems. On the other hand, a caring school community where students feel a sense of belonging can contribute to stronger academic performance. (Muñiz, 2019)

Students are more likely to take risks in their learning when they feel included and safe. In classrooms where students truly interact with others who are different from themselves, there is an improvement of achievement levels and a place for real integration (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Collaboration with Families and the Local Community

The partnership between home and school is essential for supporting students' academic and social emotional success. Culturally responsive teachers see themselves as a part of the school and local community and see teaching as a way of giving back. Ladson-Billings (1994) shares from one of the teachers in her study who lives and works in the school community,

"Devereaux believes that teaching offers a humane, ethical way for people to give back to the community" (p. 42). Culturally responsive teaching prioritizes the home-school partnership and works to engage with community members. Culturally responsive teachers assume parents want to be involved in their child's education and recognize the challenge of time, location, and schedules, in addition to past traumatic experiences, that may cause resistance or barriers for them to attend.

> They develop engagement strategies that are sensitive to the unique barriers faced by immigrant families, families of color, and low-income families. Moreover, they continually seek to learn more about the local community as well as families and their cultures and values, and they collaborate with local agencies and organizations to arrange resources for students and families. (Muñiz, 2019, p. 15)

Culturally responsive teachers believe that family and community voice are an asset and that partnering will provide a more comprehensive educational experience (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Ladson-Billings, Gay, and Delpit challenge the status quo of education for Black students. I highlighted three culturally responsive teaching competencies that are evident across their work and will be useful to the school leaders in the PAR project and study. First, the importance of the student-teacher relationship is pronounced in their writings. A teacher must know their students' communities, cultures, and interests to teach them, and the curriculum they use must be reflective of their students. Second, teachers must deeply understand that students come with valuable assets, knowledge, culture, and experiences, and these must be acknowledged and explored in the classroom. The classroom space must promote respect for student differences and be an environment where cooperation, community, and connectedness

are central features. Finally, culturally relevant and responsive teaching cultivates a positive partnership between home and the local community. Voices of vulnerable and underserved populations are invited, valued, and included.

In highlighting authors and their work that led the research in culturally responsive pedagogy, we have a strong foundation for re-thinking how and what we might do in the PAR project to engage with Black youth and families. In the next section, I focus on how school leaders address anti-Blackness and support Black youth both directly in their interpersonal interactions and indirectly by addressing institutional structures.

The Role of Leaders in Supporting Black Youth

As the literature in the third section confirms and is exhibited in Figure 7, school leaders can play an important role in addressing issues of racism in schools and creating spaces that are inclusive of Youth and Families of Color (Khalifa et al., 2016; Leverett, 2002; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Theoharis, 2007). I review literature on culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) and critical race leadership. In the area of CRSL, I explore how school leaders promote a school climate and school environment that is inclusive for all students. I examine how school leaders maintain a strong presence and relationship with the communities they serve. Finally, I analyze how school leaders use hiring practices and professional development to insure that teacher preparation supports Youth of Color.

In the discussion of culturally responsive school leaders (CSRL), three areas emerge. First, school leaders must filter district mandates to determine the relevance of policy to their schools. As they categorize mandates, they can sort for racial equity or the status quo and take actions for racial justice. Secondly, administrative preparation programs should use a racial justice framework for school leadership. Third, analysis of leadership practices that are

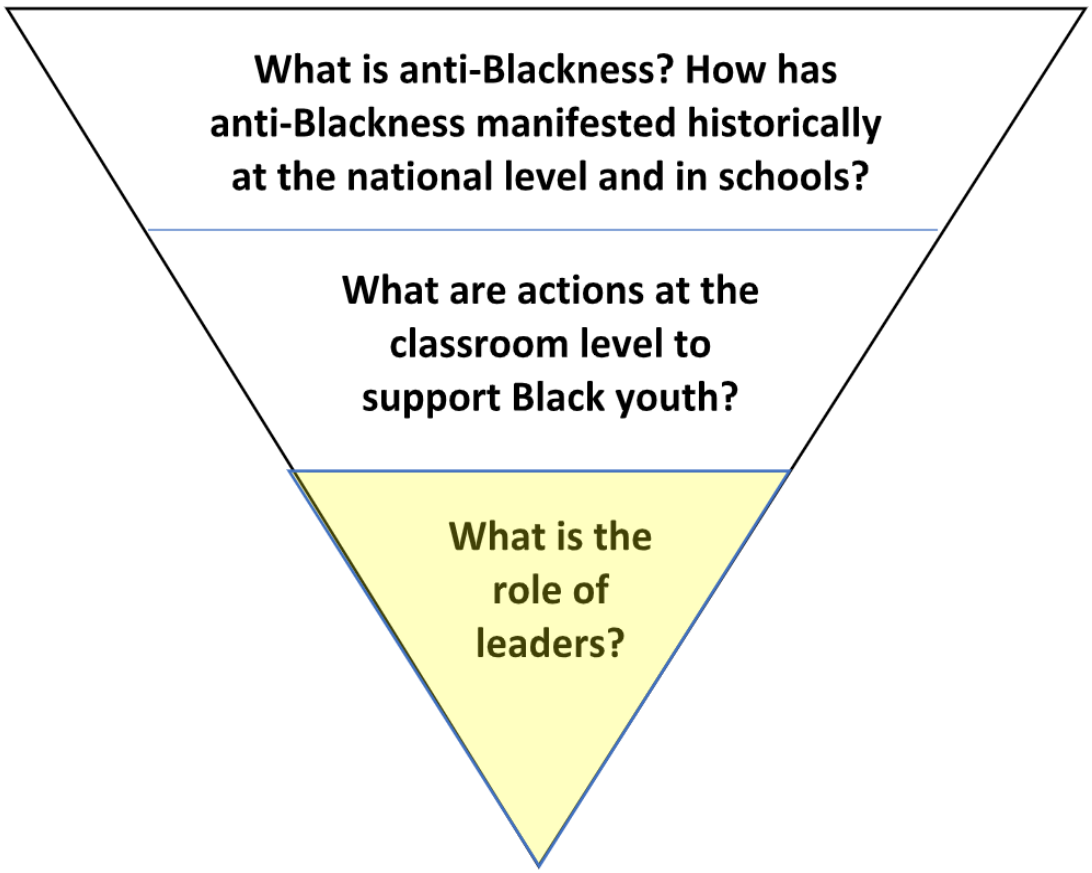


Figure 7. Literature review overview: The third section of the literature review focuses on the role of school leaders.

anti-oppressive include an examination of race as part of their framework and systematically use a lens of anti-racist leadership to frame conversations to affect local school policies (Kendi, 2019).

Culturally Responsive School Leaders (CRSLs)

As noted in the previous section, Delpit (1995), Gay (2018), and Ladson-Billings (1994) led the discourse on culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy in the classroom over the past twenty years. Their work focused on how to reform instruction and change curriculum in the classroom for Students of Color. Their work has implications for school leaders. While the terms "culturally relevant" and "culturally responsive" are close in meaning, "culturally responsive school leadership" (CRSL) is the term I use, as it is the term most often used in educational studies and communicates a more action-oriented stance. The word "responsive" emphasizes an urgency to action (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Culturally Responsive School Leadership and School Environment

Black students and other Students of Color enter school environments that often are institutionally racist (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). A CRSL must acknowledge this fact, operating with an explicit and implicit equity frame. "An 'equity frame' is defined as the visible enactment of an equity perspective or vision and presumes that a principal understands and communicates structural elements that undergird and influence the conditions for effective leadership in instruction and management" (Rigby & Tredway, 2015, p. 329). They must be equity warriors with a strong commitment to advocating for inclusion at their sites (Khalifa et al., 2016; Leverett, 2002; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Theoharis, 2007).

Further, CRSLs are warm demanders (Ware, 2006), working to create a welcoming and safe environment for students and families by warmly demanding that teachers respond in ways

that are equitable and culturally responsive. Site leaders must understand self, school, and community–-and the intersection of the three— to lead their diverse communities. Rigby and Tredway (2015) shared four recommendations for moving equity to action. First, the site leader must do a self-examination of their role in the system to authentically engage with their school community. Second, the site leader must have a deep knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of the stakeholders in the school community. Third, the site leader must be able to recognize and understand how issues around equity show up in school structures and classroom environments. Lastly, the site leader needs to experience and facilitate difficult and complex conversations with their school community, while eliciting ideas and solutions. Specifically, equity leaders must name instances of equity when they see them so as to promote both assets and issues of equity; they should be adept at casting the equity conversation from the micro level actions at school to the larger structural equity issues; and, finally, they should be clear about stating any next steps that they propose in equity language and talk about how what they are doing is moving toward more equitable practices and conditions. CRSLs must be reflective and responsive in order to promote and direct school climate and environment changes.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership and Community Members

Culture is often defined as a group's beliefs, norms, traditions, and customs (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). Yet, in different spaces, cultural norms are different: home, school, community, and national identity. While there is a home culture and a school culture that are understood, these cultures are not always seen as intersecting in our lives (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). School policies, school culture, Eurocentric curriculum, and adult expectations in some classrooms collide with the culture of students. As discussed earlier in the chapter, there is a fundamental problem in the underlying assumption that all students come from the same culture and learn the

same way (Ladson-Billings, 1994). CRSLs must be able to engage students, families, and communities in culturally appropriate ways. Khalifa et al. (2016) provide examples of how to do this work:

> This includes overlapping school–community contexts: speaking (or at least, honoring) native students' languages/lexicons, creating structures that accommodate the lives of parents, or even creating school spaces for marginalized student identities and behaviors all speak of this community aspect. (p. 1,282)

CRSLs must be able to share their personal stories, educational philosophies, and their commitment to culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy to earn the trust of their community (Johnson, 2007). Administrators must establish empowering relationships with their families and community members through active listening and by developing solutions collaboratively with families and community members (Guajardo et al., 2016).

Culturally Responsive School Leadership: Teacher Hiring and Professional Learning

I focus on two influential areas, hiring practices and professional development, taken from the literature on how CRSLs can support and prepare teachers for their diverse classroom needs. I highlight studies that demonstrate successful culturally responsive hiring practices. The second part shares the research of CRSL professional development strategies enacted for equity.

CRSL Hiring Practices. Public school teachers in the United States are disproportionately, even overwhelmingly, White. By contrast, the students they serve are from diverse backgrounds. There is a need to improve hiring practices to have students taught by teachers who look like them; we must interrupt the legacy hiring practices leftover as a result of desegregation (Goldstein, 2014),

> Of the nearly 3.4 million public school teachers in the United States in 2011-2012, the year for which most recent data are available, nearly 82% were White, and approximately 18% were People of Color. Only about 4% were Men of Color. For that same year, nearly 52% of public-school students were White and approximately 48% were of People of Color. (Vilson, 2015, p. 20)

By 2024, over 50% of the public-school student body nationwide will be Students of Color, while over 80% of the teacher population will continue to be White (Boser, 2011; Putman et al., 2016). Diversity in schools, including racial diversity among teachers, can provide significant benefits to students. Therefore, hiring more teachers who "match" the race of the student population is critical to the academic success of Students of Color (United States Department of Education, 2016). CRSLs strategically hire Teachers of Color by recruiting and retaining culturally responsive Teachers of Color (and White culturally responsive teachers), supplying them with culturally responsive resources and curriculum, and providing appropriate culturally responsive mentoring and modeling (Khalifa et al., 2016). While teacher preparation programs and school districts need to recruit more Candidates of Color, CRSLs' hiring approaches must be intentional and deliberate.

CRSLs and Professional Development. As previously noted, culturally relevant and culturally responsive classrooms are related to student academic success. Therefore, leaders have a primary role in engaging teachers in professional learning; specifically, learning that supports teacher growth in understanding and implementing culturally responsive curricula through culturally responsive pedagogical practices. CRSLs can develop the instructional capacity of teachers in ways that improve student achievement by establishing professional learning communities, supporting goal framing, offering strategic mentoring, and supporting culturally

relevant evaluation and assessment practices (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). However, school leaders often choose to hire external consultants to address culturally responsive topics, abdicating leadership to external experts. This practice is often not useful as it is difficult to shift the discussions about race, poverty, and difference to a sustainable and institutionalized school vision if the leader does not take a primary role in the professional learning facilitation (Grubb & Tredway, 2010). The important next step is to get leadership reform experts or subject area experts involved in professional development to add cultural knowledge. The CRSL should assist in improving structures that support ongoing professional learning and implementation.

In conclusion, CRSLs are responsible for ensuring that teachers are and remain culturally responsive by articulating a vision that supports the development and sustainability of culturally responsive teaching (Khalifa et al., 2016). Principals and site leaders must view their teachers as professionals capable of learning and enacting an equity agenda. Site leaders must have a commitment to their own professional growth and learning. Together with their teachers, they can move from deficit thinking to valuing diversity (Theoharis, 2009).

Critical Race Leadership

Site leaders need to have critical race school leadership lenses and skills to be culturally responsive leaders. Critical race leadership is based on the analytic framework of critical race theory. Critical race epistemology rejects the prevailing notion that scholarship about race in the United States should or could be neutral and objective (Kendi, 2019; Mills, 1997). Critical race theory considers how racism and white privilege come together to impact institutions and systems (Gooden, 2012). I next discuss how critical race leadership literature specifically addresses the importance of having a racial justice lens in leadership and how leadership preparation programs need to be structured to address the issues of race and equity.

Racial Justice Lens in Leadership

The first step in having a racial justice lens is understanding that race is a socially constructed category (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Once established, site leaders should consider creating a racial autobiography to help them understand their racial identity (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015). The process could include a careful look at equity traps and the ways of encouraging teachers to examine their practices from this perspective (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). These processes may encourage administrators to explore their beliefs about race, and may offer more insight into their development as anti-racist leaders and support them to lead professional learning in their schools. Khalifa (2018) states that another necessary step for school leaders is to conduct an equity audit. The equity audit can identify and address issues of inequities that exist at the schools. School leaders must then use their social justice lens to address and change inequities found during the audit (Gooden, 2012; Skrla et al., 2004).

Preparation Programs

Scholars have acknowledged tension between theory and practice as it relates to university and school district relationships (Lightfoot & Thompson, 2014). Yet, the university should be the catalyst responsible for developing leaders with a racial equity lens through leadership preparation programs. These programs must explicitly teach the research about equity traps and how to avoid racist actions and behaviors (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Gooden and O'Doherty (2015) propose a leadership preparation framework centered on race with five necessary areas: (1) a prophetic voice, (2) self-reflection serving as the motivation for transformative action, (3) a grounding in a critical theoretical construction, (4) a pragmatic edge that supports praxis, and (5) the inclusion of race language.

Engaging in prophetic discourse is a call to undermine the current power structure and to replace it with one that signals racial equity, social justice, and democratic practices. The prophetic voice questions educational processes accountable for creating equitable spaces for children and youth to learn. However, following such an interrogation, the visionary side of the leadership preparation framework explains why the traditional, Eurocentric practice must stop, as well as how to bring change. In this way, the prophetic voice not only questions, but provides rationales and potential solutions to the observed systemic inequities.

As discussed in earlier sections, it is mandatory that site leaders participate in self-reflection. The framework of educational leadership calls for critical self-reflection but includes the importance of transformative action. Another requirement for an effective leadership preparation framework is critical theoretical construction. Critical theory essentially critiques the everyday realities of inequitable systemic injustices. Educational leaders must embed theory in their core implementation strategies to create a true social justice agenda. In a qualitative study that analyzed 40 hours of videotape transcripts of ten school leaders who were engaged in enacting equity, Rigby and Tredway (2015) found that when principals cast micro racial actions in a larger structural reality, they had more success with engaging with teachers. Leaders must support staff to see beyond the micro context to the structural context, to prevent microaggressions and venting to become a part of the school culture. If a school has more complete conversations about structural racial dynamics, teachers and leaders can then examine equity traps to change their beliefs and practices (Eubanks et al., 1997).

Freire (1970) contends that any equity leadership framework must include *praxis* – using systematic reflection to act for social justice. Current and prospective school leaders must have the ability to critically reflect on the crisis of marginalization that is common in educational

institutions, but then must offer solutions or strategies to tackle these discriminatory practices. School leaders must be pragmatic at the same time they are visionary; they must be school leaders who see the work of schools as being in partnership with others in transforming society. The work requires questioning the very structures that harm so many institutions and societal rituals while at the same time implementing a transformative agenda aimed at changing the ways, attitudes, and structures that have for so long disseminated a racist, classist, and sexist ideology. Kendi (2019) urges leaders to systematically address race by being and becoming active and thoughtful anti-racists who work to change policy: "Antiracist ideas argue that racist policies are the cause of racial inequities" (p. 20).

In examining how school leaders promote a school climate and school environment that is inclusive for all students, I explored how school leaders can maintain a strong presence and relationship with the communities they serve. And finally, school leaders should use hiring practices and professional development to support teacher preparation to support Youth of Color. Finally, school leaders need to not only stand for racial justice and racial equity, but they must be wholly and fully intentional about their actions to foster anti-racism. When presented with district mandates, they need to make strategic decisions about what is best for their schools and challenge racist actions and racist policies.

Conclusion

The literature review informed the decisions and actions school leaders could and should make to serve Black students, which is the focus of practice for the PAR project and study. To understand how to do this, I needed to understand why Black students were marginalized historically and continue to be marginalized presently. The macro lens provided context of institutionalized racism that school leaders and I need to understand to support Black students. I

examined research that focused on the classroom level. The literature offers strategies in culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy. School leaders can work with their teachers to apply culturally responsive curriculum in the classroom to support Students of Color. Finally, I reviewed research that focused on the micro level of culturally responsive leadership and critical race leadership. The research addressed the actions school leaders could take to support Black students. The research guides my leadership of a professional learning community focused on supporting Black students.

The intent of the literature review was to understand the research on the historical and theoretical context of Black people in education and how that history is perpetuated today. In the participatory action research project and the evidence from iterative cycles of inquiry, we used the literature as a touchstone and foundation to ground our actions, have discussions, and fortify our efforts to make decisions and act on behalf of promoting racial equity for Black youth and support the academic and social emotional learning of Black students. In the next chapter I describe and analyze the context of the city and school district where the study occurred.

CHAPTER 3: CONTEXT

When I was a dean of students at a 9-12 comprehensive high school in San Francisco, I supported ninth grade students' academic, counseling, and discipline needs. Approaching the end of my first semester, ninth grade discipline referral rates were already close to 100. A group of Black ninth grade students were regularly sent out of class. They came to my office to inform me that they were not allowed to stay in class for a multitude of reasons: they were being disruptive, they were not doing their work, they did not come prepared to class, etc. In my first ten years as an educator, ten students who I knew well died. All ten students were Black males, ages 14-25. One student died in a car accident, another student died from a drug overdose, the other eight students were killed from neighborhood gun violence. From this experience, I am committed to changing the outcome for our Youth of Color. Interacting with the students and having the opportunity to hear their stories and their experiences in school made me want to be an administrator. I wanted to learn how to respond to students differently, especially the most marginalized students. I wanted to learn how to help teachers be more culturally responsive to Students of Color. I wanted to learn how to work with school leaders to influence their decision making and actions to better support Students of Color.

I currently work in the school district central office as a supervisor in the College and Career Readiness department. In this position, I support school sites, school leaders, and teachers on college and career programming. When I moved from my position as a school site administrator to the central office, I immediately noticed structural and systemic issues of inequity, particularly for Students of Color. The inequity issues are abundant, including budget allocations, staffing allocations, and material resources.

The PAR project takes place in San Francisco, California. San Francisco is a city and

school district rich in culture, with a history of civil rights activism. Yet, the city and school district are racially and economically segregated. Many schools in San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) have equity gaps in academic outcomes and culture and climate data as shared in Chapter 1. For this study, I focused on how school leaders examined their beliefs, made decisions, and took actions to support Black students in three San Francisco middle schools. In analyzing the research settings, I examined the three schools and the district at the macro, meso, and micro levels and introduced the school leaders, who I refer to as Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR), who agreed to participate in this project. Next, I will discuss the assets and supports present in the district and school settings. The chapter concludes with my role in the study, and a formal chapter summary.

As stated in previous chapters, I repeat and clarify of my use of the terms "African American" and "Black.": Because the San Francisco Unified School District employs "African American," I used African American when I refer to the District's work; because educational research most frequently uses "Black," I use that term, as my term of preference. I use capitalization for Students of Color consistent with the literature review in Chapter 2.

Place Matters

San Francisco is known for its dynamic location, views, weather, beauty, lifestyle, diversity, and history, as well as for its controversial leaders and cutting-edge politics. The city accepts diversity and experimentalism living alongside great conservatism and tradition (Hartman et al., 2002). While residents relate with the neighborhoods in which they reside, there is a larger community history and context that is San Francisco. SFUSD serves a large portion of the community, including generations of Black, Latinx, Asian, and White families and recent immigrants.

Where the PAR project takes place matters. The unique attributes of the setting for this study are a critical context. For purposes of the project and study, the macro level is the United States and the state of California. At the meso level, the study was distinctively in the city of San Francisco, but more specifically the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), which is both one large school district and a county office. The three middle schools are at the micro level.

Macro Context: Federal and State

The macro policy context of federal and state governments influences district policy. In the era of NCLB, beginning in 2002, federal and state governments, in addition to school districts, used test scores as the marker for student performance and school success. In 2013, the U.S. Department of Education approved SFUSD and districts of the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) for a waiver from certain requirements under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) which enabled SFUSD to implement the School Quality Improvement System (Core District Website, 2017). The waiver status, along with SFUSD strategic plan, allowed the district to continue the following district priorities and commitments (SFUSD Website, 2019):

- Support students so they can thrive academically, emotionally, and socially.
- Focus our entire district on the goal of preparing every student for college and career.
- Measure school performance in a variety of ways (e.g., school safety, student academic achievement, student attendance, parent satisfaction) that collectively indicate if students are being prepared for college and career.
- Foster a culture of professional collaboration and continual improvement among teachers, school staff, parents, and students

- Accelerate our district's transition to the Common Core state standards, which will improve the way we teach and learn in ways that significantly better prepare students for college, career, and participatory democracy in the 21st century.

Under the School Quality Improvement System, schools that had previously received Federal Title 1 funds and/or did not meet yearly progress would no longer be categorized as Program Improvement. Instead, schools not showing growth by the new measures would receive additional resources and supports for students and families.

However, federal and state policy continued to dominate how we identified students for added support or interventions at the local level. For example, SFUSD attempted to address the equity gaps/education debt, specifically with Black students, but the district used the same markers from NCLB. This led to similar NCLB results. "In this way, the disaggregation of test scores by subgroup, which was NCLB's most progressive feature, actually produced regressive results" (Kantor & Lowe, 2016, p. 49). The policy reinforced class- and race-based differences in access to resources rather than increasing resources available to those who lacked them.

Meso Context: The City of San Francisco and San Francisco Unified School District

SFUSD is the seventh largest school district in California and a "single district county" because San Francisco is both a city and a county; SFUSD leads both the school district and the San Francisco County Office of Education (COE). As of the 2018-19 school year, SFUSD has a total of 133 schools and over 53,000 students (SFUSD Website, 2019). There are 64 elementary schools (TK-5); eight alternatively configured schools (TK-8); 13 middle schools (6-8); 14 high schools; 12 early education schools; and 14 active charter schools authorized by the district. In addition, there are three continuation and five county programs. While SFUSD is a large, urban district in a relatively small geographic location (49 square miles), its individual school and

neighborhood diversity and characteristics make each site exceptional and distinctive. About 70% of school age children attend San Francisco public schools; the other 30% of school age students attend private and charter schools. Table 1 contrasts student demographic data of SFUSD alongside the demographics of the city of San Francisco (United States Census Website, 2019).

While San Francisco is diverse, it has a long history of segregation. The multisector policies around housing, schools, and transportation all contribute to generations of segregation and racism. As noted in Table 1, the Black community today makes up only a small percentage of the city and school district population. In 1940, San Francisco's Black population was around 4,800 (less than 1%). By 1970 it was 96,000 (13%), but by 2016, the Black population dropped to 46,000 (5%) (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, 2020). The Black population decreased while the overall population of San Francisco continued to increase.

Starting in the 1920s and 1930s, federal housing agencies provided banks color-coded residential safety maps to identify the best areas to back loans. Those living in red-lined areas, Black, and immigrant communities were in areas that were warned against granting loans, and, thus, few people from the redlined areas owned homes. Starting in late 1940s and lasting through the 1970s, urban renewal plans worked to change neighborhoods such as the predominantly Black area of the Fillmore. The Black population in the Fillmore after urban renewal was cut in half (Thompson, 2016). Unfortunately, the consequences of redlining and urban renewal left a geographic, financial, and social divide between racial communities. The history of redlining and urban renewal has driven both racial stratification and foreclosures, two of the major features of modern gentrification. Currently, reinvestment has not lessened these worries; rather;

Table 1

Racial Demographic Data of the City of San Francisco Compared to San Francisco Unified School District (United States Census Website, 2019)

Ethnicity	San Francisco	SFUSD
White	40%	15%
Asian	34%	40%
Latinx	15%	27%
African American/Black	5%	7%
Multi-Racial	5%	5%

reinvestment has further increased the stress upon poorer residents and minorities, often leaving them without a place to live (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, 2020).

Student assignment policies were another factor that contributed to the declining Black population in San Francisco public schools. San Francisco was the first large city outside of the South to face court ordered school desegregation following *Brown v. Board of Education.* The district's student assignment system would be under court supervision of one kind or another through December 2005 (Rand, 2020). In each variation, complicated community politics emerged when one set of stakeholders attempted to interrupt policy arrangements that another set of stakeholders hoped to protect. This included the fight for neighborhood schools, choice schools, and opportunities by school. In addition, busing was a solution for desegregation of schools, especially in the mid-1970s and early 1980s. While busing did reduce segregation, as a policy it faced passionate disapproval. The inability to agree on student assignment policy, with the community preference for neighborhood schools, led to tension that ran across racial lines, leading to future community advocacy for yet another change in policy. Despite the many attempts to create a student assignment policy that would promote diverse schools, SFUSD is currently at similar segregation levels today as when desegregation efforts started in the early 1970s (Rand, 2020).

In addition to San Francisco demographics and its history of segregation, I offer the context of the school district and its relationship to this PAR study. Two of SFUSD distinguished documents, Vision 2025, and the PITCH initiative, provide a background that is unique to SFUSD and demonstrates the district's clear equity stance and intentions.

Vision 2025

In 2013, many constituent groups met for several months to develop a new vision for San Francisco public education. The Vision 2025 document clearly articulated the graduate profile. The vision communicates how SFUSD is taking a leadership role to innovate educational equity and excellence for all students. The district is transparent in its equity agenda and hopes to ultimately support a diverse and vibrant community in San Francisco.

PITCH

At the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, the superintendent classified twenty elementary and middle schools as "PITCH" schools. PITCH stands for:

- *P- Professional Capacity*: Ensuring all school staff have professional development to support African American students. Supporting staff to engage in collaborative inquiry using evidence to improve their effectiveness.
- *Instructional Guidance:* Ensuring all instructional staff implement a rigorous, standards-based curriculum and pedagogy that builds on African American students' strengths, mindsets, agency, and identity.
- *T- Transformative Mindsets:* Establishing a positive student- centered learning culture for African American students that is culturally responsive, celebrates success, and reduces negative effects of bias and stereotype.
- *C- Collaborative Culture:* Building a relational trust and strong partnerships with African American families and communities to support students' success at home and at school.

- *H- High-Quality Staff:* Retaining and recruiting educators who have demonstrated success in working with African American students and families. Supporting continued development and commitment to ensure long-term professional growth.

Twenty school leaders attended a meeting in August 2018 to learn what it meant to be a PITCH school and were told to do a self-assessment school audit. The leaders used a district framework, SFUSD's PITCH Continuum of Effective Practices for Supporting African American Students, adapted from Bryk improvement science (see Figure 8).

Ten schools that historically underserved African American students and have wide achievement gaps are PITCH schools. Along with the PITCH framework, the district provided a rubric for each effective practice. School leaders had a strict deadline of completing the PITCH self-assessment in the first weeks of school. They had to choose one effective practice from the rubric to support Black students at the school. Once selected, school leaders were to lead a community meeting to share their school achievement data and the PITCH focal area. Once site leaders submitted the PITCH documents, PITCH schools would be aligned by area of focus. The district plan was to lead all PITCH schools in inquiry cycles and provide resources dependent on area of focus.

The three middle schools in the PAR study are PITCH "gap" schools with small Black student populations of less than 10% in the 2018-19 school year and an opportunity gap that led to low academic performance scores. Principals attended monthly meetings throughout the first year of PITCH, and through that process pinpointed an area of focus for each school.

As we began to meet for the PAR study in 2019-20, I learned more about how the district meetings and supports led to administrative actions at the school level, what decisions the school leaders made for their PITCH plans, and why they chose specific actions. These understandings

Figure 8. The PITCH framework for San Francisco Unified School District.

motivated the PAR research. I wondered how more support might influence the decision making and ultimately impact actions at the schools.

The meso context provided an overview of the city of San Francisco demographics and its history of segregation, including a brief historical description of school assignment policies. The school district demographics, vision, and PITCH initiative provided additional setting for this study. The background about the city of San Francisco and SFUSD provided important perspective on the inimitability for the setting of the PAR. The micro context in the next section offers additional details about the schools in the study.

Micro Context: Three Middle Schools

The district approach to identifying PITCH schools was parallel to the political model of No Child Left Behind (NCLB); there was a shared assumption that the sites demonstrated a lack of accountability in how they utilized resources to support students (Kantor & Lowe, 2016). Once PITCH was announced, I contacted several school administrators, and three middle school principals volunteered to be Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR) for the study and one assistant principal asked if he could join as well. The four leaders, along with their schools, are at the center of this study. I begin with a brief profile of each school's demographics (data pulled in Fall 2018). Then, I introduce each of the four school leaders. Brief biographies provide essential context for understanding their social justice leadership lenses.

Fort Point Middle School

Fort Point Middle School is a large middle school with just under 1,000 students. Fort Point, located in an affluent neighborhood of San Francisco, is one of nine master- planned neighborhoods of San Francisco. The initial property deeds in 1910 declared this area a Whites-only neighborhood. The courts intervened in 1948, but the first non-White resident did not move

into the neighborhood until 1957 (Thompson, 2016). Currently, the approximate demographics of the school are: 40% Asian, 20% Hispanic, 15% White, 10% African American, and 10% identified as two or more races. The school classifies 18% of students as English Learners, 15% in Special Education, and 54% as socio-economically disadvantaged. The principal had been at the school for four years; the 2018-19 school year was her first year as principal. There are two assistant principals (AP), one for curriculum and instruction and one for student support services. Most of the African American students at the school come to the school by bus from the southeast corner of the city.

Lone Mountain Middle School

Lone Mountain Middle School has nearly 700 students and is in a west side neighborhood. The development of the area started after the 1906 Earthquake on land that was originally Ohlone. Russian refugees and immigrants, along with ethnic Jewish and Irish Americans, first inhabited the neighborhood; Chinese immigrants moved in after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1965 was lifted (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, 2020). As of the 2019-20 school year, approximate demographics of the school are: 45% Asian, 23% White, 12% Hispanic, 3.6% African American, and 11% identified as two or more races. 10% of students are classified as English Learners, just under 10% are in Special Education, and 37% is categorized as Socio-economically Disadvantaged. The principal has been at the school for six years and the assistant principal for five years. Most African American students at the school come from the historic Black neighborhood in the center of the city.

Crissy Field Middle School

Crissy Field Middle School is a large middle school with just over 1,000 students, located in the same west side neighborhood as Lone Mountain Middle School. The estimated

demographics of the school are: 40% Asian, 25% White, 13% Hispanic, 3.6% African American, and 11% are two or more races. The school classifies 11% of the students as English Learners, 13% Special Education, and 35% as Socio-economically Disadvantaged. The principal is now in her third year as principal. There are two assistant principals (AP), one for curriculum and instruction and one for student support services. African American students travel from both the center of the city and the southeast corner to attend the school.

Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR)

The three principals and the AP from Fort Point, Lone Mountain, and Crissy Field middle schools formed the CPR group. Once the four school leaders agreed to participate as CPRs, I embedded myself in a leadership team at each site during the 2018-19 school year to understand the background at each school. In the first year, the main goal was to build a relationship with each CPR member and learn about the schools. I wanted to learn what focus of practice they chose for PITCH and why. In the first group meeting, I had each CPR fill out a Google slide to share as a bio. These are the questions they answered:

- Name/ School
- Where are they from?
- How many years in SFUSD?
- Where they started teaching?
- How they got into leadership?

I developed a brief bio of each participant from what they shared in the slide and what I learned about each CPR.

Assistant Principal Girard

Assistant Principal Girard was born and raised in Kailua, Hawaii. He originally

started teaching in the East Bay, Northern California, and eventually moved to SFUSD. He started as a special education teacher. Assistant Principal Girard worked a total of 11 years in SFUSD and 22 years in education. He transitioned to leadership first as a department chair in SFUSD, eventually becoming assistant principal at Lone Mountain Middle School. He identifies as a bi-racial male, East Indian and White, Special Education teacher, surfer, and traveler.

Principal Lang

Principal Lang is the Principal of Lone Mountain Middle School. He has worked for SFUSD for eight years. His first two years were as assistant principal of counseling and student support at a different SFUSD middle school and, during the PAR, he was in his sixth and seventh year as principal at Lone Mountain. He taught for thirteen years prior to transitioning into school leadership. He began his leadership journey as a teacher leader in charge of numerous school wide initiatives and, when he realized he could do more in schools as an administrator, he decided to earn his master's degree in School Organization and Leadership at the University of San Francisco. Principal Lang identifies as a White male, raised in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Principal Sutherland

Principal Sutherland at Crissy Field Middle School had her first year as principal in the 2018-2019 school year. She had worked in SFUSD for 12 years, starting as a teacher at a different SFUSD middle school. At Crissy Field MS, Principal Sutherland's transition to leadership at Crissy Field MS took her from department chair to literacy and new teacher coach, then to AP, and finally to principal. She identifies as a White, cisgender female, mother of three, English teacher, Head Teacher and Lead Learner, cook, reader, and cat owner.

Principal Schwarz

Principal Schwarz led Fort Point Middle School from 2018-2020. She is from Eugene,

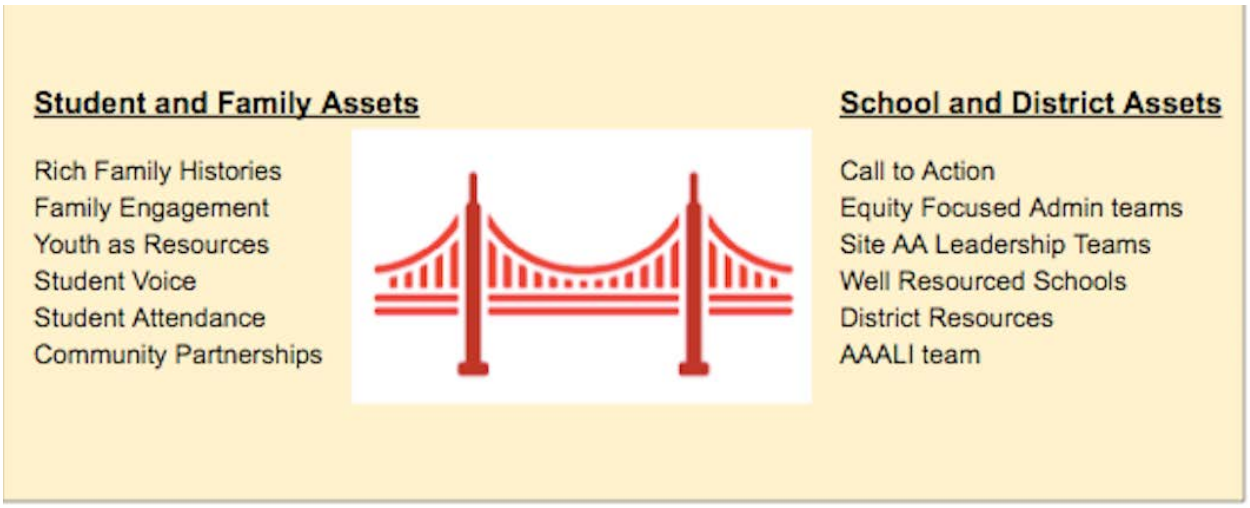
Oregon. She started as a special education teacher at a San Francisco county alternative school. Her leadership journey was by accident: she started taking on teacher leadership roles, realized she liked coaching and working with adults, and become supervisor in SFUSD Special Education Department. She transitioned to a school administrative role at Fort Point Middle School as assistant principal and then principal. Principal Schwarz left Fort Point at the end of the 2019-20 school year and resigned from SFUSD. She had been with SFUSD for 11 years. She identifies as White female.

In the first year, while no data were collected, I had the opportunity to connect with each CPR at a minimum of once a month to build relationships and nurture trust. As a result, when we started data collection (process described in Chapter 4), they were more open to sharing and accepting feedback.

The micro context explained demographic information of the three middle schools and provided brief biographies of four middle school administrators. While the similarities in the schools they lead brought us together, there was not a common path that led these equity-focused leaders to school administration.

Assets and Supports

San Francisco is known for its two beautiful and iconic bridges, the Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge. I thought it appropriate to use the bridge as a symbol of the school and school district assets at one end and the students and family assets at the other, flowing back and forth as supports for each other (see Figure 9). The work of SFUSD is to connect students and families to the learning opportunities the district provides while using students' and families' expertise, history, and knowledge as resources to inform the school communities.



Note. The bridge represents the relationship between the student and family assets and the school and district assets.

Figure 9. Assets of students/ families and schools/districts.

Student and Family Assets

In addition to the school leaders, the students and families are critical to the study. Many Students and Families of Color have a generational history that is rich in culture, experience, and expertise. They have counter-stories, stories of the people whose experiences are often not told. The counter-stories must be heard to counteract the dominant narrative that perpetuates racist systems and racial privilege (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Leadership teams can gain a different perspective by hearing directly from the Students and Families of Color, specifically Black families. This perspective could inform decision making and actions to better serve the Student and Families of Color.

School and District Assets

SFUSD created a vision statement and graduate profile to align beliefs and expectations to serve and educate each and every student with a focus on equity. San Francisco Unified's vision commits to the service of all students: SFUSD is committed to helping all students develop strong academic knowledge and skills, as well as a host of dispositions and behaviors, that increase their curiosity and engagement, activate their full potential for learning, and prepare them for life, work, and study beyond their secondary school years. While the pace and the path toward achieving these outcomes will vary among students and unfold along a set of learning progressions, the goal is for every SFUSD student to possess these capacities by the time they graduate (SFUSD Website, 2019).

The graduate profile serves as the anchor for the vision and identifies the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behaviors required by our 21st century world. The vision and graduate profiles represent the expectation that equity is a focus from our progressive city and school district. The core value page on the SFUSD Website has the following statement, "As we work

toward changing the system so that it truly is able to serve all students, we must have a strong set of core values and core beliefs that will guide us through the challenges that will come our way" (SFUSD Website, 2019). In addition to having a call to action, SFUSD has a designated African American Alliance Leadership Initiative (AAALI) office designated to improve the achievement of African American students. Schools have African American Leadership teams or parent groups that are designed to support Black students.

It is important to recognize the voice and stories of students and families as assets in addition to school and district assets. They are not exclusive of one another. SFUSD has committed to be an equity centered school district with an intentionality on educating each and every student. SFUSD and SFUSD schools must include student and family voice in policy and decision making to best serve every student.

My Role

My entire career as an educator has been with SFUSD. I started my career at a 9-12 comprehensive high school on the east side of San Francisco as a 9th grade algebra teacher. I became dean of students at that school as I worked on my administrative credential, and then was assistant principal of a neighboring high school, leading me to work as a program administrator, partnered with a non-profit, to support Black males. Most recently, I was principal at a high performing, Title 1, Cantonese-bi-literacy elementary school on the west side of San Francisco. My first role when transitioning to the central office from school site leadership, was leading summer programming and coordinating interventions and extended learning opportunities for Black students in K-12 schools. In parallel with my job, I identified PITCH schools that might need support and reached out to school leaders to identify partners. I specifically sought school leaders from the PITCH "gap" middle schools. I chose to work with this group of schools and

administrators because they had minimal resources to address PITCH, and the Black students were a small percentage of the overall student population at the schools. In October 2019, I transitioned within the same department to be the supervisor of the district AVID program, positioning my work directly with the schools in the study.

Now in my twentieth year in SFUSD, I have been able to gain experience learning about different departments, working with many communities, and educating diverse youth. In 2006, I completed a leadership action research project on how teachers could better serve Black males in their classrooms. Since then, I have committed to serving Black student populations in San Francisco. All these experiences have provided me the opportunity to be able to lead this work today.

Conclusion

The chapter provided a broad overview of the city of San Francisco and the unique relationship between the school district and the focus of practice for the participatory action research (PAR) project and study. I specifically explored the importance of place in the macro, meso, and micro contexts of the study. In the macro context, I shared how NCLB policy on assessments reinforced class and race-based differences and negatively impacted the resources meant to serve marginalized youth. In the meso context, I provided the history of segregation in San Francisco which led to current enrollment patterns in SFUSD, the emphatic district vision focused on equity, and the details of the PITCH initiative. The micro context included brief descriptions of each school in the study, and the CPR school leaders were introduced. Next, I highlighted the essential assets and supports. The chapter concluded with a brief biography of my work experience and how I connect my day-to-day work with the study. Chapter 4 provides the methodology of the project.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR) DESIGN

In the participatory action research (PAR) study, I, with a team of co-practitioner researchers, engaged in an administrative network to address the persistent inequities of Black students in three middle schools in San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). The superintendent identified twenty schools in the district with historic and persistent equity gaps and responded with the PITCH program: **P**rofessional Capacity, **I**nstructional Guidance, **T**ransformative Mindsets, **C**ollaborative Culture, and **H**igh-Quality Staff. In our study of these the three schools, we were interested in making more culturally responsive decisions to address the academic and social emotional growth of Black student populations. The four school leaders in the study who acted as co-practitioner researchers (CPRs) included three principals and one assistant principal.

As noted in other chapters, I use the term "African American" when referring specifically to the work of SFUSD because that is the term they use. In all other instances, I use the term "Black" because it is the term used most frequently in educational research and is my term of preference.

Our theory of action asserted that if school leaders focus on the academic and social emotional growth of Black students by participating in an EC-PLC with authentic dialogue and use community learning exchange as a process and a methodology, then the leaders could make decisions and take actions that increased the academic and social-emotional growth of Black students. My goal was to facilitate reform efforts through a school leader network that we called an equity-centered professional learning community (EC-PLC), consisting of like-minded school leaders committed to social justice and a willingness to more deeply understand the community

and families they serve. This EC-PLC engaged in iterative cycles of inquiry to better understand and then act on our learning to serve Black families and students.

In this chapter, I discuss our methodological approach to the study, which was participatory action research informed by activist methodology for activist research (Hale, 2008; Herr & Anderson, 2014; hunter et al., 2013) and community learning exchange methodology and protocols (Guajardo et al., 2016). I first provide an overview of the research design and methodology for the study, then outline the cycles of action research and the research questions. The chapter concludes with detailed attention to the methods of data collection and analysis and potential limitations of the study.

Research Design

The purpose of the research, reflected in the research question, drives the design of the study and informs the methodology (Cohen et al., 2018). The primary methodologies are PAR and community learning exchange (CLE) axioms and protocols.

Participatory Action Research

I selected action research for this study because of the process in which participants individually or a group in an organization or community examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully to address a particular problematic situation (Herr & Anderson, 2014). However, participatory action and activist research has another key dimension important to our work in schools and communities. Activist participatory action research is directed toward actions that promote social change and support researchers to engage in renegotiating power dynamics (hunter et al., 2013). PAR as activist research breaks from conventional ways of doing research and is useful when dealing with topics of equity, social justice, self-reliance, and oppression, as the evidence is often qualitative and iterative. PAR methodology employs inquiry

that is conducted *with* people in an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them (Cohen et al., 2018). To augment the collaborative nature of PAR and its attempts to alter the positionality of the researcher(s), PAR in educational research is concerned with context and in working directly with constituents who are closest to the issues as they may have responses that the researchers cannot know or see. Therefore, first I collaborated with a team of co-practitioner researchers who were school leaders and had the daily responsibility of implementing change; secondly, the team worked directly with Black families and students to better understand their experiences in the middle school and use what we learned to re-structure teaching and learning.

As we collected and analyzed data, we collectively implemented changes or action plans based on the findings of iterative cycles of inquiry. The actions (PAR project) and research (PAR study) occurred simultaneously over three cycles of inquiry. In the PAR study, we used an inquiry action research cycle and included the development of an EC-PLC, known in the improvement sciences as a networked improvement community (Bryk et al., 2017). The inquiry cycle assumes that a network, through carefully planning and doing, can study trial efforts and then act in ways that are informed by evidence. Thus, we could enact improvements in a relatively short amount of time, and then study that improvement to make decisions about future actions. The process is repetitive, and iterative evidence informs the next cycle of inquiry; decisions about what to do next rest on evidence from each short cycle of inquiry.

Community Learning Exchange

Guajardo et al. (2016) define the purpose of a community learning exchange approach: A CLE provides an opportunity for diverse community members to come together for a period of engaged, deep learning. Together in relationship, these community members openly examine

their common challenges, collective gifts, and then freely exchange successful approaches and tools that can drive changes within themselves, their organizations (including schools), and their communities (p. 3).

A CLE is a dynamic experience connecting the wisdom of the people in deep conversations with those committed to working together and learning from each other. The five CLE axioms guided and informed our collective learning and are the foundation of the CLE pedagogical approaches. The five CLE axioms are essential in expanding the social aspects of learning and will be evident in the PAR project.

1. *Learning and leadership are dynamic social processes.* All participants have something to share and something to learn. Everyone has something to contribute through questions, conversations, and storytelling. Relationships build the learning and can be developed through play.
2. *Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes.* As relationships are the core of social learning theory, creating a safe space to share is crucial. Safe space ensures environments that support vulnerable, honest conversations and relational trust.
3. *The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns.* Listening to the people closest to the issue allows stakeholder groups to have the power and voice to influence the approach of addressing the issue through the CLE process. Constituent voice can generate new ideas allowing administrators to develop specific and appropriate plans.
4. *Crossing boundaries enriches the development and educational process.* Border crossing increases inclusion because it forces administrators to leave their comfort

zones and shift from traditional methods. By encouraging curiosity about alternative voices and approaches, administrators can begin to shift the status quo to address the actual concerns of community members.

5. *Hope and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities.* Allowing community members and constituents to have meaningful participation in proposing and implementing solutions to the issues they identify and prioritize will inspire their belief in any plans of action. Rather than external authority figures deciding what should work for members of the community, the community self-actualizes and thereby empowers itself. The solutions thus are built on the actual assets and strengths of all participants and shift from a deficit model of change to an ideologically and relationally growth mindset model. (Guajardo et al., 2016)

As a part of our cycles of inquiry, the CPR team participated in Community Learning Exchanges (CLE). We felt it was important to listen to Black students and families about their experiences before developing plans to respond to the district, which was a technical action we needed to address as a part of our roles in the district. However, as we listened iteratively to Black families and students, our action plan moved from technical responsibility to practical need and finally to the emancipatory goal of ensuring that the knowledge generated through the research primarily reflected the values and interests of the families and students (hunter et al., 2013). The CLE provided a foundation and a methodology for the PAR because the artifacts from the learning exchanges provided authentic evidence for qualitative analysis by the CPR team and me and informed the CPR school leaders' inquiry cycles. The evidence sources from the CLE are more organic and dynamic; rather than a staid interview of focus group, we used the elements of circle,

storytelling, and world café to build and sustain relationship, shift power dynamics, and gather evidence for analysis. In the three action research cycles in which we engaged, the usefulness of the protocols and qualitative data sources became more apparent.

Action Research Cycles

Action research presumes the work of schools and districts is open-ended, and participatory action and activist research presumes that a wider group of participants inform the decisions. For the purposes of the PAR project and the dissertation, we responded to a district mandate to improve on the mandate that was already in progress. However, as we engaged in the cycles, that bureaucratic responsibility moved away from a technical, rational change activity using cycles of inquiry to one that recognized that our solidarity with families was central to dynamic change. This led us to do what McDonald (1996) urges us: rewire schools by process information, exchange energy, and exercise a different kind of power—bringing the power of student and family voice to the school reform table. Through listening to family and student stories in the CLE and translating what we learned to our leadership, we re-conceived what it meant to lead and we had, in fact, shifted to whom we were most accountable—not district mandates or project, but the students in the school.

The EC-PLC used the evidence from each PAR cycle to make improvements. Schools and districts are not often organized in ways that promote continuous learning: work is often done in silos; policy demands push for quick results; formative and useful data maybe collected, but not analyzed in a useful way; the right kind of data for making improvements are not frequently or quickly available to meaningfully inform and change practice; and poor outcomes are viewed as individual failures rather than a by-product of a misaligned system (Park et al., 2013). We designed our process to mitigate some of these issues. We relied on what Safir (2017)

calls street data and Cobb et al. (2018) name as pragmatic data. Instead of autopsy data that we receive yearly to inform us of persistent achievement gaps, we used iterative qualitative data to understand the root causes of the issue. As we analyzed those data, the opportunity gap became more visible (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Milner, 2020).

The project timeline was: Fall 2019 (PAR Cycle One), Spring 2020 (PAR Cycle Two), and Fall 2020 (PAR Cycle Three). In addition to the three inquiry cycles, we met in a pre-cycle during the 2018-19 school year. As a result of the meetings, we built relationships with one another and I had an opportunity to learn about the schools' contexts. The uninterrupted time to focus on PITCH requirements together allowed a foundational relationship to develop and us to partner in a Community Learning Exchange (CLE) in PAR Cycle One.

Co-Participant Researchers

The PAR participants are school leaders whose schools were designated PITCH schools and were identified for having a high equity achievement gap between Black students and their White and Asian counterparts. In the PAR study, I was the lead researcher working with the school leaders as co-participant researchers (CPR). That is, our EC-PLC is a co-participant research team of five persons.

The four CPR school leaders were from three different schools. I had collegial relationships with all four leaders prior to the study. All four administrators received information about the purpose of the study and agreed to partner in the research. They signed consent forms upon IRB approval with the understanding that they could leave the study at any time. The commitment was to meet as an administrative network (Bryk et al., 2017), an EC-PLC, and work together, outside of the work day, to improve academic and social emotional outcomes for Black students. We believed the CPR group would be instrumental in identifying the problems,

gathering and analyzing data, co-generating plans using the inquiry process, and setting a course of action that better served the Black communities (Bryk et al., 2017; hunter et al., 2013).

Chapter 3 included thorough descriptions of each CPR participant and the context of their school sites:

- Principal Schwarz at Fort Point Middle School
- Principal Sutherland at Crissy Field Middle School
- Principal Lang at Lone Mountain Middle School
- Assistant Principal Girard at Lone Mountain Middle School

As leaders at PITCH schools, all four of them are mandated to address the persistent equity gap of Black students. In preliminary informal discussions with each leader, it was evident that they are committed to serving all students and addressing the systemic injustices at their sites. Because she resigned from the district, Principal Schwartz at Fort Point Middle School was unable to participate after PAR Cycle Two.

As an EC-PLC, we fully engaged in *praxis*—reflecting in order to act on behalf of the constituents to create social change (Freire, 1970). Freire was suspicious of people coming into communities with more answers than questions. He was adamant that, while there are shared goals, the process of co-learning through participation is central to any attempt to work alongside the oppressed. Throughout the PAR, I reflected on my positionality and was mindful that while I was lead researcher, I was a co-learner with the school administrators in the CPR group. We, as a group, engaged Black students and families in a CLE so we could authentically listen: we could witness their stories; hear their voices, concerns, and ideas; and put those closest to the issues at the center. Our process from the beginning was to listen to Black students and families, reflect on what they said, and solve school challenges in educating their children in partnership. Reflection

was embedded throughout the three inquiry PAR cycles through the use of memos and interviews as described in the chapters. As we reflected, generative themes of practice emerged and we gained new understandings in our roles as social justice leaders and activist researchers.

Data Collection and Analysis

In a typical qualitative study, the researcher(s) collect data to understand shared patterns over time through observing participants engaging in specific behaviors (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the PAR study, we used multiple methods of collecting qualitative data. Specifically, I used artifacts from the community learning exchanges, interviews, observation notes from the CPR team meetings and individual coaching and reflection sessions, and reflective memos as the key qualitative data instruments. From the analyses of these evidence sources, we used the iterative data to inform future inquiry cycles and interactions and events with Black students and families. Although for purposes of the dissertation the study has ended, our work has not. One of the key advantages of our participatory action research was that it revealed a process for continuing our work using qualitative evidence to inform our decisions. We are continuing to meet as an EC-PLC because the network experience has provided a reflective space to make evidence-based decisions and support each other as leaders.

Qualitative Data Collection

In the PAR study, qualitative data was the primary data collection method used for analysis and making iterative decisions. The only formal instrument to collect data in the study was an interview protocol, used at the end of the study in PAR Cycle Three (see Appendix F). Other evidence include CLE artifacts, observation notes, and reflective memos. We collected quantitative data in the form of numbers of persons attending parents' events, and school and district student data continued to inform our process.

Interviews provide semi-structured, open-ended opportunities for participants to share their perspectives, perceptions, and experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the PAR study, I conducted informal individual interviews during check-ins with CPR team members during each cycle. I used a formal interview questionnaire at the end of the study. Questions in the interview template aligned with the research questions. During each cycle, I met with each CPR member individually in the context of coaching and reflection session on PITCH plans. For these meetings, I facilitated agendas and official minutes, in addition to recording my own meeting notes. The meeting notes were used for analysis to determine codes and patterns in the data.

Observation notes are the researcher's record of activities observed at a research site. The behavior and activities of individuals provide material for these notes. Qualitative researchers may engage as a non-participant or as a complete participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In most of the observations in the study, I was an active participant in the PAR and a participant in our EC-PLC; in addition, I attended school climate team, grade level, or leadership meetings. When invited to faculty meetings or other larger school events, I was often a non-active participant, though I played a more active role in these spaces in PAR Cycle Three. At times, I participated in classroom walkthroughs and observed instruction with the school leaders. I collected data from the observations usually on a shared Google document for the school leader to reference.

Memos are reflective journal notes written during the research process that assist in the coding process to determine emerging themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). The memos documented my reflections about my thoughts, feelings, and experiences after meeting with the CPR team, connecting with a school leader in an individual coaching and reflection

session, or conducting a school visit. These memos, triangulated with other qualitative data, supported the evidence for the study.

Data Analysis

I conducted data analysis concurrently with data collection, thereby enabling the data analysis to inform iterative decisions in the PAR processes. I collaborated with the CPR group to analyze our work together throughout the process. The overarching research question and sub-questions are displayed in the first column of Table 2. The data sources from each PAR cycle respond to the research questions and are triangulated with the data sources. I conducted regular member checks to respond to evidence I used at conclusion of each PAR cycle to ensure the validity standard described in the data analysis and limitations (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

Data collection procedures for the PAR study included information gathering through formal and informal qualitative data methods and establishing a process for recording information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data collecting methods produced evidence from interviews, observation notes, and memos. To complete these analyses, I used an open coding technique in which I organized multiple qualitative sources into a set of usable evidence and then analyzed the evidence sets for patterns for each research question (Saldaña, 2016). I then triangulated the various types of data collected using first level and second level coding. First level or initial coding developed emerging categories in PAR Cycle One, and second level coding solidified emergent themes for PAR Cycle Two. By PAR Cycle Three's conclusion, the data moved from emergent themes to findings to making claims in response to the research questions.

East Carolina University and University of San Francisco professors provided support for my personal and professional reflective growth. East Carolina cohort members who live in

Table 2

Research Questions and Data Sources

How do site leaders make decisions and take actions that impact the academic and social-emotional growth of African American students?

Research Question (sub-question)	Data Source (Metrics)	Triangulated With…
To what extent do PITCH school leaders change their beliefs?	● CPR Observation notes ● Individual Coaching and Reflection session notes ● Interviews	● Data from CLE ● Memos
To what extent do PITCH school leaders change their practices?	● CPR Observation notes ● Individual Coaching and Reflection session notes ● Interviews	● Data from CLE ● Memos
How do the school leaders in the EC-PLC use a networked improvement community to build their capacity for change?	● CPR Observation notes ● Individual Coaching and Reflection session notes ● Interview with CPR team	● Member checks ● Memos
How does the work with school leaders inform and transform my leadership?	● CPR Observation notes ● Individual Coaching and Reflection session notes ● Interviews	● Memos

proximity contributed opportunities for reflection throughout the course of the study. These check-ins provided continuous reflection on the process of research and assisted in filling knowledge gaps.

Study Limitations

As the primary researcher for the PAR project, I came to the study with ideas of what I wanted to study and potential CPR members who would be open to joining me in the research. As a CPR team, we planned and implemented the CLE, then reviewed the artifacts from the event together. I conferred with the CPR team throughout the PAR cycles, which allowed for multiple perspectives to be considered in the implementation of cycles of inquiry and reflection to enact change. In addition, we discussed validity considerations for the PAR study.

I considered my role in the group and in the district. I had an influential role as a district level administrator with its related power during the course of the study, which required me to take special measures to ensure that all participants gave informed consent without any coercion or sense of obligation. If at any time they decided to terminate consent, they could do so without reprisal.

My formal request to conduct the study was approved by my direct supervisors as well as the school district. I completed Institutional Review Board Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (IRB CITI) certification in January 2019 to comply with the ethical requirements governing human research. Even with these safeguards in place prior to the inception of the project, termination of the study could occur at any time, for any reason.

Internal Validity

Issues of data collection and analysis can cause concern. Specifically, indicators of trustworthiness involve establishing credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). The CPR school administrators are busy; therefore, the EC-PLC did not process all data. However, member checks and our EC-PLC time together ensured the validity of data collection and analysis as we were able to have ongoing dialogue regarding interpretation of the data and make meaning together (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The team for the study included three principals and an assistant principal. Thus, one principal and one assistant principal were from the same school. This was a limitation to the study: two administrators from one site meant there was not consistency in positions. However, because the assistant principal at one site wanted to join, he was included.

The CLE was a foundational experience that led the study in deep and purposeful conversations (Guajardo et al., 2016). The CPR school leaders independently determined who they invited to the CLE. There was inconsistency in who came from the site teams at the CLE. The hope was to have diversity within the school teams; however, one site struggled to get students and families to participate, and this was a limitation in the study. In participatory action research, reliability and validity as standards of methodological rigor are critical. I used qualitative research methods as a part of the PAR that hold this standard of validity: "a built-in test of validity that is much more demanding and stringent than conventional alternatives: Is it comprehensible to, and does it work for, a specific group of people?" (Hale, 2008; Hale, 2017). In this case, did our actions, based on the analysis of iterative evidence, begin to change academic outcomes for Black families and students? Was what we decided to do useful to improving the middle school experiences of Black students? We used the community learning exchanges as both a methodology and a process to ensure this usefulness.

Researchers who spend prolonged time with participants develop an in-depth understanding and level of detail about the site and participants that provide credibility to the

narrative account. We conducted the study over eighteen months. This time frame provided the opportunity to gather qualitative data for three inquiry cycles with participants. Extended time means that we had the opportunity to have more accurate or valid findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

External Validity

The project was established within the scope of the work of SFUSD. The study may be generalized to the scope of work within SFUSD, but caution should be taken when applying these study results to other schools or districts; there is transferability or external validity for the process to other SFUSD schools, but not specific outcomes for the schools. This is only one study in one district with a small group of urban school leaders. Thus, the process undergirding the study could be replicated in other schools or districts, but outcomes are not dependable across contexts. The value of qualitative research according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), is dependent on the particular description and themes developed in the context of a specific site.

Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

The participants in the study were site-based practitioners committed to supporting the academic and social emotional growth of Black student groups. I selected the participants based on familiarity with their work and existing working relationships. I met with each potential participant individually in a private meeting and asked them if they would be interested in participating in my research. Each CPR member signed a consent form prior to participating in the study. My relationship with each CPR member was based on trust and the ability to have honest conversations about the data for the research project. The focus of the study was how school leaders can best support African American students and families, who constitute a small student population at each site. The students and site populations in the study are vulnerable, and

special considerations were respected. The schools and participants in the study were protected through the use of pseudonyms. Data was presented in a non-judgmental way and used in a transparent manner with the CPR and the school district. All appropriate consent for the study was in place prior to initiating the study.

Participants were required to sign consent forms approved by East Carolina University's Institutional Review Board (ECU IRB). Participants were informed that the participation was entirely voluntary.

Data security and the confidentiality of the participants was a priority for the study. Confidentiality was maintained through the following measures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018):

1. Important and personal papers and data files were stored in a locked file cabinet.
2. All electronic forms for data collection were kept in password protected file.
3. Data and copies of reports were shared with the CPR group for purposes of transparency, improvement, and reflection.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided the research design and methodology for the PAR study to answer the overarching research question guiding the project: How do school leaders make decisions and take actions that support the academic and social-emotional growth of African American students? The CPR team participated in PAR methodology by engaging in three inquiry cycles, participating in a Community Learning Exchange in PAR Cycle One, and using CLE axioms and pedagogical approaches to connect with Black students and families. Throughout each cycle, I collected and analyzed data to ascertain patterns and, with the CPR team, determined next steps. The processes for data collection and analysis were detailed in the chapter, as well as the role of reflection, potential limitations, and ethical considerations of the

study. In Chapter 5, I presented the first level of organizing the PAR with the school leaders and the first set of data in which I developed a coding system that lead to a set of categories. In Chapter 6, I used the same process and analyzed data to determine emergent themes. Chapter 7, the third PAR cycle, will yield findings.

CHAPTER 5: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE ONE

> *There will always be setbacks, missteps, pushback, and losses in the fight for justice. Whiteness is resisting too. Whiteness will counterpunch and try to knock you out because Whiteness is consumed by its self-interest. However, activism, no matter how big or how small, grounded in the teachings and dreams of abolitionist and participatory democracy, will win.*
>
> –Bettina Love (2019), p. 115.

When I first read Love's words, I felt she was speaking directly to me. The quotation was a vital reminder that the fight for justice is not easy. We must battle supremacist assumptions, challenge systematic oppression, and account for the experiences of the marginalized. Throughout the process, action is a critical imperative.

Love's epigraph parallels the dilemma the school leaders in this study faced when trying to implement their PITCH plans (**P**rofessional Capacity, **I**nstructional Guidance, **T**ransformative Mindsets, **C**ollaborative Culture, **H**igh-Quality Staff). While the school district had identified a cyclical problem regarding Black student achievement, the district provided limited guidance and few detailed procedures to address the persistent and historical inequities. The four school leaders, all of whom -- at the risk of setbacks, missteps, pushback, and losses -- contended with their "Whiteness" and courageously pursued projects to advance inclusion and success among the Black families in their school communities. While none of the leaders fully achieved the goals of the PITCH plans during Participatory Action Research (PAR) Cycle One, the equity-centered Professional Learning Community (EC-PLC) model was crucial for all of them in providing collaborative guidance and encouragement to continue to forge ahead fearlessly in the fight for justice.

To identify and prioritize the school issues, the leaders seized opportunities to engage in thoughtful, equity-centered dialogue inclusive of the Black voices in the school communities in the first inquiry cycle. Using an EC -PLC model and individual coaching meetings, I established

a space for school leaders to connect personally and professionally and develop peer relationships for authentic feedback and reflection. Using the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) methodology (Guajardo et al., 2016), the school leaders brought together Black students and families from the respective school communities. School leaders were able to listen authentically to Black students and families with the intention to better serve them.

In this chapter, I first describe the background through which the Co-Practitioner Research (CPR) group of school leaders and I established ourselves as an EC-PLC, the activities we engaged in during the cycle, and how we collected data to determine action steps for the cycle. Next, I explore the emerging categories that developed because of data analyses and how the categories connect to the research questions of the PAR study. Finally, I explain how the findings from the cycle informed the plan for PAR Cycle Two.

Love's epigraph remained central to this cycle. The leaders fully participated in each meeting, and they demonstrated full presence for their schools. While the cycle did not go as they intended in many ways, -- we learned that "activism, no matter how big or small" provides optimism for future cycles.

PAR Cycle One Process

The PAR Cycle One process for the project was divided into three parts: (1) a *pre-cycle*, described below under Pre-cycle 2018-19 school year, during which I formed the EC-PLC for the PAR project and study and obtained the administrators' consent to participate; (2) PAR Cycle One activities, defined as the activities the CPR team engaged in during the Fall 2019 semester; and (3) Data collection and analysis from the first PAR cycle. I begin with a discussion of what happened the year before PAR Cycle One commenced.

Pre-Cycle 2018-19 School Year

Prior to beginning PAR Cycle One, I engaged in a pre-cycle with the school

leaders for the academic school year (2018-19). The pre-cycle was not a formal part of our collective research, but it did set up the conditions necessary for our work which began in Fall 2019. The discussion begins with a background of the pre-cycle year and concludes with a brief synopsis of the school leaders PITCH plans in pre-cycle.

Background: Year in Review (2018-19)

The genesis of the research–focusing on principal leadership to improve Black achievement–and my relationship with the school leaders (as referenced in Chapters 1 and 3) began in Summer 2018. At the beginning of the 2018-19 school year, the Superintendent identified twenty schools that historically or persistently underserved their Black students as indicated by lower test scores (California School Dashboard, 2018). The schools were labeled PITCH schools. As part of my role in central office, I had the opportunity to invite five middle school leaders, whose schools were identified as PITCH schools, to partner with me in year-long process to create and implement a PITCH plan. Three of the school leaders responded, and an assistant principal who heard about the proposal asked to be included. In total, I worked with three different schools and four different leaders (two from the same school). (Chapter 3 includes participant bios). The goal in the pre-cycle was to co-create an EC-PLC in which the leaders supported each other in the PITCH work to bring about sustainable change for the Black students. Theoharis (2009) demonstrates that networks like EC-PLCs support administrators with opportunities to share ideas, emotional support, and assistance in problem solving. I had observed that the district's efforts to create collaborative communities of administrators were largely frustrated by the unclear goals, surface-level relationships among leaders from different schools, and potential reprisal. My intention was for leaders to support one another as resource in

their work, have a safe space to connect with colleagues to discuss hard issues, and provide encouragement in overcoming resistance and barriers.

Over the course of the year, I brought the school leaders together three times for formal, facilitated meetings. At the first meeting, in November 2018, I shared my vision for an EC-PLC that would support one another in the PITCH work, offering the rationale for collective leadership. In that meeting, we completed a leadership journey line activity by mapping our personal and professional backgrounds and philosophies (where we come from and why we are here as administrators in SFUSD schools). At the second and third meetings (February and April 2018), we analyzed school academic and attendance data and brainstormed possible root causes for the persistent gaps between Black students and students of other racial groups.

Over the three meetings, we exchanged leadership stories. We looked closely at each school's data -related to serving Black students. We read articles about race, leadership, and social justice work in schools. Finally, we shared our leadership practices using a critical friends protocol to elicit feedback from peers. Following each meeting, I hosted the leaders for dinner at a local restaurant. Over dinner, in the informal setting, we deepened our relationships and built relational trust.

School Leader PITCH Plans in Pre-Cycle

Despite their commitment to being social justice leaders and to improving outcomes for their most vulnerable student populations, the site administrators clearly felt that the PITCH requirement was an oppressive, hierarchical mandate (Theoharis, 2009). As PITCH was the Superintendent's initiative, the school principals were required to participate. The mandate was to identify an area of growth and develop a plan to raise Black student achievement, specifically in high-stakes testing; but this was not a realistic goal since there was lack of clarity and

resources on how to implement their plans. In the 2019-2020 school year, the leaders identified specific actions to support Black students according to the PITCH requirements. With minimal support of the mandate, the leaders created plans that were traditional and standard–too big for attainable and sustainable change.

Assistant Principal Girard. Assistant Principal Girard supervises the counseling and student support office at Lone Mountain Middle School. He discussed the urgency to establish the culture climate team. The teachers and staff were asking for structures and protocols to address student behaviors. During our check-in meeting, he explained the question he was struggling with. *"How do I change the conversation from why the students behave the way they behave to what they need from us as the adults in the school?* Initial ideas to address PITCH were to build a shared leadership model in the student support office, including building relational trust with the security team.

Principal Lang. Principal Lang, along with Assistant Principal Girard, presented the school wide PITCH focus for the 2019-20 school year at Lone Mountain Middle School. The plan was to expand the African American leadership team to meet twice per month (first Monday of the month focused on focal students and the third Monday of each month focused on developing project-based units). In addition, the extra PITCH funding was used to hire a student and family liaison to support students in the classroom.

Principal Sutherland. Principal Sutherland had completed her first year as principal at Crissy Field Middle School. During an individual check-in meeting, she shared the questions for the 2019-20 school year. *"How do we build brave spaces for learning for students and adults? How do we provide opportunities to listen to our students? How do we build connectedness to the classroom?"* Her initial thoughts were to develop instructional leadership and culture climate

teams to grapple with these questions. She used the extra funding from PITCH for a consultant to lead staff development focused on educational equity.

Principal Schwartz. Principal Schwartz finished her first year as principal at Fort Point Middle School. The previous year, there was an event that caused significant community harm and uncovered some underlying equity needs. It was determined that the 2019-20 school year PITCH focus would be on building professional capacity and transforming mindsets. The plan was for the Culturally Responsive Teaching Lead Team to facilitate monthly whole staff PD using *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* as a framework (Hammond, 2015). The primary goal of the meetings was to strengthen community and relational trust so they could build a foundation for courageous student-centered and equity-driven conversations. In addition, Principal Schwartz hoped to use PITCH funding to hire an instructional reform facilitator to coach the staff on literacy strategies and assist with case management of Black students.

All four school leaders articulated a plan for the next school year with the goal of raising student achievement for Black students, a typical goal of district plans, but without causal possibility of achieving those outcomes in one year. Without question, the school leaders were committed to equity and social justice; however, their PITCH plans were not directly aligned to their goal of raising Black student achievement.

PAR Cycle One Activities

While we collected no data in the initial year, relational trust among the CPR blossomed in the pre-cycle. As we shared and heard each other's stories, both in formal and informal settings, we formed personal and professional connections. The principals found that having colleagues they could talk with provided the needed feeling of support. The uninterrupted,

dedicated time as an EC-PLC assisted in building the foundation to embark on this journey together in Cycle One.

The CPR team engaged in several activities throughout the first PAR cycle (see Table 3). I provide a description of the activities starting with the planning of the CLE in our first CPR meeting and the individual coaching and reflection check-in meeting that accompanied it. By early October, we held the Student and Family Wisdom Circle, an event designed to use the principles and protocols of the community learning exchange (Guajardo et al., 2016). Once school leaders decided on an action, I scheduled a second individual coaching session to support each leader's action plan. At our last EC-PLC in early January we reflected on what happened in the fall and how the school leaders adjusted their actions for the spring semester inquiry cycle. I collected agendas, notes, artifacts, and my reflection memos as data from the first cycle. Analysis of the data follows the activities sub-section.

CPR Meeting #1

I informally met with each CPR member prior to meeting as a group in our first EC-PLC for the fall semester, to reconnect, confirm participation in the EC-PLC, and learn if PITCH plans had changed. During the check-in meetings, each CPR member communicated the desire to do a fall semester community event for the Black families. I recommended we facilitate a CLE together with the three sites, and they agreed. I explained what a CLE was and framed the CLE as an opportunity for them to be active participants with the students and families rather than the traditional format of food and presentation.

The first EC-PLC for the 2019-20 school year, in early September, included an ECU instructor who assisted in the planning, offering suggestions of CLE axioms and protocols that

Table 3

PAR Plan, Cycle One

Activities	Key Personnel	Timeline	Data Collection
CPR Meeting #1: Formally establish CPR group	CPR group	September 9, 2019	Agenda Observation notes Memo
Coaching and Reflection Session #1: Meet with individual CPR member	School Leader	Mid-September/ Early October 2019	Interview Protocol Memo
Student and Family Listening Sessions (CLE)	All CPR School Leaders with school communities	October 9, 2019	Agenda Observation notes Memo
CPR Meeting #2: Reflect CLE and develop PDSA	CPR group	October 16, 2019	Agenda Observation notes Memo
Coaching and Reflection Session #2: Meet with individual CPR member	School Leader	Mid-October/ Early November 2019	Interview Protocol Memo
CPR Meeting #3:Reflect PDSA Cycle 1	CPR group	November 19, 2019 Rescheduled to January 2020	Agenda Observation notes Memo

could be used for our time, space, topic, and population. We decided to start the CLE with dinner and introductions. We made decisions collectively on which activities would engage all participants and ensure that students and families would be comfortable sharing. We agreed that the student advisor from Lone Mountain would be our best choice for facilitation. He is a Black male, from the neighborhood of the families, and graduated from the SFUSD school system.

Coaching and Reflection Session #1

After the first EC-PLC, I scheduled individual meetings with each CPR member. The purpose was to build individual, trusting relationships with the school leaders independent of the EC-PLC and to learn about each administrator and his/her context and respective work environment. I asked them the following questions:

- How's it going?
- What are your goals for this year?
- Did your PITCH goal change for the year?
- What student programming are you doing for your Black students this year?
- How can I be of help?

My intention was to learn how each person responded to the opening of school and assess changes within their schools that may affect the PAR. In addition, I was interested in how each leader planned to recruit students and families for the CLE. I distributed the notes for the meetings through a Google shared folder.

Three common takeaways emerged from the individual meetings. First, the school leaders retained the original PITCH plans for the 2019-20 school year, and they were excited to add the Student and Family Wisdom Circles CLE event to their plans. Next, they had not started recruiting Black students and families for the event, although it was two weeks away. Lastly, the

work to improve outcomes for Black youth was a goal with little implementation. When the school leaders saw me at the school, I reminded them of their PITCH priorities, but those did not appear to be a part of their everyday routines and culture.

Community Learning Exchange (CLE)

The CLE was held at a local community center in the San Francisco. The location was convenient for two of the school family populations but more challenging for the Fort Point community on the southeast where most of the Black students mostly live. The team hoped to hold the event on one side of the city in fall and on the other side of the city in spring.

We decided to call the CLE–Student and Family Wisdom Circles– the title demonstrated what we want to honor in the participants. Forty students, parents/guardians, and school staff attended the CLE: ten families from two schools attended, as did 20-25 staff from those schools. The only representative from Fort Point was the CPR member, Principal Schwartz. We held the CLE Student and Family Wisdom Circles night the first week in October and used three protocols that supported the goals: inside-out circles, world café, and closing circle.

Inside-Outside Circles. As the participants walked in, they were invited to have dinner. After 30 minutes, co-facilitating the event with the Lone Mountain student advisor, we started with introductions. We set up two concentric circles for inner inside-outside circles. Participants chose a place to sit and exchanged information with a partner until the facilitator signaled the outer circle to move in one direction, giving each participant a new person to talk to. Five questions were asked in total, each question more personal than the previous question. This initial activity was an opportunity for all participants to share and connect in meaningful ways.

World Café Activity. We transitioned the participants back to the tables and began the second round of activities. Three groups of 8-10 people were at each table based on a color from

their nametags, with a mix of students, staff, and family members at each table. We provided three posters, each representing a space in the school: one with questions about the classroom, one with questions about school experience, and one for the community. The world café activity was about thirty minutes in total.

Participants completed a t-chart recording their positive and negative experiences on three prompts, Classroom, School, and Community, by answering these questions: (1) In the classroom, what are ways classrooms do serve Black students and families and do not serve Black students and families? (2) In the school, what are spaces where you feel like you belong and where are spaces on campus you feel like you do not belong? (3) In the community, what are assets and resources in your community? Where are spaces in your community where you feel safe, and where are spaces in your community where you may experience microaggressions? What are things in the community that the school can model? All participants engaged in the activity through all three rounds.

Closing Circle. The CLE ended with an appreciation circle. Our intention was for everyone to a voice in the space, truly see each other, and close with a collective experience. Each person commented on what they liked about the CLE. They expressed gratitude for the space and time together, respect for sharing truth, and hope for change. The hour and a half CLE provided opportunities of boundary-crossing to learn from each other across differences, outside of our comfort zone, and to start to shift the status quo (Guajardo et al., 2016).

CPR Meeting #2

The CPR team engaged in two debriefs after the CLE. First, we engaged in a reflective conversation about the event over dinner. I captured notes from the evening while we engaged in the space of celebration with the school leaders. In discussion, the school leaders articulated what

> they heard from students, families, and Black staff. Assistant Principal Girard conveyed: The parents said the systems in place at school are hard to navigate. When you come in the school, it is confusing and not welcoming. A parent said that they came in to meet with their child's counselor, and they weren't willing to help without an appointment. How is that welcoming? (Girard, meeting notes, October 9, 2019)

Principal Lang pointed out that Black families said they felt dismissed when they offered solutions. He added that he would like to do a school site-specific Community Learning Exchange. Principal Sutherland (2019) agreed and remarked, "The big, hard questions are tied to the classroom. We need to replicate this for faculty with students and families that came." The school leaders were overwhelmingly positive and the initial sentiments indicated a desire to continue to engage with Black students and families.

We met the next week to debrief the CLE event and collectively look at the event data I had analyzed to determine appropriate next steps. I started the meeting with a journal write and asked the school leaders to reflect on the following questions: What is already happening at your school to support Black students and families? How can what you heard in the CLE shift the work without adding to it? After a brief share-out, we transitioned to looking at the data I had analyzed. I organized the data (Post-it Notes) from the world café poster activity and presented the positive and delta patterns within each grouping of classroom, school, and community (see Table 4). The data was inclusive of the attending CLE participants (educators, parents, students, and community members). The data indicated positive views of curriculum, relationships, and community-based partners and a need for growth or improvement was noted in culturally responsive curriculum and professional development, school rules and consequences, inviting school spaces and events, sense of belonging, and afterschool access. The school experiences

Table 4

Data Analysis from CLE Data Collection

Setting	Positives and Deltas	Patterns	Number of Instances
Classroom			
	Positives	Curriculum	8
	Deltas	Culturally Responsive Curriculum and Professional Development	8
		School Rules and Consequences	6
School			
	Positives	Relationships/Resources	7
		School Connectedness-Friends	6
	Deltas	Inviting Office Spaces and School Events	8
		Sense of Belonging	4
Community			
	Positives	Community Based Organizations	8
	Deltas	Afterschool/CBO Access	5
		PTSA Events	2

conveyed by Black students and families, albeit a small representation from the community, was consistent with Khalifa (2018) equity audit research data, educators are disconnected from Black community epistemology and voice.

During the final activity, school leaders chose an action that they could complete in a six-week inquiry cycle based on the CLE and the data. Each administrator workshopped their proposed actions. Once decided, the CPR team developed an initial plan that included time in their calendars. The evening concluded with a home-cooked dinner.

Coaching and Reflection Session #2

In the weeks that followed the CLE, I met with each CPR administrator other than Principal Schwartz, who was not available. At each meeting, my priority was to reconnect with the school leader personally and professionally, affirm the school leader's actions for PAR Cycle One, and confirm they had started the cycle.

Assistant Principal Girard and Principal Lang preserved their original action, and I assisted in developing agendas for their respective meetings. Principal Sutherland defined her action for PAR Cycle One more clearly:

> Every teacher will choose and meet with a focal student (SFUSD defines focal students as an underserved student group, i.e., African American students, Latinx students, students in Special Education, and students identified as English Learners). I want teachers to start picking a literacy strategy, write it into their lesson plans, and design their lessons for their focal student. The teacher leaders on the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) will monitor and support. (Sutherland, meeting notes, October 30, 2019)

After I had clarity on Principal Sutherland's action, we developed a calendar for her to include the work in her ILT. We agreed that I would come to do informal classroom

observations, specifically looking for opportunities for students to engage in academic conversations.

While the meetings were one-on-one, there were commonalities amongst the leaders' comments: (1) the leaders prioritized PITCH work and commitment to raising the achievement of Black students; (2) CPR school leaders viewed me as both support and accountability to the work; and (3) CPR leaders encountered barriers throughout the cycle, barriers defined by Theoharis (2009) as "all the resistance, countervailing pressures, tensions, and realities that detract from leading more equitable and just schools" (p. 87). The barriers distracted the school leaders from maintaining the agreed upon timeline. I organized the CPR actions chosen for PAR Cycle One in Table 5.

CPR Meeting #3

The last CPR EC-PLC, scheduled for November to end PAR Cycle One, was postponed until early January. The agenda included three distinct activities: a reflection on how each school leader engaged in and interpreted the first cycle of inquiry, a member check on the evidence to date, and an opportunity for reflection and changes for the next inquiry cycle.

To start the meeting, I asked the CPR school leaders to draw a visual representation of PAR Cycle One. Next, they presented the drawings with the narratives of the cycle. Principal Schwartz shared her contribution via email, and we connected on a one-on-one phone call a week later since she was not able to attend the EC-PLC.

The CPR reflection drawings signified that each leader made PITCH plans that were too big to begin with, and the plans were then dropped because of the competing priorities. Each administrator's drawing articulated the roadblocks, obstacles, curves, and politics that interrupt the work. Principal Schwartz revealed how school and district politics prevented her from

Table 5

PAR Cycle One CPR Actions

CPR Member	What they heard from CLE	Action
Principal Sutherland	"Students don't feel safe in the classroom. We need to get more student voices."	"Teachers are going to begin to build their knowledge and practice of CRT. The ILT and PD calendar will reflect this."
Assistant Principal Girard	"Engage in active discussions with our shared perspective and be strategic in implementing sustainable school wide strategies. All the feedback what families said was around school culture. This is more impactful because it is trying to make a human connection."	"Weekly facilitate T-10 (security) meetings and slowly build community and capacity and draft yearly goals for T-10's to promote inclusion."
Principal Lang	"We need to do a better job of making our African American families feel welcome and part of the community."	"Over the next six weeks the Lone Mountain staff is going to develop Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for all of our African American students."

Note. Data for the table came from October 9, 2020, and October 16, 2020, debriefs.

accomplishing the plan. While she, along with the other CPR school leaders, seemed defeated and disappointed, they did not drop everything. Principal Sutherland expressed her plan to pivot for next cycle, "I am asking teachers to repeat focal student selection (this time ensuring Black students are selected). Who they chose the first time, tells me a lot. I am not giving up on this; we keep refining what we are doing" (Sutherland, meeting notes, January 9, 2020). Our process for reflection and mutual accountability in the EC-PLC is unique because we persisted despite the barriers. In chapter six, I describe the CPR school leaders revised plans.

Following the reflection of the cycle, we engaged in a member check on my analysis of the PAR Cycle One data which included the coding tables. I presented the initial data and a brief analysis and asked questions on the coding process. They agreed that that while it appeared little happened in PAR Cycle One, the EC-PLC had a positive impact on the school leaders with data to support. Lastly, CPR school leaders responded to the prompt: *Write one concrete shift you want to make.* I captured their reflections with the intentions to follow-up during individual coaching meetings. The meeting ended with our ritual of dinner together.

This section delineated the activities the CPR members participated in during PAR Cycle One. We had three CPR EC-PLC meetings, a CLE, and two individual coaching meetings. The cycle did not go as planned for the school leaders, in most part because principals are accustomed to making more elaborate plans for change than can actually be accomplished in a short span of time; the leaders and I, schooled in institutional expectations of committing to great leaps forward that rarely happen, think we are not accomplishing enough. Though each leader faced unique barriers and obstacles at their school sites, their overly ambitious plans meant that none were able to complete their PITCH actions as planned. Nevertheless, the leaders prioritized the topic individually and collectively. The power of the CLE experience shifted their thinking, and

that in itself is a significant change for the first inquiry cycle. Figures 10-13 included quotes along with pictures to explain the leaders' CPR reflections. While the quotes tend to evince a shared disappointment, they in fact suggest hope. Their reflections capture the leaders' value of community and their commitment to moving forward with this work and to being social justice leaders.

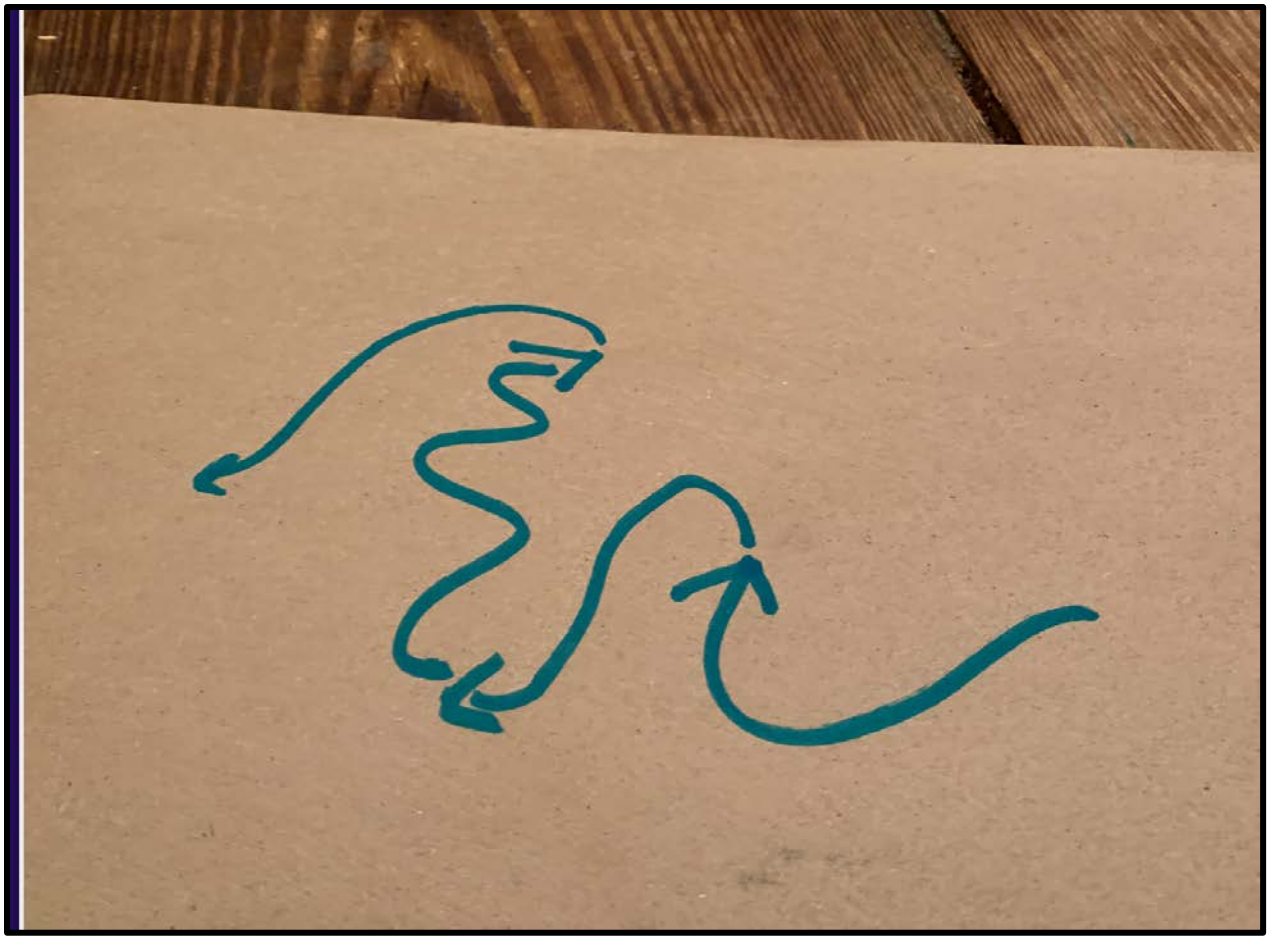
Data Collection and Analysis

Several forms of data were collected and analyzed to investigate what happened throughout PAR Cycle One. First, I share what data was collected from the activities described above. Then, I explain the process I used to analyze the data, and that leads to the categories and codes that emerged.

Data Collection

I wrote memos to myself throughout the semester. Some in response to graduate school assignments, others were recordings of my thoughts after CPR meetings or individual coaching discussions. The memos serve as reminders as well as a running record of my ongoing metacognition process while experiencing PAR Cycle One and connecting what I was learning to my leadership practices.

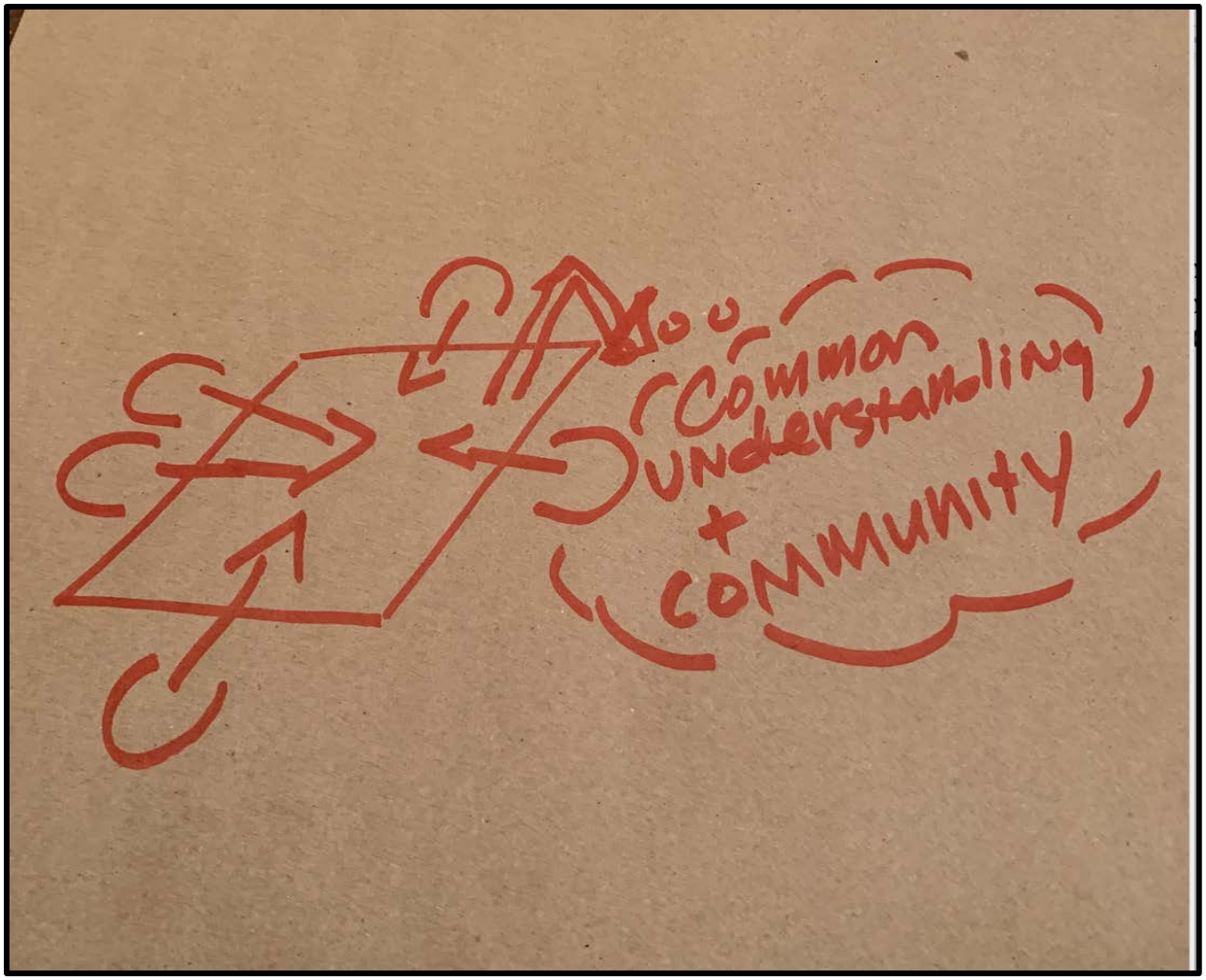
In addition to the memos, I had multiple pieces of evidence, including EC-PLC meeting agendas and notes, individual coaching meeting notes, the individual CPR journal responses, and the CLE data from the world café poster activity. The agenda and notes for all the EC-PLC meetings are kept in a shared folder for each CPR meeting to reference, edit, and review at any time. Near the end of PAR Cycle One, I gathered all the documents and systematically coded the data, creating topical codes and then variations within each code group.



"This is not a meandering pathway but the path we are going on keeps changing. We keep refining what we are doing. I want the focal students the teachers chose to reflect that we are a PITCH school. We need to relook at this. Staff have reflected and are changing their focal students."

Note. Data for the table came from January 9, 2020, meeting.

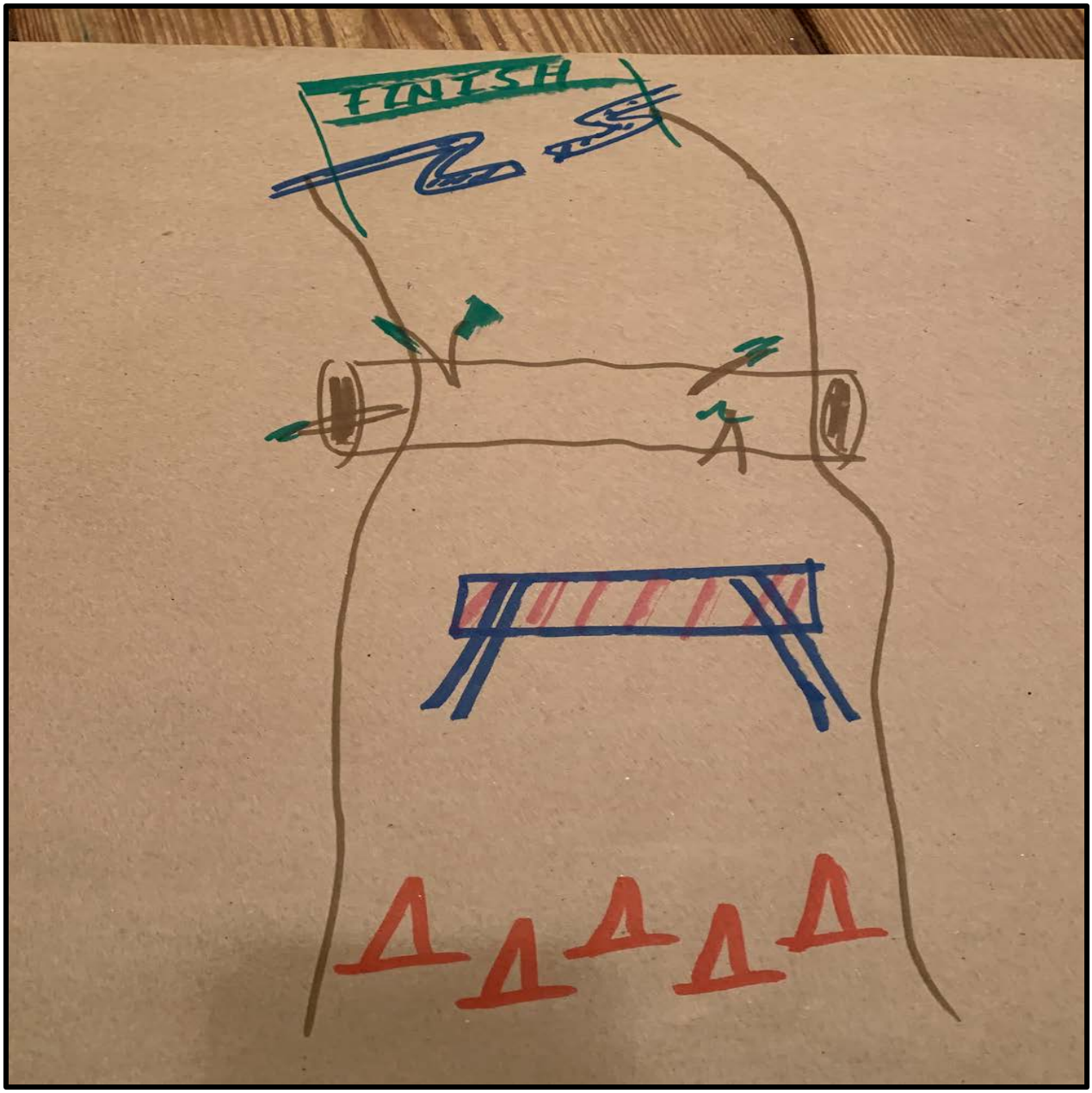
Figure 10. PAR Cycle One reflections: Principal Sutherland.



"I am meeting with security to try and get them to find some common understanding of how they are active members of the school community.
There were brain hurdles because they were asked to do something they had never been asked to do before. They had never been asked to be a part of school-wide events. Security stories parallel with the students."

Note. Data for the table came from January 9, 2020, meeting.

Figure 11. PAR Cycle One reflections: Assistant Principal Girard.

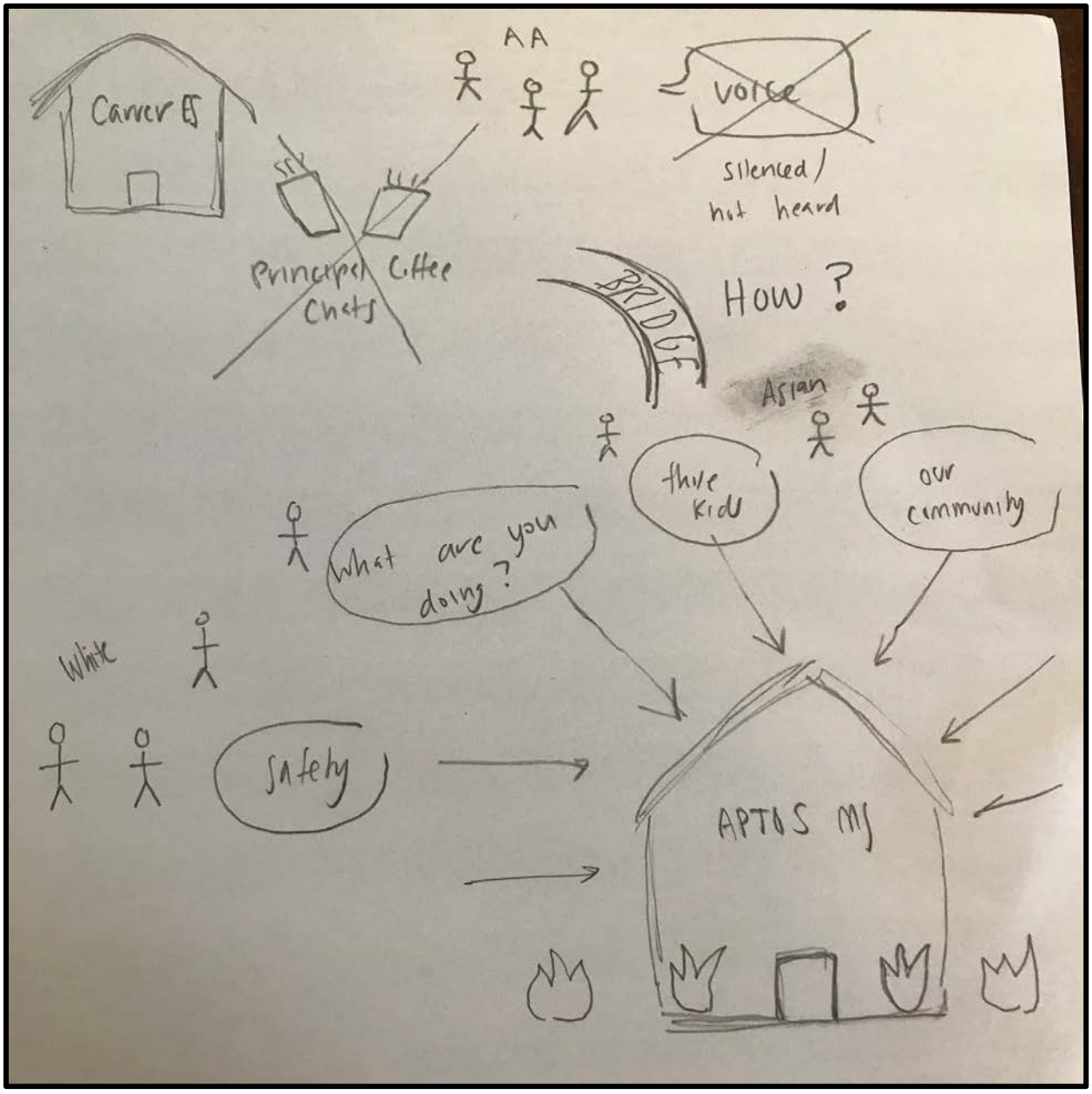


"This picture is a pathway of things that get in the way but the finish line has been crossed. This is the road of our ILPs, there were lots of obstacles along the way but got them done.

Hoping to come back for 40 ILPs, that didn't happen but developing the letter was a good result of that. Took me a while to get back in sync (after being on paternity leave). Last 4-5 weeks things were humming and that work helped solidify. 5 ILPs still aren't done.

Note. Data for the table came from January 9, 2020, meeting.

Figure 12. PAR Cycle One reflections: Principal Lang.



"Unfortunately, I was not able to complete my principal coffee chats over at Candlestick Elementary School as a way to engage with a community whose voice is too often not elevated in our school community. Sadly, the voices of privilege were speaking very loudly during the Fall and required my attention in ways that I was not expecting. I felt like I had to choose the political requirements of the job, and this fear of not doing what I was being told to do or what was expected of me got in the way of me maintaining a clear equity stance/vision in the Fall."

Note. Data for the table came from January 9, 2020, meeting.

Figure 13. PAR Cycle One reflections: Principal Schwartz.

Data Analysis

I started with the memos, agendas, and notes from the CPR meetings. I used open coding with an initial lens connected to the frame of the literature review (students and families, classrooms and teachers, school community, leaders) and school leader beliefs and actions. I organized the codes on Post-it Notes to look for potential categories. Each time a code appeared, I ticked the Post-it Note and later placed it in a data table based on where the code appeared. I then did the same process with the artifacts (agendas, memos, notes, and journal responses) from the individual coaching meetings.

After coding several pieces of data, I completed a second round of deductive coding where I looked at the emerging codes and considered them through the lens of my research questions. As I completed the second round of coding, smaller, clearer codes surfaced, and categories related to the EC-PLC materialized. The categories and coding tables are displayed in Table 6 and described in the next section, Emerging Categories.

In reviewing PAR Cycle One, there were three distinct parts articulated. First, the *pre-cycle* was central to CPR development as a supportive administrative network. The pre-cycle year deepened relationships and built relational trust amongst the CPR team. Next, starting the semester of Fall 2019, the CPR team engaged in PAR Cycle One activities. The activities included commitment and participation in the EC-PLC, CLE, and individual coaching meetings. The EC-PLC provided dedicated space for engagement in social justice actions and connection to leaders with similar goals. The CLE provided opportunity for the CPR team to authentically listen to Black students and families who often feel isolated and invisible in the school community. The individual coaching meetings provided time for me to support each administrator directly on their PITCH actions and build relationships with them independent of

Table 6

Codes and Emergent Categories for PAR Cycle One

Chapter 5: Coding of Data

Category	Code	Role	Number of Instances in Data
Pedagogy of Care			
	Resources	School Leader	7
	Space	School Leader	18
	Inclusive Pedagogy	School Leader	13
	Wellness Checks	School Leader	11
Authentic Space of Vulnerability for Leaders			
	Prioritizing Time Together	School Leader	8
	Sharing without Fear	School Leader	21
	Expansive Listening	School Leader	17
	Suspending Judgment	School Leader	13

the EC-PLC. In the final part of the section, data collection and analysis, I explain the process by which I collected and organized the PAR Cycle One data, then shared my analysis of the data. Two categories, Pedagogy of Care and Authentic Space of Vulnerability for Leaders, emerged in the cycle and are explained in the following section, Building a Professional Learning Community of Care.

Emerging Categories: Building a Professional Learning Community of Care

A Professional Learning Community (EC-PLC), as defined by Miller (2020), is “an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (para 1). The term EC-PLC has been used since the 1960s when educators began to widely recognize the need to address teachers’ feelings of isolation in the profession. Though originally envisioned as an issue specific to teachers, the term EC-PLC subsequently has been broadened "to describe every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education—a grade-level teaching team, a school committee, a high school department, an entire school district, a state department of education, a national professional organization, and so on. In fact, the term has been used so ubiquitously that it is in danger of losing all meaning" (DuFour, 2004, p. 6). Nevertheless, while much has been written on EC-PLCs in education and schools, the focus of scholarship has largely been limited to teachers; few have described how EC-PLCs can be impactful with school administrators. Furthermore, while DuFour (2004) described the importance of creating a culture of collaboration, there is minimal research on how to develop an EC-PLC that leads to the type of innovation and risk-taking that improves student outcomes.

The evidence from PAR Cycle One provided a strong indication that engagement in an EC-PLC was meaningful for the CPR members, both as a supportive network for administrators

and an authentic space for the school leaders to be vulnerable. Crucially, because of their participation in the EC-PLC, the CPR team expressed feeling a deeper connection to their colleagues and experiencing shifts in their thinking. In the following sections, I expand upon two categories: (1) Pedagogy of Care (conditions created for a successful EC-PLC), and (2) Authentic Space of Vulnerability for Leaders (what occurred in the EC-PLC).

Pedagogy of Care

The CPR relationships established during the *pre-cycle* year continued into PAR Cycle One and fostered deeper conversations and more meaningful learning. Evidence from PAR Cycle One demonstrated that the school leaders appreciated the care taken to establish and maintain the EC-PLC and coaching relationship. I call this category, "Pedagogy of Care**.**" When asked to reflect on what they valued about the experience from PAR Cycle One, their responses led to four codes (as referenced earlier in Table 6): resources, space, inclusive pedagogy, and wellness checks.

Resources

Resources are often limited in the education setting, especially for leadership professional development. In the study, three resources contributed to the pedagogy of care in our work together: time, money, and food. The CPR team consistently expressed their appreciation for the resources as indicated by the data.

A school leader's time is one of the most valuable resources, and there is never enough of it (Theoharis, 2009). The CPR team articulated how the EC-PLC and individual check-in meetings were a commitment that was important to them. Their commitment was evident by how they made time in their schedules to attend the. As busy school leaders, they prioritized the

administrative network and communicated how much they valued the time to be with colleagues grappling with similar issues.

While our time was mostly positive, there were some reflections from the CPR members that their time was stretched. The school administrators had competing school priorities and personal responsibilities. For example, at our first meeting two CPR members were late, and in our second meeting one school leader missed dinner. The last CPR meeting of the cycle was rescheduled twice because members cancelled at the last minute.

As the lead researcher of the project, I wrote a grant to incentivize and prioritize the PAR project for the school leaders. First, our school district offers small grants to administrators for collaborative work on inventive projects. I applied and received a grant of $5,000, which funded the CLE with the families (space and food), our meals together after EC-PLC, professional books on anti-racist teaching, and a stipend of $500 for each CPR member to honor the collaborative work that we did outside of our workday.

Eating together was an important ritual, a time to break barriers across differences and lessen the formality of the professional relationship. Starting with our first meeting, both snacks during EC-PLC time and sharing a communal dinner afterward were the norm. I intentionally included dinner as part of the formalized agenda time to create conditions for us to connect personally, and I appreciated each CPR member for committing to this part of the journey.

Space

The physical environment to engage in the EC-PLC work was a priority for the team and was discussed the most; it appeared as the largest code in the category. Initially, we met at the end of the school day so there would be limited interruptions. Most meetings were at Lone Mountain Middle School in the conference room; Lone Mountain has access to parking, the

room met all our technology needs, and it was a comfortable setting. Lone Mountain was close to local restaurants where, after our EC-PLC, we went to dinner together.

In PAR Cycle One we met both at Lone Mountain and at my house. The school leaders requested to meet in a location different from a school site mid-cycle, so we decided to permanently change the meeting location to my house. Changing the location provided an unexpected level of comfort and safety where authentic, engaging discussions could exist through storytelling and connection.

Inclusive Pedagogy

An important part of my work with the CPR school leaders was to learn their school context to support them in the PITCH initiative and their leadership development. The code, inclusive pedagogy, was a common code communicated by the CPR team in PAR Cycle One. During the individual coaching and check-in meetings, the principals asked me to participate in school leadership activities with them, often related to their PITCH work. Working alongside the CPR members provided invaluable opportunities for me to build trust with them and with other members of the school community, to help me understand the context of their school situations, and to reflect with them on their leadership decisions.

An unexpected outcome of the relationship with the CPR administrators was that I reminded them of their responsibility and promises to their Black families. Though I did not intend to be the "accountability police," our EC-PLC intentionally focused on supporting the PITCH initiative. My presence reminded them of the work and brought them back to our commitment to Black students.

Wellness Checks

As part of the culture of caring that I was trying to cultivate with the CPR members, I

consistently provided wellness checks. I would regularly stop by their offices unscheduled to say hello and see how they were doing. Many of the casual conversations led to more in-depth conversations where school leaders exchanged personal stories and feelings, including anxieties. I assisted each leader as needed, on such tasks as guiding their response to a district office, developing an agenda, supporting classroom walkthroughs, or attending a meeting with them. My position as an administrator in the central office, provided the flexibility for these wellness checks and helped build trust with each CPR member and lessen feelings of isolation.

In sum, the four subcategories of codes observed during PAR Cycle One--resources, space, inclusive pedagogy, and wellness checks-- became the foundation work of EC-PLC development and fostered ardent relationships with the CPR school leaders.

Authentic Space of Vulnerability for Leaders

Brené Brown (2018) defined vulnerability as, "the emotion that we experience during times of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure" (p. 19). It is the courage to fight for justice even when you can't control the outcome. The definition demonstrates the strength required to be vulnerable, particularly in public by a community leader, such as a principal, whose decisions may not actually be supported by their superiors at the school district.

In PAR Cycle One, the coding revealed an Authentic Space of Vulnerability as a second category. The evidence indicated that, both in the EC-PLC and in individual meetings, the school leaders' perspectives shifted when they could be vulnerable to the group. The shifts occurred as CPRs moved beyond collegial discussions into a communal process of discovering and generating knowledge and building deeper connections through personal narratives (Brantmeier & McKenna, 2020). As referenced in Table 6, four codes (Prioritizing Time Together, Sharing without Fear, Authentic Listening, and Suspending Judgment) materialized.

Prioritizing Time Together

Time is an important code that emerged in PAR Cycle One, as it appeared as a resource in the previous category. The CPR team prioritized uninterrupted, dedicated time together as an EC-PLC to discuss and share successes and challenges of the PITCH work. CPR school leaders indicated that their time is more valuable than anything else anyone could offer. Despite competing personal and professional obligations, the CPR members chose to partake in the EC-PLC to engage in the work. Theoharis (2009) articulated that the importance of developing a supportive administrative network and working together for change are two professional strategies for school leaders to advance their agenda for social justice.

Sharing without Fear

The code sharing without fear was a term that developed from the CPR participants in their reflections about participating in the EC-PLC. The code appeared 21 times. The CPR team communicated regularly that the EC-PLC was one of the only places they could authentically speak openly with people they trust. Assistant Principal Girard said at a dinner after a working session, “This is why I do the work. We are just professionals trying to tackle an issue together. In this setting (Principal) Lang and I are more than colleagues. There is no professional learning I have been a part of like this” (CPR Meeting, October 16, 2019). This space provided a level of comfort where school leaders could share without fear of retaliation or consequences, leading to authentic and trusting relationships with each other as colleagues.

Authentic Listening

Elena Aguilar (2018) defined the term authentic listening as a way you can listen that builds connection and community. Listening requires courage and practice, and generous questioning, and it is a way to listen for understanding, coming from a place of compassion and

humility. Expansive listening was a code that recurred when school leaders discussed both the CPR meetings and CLE. While we did not explicitly develop listening norms for the EC-PLC, there was a shift in the way in which the CPR team listened and responded to each other. We learned to listen with love, with curiosity, and with confidence.

Suspending Judgment

Leaders must assess a situation and apply their training and experience to make hundreds of decisions each day. Our decision-making skills and judgment led us to be in school leadership positions; therefore, suspending judgment is difficult for us. Yet it is necessary when involved in authentic dialogue with risk, exposure, and vulnerability.

Brown (2017) defined nonjudgment as the ability for each person to ask what they need and talk about how they feel without judgment. Specifically, "Learning how to give and receive help. The challenge is letting go of 'helper and fixer' as our identity and the source of our self-worth" (Brown, 2017, p. 39). During our EC-PLC, when the administrators were sharing situations at their schools, action steps for the cycle, or missteps in their own work in an authentic and vulnerable way, judgment was suspended. They spoke to each other from a place of curiosity and friendship. They asked probing and clarifying questions of one another. Most importantly, the CPR members spoke from a place where they could be kind and have compassion for themselves.

PAR Cycle One created a compassionate space where the CPR members could express courage in sharing genuine narratives. The leaders expressed vulnerability in both EC-PLC meetings and Individual Coaching and Reflection meetings which led to the category, Authentic Space of Vulnerability for School Leaders. While there was not enough evidence to code school leaders' actions at the school level, we saw that participation in the EC-PLC led to authentic

dialogue. The positive feedback and the data supported the conclusion that Authentic Space for Vulnerability was fundamental for school leaders toward taking appropriate action at the schools.

The two emergent categories, Pedagogy of Care and Authentic Space of Vulnerability for Leaders, provided evidence that participation in the EC-PLC was meaningful for CPR, both as a supportive community for administrators and a genuine place for the school leaders to be vulnerable, resulting in feelings of support and trust. We were hopeful that, in PAR Cycle Two, the CPR team would continue to hear the voices of Black students and parents more often than in past years, resulting in positive change in student academic performance. In the next cycle, I planned to assist in the effort.

Implications

PAR Cycle One concluded with the development of a meaningful EC-PLC for the CPR school leaders and me were much stronger than expected, but only served part of the intended outcome. In fact, the actions the CPR team identified after the CLE were minimal. This section explores what the implications are for the next cycle. I focus on three areas: (1) Implications for Research Questions, (2) Implications for Leadership, and (3) Implications for PAR Cycle Two.

Implications for Research Questions

A key part of my research was to discover the extent to which PITCH school leaders change their beliefs and practices to support the academic and social-emotional growth of Black students, and I asked the school leaders directly if they did. In the journal reflections, all CPR school leaders said they did not. They reflected that, because they did not complete the actions they said they were going to do after the CLE, they did not feel their beliefs or practices had changed, Furthermore, they discussed the barriers that prevented them from moving forward. Theoharis (2009) defines barriers for school leaders as, “the resistance, countervailing pressures,

tensions, and realities that detract from leading to create more equitable and just schools" (p. 87). Throughout the cycle, the CPR school administrators described the barriers at the macro, meso, and micro levels of the organization. It will be interesting to see if the barriers continue in the next cycle and how the CPR team will prioritize their social justice agendas.

The bulk of the chapter focused on what happened in our EC-PLC. There was mounting evidence that being a part of an EC-PLC that was an equity-centered network improvement community provided a space and an opportunity for the CPR team to share ideas, receive emotional support, and get assistance with problem solving. The EC-PLC was a priority for the school leaders in PAR Cycle One.

Implications for Leadership

My role as the researcher and participant in the PAR project was to facilitate our EC-PLC and follow up with each CPR school leader to support them in their PITCH work at the schools. As discussed in the PAR Cycle One Activities section of the chapter, we started the cycle by planning and participating in a CLE. Organizing and facilitating a CLE was new to me, and difficult to manage since I work at the district level and am not a member of the school communities. However, the CPR team worked closely with the school staff to invite families and I thought it was successful for a first effort. In reflection, I would consider scheduling two CLEs, in different parts of town, so the Fort Point community voice could have better access and be included.

After the CLE, each school leader identified actions that they wanted to implement from what they heard from their Black students and families at the CLE. Since the school leaders did not complete what they said they wanted to do, I wondered if they chose actions that were unreasonable for a six week cycle. In retrospect, I needed to guide them to choose smaller,

iterative, and more realistic actions to achieve success. Furthermore, I should have asked more questions and pushed for a stronger connection to what they heard from their families in the CLE.

In PAR Cycle One, I had individual coaching and reflection meetings with all but one CPR member twice (once with Principal Schwartz). The meetings were a combination of a wellness check and an opportunity for me to learn how the PAR cycles were going. In addition to building deeper relationships with each of them, I offered advice and encouragement as needed.

Documented in memos, I found myself wondering how to shift my approach with each CPR school leader so I am not seen as their accountability reminder for the PITCH work, and how my role with the CPR team can influence the equity work so it is considered an essential component? In the next cycle of research, I continued to explore ways to facilitate and coach, mindful of their reflections.

Implications for PAR Cycle 2

PAR Cycle One provided a strong foundation for the actions the CPR school leaders plan for PAR Cycle Two. The leaders were reflective on their missteps from the first cycle and modified what they wanted to do in PAR Cycle One to smaller, more realistic action steps. I expect that the strong relational EC-PLC structure that was established will provide an anchor for our work as we continue in PAR Cycle Two, and expect to solidify the emerging category, Authentic Space of Vulnerability for Leaders.

An important part of iterative research is to review and refine the plans from one cycle to the next. PAR Cycle Two provided additional emerging categories, specifically around school leaders' actions and or beliefs. CPR school leaders have a commitment to focus on issues of

equity to support their Black students. I am confident that after having a cycle with little evidence of action, there will be more leadership moves in the data moving forward.

Conclusion

The Bettina Love quote in the epigraph to this chapter emphasized the notion of "fighting for justice" and the need for true leaders to take action despite systemic and personal barriers. While the school leaders did not achieve their PITCH goals in PAR Cycle One, they fought consistently to establish conditions that would improve Black achievement, even at the risk of failure and censure. The analysis of the chapter demonstrates that the EC-PLC, supplemented by individual coaching meetings, provided a crucial support network through opportunities to reflect and share ideas and to obtain emotional support and encouragement.

In the first inquiry cycle, the CPR seized opportunities to engage in thoughtful, equity-centered dialogue inclusive of the Black voices in the school community. Using the CLE methodology, each school leader co-sponsored the event, Student and Family Wisdom Circles, that brought together Black students and families from their respective school communities. The event provided an opportunity for the leaders to authentically listen to their perspectives and needs with the longer term goal of taking action to improve student achievement and self-actualization.

The chapter began with the background through which the CPR leaders and I established ourselves as an EC-PLC, detailed the activities we engaged in during the cycle, and discussed how we collected data to determine action steps for the cycle. The subsequent section of the chapter explored the emerging categories of Pedagogy of Care and Authentic Space of Vulnerability for Leaders that developed from data analyses. The second section further

considered how the categories connect to the research questions of the PAR study. In the final section, I explained how the findings from the cycle informed the plan for PAR Cycle Two.

PAR Cycle Two built on the foundational work from Cycle One and included the school leaders' actions towards improving outcomes for Black students at the schools. Included in the next chapter is an explanation on organizational theory, focused on the political frame and the connection to the PAR project. PAR Cycle Two took place in the Spring of 2020, the semester that school was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The next chapter explains the unexpected obstacles that arose, the leaders' thought processes, and what was achieved during this unprecedented time.

CHAPTER 6: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE TWO

Courage is a decision you make to act in a way that works through your own fear for the greater good as opposed to pure self-interest. Courage means putting at risk your immediate self-interest for what you believe is right.
–Derrick A. Bell Jr.

Derrick Bell (2002), founder of critical race theory, believes that courage requires not only risk-taking but moral actions to benefit the collective. By insisting that true fearlessness requires risking one's reputation or benefit, he emphasizes the distinction between identifying a problem and actually making efforts to overcome it. In other words, public figures express support for progressivism and reform to appear on the side of justice; however, without pushing to take specific actions, they should earn no praise (Rigby & Tredway, 2015). As noted in the previous chapter, the school leaders in the study designed actions that demonstrated courage to tangibly improve the "greater good" of Black students and families despite the potential backlash from their supervisors, peers, and school communities. For the leaders, courage was moving past being an ally to applying their power to confront anti-Black racism.

In this chapter, I focus on the second Participatory Action Research (PAR) Cycle of Spring 2020. First, I describe the unique context of the semester: how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) administrators' action plans and activities, and the data we used to determine action steps for final cycle. Next, I explore the codes and categories from the analysis and how the categories connect to the PAR research questions and emerging themes. Then, I use French and Raven's (1959) Five Bases of Power, an organizational theory frame, to elucidate the impact politics at the meso district level had on the micro work at schools. Finally, I explain how the implications from the cycle informed the plan for PAR Cycle Three. Two themes emerged from this cycle. First, the Equity-Centered Professional Learning Community (EC-PLC) provided a safe place for school leaders to synthesize resources for

social justice work, especially when challenged with transitioning to distance learning. Second, a new category emerged during data analysis of the cycle—increased relational trust among the leader. The evidence from that category strengthened vulnerability and the pedagogy of care and led to the theme of brave space.

This chapter shares the courage of the school leaders in adjusting action plans to serve the entire school community during the pandemic while prioritizing the most vulnerable student populations. The Bell quote on courage at the beginning of the chapter is a dedication to the CPR team's deep concern for the schools they lead, the people they serve, and the actions they took toward collective responsibility for each other and the students and families during this uncertain and unpredictable time.

PAR Cycle Two Process: The Story of the Cycle

In this section, I detail the timeline and activities from PAR Cycle Two and represent the evidence in data tables including: PAR Cycle Two activities from the Spring 2020 semester; and data collection and analysis from the second PAR cycle. The cycle uncovered a deeper story that I consider as I address the themes: The school leaders developed stronger relationships with each other and, in particular, the Black students and families in their schools because of the responsibilities of digital learning. The pandemic crisis led to opportunities that we could not have imagined at the start of the cycle, and the themes in this cycle are a prelude to the findings in Chapter 7.

PAR Cycle Two Activities

The PAR Cycle One goals were overly ambitious, a reaction to district mandates that require quick results and technical processes, but are not adaptive to school contexts (Khalifa, 2018). Thus, at the outset of the semester, while we shifted some of the original plans to better

reflect what we learned in PAR Cycle One, we still needed plans that might effectively engage the Black community. At the midway point of Cycle Two, California's Governor Newsom ordered all schools in the state to close as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring a transition to distance learning. Accordingly, I provide a brief narrative about the uniqueness of this semester, how we reconnected as an EC-PLC during this time, how the school leaders transitioned the schools to online learning platforms, and how the school leaders changed their actions mid-cycle and used this moment to more authentically connect to Black families.

PAR Cycle Two started in January 2020 and ended in April 2020. During this time, the CPR team met on five occasions -- two in person CPR meetings and three "happy hour" Zoom meetings. In addition, I met with each CPR member in two scheduled one-on-one coaching and reflection sessions–the first in person at schools and the second remotely (see Table 7).

Original Plan

As explained in Chapter 5, the CPR team participated in a Student and Family Wisdom Circle in October 2019. We organized the event using the community learning exchange axioms and protocols. Based on the responses from Black students and families, each CPR member committed to an action intended to improve outcomes for Black students, including listening authentically and developing stronger relationships with the Black students and families. While PAR Cycle Two was an extension of the first cycle, the pace and the goals were different. The CPR school leaders had the foundations for the actions in place, and they proceeded with their plans. We met in person twice as an EC-PLC, and I connected with each school leader once for an individual coaching and reflection session prior to shelter in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 7

PAR Plan, Cycle Two

Activities	Key Personnel	Timeline	Evidence
CPR Meeting #1: Reflect on PDSA Cycle 1; set up Cycle 2	CPR group	January 9, 2020	Agenda Meeting notes Memo
Coaching and Reflection Session #1: Meet with individual CPR members	School Leader	Late January/ Early February 2020	Check in notes Memo
CPR Meeting #2: Check in on Cycle 2	CPR group	February 27, 2020	Agenda Meeting notes Memo
COVID-19 Transition to distance learning		*March 16, 2020*	Memo
CPR Meeting #3: Happy Hour Zoom check in on Cycle 2	CPR group	March 24, 2020	Meeting notes Memo
CPR Meeting #4: Happy Hour Zoom check in on Cycle 2	CPR group	April 7, 2020	Agenda Meeting notes Memo
Coaching and Reflection Session #2: Zoom meeting with individual CPR members	School Leader	Mid-April 2020	Check in notes Memo
CPR Meeting #5: Happy Hour Zoom Debrief on Cycle	CPR group	April 21, 2020	Agenda Meeting notes Memo

CPR Meeting #1 and Coaching and Reflection Session #1. In addition to reflecting on PAR Cycle One, the CPR school leaders revised the original plans from the first cycle. They then discussed methods for successful implementation and re-considered achievable outcomes.

- Principal Sutherland expected each teacher to choose a focal student, conduct an empathy interview, and align literacy instruction from what they heard. She confirmed that each teacher had selected a focal student. Working with the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), her goal was to have the teacher leaders work with their respective departments to complete the empathy interviews and determine and teach literacy strategies that would support the focal students.
- Assistant Principal Girard was enthusiastic about enacting a plan to build relationships with the security team. He acknowledged inconsistency in the weekly security meetings, and he wanted to connect on a deeper level with the security team to build relationships and address unsafe hallway behavior together.
- Principal Lang was intent on implementing individual learning plans (ILPs). The African American Leadership team was responsible for this work. “ILPs are not a cure; it's a syringe to get the cure in. They are a tool. The ILPs will build relationships with trusted adults and allow the adults to hear from students. We will make decisions based on what the ILPs say. Feedback from the students will lead to professional development” (Lang, meeting notes, February 3, 2020). He assigned the teachers and counseling staff on the African American Leadership team ILPs and they were responsible for connecting with the students and documenting notes from the meetings.

- Principal Schwarz changed her action based on an upcoming leave. She decided to focus on the Culture Climate leadership team. Her goal was to work with the teacher leaders on the Culture Climate team to develop a sustainable plan for the remainder of the school year. She wanted the topics and a common structure for the final three meetings organized and ready to be led without her presence. “The staff is ready to take on this work. This team is building, and I want to set them up to be successful. The staff are ready to be working towards transforming mindsets” (Schwarz, meeting notes, February 6, 2020).

Following the first CPR meeting, individual coaching meetings took place in late January and early February, 2020, at the respective school sites. During the meetings, we discussed overall well-being, self-care, and site and district concerns. At the meetings, I confirmed the iterative actions for the cycle and we developed a schedule to prioritize the plans.
Unfortunately, I did not get the opportunity to meet with Principal Schwarz.

CPR Meeting #2. Two weeks after the individual check-ins, we met as an EC-PLC in late February. Principal Schwarz was not able to attend. It was clear the school leaders had not made much progress toward their goals. Several ongoing crises and obstacles pushed the work to the periphery. Both schools had critical staffing issues —a special education teacher at one site, security staff at another. Principal Sutherland shared, “nothing can happen until I get a teacher for this class” (Sutherland, meeting notes, February 27, 2020). While actions were minimal at the schools, the EC-PLC was a space to discuss and debrief daily challenges and barriers preventing the administrators from accomplishing goals.

We did discuss scheduling a Black student and family event for the spring, possibly individual versions of the CLE at each school site. As the meeting concluded, I encouraged each

school leader to connect with one Black family to get feedback on their action plans and/or the upcoming family events. While they agreed and were open to the suggestion, I was left wondering if they would in fact follow through.

Our EC-PLC ended with dinner together. When I had to leave to pick up my child, I thought the school leaders would also leave but, unexpectedly, they asked if they could stay and wait for me to return. I received this as a positive indicator of the level of comfort they had with me and each other.

COVID-19

On the morning of March 12, 2020, the Superintendent announced in an afternoon news conference that the school district would close schools beginning March 16, 2020, through the end of the regularly scheduled Spring Break (April 3, 2020). We now know the plans continued to change through the remainder of the spring semester, and we did not return to school. The decision was made in coordination with the SFUSD School Board. School leaders and school staff had two days to prepare for what we thought at the time was a three-week school closure. The district plan sent a number of mixed messages to teachers and principals that initially interrupted their planning and connection to students and families.

On March 22, 2020, after the first week of shelter in place, I sent a text to the CPR team as a wellness check, with the intention to offer help. As a district leader, I did not have perspective or information to assess the results of school closures and distance learning, and I did not have direct communication with students and families. All of the CPR team immediately responded to my text and wanted to schedule a time to talk. They initiated the Zoom happy hour and the opportunity to share ideas. This was the first time they took ownership of the EC-PLC.

Plans Change

Beginning March 24, 2020, the CPR school leaders and I, with the exception of Principal Schwarz, met for an hour regularly, every two weeks. We had three EC-PLC happy hour Zoom meetings and individual coaching sessions during PAR Cycle Two. The CPR school leaders shifted their actions from managing school to caring about the wellness and safety of students and families. They responded to the needs of the school communities in ways that were different when school was in person, in a building, especially with the Communities of Color.

CPR Meeting #3. At first remote EC-PLC happy hour, the CPR members shared a personal celebration and struggle since working from home. Then, school leaders exchanged narratives on how they transitioned the schools to distance learning. They confirmed technology needs for every student and provided a computer for each student prior to shelter in place, supported professional development and resources for teachers and staff to create Google Classrooms to teach remotely, and communicated the school schedule and plan with families. However, the district conveyed a different plan, with no input or update to school leaders prior to the larger interface with staff, students, and families. The site administrators said they felt confused, frustrated, and undermined by the school district. Despite their discontent, they shifted the conversation to actions.

> How can I utilize the school teams and leverage my own relationships with students and families so they feel supported? I started a tracking document with the social worker so we could note who reached out to which family, what was the purpose (technology, wellness, other), and when that contact was made (Lang, meeting notes, March 24, 2020).

Principal Sutherland built a Google Classroom for the entire student body to access. At that point 80% of students at the school had joined.

> I want to see who is not showing up, who is not turning in work. 300 students are missing from accessing instruction. We cannot move forward until we find these kids. I am working with counselors to narrow down who is getting left behind, before we start learning again. Tomorrow the staff will outreach to families, specifically the ones who have not connected yet. We will survey the families, to understand what they need. Do they need books, devices, school supplies? (Sutherland, meeting notes, March 24, 2020)

The CPR team committed to supporting the most vulnerable families at their sites, including some PITCH families. Assistant Principal Girard added, "We should assume we have to be careful. Not everyone should talk to families. Counselors are doing this because they have the relationships. We don't want to offend. Our intention has to be to reach out and provide support" (Girard, meeting notes, March 24, 2020).

I requested the school leaders identify one Black family from the school and call the parent to hear firsthand how they were doing and what they may need. Each administrator stated which student/family they would reach out to and why. We planned to meet again in two weeks to revisit the looming question, "How do we support instruction and student learning?"

CPR Meeting #4 and Coaching and Reflection Session #2. We were now formally in distance learning. I began the meeting with a question: What opportunities and challenges with your leadership are coming up during this time (in service of your Black students and families)? The school leader responses focused mostly on the challenges and how they felt dismissed by the district and disappointed at the lack of communication. Principal Lang remarked, "My challenge is being undermined by the district. And when SFUSD said the first few weeks were optional, I lost the plan I had with students and staff" (Lang, meeting notes, April 7, 2020). Principal

Sutherland said that “the opportunity is adopting new agreements and a chance to embrace flexibility and be creative” (Sutherland, meeting notes, April 7, 2020).

Despite challenges, the responses from the leaders about the connections to families was strongly positive. Principal Lang shared an exchange, “They said they are fine. They could use help with groceries and an iPad and asked if I could help them with this.” (Lang, meeting notes, April 7, 2020). Another family responded to Assistant Principal Girard, “They said they could use some food, but I am also worried about the learning in the house. There are three boys plus the grandmother; the family is concerned about food, clothes, safety, and health. Online learning may not be on the top of the list” (Girard, meeting notes, April 7, 2020). They commented that they felt families appreciated connecting with them.

The purpose of the individual meeting was to discuss the transition to online learning and how they were shifting their work in response. Site leaders shared their school distance learning plans and were open to sharing their reflections and missteps. Two points of evidence surfaced from the individual meetings: First, both schools had school attendance above 90%. The school leaders were optimistic that the online setting engaged more students than expected, but they wondered what the plan was to find the students who were missing and get them connected to school. Second, the teacher and staff transition to online learning varied. Teachers who had strong relationships with students in the classroom continued to have strong relationships with the students in distance learning. What became obvious is that students who had little or no connection with their teachers did not go to class. The leaders could more clearly see the equity issues that were present previously, as they became more transparent in the virtual learning environment.

CPR Meeting #5. In the last PAR Cycle Two meeting, I asked the CPR team to respond to the questions: Did you meet your goal to connect more with Black students and families? How have you adapted your PITCH work with the COVID-19 transition? What have you learned about the Black families at your school? First, it emerged that using a Padlet to collect information offered a new engagement and collaboration tool, and they were excited to share this tool with teachers. Additionally, the CPR team spontaneously began drawing pictures and sending photos using the features of the application, demonstrating the collegiality it engendered. Each CPR member articulated their reflection of the cycle and the impact of COVID-19. The dialogue provided both successes and ongoing challenges of connecting with Black families in the distance learning setting. Principal Lang wrote:

> I've had direct contact with over 20% of my AA families since we went to shelter in place. That's a significantly higher percentage than any other ethnic subgroup. That data point alone tells me that there is a connection with our African American community and their school. It also tells me that there is a greater need for support from our AA families. Half (3 of 7) of those contacts are families reaching out to me. (Lang, meeting notes, April 21, 2020)

Principal Sutherland focused how the school would respond:

> I have had three direct interactions with AA families since school closure—to provide books and devices—all those interactions have been very positive. Hard to say at this point how interactions from a distance have been going. ILT today discussed the importance of reaching out to families with positives/ care & concern at this time…an asset-based lens we have been working on developing prior to school closure. (Sutherland, meeting notes, April 21, 2020)

Assistant Principal Girard explained, “I am focused on how to provide more clarity on the role of our parent liaison for AA families. I have provided him some direction on reaching out to families, staff, and students via daily/weekly check ins” (Girard, meeting notes, April 21, 2020). The three leaders were deepening relationships, albeit with a few families, but significant for sustaining relationships.

Data Collection and Analysis

I explain the process of collecting and analyzing the evidence during the second cycle. Each EC-PLC meeting included this evidence: agenda, shared meeting notes, a personal summary, and reflective memo. The memos served as a running record of my ongoing thoughts during the process and connected theories to my leadership practices.

I captured the meeting notes from the two individual reflection and coaching meetings in a shared document. In addition to the notes, I recorded my thoughts and reflections in memos with reminders on possible leadership moves I could make to better support each CPR administrator. The weekly meetings were vital in helping me both to track the data and evidence I collected and to organize it coherently. The record from the weekly sessions along with my memos triangulated the evidence from the EC-PLC and individual coaching and reflection notes.

I used open coding in the first pass of data analysis, which created initial codes and then variations within each code group. Vulnerability re-emerged as a category from the last cycle so I organized the same codes for this cycle. I completed a second round of coding in which the codes for the category, trust, developed. I transferred the information to a data table (see Table 8). The next section provides a thorough description of vulnerability and trust as categories.

In sum, PAR Cycle Two consisted of two distinct parts, as described above: activities and data collection/analysis. Ultimately, the original plans for the second cycle were revised because

Table 8

PAR Cycle Two CPR Actions

Emerging Categories	Codes	CPR EC-PLC	Memos	Individual Meetings	Memos	Total
Vulnerability						
	Prioritizing Time Together	4	8	3	2	17
	Sharing Without Fear	17	7	13	11	48
	Authentic Listening	5	4	1	2	12
Trust						
	Boundaries	2	3	1	5	11
	Reliability	2	4	12	4	22
	Accountability	3	2	8	4	17
	Vault	11	5	9	9	34
	Integrity	7	2	10	8	27
	Non-Judgement	5	2	7	6	20
	Generosity	5	5	11	6	27

community. I then described the process by which I collected and arranged the data then presented the analysis of the data. The category, an authentic space of vulnerability for leaders, reappeared this cycle, and the category, trust, emerged. The two categories offer evidence of what I am terming brave space, which speaks to the quote that started the chapter affirming that taking actions often requires courage. I offer a deeper look into two emerging themes that intertwine and provide further details about the categories vulnerability and trust. In addition, interwoven into the brave space is the emergence of a second theme– praxis to action, where the leaders began to shift from transactional to transformational leadership -- that is substantiated more strongly in Chapter 7 and PAR Cycle Three.

Brave Space as a Place of Transformative Leadership

Authentic learning about social justice is often uncomfortable and requires the very qualities of risk, difficulty, and controversy that are defined as contradictory with safety, as Arao and Clemens (2013) describe:

> For agent group members, facing evidence of the existence of their unearned privilege, reflecting on how and to what degree they have colluded with or participated in oppressive acts, hearing the stories of pain and struggle from target group members, and fielding direct challenges to their worldview from their peers can elicit a range of negative emotions, such as fear, sorrow, and anger. Such emotions can feed a sense of guilt and hopelessness. Choosing to engage in such activity in the first place, much less stay engaged, is not a low-risk decision and, therefore, is inconsistent with the definition of *safety* as being free of discomfort or difficulty. (p. 139)

The CPR team adopted this approach and transitioned from safe and comfortable meetings about PITCH actions to deeper conversations about inequities at the schools, social justice, and a more

systematic method of naming inequities so that they could act (Rigby & Tredway, 2015). They became more explicit about their actions; and in this shift I observed the germ of transformational leadership that moved beyond the transactional nature of the PITCH plans. Whereas the PITCH process relied on a command and control management system with plans and timelines, transformational leadership appeared as more relational, reliant on inspiration and cooperation.

The theme, brave space, developed from categories and codes, is built on the foundation established in PAR Cycle One, similar to a spiraling motion, as shown in Figure 14 (Saldaña, 2016). Pedagogy of care was present although not coded in the cycle. Authentic space for leaders to be vulnerable with each other was a category from Chapter Five with the same codes evident in the second cycle. A new category, trust, surfaced. The deepening relationships among the school leaders and me allowed for taking more risks – being braver. The EC-PLC continued to act as an anchor for school leaders as a supportive space for peer dialogue, emotional risk, and engagement in collaborative learning with a focus on increasing positive learning experiences for Black students. For the CPR team to have authentic brave space, vulnerability and trust must be present (Brown, 2018; Hammond, 2015).

Brave space is different than safe space. Brave space is built on the necessary relationships of a network of leaders who can rely on the support from others to disrupt current practices (Theoharis, 2009). The ability to rely on the EC-PLC space as a place of authenticity -- where the leaders could share successes and failures as well as gain a position of equity -- offered them a different way forward as social justice leaders. As they gained confidence to act on their espoused beliefs, they moved from transactional leaders responding to a district initiative to transformational leaders responding to an individual and collective moral compass.

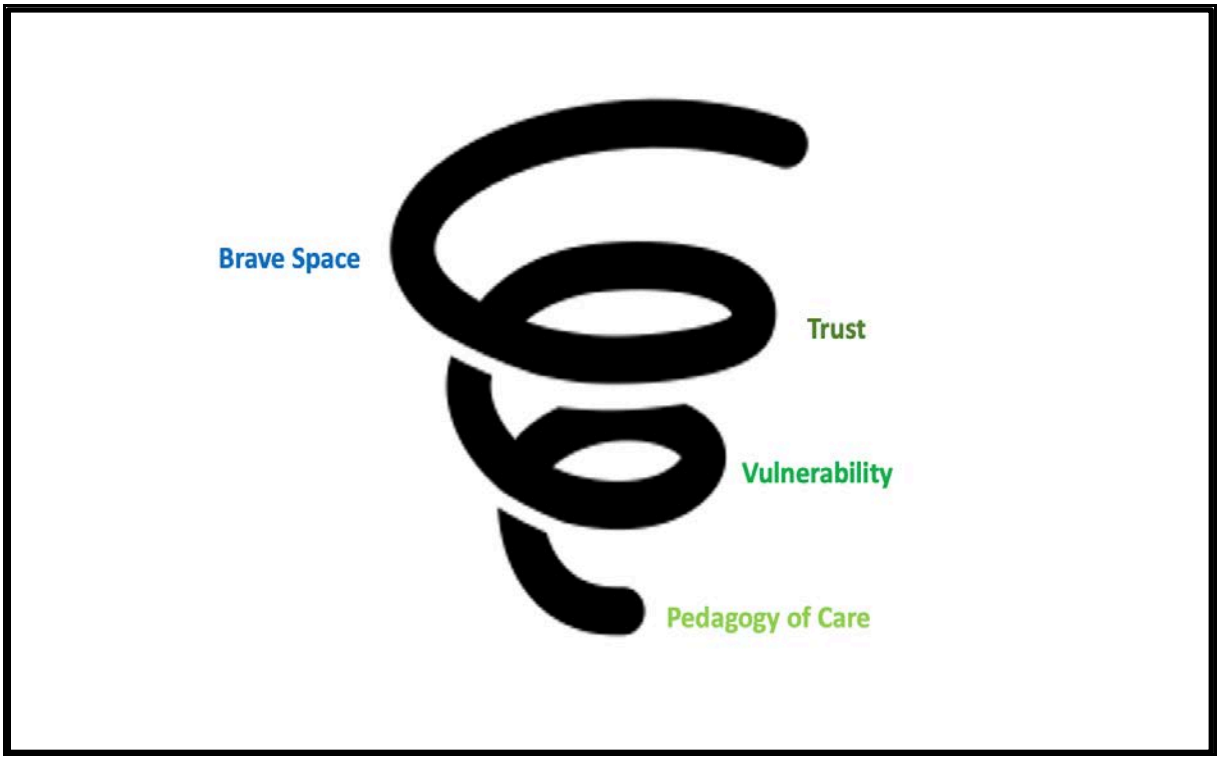


Figure 14. PAR cycle two emerging categories and theme.

Authentic Space of Vulnerability for Leaders

The CPR team spent the past two years, including the pre-cycle, sharing personal and professional stories, slowly working toward a familiarity and trust with one another. Revealing insecurities, specifically on the subject of racial equity, was daring: "The foundation of courage is vulnerability—the ability to navigate uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure" (Brown, 2017, p. 144). Thus, vulnerability within the EC-PLC led leaders to approach their work differently because we approached ourselves differently–we stopped embracing the mentality that being a PITCH school was shameful and decided to act, and act boldly.

The codes for the category -- authentic space of vulnerability for leaders -- are: prioritizing time together, sharing without fear, and authentic listening. The definitions for the codes are in Chapter 5. (Note, I moved the suspending judgement code to the trust category because non-judgement is a defined element of trust and they were too similar in definition to distinguish the difference between them).

Prioritizing Time Together

The CPR team continued to prioritize uninterrupted time together. The school leaders agreed to develop a calendar for the semester with dates to meet as a PLC and dates to meet individually. The importance of meeting time was evidenced when I contacted CPR school leaders after we were sheltered in place. They initiated the Zoom happy hour and committed to meeting every two weeks while we were sheltering in place. This was significantly more often than when we met in person, which was usually every other month.

The CPR administrators prioritized time in the EC-PLC because it was a space in which they could have open dialogue. When I asked the CPR school leaders to respond to the prompt: How can this PLC help you with this work? Assistant Principal Girard stated,

> This PLC grounds me in the work and rejuvenates me to continue to push for advocating through a social justice lens. Collaborating, sharing our personal stories, and experiences as a site administrator have provided valuable insight into how important this work is to our African American students. (Girard, meeting notes, February 27, 2020)

Principal Lang said: "This PLC is always helping me reflect on our work in supporting our African- American students" (Lang, meeting notes, February 27, 2020).

Sharing without Fear

The CPR team members were fearless and courageous in what they shared. After two years of developing relationships, we skipped pleasantries and dived into complicated and sensitive topics quickly. The school leaders communicated their frustrations about feeling undermined by the school district with regard to the pandemic plans. When SFUSD closed schools and notified students and families that there would be no instruction until after spring break, the school leaders were livid. Principal Sutherland expressed that her teachers left with a plan and then SFUSD changed the plan. "I have to do damage control part two; the goal is to now rebuild trust and a sense of confidence with my community" (Sutherland, meeting notes, March 24, 2020).

Another controversial topic was the complexities of distance learning. The leaders shared concerns about Black students and hoped to look at attendance data to see which classes students were attending. In our PLC meeting, Principal Lang and Principal Sutherland both discussed how students connected with their teachers in an online setting (CPR Meeting #5, meeting notes, April 21, 2020). Principal Lang shared, "The same issues with the same people are showing up in distance learning. If you were great in the classroom with your students you are great in the new setting." Principal Sutherland replied, "The atmosphere of the classroom in the building is

replicated online. Teachers with student relationships equals students in class." The PLC conversation about the importance of teacher-student relationships is an example of an authentic trusting space to reflect and share openly without consequence.

Authentic Listening

Authentic listening is listening to the emotional quality of the conversation, not just hearing the words (Hammond, 2015). The most powerful way to build connection and community is to practice both deep and strategic listening (Safir, 2017). The CPR team expanded authentic listening to include "generous" questions–generous questions defined as being curious about what you heard and asking questions from a place of kindness and curiosity (Aguilar, 2018). We were now at a point where each CPR member wanted the opportunity to share openly, there was organic dialogue beyond surface level communication, and there was respect within the group to truly listen and ask poignant questions. The PLC developed into a space where we felt included.

One conversation about students not using the camera in the Zoom sessions is an example of their authentical, deep, and strategic listening.

> Principal Lang asked, "What is the real issue students are not putting on their cameras? Do the students need PD on online learning?"
>
> Assistant Principal Girard responded, "Could it be that their house environment is something they don't want others to see? Maybe they think their voice sounds weird and they don't like seeing themselves on camera."
>
> Principal Sutherland replied, "I am monitoring this, and want to ask the students directly using our empathy interview structure. I am going to pull groups of students to do this with."

> Principal Lang said, “I’m making notes of what you are saying. I like that idea. Let’s ask the students” (CPR Meeting #5, meeting notes, April 21, 2020).

This interchange led to the school leaders wondering about levels of engagement, home environments, and adolescent confidence, and led to deep listening through thinking on two levels – with families and with each other. They listened carefully to the students to learn what the deeper reasons for not turning on cameras were; as they shared, they practiced non-verbal actions with each other (looking at the listener, nodding head, and waiting for the speaker to finish) that demonstrated authentic listening, often difficult through Zoom. They expressed mature empathy for each other as well as for the students and families to fully understand the home situations and challenges, and they affirmed each other. They listened strategically at the same time – orienting toward a vision through reflective inquiry to make decisions about actions (Safir, 2017).

Authentic space of vulnerability for leaders continued to emerge in PAR Cycle Two, solidifying this as an emerging theme in the research with four key codes: prioritizing time together, sharing without fear, and authentic listening. This theme led to the school leaders shifting their perspectives because of their opportunities to build a brave space and be vulnerable to the group.

Trust

Brown (2017) uses Charles Feltman’s definition of trust, “choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person’s actions” (p. 38). Hammond (2015) discussed how small interactions between people demonstrate affirmation and caring and lead to trust. Building trust does not happen overnight; in fact, it requires time for people to feel connected and get to know one another. Trust is the connection that unites individuals together and is

foundation of any change (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Grubb, 2009). After a year of pre-cycle and in our second cycle together, trust was evident as it related to the brave space we were developing together in the EC-PLC.

The anatomy of trust (braving), developed by Brown (2018), identified seven behaviors that define trust: **b**oundaries, **r**eliability, **a**ccountability, **v**ault, **i**ntegrity, **n**on-judgement, and **g**enerosity. I used her framework as a guide for the codes for trust. Figure 15 shows a representation of the trust codes and the frequency in which the codes appeared in the cycle. I discuss four behaviors that were most present: reliability, vault, integrity, and generosity.

Reliability

Reliability is defined as, "You do what you say you are going to do" (Brown, 2018, p. 225). Reliability was most frequent during our individual coaching meetings. The CPR school leaders said repeatedly how much they appreciated a dedicated professional space to process and make meaning together with the common goal of supporting Black students and families. As evidenced in the activities sub-section earlier in the chapter, the CPR school leaders wanted to meet. They relied on each other, especially after we were isolated with COVID-19, to have authentic conversations about how to lead the shift to distance learning. A point of connection arises when people come together to create a bond with others through common affinity (Hammond, 2015).

Vault

A vault is a secure place where valuables are stored, and the brave space of the EC-PLC provided a secure place for administrators to share their personal stories. Brown (2018) defines the vault as, "What I share with you, you will hold in confidence. You don't share information or experiences that are not yours to share. I need to know that my confidences are kept, and that

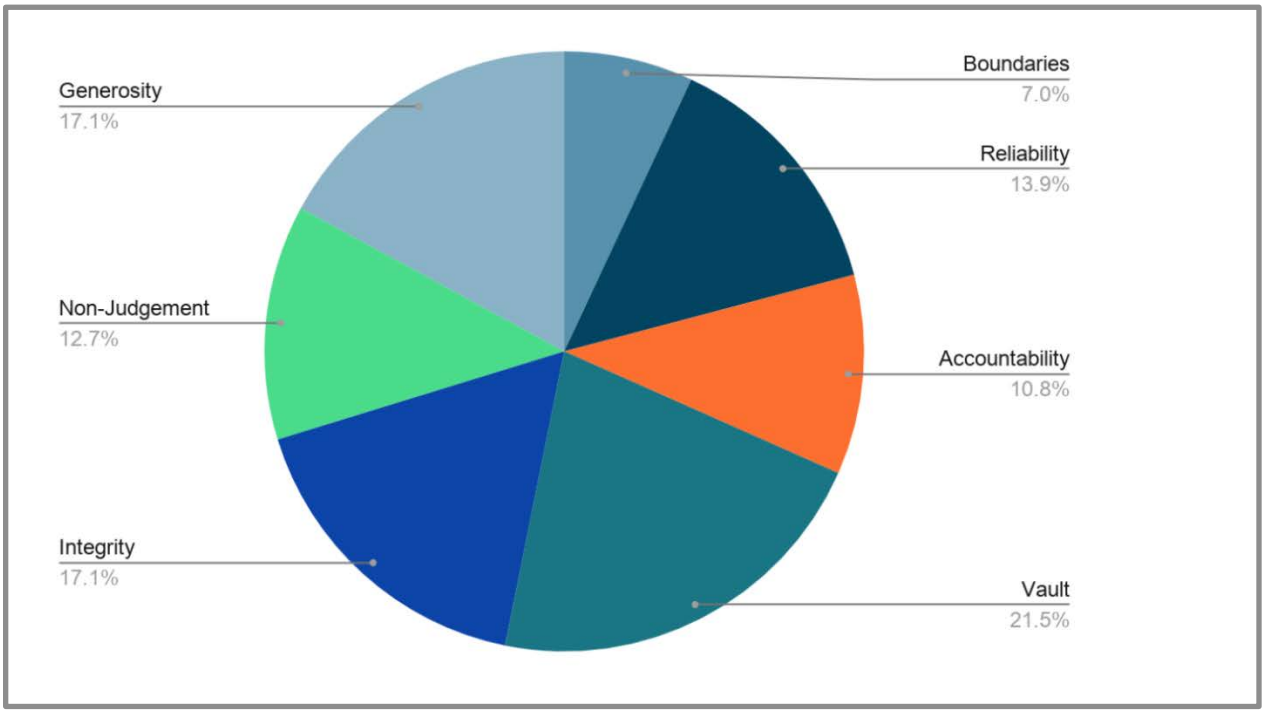


Figure 15. Category trust with codes.

you're not sharing with me any information about other people that should be confidential" (Brown, 2018, p. 225). This was the largest code in the category of trust (21.5%). We needed a brave space for vulnerability and a brave space for confidentiality. School leaders are expected to know how to lead work that requires culture competence, systems thinking, and strong communication skills. There are very few, if any, spaces for administrators to be open about a knowledge or skill gap and may need some help. Our brave space was a vault, a place where what was shared would be kept in confidence, unless we had permission to share. As I present PAR Cycle Three evidence, I explore how the vault provided more than confidentiality: the leaders also felt a renewed confidence in other public spaces.

Integrity

Integrity has three steps: "first, discerning what is right and what is wrong; second, acting on what you have discerned, even at personal cost; and third, saying openly that you are acting on your understanding of right from wrong" (Carter, 1996, p. 7). Similarly, Brown (2018) defines integrity as "choosing courage over comfort; it's choosing what's right over what's fun, fast or easy; and it's practicing your values, not just professing them" (p. 227). The code surfaced in the cycle 27 times, or 17% of coded evidence. In conversations in both the EC-PLC and in individual coaching meetings, we discussed and pushed each other to do what is right. We had dialogue about doing what is right for students and families, doing what is right for the staff we lead, and doing what is right, even if it is not aligned with district leadership.

When we questioned how to lead equity-centered professional development and pedagogy, Principal Sutherland said, "I want to practice listening. We are not good at it. Telling stories and listening to each other will help us to prepare to listen to kids" (Sutherland, meeting

notes, February 27, 2020). Integrity for us is taking small, intentional, iterative actions with students at the center of our decisions.

Generosity

Generosity is "the most generous interpretation possible to the intentions, words, and actions of others" (Brown, 2018, p. 226). This code materialized 27 times, or 17%. We built an unconditional rapport based on the hope that together we can better serve Black students. We assumed best intentions in our interactions. In response to the journal prompt about how the EC-PLC could support each person, Assistant Principal Girard shared, "This PLC grounds me in the work, and rejuvenates me to continue to push for advocating through a social justice lens. Collaborating, sharing our personal stories, and my experiences as a site administrator have provided valuable insight into how important this work is to our AA students" (Girard, meeting notes, February 27, 2020). Our EC-PLC provides a positive space for reflection so leaders can act based on their integrity.

In sum, authentic space of vulnerability for leaders and trust were prerequisites to building a brave space for the leaders. Furthermore, the data demonstrated that maintaining positive relationships through prioritizing time together, sharing without fear, and authentic listening, in addition to reliability, vault, integrity, and generosity, were essential requirements in establishing a Brave Space. The Brave Space established in the PLC strengthened the relationships amongst the CPR members to engage in dialogue that involved risk, difficulty, and controversy. "Trust is the stacking and layering of small moments and reciprocal vulnerability over time. Trust and vulnerability grow together, and to betray one is to destroy both" (Brown, 2018, p. 34). Previewing the evidence in PAR Cycle Three, the Brave Space foundation contributed more than vulnerability and trust; the leaders used the opportunity for reflection and

advanced their confidence to move from transactional leadership to transformational culturally responsive leadership.

Five Bases of Power

In examination of the research of organization theory, the PAR study is best connected to the political frame of French and Raven's (1959) Five Bases of Power, further explicated in Bolman and Deal (2017).

The political frame views power dynamics as central to everyday organizational transactions. Used in this framework, politics and power are at the heart of decision-making. In 1959, social psychologists, French and Raven, studied sources of power, specifically how leaders influenced those who worked for them. They defined the Five Bases of Power in following way:

1. Legitimate – The formal right to make demands and to expect others to be compliant and obedient.
2. Reward – The ability to compensate another for compliance.
3. Expert – High levels of skill and knowledge.
4. Referent – Perceived attractiveness, worthiness, and right to others' respect.
5. Coercive – The right to punish others for noncompliance.

French and Raven's (1959) Five Bases of Power organized the bases in two groups– positional and personal. Positional power sources included: legitimate power, reward power, and coercive power. I coupled positional power to the meso level of the study, the school district. The subordinate level of the organization, the schools and school leaders (CPR), related to French and Raven's personal power sources: expert power and referent power.

I explain how three of the Five Basis of Power – legitimate power, reward power, and coercive power -- are related to the meso level of this project, the school district, and are

transactional power structures. Then, I link the other two Bases of Power – expert power and referent power-- with the CPR team at the micro level; these types of power are closer to transformational leadership. Finally, I created a graphic to explain the complexity of the project in three frameworks: political organizational theory (French & Raven, 1959), critical race theory in education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and SFUSD PITCH framework (2018-2019).

Applying Organizational Theory to the District

The PITCH initiative was an external initiative from the Superintendent, directed to specific schools and school leaders; thus, the initiative was embedded in politics. As reflected on the fishbone diagram in Chapter 1, the PITCH schools and their leaders were at the subordinate, micro level of the organization. The people at the central office, in positional power, made decisions regarding distribution of resources for the initiative. The site leaders obeyed the Superintendent's instructions to implement the goals of PITCH and to make the goals work in the contexts of the individual schools. The PITCH school administrators had some latitude to adapt the PITCH initiative, but only if the Superintendent approved modifications. Thus, if school leaders took initiative to act independently, they might receive negative feedback or have support withdrawn by their direct supervisors. The EC-PLC provided a space to collaboratively work through the political issues regarding PITCH and develop strategies to negotiate with the Superintendent's team while staying close to the needs and expectations of Black students and families. I use the French and Raven basis of positional power to explain the district context.

Basis of Power: Positional Power Sources

Positions imply an assumption of legitimate authority attached to powerful locations, access to important communications, and power networks (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Three Bases of Power apply to the district organizational level: legitimate power, reward power, and coercive

power. Because the school district was in a power of authority over the schools, their positionality influenced the school leaders and the staff in the three power sources.

Electoral mandates, social hierarchies, cultural norms, and organizational structures provide authority for legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959). Legitimate power can be unpredictable and unstable because it is based on the position, not the person; if the title or position is lost, the legitimate power can instantly disappear. This power is only valid if others believe you have a right to wield it. In relation to this study, legitimate power played a large role. The Superintendent's action to identify PITCH schools and demand participation was using legitimate power. While school leaders already believed they should be doing more to support Black students, they can only accept the PITCH initiative while this Superintendent is leading the district.

Reward power is the ability for people in power to deliver rewards in the form of jobs, raises, promotions, political support, professional development opportunities, and even compliments (Bolman & Deal, 2017). If there is an expectation that a reward will be provided for work performed, there is a high probability that the work will get done. The challenge with this power is that the reward is subjective to its recipient and may not be consistent. The PITCH schools received additional funding earmarked to support African American students. However, the funding was not always timely. In year one, the PITCH schools received the monies six months into the school year with no option to roll the funding over into the next school year. The CPR team was appreciative of the money, but acknowledged that it felt unrealistic to use it in any kind of productive was to expect positive achievement data in a short amount of time.

Coercive power rests on the ability to constrain, block, interfere, threaten, and punish. The recipient of this power can experience dissatisfaction and resentment (Bolman & Deal,

2017). People in positional authority may use coercive power to threaten someone's job or deny privileges; they may punish people. The amount of oversight on the PITCH initiative felt coercive to the administrators and teachers. PITCH leaders attended regular meetings to review their approved PITCH plans and had to defend and explain actions and progress of the plans. The PITCH principals had a lot of pressure to improve Black students' test scores quickly or face unspoken consequences.

Basis of Power: Personal Power Sources

The people with personal power are often energetic, charismatic, and socially adept. They more easily earn trust and confidence and, therefore, are skilled in application of influence tactics (Bolman & Deal, 2017). There were two personal bases of power recognized at the subordinate level of the organization, the school leader, the micro level of the PAR study: expert power and referent power. In the area of expertise, the school district made a faulty assumption about the cultural expertise of the school leaders, and in the area of referent power, the school leaders began to recognize more fully as they worked together that they had some reserves of authority at the schools so that they could enact the PITCH initiative.

To have the expertise, knowledge, and skills to appropriately understand and navigate a situation and suggest solutions is expert power (French & Raven, 1959). Expert power immediately develops trust and respect with others and people listen to what the expert says. To have expert power provides leaders a robust base from which they can lead with confidence. This power is deemed more important than positional power because it is more likely to lead a team to accept the leader’s efforts to guide and motivate them. The school district’s PITCH mandate assumed that school leaders had the cultural competence and expertise to lead social justice and anti-racist teaching work. Though the PITCH school administrators had monthly professional

development from the District, the politics and positionality within the meetings did not create a safe space to learn or process. While the CPR leaders were not experienced in leading equity work, they were experts in understanding the unique assets and challenges at the schools they led. Rather than asking for support at the district level, which would show vulnerability, they found resources with one another through the EC-PLC to do what the PITCH meetings did not—create a brave space to share their concerns and build authentic actions – away from the political demands of the PITCH mandate.

The referent power base relates directly to respecting another because of personal qualities or the belief that the person knows or is skillful. “Referent power stems from others viewing the leader as a ‘frame of reference’ and wishing to be identified with him or her, thus modeling their behavior after the leader” (Burnette, 1992, p. 19). Referent power can be positive if used to build authentic relationships in the workplace. Administrators with referent power set examples, are respected, and are liked by staff because they can be trusted and they have knowledge and skill that is useful to the school as a whole (Pfeffer, 1992). In this study, the CPR school leaders used referent power in the schools to communicate organizational goals and influence the teachers

As I explored French and Raven’s (1959) Five Bases of Power within the political framework, I discussed how positional and personal power sources connected with the project. As the leaders gained trust and co-created a brave space, they were more likely to rely on power structures that better positioned them to be partners with students and families. Next, I connect the frameworks and theories that influenced the study.

Intersecting Frameworks Inform the PAR

The PAR project is rooted in three frameworks: French and Raven's (1959) Bases of Power, SFUSD PITCH framework (2018-2019), and Critical Race Theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The graphic (see Figure 16) provides clarity on how the project interconnected within the theoretical frameworks. I describe the graphic and then discuss each framework and how the frameworks intersect to define culturally responsive school leadership.

The orange ribbon in the graphic represents the political framework. As described in the previous subsection, the specific political references are the positional power sources related to the school district and the personal power sources connected with the main people in this project, the CPR team at the micro level. The green ribbon captured the district PITCH framework (see Figure 8 in Chapter 3). The framework provides essential practices identified by SFUSD to improve outcomes for Black students. Two effective practices of the framework most closely related to the project, transforming mindsets and collaborative culture, the T and C in PITCH. Transformative Mindsets is defined as establishing a positive student-centered learning culture for African American students that is culturally responsive, celebrates success, and reduces negative effects of bias and stereotype. Collaborative Culture is building relational trust and strong partnerships with African American families and communities to support students' success at home and at school. These effective practices reflect the intentions of the collective EC-PLC work.

Finally, the blue ribbon, Critical Race Theory, is the core foundational framework for the PAR project. The CPR team committed to improving outcomes for Black students at the schools and started by listening to the experiences and stories of Black students and families to change oppressive systems and structures in the school setting and classroom. The work we are doing

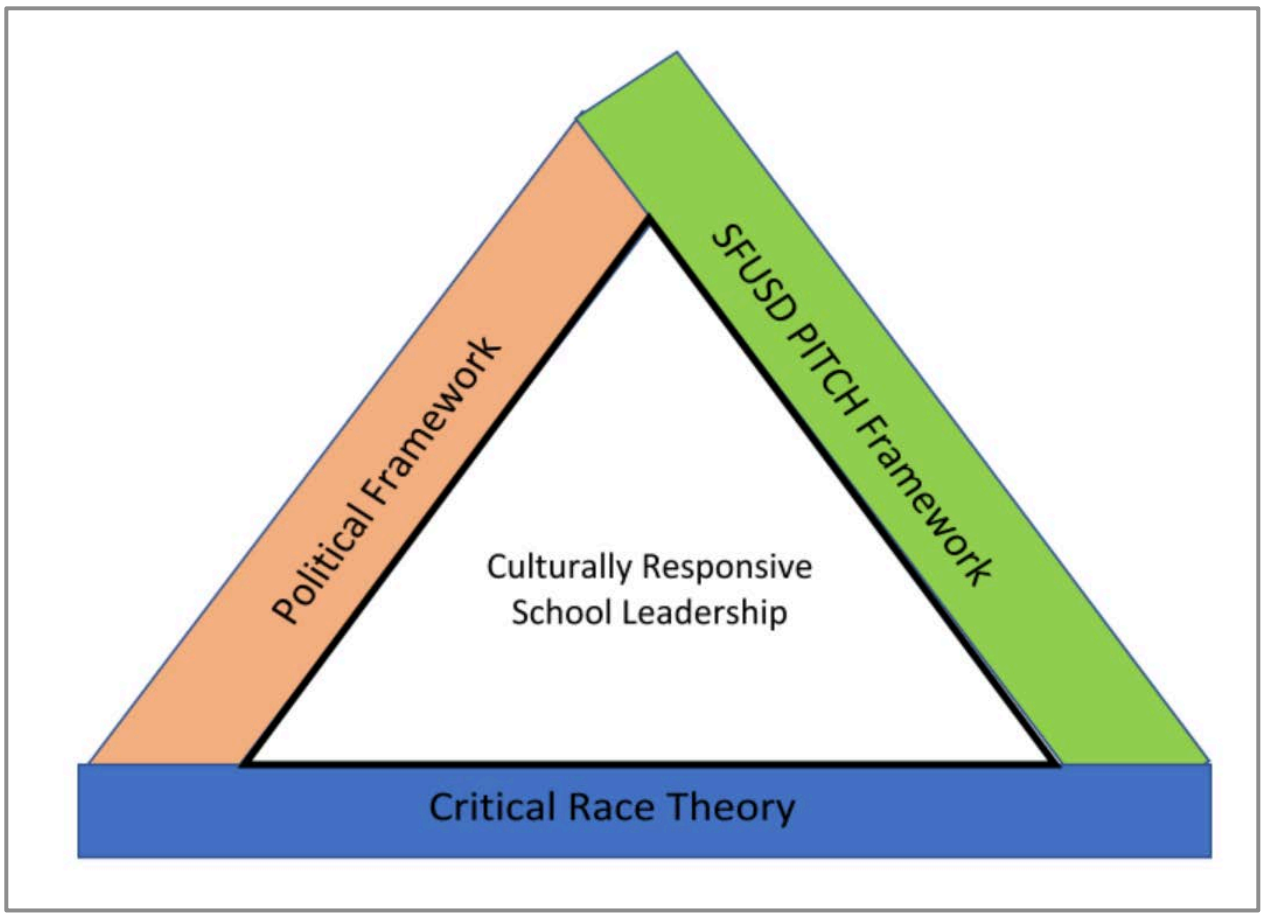


Figure 16. PAR project theoretical framework intersection.

together as an EC-PLC is centered in Critical Race Theory (Dumas & Ross, 2016; Noguera, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

I focused on the political frame of French and Raven's (1959) Five Bases of Power to explain the impact of power and politics in decision making. I then connected three of the Five Bases of Power to the school district and the other two Bases of Power to the school leaders, leading to the conjecture that this study is immersed in meso and micro level politics. In conclusion, this study is unique in its identity in three frameworks: Five Bases of Power political framework, SFUSD PITCH framework, and Critical Race Theory.

Implications

The EC-PLC provided a caring space for leaders to be vulnerable and build trust with one another in PAR Cycle Two, while engaging in equity-centered dialogue. This led to the development of an authentic brave space where the CPR members could be courageous and take risks in the stories they shared and the decisions they made to act. The narratives allowed for the formation of authentic personal and professional relationships.

In discussion of implications from the cycle, I focus on three areas: (1) research questions, (2) my leadership, and (3) PAR Cycle Three. In reflecting on the research questions for the study, I considered the evidence for each research question to determine what would be appropriate next steps. I relied on memos to assess my leadership growth. In reviewing implications for PAR Cycle Three, I can determine that Brave Space was foundational for CPR administrators to express vulnerability, build trust, and reflect. Furthermore, the leaders' increased confidence moved them from transactional actors to culturally responsive, transformative school leaders.

Implications for Research Questions

I established a space for leaders to engage in dialogue on social justice work, culturally responsive and anti-racist literature, and the politics of the school district. Two years into building the EC-PLC, we had a reliable, trusting community for the administrators. In reflection on the research questions, the EC-PLC did influence changes to the CPR beliefs and practices; they began to see trust as a necessary component of any school change effort, and they identified the importance of making incremental, but steady changes in the school communities to support the academic and social emotional learning of Black students (Gawande, 2017; Spillane & Coldren, 2011).

How did members of the EC-PLC shift their beliefs and practices? While they themselves would say they do not know if being a part of the EC-PLC shifted their thinking, the evidence showed our work was a brave space that the CPR team needed to be vulnerable and reflective. A positive area of growth was the shift in their behaviors with Black communities; COVID-19 provided the opportunity for the leaders to listen, connect, and be in partnership with Black families more than in previous months.

The school leaders participated in a CLE and listened to students and families in the first cycle; however, until COVID-19, their day-to-day managerial duties had not allowed time for the actions they wanted to do to bring meaningful change. Ironically, the pandemic provided the opportunity for the CPR school leaders to move to action and connect with Black families in new ways. The initial success from connecting with Black students and families led to a more organized and consistent outreach the following semester.

Implications for Leadership

I reflected on my leadership in the second cycle in the following ways: how I facilitated the EC-PLC, how I supported the school leaders individually with the schools, and how I grew as a researcher and equity-focused leader. I documented my reflections and learnings through memos, keeping in the forefront the final research question of this study: How does the work with school leaders inform and transform my leadership?

EC-PLC

I had read about the best ways to build community (Aguilar, 2018; Guajardo et al., 2016; Theoharis, 2009). For me, being a part of a community was important because we all need and desire connection. Aguilar (2018) describes the importance of a healthy community, "a community that fosters my resilience is one that is inclusive of different ways of being and one in which people listen well, individual and group accomplishments are celebrated, unhealthy conflict is addressed, and there's transparent decision making" (p. 97). This was my goal for the EC-PLC -- to build a healthy community. In reviewing the memos, I reflected on my enthusiasm around the successes and hopes of the EC-PLC. In one memo I wrote:

> We have created a space that is so special there are no words I have found yet to describe what is happening. I am excited to see how this time together translates into action during this strange time of each of us switching to a new normal. I am excited to see the new way of communicating and supporting instruction and supporting students. (Quadros, reflection memo, March 24, 2020)

I considered the CPR school leaders' need for the relationships with each other–especially after COVID-19. In the same memo referenced above, I wrote, "They asked for the meeting together, came with ideas to share, wanted feedback, listened with kindness and respect-- no judgement--

and literally left the meeting saying this was the best meeting they had all day. I barely facilitated the time" (Quadros, reflection memo, March 24, 2020). I feel proud of the EC-PLC we created and sustained, and hope that fostered resilience.

Individual Coaching and Reflection Sessions

The intention of the individual meeting time was for me to connect with each leader on a personal level, listen about the PITCH actions at the school, and offer suggestions as to how I could be helpful. The leaders invited me to attend PITCH meetings at the school sites to support their efforts. I participated in the African American leadership team meetings at Lone Mountain along with Principal Lang, I supported Assistant Principal Girard in the agenda design for security meetings, and I assisted Principal Sutherland as a thought partner in developing her instructional team and joined her in instructional walkthroughs. I appreciated the opportunity to be included in the PITCH work at the school level and to observe up close the interactions and staff dynamics the school leaders encountered.

I wonder how I can use the time with the CPR school leaders to encourage them to push their social justice agendas even further. What is my coaching move to interrupt systemic barriers and racist practices while maintaining the relationship? They feel safe with me and trust me. However, how can I move us to the next level in this work so the actions are visible to Black students and families?

Leadership Work

In PAR Cycle Two, I continued to recognize my positionality as middle management at the district level. I am an insider in the larger organization and an outsider to the school teams and PITCH work. In the spring semester, I positioned myself, leveraging my district relationships, to receive an invitation to participate in the district PITCH meetings. This was a

great opportunity for me to learn and understand what the district offered as professional development for PITCH and what the expectations were for the school leaders.

My next leadership steps were to use my position as the EC-PLC facilitator and our brave space to encourage the CPR school leaders to follow through with the actions they identified in the third cycle. First, we examined the politics of PITCH and experience from the EC-PLC to advocate for change and resources at the schools. The school leaders shifted focus from students to looking at culturally responsive instruction. Next, we read two culturally responsive books in the summer to advance our own knowledge of antiracist teaching. I facilitated conversations on the books at the end of summer. Lastly, I continue to build my own capacity to adapt, adjust, and change with what the school leaders need, where they are in their growth, especially in these uncertain and unpredictable times.

Conclusion

PITCH school leaders were told to systematically change the outcomes for Black students with little explicit professional direction, assuming that they knew what to do without guidance. School leaders hesitated to make change because there were few available models. They engaged with me in this study as CPR administrators to build a peer space for learning and meaning-making. The data has provided a strong indication that engaging in an EC-PLC was meaningful for the CPR group both as a process of learning from one another and as a way to synthesize the expectations of PITCH, and it supports the tenet that networks of educators dedicated to social justice need time and space to be and become stronger leaders (Theoharis, 2009). The foundation of pedagogy of care, vulnerability, and trust is responsible for the success of the EC-PLC and led to the larger, emerging theme, brave space. However, up to this point there had been little change with the leaders' practices or actions that improve outcomes for Black students. COVID-19 now

provided an opportunity to connect with Black students and families in a new way. I believe the CPR team began to build confidence from our time together through as a CPR team and the small actions they engaged in resulted in change.

PAR Cycle Three started at the end of spring semester 2020 and continued through fall with a short break for summer. During the summer break, we read two books recommended as anti-racist literature, both of which focused on building our cultural competence as administrators while recognizing and dismantling White supremacy culture. At the end of the spring semester, we did not know how we might return to school in the fall. However, distance learning exposed issues that were even more evident in this new setting. The CPR school leaders realized in a new way that student and family relationships with the school and staff had to be the priority.

CHAPTER 7: PAR CYCLE THREE

When people think of the difference between transactional and transformational, they don't understand you have to be really explicit that transformational actually still includes the components of transactional. You're still measuring, you're still looking at data, you're looking at data that matters beyond the numbers, like what are the stories... So, it's not that transformational excludes data, it's not that it excludes the components of transactional, you're just making it much more holistic. And you're centering people, instead of just numbers. It is people centric and also introspective.

–Aiko Bethea, Dare to Lead Audio Podcast

This quote is from a podcast in which Bethea with Brown (2020) discuss how leaders should frame Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work for deep transformational organizational change. She reminds us that transformational work goes beyond operationalizing change in a transactional way and beyond a statement or single professional development on equity. Bethea prompts us to humanize data by listening to the stories, shifting away from the typical technical rational ways of working to changing people and schools to authentic listening and empathy. Bethea argues that schools must go beyond the usual data that identifies Students of Color as deficient, or we will never truly transform the experiences of Students of Color.

In engaging in participatory action research (PAR), I have worked with four middle school leaders as co-practitioner researchers (CPR) for nearly two years. The San Francisco district identified each of their four schools as a PITCH school—a school that historically or persistently underserved Black students. While the school district identified a cyclical problem regarding Black student achievement, the district provided only general direction on how to address improvement. Therefore, we, the CPR team, pursued plans to advance inclusion and success among the Black students and families in their school communities. During the pre-cycle and the three cycles of inquiry, the administrators and I established conditions for co-learning in an equity-centered professional learning community (EC-PLC).

In the first cycle, we used the community learning exchange (CLE) process to listen to Black students and families about their experiences at their respective schools. Based on what they heard from the CLE, each school leader decided on a course of action. The initial plans were traditional and overly ambitious, similar to the yearly school reform plans leaders write and have difficulty enacting (Bryk et al., 2017). The plans dramatically changed as we collected and analyzed data. In addition, the schools shifted to online learning in March 2020; an unexpected benefit of moving to remote learning provided an opportunity for the school leaders to prioritize listening to and caring for Black students and families to inform their leadership actions.

In this chapter, I focus on the third and final PAR cycle from Fall 2020. First, I describe the context of the fall semester given the conditions of COVID-19 and explain the action plans, activities, and data. I collected, coded, and analyzed a total of 37 sets of evidence that I translated into tables and charts. Then, I present two findings about the principals' transition from transactional towards transformative leadership.

PAR Cycle Three Process

The story of PAR Cycle Three includes the context, timeline, activities, and the data. I provide an overview of PAR Cycle Three activities. Then, I present the data and analysis from the third PAR Cycle, which started in May 2020 and ended in October 2020. As school closed in the spring, we were not clear about what school would look like when the 2020-2021 school year began. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to be prevalent throughout the summer, and in late August, the school district announced schools would open in distance learning. The circumstances forced the entirety of our work together to be remote.

PAR Cycle Three Activities

The activities in the third PAR cycle were similar to the format of the previous two

cycles. Our interactions as a CPR team occurred primarily in two settings: EC-PLC space convening with the three school leaders and the individual coaching and reflection sessions. During this time, the CPR team met on six occasions. All of our meetings were online Zoom calls. In addition, each CPR school leader had three scheduled one-on-one coaching and reflection sessions with me via Zoom. We continued to foster pedagogy of care elements in our time together. Table 9 includes the activities, key personnel, timeline, and data collection instruments of the opportunities school leaders and I had to collaborate in PAR Cycle Three. Despite the uncertainty, the school leaders continued to shift their actions from transactional leadership towards transformative, culturally responsive leadership and transfer their knowledge and skills beyond working with families and students directly to working with teachers at their school sites (Khalifa, 2018; Shields, 2010).

CPR Meetings: May 2020

We held three virtual CPR meetings via Zoom before the 2019-2020 school year ended. The meeting goals were: to stay connected as an EC-PLC, share best practices on supporting vulnerable students while schools remained closed, and reimagine how schools might be different in the fall. The CPR team made a noticeable shift in this cycle as they used our time together for reflection in the vein of Freire's *praxis:* deeper reflection about their roles as social justice leaders and how to enact those with families and with teachers at their sites.

While COVID-19 provided community challenges, we had unexpected opportunities to act differently. In a CPR meeting, Principal Sutherland (May 5, 2020) reflected,

> Now walls have disappeared. This is an opportunity to connect with our families in new ways. Before this I wouldn't have gone to a family's home in the school day, now I do. Before our families didn't engage with students in what they were learning, now the

Table 9

PAR Plan, Cycle Three

Activities	Key Personnel	Timeline	Data Collection
CPR Meeting #1: Zoom meeting	CPR group	May 5, 2020	Agenda Meeting notes Memo
CPR Meeting #2: Zoom meeting	CPR group	May 19, 2020	Agenda Meeting notes Memo
CPR Meeting #3: Informal Zoom check in	CPR group	May 26, 2020	Meeting notes Memo
Coaching and Reflection Session #1: Zoom meeting with individual CPR member	School Leader	Mid–August 2020	Check in notes Memo
CPR Meeting #4: Zoom meeting	CPR group	August 25, 2020	Agenda Meeting notes Memo
CPR Meeting #5: Zoom meeting	CPR group	September 15, 2020	Agenda Meeting notes Memo
Coaching and Reflection Session #2: Zoom meeting with individual CPR member	School Leader	Late Sept 2020	Check in notes Memo
Coaching and Reflection Session #3: Zoom meeting with individual CPR member. Final interview	School Leader	Mid–October 2020	Interview Protocol Check in notes Memo
CPR Meeting #6: Final Zoom meeting	CPR group	November 10, 2020	Agenda Meeting notes Memo

> parents are seeing the engagement and learning. We are in a process of discovery and inquiry. We are not confined by walls.

In our May CPR meetings, for example, we considered how we could shift from looking at test score data and student-focused programs (such as intervention classes) to building cultural competency with adults and relational trust with students and families. Our last CPR meeting during the spring semester took place on May 26, 2020, the same day that the police murdered George Floyd in Minneapolis. The next day, a video of his death was widely shared and led to protests in the city and around the country. While we did not meet formally again until August, we connected across email, text, and phone with each other on how to support the Black community throughout the summer.

CPR Meetings: Fall 2020

The Fall 2020 semester took place entirely online via distance learning. All district and staff communications were through email or online communication platforms. We met as a CPR team three times via Zoom. During this cycle, one school leader participant resigned from the district and therefore did not continue as a CPR member. At the same time, the Summer 2020 Black Lives Matter protests were a call to action. San Francisco Unified School District provided anti-racist professional development to all administrators when they returned to work, with the expectation that they would lead a similar professional development with their school staffs.

In the CPR August meeting, each CPR member shared successes and challenges of the staff professional development and opening of school. We reviewed revised PITCH plans, which provided an exchange of ideas and resources across schools. Team members chose actions for their PITCH plans that moved toward culturally responsive transformative leadership, which

Shields (2010) suggests is beyond tinkering with current conditions to more dramatic shifts in practice (Tyack & Cuban, 1998). Some of those actions included:

- Principal Sutherland focused on developing healing spaces and anti-racist practices. After hosting a student listening session in the spring, she realized that all students, especially Black students, needed more informal peer connections and positive relationships with staff in the school. Her goal was to facilitate staff training in harm reduction with distance learning. She hired a restorative practices coach to partner with classroom teachers on using circles to develop a community that could create spaces for students to support each other (Guajardo et al., 2016).
- Assistant Principal Girard asked Principal Lang's permission to facilitate the monthly anti-racist staff professional development. Once approved, Assistant Principal Girard invited union building representatives and teacher leaders to co-create and facilitate the professional development. As a result, the instructional leadership team (ILT) focused on anti-racist professional development at Lone Mountain middle school.
- Principal Lang continued with the plan from the previous two cycles to implement individual learning plans (ILPs). However, he focused on fewer Black students, specifically identifying students who did not already have access to school resources (i.e., students with IEPs). He identified fifteen Black students and assigned teachers and counseling staff on the African-American Leadership team to communicate with the assigned student and family, bolster academic progress along with addressing any social emotional concerns, and memorialize all communication with the student or their families. In addition, Principal Lang planned monthly family wisdom circle

events for Black families to provide an affinity space at the school for connection and communication.

Although data collection for the third cycle concluded in November, the district grant we had received was renewed (see Chapter 5 for more information). Thus, we plan to continue our work together for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year.

Coaching and Reflection Sessions

The purpose of the individual coaching and reflection sessions via Zoom was to check in on each leader's PITCH plan and encourage each to engage in reflection that could be more intentional in decision-making and actions. I met with each leader once a month. In addition, we connected to other joint work, including College and Career programming, supporting leadership teams, and school-wide professional development. Texts and phone calls occurred on a regular basis. For example, Assistant Principal Girard and I facilitated the anti-racist monthly professional development for the staff, and, as we planned for that, we communicated daily to review content, processes, and the logistics prior to meeting with the larger teacher leadership planning team.

In the mid-October individual coaching sessions, I conducted one-on-one interviews (see Appendix F). All three leaders expressed that our time spent together as an EC-PLC was a productive space for meaning-making and reflection. They noted the time with this group and my peer coaching supported their leadership growth (Tredway et al., In press). Principal Lang concisely summarized what the other two school leaders said,

> "We started this work together and it will never be over. It is a good space for us to do your best work when you have time to think, talk, and reflect on our Black students. The space provided me the opportunity to shift moving towards some more adult practices

> while still focusing on students. I now consistently have family and student listening sessions and am getting better feedback. I appreciate you creating the space and guiding us through this work and having this team. I credit all my good ideas to this work to you and this team. (Lang, meeting notes, October 20, 2020)

The course of events highlights the balance we sought: to attend to our administrative network focused on our equity agendas and personal growth, while providing individual coaching supports and resources to each school leader so they can enact culturally responsive leadership moves. This next subsection reviews the process of data collection in the cycle.

Data Collection and Evidence

I collected and analyzed a total of 37 artifacts of evidence from PAR Cycle Three: CPR meetings (n=6), individual coding and reflection sessions, three for each school leader (n=9), and personal notes and memos (n = 22). In Appendix G, I used elements of vulnerability research from Brantmeier and McKenna (2020) and trust research from Brown (2018) to understand and categorize the evidence of the school leaders and my leadership moves. Culturally responsive leadership behaviors from Khalifa (2018) guided the codes for transformational, culturally responsive school leadership, and Shields (2010) helped me further my thinking on transformative leadership attributes. For the theme of brave space, Table 10 demonstrates that the principals needed an environment of vulnerability (27% of instances), trust (47%), and reflection (26%) to address leadership challenges by employing an EC-PLC.

For the second theme of transformative, culturally responsive school leadership, these were the results: building confidence (27% of instances), partnering with community (25%), facilitating professional learning on anti-racism (34%), and improving school environment

Table 10

Cycle Three Themes

Themes	Categories	CPR EC-PLC	Memos	Individual Meetings	Memos	Total
Brave Space						
	Vulnerability	28	18	23	19	88
	Trust	59	22	45	40	166
	Reflection	46	19	16	6	87
Culturally Responsive School Leaders (CRSLs)						
	Build Confidence	11	12	27	19	69
	Partner with Community Members	35	4	15	9	63
	Facilitate Anti-racist Professional Development	44	15	19	8	86
	Improve School Environment	18	3	10	3	34

(14%). In addition to confidence, the CPR school leaders' leadership actions aligned with Khalifa's CRSL behaviors framework.

PAR Cycle Three Themes

The context of third cycle was unusual; however, the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the Black Lives Matter movement, provided a different kind of opportunity to reflect on and change school leadership practices. There was an urgency to address oppressive institutional practices despite the minimal and conflicting information on when or if we would return to brick and mortar. In PAR Cycle Three, the CPR school leaders intentionally shifted from plans to practice. Their reported beliefs and actions more frequently reflected the theme of brave space, including their ability to reflect and be vulnerable and make choices not based on the district mandate, but on their moral imperative of being equity leaders. Acknowledging that these social justice leadership actions overlap, I discuss each of them separately while pointing out where intersectionality exists.

Brave Space

Our CPR meetings were designed as an EC-PLC but matured into a brave space. Brave space, unlike safe space, is a humanizing space where leaders can place equity and culturally responsiveness at the center and engage in social justice dialogue. This level of dialogue can often be uncomfortable, requiring the very qualities of risk, difficulty, and controversy that are defined as contradictory with safety (Arao & Clemens, 2013). The CPR team relied on the EC-PLC space as a place of authenticity—where the leaders could share successes and failures as well as gain equity fortitude in a different way—that offered them a different way forward as social justice leaders. Figure 17 provides a visual representation of how the categories of the theme brave space developed throughout the PAR cycles (Saldaña, 2016).

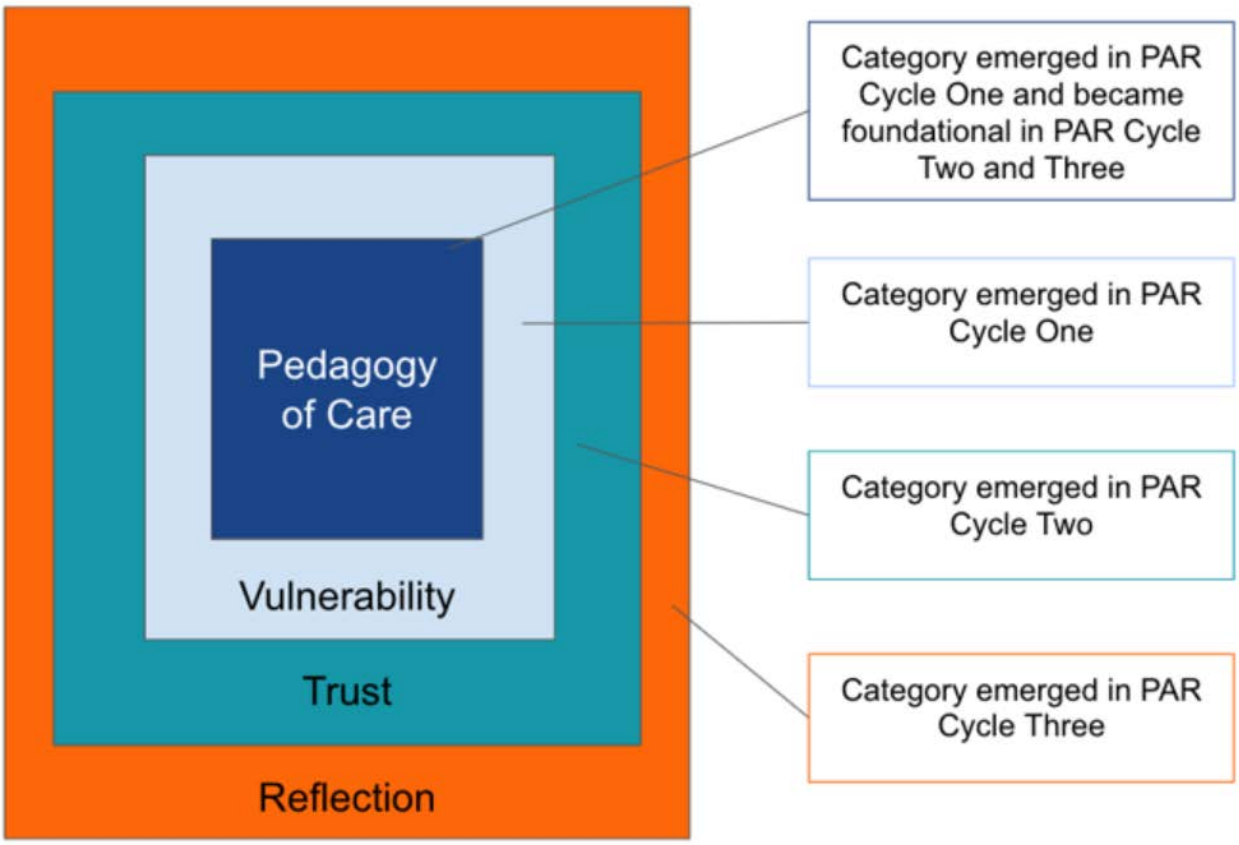


Figure 17. PAR Cycle Three theme: Dimensions of brave space.

The theme brave space was built on the foundation pedagogy of care, which was established in PAR Cycle One. Pedagogy of care is at the core of brave space. I facilitated the conditions for pedagogy of care during the *pre-cycle* year and continued to uphold these expectations throughout the three cycles. Evidence from the first cycle demonstrated that the school leaders appreciated the care taken to establish and maintain the EC-PLC, and the coaching relationships both individually and in the network setting of the EC-PLC were vital to their continued growth (Tredway et al., In press). I was consistently mindful of specific conditions that set the stage for reflection; for instance, in the first cycle, the CPR school leaders said they valued the resources, space, inclusive pedagogy, and wellness checks. After the first cycle, the pedagogy of care was foundational and at the heart of the EC-PLC.

Authentic Space for Vulnerability

Authentic space for vulnerability was a category in all three cycles of the study. Brown (2018) describes vulnerability as, "the emotion that we experience during times of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure" (p. 19). A formal definition and the codes for the category vulnerability were explained in more detail in Chapter 5. Vulnerability appeared in the third cycle in 26% of the occurrences from the data. I conjecture that vulnerability was such an important category in the cycle because the CPR team had an authentic, co-created, communal space of discovery and generating knowledge, where they could be emotional, embodied, and share the truth (Brantmeier & McKenna, 2020). The EC-PLC was a space where we could move beyond collegial discussions into deeper connections, with opportunities to be vulnerable through personal narratives.

Examples from a CPR meeting in early fall demonstrate that all the school leaders were vulnerable as they questioned the purpose of the district PITCH initiative. Principal Sutherland

shared, “I believe data tells a story. PITCH is about numbers; it is about the test scores. Is it humanizing students?” Assistant Principal Girard responded, “How are students totally seen so they hold a sense of advocacy and agency? PITCH isn’t about telling the story, it’s about the numbers.” Principal Sutherland replied, “I wonder about rigorous and challenging conversations we have about students. What is it like to be the only Black student in class? What does it feel like to have anti-racist curriculum but full of micro-aggressions?” (Sutherland, meeting notes, September 15, 2020)

The openness and authenticity of the conversation demonstrates the level of comfort and brave space in place for vulnerable dialogue among colleagues. The critique of the PITCH initiative could only occur in the EC-PLC; other professional spaces are colored with district politics, and fear of central office supervisors prevent school leaders from being as open with their comments (Theoharis, 2009).

Trust

Trust continued to be an important category in the third cycle, and the codes in trust constitute 47% of the instances from the evidence. From coding EC-PLC meetings, individual coaching and reflection sessions, and personal memos, I returned to Brown’s (2018) anatomy of trust (braving) framework as a guide for the codes for trust. These codes appeared in PAR Cycle Three (see Appendix G): **b**oundaries, **r**eliability, **a**ccountability, **v**ault, **i**ntegrity, **n**on-judgment, and **g**enerosity. I focus on the three key elements in the third cycle: accountability, integrity, and non-judgment.

Accountability. Accountability for leaders is recognizing that even when there are outside pressures and responsibilities, leaders must act in the best interest of those they serve (Grubb & Tredway, 2010). The leaders in the PAR chose to move beyond transactional

leadership actions. They chose to be accountable to their students and accountable for the learning of students rather than being only accountable to their supervisors for operational plans that may never lead to authentic action.

An example of the school leaders in our EC-PLC showing trust through accountability occurred during a fall CPR meeting. Principal Sutherland shared, “We are asked to be operational and managerial right now. We need us to be instructional leaders.” Assistant Principal Girard responded, “Yes, and we need to align our mandated anti-racist work with the PITCH work. We need to see what we do is impacting the classroom” (Girard, meeting notes, August 25, 2020). The exchange reveals the trust between us and how we hold ourselves accountable to our students while being mindful of district directives.

Integrity. Integrity is defined as “choosing courage over comfort; it’s choosing what’s right over what’s fun, fast, or easy; and it’s practicing your values, not just professing them” (Brown, 2018, p. 227). We experience integrity when our values, beliefs, and actions are aligned (Aguilar, 2018). The EC-PLC was a space where we could reflect on and articulate our values and trust each other as integrity partners to check and make sure we were acting with integrity. During an individual coaching and reflection session Principal Lang said to me, “I’m glad Assistant Principal Girard is leading the anti-racist PD because I am not the right person” (Lang, meeting notes, September 29, 2020). Principal Lang demonstrated integrity by recognizing his own skill gap (Aguilar, 2018) and his place as a learner in the anti-racist professional development space rather the leader. He could have done the professional development once to satisfy the district request, but instead he chose courage over comfort. He trusted his administrative colleague to lead the work, he permitted the professional development work to continue monthly, and chose what was right over what was been easy.

Non-Judgment. In Brown's (2018) anatomy of trust framework, she includes non-judgment in the trust category. Brown (2017) defined non-judgment as the ability for each person to ask for what they need and talk about how they feel without judgment. Principal Sutherland and I had an individual coaching and reflection session where I asked her how her PITCH work was going.

She proceeded to share, "It's not. I don't know. Teachers are so overwhelmed, so not sure what to do with PITCH work. The Superintendent sent out documents to fill out to get money." I responded, "You are right. Teachers are overwhelmed, and it seems like you are coming to a place of compassion and empathy before making a plan" (Sutherland, meeting notes, October 1, 2020). The exchange validates the trust between us; she was able to share openly in order to ask for assistance with non-judgment.

Reflection

While our EC-PLC was a reflective space in every cycle, reflection surfaced as a new category (26% of the instances). I intentionally designed activities to be reflective of our work together. To start, CPR school leaders responded to questions using an interview protocol they first answered in a shared document, and then we discussed and added to the answers in our last recorded individual and coaching sessions. In addition, our final EC-PLC was designed as a formal reflective session, where I asked the CPR school leaders the question, "What have you learned about yourself as researchers/leaders in this process?"

All three school leaders demonstrated appreciation for the relationships in the group, the time and space provided to listen, the process of making meaning together, and the EC-PLC as a place to learn and grown. Principal Sutherland explained how important she felt this process was

for her learning. Her reflection emphasized the importance of taking small, incremental steps when taking action.

> As a result of this process, I have learned to be patient, to work smaller not bigger, to be consistent over time. I appreciate the relationships with this group. It is the healthiest pushing boundaries in a professional setting. I appreciate how we take time to think about how we are doing this. There is no other space to think about what we are doing. Often, we are getting info or sharing info of what we are doing. (Sutherland, CPR meeting notes, November 10, 2020)

Assistant Principal Girard shared how he grew as a leader from being a part of the EC-PLC.

> I am learning how to be a more compassionate agent of change in our school community. Learning to trust my gut, and reminding myself to be accountable and reliable in this work. I look forward to these meetings. I miss interacting with all of you. It is the best meeting I have. I interact, I'm heard. You help me grow as a leader and human. I consider you my close friends. Human contact is far more important than the work. What matters is this human relationship and learning from each other. (Girard, CPR meeting notes, November 10, 2020)

He, of the all the CPR team, openly reflected on how having a place where he felt like he belonged supported his leadership and confidence.

Principal Lang most felt the pressure of being a PITCH school and was critical about his growth in the EC-PLC. His reflections often circled back to how Black students performed on local and state achievement data. While the mandate was in the forefront for Principal Lang, he employed the transformational shift of authentically listening as an ongoing leadership practice.

> It's hard to know what I learned in our community, versus, how outside work on this topic has influenced my growth. In total I'm learning to listen more, and to have less of a feeling of ownership/control. I'm not sure if this is good or not yet. In trying to step back and listen more, I'm not seeing the same success I saw when I was forcing my issues forward. I also feel that the old me was unsustainable. I appreciate this group for the sharing of ideas and the honesty of communication. We are growing together in this work. (Lang, CPR meeting notes, November 10, 2020)

In our reflection session after cycle one, each school leader affirmed that the PITCH plans they made were too big to begin with, and the plans were then dropped because of the competing priorities. Here, we see that the reflections instead were small, manageable steps towards actions in serving Black students with support of each other.

In sum, brave space, with pedagogy of care, is necessary for school leaders to network with peers and have vulnerable and trusting dialogue to process information and make meaning together. Reflective prompts and conversations provided opportunities for the CPR to build their confidence as social justice leaders and move towards culturally responsive leadership actions.

Culturally Responsive School Leaders

The school leader influences the school context and addresses the cultural needs of the school community including students, parents, and teachers. In addition to being instructional leaders, they are responsible for promoting a school climate inclusive of minoritized students, particularly those marginalized within most school contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016). Therefore, I use the more inclusive term, "culturally responsive school leaders," which was first defined in the literature review (see Chapter 2).

CRSLs—like anti-oppressive, transformative, social justice leaders—will challenge

> teaching and environments that marginalize students of color, and they will also identify, protect, institutionalize, and celebrate all cultural practices from these students. This affirmative behavior is a shift from imbuing only emancipatory leadership practices of resistance. (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1,278)

CRSLs surfaced as a theme in PAR Cycle Three and became central to the findings I discuss later in this chapter. The CPR school administrators shifted from being primarily transactional leaders to becoming more confident, culturally responsive leaders. More specifically, the leaders transitioned to CRSLs in four areas (see Appendix H): building confidence (27% of instances), collaborating with community members (25%), facilitating anti-racist professional learning (34%), and improving school environments to be more inclusive (34%) (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2009).

Build Confidence

Building confidence requires acknowledgement of the need for knowledge, a desire to learn, an ability to find the right resource and the time needed for learning, and an affirmative experience of feeling more efficacious about practicing (Aguilar, 2018). To build our cultural knowledge, we read anti-racist literature and research together, discussed local and national race issues, and debriefed conversations with Black students and families. With a deeper knowledge of the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and the history of oppression and injustices with Black communities, we better understood the opportunity gap (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). The CPR administrators indicated that they were more confident to enact culturally responsive actions.

The school leaders reflected that the growth in their confidence was supported by shifting to affirmative, actionable steps that they could accomplish. Principal Sutherland shared the first

staff meeting of the year, “We had a powerful opening of the year with healing space lens. We used a constructivist listening storytelling protocol and shared an artifact. It was something the staff could do with students and it built brave space” (Sutherland, meeting notes, August 20, 2020). Her success in leading an activity with the desired outcome built confidence and ensured a high probability that she will lead another equity-centered professional development in the future. CRSLs need to feel confident in order to lead for transformative change.

Culturally Responsive School Leaders and Community Members

Communities have histories and experiences that shape how they see schools. For marginalized communities, the experiences may not be positive and explain why students and their communities mistrust the school system (Khalifa, 2018). After the community learning exchange (see Chapter 5) and supporting families during the spring due to COVID-19 (see Chapter 6), the CPR solidified their relationships with marginalized families, especially Black students and families. They called and visited families to foster relationships. Principal Lang and his staff started Student and Family Wisdom Circles for Black families. Throughout the semester, they facilitated meetings in hopes to build an African American Parent Advisory Council (AAPAC). In sharing his purpose for building the Student and Family Wisdom Circles, Principal Lang expressed,

> I want to know from Black families, do they feel more included and connected in distance learning? We need to get the real understanding of the barriers and how they are feeling connected to the school. I also want to share information of what we are doing at the school site so they have access. (Lang, meeting notes, October 13, 2020)

While only a handful of families attended the meeting, Principal Lang, with the other CPR

leaders, discussed the need for and their continuing effort to build relationships with marginalized families.

Culturally Responsive School Leaders and Professional Development

The CPR school leaders supported more equitable and just schools for Black students in PAR Cycle Three, particularly by providing ongoing staff development focused on building anti-racist and healing spaces. These efforts were a shift from the first and second cycles as the school leaders transitioned from focusing on Black students to identifying how all the adults in the school could and should serve Black students. With my help, we began to facilitate anti-racist staff development at Lone Mountain, at first because the district required it, but continuing because we knew that developing culturally responsive teachers is critical. By providing opportunities for ongoing race conversations inclusive of school and district data and student and family voice, we believed that we could develop humanizing and culturally responsive teacher practices (Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Theoharis, 2009). An antecedent to this shift was from a CPR team conversation in the spring session about student-teacher relationships. If teachers had relationships with students prior to distance learning, then they continued and deepened. If teachers struggled with connecting to students, especially marginalized focal student groups, then they had low turnout to virtual classes that they didn't work to correct.

The CPR administrators discussed the advantages and challenges of facilitating anti-racist staff professional development, improving student-teacher relationships, and examining instructional practices, which constituted the largest percentage (34%) of responses in this category. Attending to these topics and ensuring that we examined our own social justice consciousness and knowledge and skills to facilitate was a high priority. In this brave space, we

had opportunities to share ideas and learn from one another across schools, experiences, and resources.

Culturally Responsive School Leaders and School Environment

The CPR school leaders were driven to create a climate of belonging for all students. It was evident from district surveys, our community learning exchange (see Chapter 5), and ongoing conversations with Black families that Black student groups often felt excluded. The CPR moved from transactional leadership of examining and talking about discipline and climate data to taking actions to improve the school environments. Principal Sutherland pointed out that the climate of the school prevents or promotes access and learning. She hired a restorative practices coach to support classroom teachers in creating meaningful relationships and a welcoming climate for the school. In a conversation, Principal Sutherland said,

> We hired her to support trauma and emotional stress with everything happening. We want her to support adults to hold healing space in their classrooms and engage them [the teachers] in developing culturally relevant pedagogy. I also want her to help us be in better partnership with students and families. (Sutherland, meeting notes, October 1, 2020)

The action items taken included fostering community building in classrooms, as evidenced by Principal Sutherland, and working with content teams to incorporate culturally relevant curriculum. At Lone Mountain, a small group of teacher leaders received a grant to attend equity-focused district professional development. In the content departments, teacher leaders are facilitating conversations around dissecting lessons and units to incorporate more social justice school curriculum.

Brave space and culturally responsive school leaders were the themes of PAR Cycle Three. The CPR administrators' shifts occurred because we created an EC-PLC as a brave space for reciprocal learning, and I supported the school leaders at sites through coaching to encourage transfer (Tredway et al., In press). In our time together, the CPR team gained confidence and began to shift from transactional leaders towards transformative, culturally responsive school leaders. In the next section, I present two key findings for the study based on the data accumulated over three cycles (Saldãna, 2016).

Findings

Two findings from the PAR study have the potential to contribute to the empirical research. First, the EC-PLC cultivated a brave space so that leaders can gain confidence and be better able to enact culturally responsive leadership behaviors (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Bryk et al., 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2010). Therefore, our understanding of what it takes to fully shift school environments to more culturally responsive spaces contributed to our understanding of how networks of committed school leaders need support and each other to take on the roles as equity leaders. Secondly, transformative, social justice leadership requires action and attentiveness to cultivate collective leadership with Communities of Color to promote relationships to work across boundaries and limit positionality (Guajardo et al., 2016). By developing genuine cooperative relationships of solidarity with families, we can devise ways with them to act with students and parents and, at times, advocate on their behalf. By authentically listening to students and families and using our positions of power to promote solidarity with students and families, school leaders learned to lead differently to fully address inequities in the schools and how we respond to the district's mandates (Love, 2019; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2010).

Social Justice Leaders: Equity-Centered Professional Learning Community

School leaders and district administrators attend countless meetings where they receive information (initiative, policy, or mandate) that their supervisors expect then to act on. There is little discussion of how to communicate and implement the information, much less why. School leaders need a peer network workspace, an EC-PLC with brave space, to process information and make meaning. Brave space is built on four main categories: pedagogy of care, authentic space for vulnerability, trust, and reflection. These attributes of brave space provide the necessary ingredients for a collegial network of belonging that relies on support from each other to disrupt current inequitable practices (Theoharis, 2009).

Our EC-PLC brave space was a place to plan outcomes, learn anti-racist pedagogy, and share resources across divisions and schools; in that network environment, we had a place to reflect on our practices (Principal Leadership Institute, 2009; Theoharis, 2010). When asked to reflect on our time together as a peer network, school leaders described the experience as a catalyst to shaping their decision-making to support the Black students at their site. CPR school leaders reflected on how our time together as a peer network contributed to their decision-making to support the Black students at their site, they described the experience in the EC-PLC as a catalyst to process how to do the work. For example, Principal Sutherland said,

> The PLC is a reflective and honest space that encouraged trust, we were able to push each other more deeply than we are able to in the (district) meetings held for this purpose. I believe the major reason for this is because we had a great deal more time and we all hold similar roles so that the politics or bias of status was removed from the equation of problem solving in looking for solutions. (Sutherland, meeting notes, October 22, 2020)

In sum, the brave space finding treated the CPR members to a space of meaning-making and belonging. Our EC-PLC space became a brave space that offered us a different way forward as social justice leaders. Our EC-PLC is unique because we took time to develop a pedagogy of care. Our EC-PLC is distinctive because we engaged in authentic dialogue where the leaders could be vulnerable to share successes and failures as well as gain competence in their equity stance. Our EC-PLC is exemplary because we built a trusting peer culture working together towards our common goal of changing academic and social emotional outcomes for Black students despite district politics and barriers. Lastly, our EC-PLC was remarkable in that it provided space and time for reflection rather than moving on to the next item on our to do lists.

Social Justice Leadership: From Transactional to Transformative Leadership

Shields' (2010) theory of transformative leadership provides an anchor for defining the work of shifting from transactional leadership toward culturally responsive leadership actions. Transformation and transformative might be viewed as interchangeable; however, the difference is found between the relationships and purpose and the moral imperatives of the leader who is acting in concert with others. In transformational work, the power dynamics often remain, even if dramatic changes occur. In her theory of transformative leadership, Shields articulates how leadership is grounded in an activist agenda—recognizing the need to begin with critical reflection and analysis and to move through enlightened understanding to action, always open to new learning and open to interrogating and changing the power dynamics. As the CPR team initiated relationships with the Black community, they were empathetic and, to some degree, transformational. They used their roles and authority to convene, to support, and to listen. As they moved toward stronger relationships and listened differently, they developed more collaborative, instead of hierarchical relationships with families. They began to see their roles as

being in solidarity with families and needing to use their power to interrupt practices in classrooms. They committed to facilitating monthly culturally responsive professional development to ensure teachers and staff are teaching curriculum culturally responsive to all student populations. Moreover, the CPR school leaders examined practices to ensure more welcoming, inclusive, and accepting school environments (Khalifa et al., 2016).

The CPR school leaders shifted from transactional leadership and began to invoke equity-focused leadership behaviors that resulted in transformative changes (Khalifa, 2018; Shields, 2010; Theoharis et al., 2009; Woulfin & Weiner, 2017). These behaviors produced successful outcomes because the school leaders had gained the confidence in the network to take culturally responsive actions in which the families and students had authentic voice. School leaders needed confidence to fully inhabit roles as equity leaders. Brave spaces led to reflection, and reflection, along with kinship in the network, offered leaders the confidence to act differently in communities with families and in their schools with the students and teachers. While resiliency is named as a factor, little research names this level of collective and individual confidence as a key criterion for enacting culturally responsive school leadership actions. Among the four CPR administrators, confidence was a dominant category.

The leaders made time to involve families in new ways and developed processes for hearing from and listening to the students and families (Theoharis, 2009). In many ways, the leaders reframed how Black families and students were seen and respected at school. Transformative leadership is often a tricky balance, as leaders need to jockey between listening and being *with* families and, at other times, using their positions of power to *act on* behalf of students and families. In either case, they are changing what happens, but the critical piece in taking on solidarity relationships is affecting how it happens. Principal Lang developed an online

monthly Student and Family Wisdom Circle event to listen to Black families' experiences and connect with them to build relationships. Principal Sutherland, in addition to asking staff to reach out to every Black family, invited students to a principal panel. She reflected,

> Students want to be together; it is hard for them to connect in distance learning. The students said their best classes are when teachers effectively used breakout rooms, connected them with peers, and organized games or assigned projects. I need to give this feedback to teachers and help them do more of this. (Sutherland, meeting notes, May 5, 2020)

We shifted our leadership to listening to students and families to inform decision-making before taking actions. As the CLE axiom states, the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns. In transformational leadership, we speak of partnerships; in transformative leadership, we speak of solidarity and co-conspiracy (Love, 2019). The CPR team believed that the Black community must be in full solidarity with school leadership to make systemic change (Guajardo et al., 2016). We expect that these are new behaviors, and we will still toggle between them, but we recognize the difference and intend to continue the work of building our collective capacity for shifting power dynamics.

In addition to connecting to Black students and families differently, the CPR school leaders shifted from focusing only on academic supports to Black students to providing ongoing staff development focused on building equity. This included Assistant Principal Girard facilitating anti-racist monthly professional development and an anti-racist instructional leadership team, as well as organizing agendas for independent teacher EC-PLCs at Lone Mountain middle school. Principal Lang facilitates an African American Leadership team focused on Individualized Learning Plans for Black focal students and the Student and Family

Wisdom Circles. At Crissy Field Middle School, Principal Sutherland facilitates anti-racist practice focused on humanizing student identities in curriculum and building healing spaces in classrooms. The CPR school leaders moved beyond transactional, initial conversations about race to leading sustainable, professional learning community models inclusive of staff and community voice. Furthermore, along with seeing teachers as professionals who would and should participate in continuous learning, the CPR school leaders retained a commitment to their own learning. This shift to prioritize ongoing anti-Black equity work at the schools for themselves and staff helped the CPR administrators implement social justice agendas in the schools.

Lastly, the three school leaders worked to promote a strong climate of belonging that included examining instruction and community in the classroom and school culture. Despite our coming together based on the PITCH mandate to improve achievement scores for Black students, we had many EC-PLC conversations that focused on developing more inclusive, anti-racist classrooms and school spaces. Our collective Student and Family Wisdom Circle (CLE) in Fall 2019 provided direct feedback from Black students, families, and staff on how they experienced the school. Since then, the CPR school leaders have grown as an EC-PLC and supported each other in implementing community in classroom and school spaces, including affinity spaces, and reexamining curriculum to ensure it is culturally relevant.

The CPR team transitioned towards social justice leaders by reacting to the meso level–district mandate not from a transactional stance but towards transformative, culturally responsive leadership behaviors. The EC-PLC with brave space continued to be an integral, safe, and reflective space for the CPR team. Within the EC-PLC and the distance learning context, the school leaders demonstrated more confidence in connecting with Black students and families and

executing leadership moves to interrupt racist practices. They shifted away from focusing on resources for students to assimilate in school spaces to examining adult practices and employing more culturally responsive leadership behaviors.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the PAR Cycle Three process, data collection, analysis, and findings of the study we came to as CPR participants. In the third cycle of inquiry, through our collective work and my analysis, we surfaced two key findings with significant impact on how school leaders addressed improving academic and social emotional outcomes for Black students. First, we found that leaders need networks with brave space. Through analysis of multiple data sources, there was a powerful impact on the CPR school leaders' practice when they had access to an EC-PLC with brave space. While not without its pitfalls and moments of derailment, ultimately, the brave space within the EC-PLC enabled us to gain a sense of belonging and, in partnership, learn and reflect together on how we best serve Black students and families.

Secondly, the CPR team, including myself, transitioned from transactional to transformational leadership and began to enact culturally responsive behaviors that define transformative culturally responsive school leaders (CRSLs) (Khalifa, 2018; Shields, 2010). We developed as social justice leaders by having access to brave space in an administrative network, collaborating with a central partner/coach who held the unwavering focus on anti-racist agendas, and using the community learning exchange processes to become more vulnerable and build trust with each other and with families, students, and teachers (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Brantmeier & McKenna, 2020; Brown, 2018; Guajardo et al., 2016; Tredway et al., In press). Staying on course required continuous elevating and framing of the importance of connection and coherence in order to maximize the work as a priority.

While the formal research cycles for the purpose of the PAR project are completed, our work together is not. I will continue working with the CPR team members. CPR meetings and individual coaching sessions will continue; however, I have changed how I frame feedback with the school leaders, particularly by promptly clarifying questions around listening to constituents and looking for reflection as the access point to encourage transformative, culturally responsive leadership actions. The final chapter is an opportunity to present summaries of the PAR inquiry cycles and discuss the important claims I can make as a result of the process. In that chapter, I reflect on my leadership journey and how the PAR process has influenced the ways I have altered my leadership approach and will continue to do in the future.

CHAPTER 8: MOVING TOWARD TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.
(hooks, 1995, p. 265)

In emphasizing that a core idea of community is affirming diversity, bell hooks reminds us that a beloved community celebrates and embraces the unique qualities of all individuals. However, her celebration of cultural identity and legacy presumes that the entire community is open-minded toward all its members. Unfortunately, this has not been true in the United States, making hooks' idea hopeful, but speculative, and the beloved community of Martin Luther King aspirational, but not yet within reach. Because some community members have been victims of systemic and generational marginalization and racism, they feel maligned and overlooked. In the Black community, the failure to celebrate and embrace Black cultural differences and traditions deprives Black people of being their whole selves, forcing them to deny their cultural legacies and identities or uncomfortably model those of the dominant group (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Thus, celebration is insufficient, and this dissertation study demonstrates that, when principals authentically listen to the voices of Black families and students, they can more effectively act in solidarity with them and promote social justice in their school communities.

At the beginning of the 2018-19 school year, the superintendent of San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) identified twenty schools that historically or persistently underserved Black students as indicated on proficiency metrics of standardized tests (California School Dashboard, 2018). The district labeled the schools and activated a process for addressing the identified deficiencies through a mandate entitled **P**rofessional Capacity, **I**nstructional Guidance, **T**ransformative Mindsets, **C**ollaborative Culture, and **H**igh-Quality Staff (PITCH). As a central office administrator during this study, I partnered with four PITCH middle school leaders to

address academic and social-emotional outcomes for Black students. In creating an equity-centered professional learning community (EC-PLC) for the school leaders as a vehicle for change, our overarching question was: How do school leaders make decisions and take actions that support the academic and social-emotional growth of African American students?

Over the course of two years, I worked side-by-side with four school leaders as activist co-researchers to engage in a collaborative PAR project focused on social justice change (hunter et al., 2013). The three cycles of inquiry over eighteen months afforded us time to determine how an EC-PLC could fully engage in equity-centered dialogue to address the substantial challenges that Students of Color faced in the four middle schools. Simply said, we listened to Black families' needs and dreams, reflected on what we heard, and incorporated their ideas in our planning at the schools. The EC-PLC members, acting as co-practitioner researchers (CPR), collaboratively investigated evidence from successive cycles of inquiry. The reflective and metacognitive nature of the PAR project within a brave, supportive space was ultimately its greatest strength and provides a template for how to support other schools or district teams to engage in transformative leadership (Shields, 2010).

As the study progressed, I relied on qualitative data to document and derive a comprehensive narrative. Over time, the PAR focus of practice evolved as we deeply listened to Black families and students and used what we heard to examine how school leaders made decisions and took actions to address the persistent opportunity gap. The operational theory of action was: If school leaders focused on the academic and social-emotional growth of Black students by participating in an EC-PLC with authentic dialogue and used community learning exchange as a process and a methodology, then the leaders would make decisions and take actions to increase the academic and social-emotional growth of Black students. In this chapter, I

make two claims about what we learned and substantiate the findings from the extant literature. I then reflect on my learning and discuss the implications and recommendations for future practice, policy, and research.

Discussion of Key Findings

The findings from the PAR cycles of inquiry reveal that participating in an EC-PLC with brave space—a place where leaders are willing to be vulnerable and take risks—supported the CPR team toward transformative and culturally responsive school leadership. The process took time, but, in the long run, it confirmed that to learn deeply we must iteratively experiment so that we can be more effective as leaders. As Bryk et al. (2017) explain it, the iterative process of inquiry cycles is:

> to develop a change idea that actually works. Each cycle builds on what was learned in previous cycles until a team has discerned how to effect improvements reliably under different conditions…. [the] cycle is a very flexible tool to guide learning at different stages—from a good idea to a quick prototype to something that may work in a few places and, finally, to a robust large-scale improvement. (pp. 121-122)

We are continuing as a CPR team past the completion of this study, and we continue to actualize what we have learned to be and become anti-racist social justice leaders. As a result of our work to date, I can make two claims that contribute to our understanding of how leaders enact equity explicitly and intentionally (Rigby & Tredway, 2015). First, administrative networks work, and networks for social justice leaders should foster brave space so that leaders gain confidence, catalyze partnerships with marginalized students and families, lead culturally responsive professional development, and examine oppressive systems of the school (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Bryk et al., 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2010). Secondly,

transformative social justice leadership requires action and vigilance that concentrates on cultivating student and family partnerships that promote horizontal, rather than hierarchical, relationships (Shields, 2010). As we move from being transformative allies in the work of justice to adopting roles as co-conspirators who are transformative, we abandon our engrained ways of knowing and working. By developing authentic collaborative relationships of solidarity with families, we can collaboratively devise ways to *act with* students and parents and, at times, *act on* their behalf. By listening and knowing differently and using our positions of power to promote solidarity with students and families, leaders can "show up" differently in their schools and districts to fully address inequities (Love, 2019; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2010).

Social Justice Leaders: Building Capacity in Networks

Networks work, and, working in principal networks, principals develop their individual and collective capacity as social justice leaders and fortify their courage to disrupt inequities. Brave space is built on the crucial relationships within a network of like-minded leaders who can rely on each other's support to disrupt current inequitable practices (Theoharis, 2010). The CPR team transitioned from safe and comfortable meetings to engagement in deeper conversations about inequities at the schools and more systematic naming of inequities so that they could act explicitly as equity leaders (Rigby & Tredway, 2015). The EC-PLC became a space where we could dependably share successes and challenges as well as increase our racial literacy and our individual and collective confidence as social justice leaders. The team members began to act from a deepening commitment to racial and social justice and, as they did move from transactional leaders responding to a district initiative toward transformative leaders responding to equity-focused agendas.

In the Lave and Wenger (1991) community of practice (CoP) research, most learning for practitioners occurs in social relationships at the workplace rather than in a professional development training or meeting setting. In their framing, learning happens during informal gatherings where professionals interact with each other and share stories about their experiences and where novices consulted openly with experts. Through this process, the participants can identify gaps in the practice and develop solutions. Our EC-PLC provided a structure in which we operated as a CoP, with an equity and social justice agenda at the center of our learning. Lave (1991) names our work as taking part in a situated social practice; as people engage, they are "in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world" (p. 67). The horizontal learning that happened in this community of practice among peers is often called peripheral participation: by exposure to ongoing practice and each other's ideas, the participants can achieve goals. The school leaders in our EC-PLC had different levels of expertise in instruction and anti-racism work (Harrell, 2019; Khalifa, 2018), and could share expertise as they generatively posed problems of practice, examined evidence, and used evidence to make decisions (Bryk et al., 2017; Freire, 1970).

As a result, our CPR meetings became a brave space that we used to plan and reflect on outcomes, take time to think deeply about our work, and share resources as middle school administrators; in that network environment, we developed confidence to be vulnerable to disrupt injustices (Principal Leadership Institute, 2009; Theoharis, 2010). In reflecting on the PITCH initiative and using CLE axioms as a tool, the EC-PLC informal structure offered us the opportunity and process to listen and reflect on student and family voices. We were able to exchange stories and, through our experiences and collective knowledge, develop counter-narratives inclusive of community voices (Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Theoharis, 2009; Yosso,

2006). Furthermore, the CPR leaders found that having an EC-PLC was essential to overcome barriers and resistant pressures that countered their equity-focused plans (Theoharis, 2009).

Social Justice Leadership: From Transactional to Transformative Leadership

The CPR team gradually shifted their leadership behaviors and equity stance along a continuum from transactional toward transformative leaders (see Figure 18). Transactional leadership, defined earlier in the chapter, occurs when participants have traditional exchanges that meet the standard of mutual use. In the case of the transactional leadership in this project, the leaders had traditional ways of interacting with families, but leaders retained positionality. They were sympathetic and then empathetic with families, but the interactions occurred literally at a distance, as Black students at the schools did not live near the schools they attended. As we engaged in our first community learning exchanges with families, the leaders started to shift. Then, during the pandemic, they had to contact families and have conversations in the communities and homes of the families and students. Initially these visits were to assure technology access, but they soon developed into more authentic conversations. As this occurred, the school leaders relied on the EC-PLC as a brave space to gain confidence and be more vulnerable, and gradually they felt an allyship with the families and students that had not been present previously.

The school leaders gradually became more invested in a deeper way to what they heard from families and students about their lives, dreams, and schooling experiences. As a result, the school leaders shifted to being what Love (2019) calls an alliance based on mutually beneficial actions. They moved from transformation as leaders who "did operate out of deeply held personal value systems that include such values as justice and integrity" (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987, p. 650) to transformative leaders who acted in solidarity with families and understood

Transactional ----------Transformational ----------Transformative

Sympathy	Empathy	Allyship	Solidarity	Co-conspirator
"Sympathy is feeling **for** them. Sympathy is giving advice and judgment disguised as concern." (Brown, 2018, p. 137)	"Empathy means 'to feel with.' Empathy requires the suspension of assumptions, the letting go of ego, and the release of the privilege of nonengagement." (Howard, 2016, p. 79)	"Allyship is working toward something that is mutually beneficial and supportive to all parties involved. Allies do not have to love dark people, question their privilege, decenter their voice, build meaningful relationships with folx working in the struggle, take risks, or be in solidarity with others…ally-ship is performative." (Love, 2019, p. 117)	"Solidarity work may require us to give up power and/or to risk our physical safety, our jobs, our secure place in any social hierarchy, our friendships, and family relationships. Solidarity is talk *and* action. Solidarity work is often enacted by, or *in collaboration with*, marginalized people. (NYU Solidarity week website, 2020)	"The time-consuming and serious critique and reflection of one's sociocultural heritage–which includes identities related to race, ethnicity, family structure, sexuality, class, abilities, and religion–taken side by side with a critical analysis of racism, sexism, White supremacy, and Whiteness is the groundwork of co-conspirators." (Love, 2019, p. 118)

Figure 18. Culturally responsive school leaders continuum: From transactional to transformative.

more completely how they would have to represent and act on behalf of families (Shields, 2010). As Khalifa (2018) says, the school leader who is in the process of becoming a culturally responsive leader finds out what important to the community, decenters the white normative story and finds ways to authentically represent the community voice, and takes on a more active anti-racist and anti-oppressive stance, particularly with the teachers with whom the leader has the most influence. Shields (2010) adds to our understanding of the difference between transformational and transformative leadership. She affirms their common roots, yet differentiates transformative leadership as taking up questions of justice and democracy; the transformative leader critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others. Transformative leadership is a call to action that requires an active stance to address issues of power and privilege, and dialogue aimed at disequilibrium to result in meaningful change.

The CPR team, including myself, transitioned from transactional toward transformational, beginning to enact culturally responsive behaviors as transformative culturally responsive school leaders (CRSLs). The school leaders are now more able to promote a school climate inclusive of all students, particularly those historically marginalized in schools. Because they cultivated stronger and more authentic relationships with the community members, they could bring the voices of Black students and families into the school and facilitate culturally responsive professional development to ensure teachers' and staff's use of curriculum and advancing pedagogies that are culturally responsive to all student populations. Moreover, as culturally responsive school leaders, they promote a climate that makes the whole school welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of minoritized students (Khalifa et al., 2016).

During the second and into the third PAR cycle of inquiry, the CPR team manifested

transformative CRSL leadership in their interactions with Families and Students of Color, as opposed to how we initially responded with transactional actions. By building a strong network with other leaders and using the community learning exchange processes, we practiced brave space and became more vulnerable with each other and with families, students, and teachers. As a result, we developed more confidence in acting on our espoused values of social justice and anti-racism (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Guajardo et al., 2016; Harrell, 2019; Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2009). Because of this work, we now offer a continuum of leadership development, moving from transactional or reciprocal interactions to transformational or improving organizational qualities, dimensions, and effectiveness, and then to transformative leadership that challenges inappropriate uses of power and privilege that create or perpetuate inequity and injustice (Shields, 2010). The continuum adds to our conception of the importance of a moral stance that advocates for more equitable results for our most vulnerable students (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Furthermore, moving beyond transactional leadership to social justice leadership must include culturally responsive leadership behaviors (Khalifa, 2018; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2009).

By identifying the critical components of social justice and anti-racist leadership, we, as a CPR group, contribute to the definition of transformative educational leadership. We demonstrate how leadership that requires an intentional drive toward equity is invoked and enacted in school and community spaces. The findings suggest that transformative, social justice leadership requires explicit and intentional actions (Rigby & Tredway, 2015) and vigilance about the nature of interacting with students and families in ways that affirm horizontal relationships. Participants' involvement in a community of practice, our EC-PLC, fostered brave space to catalyze partnership with marginalized students and families, led culturally responsive

professional development, and examined oppressive systems of the school (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Brown, 2018; Bryk et al., 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2009). In these ways, the CPR team moved beyond the kinds of transactional equity planning the district mandated toward leadership practices that relied on iterative evidence and relationships (Grubb & Tredway, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Shields, 2010).

Although we can enact school reform and culturally responsive school leadership in transformative ways (Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2009), we found that it was frequently met with barriers from central office supervisors and administrators and resistance from school staff (Theoharis, 2009). Transformational leadership relies heavily on charisma and building an image, demonstrating confidence, and arousing motivation, and these intangible characteristics take time to develop (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). While the CPR team implemented equity agendas to improve academic outcomes for Black students, the original plans were transactional, and too large to implement. In these cases, very little movement transpired toward their equity agendas (Grubb & Tredway, 2010; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). I caution that using the CRSL continuum of leadership development requires an ongoing process of networking rather than a single professional experience. The continuum is adaptable to the context; the leaders in the study initially expressed a deep commitment to social justice and our district has a transparent commitment to serving Students of Color. What we learned, however, is that enacting values is much more difficult than espousing them (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Finally, we found that our commitment to equity, the peer network, and student and family partnership opportunities became our dominant foci, and the district PITCH mandate became a secondary concern in this setting (Principal Leadership Institute, 2009). This pattern does not seem surprising, given the politics of the PITCH initiative and minimal moments for

school leaders to collaborate. Our findings contain some evidence that data reporting and resources for PITCH held the leaders accountable to the district mandate. This point is somewhat problematic because it may obviate critical questioning of our transformative leadership actions. In addition, it suggests that meso level policy needs to engage differently with school leaders to fully address the "gap problem:" the district needs to attend to school leaders' cultural knowledge gaps (Howard, 2016). Instead, districts can lead from a transformative perspective rather than transactional (Shields, 2010), requiring all administrators to step out of dominance programming and hyper focus on achievement data and to discover alternative and more authentic ways to engage both across and within our various ethnic and racial communities.

In conclusion, we set out to answer how school leaders make decisions and take actions that support the academic and social-emotional growth of African American students? We now know that site leaders must develop, over time, a transformative mindset to make decisions and take actions that support the academic and social-emotional growth of Black students. To be a culturally response school leader who is transformative requires:

> critical reflection and analysis and to move through enlightened understanding to action—action to redress wrongs and to ensure that all members of the organization are provided with as level a playing field as possible—not only with respect to access but also with regard to academic, social, and civic outcomes. In other words, it is not simply the task of the educational leader to ensure that all students succeed in tasks associated with learning the formal curriculum and demonstrating that learning on norm–referenced standardized tests; it is the essential work of the educational leader to create learning contexts or communities in which social, political, and cultural capital is enhanced in

> such a way as to provide equity of opportunity for students as they take their place as contributing members of society. (Shields, 2010, p. 572)

The PAR revealed that leaders begin to shift beliefs when they can authentically listen to and partner with Students and Families of Color. When leaders ask questions of constituents with the intent to build relationships, strengthen community, and deepen understanding, school leaders' beliefs and then their practices begin to shift. The constituents' stories assist school leaders to understand and translate the work to practice (Guajardo et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018). To truly develop transformative leadership behaviors, leaders must reflect on their power and privilege and build cultural competency within a community of practice coupled with our EC-PLC brave space.

Implications

The PAR study emphasized how school leaders can shift from transactional to transformative leadership. I detail practice, policy, and research implications of the study's findings for transformative, confident, culturally responsive school leadership.

Implications for Practice

The PAR study yielded potential implications for practice. In order for administrators to lead reform efforts (in this case improve outcomes for marginalized Black students), they must have specific elements: a commitment to equity and a willingness to more deeply understand their contexts, participation in a network, and community and family partnerships. With these elements in place, they can build a clear plan of action to reach attainable goals and fully enact culturally responsive leadership behaviors (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Grubb & Tredway, 2010; Guajardo et al., 2016; Harrell, 2019; Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2009).

Our context was somewhat unique in that SFUSD has a transparent commitment to

serving Students of Color; in fact, if other schools and districts use a scaling up model of adapting to context, they can use our processes to achieve their equity goals (Morel et al., 2019). At minimum, we suggest that a district needs to be advocating for equity, even if the processes they choose for implementation are transactional. While the SFUSD district mandate was top-down with minimal resources, the policy instrument was implemented from a district focus on equity, which afforded the action space (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). In addition, the school leaders expressed a desire to build an administrative EC-PLC focused on improving academic and social-emotional outcomes for Black students and espoused a commitment to equity, even if the ways for fully enacting their beliefs only became evident through the project (Argyris & Schön, 1974). We came together voluntarily, with a charge to build a community of practice, working together towards the same goal. The COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly fortified school leaders to connect to students and families in a new way—a place of concern and care—a place of partnership (Guajardo et al., 2016). In our context, we were able to shift step-by-step from transactional to transformational culturally responsive leadership by using the processes of PAR to investigate the evidence and then use the evidence to make decisions. The continuum that resulted from our work is not static, but adaptable to any educators encouraged to shift practice toward becoming culturally responsive school leaders.

It is important to note that the CPR team members are not Black. Three of the leaders are White and two are South Asian. When we connected as an EC-PLC, we had already started our identity work in considering critical self-reflection, white privilege, and cultural humility -- all crucial to becoming a CRSL (Khalifa, 2018). Beyond reconceptualizing our consciousness and the desire to be social justice leaders, we committed to building our anti-racist knowledge, skills,

and re-informed dispositions by reading current literature and research and attending ongoing professional development. Social justice leadership is a personal endeavor and a central and vital part of this work (Theoharis, 2009).

The EC-PLC structure was instrumental in our shift to stronger leadership practices. As the primary practitioner, researcher, and facilitator of the study, I focused on creating an EC-PLC with brave space, a humanizing space where leaders could "interrogate their leadership practices in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 142). Both the regular meetings of the network and the individual coaching for each school administrator contributed to the success of our shift to CRSLs. Administrative networks must have a facilitator to guide and coach the school leaders (Principal Leadership Institute, 2009), and coordinated experiences for school leaders enhance their ability to change practices (Tredway et al., In press). School administrators are too busy to hold this work together without outside support from someone they trust to continue pushing them forward.

The third element in our work—the full experience of not only listening, but witnessing the stories Black students and family voices (Guajardo et al., 2016; Machado, 2021)—was vital to the leadership shifts. All educational research recommends that school and community partnerships are key to successful school reform, but the literature does not often share the processes that work in detail, and few administrators know how to lead this work successfully (Ishimaru, 2020; Khalifa, 2018). CLE strategies provide guidance to administrators to partner with the school community in a culturally responsible and respectful way, forcing school leaders to authentically listen. One of the major contributions of action research is to "reduce the likelihood that they [as researchers] might unintentionally harm the participants" (Argyris et al., 1985, p. xiii). Instead, action research using participatory strategies that value family input puts

the families in the center of the research, moving toward what Ishimaru names as new rules of engagement: "begin with families and communities, transform power dynamics, build reciprocity and agency among families, and undertake change as a collective inquiry" (Ishimaru, 2020, p. 55).

The three elements from the PAR study are accessible and attainable for school leaders and districts to undertake as a school or as district policy. School leaders should adopt the use of Community Learning Exchanges as a vehicle for equitable engagement and deep listening to the people closest to the issues to arrive at ideas about how to solve school challenges in educating their children. The move toward improving student outcomes by using the practices of community schools demonstrates that we can improve outcomes for Black students if we coalesce school leadership with family leadership (Maier et al., 2017).

Implications for Policy

Education policies require more emphasis to promote the work of culturally responsive school leadership to meet the needs of Black students. The implications of the study inform not only macro level national and state policy, but local policy at the micro school level and meso or district level.

Macro Level

Educational policies at the federal level should support teachers and leaders as experts who are continuously learning; these career professionals are supportive of the concept student-centered equitable practices for young people, but they need practice in how to enact what they believe. Federal attempts to improve schools and close the achievement gap via sanctions such as Student Succeed Act (ESSA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have met with little success (Goldstein, 2014; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). National policymakers can instead support

reform efforts by focusing on alternative policy instruments such as hiring and retaining qualified, trained, social justice educators (Fullan, 1993; Noguera, 2003). This requires adoption and implementation of policies focused on educator preparation, induction, content and equity-centered professional development, and evaluation (Partnership for the Future of Learning, 2017). What our study contributes is a methodology for involving families. The proposed direction of supporting community schools as a key policy is promising (Retrieved from https://joebiden.com/education/), but the policy of using more wraparound services in a social service model needs to include the voices and experiences of families who have been marginalized in making school level decisions.

Educator policy concerned with equity must ensure that educators (both teachers and leaders) are empowered to engage students in rich and relevant learning; support their academic, social, and emotional development; teach in culturally and individually responsive ways; engage constructively with parents and communities; and create equitable, democratic learning environments (Partnership for the Future of Learning, 2017). To accomplish these expectations, federal policies can (a) incentivize teachers' and principals' to go into in high-quality preparation programs utilizing administrative networks as a methodology; (b) include critical race theory in preparation programs; and (c) recruit a diverse pool of talented People of Color from the communities served to teach or lead in high-need schools and fields (Freire, 1970; Goldstein, 2014; Rigby, 2016; Rigby et al., 2016; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Singleton, 2006).

Meso and Micro Level

What we learned about instituting policy at the district level, similar to that of federal policy, was that the PITCH initiative (inducements and mandate) was well-intentioned, but the extent of capacity building was weak and failed to change existing practices (Grubb & Tredway,

2010; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). In order to build capacity with administrators to lead social justice reform efforts, school district policy must provide school leaders professional development opportunities including choice-based, administrative communities of practice (Principal Leadership Institute, 2009; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Theoharis, 2009; Tredway et al. In press). In other words, districts must do exactly what the school leaders did to learn more: engage the voices of those closest to the issue. In this case, before deciding on district initiatives, districts should consult with school leaders, students, and families about possible directions for program initiatives. Finally, districts who adopt community schools as a comprehensive initiative can do so with the knowledge that community school participation correlates to improved student achievement (Maier et al., 2017) and provides supports to underserved families.

At the micro or school level, CPR members shifted toward transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) by enacting culturally responsive leadership behaviors (Khalifa et al., 2016). Their intentional actions to improve outcomes for Black students have three specific policy implications for schools and classrooms: (1) engage communities in authentic dialogue with educators (Guajardo et al., 2016; Ishimaru, 2020) to transform schools into places where all students feel a climate of belonging and experience learning environments that are personalized, student-centered, and supportive of deeper learning opportunities within and beyond traditional school walls (Partnership for the Future of Learning, 2017); (2) create time and space for anti-racist teacher learning through individual and schoolwide professional development, teacher collaboration, peer observation, professional learning communities, and other learning opportunities (Aguilar, 2018; Brown, 2018; Bryk et al., 2017; Kendi, 2019; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Theoharis, 2009); and (3) support school staff in learning from the critical race theory research and from each other through networking, to build anti-racist culture where staff can

incorporate more culturally relevant content in classrooms, and reflect on attendance data and discipline practices to be more equitable, while challenging and interrupting oppressive systems in both school structures and in classroom spaces (Kendi, 2019; Khalifa, 2018; Steele, 2010).

Implications for Research

The PAR design attempted to analyze the work of four middle school leaders and a district administrator in understanding how to improve academic and social-emotional outcomes for Black students in an EC-PLC. The PAR contributes to emerging research on culturally responsive leadership because the overwhelming amount of scholarship has been centered on culturally responsive teaching, pedagogy, or curriculum (Khalifa, 2018). This is an oversight, given that leaders are often considered to be the drivers of reform and the connection between policy and practice.

Khalifa et al. (2016), Theoharis (2007, 2010), and Shields (2010) identified culturally responsive, social justice, and transformative leadership respectively, by delineating conceptual and empirical theories. Adding to their work, we propose that we have more evidence identifying the internal processes that generate the shift from espoused beliefs and actions toward becoming transformative school leaders who are culturally responsive and know how to intentionally and engage families as partners. That is, while these authors provide frameworks, the PAR finding adds a textured understanding of how the shift occurs from transactional to transformational to transformative leadership style. Specifically, I contribute to the literature by emphasizing the importance for transformative leaders to have a moral stance concerned with more justice results for our most vulnerable students and the confidence to act—moving from espoused to enacted leadership through reflection to action (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Freire, 1970).

Furthermore, while there is an abundance of scholarship on teacher professional learning communities, there is little research on community of practice research with administrative networks (Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2010). The methodological design of the PAR included an EC-PLC in which co-researchers interrogated their practices in a brave space, through cycles of inquiry inclusive of a CLE, to enact culturally responsive leadership behaviors. The design included me, as an outside facilitator, as the convener and mover and often coach that helped the school leaders stay focused (Principal Leadership Institute, 2009). My role as coach, colleague, and district administrator continues to contribute to success of the PAR and my outside facilitation model can be instrumental for future studies (Tredway et al., In press).

The research has implications for school principals, policymakers, and district leaders as it explicitly identifies intentional behaviors and actions required to make meaningful improvements. It requires more school leaders to participate in PAR cycles using the communities of practice, EC-PLC, and community learning exchanges as a basis of their engagement.

Leadership Development

> My goal for engaging in this PAR was to become a more skillful equity warrior. [E]quity warriors are people who, regardless of their role in a school or district, 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 […] they are driven by personal values and beliefs, have an area of knowledge or expertise that they are passionate about, contribute freely to equity work beyond their assigned role, and are willing to grow and learn to become more effective in advancing the equity agenda in their school, district, or community. (Leverett, 2002, p. 1)

I knew that the study would push me to grow as a leader. While working with school leaders on incremental change to better serve Black youth, I gained an unexpected confidence. My confidence is more evident to me as a researcher, researcher-practitioner, and school leader. I have grown professionally and personally.

My hope in entering a doctoral program was to continue to improve my equity stance as an educator. I was committed to being an equity warrior and working with instructors and program coordinators who were dedicated to equity as a foundational element of their work. Because of my reading and learning about the research of anti-Blackness, I cannot tolerate microaggressions or racist and oppressive culture in any space, personal or professional. The instructors, mentors, and colleagues associated with East Carolina University (ECU), particularly Lynda Tredway, Matt Militello, and Colette Cann (University of San Francisco), pushed me, supported me, and provided me the space to reflect and grow. I learned in the past three years that I cannot thrive and do this work alone without a network of educators who can support me. Like Theoharis (2010), I now recognize the continued importance of well-facilitated networks of those committed to social justice and anti-racism as fundamental to my growth and development as a leader.

Growth as a Researcher

My growth as a researcher and scholar was minimal at the start of this study; my inner dialogue consistently reminded me of my self-doubt and insecurities. Beginning my doctoral journey, engaging in activities like Socratic seminar with texts such as Freire (1970), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I felt as if I did not belong. I had difficulty connecting to the research, remembering who did what, and wondering how I was going to add anything substantial to the wealth of educational brilliance in formal research that already existed. After reorganizing the

data and rewriting Chapter 5, I began to visualize the beginning stages of a framework of equity leadership; then, I began to gain confidence in my ability to use evidence to add new insights to the existing body of research.

I was finally able to speak about my research openly and let go of the notion that I needed to do this work "right." By realizing that success did not rest on "banking knowledge" but on the epistemological stance I could contribute as an insider who could observe and document the slow, iterative, messy process in which we engaged, I began to see my identity as a researcher (Freire, 1970; hunter et al., 2013). I was able to acknowledge that the research I generated with the CPR group was innovative and hopeful.

Growth as a Researcher-Practitioner

Throughout these chapters, I provided the story, data, and evidence of our work to the co-practitioner research group. While conducting this research, I was working fulltime as a district leader in the College and Career Division of the Curriculum and Instruction Department. I thought that in this district position I would have a larger voice in developing and implementing innovative college and career programming for all students. Little did I realize how much politics were at play at the district level (Bolman & Deal, 2017). I now have more courage and confidence to lead this work, even if I have to do it alone (Brown, 2018).

Speaking truth to power can be scary and can have consequences, especially if it is against the dominant culture. Often, in district cultures, people operate as if "you're either with us or you're against us." This dichotomy forced me to choose sides, and going against the grain automatically characterizes me as "the other" (Brown, 2018). The potential consequences are isolation and a loss of job security. I gained confidence, similar to the ways that the school leaders did in our EC-PLC, by developing non-hierarchical, collegial relationships with school

leaders and building knowledge to interrupt dominant oppressive structures. By modeling brave space, community learning exchange pedagogies, and co-construction of learning, I could challenge hierarchical and micro-political models of leadership.

Personal Growth

In reflecting on my personal growth, I think about the difference between fitting in and more authentic belonging. “Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn’t require us to *change* who we are; it requires us to *be* who we are” (Brown, 2017, p. 40). From the beginning of this study, I wanted to create a professional learning space, a professional learning community, that allowed for true belonging, for each member to be included.

My equity goal for myself as a leader was to create spaces where everyone was valued and experienced a sense of authentic belonging. A deep sense of belonging occurs when comfort and safety meet, when one can be authentically oneself, and when deeper learning and reflection happens. I want to continue to develop and facilitate spaces that invite this kind of belonging so the participants have the courage to speak their truths and to be their authentic selves--where open dialogue can push practice and, as adults, we can be warm demanders of each other just as we expect teachers to be with students (Delpit, 1995). I want to partner with school administrators to facilitate school dialogue where staff have a sense of belonging in the school culture. Most importantly, I want every student and family, especially our Black students and families, to feel comfortable and have sense of belonging, including in their schools.

What I learned about myself and my personal growth is that I am persistent and I am resilient, both of which led to my ability to gain confidence. In reading and learning about the research of anti-Blackness, I found that I cannot be in any space, personal or professional, and

tolerate microaggressions or racist and oppressive culture. I fully recognize that we are always in the process of being and becoming better at culturally responsive, anti-racist leadership. My growth as researcher, my researcher-practitioner, and personal growth all lead to the same conclusion: I am a strong equity warrior and I will continue to learn with colleagues how to do the work even better.

Conclusion

Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.
–Representative John Lewis

Being a social justice leader who is working towards transformative leadership is getting into "good trouble." I wanted to work with middle school leaders to change outcomes for Black youth by dramatically changing school culture to be a fair and just place of belonging for all students. We knew that involved changing community relationships so Black student and family voices are at the center of school decisions and contribute to changing instructional practices. School leaders and district staff are critical for improving the school experiences of children and adults in the school (Khalifa et al., 2016; Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis, 2010). The research about effective ways to work with school leaders in an equity-centered professional learning community and my role as primary facilitator demonstrate how an intentional and purposeful administrative network offers a brave space in which school leaders can shift from transactional to more transformative leadership. The leadership continuum framework we developed by our reflection and action was an outgrowth of a moral imperative stance about equity for Black youth. That framework is a guide for enacting one's espoused values and shifting the power dynamics so that they can be more transformative leaders rather than leaders with transactional, policy driven goals that, in the end, do not achieve the aims we seek.

The PAR project influenced my professional and personal work by compelling me to learn new pedagogical practices that supported my foundational beliefs about how adults learn and improve. I remained steady in my commitment to change outcomes for underserved youth and included people in the study who believed in the moral imperative of equity for Black students. The work with PAR changed me as a leader, kept me grounded in being a lifelong learner, and challenged me intellectually, morally, and emotionally to grow and develop as a leader for social justice. We now have some strategies that inform how we enact policies and practices with an equity lens to better serve Black students. I knew that the doctoral program and the PAR study required me to have courage so that I could learn and be a more effective leader. What I did not anticipate was that, beyond courage, this work relies on relationships and love.

We built a strong, equity-centered school leader network by developing authentic belonging partnerships with Black Students and Families of Color. What we achieved in the EC-PLC was collective work, and my role as coach was instrumental in supporting the transactional district PITCH mandate to a transformative design. The confidence that developed from belonging to a brave space and building our critical consciousness allowed us to, in John Lewis's words, "make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble," to change outcomes for Youth of Color.

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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** ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Amendment Approval

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Myra Quadros Meis
CC: Matthew Militello
Date: 12/15/2020
Re: Ame1_UMCIRB 19-001604
UMCIRB 19-001604
Culturally Responsive Leadership to Support African American Students

Your Amendment has been reviewed and approved using expedited review on 12/15/2020. 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:
This study is being extended until June 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: CITI PROGRAM TRAINING

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 04-Jan-2019
Expiration Date 03-Jan-2022
Record ID 29910243

This is to certify that:

Myra Quadros Meis

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Research (Curriculum Group)
Group 2.Social / Behavorial Research Investigators and Key Personnel (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

East Carolina University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w468a4c2c-2b71-4d57-ad1a-900ce3e773a9-29910243

APPENDIX C: ADULT CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Culturally Responsive Leadership to support African American Students

Principal Investigator: Myra Quadros Meis (under the guidance of Dr. Matthew Militello)
Institution: San Francisco Unified School District
Address: 750 25th Avenue, 2nd floor. San Francisco, CA 94121
Telephone #: (415) 379-7028
Study Coordinator: Matthew Militello
Telephone #: (919) 518.4008

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU). study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?
The purpose of this research is to examine culturally responsive leadership. Specifically, how can school leaders make decisions and take action in culturally responsive ways to better support their African American students. You are being invited to take part in this research because the school you lead has been identified as a PITCH school and participating in an equity-centered professional learning community will assist you in addressing this mandate. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn how middle school leaders make decisions and take actions that support the academic and social-emotional growth of African American students? If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about four people to do so**.**

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?
There are no known reasons for why you should not participate in this research study.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?
You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?
The research will be conducted at three Middle Schools in the San Francisco Unified School District. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is no more than three-five times per semester over the next two years.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to do the following: Participate in an equity centered EC-PLC every other month to engage in research and learn strategies related to culturally responsive decision-making practices using community learning exchange strategies and activities. You will be asked to meet with me individually every other month for check-ins, observations, and site support. You will also participate in interviews, that may be recorded, and will focus on your reflections and experiences in Community Learning Exchanges. Photographs of you or your work will also be part of the data collection process.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?
The risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research are minimal, and may include discomfort or feelings of vulnerability when sharing information with colleagues and researchers. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?
We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?
It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?
ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?
The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Consent forms and data from interviews will be maintained in a secure, locked location and will be stored for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

What if I decide I don’t want to continue in this research?
You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?
The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the advisor for this study Dr. Matthew Militello (militellom14@sfusd.edu) or supervisor for this study Jennifer Fong (fongj2@sfusd.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.

Is there anything else I should know?
Identifiers might be removed from the identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens and, after such removal, the information or biospecimens could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you or your Legally Authorized Representative (LAR). However, there still may be a chance that someone could figure out the information is about you.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?
The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I am granting permission to record interviews.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

_____ _____

Participant's Name (PRINT) **Signature** **Date**

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above, and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

_____ _____

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT) **Signature** **Date**

APPENDIX D: CALIFORNIA SCHOOL DASHBOARD, SFUSD 2018

	English Language Arts		Math		Attendance		Suspension (at least once)	
	AA Student Performance	SFUSD Performance	AA Student Performance	SFUSD Performance	AA Student Attendance Rates	SFUSD Attendance Rate	AA Performance	SFUSD Performance
	 Red	 Yellow	 Red	 Yellow	 Red	 Red	 Red	 Green
	86.2 below standards	**5.9 above standards**	**117.6 below standards**	**9.1 below standards**	**34% chronically absent**	**11.2% chronically absent**	**8.7% suspended**	**1.9% suspended**

APPENDIX E: SFUSD DEMOGRAPHIC AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE DATA (2018-2019 SCHOOL YEAR)

	Total Number of Students	Number of African American Students	Percent of African American Students	Proficiency on SBAC 2017-18 ELA	Proficiency on SBAC 2017-18 Math
Fort Point Middle School	976	94	9.6%	School 60.1% African American 13.4%	School 56.2% African American 10.6%
Crissy Field Middle School	1050	39	3.7%	School 71.9% African American 36.1%	School 68.3% African American 32.4%
Lone Mountain Middle School	692	25	3.6%	School 75.2% African American 22.9%	School 67.3% African American 11.8%
All SFUSD Middle Schools	9,271	570	6.2%	District 55.5% African American 17.2%	District 49.4% African American 9.3%

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to meet with me today. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview and will limit the time to one hour.

My name is Myra Quadros Meis. I will serve as the moderator for the interview. I am conducting research as a doctoral candidate at East Carolina University. The interview is part of an evaluation to assess your thinking, learning, and practice about the improvement work you are doing in this study and the associated ECU coursework.

Disclosures:

- Your participation in the study is voluntary. It is your decision whether or not to participate and you may elect to stop participating in the interview at any time.
- All information collected will be kept confidential. Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will only be disclosed with your prior permission. A coding system will be used in the management and analysis of the focus group data with no names or school identifiers associated with any of the recorded discussion.
- The interview will be conducted using a semi-structured and informal format. Several questions will be asked about both the individual knowledge and skills gained and the organization practices used. It is our hope that everyone will contribute to the conversation.
- The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

Interview Questions

Administrator Interview Questions:

1. How did participating in the CLE contribute to your decision-making to support the African American students at your site?
2. How does my coaching conversations and participation in the EC-PLC impact your decision-making?
3. How did you as a school leader transfer learned skills, structures, and systems into the work you do at your schools?

APPENDIX G: CYCLE THREE: BRAVE SPACE CATEGORIES AND CODES

Categories	Codes	CPR EC-PLC	Memos	Individual Meetings	Memos	Total
Vulnerability	Prioritizing Time Together	5	4	3	2	**14**
	Sharing Without Fear	15	10	19	14	**58**
	Authentic Listening	8	4	1	3	**16**
Trust	Boundaries	4	2	3	5	**14**
	Reliability	8	1	10	6	**25**
	Accountability	12	5	6	6	**29**
	Vault	3	2	4	4	**13**
	Integrity	10	4	8	6	**28**
	Non-Judgment	13	4	9	7	**33**
	Generosity	9	4	5	6	**24**
Reflection	Reflection	46	19	16	6	**87**

APPENDIX H: CYCLE THREE- CULTURALLY RESPONSIVEE SCHOOL LEADERS

CATEGORIES AND CODES

Categories	Codes	CPR EC-PLC	Memos	Individual Meetings	Memos	Total
Confidence		11	12	27	19	**69**
CRSLs and Community Members	Listening to Families	16	2	10	7	**35**
	Student Voice	19	2	5	2	**28**
CRSLs and Professional Development	Leading Anti-Racist PD	23	4	14	6	**47**
	Student and Staff Relationships	9	10	2	0	**21**
	EC Instructional Practices	12	1	3	2	**18**
CRSLs and School Environment	Classroom Instruction and Community	14	2	2	0	**18**
	School Culture	4	1	8	3	**16**