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TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP: BUILDING SOCIAL EQUITY  
THROUGH INDIVIDUALIZED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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DISSERTATION

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December, 2015

## **Abstract**

Developing social justice awareness is a challenging task. Many educational institutions have limited discourse related to race and equity. This autoethnography examines one leader's attempt to become a transformational leader by having ongoing conversations about race and racism, applying the individualized transformative model of professional development during conversations, utilizing a peer advisory group for feedback, and reflecting on the results. Findings reveal the most important element for growth is the act of engaging in the conversation regardless of one's perceived level of competence. The individualized transformative model of professional development was demonstrated to be an effective approach to professional development.

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## Chapter 1: The Problem

**Key Words:** Social Justice; race; racism; Diversity; Professional Development; Education; transformative Leader; Autoethnography

### The Research Problem

Social justice means something different to just about everyone. The meaning is developed, defined, and reinforced by a number of personal life experiences. In many ways, our concept of social justice defines who we are and how we interact with people who do not look like us. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students all enter the educational arena with different ideas of what social justice means to them and how to deal with conflicting information when it arises. The administrator's task is to build a common concept of social justice to promote equity within the educational system and become a transformative Leader.

A transformative leader for social justice is one who observes the actions of those around them, reflects on what was seen and takes steps to address any inequality. Inequality could include teacher's body language, favoritism or bias towards particular students, an administrator's willingness to talk or listen to a parent complaint regardless of race, or the way a child who "misbehaves" is disciplined. An administrator becomes a transformative leader as he or she works together with stakeholders to develop a common understanding of social justice, critically examines thoughts and belief systems, and

inspires one another to change their expectations, perceptions, or motivations.

Transformative leadership “offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others”(Shields, 2010). Scholars in the field have researched professional development for administrators and educational leaders in workshops (Burroughs, 2009; K. B. C. McKenzie, D. E.; Hernandez, F.; Fierro, E.; Capper, C. A.; Dantley, M.; Gonzalez, M. L.; Cambron-McCabe, N.; Scheurich, J. J., 2007), district wide programs, in higher education, and in teacher workshops but none have examined the impact of a leader’s efforts to promote social justice through individualized professional development.

Individualized professional development utilizes personal, face-to-face interactions to discuss any area needing improvement. Administrators frequently use it for specific improvement involving instruction, classroom management, accountability via the evaluation process or any other conversations occurring between the administrator and teacher. This method of interaction is effective. It allows the teacher privacy and intimacy with the administrator that can help to build a level of trust. Confronting ideals, questioning thought processes or actions, and discussing next steps can be uncomfortable, but this setting promotes dialogue and interaction as well as a level of accountability.

We are taught from an early age what is “right” and what is “wrong.” As our understanding develops, “different” can sometimes be misconstrued as “wrong.” Society has developed norms and resistance to them may result in negative responses from those acquiescing to the norms, for example, racism, even when it disadvantages or oppresses others. Gunzenhauser (2008) defines Foucault’s concept of normalization as “the process



in which a norm is named, reinforced, and refined.” He goes on to say, “this norm is reified as rational, natural, and standard with deviations from the norm named as sinister, dangerous, or deficient in some way” (Gunzenhauser, 2008). Critical race theorists purport that racism has become normalized in our society (D. Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The only way to break free from the normalized process of racism is to “uncover taken-for-granted assumptions (silent thinking), so to open up the possibility for thinking differently” (Gunzenhauser, 2008). Resistance then becomes personal and alters the way we look at the world around us.

Change and new learning are a journey. Both require time and effort to break through the entrenched ideologies that one develops over the years. Every journey begins with a single step. This step disrupts the status quo and brings the individual to critically reflect on their actions. The steps along the way can be unpredictable but with the final destination in mind, we have the motivation to continue on the journey to its fruition.

I was formally introduced to the concept of social justice in a 2008 graduate class at a state university. This began a change process in me that rocked the world, as I knew it. I was forced to confront my thoughts, beliefs, and ideologies and evaluate them in light of this new information.

This aggressive confrontation was quite a shock for me. I was offended, angered, defensive, yet intrigued and determined to discover more about this new reality. The classroom texts included *Simple Justice* by Richard Kluger (1975). The text brought out many issues of which I was completely unaware. It opened up a whole new world from which I had been isolated. I had to wrestle with the idea of white supremacy, privilege,

and systemic oppression, which had been invisible to me. I felt that I had worked hard for everything that I have achieved. Considering outside forces may have played a significant role in my success tainted my accomplishments like an athlete taking steroids. This invalidation was hurtful and made me angry and defensive. To think that there was an advantage to me simply because of my white skin caused me to rethink my own personal identity and worth. This brought me to examine who I was as a white male and spurred in me a desire to understand more fully my role in society and the steps needed to participate in the daunting task of dismantling racism.

June 2013, as a newly hired principal, I participated in a workshop on Racism and Leadership as a requirement of the school district for which I work. The participants were racially mixed and the discussions were lively, personal, and in other contexts, would have been considered controversial. I had the opportunity to see firsthand the pain African-American people experience on a daily basis and the heightened awareness of their skin color. Conversely, we were able to see that skin color was not a consideration for the white participants and in fact, most did not even identify in themselves whiteness as a characteristic. I left the workshop with a much greater understanding of what African-American people experience daily in America today. Racism continues to survive. Racism itself has had to change its form. It can still manifest itself in overt forms but more frequently, it occurs in ways that are subtle and leave you wondering if indeed what just happened was a racist act or not. Because this topic brings out the thoughts and beliefs that individuals hold, conversations become personal. Because of this, conversations surrounding race and racism are emotional and cause discomfort for

many people. Relationship building is critical for successful conversations around social justice.

Over the years I have reflected on the discussions from that university class and subsequent classroom discussions, particularly on emotions that were evoked as a result of the discussion, such as anger, guilt, shame, and denial or acceptance, curiosity, resolve, and passion for substantive change. How much can one person do? Is it possible for me to actually make a difference? This journey towards understanding social justice and my place in it is personal and challenging. It is not like learning a new skill or teaching strategy. It is a paradigm shift; a transformation in the way one thinks about the world and interacts with others. It requires courage to challenge racism and fortitude to accept the consequences that will inevitably follow. How can that awareness, courage, and fortitude be implanted into another individual except they are willing to take on the challenge?

With this in mind, I began to analyze the actions I have taken in discussions with my spouse, colleagues, friends, and fellow Racism and Leadership attendees regarding racism, white supremacy, and racial relations. What strategies have been successful and what strategies have not? I noted that aggressively challenging a person might not be an effective strategy with everyone. For some, it stops the conversation cold and puts up defenses that take months or years to overcome. For others, it creates an opportunity for reflection, which could lead to greater understanding and further conversation, as it did for me. What did seem effective was reflective questioning and processing time. I came to realize that there are four keys to developing social justice awareness in others: stick

to the facts, ask reflective questions, make the connection personal, and provide time for the individual to process.

### **Purpose of the Study/Research Statements**

The purpose of this study was to examine my leadership strategies focused on promoting socially just practices within the educational environment, to describe the modulation that was noted during conversations with subordinates and colleagues relating to race and racism within personal and professional relationships, and as the tenets of transformative leadership were put into practice, examine the transformation in me as a leader for social justice in an educational institution. I endeavored to answer the following questions:

1. In what ways did individualized professional development help others understand white privilege?
2. In what ways did individualized professional development help others improve their capacity to educate students that do not look like them?
3. In what ways did external forces (staff, self, higher level administration) impede or support the development of social equity through individualized professional development?
4. In what ways did focused conversations surrounding racism and social justice impact me as a leader?
5. In what ways did outside advisors assist the insider to lead for social justice?

I engaged in formal and informal conversations routinely with staff. My task during these daily interactions was to create an intimate type of professional development that was focused on transformative leadership practices. This approach was an attempt to craft a new professional identity as a transformative leader for social justice and mold its tenets into my practice as an educational administrator.

I used the individualized transformative model of professional development as I communicated with staff. This model focused on four simplistic elements:

1. Stick to the facts.
2. Use reflective questioning
3. Make it personal
4. Provide processing time.

In these conversations, I challenged racism by focusing on the facts of the situation. Examining the events that actually occurred helped to determine whether the infraction or actions justified the reaction and, in the process, uncovered the influence of previous experiences or bias. Reflective questioning could be used to turn generalized or stereotypical statements into questions to help others think more deeply about the underlying reasons for one's thoughts, feelings, and responses.

Personal connection was important in that it removed the "group" focus and looked at a particular individual. This eliminated the opportunity for placing everyone who looks like the object of his or her frustration or anger in the same category. I replaced generalized words like, "they" or "all" with a colleague or a high performing student's name to see if their statement continued to support their claim. This strategy

disarmed the speaker and encouraged them to look at the particular individual rather than the group as a whole.

It is critical to allow individuals time to reflect on the conversation. They need to experience their emotions and process the new information they have gathered. Just as I and most other individuals have had to do, they will need to develop an understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

Relationship is the heart of this model. In order to be successful, I had to continue to develop positive relationships with my teaching staff and immediate supervisors and create an environment where staff could feel safe and know that confidentiality will be strictly maintained. The staff members were more likely to be receptive if they knew they were respected and were not being judged for what they said during the conversations.

I utilized my reflections of the conversations to analyze the effectiveness of the individualized transformative model of professional development approach as well as the modulation of understanding, communication, and responses of my colleagues during conversations regarding race and racism. I used this data to evaluate my development as a transformative leader and the impact of this coaching model on helping others towards a greater understanding of social justice in professional practice.

### **Significance**

My 2008 epiphany sparked a new level of consciousness in me regarding race and racism. My subsequent journey to more fully understand the scope and pervasiveness of inequality, my role in the perpetuation of inequality, and the steps I have taken to become

an ally have become an important factor in my development as a leader. I'm confident there are more individuals experiencing similar cognitive dissonance as they develop a new understanding and frame of reference regarding social justice. This study of my journey to become a transformative leader and enact change in those around me may be of help to others. The significance of this study is based on the potential to identify methodologies and practices that can impact both the subordinates and the leader within the context of individualized professional development.

All evidence points to a severe gap in the educational achievement of minority students within our current educational system. The only way to combat this gap is to create schools that are conscious of social issues and bias that exist that may be contributing to the achievement gap and work to eliminate them at all costs. My role as a transformative leader for social justice is to help teachers and service providers recognize and confront bias that may be present in the way they approach students and families. This research will be beneficial to other administrators confronted by similar questions and by illustrating my personal journey I am able to suggest methodologies to avoid or on which to expand.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### *Autoethnography*

Autoethnography is a qualitative methodology that looks to the researcher as the subject. It requires the researcher to systematically analyze his personal experiences in order to better understand a particular phenomenon. In effect it is both a process and a

product. Theorharis (2007) states that autoethnography “places the self within a sociocultural context. Autoethnography uses the self as a vantage point from which to explore broader sociocultural constructs.” Using this framework, I was the subject of study. As I interacted with the staff I collected data on my own thoughts, feelings, assumptions, or bias that surfaced in the form of reflective field notes. I analyzed my reflections of conversations with my colleagues, my reactions to events, or other entries in the field notes in order to better understand others’ perspectives related to race and racism as well as my own.

### ***Critical Race Theory (CRT)***

Critical Race Theory (CRT) began in the mid-1970s after a number of individuals including lawyers, activists, and scholars decided the civil rights movement had stalled. Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado were some of the first writers to propose this theory and over the years, more students, activists, and scholars from a wide variety of disciplines began to embrace the theory (R. S. Delgado, Jean, 2012).

Derrick Bell, a founding father, outlines CRT in his writings. He contends “racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society” (D. Bell, 1992). He further proposes that the “interests of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites,” (D. A. Bell, 1980) which he calls interest –convergence. “Racism’s permanence, counter-narratives, interest convergence, and critiques of liberalism comprise CRT’s tenets” (Freebersyser, 2014). CRT attempts to understand oppression in society for the purpose of transforming social structures, exposing racialized power relations and how they shape the experiences



for African-Americans, and challenging the claims of meritocracy, objectivity, colorblindness and/or neutrality (Irizarry, 2012; Minikel-Lacocque, 2013). CRT rejects the “universal truths” and “master narratives” (Ortiz, 2010) that dictate what is normal or common sense. But rather, CRT asserts that race is a social construct and its ideology is interwoven into every aspect of life (D. A. Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Race is designed to stratify individuals within society. The dominant group designs the definition by which stratification takes place thereby creating a systemic structure to preserve power. Racism is considered to be just a “normal” part of American life and it is responsible for all the contemporary manifestations of advantage and disadvantage (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013). Ortiz (2010) describes CRT as a way of thinking and being that needs to be taught. It is a framework that encourages transformation through dialogue and building social relationships. CRT’s purpose is to uncover the underlying causes of inequity including social structures that may be designed to help those in need. CRT Theorists are not looking simply for greater access but are focused on identifying and eliminating the systemic mechanisms and structures that perpetuate oppression within society with a broader goal of ending all oppression (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013; Ortiz, 2010). “It is not enough to recognize that racism, inequalities, or injustices exist in a society. Rather, Individuals must take action to stop it” (Cherner, 2015). Activism is a core principal of CRT.

I utilized this framework to identify normal, everyday inequities and critically question their validity during conversations with staff. I analyzed the data using this lens to uncover opportunities for critical questioning that were missed, unaddressed, or simply

ignored. This framework was fundamental to the process of data analysis as well as the methods for gathering data including the questions asked in the individualized transformative professional development sessions, critical examination of my own thoughts, responses, and experiences, and the peer advisory group that will be discussed later.

### ***Theory of Whiteness***

Theory of Whiteness (Chubbuck, 2004) focuses on how white individuals see themselves and includes “ideologies, attitudes, and actions of racism in practice” (Chubbuck, 2004). White individuals see “normal” as defined by the white population. This can influence those in education to see those who are not following the prescribed pattern as “abnormal.” “White people have learned whiteness virtually since the day of birth” (Chubbuck, 2004). Disrupting that rightness and recognizing the internal bias can be a difficult process for white individuals and requires deep introspection and reflection of ones actions in the area of race relations.

### ***Theory of Transformative Leadership***

Transformative leadership was first discussed by William Foster in 1986 (Shields, 2010). He believed that leadership required one to critically examine the world in which they live and the conditions thereof, and work to change them. Foster’s central elements of transformative leadership are to “transform and empower.” Capper (1989), as quoted by Shields (2010) is a proponent of inclusive schooling for everybody. He utilized the concept of “transformative intellectual” to promote social justice as a practice of transformative leadership. This has also become an important characteristic of a

transformative leader in the current day model as identified by Shields (2010). Quantz et al. (1991) was able to articulate more closely the tenets of what is now known as transformative leadership. He intermingled the terms transformative and transformational creating a lack of clarity, but in the end their work was “firmly grounded in the critical elements that distinguish transformative leadership theory from formulations and characteristics of transformational leadership” (Shields, 2010).

The current day theory of transformative leadership is grounded in an activist agenda (Shields, 2010) with the focus on Social Justice. The transformative leader engages in critical reflection and analysis to achieve a greater understanding, and then moves into action to right wrongs and to bring equality to all individuals, including an equitable outcome. In order to achieve this, issues such as deficit thinking, inclusion, critical reflection, and power and privilege must be deconstructed, examined, and challenged.

Davis (2006), as cited by Shields (2010) emphasizes that transformative learning “involves the acquisition (or manipulation) of knowledge that disrupts prior learning and stimulates the reflective reshaping of deeply ingrained knowledge and belief structures.” It is the transformative leader’s responsibility to critically question and work with teachers to develop new knowledge frameworks; balance critique and promise; effect deep and equitable change; acknowledge power and privilege; emphasize both private and public good; focus on liberation, democracy, equity and justice; as well as demonstrate moral courage and activism (Shields, 2010). I used these seven elements to

drive my data collection and analysis as well as to guide my actions towards becoming a transformative leader for social justice.

### ***Paulo Freire's Theory of Conscientization***

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator whose writings focused on the quest for liberation of individuals and enlightenment of their social reality through critical reflection and action or as he phrases it, Praxis (1970). The only way for an individual to be liberated was to critically examine his or her current reality and act in ways to change it. Conscientization is a “pedagogical process defined by critical engagement with understandings of the world that leads people to actively reject established rationalizations of unequal power relations and oppression” (Carleton, 2014). The quest for conscientization is a journey through levels of consciousness, the first of which Freire (1970) calls magical consciousness. He describes it as an acceptance of the current reality and the belief in the oppressor as invulnerable and as having “magical” (Paulo Freire, 1970) powers. In Magical Consciousness, the individuals believe their current condition is inevitable and unchanging. The oppressors accept this as the normal way the world works and do not question it. The second level is naïve Consciousness. At this level individuals begin to recognize oppression and marginalization but struggle to identify the intentional nature or the depth and breadth of the oppression (Freebersyser, 2014; Paulo Freire, 1970). The third and final level is that of critical consciousness. At this level it is possible to identify the systemic nature of the oppression and through praxis, reflect and act to develop a greater understanding of the phenomenon

(Freebersyser, 2014). Paulo Freire (1970) believed that critical consciousness “leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation.” This confidence or hope that transformation is possible is the catalyst that spurs individuals to action and gives them the courage to press on in spite of the resistance they may encounter.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the research are as follows:

1. This research may not be readily generalizable to other researchers since it is based on my reflections and my understanding of events. The goal of this autoethnography was to provide a thick description of the phenomenon to allow the reader to determine the level of generalizability to their particular circumstances as well as the validity of claims made by the researcher.
2. The researcher, situated as a white male, with all of the privileges associated by his position may limit the scope of the findings. The Peer Advisory Group (PAG) assembled to provide council was used to help to surface and challenge assumptions or bias that appeared as a result of this limitation.
3. Since data was collected during conversations, the data was only as good as the reflective questions I asked and my responses to the individual participants.
4. My ability to be a transformative leader could limit the impact on the staff and others around me.

This research has the potential to impact the researcher, teachers, students, and readers. If even one life is positively affected, the research has value.

### **Delimitations**

1. I focused my study on reflections produced since I began my journey in 2008 as well as the reflections collected during the 2014-15, 2015-16 school years.
2. I used data collected from a Peer Advisory Group. The group discussions provided valuable insight into my thoughts, experiences and, beliefs.
3. I chose not to interview, convene focus groups, or provide surveys to collect data regarding teacher perceptions. This study is an autoethnography so Instead, I simply examined my own experiences, thoughts, reactions, and emotions regarding conversations with others rather than focusing on others perceptions as I endeavored to become a transformative leader for social justice.

### **Definitions**

*African-American:* I used the term to indicate individuals that are black minorities throughout this document except in the instances where minorities are specified. Then I used African-American, African, Jamaican, etc. In the event a referenced author uses a different term, I deferred to the author and retained the original.

*Critical Race Theory:* Consists of any conceptual heuristic that emphasizes racial dynamics, especially the dynamics pertaining to marginalized racial groups (Crenshaw, 1995; R. Delgado, & Stefancic, J., 2001).

*Discrimination:* “The practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other people or groups of people” (Discrimination. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discrimination>).

*Microaggressions:* “Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities” (Hernandez, 2010). These indignities may or may not be intentional but communicate “hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults” (Hernandez, 2010) that psychologically impact a person or group. They can be further categorized as a *microassult*, *microinsult*, or *microinvalidation*. (Hernandez, 2010; Minikel-Lacocque, 2013; Sue, 2007).

*Microassult:* Derald Sue (2007) defines *microassult* as an explicit racial derogation produced with the intent to hurt. This would include racial slurs or overt refusal to interact with an African-American. *Microinsults* are rude, insensitive, or demeaning words that demonstrate an individual’s attitude toward a particular group of people (DeRicco, 2005; Sue, 2007).

*Microinvalidation:* This denies, excludes, or makes invisible the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of African-American people regarding their heritage (DeRicco, 2005; Sue, 2007).

*Oppression:* Is an “unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power” (Oppression. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oppression>).

*Professional Development:* “Specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers, and other educators

improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness. “

(Partnership, 2013)

*Racial Literacy:* Racial discourse is uncomfortable and for the most part occurs on a superficial level. To engage in meaningful dialogue we must critically examine and question how race and racism informs our “beliefs, interpretive frameworks, practices, cultures, and institutions” (Bryan, 2012). Bryan calls this *racial literacy*. Understanding and critically examining our actions and underlying beliefs and motivation are critical regardless of the color of one’s skin. However it is particularly difficult for those of us who are white.

*Racism:* For the purpose of this study, I defined *racism* as the systematic mistreatment of certain groups of people on the basis of skin color or other physical characteristics. This mistreatment is carried out by societal institutions or by white people who have been conditioned by the society to act, consciously or unconsciously, in harmful ways towards African-Americans, with the mistreatment condoned or colluded in by the society as a whole (Weissglass, 2003).

*Social justice:* For this study, I utilized Theorharis’ (2007) definition. Social Justice is a construct aimed at creating a shift in the structure or societal arrangements by actively striving to reclaim, appropriate, sustain and advance rights of all humans to be treated with “equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions.”

*Social Justice Leadership or Transformative Leadership:* Theoharris’ (2007) defines as “principals making issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation,



and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision.” This definition will be the working definition for this paper as well.

*White:* I used the term to denote Caucasian individuals.

*Whiteness:* Chubbuck (2004) defines *whiteness* as comprising of “ideologies, attitudes, and actions of racism in practice.” This assumes the presence of white privilege, which equates to “power” (Graff, 2011). This includes the power to act or the power to ignore (Lewis, 2001).

*White Privilege:* Gilda Graff (2011) identifies *white privilege* as power. White privilege provides the power to ignore or address, deny or accept, and succeeded or fail. Whiteness in itself contains certain ideologies, attitudes, and actions of racism in practice (Chubbuck, 2004). It is a set of advantages that white people benefit from on a daily basis beyond those common to all others. White privilege exists without conscious knowledge of its presence, which helps to maintain the established racial hierarchy. Since white privilege is invisible to those who benefit from it most, it continues to be a major contributor to the perpetuation of racism and the advancement of itself. White privilege prevents many from recognizing that the advantages whites hold are created by disadvantages of other people. This contributes to white people, even those who are not overtly racist, being unwilling to recognize the part they play in maintaining and benefiting from white supremacy.

## **Summary**

Inequality is a problem that impacts everyone regardless of the color of one's skin. It is incumbent upon leaders to strive for social justice in education, business, economics, politics, and in daily life. In this chapter I outlined the problem, definitions, and delimitations of the proposed research. Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides the framework for analysis. In Chapter Two (2) I will discuss the tenets of social justice, current professional training and professional development for social justice, the concept of transformative leadership for social justice, and individualized conversations used for academic professional development. Chapter Three (3) will outline the methods of data collection and analysis in detail.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature**

The purpose of this study was to critically examine my experience as an administrator as I attempted to be a transformative leader for social justice. Throughout the study I documented and analyzed my conversations with colleagues evaluating my thoughts, feelings, and responses relating to race and racism. I then compared them against the characteristics of a transformative leader for social justice as identified by Carolyn Shields (2010), which we will discuss later in this chapter. Because of the nature of enquiry, an autoethnographic approach is appropriate. In my review of available literature, I noted an abundance of information on transformative learning in leadership and teacher training programs and efforts to ignite the antiracism movement within educational institutions. However, they were not wide spread and did not have a measurable impact in relation to the number of graduates from programs nationwide. Individual administrators have taken on the challenge to promote social justice within their particular buildings or districts. These efforts have been successful to enact change within the climate or culture of the school but were limited to those that agreed to participate. Research indicated professional development towards social justice occurred primarily at the school or district level with emphasis on the whole. I expanded my search using EBSCOhost and selected the following data bases; Education Full Text, Education Index Retrospective, Educational Administration Abstracts, ERIC, Historical

Abstracts, Primary Search, Professional Development Collection, PsychARTICLES, PsychINFO, Social Work Abstracts, and Urban Studies Abstracts.

I used a Boolean search of articles by key words that were similar to my topic such as *social justice mentor*, which turned up 10 results of which four (4) were related to my topic. The articles discussed mentoring programs in higher education programs to promote social justice. *Leadership Preparation for social justice* turned up 56 results in which all of the relevant research focused on preparation programs with many focusing on LGBTIQ. *Advisor for social justice* located four (4) articles with one (1) relevant article focused on higher education. *Coach for Social Justice* identified six (6) results with two (2) relevant articles, and *Supervision for social justice* found 61 articles with 12 discussing issues relevant to this topic however, all were focused on preparation programs, counselors, or social workers. I did not find any research that focused on the development of the individual in relation to social justice. I then looked at other areas in which individualized professional development occur. Adult learning in education has included more individualized learning opportunities in the form of compelling conversations, learning conversations, walk-through feedback, and formative feedback. These concepts have been successful for improving teacher skills within the classroom and can be transitioned to the concepts of social justice. A search of *Academic Conversations* turned up 358 responses. Many of them focused on academic conversations with students or simply conversations about academics that were unrelated to increasing learning. There was one (1) relevant article. *Compelling Conversations*

resulted in 20 responses with 1 relevant article, a review of a book by Thomasina D. Piercy (2006).

To provide a context for this position, I will briefly review the research surrounding concepts of social justice, professional training or professional development, and transformative leadership. I will discuss studies of professional development practices focused on developing social justice literacy for both teachers and educational leaders. I will review the research surrounding learning conversations in their various forms and how this body of research applies to individualized professional development for social justice.

### **Social Justice**

*Social justice* is a concept that works to apply just and equitable treatment to every human. This is particularly important in education. “Many educators hold culturally biased ideologies founded on ignorance, fear, and misinformation—ideologies that consciously and subconsciously inform their responses to demographic change in their schools” (Cooper, 2009). White educators enter into the classroom with both negative and positive life experiences and even those who deeply care about minority students can “devalue and unwittingly denigrate students’ culturally relevant knowledge, home culture, and language”(Cooper, 2009). The purpose of social justice teaching is to disrupt and subvert “arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary processes” (Theoharis, 2007).

Social justice is a construct aimed at creating a shift in the structure or societal arrangements by actively striving to reclaim, appropriate, sustain and advance rights of all humans to be treated with “equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions” (Theoharis, 2007). As previously noted, Theoharris’ (2007) concept of *social justice leadership* which he defined as “principals making issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision,” can lead one to experience “cognitive dissonance.” Cognitive dissonance is essentially holding two competing ideas or understandings. As one is attempting to devise new constructs, former ideas must be deconstructed. This process is challenging. Grappling with new learning that is in conflict with established ideas, values, or beliefs creates a level of discomfort that takes time to process. Social justice leadership is needed to help teachers and other leaders through the period of cognitive dissonance and help them to begin to develop and put into practice new beliefs, values, and ideas.

### **Professional Development**

All teachers and educational leaders must participate in a training program of some sort to receive their certification. Many of the programs contain at least some training on social justice and cultural responsiveness; however for most, it is minimal. It then becomes the responsibility of the principal or district to help teachers develop their awareness of social justice. Research is rife with suggestions towards improving training

programs with a more deliberate focus on socially just teaching practices and leadership towards social justice. There are a number of instances where individual principals are enacting a transformative leadership practice. They are critically questioning and pushing a socially just agenda within their schools and seeing results in culture and academic achievement. The focus of the research has been broad. By that I mean, teacher preparation programs, leadership programs, and school/district wide programs. Little research had been completed focusing on the individual.

### **Leadership Training**

Research on leadership programs with an emphasis on social justice provides a wealth of information regarding curriculum, coursework, and candidate selection to promote more social justice within the educational institution. Leaders need to be aware more than ever before the impact of their belief systems on how they interact with others who are of a different race. Brown (2004) identifies “self-awareness with regard to one’s culture and background has been identified as a key prerequisite and a first step for learners in multicultural programs.” Gooden & O’Doherty (2014) cited research of Lawrence and Tatum (1997) who concluded that “Participants’ reflections supported changes in racial identity development and behavior as a result of participating in ongoing professional development.” These two components are key to transforming one’s social identity and achieving self-awareness.

Gooden and O’Doherty (2014) utilized the work of Lightfoot (2009) to develop their study. Lightfoot concluded, “Programs need explicit antiracist vision and mission

that permeates five categorical criteria of vision, personnel, curriculum, fieldwork, and assessment.” For their study, they opted to focus on curriculum, vision, and personnel.

Gooden and O’Doherty asked the carefully screened participants to participate in a two-year leadership-training course. Each participant was asked to write a racial autobiography. Their study was found to support the idea that reflection is key to the development of “awareness of race, privilege, and institutional and societal systems of racism and other forms of oppression” (Gooden & O’Doherty, 2014).

Aspiring leaders are presented “with an opportunity to take decisive anti-racist action to influence and change the dynamic within the system through building trustful relationships” (Gooden & O’Doherty, 2014). They have the means and the capability to influence a wide variety of individuals including staff and families. Leadership programs therefore, are integral to the development of leaders for social justice. They have the power to infuse every class with culturally relevant pedagogy and critically examine values and beliefs presented in the classroom.

Both Brown (2004) and Gooden (2014) utilized cultural autobiographies to examine the participant’s development of self-awareness. This critical reflectiveness forces an individual to look inward and ferret out beliefs and their level of self-understanding. It is important for training programs to utilize some type of self-reflection. It has been determined that “individuals do not become sensitive and open to different ethnic groups until and unless they develop a positive sense of self. When this happens, they are able to further examine their own culture and heritage and be able to grow in social consciousness. Freire (1994) calls this “Critical consciousness.”



A problem of note is the number of white leaders who are emerging from training programs with minimal understanding of social justice and their role in either diminishing or perpetuating racism and inequity in schools. Some efforts have been made to expose students to social justice and develop their awareness of themselves and how they interact with others of a different race. It is a slow process because students are given the choice to pursue this line of inquiry or to explore other topics of interest. Two required courses were enough for me to gain my attention, but for others, it was not.

Some scholars have suggested implementing a screening process to identify students propensity for social justice in order to consider them for entrance to an educational leadership program (K. B. McKenzie et al., 2008). Their recommendation is to have prospective student prove through portfolios, observations, writing samples, or formalized assessment batteries that they have the desire to be socially just in their actions and willing to raise the critical consciousness of their teachers, that they are themselves a master teacher, and that they support inclusion of all individuals particularly those with special needs and English language learners.

This selection process troubles me in that it limits the scope of influence a quality educational leadership program should have. It also contradicts the very nature of what they are trying to promote, i.e. inclusivity and acceptance. I'm not sure I would have made the cut to participate in a program such as this. My transformation, as stated before, came after entering the educational leadership program.

Brown (2004) asserts that "developing leaders for social justice requires a deep-seeded commitment on the part of the preparation programs." It requires deliberate daily

action on the part of the professors to model socially just instruction and incorporate social justice concepts into their curriculum. Students should be asked to reflect on their ideas, beliefs, and thinking in order to help them become more aware of themselves and of others.

### **Teacher Training**

Teacher programs are looking at some of the same strategies in an attempt to strategically select the most qualified candidates to support the social justice agenda. Utilizing reflection whether in writing or reflective interviews is a consistent strategy that is used in teacher preparation programs (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Cook-Sather & Youens, 2007; Villegas, 2007). Service learning was another strategy to help prospective teachers become more aware of cultural differences as well as underlying bias or paradigms (Baldwin et al., 2007; Villegas, 2007). Cook & Youens (2007) attempted to reposition the students themselves as co-learners with the prospective teachers. In both cases students were able to reflect on their experiences and examine their existing belief systems. These methods focused on social justice are not used routinely in teacher preparation programs. All students participate in some form of service learning/practicum but most do not have an emphasis on developing an awareness of social justice. As a result, teachers are entering the profession with unexamined beliefs and bias and, as a result, are unprepared to deal with the rigors of teaching in a multi-cultural environment.

Some, just as with educational leadership training, would like to screen prospective candidates to determine their propensity for social justice to eliminate those

who do not share their views. Villegas (2007) writes in support of this notion, “teacher candidates, like any other learners, construct their understandings of learning to teach based on the beliefs, knowledge, and experiences they bring to their formal preparation as teachers.” To this end, “the admission review process can be productively used to explore applicants’ beliefs, which are precursors to their disposition to teach all students equitably (Villegas, 2007). The university stops short of denying access to students who display “deficit views” and fall outside the mainstream. Critics say this method is tantamount to “thought control” (Leo, 2005) and “political screening” (Hines, 2007).

With many teachers and leaders entering the profession with limited understanding of social justice or how to apply socially just instructional practices within the classroom, the responsibility again falls on the principal to be the change agent. It is incumbent upon principals to surround themselves with leadership teams that will support social justice. A leadership team focused on social justice will be able to present teachers with more consistent and actionable feedback and assist the principal in determining barriers and areas where growth is needed. Professional development geared towards fostering a greater understanding of cultural differences, personal experiences, bias, and concepts of social justice become a necessary element of leadership for social justice. A number of studies have shown how effective an administrator can be at enacting change. Shields (2004) states principals are responsible for “creating affirming, equitable, high-achieving schools that prepare all students to be multicultural, justice-oriented citizens.” Theoretically, this intricate challenge positions principals as transformative

leaders”(Kose, 2007). Kose (2007) adds that professional development should be focused on both subject-area expertise and social identity development.

The process of developing teachers is slow at best. Attempting to enact change within a group of teachers is challenging. It takes time, patience, and dedication from the entire leadership team. It becomes the responsibility of the principal and the leadership team to assess the teacher’s needs as related to teaching and learning for social justice. This process has been proven to be successful in a number of studies (Affolter, 2011; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). The principal’s actions thus become “transformative“ (Shields, 2010).

Theoharis (2007) examined the actions of seven principals who demonstrated tenets of a transformative leader for social justice. His research focused on the actions of the principals primarily which we will discuss in the next section. Within the discussion the principals indicated success in increasing student achievement over a three year period by increasing the number of students taking the examination, examining the trends within the data, and eliminating pull out and segregated services within the school (Theoharis, 2007). The principals refuted the idea that “typical teacher education or staff development programs were adequate preparation in substantiating a social justice orientation and practices for educators” (Theoharis, 2007). Although these principals demonstrated success in their quest as a transformative leader for social justice, all encountered resistance and challenges along the way. Affolter and Hoffman (2011) asserts that leadership alone cannot enact the changes needed. They need the teacher leaders to be a part of the process creating an “interdependence” that will successfully

lead to change. Shields (2010) identified many of the same characteristics including challenging deficit thinking, fostering autonomy and creativity, combatting resistance, and recognizing social patterns . She examined two principals’ efforts to be transformative leaders for social justice. Her findings indicated the success of the principals to be related to helping teachers better understand how their current assumptions create barriers for their students and “deconstructing practices that perpetuate the privilege of some to the exclusion of others” (Shields, 2010).

### **Transformative leadership for Social Justice**

Shields (2010) completed a study to develop a theory of transformative leadership and to determine if it indeed was the best fit for education leadership for social justice. She intended to further define the term *transformative leadership* with the purpose of developing a theory and secondly, to connect it directly to the work of educational leaders. She defines and differentiates three types of leadership. Transactional leadership involves “a reciprocal transaction; transformational leadership focuses on improving organizational qualities, dimensions, and effectiveness; and transformative educational leadership begins by challenging inappropriate uses of power and privilege that create or perpetuate inequity and injustice.” Her conclusion is that “transformative leadership, therefore, inextricably links education and educational leadership with the wider social context within which it is embedded” and is thereby the best option for leading for social justice. Shields (2010) identifies transformative leadership as one that evaluates structures, social conditions, power, and other systemic issues that perpetuate

racism and oppression. “Transformative leadership, therefore, recognizes the need to begin with critical reflection and analysis and to move through enlightened understanding to action—action to redress wrongs and to ensure that all members of the organization are provided with as level a playing field as possible—not only with respect to access but also with regard to academic, social, and civic outcomes. “ (Shields, 2010). She further contends, “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 attempted to bring clarity to the terms that are frequently used interchangeably primarily, transformational and transformative. As I read through a number of articles that discuss this topic, I recognized variations of how the terms are defined. Shields’ clarification sheds light on this confusion and should lead us to a more exact understanding of transformative leadership, what it looks like, and what it does for us.

Theoharis (2007) doesn’t actually use the term transformative leadership in his study. His focus is on leadership for social justice. His study examined 7 principals that were turning their schools in the right direction. He too was attempting to formulate a theory of social justice educational leadership. He defines social justice as the “idea of disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary practices” (Theoharis, 2007). He promotes the elimination of any system or policy that perpetuates marginalization such as non-inclusive practices for special education or English Language Learners. Theoharis’ theories were similar to Shields in that they both focused

on the structures in place that would maintain the current level of access to students.

Theoharis identified the need for a significant value to be placed on diversity, ensuring that all students have access to the core curriculum, collaborate with teachers to make sense of race, class, gender, and disability, and sees data through a lens of equity. While not using the same terms, his research is consistent with Shields.

This topic has been researched extensively and researchers agree that social justice leaders (transformative leaders) challenge inequality and marginalization (Cooper, 2009; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007) and act to remediate, sustain, and achieve fairness not only in the educational setting but also in economic and personal dimensions (Cooper, 2009; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). Transformative leadership requires self-awareness, a deep commitment, willingness to take risks, and the courage to do so. (Affolter, 2011; Cooper, 2009; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Garza, 2008; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007).

Shields (2010) outlined 7 elements of a transformative leader.

1. A combination of both critique and promise.
2. Attempts to effect both deep and equitable changes.
3. Deconstruction and reconstruction of the knowledge frameworks that generate inequity.
4. Acknowledgement of power.
5. Emphasis on both individual achievement and the public good.
6. A focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and justice.
7. Evidence of moral courage and activism.

These seven elements provide evidence that a leader is attempting to enact meaningful transformation of their school.

The articles by Shields (2010) and Theoharis (2007) were the primary sources of information found on the topic of transformative leadership and for this reason I relied heavily on them for the remainder of this research.

### **Learning Conversations**

Doug Reeves, Robert Eaker, and Richard DuFour emphasized the development of a community of continuous learning. Learning in which, through the data team process (Reeves) or through professional learning communities (Eaker and DuFour), staff, students, and administrators engage in conversations surrounding student progress. They collaboratively set goals to push individual students to greater achievement and help teachers to be accountable for continued learning in themselves, their students, and their colleagues. This professional learning occurs at all levels and from every direction. This community of learning is characterized by relentlessly “questioning the status quo, seeking new methods, testing those methods, and then reflecting on the results” (Dufour, 1998). Teams collaborate and plan together creating a shared vision and an environment of experimentation. Learning is self-driven and depends greatly on the level of effort put in by the individuals and the team.

Learning conversations are more specifically focused on individualized instruction. Learning conversations are structured, purposeful communications between two individuals. “Conversations that invite reflection on practice lead to deepened



understanding of the process of instruction and of the products created through the teaching and learning process (Piercy, 2006).” Thomasina Piercy (2006) introduced compelling conversations as a way to move past the clutter of data, rhetoric, excuses, blame, and secrecy that many in education use to protect themselves and focus on improvement for all students. This conversation unlocks the doors of teacher decision-making processes and fits with the current norm of regular collaboration by teachers for the purpose of defining and achieving set goals (Schmoker, 1999). Piercy’s goal was to “engage teachers in thoughtful decision making about best practices for learners”(2006). Key features of compelling conversations include conversations being individualized in nature. Each student’s achievement is examined and monitored over time through frequent collaborative meetings with administrators. Measurable outcomes are created rather than relying on the bell-curve expectations. Data generated during these conversations become classroom goals using predictions developed. Doug Reeves (2005) points out the need to examine adult behaviors such as making decisions based on data or embracing accountability using guidance in the form of direct and individualized compelling conversations. Piercy’s (2006) findings indicated a direct correlation to the proficiency data gathered by the state and the data collected during the conversations. Teachers were able to accurately predict the student’s scores. This study has been replicated and similar results were obtained(Piercy, 2006). Compelling conversations have demonstrated improvement in the gender gap as well as those students receiving special education services.

This type of individualized interaction between teacher and administrator is what I chose to use as a model for my individualized professional development for social justice. It has been successful for helping teachers to change the way they look at academic progress and data, which has greatly impacted their students' achievement.

### **Summary**

Researchers have identified that leadership programs do not emphasize enough the importance of understanding and enacting social justice as a tool to promote the success of all students. While screening potential candidates to eliminate those who are not exhibiting characteristics that demonstrate the propensity for enacting socially just teaching may not be the best answer, more work needs to be done to model and promote characteristics of transformative leadership for social justice within the coursework of the leadership programs.

Social justice is beginning to be addressed in teacher training programs through the use of service learning and student teaching. Some scholars are proposing an examination of a student's disposition towards social justice to determine whether or not to allow entry to the program. Critics oppose this and equate it to political screening.

With so many white teachers entering the field having little understanding of their cultural position and the deep seated bias' and assumptions they hold, it becomes the responsibility of the principal to help teachers acknowledge and examine their beliefs and increase their awareness of how this impacts their instruction. This process takes time, energy, intrinsic motivation, and courage.

Studies of transformative leadership for social justice indicated success in student achievement, staff development, and increasing the promise for students within the school. Shields outlined seven (7) tenets that are present when a principal is acting as transformative leader.

Researchers have examined professional development practices aimed to increase awareness of social justice in training programs and as district or school wide initiatives, but none have looked at the effectiveness of providing professional development at the individual level. Change is a personal process. When discussions are held in groups, there are many variables that can alter a person's responses to questions. The time required to provide professional development on an individual basis might be prohibitive in larger institutions, but could be done by isolating key individuals with which to begin the process. I used the concepts of compelling conversations to provide individualized professional development to my instructional staff regarding social justice. My school has seven (7) scheduled meetings between the teacher and the principal annually. This is an opportune time to discuss issues surrounding social justice and provide individualized professional development.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter will cover the methods I used while conducting this qualitative study. I will discuss the rationale for the research and describe my position as a researcher. I will then review my research questions and discuss why a qualitative

approach is the most relevant for this topic. Additionally I will discuss data collection and analysis methods, reliability and validity, and finally the limitations that will accompany this study.

### **Rationale for the Research Design**

Change is difficult under the best of situations. Social justice and racism adds in a thick layer of emotion and fully developed social constructs that have become internalized regardless of one's racial background. We approach this topic tentatively and almost always with a significant degree of discomfort. As a white male researcher, I am a member of the privileged group within society and the educational system as well as a product of the system that allows and perpetuates inequities to exist. Group or program wide professional development can provide some awareness of inequities and the need to address personal bias but falls short of truly enacting change on an individual level. I have been involved with a number of workshops in which the participants were not all volunteers and I am witness to the counterproductive nature of the situation as compelled participants undermine the presented information. It becomes incumbent upon the administrator to provide an intimate level of professional development that reaches everyone and in which bias, prejudice, or other inequities, when identified, are challenged. The central problem focus of this study is on the administrator becoming a change agent and in the process, becoming a transformative leader for social justice.

### **Position of the Researcher**

“Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009). As a white male working to develop and define my role as an administrator and leader for social justice, I constantly battle my own personal beliefs when confronted with issues related to race and racism. I am in the process of developing a greater understanding of my role as a white male in the perpetuation of racism and inequity and attempting to situate myself as an “ally” to all people who live in a society of oppression and denial. As an educational administrator, I am also responsible to lead my staff to become socially just and responsive to the needs of all students. To that end, I am striving to become a transformative leader for social justice.

### **Research Questions**

Merriam (2009) points out that qualitative researchers study phenomenon in their natural settings with the purpose of making sense or interpreting the meaning people bring to the phenomenon. This research design will attempt to understand and explicitly describe such phenomenon and my reactions to them.

1. In what ways did individualized professional development help others understand white privilege?

White Privilege is a term that white people would prefer to avoid. It is fraught with controversy and many deny its existence. In order to outline ways in which individualized professional development can help others understand white privilege, I

used the phenomenology framework which Patton (2002) states is “the study of how people describe things and experience them through their senses.” I incorporated a variety of strategies within the design of the study to generate meaningful data. I utilized daily reflections in the form of a journal to document observations from classrooms or conversations in the hallway or office. I also utilized annotated work documents to clearly describe meaning in any documents that may be unclear.

2. In what ways did individualized professional development regarding social justice help others improve their capacity to educate students that do not look like them?

White teachers and administrators are not always aware of or able to justify inequitable treatment of others. In order to better educate students, teachers must confront and address misconceptions, bias, and other deeply held beliefs. I utilized the work of Paulo Freire (1970) and his theory of Conscientization to examine the growth of teacher’s level of social justice awareness. He describes the transition of awareness of oppression in three levels of consciousness: Magical consciousness, Naïve Consciousness, and Critical Consciousness. Magical consciousness accepts what is seen without question. Naive consciousness recognizes marginalization of ones life but does not focus on systematic patterns or the purposeful nature of created inequities relating to race, gender or classes. Critical consciousness identifies the systematic nature of oppression. Freire’s concept of praxis includes the use of reflection combined with action to assist in understanding an individual’s social reality. This increased awareness should lead to more equitable treatment of minority students in the classroom.

3. In what ways did external forces (staff, self, higher level administration) impede or support the development of social equity through individualized professional development?

To address these questions I looked to critical inquiry. “Those who engage in critical research frame their research questions in terms of power—who has it, how it’s negotiated, [and] what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power...” (Merriam, 2009). Power is not the only influencing factor however. Paolo Freire (1970) pointed out that the forces of oppression are widely situated and include the oppressed themselves. My goal will be to identify and name the forces that impede or support the development of social equity for all stakeholders within the educational environment.

4. In what ways did focused conversations surrounding racism and social justice impact me as a leader?

I used field notes and daily reflections to document thought patterns and processes and illuminate bias and political influences that were evident. I examined my work using the seven (7) tenets of transformative leadership identified by Shields (2010) which included the use of critique and promise, attempts to make deep equitable changes, reframing knowledge frameworks that generate inequity, recognizing power, emphasizing both individual achievement and public good, focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and justice, and finally evidence of moral courage or activism.

5. In what ways did outside advisors assist the insider to lead for social justice?

I developed a strategy to build awareness of institutional forces and utilized critical outside advisors to offer critique to promote accountability and to challenge assumptions and assertions.

### **Data Collection**

I used a variety of sources to collect data for the study. The sources were deliberately chosen for their particular strengths and to improve validity and reliability of the findings. Each source has its own set of strengths and limitations. The researcher used written and audio reflections as the primary source of data. I utilized concepts of phenomenology, particularly the framework of *epoche* to ferret out and examine any bias or prior experiences that surfaced in the quest for social justice. Epoche is the practice of suspending judgment within the present moment and focusing on the facts, which can eliminate emotion or other interfering factors from the equation. This strategy builds a baseline as well as data to evaluate the generalizability of my research to others in similar circumstances.

As an ethnographer, I generated brief notes throughout the day when situations arose that were relevant to the research questions at hand. I also used reflections at the end of the day to examine the events of the day and note any observations. Field notes and any generated analytical memos became a part of the data as the study progressed. The constant comparative method was used to assess new data in relation to previously collected field notes (Merriam, 2009). Consistently reviewing collected data in light of new data, keeps the research fresh and the researcher engaged with the data. Audio



recordings were used via the memo feature on the iPhone. These recordings were transcribed and preserved on a password-protected computer.

Any school or district documents that were generated by others or me within the district that may be related to social justice will be preserved as artifacts. This includes but is not limited to: emails, agendas, memos, informal feedback, etc. These items include annotations to ensure the original thoughts and reactions were preserved. This assists with the analysis process and ensures the possibility of a more complete evaluation.

I utilized the individualized transformative model of professional development during conversations, which attempted to keep the conversation focused on the facts of the situation, utilized reflective questions, created a personal connection to the situation, and provided processing time.

A final strategy was to assemble a peer advisory group of individuals to act as counsel and provide an additional layer of accountability as well as increase credibility. This “external audit” (J. W. Creswell, 2007) helped to guide, challenge, and/or validate my work and interpretations of myself and others. I assembled a diverse group of individuals that were interested in the work of social justice with the express purpose of being a sounding board and providing perspectives that are from someone other than a white male administrator. Members of the group were known by the researcher and were recommended by other members of the group or someone familiar to the researcher. Each participant was fully informed of the research process through the use of IRB Consent Forms. The group met 3 times after August 1, 2015. The meeting consisted of

the researcher sharing scenarios from field notes that were important to the work of social justice and transformative leadership. The topics were chosen and moderated by the researcher. A scenario was presented followed by a discussion question. I engaged the group in a discussion to process the scenario. The group was asked to critically question the responses, which shed light on the situations and lead to different questions and conclusions. Meetings were audio recorded using the memo feature on the iPhone and Video recorded using the video recording of an iPad. The recordings were transcribed and saved on a password-protected computer. Members signed a confidentially agreement to prevent disclosure of information. These Items were stored in a locked filing cabinet within my private residence.

This group could have exhibited bias on several levels. Since some of the members of the group were familiar with my particular building and the individuals therein, they could have been privy to personalities and previously formed opinions. I changed names and places in an effort to maintain anonymity for all players involved in any conflicts or situations that arose in an attempt to minimize bias. Those intimately familiar with my building still could have been able to ascertain the individuals involved in the scenarios. A second bias that could have occurred was the desire to affirm me as the researcher and in the process, withhold open and honest critique of the scenario. The goal of the group was to provide a forum for critique of particular situations and to encourage vigorous debate. The lack thereof could have represented a favorable bias. As I analyzed the reflections of the group meetings, I was able to determine the effectiveness

of the group by the participant responses that supported the researchers understanding and those that refuted or opposed.

### **Data Analysis**

I utilized a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1967) in the analysis of the data. Grounded theory is an approach that is “grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed” (Strauss, 1990). It consists of participant observers immersing themselves into the routines and daily lives of those being studied, interviewing the subjects to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, and collecting any artifacts that may help the researcher to more fully understand the culture or individuals of interest. In this case, I am the subject of study and my field notes were systematically gathered and analyzed. “The aim is to ultimately build a theoretical explanation by specifying phenomena in terms of conditions that give rise to them, how they are expressed through action/interaction, the consequences that result from them, and variations of these qualifiers”(Corbin, 2007). Data collection and analysis were an ongoing process utilizing constant comparison (Merriam, 2009) of the collected data with previously collected data.

I used an open coding system as described by Merriam (2009) utilizing thick description to clarify reflections and artifacts. Open coding is the initial method of identifying segments of data as belonging to a particular category or code. Additionally, I developed a codebook to support claims of reliability. This codebook contains a list of the developed codes along with a description, example, and any analytic memos that are

tied to a particular code.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Validity assumes that the information presented is accurate, authentic, and trustworthy. Creswell (2000) defines validity as “how accurately the account represents participants realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them.” Studies of this nature do not fit within the standard parameters of reliability and validity identified within quantitative inquiry. The results of the study may not be generalizable or replicable as is expected for scientific research. In ethnographic research, “understanding” (Wolcott, 1994) is more desirable than validity. Angen (2000) suggests that “substantive validation” identifies evidence of the researcher’s understanding of his own understanding of the phenomenon. To that end, I utilized thick description of the phenomenon and its context to ensure the readers understanding of the phenomenon and the conclusions drawn by the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability to be appropriate in the evaluation of research if it takes place longitudinally in the field.

The final element is the use of self-reflection. “Self-reflection contributes to the validation of the work” (J. W. Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) goes on to say that a “chain of interpretations... must be documented for others to judge the trustworthiness of the meanings arrived at the end.” He identifies eight strategies for validating qualitative research which include prolonged engagement; triangulation using multiple sources; peer review/debriefing; analysis of disconfirming cases; clarifying research bias; member

checks; rich, thick description; and external audits. Creswell recommends utilizing at least two of the strategies. I attempted to satisfy the validity question by following Creswell's model.

Reliability assumes that the research could be repeated and reasonably achieve the same results. I made use of numerous items to satisfy best practice for promoting reliability as indicated by Miles and Huberman (1994). I made use of a codebook with code memos, transcripts of conversations and meetings, artifacts that were relevant and identified in the findings, and the development of an audit trail as indicated earlier.

### **Summary**

I have outlined the rationale for the methods used and the process for data collection and analysis. I discussed the research questions and issues surrounding reliability and validity. I revealed some limitations that may impact the study. I also indicated strategies for supporting participants and preserving confidentiality of all participants and data collected. Chapter Four will outline the findings and the analysis thereof and Chapter 5 will detail the conclusions and recommendations.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine one leader's strategies to promote social justice utilizing individualized professional development, to describe the modulation that was noted during conversations with subordinates and colleagues relating to race and racism within personal and professional relationships, and as the tenets of transformative leadership were put into practice, examine the transformation in me as a leader for social justice within an educational institution.

This chapter examined the researcher's progression towards social justice awareness, research demographics, and the professional development strategies utilized in light of Shield's (2010) seven tenets of transformative leadership in an effort to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways did individualized professional development help others understand white privilege?
2. In what ways did individualized professional development regarding social justice help others improve their capacity to educate students that do not look like them?
3. In what ways did external forces (staff, self, higher level administration) impede or support the development of social equity through individualized professional development?

4. In what ways did focused conversations surrounding racism and social justice impact me as a leader?
5. In what ways did outside advisors assist the insider to lead for social justice?

### **The Gated Community**

I am a white male born last of seven children to a lower middle class family. I have four brothers and two sisters. My father was a local truck driver and my mother a stay-at-home mom. Our home was a small three-bedroom house in a Midwestern suburb. Our family was religious and extremely supportive. Our lives were completely wrapped up in church and the family. We attended service four times weekly and socialized primarily with friends from church or with family. Our church had no African-American members so therefore; we had no African-American friends outside of school. We all attended the local public school but participated in few extra-curricular events. Our local schools were racially mixed but I did not spend time with anyone from school after hours.

My parents were born in the 1920's and their view of race mirrored the sentiments of many whites. Interactions with African-American people were minimal and therefore, they bought into the many stereotypes regarding race and shared them with their children. Through the years, I've seen a great shift in my father relating to race. As my father had more and more opportunities to work with and interact with African-Americans, those beliefs began to break down. I saw a dramatic change when my mother had to enter a nursing home due to advanced stages of Alzheimer's. Many of her caregivers were African-American and I watched as my father developed close relationships with several

of the nurses and assistants. He now has a diverse group of friends and has taken a special interest in a couple from Haiti. They socialize on a regular basis whether out or in each other's homes. Individual relationships and personal connections make a huge difference in one's acceptance and understanding of different cultures and races.

I grew up in a world that was very different from those around me. I was separated and sheltered from many of the influences in the world around me. We did not have a television; we socialized with a limited group of like faith; our world was limited to church and family. We did not participate in organized sports; attend dances or other social activities with the community or schools. This separation created a world for me that was unlike the experience of most of my classmates. I was aware of other races but since their issues had no relevance in my life, I had the privilege to ignore them.

As I grew, I learned more about others. I learned in the second grade that directing the "N-word" at an African-American was not the best choice. I used the word with no malice but simply because it was a word we used in our home when someone was acting silly. Tyrone was offended by the remark. His reaction made a profound impact on me. I felt awful about my remark and have not used that word since. Looking back, this marked the beginning of racial awareness and cultural sensitivity for me. I had interacted with many African-Americans throughout my elementary and secondary experience but it was not until I entered college that I begin to develop ongoing relationships.



After graduating I began my career as a speech–language pathologist. I started my own company providing early intervention services for families with children experiencing delays in speech and language. I worked successfully with a variety of cultures, or so I thought. This was a big part of my rationale for why I was not a racist. I felt that I had been able to serve with an equal amount of love and support both for white and African-American families. I went into all neighborhoods and embraced their families as a part of my own; therefore, I clearly was not a racist.

### **University Challenge**

These concepts were challenged when I returned to college to study educational administration. The professor challenged my beliefs that I felt made me exempt from the title of racist causing me to examine myself more closely. His simple, yet probing questions to my comments brought into question my culpability and acquiescence to the perpetuation of racism. I stated my argument that I worked effectively with all races. His response was, “how do you know?” The simple truth is I don’t know and that opened up a whole other set of questions. Had I been insensitive in my approach when dealing with African-American families? Was there a possibility that I could have offended them in their own homes? Could I have perpetrated microaggressions against the families that I was attempting to help? Have I disregarded the needs and wants of the families to push my own agenda? As one who genuinely cares about people, this possibility was incredibly disturbing. I fought the urge to run to some of my families to validate my non-racist position. My anger was directed at the professor for broaching such an absurd topic

and entertaining the discussion. It was non-productive and just focused on “white bashing.” All it did was fuel the ridiculous ideas in the African-American students and overstate the effects and presence of racism. I was very uncomfortable the entire semester and continued to internally deny and refute much of the information discussed. I was also angry with myself at the possibility of having offended my families and for having the audacity to assume my interactions with families was appropriate and respectful without ever asking. I did not challenge the professor or any of my classmates but rather, tried to be invisible so I would not have to confront others or justify my position.

The concept of white privilege was difficult for me to process. Having an advantage because of my skin tone interfered with my belief that it was hard work and dedication that drove me to success. I was not able to accept that for several months. I recognized that the African-American students had experienced some disadvantage but surprisingly did not conclude the opposite and equal reaction. If one is disadvantaged, someone else benefits from that disadvantage. I had to rethink my position and the bootstrap theory of hard work and perseverance. It was not until an experience in the summer of 2012 that I more fully understood this concept. We will discuss that shortly.

The university had two required courses that dealt with concepts of social justice. The second course was equally uncomfortable at first but as the course progressed, became easier. I then voluntarily chose to participate in several seminars on the topic. Through these experiences I began to develop a greater understanding of the systemic nature of racism within the political, social, economic, and educational structures. We

read and discussed a variety of books on a plethora of topics. Jack Dougherty (2004) wrote about the struggle in Milwaukee for equal education. Every success was met with a political or social barrier in order to maintain the status quo and an attempt to prevent desegregation, voice, and equal opportunity for students and African-American families.

Anderson (1988) outlined the struggle and the hunger for education of Blacks in the south. He detailed the systemic struggle to prevent schools for African-American students and when that was unsuccessful, tried relegating education to rudimentary or technical skills. The financial success of whites in the South depended on a poor, uneducated population. Educating blacks would have destroyed their way of life and financial freedom. These authors and many more, along with the lively classroom discussions, were instrumental in helping me understand how we have arrived where we are today. How governmental policy has influenced how we live, the way we think, and the way we discriminate. I struggled to believe the depths individuals would go to oppress a group of people. I felt betrayed and hurt that this history was omitted from my education. I made the comment in one of the classes relating to how much better things were now than they were in the 60's. The African-American professor who was filing in replied, "Is it really?" I had to again stop and think. Were things better now? It seems that overt racism has diminished. The government finally passed a law against lynching. From my white lens, things did appear better but I cannot see the world through the eyes of an African-American person and will never fully understand the subtle and not so subtle impact of racism they have to deal with on a daily basis. Once again I found

myself grappling with the issue of racism. Not just the history of racism, but the continued presence that I could not see.

### **Seeking Critical Consciousness**

The quest for understanding continued in the summer of 2013 when I accepted a position of principal in a local school district and was required to participate in a workshop on racism and leadership. Within this course we were exposed to a variety of topics including microaggressions, self-concepts, white privilege, white guilt, and so on. This group was a mixed race and gender group. The participants included eight (8) white and five (5) African-Americans. Ages of the participants ranged from 23 to 76. This included one new teacher, two retired teachers, one preparing to retire, and others that were in the middle. There were five (5) men (1 Black, 4 white) and eight (8) women (4 Black and 4 white). The group included Administrators (4), teachers (6), and facilitators (3).

The discussions were led by the facilitators and primarily occurred one-on-one. Initially, then we shared our thoughts and emotions with the group. I was anxious on the first day of this workshop even though I had been in several racially diverse classes dealing with this topic. This three-day event opened my eyes to a number of realities. Listening to the African-American participants, it was clear that acts of racism occur frequently and in many forms. There was much pain and frustration among our African-American friends regarding the persistence and the ubiquitous nature of racism. As allies, white individuals have the privilege to stand up against acts of racism just as they

have the privilege to turn away and ignore them. This workshop brought me closer to my African-American colleagues and I feel empowered by them.

This workshop broached a number of topics that helped me to see racism in everyday life. One participant served on a committee overseeing a gymnastics league. They discussed the need for plugs for members that had large holes in their ear lobes. They developed a policy to state this requirement and to keep them from being distracting, the committee required the plugs to be flesh colored. My colleague initiated a discussion with the committee on what exactly was meant by “flesh colored.” I had not considered “flesh” color to be anything other than a whiteish-pink, but looking around the room, it was clear that there were many different shades of flesh of which most did not match the accepted “flesh” color.

Participants reported that speaking out against racism or racist acts empowered them. Several individuals shared experiences relating to inaccurate information being shared with students regarding different races or stereotypes being reinforced by teachers. What struck me most were the numerous instances of racism that the African-American participants elected to share. Story after story indicated racism is not only alive but continues to have devastating effects on those around us everyday. Those who are blind, as I was and can sometimes still be, can and do perpetrate racist acts routinely and never realize the pain they are inflicting on those who just happen to be in their path and don't deserve it.

This workshop helped to propel me to a new level of understanding or, “critical consciousness” (Paulo Freire, 1970). This workshop inspired me to continue to research and grow my understanding of racism but in addition, to understand myself and the role I play in the perpetuation of racism today. I have been encouraged and compelled to stand up and confront racism when it occurs because it is the right thing to do. This brings me to this research and the continued efforts to grow in understanding, to use the power and authority I have been given to promote equity and opportunity for all students, and to help others begin or continue this process of social justice enlightenment.

Now it was my turn to share what I had learned regarding social justice and equity with others in hopes of creating an environment that is free of bias and inequity for everyone, not just those that “fit the mold.” In order to do this, I needed some parameters. I chose to use Shield’s (2010) seven (7) tenets of transformative leadership.

They are as follows:

1. *A combination of both critique and promise.*
2. *Attempts to effect both deep and equitable changes.*
3. *Deconstruction and reconstruction of the knowledge frameworks that generate inequity.*
4. *Acknowledgement of power.*
5. *Emphasis on both individual achievement and the public good.*
6. *A focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and justice.*
7. *Evidence of moral courage and activism.*

In addition I also looked for evidence that individuals within my scope of influence might be moving along the Paulo Friere's (1970) social justice consciousness continuum from Magical Consciousness towards Critical Consciousness and utilized the strategies of the Individualized Transformative model of Professional Development. This model includes the following strategies:

1. Stick to the facts,
2. Use reflective questioning,
3. Make a personal connection to the event,
4. Provide processing time.

### **Data Demographics**

I am an administrator of a preschool primarily serving children with special needs; however, we also serve typically developing children and those identified as “at risk.” The school district was a medium-large suburban district serving around 18,000 children pre-kindergarten (PK) to grade 12. Our PK program serves over 500 students in three (3) different buildings. I oversee the largest of the three serving around 200 students and supervising 11 Teachers, five (5) Diagnosticians, seven (7) Speech-Language Pathologists, one (1) occupational therapist, two (2) physical therapists, and one (1) behavioral analyst. We did not have any African-American teachers however; eight (8) out of fifteen teacher assistants are African American (7) or Hispanic (1). Two (2) Speech-Language Pathologists, the building Secretary, the Teacher Clerk, and one (1) Occupational Therapist were African American. 65% of our students were African-

American students as compared to 29% of the staff. The disparity in the number of African-American students in relation to the staff was startling and needs to be addressed (see table 1). In addition, only 13% of the certified staff was African-American while the non-certified staff was at 53%. The majority of the skilled positions were filled by Caucasians.

Table 1: General Demographics

Staff	Students
29%	65%
Minority	Minority

Table 2: Minority Certification Status

	Certified	Non-Certified
African-American	3	8
Caucasian	23	15
Percentage Minority	13%	53%

These numbers have only changed slightly during my tenure. I have had the opportunity to hire four certified staff members and only one was an African-American. This is an area of need requiring much greater effort at locating and hiring skilled African-American teachers and therapists. I need to examine my hiring practices and ensure that these percentages more closely reflect our student population.



## **Seven Tenets of Social Justice Leadership**

### **A Combination of Both Critique and Promise.**

In an effort to promote equity there must be a method for examining practices to ensure students all have an equal opportunity to learn. Reflecting on or critiquing ones practices is a method to build greater understanding of ourselves and how we think. This critique can be daunting, but it is an imperative first step if practices are expected to improve. Along with the critique, there must be promise, the belief in the possibility of eventually achieving the desired goal. I prefer to think of *promise* in terms of *hope*. Shields (2010) outlines a need to “challenge current practices and to begin to do things differently.” She further encourages optimism in the quest to overcome deficit thinking and accepting the responsibility for all children becoming successful. Reflection on current practices coupled with action, creates hope for all children to succeed.

In the midst of situations it can be difficult to have clarity. This was evident more than ever in the St. Louis area, particularly, Ferguson, Missouri where Michael Brown was shot and killed by a Ferguson police officer in August of 2015. The tragic and untimely death of Michael Brown triggered many emotions on all sides, black, white, and blue. It also inspired a great deal of fear. The rioting and looting that occurred in the days after the shooting and again after the results of the investigation were revealed created a fear that cut across racial lines. If there could be a silver lining in this awful circumstance, it was the conversation that stemmed from that situation and other police involved shootings that occurred in the months following. The United States Justice

department examined practices by the Ferguson Police department finding areas that could be improved. The critique of judicial and law enforcement practices was a great first step. It begins the process of moving forward with the hope of a better tomorrow. The news media has continued the conversation on all fronts. The Ferguson commission continues to discuss topics of interest. This conversation between all parties regardless of race, gender, occupation, or political position, is necessary to break down the barriers between the groups and allow us to work together for a more equitable societal structure.

Fear bled into the school, which I oversee. Teachers and other administrators were afraid the protests were going to interfere with their work in the classrooms or relationships with parents. Several of my staff members spend a lot of time in homes. They are charged with assisting families with children as they transition to and while attending preschool. They go to family's homes and meet with them to answer questions, provide support, speech or occupational therapy services, counseling, and/or assist with the determination of the level of support students will need when they enter the preschool setting. Our district had a wide range of socio-economic levels leading to some affluent and some poor neighborhoods. The east side of our district had a greater concentration of poorer families and a higher crime rate than the west side. Schools on the east side of the district had a much higher percentage of minority students than the schools on the west side.

One teacher, Sal, approached me one day and asked to talk. I invited her into my office and closed the door. I was taken aback when she informed me,

Sal: I have a meeting scheduled, but I'm too white to go into this neighborhood. I don't feel safe.

Curtis: I do not want you to be uncomfortable and in no way wish to put you at risk.

Curtis: Why now? You have been doing this for seven (7) months. Why is it now a concern?

Sal: Because of all the crap, Ferguson stuff. I'm more aware of my surroundings. If I had a choice, I'd leave [the area] (Fieldnotes, 2/18/15).

This exchange gave us the opportunity to examine the underlying root of the fear. Sal felt very uncomfortable having the conversation and stated that she did not have the words to describe her feeling.

Sal: "I can't tell you where I'm coming from, but the climate in Appleby's when I'm the only white... I feel like I'm a racist."

Curtis: We, as whites, are conditioned to be racists.

Sal: I don't think it is conditioning but the looting was all black people.

I struggled to come up with a good answer to her dilemma and fear. We parted without a solution but I promised to support her. Two weeks later, I met with her again to outline a plan of action. Discontinuing the practice was not an option. It was a critical service we provided to our families and it was mandated by the state. Sal suggested having the families in "rough neighborhoods" come to the center for their sessions or use Skype/Facetime. I questioned the "parent friendly" nature of requiring those with the fewest resources to come to us. I pointed out that many of our families may not have access to Internet services and that would again put them at a disadvantage. Additionally, providing therapy or counseling services via Skype is impersonal. Without question, we must continue to support our families and start them off on a positive note.

Sal: [my husband] says I have no business going into those homes

Curtis: That is your business, these are our families, and this is where they live.

Sal: yeah

Curtis: We place ourselves at risk every time we go out of our house. Look at recent crimes like the movie theatre shooting in Colorado. You don't know when someone is going to come in and go nuts. Those are things you can't control.

Sal: I'm not going to live my life in fear, I'm not going to stay locked in my home all the time. Your analogy was dead on.

We established some accountability guidelines to ensure we knew where she was going for each meeting and asked, if possible for staff to double up to go together to meetings or sessions. This reduced her anxiety a little but Sal continued to be dominated by the fear of what could happen. She was fixated on the perceived danger and could not see past it.

My journal entry on 3/4/15 demonstrated some positive results from our conversations.

Spoke with Sal this morning and she realized last night that she was being overly ramped up and making herself crazy. She spoke with her friend and asked him to stop grilling her on where she was going and anticipating that she would be dead soon. She stated that she feels much better this morning and she is back to normal.

This was by far the most challenging circumstance that I had to confront. Fear was the catalyst for the action, fueled by the current events and racial unrest in the area. I did not know how to address the situation. I understood where they were coming from but also understand our responsibility to families. Even though I had read and researched social justice concepts for some time I still felt blindsided and unprepared. I wanted to respond with concern and apathy while presenting a resolve to meet the needs of every

student regardless of where they live or the color of their skin. My attempt was to find a solution that would benefit both the families and the teachers. We analyzed the situation to determine needed changes. We implemented the changes and confronted the misconceptions leading to a reduction in anxiety and a return to normalcy.

I attempted to help this teacher reflect on the underlying reasons for her fear and emotional response. I asked probing questions like “why now?” or “why do you feel that way?” She indicated that the events in Ferguson Missouri, particularly the rioting and looting and the heightened awareness increased her anxiety over time and had reached a tipping point. One teacher’s friend was asking questions like, what happens if your car is damaged? Will the district assume responsibility for repairs if it is damaged? He further incited her fear, as he demanded to know where she was going for each meeting and researched the crime statistics for that area.

As I reflect on my responses, I realize my attempts were to alter the circumstances rather than focus on the underlying issues mainly because I was not sure how to confront perceived racism and did not have time to draft an appropriate socially just response. In the initial meeting, I addressed the immediate problem of fear for their safety while not addressing the issue of fear itself. I offered to attend the sessions with them to ensure their safety. Sal pointed out the “climate has changed and crime is rampant” (Fieldnotes 2/18/15). She did not feel safe.

In the subsequent meeting, I had time to prepare my thoughts and questions to focus more deeply on the underlying causes for the fear. I asked her why the sudden change? The neighborhoods had not changed; she had been visiting homes since August without problems? Why now? This allowed her to reflect on why she was fearful. Sal described the reasoning for the shift in feelings as a fear due to the racial unrest in the area. Sal pointed out that she and her husband had “changed where they shop and when we go to restaurants” (Fieldnotes 3/2/15). She went on to explain that there were “22 predators” near the home they were soon to visit and you never know when “*there will be a brother on crack or boyfriends or an angry friend, or our hubcaps will be stolen or tires slashed*” (Fieldnotes 3/2/15). Sal also stated that she understood “this is where we work and live.” She admitted that she had experienced a few incidents which made her feel uncomfortable, i.e. men standing around outside the apartment, dark hallways in apartment complexes, vacant homes. However, she had never been physically threatened or made to feel unwelcome by the families she served. “We are judging by what we see” (Fieldnotes 3/2/15).

This would have been a good opportunity to discuss skewed perceptions, stereotypes, and/or white privilege. She alluded to stereotypes of stealing, drug use, vandalism, and unemployment. Her white privilege allowed her to judge others based on her perceptions of how the world should be. My failure to address these issues, perhaps due to inexperience or lack of courage, prevented a deeper and more meaningful critique that could have highlighted the misconceptions present in her thinking and begun the

process towards greater understanding. Greater understanding brings the promise of hope.

**Attempts to effect both deep and equitable changes.**

The effort to effect deep and equitable change for our students requires us to shift from deficit thinking to a belief that teachers can help all students achieve high standards by using multiple pedagogical strategies (Shields, 2010). Deep and equitable change requires creating new knowledge frameworks. Shields states that deconstruction of the old knowledge frameworks is necessary if adults will be able to move away from deficit thinking and inequity and build new frameworks of equity.

The change for me occurred over several years by putting in a concentrated amount of time reading, talking, listening, and examining bias, conversations, and behaviors. Only then was I able to come to the ever-evolving realization of my role in perpetuating racism. The first step in this process of change is awareness. This is a common theme as I talk to others who are experiencing a similar type of transformation. Skipper also participated in the Racism and Leadership conference. “The biggest change that she had noted was simply awareness” (Fieldnotes 2/28/14). Paul noted that reading a privilege chart on a website, tumblr.com, was the beginning of awareness for him. Paulo Friere (1970) calls this process of developing awareness, Conscientization.

He outlined three stages from low levels to high of awareness. Magical Consciousness is the lowest level consisting of individuals that may or may not recognize

the existence of racism or accept it as a way of life without questioning the origin or it's continued presence. Naïve Consciousness indicates one who has begun to recognize that racism in its varied forms but does not understand the extent or the systemic nature. Critical Consciousness is the highest level of awareness. This individual understands the depth and breadth of racism and the pervasiveness in society.

The goal in effecting change is to increase social justice awareness in others. Many of the individuals I conversed with daily were in the magical realm. Ellen commented, "white privilege only exists in some people's minds" (Fieldnotes 2/12/14). Bessie refuses to acknowledge the impact of her word choices and continually throws out the "N" word. Sal and Greta allowed stereotypes and emotions to dictate their thought processes and limit rational thought (Fieldnotes 3/2/15). Calling attention to the racist language or thought processes that perpetuate racism in practice is a first step. Bessie continued to use the "N" word, but it was not as frequent and more for effect than a permanent part of her vocabulary. Ellen was open to discussion related to white privilege and acknowledged that some benefits may be gained by having a "white" sounding name. She recalled research she had read relating to hiring practices in relation to names that sounded "black" or "white" (Fieldnotes 2/12/14). She stopped short of embracing the concept or looking critically at her communication practices or thought processes.

Alice, Paul, and Saul have demonstrated some shifts in their thinking as evidenced in their conversation and have achieved the level of Naïve Consciousness. Alice has made the shift from denying that inequality existed in the world to



acknowledging racist comments and even prefacing her own comments with, “I’m going to say something racist now” (Fieldnotes 11/28/14). We have engaged in a number of conversations over a number of years. Alice still, however, associates stereotypes with African-Americans and will comment on them. “The Dodge Charger is a Black person’s car.” The teenager needs to pull up his pants and put his hood down. He must be up to no good. These generalizations have been continually questioned and she is beginning to challenge herself before I have a chance. This demonstrates a shift in her thinking.

Paul acknowledges a shift in his thinking, “I was kind of a bigot and a racist because that’s what I grew up in. And I’m still in that a little bit. But, I can see that as racism now.” He had begun to recognize that racism around him. He was not always sure what to say and when to confront racism. “I don’t know how to define things. I just know how to point it out” (fieldnotes 3/28/14). His approach to confront inequity however was quite aggressive. He responded to racist remarks by telling people to “check your privilege” (Fieldnotes 3/28/14). He acknowledged that it was not really a good approach meeting hostility with more hostility. “But, I think it’s more effective than the gentle, you should think about this, because they don’t care about them” (Fieldnotes 3/28/14). Paul’s awareness continued to develop and my goal with him was to keep the conversation going.

Saul and I have discussed the topic of social justice a number of times over the past year and I have noted a shift in his thinking. Our first conversation began as he asked about my dissertation topic. The discussion that followed revealed his disbelief of

the presence of white privilege or any disadvantage due to the color of one's skin. He stated, "It's a myth." I shared with him some of the information from the Racism and Leadership conference and the examples that were discussed. He listened politely but I could see by his reaction that he was not ready to accept this reality. He returned a few weeks later to discuss the topic again which demonstrated his interest and reflection on the topic. We discussed various forms of privilege including the privilege that comes with having a higher SES. I pointed out those who live in a stable two-parents home have an advantage over those that don't. Privilege simply gives one group an advantage. Our district's East side schools serve African-American students primarily. White people may be poor, but they don't live in the poorest of neighborhoods. This gives their children an advantage over the children concentrated in a poor neighborhood. At the conclusion of our conversation he acknowledged the possibility that privilege could exist (fieldnotes 2/18/15). Our most recent conversation involved his daughter who is a police officer. He stated that his daughter was afraid to pull over an African-American because "they" are always so disrespectful. I asked her,

Curtis: why do you think that is the case?

Saul: Because they are cops, they (black people) always pull out the race card

Curtis: If they weren't speeding or breaking the law in some way, they would not be pulled over, correct?

Saul: They are always angry

Curtis: Why might they be angry? What in their history with police might trigger that response?

Saul: ...

Curtis: Might they have had negative experiences with the police? Could others in their family have experiences that have been shared to lead them to this conclusion that they are being singled out because they are black?

Saul: I guess so. I want her to quit

Skipper: I tell my husband to quit all the time. It is a dangerous job and thankless.

Curtis : It is a vicious cycle. The police are afraid of African-Americans so they take extra precautions they would not take with someone who is white (two or more officers, quick triggers, etc.) and wonder why African-Americans are on edge around them and are not trusting.

While Saul may not have completely shifted his thinking, he is on the right track. He continues to reflect on our conversations and this will lead to a greater awareness and more equitable practices. My actions have been to ask questions that will help him to see that others may have had different experiences and their responses are based on their experiences. We have to look beyond the anger or frustration and attempt to see what may have precipitated that response and meet them with empathy and understanding.

I was encouraged by the progress that I saw in Alice as well as Paul, Saul, and myself. Confrontation, while sometimes uncomfortable, successfully achieved the intended goal. The transition for Alice and Saul was a little more challenging than for Paul. He had already made some discoveries of his own. Alice and Saul increased their awareness through conversations and reflection. Alice challenged me in a number of ways. She questioned my responses and forced me to come up with an answer. There were times I did not have an answer for her and that was frustrating for both of us. There were a number of occasions that I opted not to say anything at all just because I did not have a good defense of my argument and I knew that she would challenge me.

The final level of Conscientization is Critical Consciousness. This is the highest level of understanding and awareness. This level requires one to understand and actively confront racism and inequality. This study reflects my intent to do just that. Skipper and I attended a Leadership and Racism conference several years ago and have worked

together to try to combat racism within our respective buildings. Skipper reported that the most noticeable change for her was awareness (Fieldnotes 2/28/14). She reports being more “easily “thrown off” by what people say where previously she would have participated in the conversation or had similar reactions.” She also acknowledged “even with the awareness it is possible to slip and do something inappropriate” (Fieldnotes 2/28/14). Skipper’s experience was similar to my own. I was aware of the blatant and covert racism that occurred daily in America. I sometimes still, and probably will continue to, exhibit behaviors or say things that I should not say. Reflecting back on some of my conversations, I’m embarrassed and in some cases angry with myself for what I said, or more importantly what I did not say but should have. Skipper commented, “The difference is now the awareness of how what you say and do can impact one’s life in a real way” (fieldnotes 2/28/14). Recognizing the impact of one’s words can change responses from hurtful to respectful and can disarm those who have been hurt in the past and fully expect to be hurt again.

Increasing the level of social justice awareness is key to effecting both deep and equitable change. Reflection, critique, and promise solidify and help to perpetuate the change process. We are all a work in progress and everyone evolves in his or her own way. It is my responsibility as administrator to help my staff develop awareness of social justice issues and to provide consistent opportunities for them to reflect and develop these skills.

***Deconstruction and reconstruction of the knowledge frameworks that generate inequity.***

The knowledge frameworks that perpetuate deficit thinking and inequality must be dismantled and new frameworks of equality must be erected. We work with an educational system that provides an advantage to the majority population. This system devalues culture and prior knowledge frameworks if they don't align with the majority. In order to create a more effective system, it is imperative that we focus on the development of student skills. To accomplish this, we have to examine our knowledge frameworks to ensure that we are promoting equity for all students.

In our district, we have 14 classrooms dedicated to the federal Title 1 programming. We carefully screen prospective students to ensure they are being appropriately placed. From this group of high needs students, a significant number of them will be referred for special education testing. Every school year we have this issue with two (2) of our teachers making a number of referrals. Of the referrals, few actually qualify for services. Crissy is one of our staff. We have had a number of conversations relating to behavior management strategies (teacher strategies) using positive behavior intervention and support. Implementing a classroom routine that engages students and promotes learning reduces "acting out" behavior. This has been a challenge for Crissy. She believed that to spare the rod, is to spoil the child. Her classroom required a lot of sitting and waiting as well as pencil paper tasks. For active students, this is always a challenge. It has become clear that she had difficulty dealing with African-American

boys. Her correction often times perpetuated and exacerbated the behaviors that were presented allowing them to escalate out of control. It was my responsibility as the change agent to have direct conversations and help her to develop new knowledge frameworks that promote equity.

Sal demonstrated knowledge frameworks that supported stereotypes indicating that groups of men congregated during the day must be dangerous. Poor homes are always dirty, dark, and house individuals who use illegal drugs. She also indicated poor neighborhoods are full of criminals. While crime statistics may support some of these stereotypes, and it is important to be vigilant at all times, Sal provided anecdotal evidence to refute her argument. “I have never been physically threatened or any feeling of unwelcomeness” (Fieldnotes 3/2/15). “I have never had an angry or disrespectful parent” (fieldnotes 3/2/15). These are frameworks that are built by society and even one’s own personal experiences are not enough to begin the deconstruction of them. When these concepts were challenged, she pointed out that terrible things were reported every evening on the news and most of the victims probably felt that it would never happen to them.

This challenge perplexed me. I did not have a clue how to handle this situation. As a result, I focused on the symptoms rather than the etiology. Sal entered in a defensive position focused on self-preservation. She believed wholly that her life and belongings were at risk by entering these “rough” neighborhoods. I had to disrupt the thinking pattern and remind her of the purpose, which is helping family’s navigate early

their childhood experience. She stated they had no business entering those neighborhoods, my response was clear, “this is our business” (Fieldnotes 3/2/15). I helped her to understand that our job remained child focused and family centered. Continued work is needed to address the above listed beliefs that perpetuated stereotypes and impacted equality.

***Acknowledgement of power and privilege.***

As educators the public views us as the educational experts. With power comes great responsibility. We get to dictate what is important in education and what is not. We can engage parents and include them in the educational process or we can exclude them. The choice is ours. Sal wanted to exercise her power and privilege by requiring some families of her choosing to come to them or using technology to conduct the meeting. This sends the message, educators are too good to come to my home or I’m not important to the school. I pointed out the unfairness of picking and choosing who would come to the center or who would have a home visit. She recognized the discriminatory behavior but her emotional response seemed to justify it. While this may all be appealing for the staff, it demonstrated the power and privilege that can be usurped if allowed.

I would like to say I recognized this situation as a misuse of power and privilege at once, but that is not the case. It was not until I began to analyze data that I began to see the extent of the power that could be wielded by my position as administrator and the potential harm that could emanate from those actions. Even the action that was taken could be considered a misuse of power and privilege. Sending two (2) individuals from

the school could have intimidated families and made them feel uncomfortable in their home.

Crissy approached me at the beginning of the school year with a letter to go home (Fieldnotes 8/5/14). The letter encouraged parents to be on time and stated breakfast would be over at 8:50 and any students arriving after that time would not get to eat. This was an attempt to assert control over parents who chronically arrived late and still expected their children to get breakfast. She defended this action by citing lost instruction time, creating a delay for students that arrive on time, and rewarding parental bad behavior. I assured her that the entire class did not have to wait for the late student to complete their breakfast before instruction could begin. I instructed her to have her assistant set the child up at the table and begin your instruction. Under no circumstances are students to go hungry so a teacher can make a point. This assertion of power was inappropriate and put kids in the middle of a needless power struggle. Again, at the time of the incident I did not see it for what it is, power and privilege.

Anita, a classroom teacher, was having an issue with one of her parents and their child. Every morning the parent would bring the child into the classroom and linger. She would inevitably anger the child. The child would then have difficulty in the classroom for the rest of the day. These incidents occurred once or twice a week. The teacher requested a meeting with the parent to express concerns and suggest alternatives to assist with the transition to school. We agreed that the parent would drop the student and leave rather than bringing her into the school thus avoiding “lingering” issue. After some



consideration, the parent decided not to comply with the decision. She continued to bring the child and walk her to the classroom.

Anita came into my office requesting that I force the parent to abide by the agreement. I explained that the parent has the right to bring her child if she so chooses. She also has the right to anger her child and put her in a bad mood. There is nothing administratively I could do to force her to follow the plan. Clearly, she did not feel that it is the best way to handle the situation.

This was another example of power and privilege that could have violated the family's rights. This parent was correct; this was a different procedure than for other students. This singled her out and might have isolated the family if we had attempted to pursue the agreed upon plan. A strong parent will stand up against unfair use of power and privilege but a weaker or unprepared parent may simply comply. How many times have we, as an educational institution, inflicted unfair practices upon our families by the decisions that we made? This was an example of a decision being made without the parent support. In the meeting she agreed to what we were asking of her, but clearly that was not what she wanted to do. Her body language demonstrated her level of discomfort in the meeting. She was quieter than usual, shifted in her chair, acknowledged the issues, and agreed to the suggested plan of action. From an administrative viewpoint, the meeting was a success. Looking back, I can see that the parent was communicating, but we were not paying attention. We had an agenda and stuck to it. School meetings can be intimidating, particularly when there is a large group of educators and only one (1) or two

(2) parents. It can feel like an ambush. In reality, I may have failed the parent by not recognizing her non-verbal communication and responding accordingly.

This misuse of power and privilege can be damaging to everyone involved. It is critical to reflect on practices, which is the only hope for attaining equity. A transformative leader for social justice attempts to effect both deep and equitable changes by deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge frameworks that promote fairness.

***Emphasis on both individual achievement and the public good.***

Development of community has been a focus in our building for the last three (3) years. Cliques and divisions had formed among staff and there was constant tension. One staff member described the tension as a “green gooze” wafting down the hallway. They did not trust the administration to support them or provide necessary materials for them to adequately do their job. Arguments between individuals took place over email, including all staff. A staff survey in 2012 demonstrated that more than half of the staff members did not trust their colleagues and more than 25% were unhappy and would prefer to work somewhere else.

My first attempt to develop a sense of community was to create conversational norms with the staff. This was an attempt to build civility and respect into the communication practices. Secondly, I began to rebuild trust in the administration by responding to emails quickly, being present in the classrooms, supporting the teachers academically, socially, and emotionally, and holding them accountable to the decisions

we made as a group. I also demanded honesty and communication from them. Staff meetings were at times brutal as some willingly pointed out my deficiencies as a leader, procedures that needed to change, or complaints regarding the district. This willingness to accept criticism and adjust procedures or my actions accordingly demonstrated my commitment to growing community and began to repair trust between the staff and administration.

Our district utilized Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS). This program supports staff and students by focusing on positive behavior in the classroom. Classrooms and individual students had charts to indicate when they had been “caught being good.” In addition, we had instituted a system that allowed staff to report other staff when they were “spotted doing good.” The “good” in this case is defined on the charts for the students and on the slip of paper (Staff Spottie) for the staff, i.e. helping one another, collaborating, designing quality lessons...etc. During our staff meetings, I would read every staff spottie and acknowledge every individual that had been identified. I had a drawing that allowed several of the staff to choose a prize for their efforts. I also tracked whose names had been submitted and make sure all staff were represented. In an effort to build community, everyone must feel included.

Time, consistency of accountability, and several key personnel transitioning to other positions or retiring also helped the climate and sense of community within the building. This most recent school year demonstrated a significant shift in the level of community. Teachers were sharing ideas, working together, and implementing ideas

across classrooms. One teacher organized a Thanksgiving meal for the entire school. Each classroom was responsible for a part of the meal. The students and the teachers worked together to develop the menu and organize the event. It was an outstanding collaborative effort and one of the first manifestations of improvement within the climate.

Another teacher organized a community event in conjunction with a local festival, which was held on a Sunday. Traditionally, teachers in this building did not participate in events that were beyond the school day. I was concerned that we may have difficulty staffing an event on the weekend. Much to my surprise, teachers who had never volunteered for extra duty were ready and willing to participate. There were more than enough volunteers to staff the event.

A third teacher began to organize monthly staff outings after hours. She began with a bowling night in which almost 20% of the staff attended. She followed it up with several happy hours and continued the outings over the summer. Attendance continues to grow and staff are developing as a community.

We have made strides to expand our sense of community to our students and families by hosting an open house prior to the beginning of the school year, a Halloween parade, grandparents and special person's day, graduation for all students, and working with parents to celebrate birthday's or other holidays. This is an area that still needs some attention. As mentioned in the previous section, building community requires working with parents rather than dictating expectations to them. While I have instituted a

number of opportunities for parents to interact with the school, none have given parents a voice. I provided surveys from time to time but have not really taken the results seriously. Providing opportunity for all stakeholders to have a voice must be a priority moving forward. This will expand the sense of community outward and create a powerful connection between school and family allowing them to begin their educational career in a positive way rather than one of separation or confrontation.

***A focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and justice.***

Evaluating progress helps to clarify changes over time. As I have reflected on the various opportunities to promote equity and justice that have occurred during my administration, I realize the tremendous growth in understand and awareness that has occurred as well as the difficulty I have had recognizing and dealing with issues of equity in real time. As with any objective, each step brings the desired result that much closer.

I am and continue to be committed to social justice and equity for all students and families. I have diligently collaborated with teachers to improve pedagogical practices through feedback both informal and within formal evaluations, professional learning communities, and professional development. I have given my staff permission and encouraged them to challenge me if they see areas for improvement as I have promised to do for them. I have given teachers the autonomy to try new strategies and time to collaborate with one another for constant improvement. I have encouraged them individually to have high expectations for students and for themselves and questioned

patterns of deficit thinking. I have challenged teachers to put students and families needs in front of their own needs and to treat families with the utmost respect and dignity.

Willingness and commitment towards liberation, democracy, equity, and justice is not enough. One has to recognize inequity or injustice and quickly act to eliminate it. My failure in a number of situations was to recognize inequity or inappropriate uses of power as it occurred. In the situation with Anita and the parent, I allowed the staff to intimidate the parent by establishing the drop off procedure without really trying to understand the parent's needs. Sometimes the lines can become blurred between supporting a teacher and supporting a family. A strong teacher demanding a solution can create a delicate situation with the parent. Focusing on equity and justice should help me as an administrator to find ways to support both the staff and the family.

I also demonstrated instances where I knew immediately that the situation was unjust but was unsure how to directly deal with the situation. Sal presented a significant challenge for me. I knew immediately that there was a problem but I was unequipped to deal with issues of such a personal nature. Their perceptions involved deep-seated and long held beliefs that could not be resolved in one or two conversations. I did not know where to start so I delayed my response and deflected the main issue, focusing on the symptoms. I was afraid to confront the racism head on due to their emotional state. Sal was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I instead questioned and identified short-term solutions. I did not deal with the underlying beliefs so they continue to be present and will again rise up at some point.

*Evidence of Moral Courage and Activism.*

Shields (2010) contends, “transformative education at minimum, will not necessarily change the wider societal patterns of poverty and power but will acknowledge their existence and effect on students and will therefore make policies in schools that redistribute resources to correct inequitable outcomes.” I cannot change the level of poverty in the district or adjust the changing demographics. What I can do is confront each situation as it arises challenging inequality and injustice immediately as it occurs. In the leadership and racism workshop, one of the video’s relayed a story told by Dr. Joy Gruy Leary, assistant professor of social studies at Portland State University in which she recounting an experience during the viewing of the movie King Kong.

She went to the bathroom in the middle of the movie. She noticed a man and his son were also coming out of the movie to go to the bathroom as she was waiting, she asked the boy if he was enjoying the movie. He said yes. She asked him if there were any scary parts. He replied the part that scared him the most was all the black people. She was astonished, angry, and did not know what to say. The scene he was describing did include some black people but also a variety of other nationalities as well, including Asians and some white people. After the movie, she was walking out with her husband and saw the boy and his dad. She approached them and asked the man if she could ask his son a question. The man replied sure. She asked him again what was the scariest part, the boy again replied, “all the black people.” The dad was embarrassed and apologized to the lady. She shared with him the number of different kinds of people in the scene and the fact that the boy only noticed the black people. The dad apologized again and left with the child. Moments later he came back and told the Dr. Leary that there was not much he could do with the racism in the world but what he would do is teach his children differently (fieldnotes 3/12/14).

I am and continue to be committed to social justice and equity for all students and families and willingly participated in difficult conversations. I do have a tendency to

choose my words carefully and frame them in the nicest possible way, which frequently decreased their impact. I strived to maintain a positive conversational flow especially when the topic was difficult to approach to ensure that my voice continued to be heard and the message received. This may not be the best approach but it made me more comfortable.

I outlined a number of situations that required moral courage to address, and with some reservations and challenges, I was able to meet them head-on and address the inequity or marginalization of families. I did not always handle the situations properly, but that is not a requirement. I recognized that I still had much to learn and know that there will continue to be challenges that will test my moral courage. I have hope that my resolve will carry me through any tests that arise, and if I fail the test, I will learn and grow stronger for the experiences.

I do not consider myself an activist. I'm not trying to change state or district policy. I just want to make a difference for each and every child and parent that walks through the school doors by creating a fair and equitable educational experience for all students and families. The only way to do that is to help those working with the students to be more aware of their actions, use of power and privilege, knowledge frameworks, and the need for change.



### Peer Advisory Group

A peer advisory group was convened to provide feedback on my data collection and research conclusions as well as to improve the validity of my research. I selected 6 individuals to invite who had previously indicated their interest in participating and asked them to suggest one other person. Only a few participants suggested others to invite so I expanded my invitation to several more colleagues. We met three times over the course of six (6) weeks and discussed three (3) different topics. Meeting one (1) was an introduction to my research discussing conceptual frameworks, research questions, and my journey as a leader for social justice, and finally two scenarios involving the use of power and privilege. Meeting two (2) focused on one incident entitled, “I’m too white to go there.” Meeting three (3) examined scenarios involving stereotypes and microaggressions.

Meeting one (1) included six (6) individuals of which three (3) were male and three (3) were female. Three (3) of the participants were white and three (3) African-American. Meeting two (2) included nine (9) participants of which two (2) were male and seven (7) were female. Five (5) of the participants were white and four (4) African-American. Meeting three (3) included eight (8) individuals of which three (3) were male and five (5) were female. Four (4) of the participants were white and four (4) African-American.

Table 3: PAG Ethnicity

African American	Ca uca
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		Frequency
Females	4	4
Males	2	1

### Power and Privilege

Meeting 1 focused on two (2) incidents relating to power and privilege: Crissy’s letter home to her parents letting them know that if they did not get their children to school on time, the children would not get to eat breakfast and Anita’s attempt to control the parent’s method of dropping off her child at school.

Crissy wanted to send a letter home to her parents letting them know if their children arrived after 8:50 AM, they would not get to eat breakfast. Everyone was in agreement that Crissy’s letter signified a misuse of power. Randy and Terry, both African-American administrators, disagreed with the researcher that there was any sign of racism present. Terry stated, “I think, more than race in a sense like this it is the power and privilege.” “I believe if all of the students were white, based on what I read from this brief, she still would have done the same. So it’s more with her being able to say, I have the authority to determine whether or not your kids eat” (PAG 1, P. 8). Randy agreed, “I can’t see the other part [racism] in there with regard to the 4 black families versus the one

white family.” Sally agreed, “I still think this is an example of power for me” (PAG 1, P. 9). Kelly felt white privilege was present, “I think she is only seeing things from her perspective and that’s white privilege” (PAG 1, P.8). Randy disagreed, “I don’t see where it became a white privilege issue” (PAG 1, p. 9).

What stood out was not the letter itself. Such letters are important for families. They allow them to know what is expected when their children are at school. All schools have policies and procedures however; the punitive component built into the letter was the piece representing a misuse of power. Terry stated, “I don’t think this is about race at all. I think this is about her and even though we all send out those letters, you are not putting in the letter that your kid will not be able to eat” (PAG 1, p. 10). Randy pointed out that just because there are African-American children or families involved doesn’t mean there is racism present. He pointed out, “often times, we will take that same scenario because it had a 4:1 split and we will turn it into something racial when it had nothing to do with race, it was all about power. From there we turn it that turns into something else and that takes on a life of it’s own” (PAG 1, p. 10).

The second scenario regarding Anita was presented. Anita was having an issue with one of her African American families during drop off in the morning. The parent would routinely upset the child and the effects would linger through the morning. The child was not able to recover quickly. The teacher and the parent agreed on a solution but the parent changed her mind and Anita came to me to brainstorm how we could force the

parent to follow the agreement. I presented this as an example of a misuse of power and privilege.

Terry disagreed with my analysis of the situation. “I don’t see it as a teacher trying to use her power to get a parent to do something” (PAG 1, p.17). He suggested that if it was in the best interest of the child for the parent to stop, that is what needed to happen. This was an opportunity for the administrator to have a conversation with the parent and come to a solution leaving the teacher and the child out of the conversation. Sally pointed out that the meeting itself was essentially four (4) white teachers and two (2) African-American adults. Randy added, “It’s our territory” too (PAG 1, p. 18). The home court advantage benefits the school personal in this situation. Terry acknowledged, “that is very intimidating. To come to a room of 4 people and even though it isn’t about race, when she walks into the room and sees 4 white people, she could easily make that about race.” He reiterated, “again it doesn’t have anything to do with [race], but to a degree, you on that side of the table, I’m on this side of the table, you can’t say that it is not” (PAG 1, p. 20).

The primary conclusions drawn from the discussion were that in both scenarios power was present. There was some disagreement regarding the presence of white privilege. Both scenarios were not considered to involve racism however the second scenario left just a hint of doubt.

### **I'm Too White to Go There**

I described for the group the discussion that occurred with Sal and the setting for the conversation, which occurred in the midst of the Ferguson unrest. I shared the comment from Sal in which she stated, "I have no business going into those neighborhoods" as well as my response of, "that is our business." Randy, an African American gentleman, took exception to response. He stated, "we say it's our business but, the bottom line is that sometimes we know in our gut the business is giving wrong information," "a lot of things sometimes in your gut doesn't feel right" (PAG 2, p.2). He felt that a response of, it's your job, was too harsh and unfeeling. Sal had a gut feeling that made her uncomfortable and for the administrator to demean or make her feel inadequate for not wanting to go into a particular neighborhood rather than addressing the deeper issue, was a problem. Randy further outlined a violent incident at a former school where he worked in which several children were murdered in the school and a classroom taken hostage. The school was in a poor neighborhood that experienced a lot of crime. He reported as an African American father and Air Force veteran, "I knew how to take care of myself but I drove by that neighborhood all the time and that neighborhood was not a neighborhood I would be caught in" (PAG 2, p.3). He told his wife and children, "you can go hang out [with friends] but you cannot go to that place. Why? cause, I'm dealing with all of that stuff [too]" (PAG 2, p.3). He went on to say, "by the way it's a black neighborhood. Even we tell our kids, and even we tell ourselves" (PAG 2, p.3). "I can't say for this person that how she is feeling is not valid. I can't even say at this particular point that it is wrong" (PAG 2, p.3). Randy felt the invalidation of feelings

was damaging. Tammy felt that at least an attempt was made to acknowledge the individuals fear. “I mean, he heard her and I think gave some validity to what she is feeling but at the same time that’s reality, it might not be right, but this is your job” (PAG 2, p.4). Randy pointed out that with all of the unrest, the administrator’s answer might not be enough. It is easy to outline what you will do or not do when you are not faced with that immediate decision but you never really know how you will respond “until your issue makes it to the front burner of your life and you get to deal with [it]” (PAG 2, p.4).

Sal was concerned for her safety and I recognized that. At the same time, violence is all around us. We cannot control what other people do. I pointed out to Sal that in going to the mall or movie theatre, or simply lying on your mother’s bed doing homework you could be at risk.

After completing the scenario, the group agreed that the researcher’s attempts to respond were surface level responses. The question arose, “How do you push at that that’s comfortable and not push them completely away when you’re an administrator? Randy indicated the risk associated with merely acknowledging these feelings and verbalizing them and the courage it must take to present them to the administrator. He stated, sometimes I have to remind myself that I’m not the therapist here” (PAG 2, p.6). Randy admitted he continually wrestled with his own prejudices and racism.

Tamika, an African-American participant, expressed concern in the presence of fear, for these ladies to serve the families, “is she going to be effective” (PAG 2, p.6).

Carla added, “because the underlying thinking is there and the stereotypical thinking is there” (PAG 2, p.7), will they be able to appropriately interact with the families?

Weeks after the initial conversation, I met with Sal and we were discussing the topic again. She mentioned that she had gone to Chipotle to eat one evening and she and her husband were the only white faces in the restaurant. She commented that she was uncomfortable in that situation and it made her feel like a racist. Our discussion then turned to how that relates to the families she sees routinely and how an African-American family might be uncomfortable in a strange environment surrounded by white faces. Recently Sal relayed another incident that was similar in Applebys. So the conversation that began in March 2014 is continuing.

Tamika stated, “it’s impressive that she is open to it and that she shares with you” (PAG 2, p.8). Belinda, another African-American woman, concurred. “I think that says something about the relationship she has with you and she feels she can come and open up. This is something that is deep rooted within her and she is coming to you and saying, this is how I feel. So she is really taking a risk when she does that” (PAG 2, p.8). Belinda went on to describe her participation in Home Works, which is a program where teachers canvas the neighborhoods to let families know school is preparing to start. She indicated that this was a positive experience for her because she was in an area where she grew up and she looked like those she was meeting. She stated, “I don’t know if I would feel that same way you know in a totally different part of town” (PAG 2, p.8).

Randy relayed a story that the African American church he attends is located in a primarily white and affluent neighborhood. His duty as a disciple of Christ is to share the Gospel to the community yet he doesn't feel as if he can safely go and strike up a conversation as an African-American man in that setting. Randy has to struggle with "how do I go into that yard and press that doorbell?" "We have the same feeling about going there in wealth and affluence as your teacher as about going into Florissant and yet we are looking at [Sal] as if she is [racist] or has issues of racism" (PAG 2, p.9). Randy went on to say, "when I look into their window, I see all of my stereotypes as well" (PAG 2, p. 10).

Randy made the point that we all have the same insecurities and fears when dealing with different cultural and racial groups primarily because we are not allowed to or it is taboo to talk about issues or differences. The researcher felt as though he should have the answers or at least something that would help Sal through her fear. Tessa indicated that Sal continuing to come and discuss the situation was an indication that she had received at least some hope. "I think she is processing what you're saying" (PAG 2, p.11). "In emotionally charged situations, you need processing time" (PAG 2, p.11). She completed her comment by saying, "I would take this as a big compliment to your leadership and your character for her to keep coming back to you" (PAG 2, p.11).

### **Stereotypes and Microaggressions**

Session number three began with a discussion of the definitions of stereotype and microaggression. The latter term was new to several members of the group. The



discussion began with stereotypes that were listed by Sal. They stated as a reason for not going to some neighborhoods, “you never know when there will be a brother in this house on crack or boyfriends, or angry friends, or our hubcaps will be stolen or tires slashed” (PAG 3, p.2). Sally, a white participant, noted that according to the definition, these might also fit under microaggressions and not just a stereotype alone. Connie, a white participant, wondered if “they would say the same thing if somebody from that neighborhood was standing right with them” (PAG 3, p.2).

Connie went on to question what an appropriate response would be to these stereotypes. I shared the strategies of making the situation personal, i.e. using individuals in their lives that do not fit the stereotype, to indicate the error of the stereotype. Connie indicated she would ask for evidence. “I’m more of the show me the facts kind of person” (PAG 3, p.4). I would ask, “how do you know this happened? Why do you think that? Has that ever happened to you before” (PAG 3, p.4)?

Terry, an African-American participant, introduced some new variables. He stated that with some minor changes, we could be talking about a poor white community. If you replace the word “crack” with the word “meth” or “drug,” the same statement would apply to almost anywhere. “We sometimes get caught up in looking at white people saying these things about black people or we look at different races saying these things but a lot of these things are said by people of the very same race too” (PAG 3, p.4). He went on to say, “some of the things we talk about in the neighborhoods, they are not necessarily racially based, they are economic based” (PAG 3, p.5). Sally asked Terry if

he would approach the individual with this response. Terry replied, I would point out, it's not about race, it's not about economics, it's about students" (PAG 3, p. 5). When you place students as the focus sometimes you will have to face your fears and insecurities and put them aside. He applied the same principles to gender and sexuality based discrimination as well. At the same time, he says, "I know how you feel" (PAG 3, p.6). The media's portrayal of North St. Louis County and the violence that is bleeding out from the north side of the city is largely negative. Violence is present everywhere but these areas have become popular targets for the media. They report incidence of violence and "9 out of 10 will involve a young African American male who has done something with a gun" (PAG 3, p.6). Our district serves many African-American children and this message being fed to us affects everybody regardless of race, creed, or culture. "I feel a lot of it is related to race bias but some of it is not" (PAG 3, p.6). However, it is still discrimination. Terry pointed out that many of the discriminations that are perpetrated against African Americans happen to low income individuals in general.

Randy, an African-American participant offered another point. Assuming we accept the media's message and believe it to be true, when we arrive at school, "we are expected to put it aside and play this as though as it's all about kids" (PAG 3, p.6). This is not possible to do. Randy stated, we as teachers have a responsibility to be accountable professionally as does the media. However, when they say something destructive or target a community, we "give them a pass" (PAG 3, p.6). Teachers however are "expected to come to school and yet be different" (PAG 3, p.6). The media and the rest of

the community can say all manner of hurtful and damaging things and act out their discrimination but teachers get slammed or fired for acting out the media's message at school.

Randy was deeply bothered by a statement made by the researcher at the previous meeting. He indicated that it had been on his mind for the past two weeks and he continued to reflect on it. Belinda, an African-American participant, entered and "you said, this is Belenda and we go to the same church ..... and then you tagged it with "but more than that, she is a friend of mine" (PAG 3, p.7). He felt that the tag "but more than that..." was very powerful. He further commented, "Hopefully that's the place we are trying to get through and to with all of this nonsense" (PAG 3, p.7). Wars have been fought over this very topic. "We destroyed a nation almost because of this and nobody had this conversation back then" (PAG 3, p.7). Sally commented, "I've talked to Curtis after every meeting and I feel like I'm learning so much over things that he is sharing about himself and how he handled situations and I'm like, how would I handle that, what would I have done" (PAG 3, p.8)? Sally felt that the discussion had challenged her thinking and made her conclude, "I'm going to be a better person after this" (PAG 3, p.8). Cathy, an African-American participant, stated, "most people are not going to willingly engage in [uncomfortable conversations] like that unless you're forced to because it is something that you're not sure you can survive" (PAG 3, p. 8).

One stereotype presented was a statement that the Dodge Charger is an African American's Car. Randy posed the question, "if you stand outside and count chargers

driving by and eight (8) out of ten (10) had an African-American person driving it and then somebody comes in and makes a statement of stereotypes. What part of that is wrong if you are recording this as quantitative [research]" (PAG 3, p.9)? Would we say this person is using a stereotype? Sally replied, "no, they are mathematically correct statistically" (PAG 3, p.10). Randy expressed his displeasure relating to how people are blamed for their thinking when the evidence that we are listening to all the time is perpetuating their thought processes. He asked, "How much baggage are we dragging into our decisions and forcing on people because they don't think the way we do" (PAG 3, p. 10)? He reiterated, "if we are just playing with the numbers, would she be wrong" (PAG 3, p.10)?

Randy and Terry decided to share a secret with the white participants. "I know we'll confess to this when ever we sit down in our own little cultural groups to discuss the things that you are talking about here, we come up with the same conclusions" (PAG 3, p.11). "We (African-Americans) don't understand what we are looking at either and we are in the same skin as the people committing the infractions" (PAG 3, p.11). We as African Americans don't admit that because that leaves our white colleagues thinking, my God, I must be a bad person. There is a rift left in the middle, which creates tension and interferes with the flow of conversation on the topic. In the meantime, many African-Americans are discussing the same issues and can't figure it out either. Randy confessed that many African-Americans pick the neighborhoods they want to live in, their home, type of cars and where they shop based on the same criteria as white people.

But white people get called names because they happen “to be white and choose that address. When we choose it for the same reason, from our black communities, we get a pass and we don’t have to do a dissertation on it” (PAG 3, p.11).

Terry reiterated that many problems are based in economics. However, “you cannot look at a kid and tell if they are violent or good. They could be just as clean cut; they could be black, white, short, [or tall], you really can’t tell. But what we see is a little African American male who, [whether] clean cut or not, poses as a threat to my life or my family’s life” (PAG 3, p.11). That is just the current reality. He went on to point out that there are two types of individuals, those that are progressive and those that are takers. Progressive African Americans are “people who pay taxes, believe in education, who fight for those things that are right, [and] who are god fearing” (PAG 3, p.12). Terry added, “on the other side of that coin, there is another sect of people that look just like us that are of African American descent but they are not progressive at all, this is where the news comes in” (PAG 3, p.11). Although they look like us, they are not like us. Life has its many ups and downs but you have to persevere to succeed. “You have people on the other side of our race and they don’t have that attitude. That’s not just black people. These are people in general so it’s not a race thing; it’s a people thing” (PAG 3, p.11). “If I were something other than black, it’s a good chance I’d be racist. That is the truth if I’m making decisions off of what I’m being fed, especially if I don’t have any interactions with African Americans” (PAG 3, p.11).

Terry ended his comments with a story about a man watching the Confederate flag being taken down from in front of the capital building. He was wearing a Nazi hat and had KKK on everything he was wearing. The man was wearing tennis shoes made by FUBU, an African American owned company. The man was asked, “sir, do you know you are wearing shoes that were made by an African American company?” The man replied, “I don’t have a problem with black people who are like that. I have a problem with black people who are taking away.” Terry explained that the man had a problem with people who were jeopardizing his American way of living. It was not because of race but rather, because a symbol that he associated to be a part of his history that probably did not represent racism for him, was being taken away.

### **Summary**

The researcher identified a number of situations that involved race, equity, power and privilege and outlined the steps to respond to each incident. He described how they fit into the framework of the seven (7) tenets of transformative leadership and Paulo Friere’s theory of Conscentization. The Peer Advisory Group was used to discuss the different events to highlight any misconception or perhaps errors and to enhance the researchers understanding of himself.

Chapter 5 examines the research questions and discusses the conclusions that have been drawn from the research. Recommendations for future research will be indicated and outlined.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendation**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the researcher's leadership strategies focused on promoting socially just practices within the educational environment. We will discuss the findings outlined in Chapter Four (4) and their implications, respond to the research questions, and offer recommendations for further research.

### **Major Findings**

Transformative leadership for social justice is not as simple as it may appear. It is easy to say, I will find racism and stamp it out! However, when it is suddenly in your face, finding the right response can be a challenge. There is no one right response. Every individual you meet is at a different level in his or her journey of social justice awareness therefore, requires a differentiated response. The first challenge is recognizing the racism for what it is. The second challenge is beginning the conversation in a respectful, non-threatening fashion.

I examined my experiences using the framework set forth by Shields (2010), the seven (7) tenets of social justice leadership. Within that framework I also discussed Paulo Friere's concept of Conscentization and applied it to my research. I completed my research by presenting the major incidents noted to a peer advisory group and asked them to critique my responses, thought processes, and actions to help me better understand my position as well as to increase the validity of my research. I then responded to the research questions and finally, examined the individualized



transformative model of professional development, which focused on sticking to the facts, use of reflective questioning, make a personal connection to the event, and providing processing time.

The first tenet of social justice leadership is, a combination of both critique and promise. I discussed Sal grappling with her emotions and fears during the unrest following the Michael Brown shooting. This was easy to recognize but much more difficult to respond appropriately. I found myself in a quandary. I did not know how to respond to their concerns and meet their needs, both emotional and physical, while still meeting the needs of the children and families of the district. My response was surface level and focused on the circumstances rather than root of the problem. They were fearful of going into certain neighborhoods so my response was to find a way to make that trip more manageable. Randy pointed out in the Peer Advisory Group (PAG) that Sal had every right to be fearful and her response, while racist in nature, was not all wrong. As an African-American person he made sure his wife and children knew which neighborhoods they could visit and those they were not to enter. He felt their feelings should have been validated and acknowledged and that perhaps my response could have made them feel as though they were inferior individuals or there was something wrong with them. Terry disagreed with Randy and indicated that sometimes we have to set aside our fears and do what is best for our students.

The committee was in agreement that my response to Sal was surface level at best. Randy challenged my thinking in regards to their fear. I attempted to acknowledge

their fear and at the same time let them know that our practices must continue. I may have inadvertently left the impression that their feelings were invalid or they were in the wrong. I agree with Randy, it would be counter-productive to demean an individual because she felt one way or another. The push for this tenet is *both* critique *and* promise. There must be hope associated with the response as well. I altered the arrangements to allow two people to go to the session at the same time and even offered to participate myself whenever she felt uncomfortable. She took me up on that on two occasions.

The second tenet, attempts to effect both deep and equitable changes, required a shift from deficit thinking and creation of new knowledge frameworks. The individualized professional development model was utilized in an attempt to shift the thought processes of individuals by increasing their awareness of themselves, the language they used, and the message they portrayed. This journey towards a greater understanding of social justice and equity takes time and persistence. Sal demonstrated significant changes during the conversations that occurred over the course of about six (6) months. I used Paulo Friere's theory of Conscientization to measure progress in this area. Sal moved from the first level, Magical Consciousness, to the second level, Naïve Consciousness in just a few months. She has begun to see that her fear of being the only white face in a restaurant may be similar to an African-American parent entering a meeting in an educational institution and being surrounded by white faces. Additionally, she has continued to initiate conversations on the topic. She has demonstrated a genuine interest in developing her understanding.

Saul and Alice, both white women, have also demonstrated change in their level of awareness and continue to have conversations on the topic of race and equity. Alice recognizes and will acknowledge when she says something that could be perceived as racist. Saul has begun to consider how past experiences of African-Americans influence their decision making process today. Families who have negative experiences with the police may socialize their children to mistrust them. People always have a reason for their actions even if it is unconscious. He has begun to recognize that and is willing to consider alternate theories regarding the behaviors of others. His continued reflection helped develop a greater understanding, which will hopefully create more equitable practices.

Deconstruction and reconstruction of the knowledge frameworks that generate inequity, tenet three (3), involved examining practices and continuing to develop awareness of equitable practices. Crissy's selective discipline practices perpetuated and exacerbated the behaviors she was trying to extinguish. Breaking down this thinking requires the individual to recognize what they are doing and the counter-productive nature. Punishing children for their parent's tardiness is extreme and unacceptable. While she did not follow through with this, she still believed it was the right thing to do. The PAG did agree that her actions were most likely not racially driven, but there was some disagreement as to whether privilege was a component.

Sal outlined a number of stereotypical characterizations of the people in the neighborhoods she had to enter from groups of unemployed men standing around to a

boyfriend on crack. She also indicated that in all the years they have been visiting homes, she had never been physically threatened or made to feel unwelcome. The PAG discussed this topic at length and agreed on a number of issues. The media continually supports these stereotypes of African-Americans by the stories they choose to broadcast and the method by which they report. Stereotypes of drug use, unemployment, and crime are not only occurring in African-American neighborhoods. Most poor neighborhoods, regardless of race, experience similar rates of crime, unemployment, and drug use. This is more accurately an economic issue rather than a racial issue. The media does great damage to the African American community by their irresponsible reporting practices.

Randy pointed out that teachers and school officials are held to a higher standard than those in the media and are expected to put aside all of the competing messages and experiences they may have had and teach the children objectively. If a school official behaved as the media does, they would lose their job. The media is allowed to be destructive and we give them a pass but a teacher's actions are scrutinized and criticized regardless of the intent.

My assumption was that buying in to stereotypes was an indication of racism and therefore bad. Randy pointed out that it is just a manifestation of what you see around you everyday and what you are being fed by the media. It doesn't mean that person is a racist. He pointed out that in a quantitative research project, depending on where you were and what you observed could be statistically accurate. One stereotype indicated the Dodge Charger to be a car preferred and most often driven by African Americans. Randy

asked, from a quantitative position, if you see eight (8) of ten (10) Chargers go by driven by African-Americans, is that a wrong assumption? I then had to rethink my position on how I evaluate people's responses that involve stereotypes. I found myself being judgmental of others in their conversations dealing with race and perhaps a bit self-righteous.

For tenet four, acknowledgement of power and privilege, I outlined two instances of power and privilege that I felt were or could have been instances of racism. Crissy presenting her letter demanding parents arrive by a certain time or their children don't get to eat and Anita attempting to force a parent to comply with her transition plan. I defined them as instances of inappropriate use of power and privilege. I failed on the first challenge by not recognizing immediately the source of the action but, upon reflection, identified these actions as power and privilege in action. Randy and Terry again disagreed that the actions of the two above had anything to do with race. They demonstrated inappropriate use of power but were not racist actions in nature. There was some discussion as to whether the use of privilege came into play but not everyone agreed.

Sal exercised her power and privilege as she attempted to alter the home visitation process for families living in less desirable neighborhoods. This caused me to consider the power of the administrative position to set policy and determine how these services are delivered and how easily decisions that have far reaching affects can be made.

Tenet five (5) examined emphasis on both individual achievement and the public good. I outlined the attempts I have made to grow community, trust, and climate in our school. We established conversational norms, used survey data to focus on problem areas, demanded and modeled honesty, and I attempted to respond to staff and student needs quickly. We celebrated staff successes both small and great and work diligently to ensure everyone feels included. These activities along with some key attrition have led to much better working conditions. We now have teachers that are organizing school wide and community events such as a thanksgiving dinner for all students and staff or a booth in a local festival. Teachers that have traditionally been absent at extra-curricular events are now attending. They are more willing to organize events to include the community.

Tenet six (6) is, a focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and justice and seven (7), evidence of moral courage and activism, have challenged me. I don't see myself as an activist or one who can liberate. But I do see my role as one who can build awareness and therefore increase the instances of equity and justice. Having the moral courage to begin the conversation is the most difficult part. Once the topic has been breeched, subsequent conversations become exponentially easier. I did not always get it right, but I always had the courage to begin the conversation. Upon reflection, it was evident that I missed a number of opportunities to address underlying issues and thought processes but opted to focus on surface level palliative measure instead.

## **Research Questions**

### **Individualized Professional Development and White Privilege**

Research question one (1), in what ways did individualized professional development help others understand white privilege? White privilege is a controversial topic that elicits a wide variety of responses regardless of one's demographic. Many white people have difficulty grasping the concept due to the privilege we espouse. It evokes a knee-jerk reaction to defend one's position and deflect any and all responsibility or culpability away from oneself. Discussions about this research have led to a number of negative responses when white privilege is mentioned but additionally, opportunities to engage in informal professional development regarding this all-important topic. "You are being brainwashed by the liberal institutions" (Fieldnotes 1/20/15, 7/6/15). "White privilege is a myth" (Fieldnotes 2/3/15). "White privilege is just something liberals want you to believe to make you feel guilty for something you have no control over" (Fieldnotes 11/20/14).

These moments were opportunities to discuss concepts of white privilege and begin the steps to greater understanding. My first exposure to the concept was met with much skepticism. Only after several years of reflection and discussions with African-Americans did I begin to understand that my perspective was different than others. So, naturally, I expected individuals who have not invested the time in reflection and discussion with others to have difficulty with the concept.

Through individualized professional development conversations regarding white privilege I observed Saul's rejection and dismissal of the concept shift over time to an acknowledgement that privilege may play a role in our lives. Processing or reflection time was key in this transformation. Those that chose to engage in the conversation tended to continue the conversation over time. The conversation with Saul continues periodically to this day as current events unfold.

Individualized professional development occurred in a one on one or small group setting that offered a safer environment for individuals to open up about their true feelings than a large group setting. This of course depended much on the relationships that had been established. I managed to develop trusting relationships with most of my staff, which supported this type of professional development. Saul would not have shared his feelings in a larger group but was willing to have a conversation in an intimate setting without fear of being judged. In his case the use of individualized professional development was effective at promoting a deeper understanding of white privilege.

### **Individualized Professional Development and Equity**

Research question two (2), In what ways did individualized professional development regarding social justice help others to improve their capacity to educate students who don't look like them? Leaders for social justice "increase staff capacity by addressing issues of race [and] provide ongoing staff development focused on building equity" (Theoharis, 2007). Individualized professional development helped Sal see the importance of doing the right thing in the face of fear. Sal recognized that her experience



with African-American individuals did not match the narrative of the media. Even though the media painted an image of ongoing violence, crime, and anger towards white individuals, she had never been disrespected or physically threatened at any of the homes she had entered over the past two years. Sal also recognized how the uncomfortable feeling she experienced in a restaurant full of African-Americans might translate to an African-American parent attending a meeting at school where they are the only black face present. This awareness was increased over the course of six (6) months and through numerous conversations.

Crissy was able to alter her expectations and not punish students by withholding food when their parents brought them after the allotted time for breakfast. Individualized professional development allowed for an immediate response or discussion to occur and thereby, enhanced the development of teachers more efficiently and effectively.

Saul, April, and Sal all demonstrated movement in Paulo Friere's (1970) concept of Conscientization. They each moved from Magical Consciousness to Naïve Consciousness, which is the second of three levels. All three (3) individuals grew in their awareness of white privilege and their ability to recognize racism when it arises. This awareness translated in to improved classroom practices by challenging them to think differently about the decisions they made and the approaches they used when dealing with a student or a family. Now that Sal understands how she felt surrounded by people that did not look like her, she can better respond to the needs of the African-American

families when they come into a meeting. April demonstrated that she recognized inequity or racism and will now be better able to analyze how she interacts and disciplines her students as well as how she deals with the family.

### **External Forces Impact on Individualized Professional Development**

Research question three (3), in what ways did external forces (staff, self, higher level administration) impede or support the development of social equity through individualized professional development? The external forces were many and there were more that impede than support. The media is a driving force that feeds us negative images and messages daily in our homes. The news consistently depicts certain regions or individuals in a negative light. Television shows perpetuate the stereotypes for African-Americans much more frequently than they debunk them. Alice and Sal were prime examples of how the media can influence an individual to believe a narrative that may or may not be accurate or based in truth.

My own impact on individualized professional development was limited by my ability to counsel those struggling with issues. I failed on a couple of occasions to recognize issues of racism and address them. With Sal, my responses were supportive but at the same time superficial and ineffective. What made the situation successful was my willingness to reflect and to continue the conversation. I felt I should have had the answers but I did not. While this was a frustrating feeling, everyone in the PAG admitted similar experiences.

The staff themselves presented an external force. Sal greatly influenced her colleagues as she began to list the number of things that could go wrong during home visits and the loss of property or even life that could result from going into those neighborhoods. Sal shared crime statistics and became increasingly agitated, which caused an increase in anxiety for those around her. On the other hand, one colleague had a direct hand in helping Sal reduce her frustration and anxiety by letting her know when she had enough. She had to ask Sal to stop sharing the statistics and doom and gloom information. Sal realized at that point that she had built this problem into something much bigger than it should have been and began the de-escalation process herself.

The district is influencing the development of social equity by engaging the staff in discussions of Cultural Competence. This program is a district wide initiative that is being lead by a group of consultants focused on educational equity. My staff has participated in two partial days of professional development and this has generated a number of positive effects. One teacher, Elise, reported to me that as she goes about her daily routine she continually reflects on the workshop and the information gathered there. This lets me know that large group activities can be effective too.

My colleagues became a tremendous source of influence throughout my study but particularly after the formation of the Peer Advisory Group (PAG). I shared the every incident that I though could be related to racism with my colleagues for their feedback and guidance. I was able to surround myself with a number of supportive principals and teachers outside of my building that I could share my thoughts and impressions and could

rely on them for their honest feedback. According to Theoharris (2007) “Developing a supportive networks provided opportunities to share ideas, emotional support, encouragement, and assistance in problem solving.” These were critical components for me in the process of developing my leadership capabilities for social justice.

### **Impact on Leadership**

Research question four (4), in what ways did focused conversations surrounding racism and social justice impact me as a leader? Focused conversations helped me to realize how much more I need to learn about race and racism. I have had to confront feelings of inadequacy, failure, and fear as I attempted to discuss concepts with staff, family, and friends. I have also had moments of intense pride when during our conversation someone has an, ah ha moment.

I have always been persistent but have at times lacked the courage to speak up. These discussions have forced me to engage in uncomfortable conversations and helped me to realize that the discomfort is short-lived and the benefits are innumerable. Shields (2010) stated, “having the courage to address, head-on, situations that are unjust and marginalizing is not easy.” Push back is almost always an initial reaction but with each continued discussion, it gets easier. Hoffman (Affolter, 2011) found three overarching characteristics that helped her to sustain social justice leadership, “persistence, vigilance, and interdependence.” I have grown greatly in the first two and have begun to discover teachers in my building who are concerned about equity and are willing to explore and expand their understanding.

Awareness is a key component that has continued to develop as I reflect and discuss my practices. I find myself recognizing racism all around me. As a pediatric speech-language pathologist I worked with young children who were just learning language. I frequently saw students that “over-generalized” a concept i.e. all animals with four (4) legs are dogs. I seem to have fallen in to this developmental pattern as well with regards to racism. I saw racism within our institution, within conversations, and interactions with students and families. I even saw it in situations that were not necessarily related to racism. Not all interactions involving different races, even if they are not treating one another fairly, are actually racism. As a part of the growing process, I need to learn how to analyze and discriminate racism from everyday acts.

As a part of awareness, I found myself continuing to exercise racism in my own communication and thought processes. The difference is, now I recognize it as such. My acknowledgement that the word ghetto could only be applied to African-Americans was identified at once but it was too late. It was already out there. Instead of avoiding the conversation however, I was easily able to confront my bias and acknowledge it. I have found in the past few months that the anxiety present during conversations of race or racism has turned to excitement. I look forward to exploring my thoughts and sharing them with others. It can still be difficult with a hostile audience though.

### **Peer Advisory Group (PAG)**

“Rational discourse involves a commitment to extended and repeated conversations that evolve over time into a culture of careful listening and cautious

openings to new perspectives”(Brown, 2004). This does not mean consensus will be achieved but rather a deeper understanding not only of ourselves and our biases, but also our colleagues and the different ways particular issues are constructed in each of us (Brown, 2004).

Research question five (5), in what ways did outside advisors assist the insider to lead for social justice? The peer advisory group (PAG) was probably the single most powerful part of this research. I presented many of the scenarios from Chapter Four (4) and asked them to critique my responses, thoughts, feelings, and emotions. The conversations that emanated from the group were stimulating and challenging. Not everyone agreed with my assessment or my response to the situations. However, at no time did I feel as though I was being judged for responding in the way that I did. I left each meeting with a sense of euphoria and satisfaction that I had been a part of something special.

From this group I learned that not everything that involves conflict between two races is racism. Several times it was noted that if the race component were removed, the results would still be the same. I also was challenged to consider that the use of stereotypes does not equate to racism. It is the message portrayed by society and played out in front of all of us. If people then react based on what they see, that is not necessarily a bad thing.

My relating my conversation with Sal bothered Randy. I told Sal that she did have business going into those rough neighborhoods, “This is our business.” Randy took exception to that and reminded me that there has to be a human element included in leadership. Just because it is what we do does not make it right. He reminded me to pay attention to my gut feelings even if it is telling me to do something contrary to what is traditionally done. He felt that my words implied an ultimatum. Telling a teacher that is afraid to suck it up or go somewhere else is not the answer. That simply demeans the teacher rather than supporting them and building them up.

A final powerful point came when Randy and Terry let us in on a little secret. They discussed two types of people, progressives and takers. Progressives, regardless of color, are educated, productive members of society. The takers are the newsmakers, criminals, etc. The progressive group looks just like the takers and are many times mistaken for them, but they are not like them at all. The progressive African-American group has the same thoughts and concerns as the progressive white group. They choose their homes, neighborhoods, cars, and houses of worship for the same reasons that the white group does. They cannot understand or relate to the takers either. Terry revealed his upbringing to be difficult but his mindset (progressive) drove him to be what he is today. Randy confessed that he did not have the answers either. He further shared that many times the conversation between races stops short of that confession leaving the white colleague to believe that they are the only ones thinking this. It is this rift that limits the conversation rather than expanding it. This knowledge is key to dismantling

the space between us and recognizing that we are all trying to figure out the same thing, experience the same concerns, fears, and desire to protect those whom we love. This knowledge also gives us permission to accept the way we feel and rather than repressing any guilt associated with the negative feeling, examine it so that we can better understand where it is coming from.

This inside information provided by my African-American colleagues has been the focus of my reflection for several weeks now. I can't help but feel that those who work to protect the silence and maintain the rift between racial groups, regardless of race, could be complicit in the perpetuation of racism. This distinction is traditionally reserved to those that are white however, Intentionally allowing others to bear the guilt and the label of racist for thinking and feeling the same way could make those individuals a contributing factor in the perpetuation of racism. The knowledge that Randy and Terry do not understand the senseless murdering, violence, crime that appears on the news every night any more than I do, helps me to realize that this is more than just a black and white issue, it is about more than economics and a self-perpetuating cycle of violence or discrimination. It has truly become entrenched within our culture and the only way to break out of this destructive cycle is to have the conversations that help us to realize that we are all the same regardless of skin tone. That is what breaks down the barriers, destroys the rift between races, and could eventually dismantle racism altogether.



### **Individualized Transformative Model of Professional Development,**

This model of professional development developed out of observation over time of on-going conversations, which I deemed as successful. Successful conversations demonstrated positive discussion resulting in reflection and the possibility of greater understanding. As I entered into discussions, I utilized this model to help focus the discussion. The simplistic model attempted to:

5. Stick to the facts,
6. Use reflective questioning,
7. Make a personal connection to the event,
8. Provide processing time.

### **Stick to the Facts**

It is easy to get caught up in emotion when discussing race and racism so I felt it was important to keep the conversation focused on the facts of the situation rather than allowing emotions or generalities to cloud the discussion. I searched for ways to help Sal understand that her experiences did not support her fear and remind her of her purpose for going into the homes. When Sal, Alice or Saul made generalized comments, I tried to replace the generalization with specific facts to see if they felt it still aligned. Just because you see a number of Chargers begin driven by African Americans does not mean they are the majority car owners. I pointed out a number of Chargers with white drivers.

This objective may not be as clearly defined by its title therefore; I will change objective number 1 to “Focus on factual details.” This may more clearly define the scope of the objective.

### **Use Reflective Questioning**

I attempted to ask questions that would inspire reflection such as with Sal, “why now? What has changed” (Fieldnotes 2/8/15)? I also asked them if they would feel the same if they were going to one of our white teacher assistant’s house that happened to be on the same street that was concerning them. The reflective questions allowed them to consider an angle they had not thought of before and in many cases resulted in a follow-up conversation. This strategy was particularly effective for expanding thinking.

### **Make a Personal Connection to the Event**

It is easy to make blanket statements about a group particularly if you don’t know any of them. Equating criminal activity with all African Americans was fairly common among whites in the areas surrounding Ferguson during the unrest. By inserting the name of an African American coworker or a friend, in place of the generalization, I was able to change the face of the conversation. It was no longer a faceless mass of people, but someone personally known. Most people seem to exclude those that they know from the stereotypes or over generalizations in conversation. I found that applying a personal connection changes the way individuals responded. This strategy was successful at helping others see the fallacy of generalized observations or at least give them pause to think about what they were really saying.

### **Provide processing time.**

One of the most important elements of the model is providing processing time. Deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge frameworks is a difficult process. It is a complex and very personal process. Examining one's long-held and deep-seated beliefs requires time and patience. It cannot be done in one conversation. Providing time between conversations for reflection and processing new information creates an opportunity for individuals to examine their beliefs privately and adjust their thinking, as it seems relevant. Sal demonstrated on a number of occasions the power of processing time. She continued to initiate the conversation that began months ago, adding new information or new ideas that she has developed. After weeks of conversations, April began to recognize when she was saying things of a racist nature and commented, "I'm going to say something racist now." Reflective journals were found to be effective in many of the studies surrounding teaching and leadership training programs. Processing time is less formal but affords individuals the same opportunity to reflect and apply their new knowledge to their lives.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The purpose of this research was to examine one leader's methodologies using individualized professional development to promote socially just practices within his school. The strategies used were simple. The benefits of individualized professional development are that it is safe, immediate, reflective, and ongoing.

Individualized professional development provided a safe environment for conversations of a sensitive nature. Participants who would remain quiet in a larger group setting were able to openly speak their mind because the peer influence was removed. One teacher is shy. She refused to speak up in staff meetings or even in small committee meetings. In a one on one setting she was able to speak freely and demonstrated so by courageously bearing her soul. This form of professional development could be convened at a moments notice to respond to a need. It allowed time for reflection between conversations and created an on-going dialogue on the topic.

The premise of individualized professional development is good but at times my execution as a leader was lacking in substance. Despite that, participant's awareness of social justice increased. Even though I did not always have something profound to say or a quotable sound byte, individuals began to think differently simply based on the discussion that challenged their thinking. As a result, several staff members have continued the conversation over several months. This leads me to conclude that the primary ingredient is not the number of people in the group, the location of the meeting, the content discussed, or the expertise of the presenter or moderator. It is instead, the conversation itself. The frequency and duration of the discussion will vary but the conversation will ultimately create opportunity for reflection, which leads to more questions and hopefully a continuation of the conversation and a greater understanding of self and others. A former superintendent once said, "you don't have to get it right, just get started." In this instance I agree with him. Conversations coming from a heart that is

seeking answers rather than attempting to condemn, regardless of the individuals level of awareness, growth can occur.

The Individualized Transformative model of Professional Development was effective in its approach to conversations surrounding social justice and racism. It is important to focus on the facts of the situation, ask reflective questions, make a personal connection to the situation, and allowing processing time. These strategies provided a guide as I attempted to lead conversations to promote social justice.

As far as me becoming a transformative leader, I may not have met all of the characteristics outlined by Shields (2010) that are required, but I have begun the process.

Finally, regardless of the color of one's skin, we all have the same fears, concerns, and misgivings when dealing with one another and each other. We make choices, where we live, shop, attend movies, and eat for the same reasons. We are all bewildered by the violence that is rampant around us therefore; it is all right to talk about it. It is all right to use the information in front of you to make decisions. As white members of society, we should not feel guilty when stereotypical thinking or racism invades our thought processes, but rather, honestly and critically examine them for what they are and where they come from. There will be moments of regret over word choices or thoughts that pop up unsolicited that highlight our inner most thoughts. This is an ongoing process in which we address each moment as they arise. Critical reflection will lead to greater understanding.

This study utilized a Peer Advisory Group to analyze the findings and provide feedback to the researcher. All of the participants were in education in some capacity. Further study could be done to analyze the results given a Peer Advisory Group with a different make up. Including individuals from all walks of life and levels of education may yield significantly different results from the panel. It would also be interesting to present to a group of teachers with varying levels of awareness of social justice concepts.

Further study is needed to examine the dynamics of interracial discussions to develop a greater understanding of how groups communicate and what they choose to withhold. This has implications on how racism or racial tension can be maintained by the actions of both races

In 1957 while giving a speech in Montgomery, Alabama, Dr. Martin Luther King said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'what are you doing for others?'" My life's purpose has been to serve others. Leadership affords me this opportunity daily. Creating an environment that is socially just and equitable for everyone is my goal. Hopefully one day I will have a good answer for Dr. King.

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