

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Julie McLaughlin McCann for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education presented July 9, 2012.

Title: White Principals Examine Power, Privilege, and Identity: The Challenge of Leading for Equity.

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Karen M. Higgins

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experience of white principals in understanding their white identity, privilege, and power as they worked to implement socially-just and culturally proficient schools. The findings offer insights into the following questions: 1) How do white school leaders view white identity and the impact, if any, it has on their leadership? 2) How do white school leaders relate to students of color, their parents, and the community? 3) In what ways do white school leaders engage in race talk and address issues of white identity, privilege, and power? 4) What challenges do white school leaders experience as they attempt to end racism in their schools?

The study was set in a mostly white suburban school district in the Pacific Northwest. It involved three male and two female white principals who were previously engaged in equity training. Primary data sources included two individual interviews and two focus group sessions which were audiotaped and transcribed. Data analysis involved several coding cycles to identify themes related to the research questions. The analyses indicated the white principals engaged in a number of actions which demonstrated leadership focused on becoming culturally proficient.

The knowledge and understanding principals gained in the equity training contributed to their understanding of white privilege and white identity. Their ability to name this understanding while interacting with parents and students of color helped to build relationships and created allies in their work. Due to their perceived lack of

skill and knowledge related to implementing equity efforts around cultural competence, principals shared a hesitancy to lead staff into meaningful race talk and other work around white identity, privilege, and power. Challenges also arose as principals worked to manage competing district initiatives, limited staff training time, and the need for support.

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White Principals Examine Power, Privilege, and Identity:
The Challenge of Leading for Equity

By
Julie McLaughlin McCann

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APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Education

Dean of the College of Education

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Julie McLaughlin McCann, Author

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DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad

You have always believed that I could accomplish whatever I took on,
in spite of the obstacles I created or faced.

You've talked me through them and have always been there
with a soft place to land when I needed it.

Thank you for raising me to care about others, to sacrifice for the greater good,
and to believe in social justice in our world.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and
fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.

Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened
about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest
the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine,
we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear,
our presence automatically liberates others.

Marianne Williamson

White Principals Examine Power, Privilege, and Identity:
The Challenge of Leading for Equity

Julie McLaughlin McCann

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1992, I was an elementary school principal in my 4th year leading a predominantly white high-poverty school. I was meeting in the office of my white male superintendent, who I greatly admired, and another white female administrator, and we were telling stories after the end of a long day. I shared an email I received that was a joke on Ebonics and a play on the meanings of the words. The other administrator and I were laughing very hard and I told him to read it and have a good laugh. He read the first line and handed it back to me without much emotion but clearly not amused. I said, "What?" He told me, "I don't do racist jokes," in a very matter of fact way. I argued that this wasn't racist; it was just a joke on other meanings of words using Ebonics. His face didn't change and I felt a hot feeling overcome me with dread, realizing that he was disapproving of my action and calling me out on it publicly. We didn't say any more about it then or ever again; I was quite confused and thought he was seriously overreacting.

Background

In September of 2006, I attended a seminar called Coaching for Educational Equity (CFEE) that challenged and deconstructed my white identity in a way that I had never experienced in my 53 years. The seminar was seen as something that would help my work as a school change coach for an initiative I was involved in focused on equity. I was one of three in my state who attended the first seminar offered. To say it changed my world is an understatement.

That event provided a week full of activities that unpacked the racial and immigration history of the United States, placed me into affinity groups by race, provided me with opportunities to interact with and hear from African Americans, and challenged me to grapple with the content of my white racial identity. At the time, it put me into a situation where I had more interaction with people of color than I had ever had in my life. I experienced, felt, learned, and struggled with issues that had never before been put in front of me. It was painful, gut-wrenching, and I was emotionally drained and ashamed as I acknowledged my lack of awareness about the experiences of people of color in the world and my complicity in racism. It was the first time I understood what it meant to be white and have societal position and privilege that provided me access and opportunities not afforded to all. I committed to read and learn about race and white identity to understand my racial identity and the

experience of “others.” I became aware of and discussed privilege, oppression, and social justice issues with educators and challenged my own work as an educational coach. It was clear that I was not coaching for equity and did not have an understanding of the concepts my schools needed to address the racial achievement gap they faced. That training became a seminal moment for me and defined my future work.

Because of the CFEE seminar, and the increasing awareness I gained around my own and other white educators’ understanding of race, privilege, and oppression, I felt called to research race and the white school leader’s role in creating and sustaining a socially-just school. This gap appeared to be a core issue, essential to the efforts to close the achievement gap in schools.

My own experience led me to wonder if other white school leaders had examined, from the inside-out, how they understood and recognized white identity and privilege, and what impact white educators had on the children of color they served, thus contributing to an achievement gap, or what I will refer to as a racial gap in our schools. Ladson-Billings (2003) argued white educators deny they are part of a racist institution while they unconsciously replicate racist practices. Those words feel harsh and judgmental when voiced, and predictably shut down white educators to any potentially useful dialogue around the topic of race and racism. Yet, it sounds so simple... what if we understood the biases, beliefs, and privileges white school principals bring to their work? Could that ensure the schools they lead are culturally and racially literate so they positively impact the way schools serve students and families of color? Would this lead to powerful relationships and greater student success? What sustains or breaks the silences among white educators about race, racism, and social justice? I believed there were many causes worth exploring to inform the field of socially-just school leadership. Informing the field of educational practitioners on how white leaders take up social justice leadership is important if we are ever to move beyond institutionalized racism, colorblindness, ignorance, and unexamined identity, all of which contribute to denying students of color the feeling of

acceptance, understanding, and support in attaining their educational goals. Profiling white principals who have had success in high-poverty schools with students of color is not enough. It is essential that white school leaders enter into this struggle of understanding white identity and recognizing institutional racism; the work must go beyond a cognitive approach if white leaders are to develop the will, skill, knowledge, and emotional intelligence to do this work (Warren, 2010).

Looking back, the vignette around sharing a racist joke with my superintendent was a powerful learning opportunity for me that I did not truly acknowledge or own for many years. I did not have the awareness, understanding, or capacity to deal with his reaction. It would be thirteen years before it made sense to me; and I still feel shame about the incident. It was the beginning of my journey to take up race, even though I did not know it. As researcher and participant, I continue to learn how to understand my white identity, how to be a culturally competent white educator, how to coach other white educators around educational equity, and how to be an ally to my colleagues and friends of color.

Purpose and Background

As a researcher, I was interested in examining how white school leaders approached creating socially-just schools. I was also interested to know what concerns, if any, white school leaders had with regard to culturally shifting their staff members to become racially and culturally literate. Additionally, I wanted to examine their attitudes towards understanding white identity and how this understanding contributed to their effectiveness as social justice leaders. These actions appeared to be essential in creating a culturally competent staff that could engage in courageous conversations about race.

My research goals in this study were to explore the experience of white principals who have participated in transformative equity training and follow up on the actions they took related to social justice leadership upon returning to their schools. Important considerations included the shifts that occurred in their equity perspective, how they came to understand white identity, what actions they initiated to eliminate

the silence on race talk, how relationships were affected, and what cultural shifts occurred in the school, if any.

For purposes of my research, I placed the actions and inactions of school leaders at the center of my study around social justice leadership, focusing on race, white power and privilege, and white identity. I identified two areas that white educational leaders practiced as they worked with all students and families: racial literacy and race talk. All of the aforementioned skills are essential for all white leaders (Guinier, 2004; Marshall, 2004; Rogers & Mosley, 2008; Rusch & Horsford, 2009; Theoharis, 2007; Twine, 2004), whether they are in an urban setting or a small monoculture white community. The leading and modeling of racial literacy, colortalk, and cultural proficiency are essential in order for white leaders to lead discussions on race and education, and develop students ready to embrace a diverse and multicultural world.

As a principal for 20 years, I have a strong desire to hear the voices of principals in the growing body of research. I want to deprivatize the struggle, the challenges, and the reality of taking on this bold and courageous work. We need candid and honest reflection to help us understand the challenges principals face in leading for equity.

In examining and searching the social justice leadership literature, a void existed in the research around how practicing white principals became culturally aware of race and white identity and became racially literate. Much of the research on social justice leadership and white identity (Brown, 2006; Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Lindsay, 2007; Marshall, 2004; Marshall & Oliva, 2010; Shields, 2004) focuses on pre-service school leaders and teachers with little to no follow-up once they were removed from the university setting. Cultural competency frameworks (R. B. Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbell Jones, 2005; R. B. Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Theoharis, 2004) provided helpful models to offer educators examples of what a culturally proficient school looks like and how to measure success.

Theoharis (2009) provided descriptors of what a social justice leader's work is in a school with examples of highly successful principals. While studies of white racism are plentiful (Case, 2007; Katz & Ivey, 1977; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Picower, 2009; Scheurich, 1993; Sue et al., 2007; Vaught & Castagno, 2008) the studies of white anti-racism policy (i.e., the policy or practice opposing racism and promoting racial tolerance), are fewer in number (Marshall & Anderson, 2009; Warren, 2010). It is important to understand both, and yet, to move forward, we need to determine how white people, who are not themselves victims of racial discrimination, can move into action for racial justice. Without a deep understanding of one's white identity and the culture of our students, most district, school, and classroom strategies have minimal effect on student achievement.

Information gathered and analyzed for this study may serve to further inform the understanding of racial literacy, race talk, colortalk, and cross-cultural relationships of white school leaders as they actively work to create social justice schools where all students achieve and succeed. Research results will also help inform the audiences about the experience of the school principal currently in the field, a story that is not often told.

There is significance in locating this study in a predominantly white region. It is important to understand the racial make-up of the educational profession both nationally and in the Pacific Northwest. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), of the 6.2 million teachers in the United States, 81.6% are white (non-Hispanic). Oregon and Washington rank among the 20th whitest states in the "White Alone" category of the 2000 Census. The national trend also shows a predominance of white administrators in schools across the country. Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Chung, and Ross (2003) studied the principalship across the country and found "that only a small proportion of principals were members of an ethnic/racial minority, particularly compared to the proportion of minorities in the student population" (p. 19).

These statistics demonstrate the need for Pacific Northwest schools, and schools nationally, to end their struggles with colortalk and race talk and become

racially literate in dealing with an ever-increasing diverse student population. When white leaders are faced with describing a perceived problematic racial pattern, a common response is what could be called “colormuteness” (Pollock, 2004). White leaders are worried about naming race and being viewed as racist, or tend to delete race terms from their talk, creating a silence that assures patterns remain a reality (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; J. L. Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Mabokela & Madsen, 2005; Mazzei, 2008; Sleeter, 1991; Thompson, 1999) . Reluctant to navigate the question of how race may matter, school leaders actively delete race terms from their talk and assume a colorblind perspective in their schools. Silence about race patterns actually allows them to remain intact.

Very few leaders are willing or able to leave the comfort of the predictable for the risky terrain of creating discourse on controversial issues such as race (Delpit, 1988; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005; Tatum, 1997; Theoharis, 2009). This inability to engage in reflection on white culture has implications for pedagogy and practice. Without these crucial conversations, there are huge implications for leadership and teaching practice related to our unexplored and unconscious habits of mind. What are the decisions we make to reach all students when we can only see through the unexamined lens of privilege?

What is necessary for white teachers is an opportunity to problematize race in such a way that it breaks open the dialogue about white privilege, white advantage and the white ways of thinking and knowing that dominate education in the United States. (McIntyre, 1997, p. 15)

It is difficult for educators to recognize or raise the issue of race when examining complex issues around social justice (Marshall, 2004; Marshall & Oliva, 2006). According to Tatum (1992), who speaks of her work with students in college courses, holding conversations on issues of oppression such as racism, classism, or sexism brings on emotional responses in the participants. These emotions often show up as guilt, blame, shame, judgment and anger.

Researcher Connections

My background is significant to this study. As an Oregonian all my life, I attended schools that were 98% white from Kindergarten to high school. The town I lived in had about 12,000 residents and was on the outskirts of Portland. I attended a Catholic school during my elementary years and then the public schools for junior high and high school. The university I attended was also predominantly white, other than student athletes and some foreign students from Asia and Africa. My awareness of the importance to interact with people of color did not exist.

As a school leader, I was very successful. While working in high-poverty schools in a predominantly white town, I successfully led my first staff to turn around our school and strongly believed that poverty was not a cause for low student achievement. My approach involved developing teacher leaders and finding grants and resources to fund professional development so that we all had the latest research on best practices and implemented them successfully. I believed that challenges could be overcome with knowledge and courage.

With experience as an unconscious white female educator transformed into a passionate white anti-racist, and a successful change agent as a white school principal, I entered this study. My expectation was to provide information to schools about the need for white educators and white leaders to understand race and their white identity. I believed that doing so would bring about the serious changes that needed to occur in schools. My career as a principal provides me an insider view of the participants I was studying. Experiencing the CFEE seminar and then serving as a facilitator for the CFEE seminars also gave me insight into the cognitive and emotional struggle white people must endure to step into the work of developing cultural competency in self and others. Thus, I am a participant in this research study as well.

Definitions

The section below lists definitions of terminology used throughout the dissertation.

Anti-racist is the policy or practice of opposing racism and promoting racial tolerance.

Coaching for Educational Equity (CFEE) CFEE is a five-day residential seminar to develop capacity to examine, identify, and eliminate policies, practices, and behaviors that create inequitable school systems; address the challenge to facilitate honest and productive dialogue when issues of equity or race are raised in one's school community; examine the reason for slow progress in building bridges across difference, despite a commitment to do so; and learn to address racism and equity issues on a personal as well as an intellectual level.

Colorblind is the condition where individuals avoid racial realities and are unable to deal with racial undertones in their environments (Lewis, 2001). A person who is colorblind takes the stance of not seeing color and refuses to label people racially.

Colormuteness describes behavior that rather than not *seeing* people in racial terms, people are actively suppressing race labels when *talking* about people in their schools. Colormuteness examines the everyday moments when people choose not to label people around them in racial terms (Pollock, 2004).

Colortalk is talk that draws attention to the racial patterns found in social life. Rejecting the romanticism of appeals to a racially transcendent we-ness, colortalk both acknowledges racial and ethnic differences and identifies these as connected to power (Thompson, 1999).

Culture is the sum total of ways of living developed by a group of human beings to meet biological and psychosocial needs. Ordinarily, culture includes patterns of thought, behavior, language, customs, institutions and material objects (Winking, 2007). Culture has also been defined as the integrated pattern of human behavior, which includes thoughts, communication, action, customs, beliefs, values, and instructions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group (Zinn, 1980).

Cultural Competence is about a process of growth, change, and transformation, which requires individuals and organizations to commit to diversity and inclusion (R. B. Lindsey, Karns, & Myatt, 2010).

Cultural Proficiency is knowing how to learn and teach about different groups in ways that acknowledge and honor all people and the groups they represent (R. B. Lindsey et al., 2010).

Discourse I and Discourse II are terms used to identify the level of discourse occurring in schools as they work to implement, or in many cases, not implement needed changes in schools. This terminology is used in the interviews and focus groups so it is important to understand. Eubanks (1997) identifies the current “dominant discourse in schools (how people talk about, think about and plan the work of schools and the questions that get asked regarding reform or change) as a hegemonic cultural discourse” (p. 151). If leaders intend to address issues and make systemic changes, they “must begin with a Discourse II dialogue in schools, one that blames no one and deconstructs what is really going on (p. 166):

Discourse II processes create demystified schooling eventually. Discourse II schools create an organizational setting that is continually changing and developing because the members are continually learning. In a Discourse II school, ambiguity and change are part of a purposeful structure. The direction for change is clear. It is intended to produce schools where every student develops intellectually to high levels and the performance gap related to race, class and gender narrows until school effects are no longer correlated with those factors. How schools get there is varied and part of the human dynamics. Teachers and principals can figure it out, given time and a path to follow. This is what Discourse II becomes. (Eubanks et al., 1997, pp. 156-157)

Dysconscious Racism is an “uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given” (King, 1991, p. 135); it describes a narrow perception of reality based on miseducation, causing limited views of society and possibilities for social change. King (1991) explains that when someone is dysconscious, they do not question and cannot see any possibility for change in the status quo.

Ethnicity describes groups in which members share a cultural heritage from one generation to another (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 13). Attributes associated with ethnicity include a group image and a sense of identity derived from contemporary cultural patterns (e.g., values, beliefs, and language) and a sense of history (Zinn, 1980).

Race currently operates as a social construction that frequently refers more to social and political interactions and dynamics that subordinate nonwhite groups than to skin color, genetic, or biological features as a classification system based on physical characteristics and generalized conceptions of skin color. Originally, the term race was used to sort races on the basis of phenotypic or permanent physical characteristics; therefore, many racial distinctions which were determined on the basis of physical differences were promulgated under the guise of scientific fact to legitimize the oppression and subordination of various racial groups (Lumby, 2006). Using this classification arrangement, the Caucasian races were deemed superior and the colored races were regarded as inferior (Zinn, 1980).

Race Talk has multiple definitions in the research. Pollock states that it is talk that uses racial terms or discusses racialized issues without using racial terms. Toni Morrison (1991) views it as talk that demeans on the basis of race or ethnicity - the ways in which speakers use race labels. Sometimes people use them without thinking twice; at other moments they avoid them at all costs or use them only in the description of particular situations. While a major concern of everyday race talk in schools is that racial descriptions will be inaccurate or inappropriate, Pollock (2004) demonstrates that anxiously suppressing race words (being what she terms colormute) can also cause educators to reproduce the very racial inequities they seek to avoid. Even antiracist race talk may contribute to racism by normalizing the category of race in everyday discourses, popular and academic.

Racial Literacy is a concept explored by Twine (2004). While her definition was initially written for white parents of black or African-American children, the discussion and components she identifies inform the work educators do in schools

with all children. She discusses three dimensions to racial literacy: 1) discussion and evaluation of their child's experiences with "race" was a social practice that was central to transmitting analytical skills and comprises one dimension of racial literacy; 2) providing children with access to privileged cultural knowledge and social relationships with black adults and children. White parents, particularly those who belong to the middle- and upper-middle classes, often reside in residential communities in which their children do not routinely meet blacks in schools or as neighbors; 3) white parents described their selection and consumption of black produced cultural objects as they designed their home interiors to promote an anti-racist aesthetic. They collected and displayed artwork, games and toys, and books that depict black Africans, black Caribbeans, and North American blacks (Twine, 2004).

Racism is the power of a dominant group, through its systems and institutions, to enforce the dominant culture's history, values, practices, and beliefs. It advantages those in the dominant group and disadvantages those who are not. It results in disparities. It can be conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional (Barndt, 1991).

Social Justice Leadership is defined "to mean that these [leaders] make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the U.S. central to their advocacy, leadership practices and vision" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 233).

Taking It Up is a provocative 2 day seminar focused on helping educators, school board leaders, and community members deepen their understanding of the institutionalized racist barriers that hinder elimination of schools' racial achievement disparities. This focus on working from the inside out challenges participants to step out of their comfort zones, becoming aware of, understanding, and interrupting inequitable policies and practices in our schools.

White privilege is a set of advantages that are given to people who are part of the majority and dominant group. These opportunities and privileges are often invisible to white people (Barndt, 1991).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine how white school leaders approached creating socially-just schools and what concerns, if any, white school leaders had with regard to culturally shifting their staff members to become racially and culturally literate. Additionally, I wanted to examine their attitudes towards understanding white identity and how this understanding contributed to their effectiveness as social justice leaders. I did this by examining the following questions: 1) How do white school leaders view white identity and the impact, if any, it has on their leadership? 2) How do white school leaders relate to students of color, their parents, and the community? 3) In what ways do white school leaders engage in race talk and address issues of white identity, privilege, and power? and 4) What challenges do white school leaders experience as they attempt to end racism in their schools?

In this chapter, I discussed my journey to understand my white identity and the experiences that informed some of my beliefs and attitudes around this study. I provided a detailed overview of the significance of the study: The urgency for white educators to become culturally proficient due to the impact they have on a growing non-dominant student population in a field that is dominated by white principals and teachers. I have also disclosed my personal connection and background related to this topic. Finally, I have named and discussed many of the terms that underlie this study.

In the coming chapters I will present the literature review in Chapter 2, my methods and methodology as well as my perspective as a researcher in Chapter 3, the findings of the data in Chapter 4, and conclude with a discussion of the key findings related to the research questions, as well as my recommendations for further research, in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

The first person I talked to after my CFEE seminar was my son, Mark, a 21-year-old education student at a university in the Pacific Northwest. I had talked to him throughout the week, especially when I was at my lowest point in this training. I told him I was struggling with my racism and my obliviousness to my privilege. How can I have lived this long without knowing I am white and what that means? How can I have lived this long and never been aware of or spoken of my privilege? I've been unconscious and ignorant and I feel shame. He, of course, worked to affirm me and tell me I was being too hard on myself. While driving home on Friday, Mark called to check in on me. I was bubbling with enthusiasm and tried so hard to put my experience into words. I talked about Discourse II and explained how questions we raised could be tweaked to become DII. I talked about spending time with my new "family" of black and white allies from the training, and that I was now committed to stand with my friends of color. I was also committed to take steps to help my white colleagues in education learn and examine this experience.

I really struggled trying to get my point on DII to Mark. I told him about the rap that two young black men shared with our group and the words to I Am a African and the other song They Schools from Dead Prez and I heard him start laughing and say, "OMG, my mom just said Dead Prez." I told him the words to Rap and Hip Hop are Discourse II. That language is at the DII level and I helped him understand that angry black youth putting the truth of their experience out there without pc language and without making it easy to listen to was what we talked so much about this week. I went on to tell him how amusing it was to watch Will take care of us and warn us about offensive lyrics. Mark thought that was funny too and said, "You can handle it mom." I told him I needed him to help me get some music and the lyrics. He continued to laugh and said he'd be glad to help me and that he couldn't believe that I would actually want to listen to rap.

He then went on to say, "Do you remember throwing out my Discourse II?" I said what??? I didn't do that. He said "Ya....I had a cd that Tyler gave me when I was visiting him and you threw it out." I argued a bit and then he said, "You remember. It was called Doggie Style." The memory started to return to me. "You asked me what doggie style meant. You wanted to know if I understood what it meant. I told you it was about some dogs walking around with attitude. You said, When you know what doggie style means, you can listen to this cd!" It all came back to me clearly. I said, "Oh ya, I do remember that." I lamely attempted to offer excuses that he debunked as quickly as I offered them. He had me cold. We talked a bit more and then I laughed all the way home. Only Mark could understand and develop a comeback response to put me in my place with his, "YOU threw out my Discourse II!"

McCann Journal Entry After CFEE 9-2006

Overview

After attending a CFEE training with a colleague in 2006, my perspective dramatically changed. The world as I knew it shattered and I became aware of

privilege, oppression, white identity and social justice issues. That training would become a seminal moment for me and define my future work. My commitment to my colleagues of color at the end of the training was to go into action to create understanding and dialogue around identity, race, and equity issues in the schools of the northwest with practicing white educators. I declared that I would work across difference, with allies of color, to create spaces for white educators currently working with children to understand race, power, white identity, and privilege in their practice.

As I reflected on my educational experience as a white woman in teacher and principal positions, race never appeared on my radar. As a leader, I did not understand what it meant to be white and was oblivious to the issues surrounding race while in the principal position.

My leadership evidenced this lack of understanding systems of power and privilege. Race never showed up in staff meetings or professional development. It was never on an agenda that I developed, on a district leadership team agenda for administrators, nor a school board meeting agenda. While my leadership stance was to disrupt the status quo, I was actually unconsciously perpetuating the status quo of white power and privilege.

This review of the literature lays the foundation for my research study which focused on how white leaders understand power, privilege, and white identity. Going deeper, how did their awareness of these notions affect their decision making around leading for equity in their schools?

Examining the framework of my study, there were many issues to consider. I was interested in understanding the social justice work happening in the schools and what the research said about the successes and struggles of leaders undertaking this work. Since the term social justice was not a common concept explored throughout my principalship, I wanted to know what the research had to say about it, and how it was showing up in schools today. There were many articles and books on social justice, and I thought this was an important concept to include in my literature review.

Reluctance to take up equity issues was another area I wanted to explore. What did the literature have to say about the avoidance of conversations around race and equity in schools? Since I had never participated in one in my 20 years as a principal, I was curious to know about places studied where conversations on race did occur in schools. I also wanted to delve into the avoidance of these conversations. Was the Pacific Northwest unusual in avoiding courageous conversations on race? Or was this a national phenomenon? Understanding why conversations on race were not occurring in school was important to understand and address in this study.

In my initial review of the literature, I came across the term racial literacy and other terminology that described talking about or avoiding talk concerning race. Racial literacy seemed to be a critical aspect of working in diverse schools with increasing numbers of students and families of color. Adding this specificity to the literature review informed my understanding of what researchers found about having dialogue around the concepts of race, equity, and social justice issues.

The abundance of literature on race and social justice issues that informed my study challenged me to find the most relevant research. I have examined racial literacy and social justice leadership in this review.

Colortalk, Colorblind and Colormute

For purposes of this review of research, I am combining the terminology colortalk, colorblind, and colormute. All three of these terms address the notion of discomfort in having dialogue around race and the methods one might use to ignore, avoid, or be unconscious about race as a construct.

Conversations on race are difficult for all educators (Rogers & Mosley, 2008; Rusch, 2004; Rusch & Horsford, 2009; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Efforts to raise issues related to race or equity are often met by silence and guilt, coupled with resentment and frustration. Navigating the feelings surrounding our blame, shame, and guilt about racism governs most talk about race within and across racial groups in the U.S. The road to racial literacy is complicated by the fact that all too often white

people are unaware that they have a racial identity (Chubbuck, 2004; Dickar, 2008; Fine, 1997; Haviland, 2008; Hays & Chang, 2003; McIntyre, 1997):

The tension of the discontinuity between white people's self-proclaimed commitment to democratic equality for all and the internalized message of white supremacy drives racism into even deeper unexamined realms. Even well-intending teachers can fall prey to this unexamined racism, rendering their actual practice and policy with students of color ineffective if not outright discriminatory. (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 302)

An emotional response is common among white educators working with students of color, the students who depend on educators to understand who they are and teach effectively so that they will succeed and have access to the future they desire (Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, & Quinlan, 2001).

Frequently, white educators stay silent in a mode of self-protection and rationalization of behavior even though they clearly observe discriminatory practice (Chubbuck, 2004; de Freitas & McAuley, 2008; Rusch, 2005; Rusch & Horsford, 2009; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Tatum, 1992). This behavior does not go unnoticed by students of color, and yet, we are puzzled when they become angry and lash out, actions which ultimately result in discipline for their lack of control.

There is an ever-present tension that exists whenever the subject of race is brought up in meetings with parents, teachers, or other administrators. This tension has been named and studied by such notable scholars as Ladson-Billings (2001, 2003), Lindsey (2005; 1999), and Pollock (2001, 2004). The tension, in some cases, relates to our upbringing to be "colorblind" and view all people as equal and human rather than focus on our differences. In spite of the fact that people of color can give us accurate information about how their experiences in our systems do not match a white person's experience, there are educators in our schools espousing this colorblind perspective on race.

Racial Literacy

It is imperative that white educational leaders take on the difficult and uncomfortable work of surfacing conversations on social justice issues with all staff members. To do so demands the will, skill, knowledge, and capacity to engage in and

trouble the subject of the impact of race on our schools (Warren, 2010). In searching databases on the term racial literacy, it was evident there was not much written on this relatively new term. Two theorists are identified as prominent in defining the term—Guinier (2004), from the legal perspective of critical race theory, and Twine (2004), from the sociological perspective of whiteness studies. Additionally, Rogers and Mosley (Rogers & Mosley, 2008) use a critical discourse analysis to examine racial literacy in teacher education. These perspectives contribute to an understanding of how racial literacy can contribute to educational leaders' abilities to surface and navigate the issues of race in their schools and systems.

Guinier (2004) identified racial literacy as a move away from racial liberalism as represented in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Racial liberalism has three basic tenets: the belief that legislatures and courts should lend a helping hand to battle racial discrimination; an emphasis on equal opportunity legislation, such as the dismantling of legalized segregation and the establishment of anti-discrimination laws in all aspects of American life; and the belief that race is socially constructed. Racial liberalism fostered the notion that if society could end segregation and colorblindness, that merely integrating schools would somehow end racism and create a level playing field for all. It did not consider the individual's inability to navigate racism and segregation, nor the entrenched and institutionalized societal factors such as economics, geography, and politics that are stacked against people of color:

In contrast to racial liberalism, “racial literacy” is an interactive process in which the framework of race is used as a lens to explore social and legal practices, explicating the relationship between race and power, and examining mitigating variables such as gender, class, and geography. Racial literacy recognizes the historical meaning of race – that race is a socially constructed category that functions to maintain social hierarchies – as well as the economic outcomes that race creates. Although a perspective and not a solution, racial literacy recognizes the tangible and intangible outcomes of race as a social construct and racism as a mechanism for powerful groups to maintain social, political, and economic advantage. Racial literacy recognizes the interest-divergence dilemma in which race, a “tool of division and distraction,” has been used to pit working-class European-Americans against African Americans by creating a system where jobs and educational opportunities are

part of a zero-sum game. (Guinier as quoted in Rogers and Mosley, 2008, p. 108)

Racial literacy “requires us to rethink race as an instrument of social, geographic, and economic control of both whites and blacks. Racial literacy provides a more dynamic framework for understanding racism” (Guinier, 2004, p. 114) and identifies three significant differences: “1) Racial literacy is contextual rather than universal; 2) Racial literacy emphasizes the relationship between race and power; 3) While racial literacy never loses sight of race, it never focuses exclusively on race” (pp. 114-115). Guinier’s (2004) conceptualization of racial literacy primarily emphasizes the institutional level rather than the individual level, which can inform the work necessary for educational leaders, but does not go far enough to move leaders into clear action. In summary she states

If there is only one lesson to be learned from *Brown*, it is that all Americans need to go back to school. The courts acting alone cannot move us to overcome, and the federal government has not assumed leadership in this arena since the 1960s. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a racially literate mobilization of people within and across lines of race, class, and geography might finally be what it takes to redeem the optimistic assessment of those early academic commentators. Of course, a racially literate analysis, meaning the ability to read race in conjunction with both contemporary institutional and democratic hierarchies and their historical antecedents, may not resolve the interest-divergence dilemma; nor should it. But at least it may help us understand why *Brown* feels less satisfying fifty years later. (p. 118)

Guinier (2004) creates a definition of racial literacy that considers the historical, institutional and systemic perspective related to *Brown* (1954). The next perspective narrows the focus to the individual and the actions called for in racial literacy.

From the field of whiteness studies, racial literacy is an important concept defined and emerging through the work of France Winddance Twine (2004), a sociologist who researched mixed-race families. She identifies racial literacy as a form of racial socialization and antiracist training for white parents with African-descent children to assist their children in dealing with racism. Her work holds that racial literacy shows promise for thinking about race talk across and among racial groups,

and supports the valuing of a multi-racial society while acknowledging racist practices in our society and how to transcend them (Twine, 2004).

The concept of “racial literacy” was examined by Twine (2004) through the eyes of the multiracial lens. She studied the strategic efforts of “white transracial birth parents who were attempting to cultivate black identities in their children of multiracial heritage” (p.878). In her interviews with children and white birth parents, Twine (2004) identified three strategies used to help children identify with black struggles against racism. This study examined the concept of racial literacy and more specifically, Twine (2004) examined the “important theoretical questions about how racial hierarchies and racial boundaries are managed by white members of multiracial families” (p.880).

Her research informed adult educator praxis on navigating racial hierarchies and racial boundaries as well as how to work with children to interrupt and work to change racist practices. Twine (2004) identified three practices used by white parents to assure their multiracial children would resist racism, using the term “racism-cognizant” to describe dealing with racism and having the emotional, cultural and political resources to cope with these acts as they arose. The strategies and tools she identified in her work with these multiracial families offered insight into how racial literacy might be developed among white educators to deliberately interrupt racist events.

The use of “conceptual tools” to build understanding of black heritage was the first practice Twine (2004) identified. Parents purposely provided opportunities to talk about and evaluate media representations of blackness; the regular conversation increased awareness of the realities of race in everyday life and provided children a vocabulary to express their experiences with racism. Twine (2004) concluded that being racism-cognizant means that one sees racism not as an isolated set of incidents but as a recurrent and serious problem that requires sustained attention and is part of a larger pattern. Awareness of the content not taught, the stories not shared, and the essential history that has been overlooked in our education is essential if we are to

counter the messages of racism. Many white people today have absorbed messages from the media to create their understanding of people of color. In the absence of information, things get made up. It is essential that white educational leaders increase their awareness of the untaught history that gives a clearer and more accurate representation of people of color and their contributions to our country (Twine & Gallagher, 2008). As early as 1995, author James Loewen (1995) began to surface the omissions in American history and the sanitized versions of history many teachers, including me, taught the children in their classrooms. Textbooks did not give a complete and accurate view of the acts of our historical leaders and the contributions of people of color were omitted and not highlighted.

Twine's (2004) second dimension of racial literacy involves creating opportunities for children to have access to black adults and other black children such that they have strong relationships for the transmission of cultural knowledge. These white mothers recognized that white people cannot do this work alone. The same lesson transfers to white educators seeking to be racially literate and practiced with other cultures. White people lack a perspective of their privilege that people of color can provide should they choose to and if they develop trust and feel an alliance with white people. Developing these alliances requires humility, curiosity, and openness to honesty without putting up defenses.

My strongest allies of color have often shared with me that they aren't sure I am ready to hear "the truth" they want to share. It was only when I told them I could only learn with their critical eye, and accept that their feedback came from a supportive place, that they took the huge risk to speak their truth to me.

Caution must be taken that this is not a "Teach Me, Please" (Olsson, 1997) request, a white person's expectation that people of color will tell us what we need to know, and it is, in fact, their responsibility, not the white person's. Jona Olsson (1997), an anti-racist educator, wrote of habits and attitudes that set white people off-course in their efforts to become racially literate. These habits and attitudes are referred to as detours that keep white people from resisting racist actions or beliefs;

several of them include “Teach Me Please; The White Knight; I’m Colorblind; and Innocent by Association” (Olsson, 1997, pp. 2-5). Each detour describes the behavior white people demonstrate, explains what the detour means, gives a reality check and shares the consequences of the behavior. It is important that white people understand that they bear a responsibility to learn for themselves and seek out resources and literature to inform themselves (Warren, 2010). Olsson’s (1997) detours have been a valuable resource in equity trainings.

Twine’s (2004) third dimension of racial literacy identifies the importance of surrounding the multiracial home with examples of their cultural identity such as art and music that reinforce their racial identity. The ability to notice the absence of people of color in their schools or neighborhoods, as well as what they see on television or in their books, is a critical dimension of racial literacy for our children. Sue et al (2007) identified the absence of a person of color’s identity as “environmental invalidation” (p. 275), a form of racial microaggression. The power of racial microaggressions lies in their invisibility to the perpetrator and, oftentimes, the recipient (Sue, 2005). An important question to ask is whose color or culture is not represented in this classroom display, textbook or movie? Adults must ask what or who is absent from the work being done? (Twine, 2004).

Twine’s (2004) research provides a glimpse into the home life of multi-racial children and the invisible work being done by white parents to encourage black identities and counteract racism their children will face. Educators would do well to pay attention to these tenets and see where they show up in the work being done in schools. The road to racial literacy will require us all to step into difficult conversations and having conceptual tools can support the effort.

Social Justice Leadership Research

Over the past decade, social justice leadership is a popular topic found in much of the literature around leadership (Blackmore, 2009; Brown, 2004a, 2006; Bruner, 2008; Capper et al., 2006; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Marshall, 2004; Shields, 2003, 2004; Theoharis, 2009). Searching on the words “social justice leadership.” in Google

Scholar, one finds over 569,000 items returned and in Academic Search Premier there are 338 scholarly reviewed articles. It is the contention of many (Brown, 2004b; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009) that educational leadership for social justice both problematizes and offers solutions to the issues that surround inequitable conditions in schools. Marshall and Oliva (2006) state, “Riehl’s (2000) review of literature chronicling the role of the school administrator in responding to the needs of diverse students (Riehl, 2000, p. 55) includes historical, empirical, and theoretical literature influencing the practice of school leadership.” Riehl (2000) clearly articulates that an “inclusive administrative practice is rooted in the values of equity and justice and that the values of equity and justice are lenses through which leadership practices can be considered inclusive, transformative” (2006, p. 195).

Examining many definitions and frameworks for social justice education Adams, Bell, and Griffin (M. Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007) provide a powerful view of social justice education. They identify a goal of promoting positive social change through use of the following principles:

- 1) Balance the emotional and cognitive components of the learning process;
- 2) Acknowledge and support the personal (the individual student’s experience) while illuminating the systemic (the interactions among social groups);
- 3) Attend to social relations within the classroom;
- 4) Utilize reflection and experience as tools for student centered learning; and
- 5) Value awareness, personal growth, and change as outcomes of the learning process. (M. Adams et al., 2007, pp. 32-33)

Social justice and the abilities required to implement social justice in schools are a theme around leadership in much of the literature I reviewed. There are examples of the actions a social justice leader takes to create an environment where students of all races and cultures succeed. Researchers (M. Adams, 1996; M. Adams et al., 2007;

Bogotch, 2002; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Marshall & Oliva, 2010) have discussed not only the role of leaders, but teacher as well, in their efforts to examine schools and successful models to inform the field. In examining social justice leadership research, I focused on the school principal and narrowed the literature to leadership preparation, barriers, resistance, and politics involved in this review.

Marshall and Oliva (2010) call on leaders to move from “passive discourse and involvement to conscious, deliberate, and proactive practice in education leadership that will produce socially-just outcomes for all leaders” (p. 31). They put forward a powerful definition of social justice leadership. “Leadership for social justice interrogates the policies and procedures that shape schools, and at the same time perpetuate social inequalities and marginalization due to race, class, gender, and other markers of difference” (p. 31). As leaders interrogate the policies and procedures that shape their schools, they enter into a dangerous dialogue. Whether at the district level or the school level, leaders will face uncomfortable spaces and silence. Raising issues of inequitable outcomes and unequal results and conditions can silence a room and put important relationships and alliances with administrative colleagues as well as staff at risk.

As I reflected on the urgent dialogue required to create schools with high expectations and results for students of color and all students, I had difficulty bringing one to mind during my career. I saw myself complicit in an educational system for many years where not once did I participate in social justice trainings, agendas, district planning, or district leadership agendas that spoke to the issues of race and culture in a way that made me, a white woman of privilege, acknowledge and challenge my white perspective. We examined the issues of gender, disability, and sexual preference; but as a white leader, I never explored the meaning of whiteness, never explored my racial identity, nor was ever asked to confront the difficulties in thinking critically about race or racism. I was encapsulated in a system of whiteness where race was invisible to me (McIntyre, 1997; Singleton & Linton, 2006) and with that inability to see and understand multiple cultures, I suspect I contributed greatly to negative learning

effects for students of color as confirmed by the research (Banks & Banks, 1997; Bergeson, 2003; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Rogers & Mosley, 2008; Sleeter, 2001). With schools today more complex than ever and rich with students of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities, white leaders must examine how this condition is allowed to continue in school systems today and what it will take to disrupt the status quo:

While anyone can proclaim colorblindness, clearly white people are more likely to do so than their black counterparts. Moreover, it seems plausible that while anyone can be color silent, only those with social power can be, to borrow a term from Ruth Frankenberg, color- or power-evasive. In interviewing white women from across the country, Frankenberg found that most of them expressed a desire not to take any notice of race. This desire, on her account, was a culturally sanctioned tactic that allowed these women to avoid interrogating their own whiteness and their role in sustaining systemic injustice. For white people, color-evasiveness serves to reduce discomfort and to preserve the system of privilege from which whites benefit. (Applebaum, 2006, p. 358)

While tension exists on the topic of race, there are other aspects of this critical conversation that create enormous discomfort and silence within schools. Researchers on white privilege (Arvold; Gillespie, Ashbaugh, & DeFiore, 2002; Hays & Chang, 2003; Levine-Rasky, 2000; McIntosh, 1990) provide numerous entry points into examination of white people's identity. Interestingly, as I work with white educators I always ask how many of them have explored their white identity and taken the initiative to read and learn about their culture. I never see more than one or two hands go up and they accompany puzzled and confused looks. Other researchers (Applebaum, 2006; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Marshall & Oliva, 2010; Solomona et al., 2005) reference the common reaction from white people who are tired of hearing about white privilege. Applebaum (2006) states

When I speak with colleagues involved in social justice education at postsecondary institutions, over and over again they tell about tense encounters in their classrooms between white students who believe there is too much talk of race and who claim they are tired of hearing about their power and privilege, and students of color who claim that racism is sustained by white people's very indifference to race. When students of color pour out their souls detailing the dramatic effects of racism on their lives, the multiple experiences of being

profiled or being treated in a discriminatory manner by someone who does not even recognize what they are doing, often white students demand “proof” that these things are happening “because of your skin color.” I presume encounters like this have become commonplace on campuses across North America, both inside and outside of the classroom. (p. 361)

While I believe it’s important for white people to educate themselves about what it means to be white, reading, understanding, and learning about white privilege and white identity is not enough. Warren (2010) cautions that often white people can keep their focus on white privilege and white identity, getting caught up in the introspection and never actually doing anything. His findings on white activists and what moves them into action to combat racism provide important data to this study. These principles provide teachers and school leaders encouragement to critically reflect on the environment, actions, classroom norms, social awareness, and group dynamics through the lens of a social justice perspective. This framework is a starting point to examine social justice leadership at the principal level.

Leadership preparation. Much of the research around social justice leadership concepts put the emphasis on leadership preparation and higher education programs (Marshall, 2004; Rusch, 2004; Scheurich & Laible, 1995; Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2008). While this significantly informs the field, there are also many currently practicing principals who are in need of examples of practitioners not only taking on the work, but being successful in enacting social justice principles. Researchers who study situations and dilemmas faced by principals in taking up social justice leadership share powerful examples and details of the struggle an activist stance can trigger (Adams, Blumenfeld, Hackman, Peters, & Zuniga, 2000; Marshall & Oliva, 2006, 2010; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Theoharis, 2007). Marshall and Oliva (2010) speak candidly about the need for qualified, courageous, and transformative leaders when they boldly asserted “Those who can and won’t shouldn’t” (p. 16). They go on to say they are optimistic and a bit idealistic in their belief that “educational leaders will have the will, the words, the facts, and the guts to make a difference” (p. 315).

Theoharis (2007) provides a working definition of social justice leadership by focusing on school leaders who were committed to social justice and equity and working from the premise that traditional norms of school leadership maintained a system of power and privilege for certain groups. Theoharis (2007) identified school leaders who were committed to enact social justice for traditionally marginalized students based on race, gender, ethnicity, class, disability, sexual orientation, family structure, and neighborhood in urban schools in Midwestern states. Theoharis (2007) defined social justice leadership “to mean that these [leaders] make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the U.S. central to their advocacy, leadership practices, and vision” (p. 223). His research identified the distinctions between a good leader and a social justice leader as shown in Table 2.1. (Theoharis, 2009). This chart identifies key issues leaders must focus on and make visible in their schools. Learning about diversity and making sense of race, class, gender, and disability are explicitly identified as key behaviors for the social justice leader and are linchpins to the changes occurring with the staff members in the school.

Table 2.1 Distinctions between a Good Leader and a Social Justice Leader according to Theoharis

GOOD LEADER	SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADER
Works with subpublics to connect with community	Places significant value on diversity, deeply learns about and understands that diversity and extends cultural respect
Speaks of success for all children	Ends segregated and pull-out programs that prohibit both emotional and academic success for marginalized children
Supports variety of programs for diverse learners	Strengthens core teaching and curriculum and ensures that diverse students have access to that core
Facilitates professional development in best practices	Embeds professional development in collaborative structures and a context that tries to make some sense of race, class, gender, and disability
Builds collective vision of a great school	Knows that school cannot be great until the students with the greatest struggles are given the same rich opportunities both academically and socially as their more privileged peers
Empowers staff and works collaboratively	Demands that every child will be successful but collaboratively addresses the problems of how to achieve success
Networks and builds coalitions	Seeks out other activist administrators who can and will sustain her or him
Uses data to understand the realities of the school	Sees all data through a lens of equity
Understands that children have individual needs	Knows that building community and differentiation are tools to ensure that all students achieve success together
Works long and hard to make a great school	Becomes intertwined with the life, community, and soul of the school

Interviews with these principals surfaced strong beliefs that schools systems are based on an unjust deficit model and not designed to serve all students in their schools. Theoharis' (2007, 2009) research provides insights into how principals shifted the attitudes, culture, and work in their schools and achieved significant growth in statewide achievement testing; however, those shifts did not come without resistance.

Resistance. Understanding the resistance school leaders face when taking activist stances is critical and must be considered and anticipated. A powerful piece of Theoharis' (2007, 2009) research identified and discussed the resistance these seven principals faced. Their stories identify the demands of the principalship, the momentum of the status quo, obstructive staff attitudes and beliefs, and insular and privileged parental expectations (Theoharis, 2007, p. 238). While the resistance took different forms in each school, it was present at all seven sites. Isolation and lack of support from colleagues and district office staff also occurred. Theoharis (2007) found principals were “without models of how to do their social justice work, in a system not designed to support them, and working with and for people who did not share or value their social justice commitment” (p. 240).

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) talked about the risks involved in leadership that pushes the status quo. In a community or school, real leadership, the kind that surfaces conflict, challenges long-held beliefs, and demands new ways of doing things, can put people in the danger zone. And when people feel threatened, the person leading the push for change becomes the target. As a result, leaders often get hurt both personally and professionally. Resistance can include teacher complaints, community complaints, union grievances, retaliation, sabotage, and isolation. Resistance may also come from the district leadership if principals are viewed as potential threats for taking on inequitable practices at the system level, making supervisors uncomfortable. Principals may get reprimanded or fired for doing the morally right thing. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) talk about the importance of keeping perspective, paying attention to the politics, and developing allies within the system while keeping the opposition nearby.

Facing resistance around activist issues can impact one's physical and emotional well-being (Adams et al., 2000; M. Adams et al., 2007; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008; Theoharis, 2004, 2007). The results of this resistance took mental, physical, and emotional forms with the subject principals and had an impact on their health and well-being. Strategies they identified for coping included developing supportive administrative networks, being purposeful and authentic in their communication, engaging in professional learning, and creating and sustaining strong relationships. Theoharis (2007) concluded that leading for social justice required a three-pronged framework of resistance:

- 1) *The resistance principals enact* against historic marginalization of particular students,
- 2) *The resistance principals face* as a result of their social justice agenda, and
- 3) *The resistance principals develop* to sustain their social justice agenda in the face of resistance. (p.248)

Personal vulnerabilities. Researchers also address often-neglected aspects of leadership, such as how to manage your personal vulnerabilities, and how to anchor yourself and sustain your spirit through tough times (M. Adams et al., 2007; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Marshall & Anderson, 2009; Marshall & Oliva, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). To do this work requires school leaders to be courageous and comfortable with ambiguity. There is no one path to address these issues in schools. Taking care of one's well-being can ensure that leaders do not lose their way or themselves. A support network where stories can be told and resources can be shared is one way to keep one's perspective and share the struggle with other school leaders taking up this work.

Barriers. One of the barriers social justice leaders face is the perception by white people that they have no race (Burchell, 2006; Case, 2007; Fine, 1997; McIntyre, 1997; Scheurich, 1993). As Katz and Ivey (1977) suggest, and it still rings true today, being unaware of one's racial identity and being unable to conceptualize the larger system of whiteness "provide[s] a barrier that encases white people so that

they are unable to experience themselves and their culture as it really is” (as quoted in McIntyre, 1997, p.14). In the equity trainings I co-facilitate, we always ask diverse participants to group themselves by race to determine racial awareness (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Invariably, we see people of color immediately group themselves as African American, Asian, Native American, Latino, Mexican or bi-racial and our white participants struggle, eventually collecting into groups they label Irish, Scandinavian, Italians, Germans, and an occasional outlier or two who self-identify as white. Whiteness as a race is a new concept to many of the educators we work with and they are resistant to identifying as white (Levine-Rasky, 2000). One participant shared that she viewed white people as the Klan, Neo Nazis or racists, a safe way to distance herself from the “bad white people” concept and maintain her view of being a “good white” (Haviland, 2008, p. 46).

A second barrier consistently identified by researchers of social justice leadership was leadership program preparation (Brown, 2004b; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Capper et al., 2006; Marshall, 2004; Rusch, 2004; Scheurich & Laible, 1995; Theoharis, 2007). Rusch (2004) concluded that there is a bleak picture of leader preparation for social justice. Her national study of faculty members from 57 prestigious leadership preparation programs showed a limited sense of urgency among this reporting group to address issues of race. Rusch (2004) connected her finding to earlier research with administrative aspirants who described professors governed by “silence, blindness, fear, and a lack of preparedness” (p. 33) to handle issues of social justice. The avoidance of discourse among educational leadership faculty about race was also addressed by Rusch and Horsford (2009), who noted the discomfort leadership preparation faculty experience in raising issues of gender and race. According to the researchers, the avoidance of these topics results in programs that do not adequately develop cultural competence and in fact, do a “huge disservice to graduates who lead in diverse communities” (Rusch, 2004, p. 307) .

Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis (2008) noted that administrator preparation programs must be a contributing factor in the development of social justice leaders

who have strategies for reflective consciousness centered on social justice. In his view, knowledge and skills for well-prepared social justice leaders include special education, differentiation, race, poverty, ELLs, and working with diverse families. Theoharis (2007) also contends that it is irresponsible to send leaders out to do this work without the understanding of how to face the issues that arise, stating, “Creating a space to wrestle with developing resistance can provide future administrators the opportunity to be a step ahead of the resistance they will face, and address proactively issues of burnout that can impact social justice leaders” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 251). While leadership preparation programs have prepared some great principals and school leaders, leaders continue to create and oversee unjust and inequitable schools; they are the rule, not the exception today.

A third barrier to social justice leadership involves the lack of knowledgeable and racially literate mentors in school systems. Blackmore (2009) points out that many of the experiences in leadership preparation, such as internships, do nothing but reproduce the status quo without close scrutiny around who programs select as mentors. Mentor leaders must show a commitment to social justice and demonstrate awareness of race, power, and privilege (M. Adams, 1996; Brown, 2004b; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Leaders must understand and be sensitive to social justice issues such as race, gender, class, ableism, religion, and white leaders must examine white identity. My experience as a principal found mentoring practices sorely lacking. Mentor principals were assigned based on networking and connections that often had more to do with relationships and skill in management than leadership. Social justice activist principals are often controversial leaders in that they pushed the system and identified inequities that others ignored (Blackmore, 2009; Brown, 2006; Bruner, 2008). They are often covertly kept from the mentor roles, so as to keep the peace in the district and to not influence more principals to become challengers of the system (Bogotch, 2002; Bruner, 2008).

Finally, I will mention the barrier of politics and the cost of leading for social justice. Speaking out and speaking up for social justice issues is difficult and risky.

Bogotch (2002) speaks about the “heroic efforts of individuals” (p. 6) who resolutely pursue addressing conditions of inequity, whatever it takes. Often the systems that expect these school leaders to fix schools’ social and academic ills at the same time view them as disruptive, rebels, and troublemakers. For those currently in school leadership, being viewed as a threat could hamper career hopes and plans. School leaders must be cognizant that their colleagues, who dealt with the moral and ethical responsibilities of social justice leaders, grappled with the personal and professional costs of making the tough decisions.

Barriers are plenty in this work. I have highlighted a few of the prominent ones with the recognition that each individual’s context may provide additional or dissimilar barriers to this work, as does each leader’s length of experience and reputation as a school leader. Activist social justice school leaders find ways to pierce the barriers (M. Adams, 1996; Bruner, 2008; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Shields, 2004) and develop supports to see them through this important work.

Support is essential for this work and can come from many places. In reading of successful principals doing social justice work, there are often networks established where open talk about the struggles provided new sets of eyes on the issues raised (Adams et al., 2000; Marshall & Anderson, 2009; Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Professional learning communities are powerful supports for this work as well (David, 2009; Huffman & Jacobson, 2003; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008). College and university programs could be indispensable in providing information and literature that is accessible and useable with school staffs.

Superintendents and school boards must become active, knowledgeable and supportive in this work. As educational leaders are faced with the pressure to demonstrate that every child for whom they have responsibility is achieving success, the profession must examine the deficit thinking and blame that frequently occurs in schools,

Engendering in students and their families feelings that, somehow, they and their lived experiences are abnormal and unacceptable within the boundaries of the school community and their abilities subnormal within the tightly

prescribed bounds of core curriculum or transmissive pedagogy still too common in many schools and classrooms. (Shields, 2004, p. 111)

I found the body of work defining social justice leadership to be extensive, the examples of social justice leaders to be scarce, and the examples of real supports provided to school leaders to take on this work missing. The goal of my research was to identify and talk to practicing principals demonstrating these traits to provide the field support in doing this work. Only through real life examples and honest dialogue about the difficulty of this work will school leaders have confidence to take the necessary steps and create equitable learning environments for each student and family.

Summary

In this chapter, I have offered a literature review which examined the research on racial literacy, social justice leadership, and the avoidance of talking about race in schools and society in general. The lack of examples of principal practitioners taking up this work suggests the need for additional research in this emerging field. I also shared information on the CFEE seminar and the research that underlies the experiential training. In Chapter 3, I will explain my research perspective, the selection criteria and process for choosing participants, and outline the procedures and sources that were used for collecting the data for this study. Finally, I will share information about the process used to analyze the data in the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Design

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how white school leaders examined their understanding of white identity, privilege, and power, and how this understanding contributed to their effectiveness as social justice leaders. As indicated in the literature review chapter, there is research supporting the urgency of white educators becoming culturally proficient in order to meet the needs of the children of color we are serving in our schools. To lead this effort, white principals must understand the intricacies of racial literacy and become courageous leaders who have the skill to navigate the uncomfortable and unpredictable conversations around race.

With the intent of gaining an in-depth understanding of how white school principals understand their white identity and examine power and privilege, it was important to use a research design that allowed participants to engage in open and candid conversations regarding their experiences, their successes, and their challenges. To meet the proposed criteria and to address the research questions, a qualitative study involving the use of individual interviews and focus groups was designed.

This qualitative study took place over 18 months. During this time, I studied the work of five school principals working in elementary, middle and high school settings in a common northwest school district. This chapter describes my research paradigm and perspectives. Details of the participants and how they were selected, the setting, the process of data collection and analysis, and a discussion regarding issues of trustworthiness and credibility are presented along with the recruitment and ethical considerations for the study, and the process of informed consent.

Research Paradigm and Perspectives

Research paradigm: qualitative research. As a novice researcher, I struggled with my research paradigm and perspective. Qualitative research is designed for naturalistic inquiry to study real world situations with openness to whatever emerges. The data-collection and fieldwork strategies pay attention to the process and

understand that systems being studied are dynamic, and the personal experience and engagement allows the researcher's personal experiences and insights to be a part of the inquiry (Patton, 2002). While qualitative research has shifted over the years and is difficult to define, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) provide this definition:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world...qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p.4)

Perspective. My evolving world view is a mix of constructivist theory and critical theory; and for this research project, critical race theory also informed my ideology.

I believe humans generate knowledge and meaning from their experiences, knowledge is ever-changing, and that there is no single truth, but multiple truths depending on perspective. My research will be a co-construction model where the researched and researcher will join together to understand the inquiry process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

I also identify with critical theory as a perspective. Kincheloe and McLaren (2008) discuss the complexity and debate around critical theory stating it "attempts to avoid too much specificity, as there is room for disagreement among critical theorists"(p. 403). Questioning assumptions and understanding that social and historical forces influence our views describes my world view. In defining a criticalist, Kincheloe and McLaren (2008) posit several assumptions related to researchers using their work as a "form of social or cultural criticism." They note that

As critical researchers attempt to get behind the curtain, to move beyond assimilated experience to expose the way ideology constrains the desire for self-direction, and to confront the way power reproduces itself in the construction of human consciousness, they employ a plethora of research methodologies. In this context, Patti Lather (1991, 1993) extends our position with her notion of catalytic validity. Catalytic validity points to the degree to which research moves those it studies to understand the world and the way it is shaped in order for them to transform it...Research that possesses catalytic validity will not only display the reality-altering impact of the inquiry process;

it will also direct this impact so that those under study will gain self-understanding and self-direction. (p. 431)

Lather's (1991, 1993) notion of catalytic validity is what moved me to conduct research on white identity. The ability to move research participants and readers into action is a worthy goal. Two of the assumptions identified by Kincheloe and McLaren (2008) speak to the dynamics of issues around racism, power, privilege, and oppression and resonated with my research:

All thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted... that certain groups in any society and particular societies are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinations accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable; that oppression has many faces and that focusing on one at the expense of others (e.g., class oppression versus racism) often elides the interconnections among them; and, finally, that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression. (pp. 404-405)

The purpose of critical inquiry is to raise consciousness of oppression and elicit transformation; and dialogue is an integral part of the process.

Critical race theory (CRT) informs this study as well. Critical race theory "seeks to decloak the seemingly race-neutral, and color-blind ways in which the law and policy are conceptualized, discussed, and formulated, with respect to their impact on poor people and persons of color" (Parker, Deyhle, Villenas, & Nebeker, 1998, p. 5). Matsuda (1991) defines CRT as the work of progressive legal scholars of color "who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination" (p. 1331).

Table 3.1 was developed by Horsford (2007) and illustrates the tenets of Critical Race Theory:

Table 3.1 Tenets of Critical Race Theory

CRT Tenet	Definition	Source
Counterstorytelling	A method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths especially ones held by the majority	Matsuda (1995)
Critique of liberalism	Critique of three basic notions embraced by liberal legal ideology: colorblindness, neutrality of the law, and incremental change	Creswell (1998)
Whiteness as property	Due to the history of race and racism in the U.S. and the role U.S. jurisprudence has played in reifying conceptions of race, the notion of Whiteness can be considered a property interest	Harris (1995)
Interest convergence	Significant progress for Blacks is achieved only when the goals of Blacks are consistent with the needs of Whites	Bell (2004)
Permanence of racism	Racism, both conscious and unconscious, is a permanent component of everyday life	Bell (1992)

Elimination of racism in schools ties into the work of previous scholars discussing CRT. In education, CRT has at least the following five elements that form its basic model: a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) a transdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

CRT originated from the legal field and was used to examine and uncover the unchanging racism in our institutions, judicial systems, and laws. Although these themes are not new, they do challenge the methodology currently used to research race and inequality. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) identify the notion of critical race methodology as a theoretical approach to research that:

(a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process. However, it also challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of color; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. Furthermore, it views these experiences as sources of strength and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24)

The tenets that are discussed in my study include counter storytelling, whiteness as property, interest convergence, and permanence of racism.

Research Participants and Setting

Setting. This research project took place in a school district located in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. The setting is a region identified as being a fairly liberal urban community. There is an eclectic feel to the city I will call Larkspur, an urban district with more than 16,000 students. When one thinks of Larkspur, images of acceptance, counter-culture, and alternative viewpoints come to mind. It's an inventive community with an appreciation for the outdoors, focus on the arts, activist political leanings, and residents with "alternative" lifestyles. The school leaders I chose to study are spread across the community and serve both high-achieving and low-achieving schools with varying levels of poverty and diversity.

The demographics of Larkspur School District show a white population of 73%; Hispanic – 10.2%, Asian – 4.9%, Black – 2.7%, Native American – 2.09%, Multiracial – 4%, and 3% refused to identify. The school district had been concerned that the workforce did not reflect the students it served, so the school board set a goal to increase the diversity of its licensed staff. In 2010, the goal was met and the percentage of minority teachers increased from 6% to 10% of the licensed staff. There are 40% of the students who qualify for free and reduced lunch.

This commitment to equity showed up in other actions taken as well. Over the past five years, the district committed to have their staff participate in equity training.

The district selected the CFEE seminars and all administrators in the district were trained. District officials followed up with seminars for teachers and staff called Taking it Up.

Coaching for Educational Equity seminar. It is important to understand the Coaching for Educational Equity (CFEE) seminar as it was one of the qualifiers for the study and all of the participants attended a seminar prior to the beginning of the research study. CFEE is based on the work done in numerous educational change projects that led to the formation of the National Coalition for Equity in Education. In the summer of 2005, a group of educational consultants from the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), the Bay Area Coalition of Equitable Small Schools (BAYCES), the Small Schools Northwest, and the San Francisco Coalition of Equitable Small Schools (SFCESS) gathered in Sonoma to design a powerful five day experience to support white people in understanding power, privilege, and oppression and the impact of this condition on student achievement

I attended the CFEE seminar in November of 2006, as a participant. The training was designed to serve educators across the country, including K-12 schools and districts, higher education, and both state and non-profit educational organizations. The attendees at this session were not from the northwest, but rather from around the country. Based on my experience and the powerful effect it had on me, I began to study white identity, privilege, power, and oppression. The CFEE training has taken root in the Pacific Northwest, and over 500 educational leaders have participated in the five day seminar and joined a continuing support network.

As in other states, school districts in the Pacific Northwest show student achievement data with clear racial disparities. There is a tremendous need to address and heal the racial issues that perpetuate these racial disparities in student achievement and the failure to address the needs of all students. The CFEE consortium serves the students of the Pacific Northwest by engaging the predominantly white educators in deep interrogation of the impact of structural racism through both a personal and professional lens. Through the explicit and intentional CFEE seminar and follow-up

support, educators learn to see new ways to deal with the disproportionate number of students of color in special education, failing to graduate, dropping out of school, receiving disciplinary referrals, and suffering harassment.

The CFEE sessions work with the educational leadership to ensure that the culture, structures, and processes of the schools will change as a result of the equity work. District-level and school-level administrators, school board members, higher education professors, and teacher leaders are targeted for the five-day seminar. After leaders experience the power of addressing equity issues in their schools, the consortium provides additional support and professional development to entire school staffs.

Confronting our history of oppression is no simple or unemotional task, but is one that requires support and understanding. Both whites and people of color require support to guide them through the dynamics inherent in addressing issues of racial oppression and privilege.

The CFEE curriculum is drawn from the work of Weisglass (1998), Eubanks, et al, (1997), and Heron (1993) and the CFEE seminar has been designed around the context of the Pacific Northwest, whose population is predominantly white. Opportunities are provided for experiential learning, reflection, and dialogue in a safe, facilitated setting, paired with direct instruction in the components of institutional racism. The seminar is comprised of 30 to 40 participants with a requirement that at least one-third be people of color. The cross-racial facilitation team consists of white, African American, Latino, and bi-racial facilitators. Participants learn tools and protocols to ask honest questions of themselves and each other and to listen deeply to, and trust, the uncomfortable responses. Emotional release is a process that increases one's ability to think more creatively and intelligently about the issues that must be faced (Weissglass, 1998). Throughout the week, stories and experiences are shared making real the issues around privilege and oppression that many white people in this region might read about but never experience. Engaging in this work together deepens cross-racial alliances, and with left and right brains reintegrated,

participants have a deeper capacity to problem solve, to interrupt, and to transform structural racism. The consortium works with educational leaders, the linchpins to changing beliefs and practices.

The people of color living throughout the Pacific Northwest are isolated, and most have few opportunities to be in professional spaces with other professionals of color to talk about their work and their perspective, especially if they live in a rural or suburban environment. As they unpack their experiences in CFEE, many uncover the extent to which their voice and perspective have been silenced, not only by others but by themselves as a coping mechanism in a white-dominant culture. They also often discover they are reproducing the same skills to students of color in their systems.

On the flip side, many white people in this region have no idea that the schools and state are immersed in white culture and practices that are uncomfortable and harmful to students of color, while also reinforcing the dominant nature of white culture in white students and families.

For healing to occur, the seminar first surfaces and articulates the experiences that wound and the emotions people carry as a result. Processes for emotional release, and safe spaces for uncomfortable, honest dialogue about race are critical pieces of the process. This process engages participants on both personal and institutional levels, both intellectually and emotionally, towards healing and action.

When a safe space is created for the experiences, the emotions and the ignorance of participants combine with the history and big picture of systemic racial oppression, allowing a process to begin to examine the impact of racism on each participant and from there, collectively take action to interrupt and transform our systems.

Participant selection. The target group for this study consisted of white principals from the Larkspur School District who had principal experience, and had attended a five day CFEE seminar. I wanted to be certain no first-year principals were in the study, but rather those with experience. All white principals in Larkspur

attended the CFEE seminar and were invited to participate in this study. Because I am a trainer for CFEE and have met with the principals in this district, I minimized pressure to participate in a meeting with all principals by stating participation is totally voluntary.

I distributed the Participant Survey (Appendix A) to all principals and explained the study through an email sent out by the Directors of Elementary and Secondary Education. Prior to initiating any of the selection process, I requested permission from the Larkspur School District to conduct a research study per their board policy. A letter of support was sent from the Larkspur School District indicating their support of this research study for the IRB application and once approved, the district sent a formal acceptance which indicated their approval to participate in this study.

Interested participants returned the survey to me via email or telephoned me to ask questions and then opted into the study. My goals were to have balanced diversity in gender, where they were raised, level of assignment, and age if possible.

I received six responses from white principals to participate and, because respondents met the demographic diversity requirements, I accepted them into the study. As the interviews began, one female dropped out of the study after her first interview due to time constraints from being placed at a new school unexpectedly. The constituency of the group was finalized at that point to five members; there were two female and three male school leaders identified who worked in two elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The Table 3.2 shows information on the participants.

Table 3.2 Information on Principal Participants

Information on Principal Participants					
	Tricia	Cara	Mark	Bruce	Jason
Age	53 yrs.	47 yrs.	55 yrs.	41 yrs.	57 yrs.
School	Hoover Middle	Dolores Huerta Elementary	Tucker High	Woodleaf Middle	Douglas Elementary
Years Exp.	10	5	6	5	19
Where Raised	Rural Northwest	Rural Northwest	Metropolitan Northwest	Eastern U.S.	Urban Northwest

The principals agreed to participate in two interviews that lasted 90 – 120 minutes each and two focus groups that lasted 90 – 120 minutes each over the course of the study. Before meeting with the group, each participant filled out a questionnaire that provided background information on his or her experiences. Interviews were held throughout 2010 and 2011, both in the offices of the principals and offsite. Focus group interviews were held at an offsite location to prevent interruptions and allow participants to feel comfortable. At each interview and focus group, participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and were asked to surface any questions they might have. In the focus groups, participants agreed to follow agreements taken from Singleton and Linton (2006) and used in the CFEE training. Those agreements were 1) Stay engaged; 2) Speak your truth; 3) Experience discomfort; 4) Accept and expect non-closure. At the second interview and focus group, a summarization of what they remembered was surfaced to allow them to voice any responses or questions in response to the summation.

Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent

One of the characteristics of a good qualitative study is sensitivity to the risks of human subjects research. At the beginning of this study I reflected on the ethical considerations I would face. Having worked in this district, as well as being a facilitator in the CFEE training, I had experience with all of the participants in the study. The methodology of case study allowed me to deepen my relationships with the participants, and understand their context more comprehensively. Exploring the notion of ethics, I found that Christians (2008) talks about the code of ethics that many scholarly associations have adopted with four common guidelines: 1) Informed consent; 2) Deception; 3) Privacy and confidentiality; and 4) Accuracy (pp. 192-194).

Informed consent. Each participant was given an Informed Consent document that outlined the purpose of the study, why they were invited to participate, what would happen during the study, the risks and the benefits of the study, and notice that they had a choice on whether or not to participate in the study (See Appendix B). Participants signed the document and returned it to me prior to our first interview. This study received thorough review and approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Oregon State University.

Deception. This principle suggests that the research study will not engage in deceptive experiments or methods. All methodology and use of the data was shared with the participants prior to the beginning of the study.

Privacy and confidentiality. It is essential to adhere to the ethics of confidentiality in a research study. Protecting the identities of participants and the research locations must be at the forefront of the researcher's mind as the research is written for distribution. Christians (2008) talks about the difficulty in "maintaining a confidential study as pseudonyms and disguised locations often are recognized by insiders. What researchers consider innocent is perceived by participants as misleading or even betrayal" (p. 193). Additionally, in the focus group, the participants became aware of the other participants in the study, and so confidentiality was emphasized to make it safe to share openly. In this study, pseudonyms were used for the participants and the city and school district. As participants shared real situations that could impact

others, I worked to disguise the setting and protect the principal sharing the information. Recordings, transcripts, and written work have been kept in locked cabinets to protect confidentiality.

Accuracy. As a researcher, my commitment to accuracy in reporting is essential to the integrity of the research study and the findings. Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed, with the transcript sent to the research participants so they could verify accuracy of the transcription or clarify statements they wanted to change. This triangulation process reassured participants and provided me confidence that the reporting was accurate.

Design of Study

My methodology was a combination of focus group inquiry and interviews.

The central questions that informed the study were the following:

- 1) How do white school leaders view white identity and the impact, if any, it has on their leadership?
- 2) How do white school leaders relate to students of color, the parents, and the community?
- 3) In what ways do white school leaders engage in race talk and address issues of white identity, privilege, and power?
- 4) What challenges do white school leaders experience as they attempt to end racism in their schools?

These questions were designed to explore the experiences of the principals in the study.

Data sources. There were multiple sources of data that I used in this study:

- 1) Interviews.
- 2) Focus groups.
- 3) Researcher notes and observations containing my reflections and insights during the processes conducted.

The schedule shown in Table 3.3 shows the dates of interviews and focus groups. The interviews began in the spring of 2010 and concluded in June of 2011. There were two exceptions due to circumstances at work, so they were scheduled at a later date.

Table 3.3 Research Interview Schedule

Research Interview Schedule					
	Tricia	Cara	Mark	Bruce	Jason
Interview 1	5/14/10	11/19/10	5/14/10	5/14/10	5/14/10
Focus Group 1	1/21/11	1/21/11	1/21/11	1/21/11	Absent
Focus Group 2	4/19/11	4/19/11	4/19/11	4/19/11	4/19/11
Interview 2	6/17/11	5/6/12	6/2/11	6/14/11	6/9/11

Interviews. The use of interviewing to gather information is not just for researchers. Interviews are used frequently today as a source of information and “usually with the assumption that the responses they get are true and accurate pictures of respondents’ selves and lives” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 647). Fontana and Frey (2000) also talk about the shifts in interviewing over the last few years from structured questions to negotiated text. They comment on the role of the interviewer stating, “Ethnographers have realized for quite some time that researchers are not invisible, neutral entities; rather, they are part of the interactions they seek to study and influence those interactions” (p. 663).

During the first individual interviews, my goal was to develop relationships with the participants and understand the context of their work. At this 90 minute interview, I reviewed the informed consent document and ask them to sign it. The questions I asked provided me insight into why they became a leader, and what their experience was in the CFEE training, challenges they faced around equity issues, and how they defined and worked for social justice in their schools, both individually and

with staff. The seven questions were asked in the interviews and I followed up with probes where appropriate or where I believed there was more to be said. The questions were as follows:

- 1) Talk about why you went into educational leadership.
- 2) Talk about your experience after attending the CFEE training. What did you notice about your perspective on equity and/or white identity?
- 3) After the seminar what did you plan to do around equity issues with your staff? What did you plan to do around understanding white identity with your staff?
- 4) How do you define social justice?
- 5) Talk about your experience with social justice at your school.
- 6) Talk about the teachers in your school. How do they experience working for social justice?
- 7) What would you describe as your biggest challenge in leading for equity?

I transcribed the first interviews and paid for a transcriptionist for most of the focus groups and second interviews. I reviewed them for accuracy by listening to the recordings and reviewing the transcribed text to familiarize myself with the data.

At the second individual interview, conducted toward the end of the study, I wanted to probe more deeply into white identity and the principals' understanding of being white, their privilege, and their power. I was especially interested to see if there was any movement in their understandings or actions related to leadership for equity.

The questions were as follows:

- 1) Talk about your thinking about being a white school leader.
- 2) Race talk is the ability to speak the realities and struggles around race including power, privilege, and oppression. Do you use race talk in your work as a school leader? Explain.
- 3) Talk about your students and parents of color. Does your white identity impact working with this community? Explain.

Focus groups. The focus group is an effective way to observe participants and hear their thoughts at the same time. They are “fundamentally a way of listening to people and learning from them” (Morgan, 1997, p. 9). This notion relates to the purpose of my study which is to examine the attitudes and beliefs of white principals around social justice issues in their schools. In this study, the participants identify ways in which they are attempting to remove oppressive barriers to families and children of color.

Focus groups were held twice: once in January, 2011 and once in April, 2011. The dates were decided jointly and were held in a suite offsite for privacy and comfort.

At the beginning of the focus group session, we reviewed agreements and discussed the importance of confidentiality. The agreements were ones used during the CFEE seminar so all participants were familiar with them and agreed to follow them.

The first focus group allowed participants time to interact with each other and connect. At the first session, one of the participants forgot about the session and it was decided we would go on without him. There were five questions for the group designed to both gather information and allow me to observe participants’ reactions during the dialogue. The questions were as follows:

- 1) You all had a common experience in the Coaching for Educational Equity seminar. Can you talk about your experiences?
- 2) How was it to return to your school and district after the seminar?
- 3) All of you left the seminar with an action plan. Would you talk about some of your experiences implementing your plans?
- 4) What, if anything, were you able to implement as you returned to work with your staff members? How did it go?
- 5) Talk about the challenges, if any, in addressing white identity with your staff and taking up equity issues in your school and district.

During the second focus group, I asked the principals to talk about their successes and struggles in leading for equity and to talk about the actions they had

taken to address equity issues in their schools. The questions were provocative in that if a principal had not taken any action, the questions could cause discomfort or possible safety issues. The questions were as follows:

- 1) What role, if any, has your district office played in supporting you to take up this work? What has been helpful? What has gotten in the way or been harmful? Have you sought after district office support for this work? If so, how? If not, why not?
- 2) What has been the most comfortable piece of taking up this work at your site? What have you done that has not been problematic? Do you have any evidence of impact?
- 3) As you think about what steps you've taken at your building, talk about what specific and conscious actions you have taken around examining dominant culture or white identity with your staff?
- 4) What would you identify as the things that stop you or keep you from taking up equity work in your school?
- 5) What needs to happen in administrative preparation programs to support this work? What support either in the district or from outside sources do you think principals require to do this work? Why do you think this support is often lacking?
- 6) In a perfect world, what would you be doing to address the needs of the dominant culture staff you work with to help them examine their power and privilege? What would you hope the outcomes of this work would be for your building?

Each focus group session was audio taped. The sessions followed a protocol that began with a social time to connect with their peers, followed by the discussion based on the questions above. Each focus group discussion was guided by a set of open-ended questions.

The interaction of the principals was informative and they reported at the end of each session they felt like they had been “replenished” and were ready to head out for another day. I observed problem solving occurring and peer support as principals shared their discouragement around progress in implementing equity initiatives. I transcribed the recording of the meeting and checked it for accuracy. Transcripts from both focus group sessions were sent to the participants to check for accuracy.

Researcher journals. In addition to the focus groups and interviews, throughout the data collection process I used a researcher journal to capture thoughts, observations, participant behaviors, and for periodic rumination around the research questions and possible findings during the life of the study. The journal was also a place for me to write about the conclusions I was drawing which were far too early in the process. These conclusions helped me identify my bias and expectations related to the study. During the data analysis process, I spent considerable time reviewing the journal and finding where my observations or thoughts validated the data from the transcripts examined, and/or contradicted the content of the data. The researcher journal provided me a researcher check to keep me aware of not only the participants’ progress throughout the process, but also my growth in understanding the data and moving from a biased set of expectations to an openness to results, whatever they may be.

Data Analysis: Interviews and Focus Groups

To examine and analyze the data collected in interviews and focus groups, Saldaña (2009) recommends and demonstrates a coding process to mine the data. I used a multi-cycle coding process on the interview and focus group transcripts to allow me to identify and code attributes of the data. Prior to beginning this process, transcripts were reread several times and recordings were reviewed again to have an understanding of the dialogue and create a mental picture with which to read and code the written word.

First Cycle coding. Using the coding cycles Saldaña (2009) identifies, I began examination of the transcripts using First Cycle descriptive coding on the first run

through the data. Saldaña states, “Descriptive Coding summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data”(p. 71). Setting a wider right margin, I reviewed all the transcripts and coded the comments made by the principals, using words and phrases such as “feeling anxious; emotional experience; frustrated at lack of time; stepping into risk.” My goal was to “identify both ordinary and significant elements of [the stories] that have the potential for rich symbolic analysis” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 107). These codes provided information about the substance of the various passages within the interviews and focus group transcripts. After completing the first cycle, I reviewed the codes to see if themes or patterns emerged and made notes of those on Post-it memos and displayed them on a grid with each research question displayed. This process allowed me to see what participants had said and to compare and contrast the experiences of the participants.

Second Cycle coding. Second Cycle coding methods allow researchers to organize and reorganize the data gathered in First Cycle coding (Saldaña, 2009). As I reviewed the First Cycle coding, I categorized and grouped some of the codes for examination. This process allowed me to begin moving categories and in some cases changing the category as my understanding and view of the comments shifted. Conducting the Second Cycle coding allowed me to more clearly see what had been said by participants and to remove some of the inherent or “I know what they mean” understandings and take the data at face value. I began to reduce the number of categories into a smaller, more concise list. Second Cycle coding was messy and chaotic to conduct and at times I wondered whether there was any way to make sense of the data. However, as I spent more time with the data, meaning emerged for me.

Following the Second Cycle coding, I went back and constructed the interviews to begin the cross-case analysis. I pulled comments from the transcripts and began to group them, first by the interview question and on the second review, I began to look at how the participants had comments, themes, and patterns that were alike and were different. I looked for cases where there was one principal commenting on a notion and also looked for group agreement on their thoughts. Through this analysis, I

began to see three themes which captured the responses of the group. The first theme was structural issues. The second theme was competing initiatives and the third theme was personal issues around leading this change. After sorting the participant comments in those theme groupings, I then proceeded to connect those patterns and themes directly to the research questions.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

As qualitative research has grown and evolved, there are new issues and tensions arising around how research is conducted, the validity of the research and worries about ethics. Researcher voice, ethics, and issues in the representation arise in addition to the traditional concerns of bias and validity (Oleson, 2000). “The traditional positivist criteria of internal and external validity are replaced by such terms and *trustworthiness* and *authenticity*” according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 158). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) identify trustworthiness as the most cited standard for validity and reliability in qualitative studies. The data collected must be substantial and detailed enough to convince the reader that the researcher’s conclusions make sense (Merriam, 1998). Regardless of the terms used, as a qualitative researcher, I have the obligation of convincing myself, and my audience, that the findings are genuine and dependable (Merriam, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the trustworthiness of naturalistic investigation as being the quality that makes it noteworthy to the audience.

Showing that qualitative data is trustworthy can be enhanced through the following six strategies:

- 1) Triangulation: using multiple sources, methods, investigators.
- 2) Member checking: taking data back to those from whom it was derived.
- 3) Long-term observation: extending the period of observation time.
- 4) Peer examination: asking colleagues to comment on the findings.
- 5) Participatory forms of research: involving participants in all phases of research.

- 6) Researchers' biases: clarify the researcher's worldview, theoretical orientation and assumptions at the outset of the study (Creswell, 2003, p. 204).

These strategies were all used in my research study to create a trustworthy research environment. Triangulation, member checking, long term observation, and peer examination were my primary strategies.

Throughout my research studies, I found myself frequently questioning whether I was getting what I needed and would it be valid, useful, and accepted. Stake (1995) speaks of the need for discipline and protocols of which triangulation is one. Data for my study were triangulated through continuous checking with research participants on the transcripts with the intent of clarifying any misconceptions on my part and assuring the participants that they were able to review and respond to my data. Using both individual interviews and focus groups I was able to access individual thoughts and observe the interaction of the principals in a group setting. Comparing the content of interviews with the focus group transcripts allowed me to look for consistency and inconsistency in thinking. I also kept a research journal where I wrote my impressions during and after the sessions. These thoughts helped me reconstruct the interviews and focus groups and provided me insight into my thoughts and reactions to the sessions.

Member checking took place throughout the study as participants were sent transcripts of the interviews and focus groups. I found this strategy to give me little feedback as principals were burdened with so many tasks to do in their buildings, I wondered if they did indeed read them. During the data gathering, I received one comment from a principal after the first interview and two comments as I sent out what I called the draft of their data. One participant felt that she sounded "arrogant" and worried that her comments might cause her difficulty in her school and district. She wrote, "I guess I should read this more carefully." Another principal was worried that the "manner in which I talked sounds incoherent and random at times. I hope you will help me sound more professional."

I also used peer examination as a tool. I had numerous conversations with peers to talk about the findings I uncovered. CFEE facilitators, who are specialists in the field of equity and white identity, provided me feedback on my assumptions and assisted me in clarifying my thoughts and conclusions about the data.

The extended time of the data collection provided me an opportunity to observe growth and shifting in the principals. I saw attitudes move from “no hope” to “in action” in at least three of the cases. I believe if I had done this within a six month period, as I had originally planned, I would not have had the opportunity to see how the principals moved into action over a longer period of time.

Researcher Challenges, Perspectives, and Biases

As a researcher, it is important to be aware of the biases I bring to any study I conduct and how they might influence the conclusions I might come to in my research. In studying white school leaders, I have two obvious areas of bias – 1) my experiences as a white woman, and 2) my experience as a school principal. As I spoke with and observed and recorded data with my research participants, it was done through a white lens, the only lens I have being a white woman. Having been a school leader for over 30 years, I brought my beliefs about leadership, the principal role, and how principals create change in schools into my perspective. It was important to set those beliefs aside to be open to the participants’ approaches to leadership. At times, I did not recognize a belief I had until I felt a reaction to what I was seeing and hearing. I learned as time went on to record those in my researcher journal and note my reactions to help eliminate bias.

Another possible limitation is the fact that regarding a sensitive topic such as race, participants may not have told the truth about their feelings or actions. It can be risky to honestly disclose one’s racism or feelings and reactions to the workplace and/or the staff one is working with daily to take up this work. I believe the participants were very candid in their responses; two expressed their concern about possible repercussions about their comments.

Summary

The intent and design of this qualitative research study was to understand and examine white school principals' dispositions related to power, privilege, and white identity in their work to create equitable schools. This was done through a series of questions related to the research questions:

- 1) How do white school leaders view white identity and the impact, if any, it has on their leadership?
- 2) How do white school leaders relate to students of color, the parents, and the community?
- 3) In what ways do white school leaders engage in race talk and address issues of white identity, privilege, and power?
- 4) What challenges do white school leaders experience as they attempt to end racism in their schools?

These questions were investigated both from the individual perspective as well as the group perspective.

In this chapter, the perspectives that I brought to the study were examined. The use of social constructivism, critical theory, and critical race theory were used to frame my understandings. I also examined the biases that I brought to the study – specifically my view as a white woman, my views from being a practicing principal, and my experiences serving as a CFEE facilitator for the past three years. I also spoke about the setting of this study, the participants, and the selection process. I presented the data sources I used including interviews, focus group sessions, and observations. Finally, I shared a detailed description of the process I used to code and analyze the data collected in this study. In the next chapter, I will present and discuss the findings of my study.

Chapter 4: Findings

The group conversation moved into the uncomfortable space; the space where white people go silent and have worried, downcast eyes. Ana, a Latina woman, asked the group the question, the question white people are mostly unwilling to answer. She angrily said, "Why are you silent? Why do you sit there and say nothing as we bare our hearts and souls to you about our pain, our children's pain? How can you just sit there?" The pause was longer than I could bear and I knew I was going to speak up. I decided to speak it out loud, "I'll tell you why. In my head I'm thinking why are you blaming me for all of this? I didn't do it. Why can't you just get over it? I'm tired of feeling guilty and ashamed for what happened before I was even here. And, how can I ever say that out loud?" I knew I was going to speak the unspeakable and do some modeling and; it was also a true feeling I've often had. The Latina woman gave me a knowing smile and nodded her head to me. The people of color in the room also nodded and made eye contact with me. It was spoken and on the table now. And at the break she said to me, "Thank you for speaking your heart." A moment later several white women came up to me and said, "Thank you for speaking. I could never have said that and it was exactly what was in my head."

McCann facilitator reflection at a CFEE training, 2010

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine white school leaders' attitudes and perspectives on white identity, racial literacy, and race talk as leaders of schools with diverse staff and students. This study focused on five white principals of an elementary, middle, or high school within the same district. They all attended a five-day training called Coaching for Educational Equity (CFEE). All schools within the district are engaged in equity work and the district school board has adopted an equity goal stating,

Increase achievement for all students and close the achievement gap. The board is committed to providing equal opportunities for all students to succeed. Every school must focus on improving teaching and learning to increase achievement for all students. All students should have the support needed to actively engage in their learning. Some schools may require additional resources to achieve district and state academic goals and close the achievement gap.

One of their district's Core Values states, "Equity is: all students having equal opportunity to achieve at high levels; may require an unequal distribution of resources and services to address the diversity of student needs."

Studying school leaders who are racially and culturally different from their school communities will shed light on how they approached creating socially-just schools. It is important to know what school leaders experienced while attempting to shift their staff members to become racially and culturally literate (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). Because talking about race is often seen as an explosive topic among white educators, it is helpful to understand if staff members are able to comfortably and effectively talk about race without getting defensive and shutting down. Are they or their staff members able to see how their dominant culture experience impacts students and parents of color? Additionally, I chose to explore their experiences in understanding white identity and how this understanding transferred to their staff members. Because school staffs in the Pacific Northwest are predominantly white, I believe it is critical that white educators explore the concept of social justice, race, and their white identity. This work is difficult and requires leaders to be courageous and understand the steps necessary to lead to cultural shifts in their schools.

The interviews and focus groups were also designed to inquire about the shifts that occurred in their equity perspective, how they understood white identity, what actions were initiated on returning to their schools, how relationships were affected, and what cultural shifts occurred in the school, if any. Examining leadership that challenges the status quo and brings the topics of race and identity into the school setting after experiencing transformative equity training is explored in the transcripts in this section.

In this chapter, I refer to the transcripts of the interviews and the focus group sessions. Each quoted text is grouped according to the structure used. I see the interviews as narration of the research study. As participants shared their thoughts with me, a story unfolded and my goal was to capture it to expand understanding of the challenge of leading for equity and social justice. As I reviewed the quotes to include in this study, I was aware of looking for comments that conveyed an authenticity and perhaps rawness, almost undiscussables. Due to the candor of the participants, they shared comments that are not often shared outside the inner circle of

the principalship. There is a culture of understanding among those of us who have served in this role and I believe my experience of being a principal opened that door for me to hear their real thoughts. I looked for comments that were germane to and shed light on the four research questions of the study. Comments from the participants were powerful and frequently named the big issues around this study. I am grateful for their candor and non-evasive responses in our meetings. The reporting of the data attempts to follow the flow of the questions throughout the interviews. They also are grouped in the order they occurred: Interview 1; Focus Group 1; Focus Group 2; Interview 2. All of the information quoted in this chapter comes from these interviews and focus groups. When necessary for grammatical and syntactical consistency, some remarks were edited, but context and meanings of statements were carefully preserved. The comments below illustrate the thinking of this group of white leaders.

Findings

Interview 1. The principal interviews occurred at least a year after the participants finished the CFEE seminar. Interviews were held in the principals' offices and one interview was held at a coffee shop. Interview 1 was designed to elicit principals' thoughts on their experience in the CFEE seminar, how they defined social justice, and what it was like to return to the school after finishing it. They were also asked about what kind of follow up occurred with their staffs and what challenges were faced in implementing changes they identified as needed. To examine and analyze the data, I coded all the transcribed responses and did a cross comparison analysis. During the examination of interviews and focus groups, the responses of the principals were analyzed and coded. The following overall themes were identified in the data: structural issues, relationship issues, personal issues. The comments in this section will reflect these three themes and are summaries of the transcripts.

Tricia interview 1. Tricia is a 53-year-old white female who has been a principal for 10 years. She was born and raised in a rural part of the northwest in a small town. She was a teacher for 11 years before deciding to become a principal. "I have always known that I am a good teacher. I have made a huge difference in kids'

lives, and parents' lives." She felt like she was ready for a new challenge and wanted to support teachers, kids, and families, "The same as I did in my classroom, but just add the teachers to the mix." She was principal at an elementary school that was located in a higher socio-economic area of Larkspur, and recently moved to Hoover Middle School that is more diverse racially and socioeconomically. She stated, "I am on the correct side of town for my work, right now. I got pretty taken to task on the other side of town. But that's ok. I got a taste of white privilege and what it does." When asked what her career goals were she shared she "just wanted to be a principal. I don't see myself moving any further away from the kids than I already am."

Tricia spoke positively about the CFEE experience she had in part because of how she processes and how she learns:

It was a really great match for my learning style and my process style...CFEE had a lot of story in it, and a lot of discussion in it. I am an outside processor so I need to talk...I'd start talking and I would get to process and to learn. I had to talk it out to learn it. It really helped to hear what reality is rather than reading a book. I am not a great learner on reading information. I need to read it through story, or hear story.

She also commented that the training would never have happened for her without Felicia, the district equity coordinator.

I think the idea that she brought CFEE in, in the first place, she tried things, and she did things herself. We did the pre-work around the courageous conversations, but that wasn't enough, you know. And then to have somebody when you're going through it afterwards. As you're trained to do the work afterwards, it's really hard. You have to have a Felicia. You have to. There has to be investment by the district. Or the corporation, or whatever to have that person around.

Tricia's understanding of white privilege emerged from the Pacific Northwest Timeline of Race and Immigration History activity that is used in the seminar:

The timeline was very impactful for me. The first time I had really seen what white privilege is. How it had really shaped our country in a really, real way. I think hearing other people process, and hearing other people's emotions and realities was really important to me. There were very structured activities that we got to do that had certain intent. But inside of that structure, [they were] really pushing me to challenge my thinking.

She particularly identified the notion of being an ally and understanding white privilege:

I have a certain power, and a certain voice that other people don't have because of my socio-economic [status] and because of my race. I am able to have a voice. So what does that look like to be an ally and how does that sound? The other idea was really the idea of white privilege. What do I have, because I am white, that other people don't have? And not taking for granted those things. Not that I feel bad about having them. But this idea, ok I have this so that means that other people don't have this. So what does that mean for me, that I need to do, and connecting with my families?

In reflecting on her understanding of white privilege, Tricia talked about how long she lived before coming to realize what it was and developing an awareness of this privilege:

We get to take that for granted. That we don't think about our race....Do you ever think about being white? How often do you think our kids that are African American or Asian, how many times do you think they think about their color, and how people are perceiving them? I didn't think about being white until probably, I went to CFEE. I had fifty years of not thinking about it.

In talking about her experience at CFEE, Tricia felt the seminar was relationship-oriented and felt there was a lot of support for her as she took up the work. She appreciated the diversity of people and the variety of roles represented in the facilitator positions so that there were many ways to access the learning from multiple points of view. The facilitators included principals, family support specialists, equity consultants, teachers, and university professors. She stated, "You really need someone that gets you...especially in the heart work." The learning is not over and she continues to learn and grow in the work. Early after returning from the seminar, Tricia had a situation arise with a student of color and she reflected on it:

One of my first weeks there, I had a student of color get in a fight. And I knew before I even made the phone call, that that mom would probably not trust me because of her experiences with people in authority who were white and had been dealing with a child that had done something. I knew I needed to approach it differently. And I just make it...you're not going to trust me. You don't know me. And so it just helped me approach things totally differently. Being able to listen, it made me realize I need to ask more questions about

what reality is for people and to not assume that I know it. To just say, “What is the reality of this, for you?”

When asked to talk about how she has changed since attending the seminar, Tricia had trouble recalling how she was prior to attending CFEE:

It’s is really hard for me to remember that, because it changes you. It’s one of those things, like I tell people, some things kind of go in your head, some things kind of go in your heart. And then some things kind of change the composition of your cells. Yeah. Yeah, that is what it did for me. It changes the color of your cells. You know, that is kind of how I put it. The more work I do, because then it has a place to land. It is not discreet events that are around equity work. Now, I have a frame for it. That helps, for me.

When Tricia was asked to define social justice, she commented, “Wow, I don’t think that I’ve ever thought about it. I guess it would be that people would have the ability to walk around their life and experience life in the same way that the dominant culture experiences it.” When asked about the work she was doing with her staff after attending CFEE, Tricia shared that the staff knew of her commitment to equity. In her previous school she heard of some “underground grumbling” by the staff. She decided to come into Hoover a bit restrained:

Well the area I am in, I figured right off the bat, I was going to be lower key about it first, so that I didn’t draw attention to that; because, I was already so known in the community. But there we are talking about what we are going to do for Martin Luther King Day, and I throw out, I used to coordinate this human rights thing there at a high school. That might be kind of fun. So then that grows. No, we can’t do it then, so let’s do it at the end of the year. So then it takes off. I am like you know we really don’t need to do this. Now we think it is a really good idea. So, I wasn’t low key.

Feeling that staff were receptive, she moved ahead with efforts to involve them in the work:

What I did with staff, I kept talking about it, and I kept talking about why I was doing it. I kept saying you know, this has to be a safe place for every single person that comes here. ... This place has to be, it has to be known that Hoover is safe for anybody. No matter who you are as a parent, no matter who you are as a child, no matter who you are as a staff member, you have the right to be here, in a safe place.

Her work with staff included training and dialogue around the principles of equity, and activities were planned to help staff develop an understanding of white identity and privilege. When asked if her staff understands these concepts she stated, “Not so much. I think they are kind of surfacing in what they think. They are kind of the intellectual...you know, wow, we are going to do human rights? Because we are going to march. That kind of stuff.” The district has begun offering 2 day Taking it Up sessions for teachers, as long as their administrator had attended CFEE. Tricia sent a couple of her staff members and it “was not real impactful for a couple of staff members that went. They had a bad experience. It set up more walls. So, I am hoping maybe to send another, different group of people.”

Cara interview 1. Cara is a 47-year-old white female principal at Dolores Huerta Elementary School who grew up in the surrounding area of Larkspur. She has been a principal for 4 years in the district and works in a high-poverty, high needs school with many ELL students. She taught for over 20 years before going into administration. Her previous work involved working at a psychiatric day treatment program and behavioral learning centers for students with behavioral difficulties. Cara talked about appreciating the opportunity to “have some experience outside of the classroom before I went into administration.” She worked as a district office coordinator in federal programs and student achievement. When asked why she became a principal, she shared, “A lot of people said I have some leadership skills. I had leadership tendencies in any school I worked, so it was a natural transition. I don’t know if I decided this is what I was going to do.” She believes every administrator should have the opportunity to work with kids with special needs, especially kids with behavioral difficulties.

Cara spoke about the emotional aspect of becoming an administrator. She shared that “trying to... make an impact and support and encourage the education system to both support and advocate for kids with disabilities or kids that are diverse or kids with other needs that are uniquely different than the majority” was challenging. She believes that not all schools are ready to support students in the way they require.

She is proud of the work she has accomplished at Huerta. “We worked as a community to create this school -- it was amazing to have opportunities to create systems and influence the energies around kids and the way we interact with kids, the way we speak with kids.” The culture of the school has been Cara’s focus as well as her staff’s:

Luckily, this community works amazingly well together. I’m very fortunate. Very cohesive. We all have the same goal, and that’s kids. I think kids really are considered first in most decisions. I was just thinking today about our office staff, wonderful people, and when we first all came together. They tended to interact with our public in the manner that I find lots of secretaries do. Very business-like, not as engaging, not as relaxed as I think they could be.

As she was watching the secretaries during my visit, she noticed an example of the cultural shift and talked about how they were interacting with students:

Tardies can be a big problem and negative for kids. So we don’t give kids tardy passes. We give them “We’re Glad You’re Here” passes, which is positive and [acknowledges that kids don’t always control when they get to school.] That was hard for some people to get used to. [Today] one of the secretaries got one of the passes and handed it to the young child, understanding that it wasn’t the child’s responsibility to get to school on time, and handed it to him and got down at his level and said, “We are glad you’re here!” and handed him the pass. It’s an example of how I think some of the culture has changed.

When asked about her attendance at the CFEE seminar, Cara shared:

It was an amazing journey. The overall experience was a growing experience for me. I absolutely grew up in a culture of white. You know... there were two African-American children in the entire city at that time, and they had white parents and so there wasn’t a lot of opportunity to experience real life in the sense of understanding both the uniqueness and the similarities, or much about any other culture other than being white, and pretty traditional.

Cara feels she has an understanding of diversity through her work with physically disabled students and students with emotional and behavioral difficulties. Those experiences led to a “general awareness that there are a lot of different cultures and peoples and needs, and strengths.” She felt the CFEE seminar provided her some time for focused reflection:

CFEE gave me the opportunity to just verbalize. I’d never really taken the opportunity to examine my own feelings around [equity] other than I wanted to

be sensitive, supportive and encouraging to all cultures, all people. And so I knew that I was aware enough not to blatantly discriminate or be disrespectful; but, at the same time I probably didn't use some opportunities that I could have used in terms of learning and growing. And definitely the "I don't see color" was how I grew up. CFEE helped me understand why I hadn't really evaluated that. CFEE helped me evaluate that's not necessarily the way we want to see the world. So that was huge, that part going from "I don't see color" to understanding ... there's different ways of thinking about that.

She shifted her understanding of culture and how schools address it. "As a teacher, I wanted to help kids learn about other cultures, but did it in a manner that was more tokenism; costumes and holidays versus what was real. And of course this was not a diverse community [then]."

During the training, Cara felt the Pacific Northwest Timeline of Race and Immigration History that was provided had an impact on her. "Especially with the Pacific Northwest perspective, in particular. The activity that had us trying to identify what culture we came from; how challenging it was for white people to figure that out." Talking about white identity and knowledge of white people she went on to say:

I think sometimes unconsciously we feel that we can't honor the white culture that we grew up in because the white culture is what is seen as being the culture that is dominant and therefore controlling and unaware, all those negative things. I don't think I had the opportunity, really, to identify that it is what I am. I was European American when I was younger, and so I'd tell people I was German. White middle class wasn't something that I'd introduce myself as. So that was a big one.

There was a particularly emotional experience Cara had during the training where she felt put on the spot. The conversation was about white people staying silent and an African-American female facilitator shared that the silence communicated disengagement in her eyes. When Cara heard that comment, she felt it was directed to her and became uncomfortable with her reaction:

The one time I did get really emotional was when I felt that just because someone was quiet... didn't necessarily mean we didn't understand, or we didn't have questions. I am an emotional person but I don't usually show those emotions in public. I show a lot of emotion, but not those emotions, and so I was surprised by that. So I took a risk of saying something and I was like,

whoa. So that was an interesting experience... I listened to conversations differently after that experience.

Cara talked about how she wanted to bring her learning and experiences on race and equity to her school. “Certainly [I’m] very supportive of my colleagues in this school to have the same experience. It will never be the same experience, but a similar experience by either going through CFEE or Taking it Up in our district.” She has a school with 60 staff members and is committed to having more staff go through training experiences and explained her approach:

It’s more about just changing practice, just changing perspectives and having different insights. I hope I model that or engage in ways that are respectful in honoring diversity, and people observe that. I know that’s not a very direct way, but I think that’s a way that works really with staff. It takes longer but it works with staff because... unless you’re able to go through a very safe experience, like what we were able to go through with CFEE, it’s hard to take people to that examination point without extended time for reflection and information.

She also pointed out, “I don’t want to confuse poverty with diversity, because we have both here. It’s 80% poverty now, and we’re over 50% diverse, which for our community, Larkspur, is dramatic.” She pointed out that there were certainly some ways of working with families that were similar, but there are very unique experiences around equity and poverty:

And I think assumptions often are made...that because so many of our families experience both of those things, we have to really work hard to understand that just the diversity, or just the race isn’t what connects them to poverty. So trying to separate that out [is] also our reality. Sometimes we...make those synonymous, where we think the way we work with kids of poverty...will probably work just as well with [our] diverse kids. I can interrupt when it needs to be interrupted.

Cara defines social justice below:

Social justice would be...equality amongst or for all people, understanding that some cultures and societies aren’t offered the same opportunities as the white culture in terms of justice. And I think we have to be very aware that justice isn’t just something that happens. We can’t assume it’s going to happen, and we have to promote it.

She sees social justice showing up at the elementary level as “being aware and respectful and supportive of all of our families in making sure that we’re treating them equally and providing for them what they need individually.”

When speaking about her biggest challenge in leading for equity, Cara stated, “I think it’s about the mini-initiatives that we have, and trying to make sure that it remains a priority and not just in my thoughts and my intentions, but in my actions.” She noted that Felicia [district equity coordinator] has provided access to the equity trainings like CFEE and Taking it Up to the point that

People certainly are expecting it now, demanding it, but [also] expanding it and asking for it to be a part of our conversations. I don’t think we just leave it to Felicia as the one that has to do that. I think we all [must] take responsibility for it, and we all have those conversations.

Mark interview 1. Mark is a 55-year-old white principal at Tucker High School who grew up in a metropolitan area of the northwest. Mark went into the principalship six years ago because colleagues encouraged him and he felt he was good at leading people. “I’d always been told I could ...I was a good candidate for being a leader because as a teacher for 10 years...I had a good vision, I spoke well, and I cared about people; and, they were encouraging me to be a leader.” As a basketball coach for many years, he believed he understood leading people toward a common goal. As openings became available, Mark felt he had experience that would be valuable to a school and the district. When asked if he was planning on moving to the central office eventually, he shared:

I just really want to be the very best high school administrator for this school, for this set of students, for this set of teachers that I can be. And I think that when you project your career out too much it dissipates your ability to really be fully present for the people that you are working with. That was always what my goal was...a principal. And everyone thought I was a climber. And it cracked me up. I could have gone on to other positions many times but I had no desire to.

I asked Mark to talk about his experience with the CFEE training and what he noticed about his perspective on equity or white privilege and white identity:

Well it was a very emotional 4 days, a very difficult journey. I was not able to speak to my wife for the first couple of days...it was so upsetting and revealing and it was really difficult to get my brain around it. Because, partly because I thought I was more aware, or more with it than what I really was. I do think that I've always been willing and ready to talk about issues having to do with race but I think the CFEE experience really made it much more immediate....And I think the idea of white privilege...I knew about it but I hadn't really experienced it.

As Mark talked about white privilege and his understanding of it, he felt the training allowed him "to maybe understand minority positions even better or more in-depth." He noticed that he was much more direct with kids of color. He spoke about a particular student he referred to at the CFEE training:

I was very direct with him about what that [CFEE] meant to me and that my connection to him, my concern for him and my love for him, as a learner and as a person, I just said it was very important to me that he be successful. And I think that I've always been aware that race plays, that race is a huge issue and been able to talk directly to people. "Do you think race had anything to do with this?" is a question that I've always been willing to ask, but I think it's... I think CFEE definitely drove that home.

He shared his thinking on white people and privilege. "I think people don't understand white privilege. And they are not really aware that they start from a position, a higher position." Mark spoke about working with his staff after finishing the seminar:

I think that there are a lot of people who get this work, but I think there's a lot of people who ... don't understand things having to do with race, and so my staff is not necessarily the most, it's not very diverse. They don't really have that much experience in diversity so a lot of it for me was trying to change their level of empathy and their level of understanding towards things.... and having them really get into [hard questions around equity]is relatively difficult in this building. So just bringing those issues to the forefront and having them be part of every professional development that we do was important.

Mark also shared his staff's reaction to raising questions on white identity, power, and privilege. "I think there's some new incredible personal stories that people have latched on to and think that the learning is slow for my staff. " He had select staff members attend the Taking it Up training and shared:

We've had a couple of teachers go on Taking it Up ...but I don't think that there's been, I can't say that there's huge differences in the data; but, I do know that there are some stories out there that have been very impactful....I don't know. I think that we are kind of getting it. I can't say that...we've had a couple of teachers go on Taking it Up. I think that those are big moments in our collective history. You know, I don't know. I think that we are kind of getting it...then it becomes ah, ah oh...here we go again. But, what lurks in the hearts and minds of teachers? (laughs)

Mark commented on the district involvement in working on the equity initiatives:

The district was really generous with the Taking it Up. ...they get so busy, and there hasn't been... a really great follow up. I think that sometimes things get a little bit lost in the shuffle...I do think that there has to be more of a space created for it.

He spoke about a training that was held involving teachers from his region and shared that it hadn't gone as well as he had hoped:

What I mean to say there, is that the gravitas, and the significance of it, was great, and [my] preparation, and my understanding... wasn't to the level that it should have been. That's a critique of my own participation. But also in the district leadership, and how we are actually rolling this out.

Mark had worked with principals in his region to spend a half-day sharing some of the training from CFEE that they experienced. At this inservice, each principal stood in front of the 300 or so teachers and publicly stated their equity stance. It was powerful, and yet he felt ill-equipped to take this on.

He shared that the planning process in some cases does not have the necessary things he requires for his staff. With so many schools involved, ideas got watered down and lacked the pedagogical basis he wanted. "So, we are more fluid, and that is a critique... of the district leadership. I think there is a lack of vision that way, in terms of what does [the equity work] mean?" Mark felt he pushed the envelope with [his administrative colleagues]. "But it takes a little bit of a different structure for us to do that work all together...to have it coordinated better." He questions, "Who is going to take control of this, who is going to be the person responsible? Well, [the district

administrator who leads this] doesn't necessarily communicate that well with us, about what we were going to do."

I asked Mark what his definition of social justice was. He commented that was a "tough question." He defined it as the condition "that we don't always read one point of view, or have one point of view be the expressed truth, and that we acknowledge different perspectives...that we allow voices to be heard." Mark shared his perspective on the importance of multiple perspectives:

There is history, and the world is part of a narrative, and if those are stories, we can't say that they are always objective. There is subjectivity to all those sorts of things. And, that it is a complex reality. That deserves a lot of multiple perspectives. But you know, the word, those two words social justice mean that there [must] be an element of tranquility or that people feel comfortable in your school, in their skin, in their position. And that they see that this system works for them, and that [we] are responsive to who they are as people. So, I think there are a lot of ways of looking at that. But I think the bottom line is whether people feel comfortable.

Mark expressed pride in the comments that the school's ELL students gave to visitors during a recent interview by state education officials. The students were asked about the treatment they received at his school, their academic performance, and the support they had at Tucker High School. Mark shared:

I think they acknowledged that things were very difficult for them. The subject matter was hard, but they also acknowledged that they feel comfortable at school. That they find that there are some problems, not that there aren't problems, and not that there aren't ignorant people. But by and large they felt acknowledged, supported, and continued to be better students.... That is part of social justice too. The fact that people feel that they are acknowledged. And that they are appreciated, for who they are. And not seen as a deficit. Because I see that a lot times, in some schools kids feel that they are a deficit and not a resource for the school, that their culture isn't appreciated.

As Mark spoke about the spirit and acceptance he wants students to feel, he shared events his staff has undertaken to be inclusive:

The Cinco de Mayo celebrations that we had at the school were phenomenal. Fashion show, with dancing and singing and a funny video. And kids were very, very respectful. So that warms my heart...very much. And I think we have a school that can celebrate differences, and recognize it, and that there was an interest in that. So, I think that is part of social justice too, that people

want to know about other people. And that they see it is important to learn about different perspectives.

Mark gave some examples of how teachers in his school were addressing social justice issues. “We bring up data and we look at how SPED students are doing, how our minority students are doing, and talk about it. I am not pleased at all with our failure rate, in our school in general.” He spoke about his efforts with staff to examine the achievement gap. Teachers were involved in a retreat where students and staff participated in focus groups and raised areas of concern around achievement, relationships, and other areas. Using that information, staff “had to come up with a list for our 2 to 3 year plan. So, we were able to vote on that. Through student voice, and through unpacking [their input], we were able to come to ...five [agreed upon] areas.” His one concern was how to keep equity from being a separate entity in the conversation and how to sequence the events to keep it as an integrated central objective:

What would those teachers say was the essence of what we presented? [My thinking] was so diffuse that it wasn't really clear. And my thinking is that since we have the lowest SES, and the highest minority, that we get a certain reputation here in Larkspur. People don't recognize the great things that we do. That we are achieving at high levels and that it is a different sort of school, that we're actually concerned about the success of all students, and not just the college bound students. I think that really living that mission statement of actively pursuing the success of all students is one that I bring up a lot. I think that teachers are starting to understand, although our results are not very good right now.

As Mark talked about his challenges at Tucker High School, he spoke about his plans for instituting some practices with staff:

I think my plan for next year, is a notebook with staff agreements, and documentation. If I want this to happen I better damn well document it. One of the first things I did when I came on board here was say listen, you guys don't write your objectives on the board, let's get that going. That was a huge undertaking because people didn't know me. I wasn't part of the interview process here... they opened it up didn't find the candidate they wanted, so they brought me in. I had to establish who I was. I like where we are at right now.

In reflecting on challenges with students he stated:

I need to talk about the young men that I am working with. It is very emotional and very painful. It is very hard to change the way they look at life and the way they look at school. A lot of them do not have male role models. Getting past that is hard, having worked with them, [written] plans with them, watched their games, contacted their parents; there is a certain amount of the I am a leader of this school, but when it gets right down to it....

Mark expressed that he works with a needy population, with a lot of needy kids. “The needs of the kids are so great that it is hard to say that we cannot reach them. We have drug issues ... kids involved in meth, and pot...” As he works with parents, counselors, and community resources to support their return to school he worries that they are not going to be successful:

I have a young man, who is in prison, and he and I are exchanging letters, he is so intelligent, and so capable. I think it is the easiest thing to say we are capable of growth; but, actually allowing those kids to be themselves and grow at the same time... If you can talk you can tell a story. I don’t care if it is misspelled, it’s interesting. I want to hear it, you can change it. Jason tells me that I am the first teacher that has believed in [him]. I don’t know that kids believe that we actually believe in them. Jason said that he tells the other inmates that he is writing his principal. I think it is the easiest thing [for us] to say kids are capable of growth, but actually allowing those kids to be themselves and grow at the same time... Seeing these young men that I really care about, not seeing them do well, not come to fruition, it is very hard.

Bruce interview 1. Bruce is a 41-year-old white male principal at Woodleaf Middle School in an urban area in east Larkspur. He has been a principal for three years. He is the only principal in the study who grew up outside of the northwest. At one point, he taught in New York in Brooklyn, Spanish Harlem, and the Bronx:

Most of the teachers at the schools where I worked were white. When I got out here everyone was talking about race and I thought how silly because you just deal with it. You have to learn how to work with kids of different races because that’s what you do.

Bruce shared that his experience with CFEE raised his awareness about his experiences in New York City. “I didn’t really know anything about issues around white privilege. When I started reading articles I thought wow, I really do have a lot of privilege I never realized I had, even when I was working in those settings.” He felt that CFEE “did strip you down, but you had time to be put back together again. Not all

trainings are that way.” Bruce felt working with folks of color helped him understand privilege in a way he did not expect. He had never had anyone challenge him about his ideas and he valued the opportunity to look inward. He remembers coming back from CFEE and an inservice where all the principals would share their equity stance. “I remember having to take a stance. Kind of like this is who I am as a white educator and this is my stance on race and what I was prepared to do.” He also saw a shift in his listening, especially with students:

Conversations with kids. I am more open to them now. To listening and seeing a perspective I may not have seen before. I feel much more able to connect with the families. I have a better sense of listening to understand and learning as we talk about their kid or their issues. I’m better at it now.

He personally grew from working with the Pacific Northwest Timeline of Race and Immigration History, developing understanding and unpacking the context surrounding racial issues. He talked about the affinity groups, where participants grouped by race and shared out the wants, needs, and what everyone should know about their race with the group. “Affinity groups were powerful...to see the people of color struggle to identify themselves...Brazilian, Mexican, all the differences within a group that is put together ...that was interesting to watch and think about.”

As Bruce thought about plans for the school as he returned from CFEE, he shared the struggle he faces in dealing with all the “stuff that happens in the day.” He gave an example of how he works to pick moments where people may be ready to hear about the equity pieces as a situation presents itself:

For example, the other day I had a teacher come up to me and refer to “those Mexican kids” and I said, “Whoa, hold on a minute. By using that term...” The teacher interrupted me and said, “Well, like they are Mexican.” I then told her, “I get that, but would you describe someone as a group of those white kids over there? Is that language you would use?” She responded, “No,” to me so I knew we made progress. By me pointing out in the moment, in a private and supportive way, that calling those students “those Mexicans” was really not appropriate, I think we started to help build understanding.

Bruce feels it is important to keep it relevant to staff and students as he raises equity issues:

I like having an opportunity like today, when we used a staff development video on social justice and poverty, to get people [to understand] that you don't give up on kids, why we can't give up on kids. People in our staff were applauding so I think every opportunity where you can see something like that and then link it back into what we're trying to doing with kids is much more authentic. Sometimes I think people are very, very wary of OK now we have to do a staff development on equity or here we're going to talk about race. You know, you have to keep it relevant to what's going on in your own school and your own kids and then find a ways to make it relevant. Like today, where it had a profound impact on folks. And we didn't start off by saying ok we're going to talk about equity right now. I think how you present it and knowing where it [connects to the work being done in their school is important.] We have a lot of staff here now who are CFEE trained so we have a staff pretty open to [looking at equity issues].

He also spoke about an initiative he is very proud of called GANAS which is specifically designed for Latino youth and connects them in their affinity group on a regular basis:

I'm really blessed to work in a school where we do have a program like GANAS which is specifically for Latino youth that reconnects them to their peers. But there needs to be support behind it and now we have 6, 7, and 8th grade Latino youth linked it into our programs. These kids come and they hang out and they go over to the university and they take field trips to the university where they are hooked up with MEChA program, a group that provides Machistas, who serve as mentors to the kids from the university. The university students come over [to the middle school] and so there's that link to college and middle school. It's really about developing leadership, reconnecting with your culture and there's the academic component where they say to each other "get your grades up! get the grades up!" They support each other not only in the cultural but the academic. Those kids have grown up to be mentors at the High School\ level.

I asked Bruce to think about the barriers he faced in leading his staff in understanding equity issues and white identity. He identified his biggest barrier in doing this work as himself:

My biggest challenge is me, myself. You know, it's just keeping it in the forefront because when things do come up, and you're being called to do the things happening for the district, like the new math initiative and all this stuff, you run into an issue of where's the time to do this? I think having that front and center where you keep reminding yourself these kids are dying now.

They're not graduating now regardless of the initiatives that are going on the building or anything like that.

He shared an experience at CFEE that he uses to remind himself of the importance of keeping this work in front of himself:

I've never forgotten at one of the CFEE groups one of my colleagues of color said, "White people don't go home and talk about black people. They don't talk about [equity] situations, but racism and things like that are common discussions around a table in a nonwhite family. And we talk about white people and things like that."

Bruce shared that this comment has really stuck with him. He commented that it is easy for him to walk away from his work on equity without consequence. "I can walk out when I've had a rough day and not think about those things. It's about keeping it in the front of my mind. I'm my worst enemy because I don't live it every single day."

Jason interview 1. Jason is a 57-year-old white male principal at Douglas Elementary and has been a principal for 19 years. He was born in a metropolitan area of the northwest and attended a school where he was in the minority as a white student. Jason started out as a special education teacher and eventually moved to the central office, working as the special education administrator. He felt a strong pull to return to the schools and, after a year off to study school-wide behavior systems, he returned to the district. As he was planning to return to the classroom, he was called to take a role at a district middle school where his help was needed to address specific issues around behavior. When he finished that assignment he took a job at a smaller district as a principal, and then returned to Larkspur to step into the principalship. As Jason shared his administrative experiences with me, it was clear that he knew where he was effective and, if he did not feel the school was a match for his skill set, he moved. At the time of the interview, he had just been told he would be moving to a magnet school with a very high socio-economic status (SES), and he felt concern about the placement. Jason sees his strengths in working with neighborhood schools; yet, district administrators all felt this school was in need of his leadership:

I am thinking, wait a minute. It is probably, it is one of the highest SES schools in the state. It's an alternative school. You have to drive to get there. You have to have a big old...whatever they are, Suburban [car]. It is a very, umm, it's not what you would call bash in the door of equity. So there are issues about the school being welcoming, being elitist, and being non-inclusive. So they think that, I think, I haven't heard this from anybody, but I am assuming, what they want is a white race, anti-racist leader. And they want a commoner to run that organization which is what I am.

Jason says he was raised to have what he calls common values about community and equity. It is who he is:

So I don't know how I feel about, being characterized as a white male leader. But yet, isn't that interesting? That it is the first time in my life, I have actually had to say, yeah you have a race and you have a gender. And yeah, it is a factor. My first thought was, well I don't like that. I don't like that idea.

I asked Jason to tell me about his experience at the CFEE seminar and what he has noticed about his perspective on equity and/or white identity. He shared that his learning prior to CFEE was based on mistakes that he had made professionally:

I had several really difficult situations with students and families of color, and quite frankly I could have played them differently. So I learned; those situations to me were hard learning experiences. But, I really learned from them. And in the end things turned out fine. But, I really had to think about things, and really get close and personal with some people about race. So, I am interested in it.

He spoke about being raised in a huge Irish Catholic family where everyone was treated the same. That experience caused him to question dealing with race. "So, why on earth would I customize my instruction for an African-American student? That is ridiculous. What am I supposed to have different curriculum for Chinese kids too? And Hispanic too? Well, that's not the point?" He said that what he learned from CFEE wasn't all new learning:

It's not like I went through the five-day intensive training, up at...where ever that was. And I really liked that, but it wasn't, I didn't learn it all there. But I will tell you, I am a workshop cynic. I mean, I am so hard to please. And so cynical, about people trying to train and pass on the latest thing. But CFEE was and I hate this word, was really transformational. I took a rash of abuse from my colleagues. I heard, "Jason, what is up? You're like the ultimate cynic. You don't go to those." I said, well, this one was good. "Come on." Nope, no buts.

No buts, it was excellent. I enjoyed it, I learned a lot. I met a lot of different people. And I learned a lot about myself, and I learned a lot about others. So that part was really unusual for me.

Jason was in the first group from Larkspur to go through the training. He attended with four people from his district. He really liked being in training with people who were not all white, that he had never met, and didn't know from across the state:

And I just, like for the first time, I could actually just sit there and listen, and not want to dominate. Because I dominate every conversation I have in my district. I just don't sit quietly. I always want to make a point, or I always want to cut people off; I always want to make my point. But at CFEE it was different. It was so comfortable listening and learning, and just absorbing. And thinking, and thinking, and thinking. More and more. And then it just kept going. So CFEE is personal transformation. CFEE was just realizing and experiencing other points of view. About race and culture, and I really have come a long ways in the last five years.

Jason has been pushing to move the conversation in his school to instruction and shared a story about a CFEE follow-up meeting he attended:

At the last CFEE [fellows] meeting I went to in Salem, I asked the group can we talk about teaching now? Can we talk about strong pedagogy and strong instructional strategies? Because, all we seem to be talking about is race. So, can we talk about instruction now? There was this gentleman who said, "look, you have your suitcase, and it's like unpacking your suitcase. You can have all the strategies; you can be the best damn teacher in the world. The pacing, the praise, the encouragement, the reinforcement, all that. But you have to know, how to help each child open up their case. And you have to help them experience that comfort before they can be comfortable, even with your outstanding strategies." And that's really been, that's been to me the most important thing I have learned in CFEE.

Jason does not feel that the work is all about race. He stated, "See, race is not the big answer. To me, it is a great vehicle for understanding and empathizing with differences; cultural differences and poverty. It's like we're not supposed to talk about poverty. But poverty is a huge issue." Jason talks about the detour white people want to take to poverty, "It's important to get back to race. Anti-racist leaders, if I understand them right, say don't go to poverty because you won't come back. Don't go to SES - you won't come back to race -we're talking about RACE!"

He is very interested in helping teachers make the connection between understanding race and equity and good instruction. “All these things that kids bring. The good teacher understands who they are, how to approach so they feel safe and respected. So, now race is one of those...race is this huge issue... so my big take away.”

I asked Jason to tell me how he defines social justice and to talk about his experience with social justice at his school:

Social[ly] just people in my estimation are not judgmental. And, you can almost leave it at that. Because if you're not that kind of person, you know the people that judge, the religious right, and a lot of so called liberal lefties, are very judgmental. And we really try to stay away from that. But the other piece that I think of is, I think it is a serious injustice to let kids leave who are not competent academically; so, the notion of a rigorous academic program is one of the best things you can do for somebody. But the context for that has to be [present]. It goes back to that context of yeah, my teacher understands me, my teacher values me. My teacher finds me to be interesting, and finds me to be an important part of our learning community. So that inspired global citizen starts right now, because you're a citizen of your school.

He envisions a student who understands what he or she does in the classroom impacts the quality of the instruction. He feels, “It's a big stretch for kids to actually feel responsible for the quality of their own instruction, by participating and that kind of stuff.” Jason has three concepts he and his staff think will set the foundation for the students; students who are competent, compassionate, and contributing. He believes if they can solidify these concepts then “We're starting to develop somebody who, when they go to middle school, will have their head on straight. And they will know when they see other kids that they have never seen before; they'll know how to handle that.”

In talking about the teachers in his school and how they experience working for social justice, Jason feels “This is a hard one. My teachers in this building, some understand this better than others, and they haven't grabbed onto it [like I am hoping.] This whole notion of inspired global citizen starts in their classrooms.”

I asked Jason what he saw as his biggest challenge in leading for equity in his school. He feels that it's the ability for him, as a white man, to truly understand what the injustices are and how they affect the families and students he works with daily. It

is a daily struggle for him “because quite frankly, I don’t really know and I don’t feel it. I can extrapolate, I can generalize a little bit, I can imagine, and I can try to empathize. But, I don’t know.”

Summary. In this first interview, three themes emerged in reviewing the data.

- 1) Impact of the CFEE training on principals’ understanding of white identity
- 2) Challenges in bringing the work to their schools
- 3) Sense of inability to lead the staff in race talk conversations

The first theme, the impact of CEE training on principals’ understandings of white identity was identified by all five principals as important in their development as leaders of equity. Principals commented that until they participated in the seminar, they did not understand what it meant to be white. For one principal, it was the first time he thought of himself as a white leader, while for another principal, she stated it was “life changing” and “changed the color of her cells.” All five principals spoke to the importance of the training in giving them an understanding of white identity and the historical context of race. Three principals commented it was an emotional experience that has remained in their consciousness. All principals commented on the seminar as not being heavy handed or bringing on feelings of guilt. Two principals spoke about the value of learning from and with people of color to help them understand the struggle in a personal way.

The second theme, the challenges of bringing the work to their schools, was also spoken about by all five principals. Issues that were named that challenged them included competing initiatives, teacher resistance to talk about race, lack of resources to send teachers to the seminar, and lack of district vision and support. Principals mentioned that they had concerns about the readiness of staff to hear about white identity and race without getting defensive and shutting down. Three principals commented about wanting funds for the district to send their staff through CFEE so that they would have a common experience on which to build. Each principal gave an example of taking on a teacher who was inappropriate with students or families around issues of race. Two principals talked about the need to create a safe space to talk about

race with staff and the difficulty of setting aside time when they were required to do training on new curricular programs, data analysis, and more.

The third theme involved all of the principals feeling they had the skill, knowledge, and ability to lead conversations on race with their staff. This feeling was expressed by all principals. One principal expressed fear of leading these conversations alone without support. Another principal shared, “It’s hard to be brave and lead this work,” while another principal said she was in no way ready to lead this work as she was still living and learning about herself. The three principals who shared examples of the work they were doing had support from the district equity coordinator Felicia. Two principals expressed a need for the district to clearly support this work through coaching, training, and a clear vision.

Focus group 1. The first focus group followed the first round of interviews and was designed to allow the group to go into depth on the research questions and allow insight into the principals’ experiences around race, equity, and white identity. The time allotted was approximately 90 minutes and prompts were designed to elicit dialogue around their experience in the CFEE seminar, their experience returning to their schools after the seminar, what actions they took, and what challenges they faced in raising staff awareness on white identity and equity issues. The questions are listed in Chapter 3.

The focus groups were held offsite in a private setting to allow for confidentiality and minimize interruptions. As the session began, the principals reviewed the four agreements developed: Stay Engaged, Experience Discomfort, Speak your Truth, and Expect/Accept Non-Closure (Singleton & Linton, 2006). We also discussed the importance of confidentiality to support open and candid conversation. Throughout the focus group I asked questions (listed in Chapter 3) to spark conversation among the participants. As they discussed the questions, I digitally recorded their responses and took researcher notes.

When asked about their experience in the CFEE seminar, the principals all spoke about the impact of the training. Mark shared, “I just remember it as being a

complete journey of beginning and baby steps, and how profoundly affected I was by the presentation, and how humbled I was by what was discussed.” He felt he was pretty aware of cultural issues and his realization of the “position of power because I’m white, it was something new for me to say. And I just felt like I had been to a different place, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, and it was a pretty heavy thing for me.” Mark also commented, “It was intellectually engaging as well as emotionally [sensitive,] and I think that it was purposeful. I really felt like the theoretical and the practical really met, had a real strong union at those meetings.”

Bruce was really affected by the opportunity to hear from people of color:

I guess to me one of the big pieces that really affected me was very rarely am I in a situation where I’m actually being forced into dialogues and having to listen to colleagues of color. And so when they were sharing some of their experiences it wasn’t something you could ignore anymore and it made me feel really uncomfortable, some of the things that were said. And I just started thinking back about that. You know, very rarely do you really get a parent’s conversation that’s unbiased, you know, there’s usually a lot more tension, at least at school, where there’s situations going on. So it was really good for me...in addition to all that other stuff, I just remember I felt it very personally aimed towards me yet it was just their experience.

Bruce also noted that he had never had the opportunity to hear honest dialogue about what his colleagues of color experience and how it impacts their work:

I think I’ve done a lot of work with equity, diversity issues, and things like that, but usually it’s with other white folks and there’s very few people who are of color in the room and oftentimes I haven’t heard those kind[s] of really deep-seated, painful hurt as a result of this system of power that’s been set up. So for me that was hard to hear. That’s what made me most uncomfortable about that whole week; really hearing that in a different way than I think I’ve ever really heard before.

Tricia spoke about feeling the training took her from where [she was] and she was able to develop new understandings. She shared, “CFEE changed the color of my cells. Just a little bit. And it made me different. It’s like I hear different, I see different. Sometimes I go into a conversation different, I take feedback different. It’s all different.” She spoke about the challenge of the training:

It was a challenge. It was being allowed to be challenged in a safe way and then not feel like you're stupid because you said something stupid. There wasn't anybody saying anything stupid. And it was, I think it was something that a facilitator said a lot, I can't remember what it was, but there's no right or wrong, it's just you are where you are. My experience was I'm a different person because I went through it.

Mark echoed this sentiment:

I felt there was no aha, gotcha, you know, you son of a bitch. It was gentle. It was like, it was with love that I was taught, and I really felt that. I admired that a lot and it really made me listen a lot better when I felt like my voice was not denied and that I had my point of view, my racial heritage, my cultural background and was not going to be denied, but that it was important to understand the racial implications of things. I thought it was very well taught.

Cara called the CFEE training a unique experience:

I agree that it was, you got to kind of do it your way. I did feel somewhat challenged, like you were saying, Mark, and I got really emotional. I don't usually get really emotional. I felt really challenged if we didn't speak. And so on one hand, they were saying do it your way and participate in your own manner, yet on the other hand I felt... pushed to speak. Not that that was bad, it ended up being good. But I think, when I went to trainings I always worry about is it real, is it canned, is there something behind this, you know, what are they looking for? And I've had some previous experiences where it was kind of a gotcha thing, and this one didn't feel that way. But I know I wondered if it would be.

The group talked about the challenge to speak up in the seminar. A conversation occurred where the group who attended Cara's seminar recalled hearing from an African-American female facilitator that when white people do not speak up, she was left to feel they were not an ally or engaged. There was some push back from the whole CFEE group and Cara became emotional and felt put on the spot. Tricia reflected on this event saying, "Some people were saying, you know, silence feels judgmental; some people were saying that the silence is mine, I get to be silent. So that was, that was really tough." Bruce added:

But it is hard when you're talking about these issues if there's one person silent, you don't get a read. That's one thing I really appreciate, is hearing all the different perspectives because that's really what helped me grow. And so there are times when you feel uncomfortable, but I can see, I don't know, it's interesting.

Mark also had a perspective to share on being challenged in the seminar:

One of the things that really stuck with me is, so I have all these beliefs about being able to love and communicate well with a whole bunch of people, different cultures, different peoples, and I have a little bit of experience that way living abroad and being in a bilingual marriage, bicultural relationship. And yet my self-concept is not as important as what I do with it. So how am I anti-racist? And can I interrupt discussions? Can I interrupt the shit that sometimes goes down? And I find that I'm the type of person that I would much prefer to have a dialogue with somebody and really understand them, than to call them on shit and be confrontational. At the same time, I think that that anti-racist stance is with me now, that I am more aware of that and calling people on that. Although my style is to say, hey, talk to people on an individual basis, meet with them, you know, tell me more about that. It's kind of weird because at the CFEE seminar I was called out. But I was called out in a really structured way, logical, sequential way. I was taught then I was asked if it made sense.

Our second question addressed how the principals took action upon returning to their schools after the training. Mark spoke about the experience he had in leading a conversation at work on race and equity issues:

So I don't have those, you don't have necessarily those skills, or that common knowledge, common language to be able to dialogue with somebody in a big group. And that's very contentious, and I think it could be very, very counterproductive, but this whole idea of being more, okay, I'm white, I have these beliefs and I know in my heart that they're right, but am I really anti-racist? Do I do stuff that indicates to others that I'm an ally? And that was a really strong statement in the whole [seminar], was find allies, who can you talk about [this with]? And I haven't done that. I haven't purposely found that ally. I guess I have my allies that I know I can speak with.

Cara shared, "I didn't return thinking I could just start having a lot of conversations around equity and race. For Forest Glen, we're 50% diverse and we're one of the elementary schools in the community that has, well, any diversity." Cara shared that her approach is to "lead by example or action versus the teaching, direct language kind of [approach]. I try very hard to just model it."

Tricia had some experiences immediately on returning to her school. She credits having a Latina ally to work with who will challenge her all the time. "She will

challenge the things she hears that I say. She challenges processes.” An example was a play that the high school was putting on in the district:

She said, “I don’t want that.” She’s Puerto Rican, she said, “that’s a racist play and I don’t want it advertised here.” We had a big deal about that. And for me, I don’t get to not take sides anymore. Like, I wouldn’t have thought of that, but I don’t get to not take sides. You’re either a positive bystander or you’re a negative bystander, and around those issues I get to be a positive bystander, I get to take a side. I have to. And I have to be an ally. That’s part, too, that’s changed. I don’t get to brush it off.

Tricia also spoke about the need to listen as she returned to Hoover:

When I came back I remember thinking, I have to do more listening, I have to ask better questions and I have to listen more, I have to understand who someone is and what their fears are, because they’re not going to trust me. They don’t know where my circle overlaps their circle; they don’t know where my experiences are similar to theirs. And so we have to find that common ground before I’m going to have any trust.

The conversation moved to the notion of talking about race with people who have not been through the CFEE training. Bruce shared:

It takes a lot of background. You can’t just have a conversation with someone that hasn’t really thought about it before. I find I’ve had some conversations with my secretaries around some of the stuff, and the conversations are literally an hour long because you’ve got to put the background in there. The [seminar] that we took... had the background and the small individual [to build meaning]. So they took us through this whole, you know, almost inculcated in how to speak about it. You know it’s almost like you can’t use detours, you can’t use that word without reading the article, without practicing it with your staff, things like that. We did the timeline with our staff and so after that it’s like, okay, after that you can start to build some groups of people that kind of understand what you’re talking about.

Tricia agreed saying, “I find that sometimes I have to think about how I’ll share an idea in a way that people will get it without all the background information. And so that’s kind of tricky for me.” She feels that going through a CFEE training and changing her perspective doesn’t mean that she is good at the training and conversation part of this work:

There seems to be that assumption, and that was something I left with, was this idea that I’m not going to be good at this. This is internal work, and I’m not there, I’m not the leader of this because I’m not at that place. I can lead by

example; I can lead by what I say and what I don't say. I can lead in how I respond to challenges from people who say things. I can say, that's racist, or, ooh, you didn't just say that, did you? Did you say that? Or did you just do that? Did you just say a hip-hop group can come to our school and there's not a single black person in it? Really? You did that? That's how I respond to it. But to lead it? I'm not equipped. And I do feel guilt, and I do feel that pressure to somehow be the leader in it when it's a journey and the journey's way down here and I'm maybe this far along because I haven't lived the life of an African-American family or a Latino family or a gay family. I have not done it.

Cara commented that there are two big issues she faces as a principal. "They're a big staff, and we're an elementary school, [with] over 70 staff. I'm the only administrator so without having people who've gone through the experience, I find it very challenging to have many conversations that are CFEE connected." Cara's plan was to have more conversations around equity and race with her staff. "That's something I'm constantly thinking about, encourage more conversations. That is a big challenge. Part of it's the competing needs. When we have training days I have people asking for different parts of the day to work with staff." She struggles to find ways to get equity on this agenda because there are so many things they are required to address.

Our final question centered on the challenges and hurdles in taking up equity issues in the school and district. Mark talked about the lack of understanding or awareness around the difficulty of being an immigrant in our country. He said, "So my biggest thing is I don't know how to change people's heart, I don't know how to give them empathy. I've done articles, I've talked about stuff. You relate to that look. This is hard for these people." He grew up with the melting pot ideal and sees the shift now to everyone having their own mosaic:

It's recently come to my attention that you can intellectualize this to the nth degree but until people actually feel it and know it, and understand it and empathize with somebody's position and point of view, that it is beautiful that they have, that this is a strength, a moment of strength, not weakness, that our Latino students and our African-American students have things to show us and teach us, and tell us about. It always seems to me like the kids that fail have teachers that find the negative points rather than finding how much their students know, and measuring their growth, for heaven's sakes.

Tricia could relate to Mark's point of view around being white and not having or appreciating the perspective and background of races and cultures different than hers; yet, shared where her white perspective did serve a purpose in working with white people on race:

I have to tell you, I went to a black principal's school. She asked me to come and talk to the staff about CFEE stuff because she had been beating her head against the wall. She was an African American and they weren't listening to her. I said what I had to say, and I think I probably said very similar things to what she said, and they listened to me. So I was white, talking to a white staff, and they listened to me. Because she called me later and said, when I walked back into that room they were a different group. I don't know what you said to them, but they were different.

Bruce shared that his biggest hurdle was around building capacity with his staff. Having taught in New York City, he worked with many kids of color and at-risk students, and he learned quickly if you didn't bring in their culture, you wouldn't be successful. Moving to the northwest required him to make a switch as the approach to working with students of color was very different:

I've got to tell you, when so many people said equity before, I cringed. And a lot of times these [seminars] have been done-- I remember at different equity trainings just feeling the gotcha, gotcha, gotcha, and then there's no putting people back together. And so it's like people just turned off to it. So I feel like CFEE really allowed some deeper conversations to occur, to get over that hump. I feel like sometimes you start having these conversations about equity...and it kind of meets roadblocks because if you haven't been through CFEE it's a challenge. That's the biggest challenge for me is finding ways to keep people moving on that line. And I think we've got great folks that want to lead that and want to work with these kids. So it's just finding little ways of keeping that going because the momentum is just starting to pull.

Another challenge that surfaced in the dialogue was the lack of teachers of color in the district. All of the principals agreed they were not as successful in recruiting, hiring, and keeping teachers of color. Bruce commented on the fact that he frequently sees student teachers who are black and Latino in his school, but when the hiring pools are formed, there are none of them included:

It seems like the pool of candidates never has minority candidates in it. I need to educate myself on who I need to talk to and where the resources are to pull

more folks in. That's a problem, because we do not have even close to equity with teachers.

Tricia commented that she had been successful in hiring teachers at the elementary level, but another principal convinced them to transfer to his school at the end of a school year.

Cara spoke about her need for feedback on how effective she is in doing this equity work:

It's like I need someone in the building that will have these conversations, or will let me know...I need someone, if there is a mistake or a wrong turn, that someone would say that. I don't know how to judge if it's working or not, that's the thing. Is it working?

She feels confident that her families of color are happy in the school and they are connected in that they are involved in the parent group and participate in school activities. Tricia agreed saying, "You feel like all the time, am I doing this right? Am I doing enough?" The uncertainty about getting this work right and being effective had Cara once again surface the need for feedback. "I wish there was someone that would interact and follow along, let me know. I don't get a lot of feedback on it." Tricia added, "You're right, we don't get told we're doing a good job around this stuff because who's going to tell you?"

Summary. The focus group allowed principals to interact around questions and the themes that emerged. These included the following:

- 1) Attending the seminar did not equip them to lead this work in their school and they lack confidence.
- 2) It is difficult to achieve momentum without having more staff trained in CFEE content to create a critical mass.
- 3) They are hungry for feedback on how they are progressing on implementing equity practices.
- 4) They feel the district equity coordinator provides essential support and is over-booked.
- 5) Their view of themselves as white leaders was a new insight.
- 6) They feel they are hampered by not having more staff of color.

There was much conversation about the need for support to work with their staffs around race. All agreed that having a perspective shift did not mean they were capable of stepping out and leading this work. There is a need for support to conduct this work, and they would appreciate having feedback on the progress they are making. The notion of the need for continued internal work was also discussed and two principals spoke about their need to continue to go deep. They felt they could lead by example at this point, but could not teach it to staff. The importance of how to share an idea that will allow all staff without background in this work to understand and grow was also identified as a difficult skill to develop. It would be helpful to have all staff trained in CFEE and the sooner the better. Finally, one principal commented that he did not know how to change people's hearts and he really struggled with that notion.

The principals spoke openly about new insights they gained about being a white leader. There was discussion about the need to be explicit and speak up while discussing race; and one principal shared she struggled to do that. Another principal talked about the assumptions made when a few people are silent and how difficult it is to get an understanding of their perspective. They also spoke about the way they are approaching staff when they see something that needs interrupting. They all talked about finding the "teachable moment" and doing so in a way that did not call out or embarrass a staff member. They see there are still many aspects to white identity that they are not fully aware of and want to learn.

Focus group 2. The third meeting with the principals was the second focus group in which they delved deeper into the work happening in the district and the schools. All five principals attended and questions were developed to explore district support of their work, stories of success in leading for equity, how educator preparation programs supported this work, and other issues that emerged from the dialogue. The focus group was held in the same location as the first, allowing principals to feel comfortable with their environment.

Our conversation began with dialogue about the support principals felt from Felicia, the equity coordinator at the district office. Mark spoke to the importance of having someone centrally who truly understands the equity work they are involved in. He stated, “Being able to talk to somebody downtown, Felicia, who knows who I am, and we’ve experienced something together, is probably the most significant thing to me, that I have somebody downtown who understands and we have a common understanding.” At the high school, Mark felt:

It’s the most difficult work that I do [is] when a racial issue comes up and it’s difficult to deal with. One of the things that’s given me a lot of courage is I know our district equity person so well. I talk to the kids in a different way than I think I did before CFEE. Mark knew the district equity person understood that he will talk about race with students, and explore whether issues are racially motivated.

Cara shared, “The elementary principal group started courageous conversations [while meeting at the district], and we met in a circle having conversations. I don’t know [the last time we did that], the last time we had a courageous conversation.” She expressed regret that these conversations were not happening anymore. “Those were good conversations and I think it allowed for people to talk out any concerns they might have or issues that are going on at school.”

Tricia agreed that Felicia was a support as she began her equity work. “As we began this, I always knew that there was somebody I could ask the question to, it was that person, that key person.” When it comes to support in the work, Tricia says Felicia is integral. She also notes, “But our region has, keeps pushing each other, keeps pushing each other, keeps pushing each other. What are you doing, not letting each other off the hook, because the competing things are big.” The competing things she identifies are the district reading, math, and Response to Intervention trainings.

Jason also expressed appreciation for the district support, especially around the regional meetings that were held around equity and race:

I really appreciated in our region ... when you choose a goal as a region and work towards it. We had that whole day at the end [of the semester] where [we] had all the teachers there and [all the principal’s stood in front of the region’s teachers and were sharing] our equity stance. And for me, that really

forced me to move forward, because my biggest barrier doing this work is I'm white. I mean, it's the urgency factor, and you don't get that unless you keep having little experiences [to push you].

He also stated that Felicia and other folks keep up the constant push when they hold the regular district CFEE meetings for participants who have been through CFEE.

Cara shared a concern about the district office practice and decision making around staffing procedures in the face of significant budget cuts the district is facing:

I was really hoping the district would move towards... retaining staff for minority groups, and it looks like that's not going to happen. So we're going to have 51% diversity at our school...many of them being our Latino kids. We do have staff who we thought about when we hired, [who are diverse and speak Spanish] It wasn't the [only] reason but it was something we certainly considered. And they've all received the pink slip so they're all leaving. That just worries me that we do all the work to really take care of the kids and bring in a more diverse staff, and it just doesn't go anywhere. And again, there's a whole lot going on and that's not one [of the issues] that we're going to tackle at this point, but I hope in the future that's something we look at.

Jason added, "It goes to show, though, it's only important as long as the economy's good," and Mark added, "It's a union issue." Bruce had thoughts to share on collaboration with the union and the reduction-in-force (RIF) issues:

So it's that piece, and then another thing like with the Association. It's just like we have to work with them and it's like we were talking about negotiations at one of our administrative meetings and it was like, I'm thinking, you know, can't you get this shit straightened out before we send out RIF notices? Why can't we do this? Well, automatically it went into, well, the union and you know, the Association and the union-- And I'm thinking, you know, what do you think they're saying? So we have this schism and we're not working together at all, we're not.

Tricia agreed on the value and importance of having people who are not white on her staff. She has a Latina ally on whom she relies:

She is brave and amazing, is always challenging my thinking and the way I'm looking at something. And if I didn't have her I would be far less down this road. She hates having conversations with our staff because we are so far not down the road.

Tricia shared that as long as her Latina staff member talks with her and shares her challenges with her, Tricia will take it up with the staff. She adds, "You know, [I

know] it drives her crazy. ...[and] without her what would I be doing? So you lose those staff and [it impacts our ability to do this work.]”

Jason spoke about the need for allies to challenge the work with him so that he is not the only one responsible for it. He raised the notion of moving from conversations to actions. In the training, participants were encouraged to engage in conversations that spoke to the point, did not sanitize language, named the equity issues, and could be uncomfortable. They were labeled Discourse II conversations or DII. Jason shared:

For me, it's like I've been struck with this thing, you know these DII conversations we're supposedly having?... they're really not. And I think our [principal] circle stuff is more of a warm-up. But the thing I've been really struck with, it's just this phrase I've had in my mind. Just dare to act. Instead of DII conversations it's DII action. So just do it. Let's not talk about all this stuff, but I think talking about it, it's a really white way to do it. Like this whole CFEE thing, it's totally a white thing, man. It's like it's so polite and it's so organized and it's so...I watched this special on Tupac Shakur this weekend, and it was amazing. I'd seen it before and it's just like bam, whoa, get out of my way, because this guy was into it in a really deep way and really about a lot of pretty cool stuff...

But I'm just thinking, for example, my school was kind of in therapy around that they're white and rich and they should feel guilty about it, and it's really an interesting phenomenon. So we had a facilitator cued up to work with us for four sessions. We had one parent meeting and one staff, and I thought, okay, I think we've got it now, I don't think we need to talk about it a whole lot more, let's just do some stuff.

So call it like you want it. A stance on equity could be a really strong coalition, alliance between administrative and the certified. I guess that's a long way of saying, it's like I think we've got to be looking at doing stuff and talking about it later. Or maybe it didn't work well or it did work well. And I like the stories, I love the CFEE stories, that's why I go. But just kind of getting some things done.

We shifted the conversation to actions principals have taken in the schools since CFEE and Jason shared an initiative his school is stepping into:

So for example, we're looking at parent-generated funding priorities and the first one's going to be \$50,000 in literacy support in English and French. And you think French, what are you talking about? But that's what makes low

income, disadvantaged kids drop out. So we want it to be, you can have all these slogans about equity but if you don't have an infrastructure in place, like IIPM to me is the best thing this district's ever done for equity, period. It blows CFEE away, it totally does, because you're actually doing stuff, you're looking at people who aren't performing well and who are they and how do we make this better, how do we get it better?

So instead of having parent conversations about equity stuff we're going to have a conversation about are you willing to pony up \$50,000? And that's the conversation. I don't know that anybody's even going to see it as an equity stance but it's a tremendous stance. It will be a tremendous stance on the part of the community to say, yes, we do, we understand what it's for and we support that. We support those pieces.

Tricia also shared steps her school was taking to connect with students of color:

So when you guys were talking about doing something, [I wanted to share how our equity work] sparked a really great conversation at my school because we've done something. We have put an immense amount of energy into a program called AVID that when you look at who was failing and who had huge behavior issues, [it was] a lot of our Latino students, some of our African Americans, and many of our poor students. So we started AVID, got a lot of those kids in there that were struggling and especially failing who had lots of behaviors... it's completely changed their lives. We just took them on a college trip and they're all headed for college. Behavior referrals have plummeted for that group of kids, academic scores have gone way up. And it still to me does not address the issue of how comfortable those kids are to be who they truly are and who they truly want to be in our building. Are they absolutely seen as a beautiful Latina or a strong African-American student, or is a kid still comfortable to come to school with the same pair of shorts he wears every day because that's the only pair of shorts he's got? That's the other part of the puzzle. We did something, and we are doing something and we're addressing their academics, they're getting AVID, [and academic support.] But where's the other stuff [they need] that we're [not] addressing for him as well, or her as well? That's where I'm not as comfortable.

Cara commented that in her school:

We're taking that next step, where we're introducing the staff to more conversations or having the kids engage in more conversations, I don't know, I do think the elementary schools in the self-contained model have the ability to develop the relationships so that any question that comes up, any conversation that might happen on the playground can be addressed immediately in a community that we've worked hard to build. Each of the classrooms have a tribe and they can immediately bring up conversations and talk about the racial

comment or the word gay or whatever it might be. And the kids feel safe because that's what we've worked on, building that community.

As the group shifted to discuss some of the barriers they faced at their schools, Cara shared, "Time and competing [interests.] The adult competing interests. There are people losing their jobs, people's husbands losing work. There are all those things that our adults are going through right now." She spoke of the difficulty the staff is facing and feeling the need to take care of, protect them, and support them. Tricia shared a frustrating experience in working with a staff member that the group easily related to:

For me the hardest conversations are with staff, and that's where the work we do at CFEE and the region, and our administrators in my region where it really helps, because we can practice it. I hear things. So one of my staff members says, "Well, I asked and all of the black kids in my class said that they don't feel discriminated against but it's all about being gay at our school." And she totally missed the conversation. It's how are they feeling in their own skin, walking around our school -- are they feeling like they can be an African-American man in our school? Or are they not feeling the prejudice because they aren't fully in their being? I mean, that was kind of where we were going, and she just kind of went off to this, "but I asked." And because we've been working together as a staff I had another staff member say, "Yeah, that's a really good thing you did, but I don't think that's the point." And so it's having the conversations, even if you're going to screw them up really bad.

Cara talked about the alternative schools across town that are available to students and families, and that her families are not going to choose to go to those schools because she does not believe the kids will feel they belong. Bruce challenged:

So, what have we done to facilitate that? What have we done to select that? What about our superintendent's [dealing] with some busing issues. Well, this little thing about busing low-income students to alternative schools can't be that difficult. This is a district policy, this is not state policy. And most of our transportation money's federal. So it's not like a big money burner. But you're right, that access is [an issue] and we certainly see it. But I love the idea of saying, isn't that where you want your achievement kids? Don't you want them in a college prep track? But you've got to have the horsepower.

Bruce stated that "I have teachers who I know are going to fall. They're going to fail; they're going to go by the wayside because they don't believe it. They don't believe it." Cara asked, "The equity?" Bruce answered, "They'd never say it." Tricia

added, “I have a few kids that people say, at least the teachers say it, they’d say first year I was there, well, that kid doesn’t belong here.” Cara commented, “That’s why that kid has now moved over to my school.” Tricia shared how she dealt with the teacher:

And what I said to that teacher is, first of all, those words are to never come out of your mouth again in this school building or anywhere else as long as you’re working for me, ever. And we’re going to work on changing your attitude. You’re going to stop the words and we’re going to work on changing your attitude. I don’t care who they are, I don’t care how low they are, if they’re on an IEP, you’re as good of a teacher as the person that’s across the hallway. Other schools don’t kick kids out because they don’t belong there. When they have a kid walk in the door who doesn’t speak English they take that kid and they love him until that kid’s speaking English, and you will do the exact same. With kids who don’t speak Spanish... I mean, I was just so, don’t ever... And some people probably never did change their attitude, but they changed what they said.

Jason shared a metaphor he likes to think of that helps him understand why sometimes it is difficult to talk about issues of concern with families:

Going to school for some people is like going to a hospital, or going into the clinic. Now, think about your desire to have them come in and engage with you. What if a physician at a clinic called you up and said, “Hey, I’d like to talk to you more about the clinic.” That’s the last thing I want to do, right? If you think about it, we love school, we love it. It’s a happy place, my happiest place except for home. But it isn’t for everybody. Why isn’t it, why isn’t it happy for you? And in the end, often we don’t really want to hear it, because what we put a premium on is really self-control, doing your work. These are very, very strong white values and actions that we want kids to do, and one of the things is we don’t want you mouthing off and telling us what’s wrong.

The principals had a lot to say about their administrative preparation programs. Cara shared that her cohort had a lot of conversation about equity, equality, and whiteness. She remembers it as an intense experience:

We had a lot of opportunities to have conversations. Most of them started, though, as pretty adversarial. And so what you had was people of color wanting to be, well, confrontive. I don’t know what a better word is -- but really confront this inequity and white people not knowing what’s happening and being in the middle of something, then just backing off and not having that conversation. So it was really, really an intense situation. In the end did we all learn something? Absolutely. But it’s kind of like when you get into a game,

you don't know the rules. It's almost, sometimes that's good, it works for some people, but it works for some people because they get challenged by that, and for other people it's like, I don't know the rules. At the time it was really uncomfortable. At the time it was really adversarial. That was okay.

Tricia questioned Cara about the structure that was provided. "Did anybody frame it for you, to say, you know, this is a difficult conversation you're having, it's organic, it's going to be uncomfortable but I want you to stay in it." Cara did not remember if that happened but she stated, "I wish as an undergraduate there had been more opportunities. I think there was the, remember one person that got to have conversations with teacher prep kind of people about multiculturalism." Tricia remembers her experience where "We got nothing. Other than situations like that, where there were people who were just pushing back, pushing back for the conversations to be real." Bruce shared that he worked in a program back east:

Not for my admin but for my teaching. And the kids I was teaching, they were majority black, Hispanic, you know what I mean. So you had to change. Those are the kids that you had and so you had to move them forward and so you figured out how to bring their lives in, but there was none of this overt discussion about race. And so you ask about the programs... I think there needs to be a mentorship piece, where you're matched up with people who aren't like you, that don't share the same dominant culture. Otherwise I don't know how you're going to have these conversations. It's not a conversation a white person would just have on their own, because they wouldn't know to have it.

Bruce recalled that, as he worked with diverse students, he shared with the students that he really did not know how to have this conversation because white people do not talk about race because they do not have to. He shared with them that he learned people of color talk about white people all the time. He remembers sharing this with the black students he took to the leadership conference and they said, "Oh, my God, you're right. We do talk about white people!" He felt a mentorship with a person across race was essential because, "I didn't get that move until CFEE, probably, when people said, okay, as a white educator, how else do I talk and piss people [of color] off?"

Mark talked about resonating with what Bruce shared. “I think there’s a lot of truth to what you’re saying about putting yourself in situations where you have to learn. That growth that you’re going through is so important to continue to do as an educator.” Bruce added, “It’s almost like you need a light bulb, like an outlet. You take a white person, stereotypically here, who’s learning to teach, you teach them all this stuff but then [they] default to what they know at birth, first 3 or 4 years of your life, right?”

He added those are the years beliefs are solidified “so it’s almost like you need a socket, and every other day you’ve got to stick your finger in the socket to remember what you’re doing, to interrupt.”

Summary. Examining the data in this focus group, the most prominent theme in this dialogue was around the challenges principals faced in taking up this work. Whereas in the first focus group they spoke about personal challenges and the growth they experienced, in this focus group, they spoke about common challenges. They spoke about their work with teachers in sharing information around white privilege, the importance of support from the equity coordinator, and the efforts they had undertaken in their schools.

As the principals spoke about challenges, they mentioned the importance of having people who are not white on their staffs, and the difficulty they have in keeping the ones they do have, mostly due to budget cuts that reduce staffing. As they hire people of color, they are sad to see these critical staff people let go because there is no expressed priority to keep them. There are also times where principals from other schools influence Spanish-speaking staff to transfer to their schools, setting up a bit of competition among the buildings. This issue resonated with me as I experienced similar behavior from principals with whom I worked. Scarcity of staff of color is a perception many principals share as they attempt to build pools of candidates that have diverse teachers and assistants.

Schools’ abilities to fundraise to provide support for initiatives were also mentioned in their conversation. Schools with higher socio-economic status

populations are able to easily raise funds, sometimes amounting to as much as \$50,000. One principal shared how his parents were demonstrating social justice understanding by funding extra support for struggling students rather than funding a curricular program like art, music, or PE. Since the populations of white students in these schools are higher, this created an inequitable situation that can be frustrating.

The principals spoke about the urgent need for support and mentoring as they take up equity work. One principal expressed disappointment that the elementary principal group stopped their regular meetings where they received peer support and where equity was a focus. This group met regularly and held “Courageous Conversations” at each gathering. It was an agreed-to agenda item and allowed them to share strategies, challenges, frustrations, and solutions to common issues.

Their district administrator was a strong support for this conversation and encouraged this agenda item at their regular meetings. Somehow, the focus on equity shifted as competing initiatives came into focus. Issues around academic intervention, the effective use of data, professional learning communities, and more filled their agendas and also competed for staff development time, which was already scarce.

Principal preparation programs and teacher education programs were also mentioned as woefully inadequate in readying students for the work around race and equity in schools. The principals shared that, when the issue of race did arise, it often blew up and ended with people more disconnected and angry.

The principals also spoke about some of the actions they had taken in their buildings to surface the conversations about race and white identity. Three of the principals spoke of the importance of having Felicia available to help them. The notion of mentoring principals as they take up this work had strong agreement. The principals expressed several times the feeling that they were not ready to lead this work, yet understood the importance and urgency to do so. Mentoring was clearly an expressed need. They had an express request for finding a way to create allies, both white and of color, and to have those allies be comfortable in challenging their practices and systems in place. They acknowledged that they do not have an equity

lens that is ever-present and may not know when they are communicating or structuring school practices that may be offensive.

Interview 2. The second interview occurred approximately 6 to 8 weeks after the first interview and both focus groups. These interviews were conducted in person and by telephone, depending on the principals' schedules. The design of these questions allowed principals to explore their understanding of white identity affecting their leadership, how they were using race talk in their schools and how they related to families and students of color as a white school leader. I was especially interested in seeing if any of their understandings or insights had shifted since beginning this research study.

Tricia interview 2. In my second interview with Tricia, I asked her to share her thinking around being a white school leader. She shared her understanding was emerging. She said, "I think that's probably been the biggest thing, the realization that my reality varies, is very different from that of students with different ethnic backgrounds, especially students of non-white ethnic backgrounds." She hears things differently now. She listens differently as she speaks with kids and families. She also catches herself listening differently to her white colleagues as they talk about issues of color and diversity. She shares, "I guess I am more aware, but I'm still not there by any stretch of the imagination." When she spoke about race talk and her ability to speak the realities and struggles around race she notes that people want to make it like a check list:

You know, our black kids don't feel discriminated against so we're fine here. When I really bring up things, they aren't hearing racial terms, great, no racial slurs, check. She believes it is a lot more than a checklist that can be quantified. Tricia asks, but how do they feel? Are they able to fully be themselves and fully present here at our school? Are our black youth able to be a black man in our school, and how would we know that? How would we know that he or she wouldn't? People look at me kind of cross-eyed, like what are you talking about? He's doing great, his grades have improved, his behavior is better. Is that because he is feeling more comfortable in his skin or is he learning to play the game better? How do we know that? It could be that or it could be other things. So, what are we doing to allow kids to be fully present in the skin that they live and the experiences that they live in their

hearts and their souls, not just their skin? So how do we know that? Not that we are doing a bad job but how do we know what kind of job we are doing? What's our measurement? And that's a really difficult conversation to have with people who haven't been to the training and had conversations [like this] before.

Tricia talked about how she sees the effects of her work in the leadership her staff is beginning to show. The school is starting a class this year called the Creative Conversation class. All students will take it, and a small group has taken up the curriculum. She shared that:

I can't always just wait for the grown-ups to get it. I need the kids to get it. I need the kids to know how to have a conversation about race and equity issues. To know why you can't say things like, oh you're Jewish, that's a penny on the ground. I bet you want that. Or to the Asian students, is that rice for lunch every day? I need to get them to be able to talk about where their power is and how to use that in a better way. This class will support that.

We wanted to have [conversations on race] at some of our staff meetings, but it's a little scary with our staff. But [we do] have fishbowls with people who do want to have conversations in front of the other staff members, and just kind of have those others that don't want to have it or participate at least listening.

It is important to Tricia to get people into this experience and make sure that key people have gone through the seminar so they are all in the state of becoming a supportive staff. And creating the environment to move into difficult conversations as a new principal gives her pause, but does not stop her:

I feel like I came into this new school where I had to build credibility and it's a really hard school, and a very difficult staff. And though you have to tread really carefully, and even with that we are doing stuff. I think it's just trying to be and become and do it overtly and out loud so that people feel safe to do that and it's an expectation of leadership. You know it's like when you're in a classroom and you're a teacher and you know that kid that nobody likes because they're maybe not clean or not organized or not very cute. You make them the teacher's pet. You find the things that are wonderful about them and praise them in front of everybody about it, and pretty soon other people aren't as mean to them. And they become cool. So if I can make seeing the kids in a certain way or a family in a certain way or stop a conversation that's going "you know that family," I can say "yes we don't know that reality." If I can do that, I can model that, then for this place and this time that's the best I can do as well as support those teachers who want to take leadership around which we have none.

As she speaks about working with children and families, Tricia is pretty aware that she does not know the reality of her families as well as she would like. She is becoming more aware of their experiences in the broader community and working to have her staff understand this as well. “I don’t know if I’m doing a lot different. I am really just trying to spread that out to staff by saying you know we don’t know what a student experiences when he leaves this room.” She works to keep things in front of staff when dealing with the families:

One I always keep in mind when dealing with families, and I don’t say this overtly to all families...they have one or two extra hurdles to jump before they figure out if I am trustworthy. So this school needs to stay consistent and if something happens that might make us look trustworthy or feel trustworthy for them, I have to come from that angle. I can’t just assume that they know my intentions or that they know I understand that about them. I have to somehow figure out a way to do or say this overtly. I have to figure it out. These kids, and their experiences with white establishments means that I can easily be misread in my intentions and there is no reason for me to be misread because they do not know me. I’m going to miss stuff so if I miss something I am going to ask you to help me and tell me. And it’s not your job to help me or tell me. I really need to know this, but I’m not going to know this, I’m not going to know everything. And I want to know everything and I’m learning and I’m open but I’m not going to. It’s kind of like I now know that there’s a lot I don’t know. I just don’t know what all of that is.

Cara interview 2. Cara described herself as being “more aware, more focused on the needs and potential concerns that the families put out.” She talks about all families and then specifically stated, “We are directly focusing on students of color so we can support them in the manner they need to be supported.” She identified the staff of her school as “becoming more aware, more honest ... white educators in a school with such a diverse population.” She noted that at least 17 staff members have gone through the 2 day Taking It Up training. She comments:

That helps because whenever we have a conversation there are enough of us that can use the correct language or be willing to take the risk or perhaps a DII conversation, especially if someone is trying to detour (the topic) we can bring it back. Now I’m not the only one that has that experience and expertise. It works out now with many more staff members (able to redirect the conversation and keep it focused on race).

Cara feels that staff is able to be more honest now. When they opened Dolores Huerta Elementary, the staff wanted to have an equitable school with a welcoming environment that was free from racism. “Most of our staff members grew up in very white communities. Several years ago when we opened this building, we considered what we were doing worthwhile and supportive, but we weren’t taking it to that next level of conversation.” Her commitment to equity shows up now through the actions she identified she has taken since CFEE. “We’ve been working with Felicia all year. Being a white leader, I felt I wasn’t competent to lead our conversations. I’m not an expert. I have a lot to learn,” She shared that she invited the district equity coordinator, Felicia, to lead their conversations. This allowed Cara to continue to learn alongside her staff. Felicia gave her a great deal of confidence in this work.

I asked Cara what kind of work she had designed with Felicia for her staff. She shared that they took aspects of CFEE involving racism, white identity, detours that white people take, and the historical timeline of Pacific Northwest history. She was pleased with the results as she shared, “The conversation led people to want to join the CFEE trainings. Some people who maybe weren’t ready to take up this conversation expressed interest.” She also believed their work also reinforced staff who had gone to some training. They were able to contribute differently and take leadership in the dialogue:

Every time we are willing to have the conversation, we grow. Having Felicia in that structured format allowed us to continue the conversation throughout the year. It wasn’t a one shot deal. We used to have a school Equity and Diversity Team. We realized quickly it wasn’t getting the energy we needed. This topic can’t be one of those 60 minute meetings where each team sends a representative to a controlled and focused agenda. It didn’t work in that format That group plus some other staff now meets in a PLC and we’re reading *Courageous Conversations about Race* (Singleton & Linton, 2006), and we meet outside of school to have the conversations. This group has all staff who (have done equity training) and they are extremely positive and energetic around the issues and concerns. Knowing that we are a mostly white group with a lot of kids of color, we had work to do. They actually helped lead professional development training right after we got back from winter break. They did the guidelines, agreements from Singleton and Linton (2006), and

that was very comfortable. Again, I was part of the group but I didn't lead it. It was more powerful for them to hear it from their colleagues, than just from me.

Cara also shared about development of her equity plan for next year at Huerta Elementary:

It was really powerful to set the direction for next year. We're going to invite high school students of color to come to the school. We want to have them share openly with the staff. And, we are going to...I keep shying away from this. I am going to have an after school group with kids of different races and ethnicity. I've always thought I'm not the right person for that. Well, we're all the right persons for that! I think the kids have a lot to say and I think it's going to be exciting. It's been on our action plan and we haven't taken it to that next level.

As Cara talked about the use of race talk at her school she commented they are using words (like racism, white privilege, racial gap, etc.) and becoming more comfortable with those words. "We're doing more. We still have areas where we can be braver and more deliberate around the conversation. I see that at this school at this time, we are taking steps towards race talk. I think staff is more comfortable." She noted that the families are in another kind of realm. As she has brought up race in conversations, families are accepting it:

We are having eight-to-ten Latino moms and dads that are joining our parent group with white moms and dads so it's mixing up. It's acknowledging we're doing this in different languages. And we are translating. We are seeing parents begin to understand, and it takes some patience. I know we'll be making some movement when our families can have those kinds of conversations as well.

When asked to think about whether her white identity impacts her as a leader she commented, "Absolutely my white identity impacts the community. I have not sat down and had conversations with our families of color about my being white. What I do know is what people tell me." She believes in strong relationships with the families and since she does not speak Spanish, she relies heavily on a bilingual, bicultural office assistant to support her relationships with the Spanish-speaking families. She has worked hard to make sure the systems are in place so families feel welcome and comfortable. "We have a bilingual, bicultural office assistant who works with students and families. If I need to talk with a family where language is a barrier, she joins me. I

don't think I could work without this position." In spite of a 75% cut in central funding for that position, staff made it a priority for the following school year, causing them to give up important budget items and be creative in their funding.

Mark interview 2. As I met with Mark, I asked him to talk about his thoughts on being a white school leader. Mark shared he found it difficult to remember his whiteness day-to-day. "I think understanding the vulnerabilities and sensitivities of kids and people of minority status in general that are at the mercy of... the dominant culture [is important.]" He works to remember that "by reading about it, participating in discussions, and talking to my minority educators, and really involving myself with the kids, and talking to them as much as possible, all the minority kids." He spoke about his relationships with the students and his effort to get to know them and let them know him. He believes the kids see him as someone who is real with them and to whom they can relate.

As we spoke about his use of race talk as a white school leader, Mark stated he has grown in his ability. As he met with a student of color who was encountering difficulties with another person, he shared his approach stating, "I ask do you think this has anything to do with your race? So acknowledging that race can be a part of people's reality is something that I try to do." He also takes up the conversation with his staff saying, "I try to bring up with my staff that we have to really consider why there is the achievement gap and how difficult it might be for minority students when they see their entire world is being taught by white people." When asked what kind of response he got from staff, he shared there were a wide variety of responses:

There are some educators that roll their eyes [and think] that it's making an excuse for a lack of effort. I don't know why some people have empathy and understanding and other people don't. I think it's ignorance, I don't think there's ill will; people are not educated enough, haven't had enough experiences to understand the complexities of race relations and racial identity. I just think there are too many people that have not experienced other cultures or experienced for themselves what it's like to be vulnerable and on guard. I get a huge range of responses There are teachers you know that get it and relate, and take a chance and take the first step towards understanding and then there are teachers that [feel] well I'm here to teach and I have the material to

teach, so there's just that kind of vibe about certain teachers and their approach.

Mark also shared that:

So many people want to hide behind the myth of America as being the land of opportunity. White people don't ever talk about what it means to be white and I credit CFEE for bringing that into my reality, putting the mirror to my face, and having me explore what deficits I had in my knowledge.

After attending CFEE, Mark left with the idea that he would have dialogues about race, bring things up to people and talk about the issues. The reality for Mark was, "You go back to your daily routine and it's much more difficult to extract yourself from the day-to-day operations. We have been decimated by our professional development time." Mark expressed a need for extended time to have promising dialogue with staff about race and equity issues.

As Mark talked about the students and parents of color in his high school, and how his white identity plays a role in relationships, he believes the fact that he's bilingual allows Latino parents to be more comfortable with him. He commented, "they have a comfortablity that feels really genuine and real and are thanking me. They feel like they can approach me and talk to me." His high school has very few African-American students, and quite a few have white parents. He shared, "The African-American kids that we have, I just have not had much interaction with the parents. It seems as though these, quite a few students have white parents. There's not much interaction with African-American parents at all." As he thought back to his interactions with parents prior to the CFEE seminar, he shared:

I definitely think I have improved the, I think making people feel comfortable and making people feel like they're having a dialogue with somebody who gets it. It has definitely improved because of CFEE. I think I'm much more aware of things and that I'm not afraid to bring up the talk about race. That it's, when appropriate, it's good to do so. I do think that's been a major change in the way that I interact with parents of color.

He believes "You can sense the relief from people when they realize they're talking to somebody who has maybe a little bit of knowledge of what it might feel like to be a minority in such a white majority environment."

Bruce interview 2. As Bruce thought about his responses to the questions for this interview he shared some thoughts about his CFEE experience. He was thinking about his plans for bringing equity and race to his school and shared, “It’s like anything, whenever you have an emotional big experience like that you come back wanting to change the world and then you hit the reality of where everybody else is at.” He felt good about the great conversations he had with some of the staff members, “But I’ve found that I’ve had to be careful. I was all excited about sharing this passion for and concern about what I learned and experienced... I had to share it little by little when it was appropriate.” He is working to change one mind at a time and using the supporters who have expressed interest in the equity work. He talked about barriers he faced in his school and appreciated that the CFEE seminar did a really nice job erasing the kind of mythology that “we bring with us and helped us to see how race plays into it.” Bruce sees a need to learn how to transform and translate the curriculum. “So I think there needs to be two parts, there needs to be that part where you’re dealing with people’s own feelings about race ... and how does this translate into the curriculum. How can I start infusing these pieces into it?”

I asked Bruce about his thoughts on being a white school leader. He shared:

You know it’s always in the back of my mind, especially when I’m dealing with parents. I’m always aware of how I might be perceived. It’s definitely because of all the work that we’ve done; it’s always there in the foreground. And my biggest fear, typically in evaluations and things like that, that’s one thing I always factor in now. Is the material at the time really accessible to all? So when comments are made which might not be inclusive in the classroom, it kind of slaps me in the face a little bit. So I’m always looking at a way of having a conversation with the teacher. And I don’t know if it’s me being white that creates that, or me being white after going through all this equity training, and how looking through the eyes of how someone else might see it. So from that standpoint, it’s always in the forefront of my mind when I’m working with families of color, and even when I’m working with my teachers knowing that we have all the students of color.

He shared a story about taking a contingent of African-American students to the African American Leadership Conference:

I was able to take some of my kids to a leadership conference, African-American leadership conference, and it just totally [brought] it home when you

start having these conversations with these kids... Debriefing when they came back [I asked] so what was the best part about that day? And they're like, God, just being around black people. It's like, oh, yeah, duh. It's that thing that [I] take for granted...being around, you know, it's easy [for me] to be around white people. But to hear those kids just really be, you know, and just playing in my head. I mean, some of them were calling the bus that we were on a chocolate-filled Twinkie, you know what I mean? It took me awhile to just go through it and how it comes out, and they just were calling it. Because they didn't have to explain, you know, they were with similar kids, they just didn't have to explain. They were totally relaxed. It was a totally different energy from most of those kids than what I get at school. It just made me realize no matter what, they wouldn't open up in the school environment.

He talked about how he worked to go deeper with the black students, "honestly asking for their help. I shared with them middle school is just tough. In high school at least you have some affinity-like groupings, you've got some different groups, you've got different clubs that meet that do that." He talked about the kids asking "Why isn't there a white union?" ...and these are black kids asking this. And I said, "Well, every day's kind of a white day here, don't you think?" They couldn't believe...I said that. As a leader he states, "That helps me, having opportunities to do that with those kids and looking for those opportunities, that creates the urgency for me to help keep doing this work."

As Bruce talked about how he uses straight talk about race in his school he shared:

I do. A lot of times I determine if it's appropriate and I always have to determine if we can be heard by folks at a certain time. My sense is, and I don't know maybe it's me being white again, but I find that with a predominately white staff you have to choose the moment to have those conversations, and I have, but I have to think it through before and strategize before just blurting it out to make sure that it can be heard.

He stated that dealing with adults calls for a different dynamic. "Often times if I hear something like that during a teaching episode or evaluation it's not appropriate for me to jump in and crack it in the middle of the kids. That needs to be a private conversation." He shared an incident with students where he did jump in immediately:

I was at a track meet and there was a student with a Latino name and he was pronouncing the name and the person was writing it down. And other kids

overheard him “My name’s Jose,” and the kids started talking with a Mexican accent from a character who was Mexican on TV or something like that. And I said what are you doing? I’m confused, why are you all of a sudden taking on this because you heard this kid’s name. And even the student was playing along with it and it was inappropriate and rude. And even dealing with middle school kids, I find that I get better response and better true conversations with folks if it’s a private conversation that happens.

He also talked about some follow up with the African-American kids who came to him after the leadership conference with some issues. “The kids brought up that other kids were having microaggressions towards them. And [they were] good friends. I used that as an opportunity to address those [white] kids in private.” He shared:

I often use race as a “Hey, I’m a white guy so I understand...” coming from that [place]. However, you’ve got to understand how it can be taken [by the white students] and so having conversations [with those white kids] is important. This year has been a really pivotal year being able to have those conversations honestly with those kids but it starts with giving it your all and going to conferences like [the African American Leadership conference] where you’re the minority in the room, to really get it. It’s a sense of urgency. As educators, we have to create the urgency because those kids are feeling it. They’re not making it through school and it’s easy to go home and [not] think about it if you don’t immerse yourself [in] the reality of that. So I try to take every opportunity to go to conferences like that so I can really get it and remember it. So I can have those conversations, otherwise, it is invisible because it’s not part of your everyday life.

Shifting to talk about how Bruce’s white identity impacts his students and families of color he said:

I really try just to listen. And find out what they need in any situation. Because different families are totally different. My Latino families are fairly homogenous as far as both having Latino parents. My African-American student population is mostly bi-racial and the dynamics are very, very different.

His approach has been to listen, share with everyone, and not take things personally:

I really just try to listen to folks and try not to judge because in most cases they haven’t had a good experience with the system. But I always call and have conversations and try to keep them in the loop. [I am] always conscious of when I call someone how something’s going to be taken; and, I just listen

and[do] not take it too personally. Everyone's got their own point of view and it's totally valid.

When asked if his approach shifted after the CFEE training, Bruce shared:

I used to think I was pretty open to most points of view because I've had so called equity training; but, when you factor in all the history, I think that's what makes the biggest impact to me. All the years and years and years of oppression at different levels, [it will] affect people in a different way. And they're suspicious and they don't trust me just because of how I am. And I need to factor that in and that's something I'm always working with.

Jason interview 2. Jason began our interview by sharing some of his current thoughts about his CFEE experience. He commented that "I'm still attending CFEE! I'm kind of a perpetual learner; I still don't have it." He didn't approach his staff when he came back, but rather worked for his own learning. He shared, "You can have the top instructional practices but those instructional practices are not going to be as effective unless you take the time to unpack where kids are and where they come from." He sees that

Race all of a sudden becomes the key factor when you're thinking about your relationship with the child and the family and how they learn. And before I went [to CFEE], I thought, look, I don't care where they come from. What am I supposed to do, have a special reading program for African-American boys? No, of course not. So I was of the mind of being very confident with pedagogy and instruction and really felt like this is all ridiculous.

He still believes seminars haven't addressed instruction and race in a way that will help teachers with their pedagogy. He notes the need for growth and understanding around identity and race as critical to influence the pedagogy:

It's too soon to be getting off on instructional practices. However, you have to understand who it is you're teaching. You have to unpack that stuff, and get it out there, and establish that level of relationship with your students before it works.

And, he still feels there is a struggle about the need for both now.

Jason identified his thinking about being a white leader as complex and centered on being a white male leader. He believes being white is an asset as he works with white teachers and parents:

I'm able to connect well and have great conversations and make really important decisions because I work with white people. I have very few students of color, and the students of color I do have, a lot of them come from economic privilege. So at my school, my job is to create a school that over the years becomes more hospitable and more welcoming and more effective with students of color and students who don't have the racial or economic privileges that a lot of the students have.

While he notes there are few students of color, he comments that he does spend a lot of time thinking about those students' experiences:

However, I continue to think about and try to imagine what it's like to be a person of color and I'm not there yet, that's for sure. So I don't feel the pain and the sense of urgency that a person of color would feel in my position. I just don't. Because when I wake up and look in the mirror, I'm white. And when I go home at night, even after all the good equity work I've done, I'm white.

He reports being very aware of his whiteness and the advantages and privileges he has that minorities do not.

His use of race talk to speak about the realities and struggles around race is not a common language he uses in his school. He shares, "I'm not facing large numbers of issues around race. I'm not seeing anything.... I get few reported to me. But I look at things, and my lens is on all the time. There are times when I absolutely do." He told of a case where he felt teachers were not making learning opportunities during school breaks available to an African-American male who was not identified as talented and gifted (TAG):

For example, we had a student who had two teachers who didn't want to fill out paperwork so that this student could go to TAG [enrichment activities] over winter break. So [the student is] not asking you for a recommendation, he's asking you to fill out the information. And they said, "The student's not TAG." It was an African American; it was a fifth grade African-American boy. And I said whoa, wait a minute. You're telling me this mom isn't doing exactly the right thing by introducing this child to some high end creative TAG activities? Are you kidding me? And [the teachers] were like "Whoa, are you kidding me? He's not TAG." [I told them] but don't you see what this [mom's] doing? He's an African-American boy and she's trying to [make challenging opportunities available to him.] I said look, this is like, it was ridiculous to me and I said so. I am really unhappy with both of you right now. It was intense. And a lot of that was, I don't think I would have had that conversation if he would have been a white fifth grader.

Jason plans to explore data with staff through a racial lens. There will be culturally relevant protocol questions at every one of [our weekly staff data meetings]. “We’re going to force ourselves to say, ok is race a factor in this child’s performance? Is culture a factor in this child’s performance? Because if we don’t, we get away from it.”

As he began to speak about relationships with parents and students, he was excited to share how his parents have taken on social justice issues for their school:

[This year] we have some policy instruction and fundamental restructuring that is all about equity. So if you ask me about my equity lens I’ll say well look at all the school improvement initiatives we’ve passed. And look at where our parent generated money is going. We’re spending \$40,000 on providing literacy support at first and second grade in both English and French. And at first I thought who cares about French. If they get it fine. But what happens is, if a child comes and let’s say they’re a child of color who doesn’t have the privileges that some of these white kids have. So what kind of school do they need? They need a school that has an infrastructure in place, that we predict and we expect students who are not above grade level, who are at grade level, and we expect that they are going to need very strong instructional support and the yearly growth so they can feel good about who they are and they can be successful academically.

His staff and parents have done some major shifting, “a jaw dropping amount of restructuring in this school that is designed so that we can be [looking out] for all kids.” He spoke about the math program at his French immersion elementary school:

So for example, the math program which was taught in French. I’m telling you right now that might work for privileged kids but you can’t design a school around privileged kids. So we’re shifting it to English and we’re using a district adopted program. And the people who are really privileged and arrogant and high performing, you know I’m talking about teachers, don’t really like that shift. So the work about equity and race that’s in there, is setting up schools [so] that when you look at the structure of the school and where parents spend their money, it is about equity. And [another decision is] we’re not going to have PE and music specialists at all. So the parents voted unanimously to provide additional [academic] support rather than having PE. So [it’s been one year], and that’s why they sent me here.

When Jason was assigned this school, he was reluctant to go because the school had a reputation for catering to entitled and elite clientele. Jason argued he

didn't belong there and the Latina equity specialist gave him a valid reason why. "She said no, you're exactly the person to go up there. And you're the one to go there because you can get that work done with this group of people. And because you're well respected and you're white."

His experiences with students of color revolve mostly around social issues on the playground. He shared a story where he was working with a young Pakistani student who was being teased and he brought the students together to talk about the issue. He runs into complexity as he deals with young students around issues:

It's a tricky proposition. And I've worked with kids about that, and I've been straight out about, look does this have to do with his culture? Is this why you're teasing him? And you know, they say no, and I've said well really, then why are you? Like someone put a tack in his basketball. Well, why his basketball? Why wasn't it someone else's? Were you thinking about him or was it just there? Were you thinking about him, and when you thought about him, do you think about him as being different? And if so, why is he different? And so the kids were like no. You'll love this comment. One kid said he'd be annoying in Pakistan. So it's not because he's Pakistani, it's because he's annoying. I'm thinking really? But why? He's in America and so they're teaching him how to play basketball. And he's terrible, a terrible player. I can see him right now. And he's got a ball, and he's not really fitting into this game because he's not really good at basketball. But they're helping him and they're staying with him. But that's a race thing. [And] then on the other hand, this kid comes from privilege. So his family is Pakistani, but they're privileged. So it makes it complicated.

Jason shared that the demographics of his school show very few students of a race other than white:

The race that we do have are people...from North Africa, Asia, who kind of have their act together. You can't not have your act together and be here, because you have to participate in a lottery, so we have a lot of work to do around some policy stuff that will open this school up. Because my goal is for this school to be like what people talk about race and talk about the achievement gap. And they say Jason, your school, that's pathetic, why are you there? And I say well, I think you're selling these kids short. I think you're selling them short. Look what you're saying is they can't handle this high end French immersion program and they can. But we have to help them; we have to have structures in place.

Jason stated he is committed to having structures in place to help all kids succeed in his school.

Summary. In doing a cross-analysis of the second interview the following themes emerged:

- 1) Awareness of the impact their white identity had on leadership.
- 2) A conscious awareness of relating to students and families of color.
- 3) Small beginnings of race talk occurring in the schools.

Principals had a lot to say on these themes and had varying levels of success and awareness.

Each principal could articulate how their white identity and their understanding of what it meant to be white in their role and a leader had an impact on their leadership. The notion of listening differently to families of color, and with more awareness of the impact of their privilege, was mentioned frequently. One principal shared he always thought he was open to most points of view because of past equity trainings; however, those trainings had not helped him understand the historical oppression and how it impacts the children and families he works with daily. Another principal realized she needed support to create relationships with non-English speaking families and invested resources in a translator for the office that is now an essential support for her work. The ability to remember to think about whiteness day-to-day and in all interactions was listed as an issue for one principal. He mentioned how easy it is to fall back to comfortable patterns and has to find ways to keep it ever-present in his consciousness. Finally, one principal talked about the way he used his white male identity to benefit people of color in his school. He saw his being white as an asset in his work with the dominant culture parents in his school.

Each principal had examples and thoughts about relating to parents and students as a white school leader. One principal shared that she listens and hears differently now. She is more aware of the possible counter-narrative going on in her communication and asks supportive probing questions to make sure she fully understands issues brought to her. Another principal stated that she has worked to help staff understand the specific needs of all students, and pointed out how she uses that

process to address needs of students of color. Whether it be specially inviting Latino moms to join the parent group or making sure interpreters are at all meetings so all can understand, she has a clear commitment to make families welcome in her school. Her prioritizing of resources to accommodate these needs clearly communicated to staff that this was a priority. One principal talked about his effort to not take things personally as he was given feedback to help the school become more welcoming. He named his whiteness and asked for help, and the feedback came in with suggestions. Finally, another principal said he believed his ability to speak Spanish helped families trust and relate to him.

The conversation on race talk was the most difficult for principals to identify and articulate. All five principals spoke about the need to be cautious and not try to “change the world” as they engaged in conversations about race. One principal said that, with support from the district equity coordinator, she was feeling braver and her staff was engaging in some very honest conversations about race and how her school structures learning for the success of all students. She also shared that having her staff go through the equity training has made the conversations easier and safer as there is a common language. One principal stated he was not educated enough and had not had enough experience to step into race talk conversations. The most common experience principals felt success with was talking to students about race. Telling the students they knew they were white and wanted to understand how race might be involved in incidents that arose in the school increased trust and opened communication with students with all five of the principals.

Summary of Findings

The information principals shared during the focus groups and interviews provided valuable insight into the role of leading for equity and from them, a picture begins to emerge. From their thoughts, ideas, successes and struggles, I began to understand their effort to take up equity in their schools.

The interviews allowed the principals to individually talk about the journey they are on as they begin to develop the importance of understanding white identity. It

was a common theme among all five of them; the equity seminar had a profound impact on their understandings of what it means to be white and has impacted their practice as school leaders.

Concern about their ability to lead, their courage to lead, and their understanding that they must lead equity efforts was also expressed by all. They are quick to point out there is still much for them to learn about their own identity; and, they face an urgency to get equitable and culturally proficient practices in place for the students in schools now. They have ideas of what kind of help they need, including principal agenda topics to share practice, support groups, use of the district equity coordinator, and the need for mentors in the work.

Principals also face structural issues around this important work. Ability to focus on equity, or integrate it into competing initiatives is necessary. Needs for staff of color to be hired and retained is an expressed concern, as well as a hope that university programs will produce teaching and administrative staff who understand the issues around race, identity, and social justice.

The interviews and focus groups allowed two different looks into their principal practice. Capturing their dialogue in the focus groups allowed me to see the common concerns they expressed, as well as where some individuals were working on solutions. It demonstrated the need for dialogue among the principals as they expressed appreciation for the ability to be together and talk, even though it was for my benefit. The individual time I was allowed to spend with them provided me insight into their growth through the various stages of cultural proficiency. The conversations definitely helped me to understand this process is dynamic in nature and constant growth occurs within the work principals do each day.

Chapter 5 will provide a conclusion and discussion on the findings related to the four research questions.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

It took a few days and nights to absorb the information, emotions, questions, thoughts and images that surfaced after attending the training. Talking about race and racial consciousness in the manner in which we did stirred something inside of me; it woke up a part of me that I'd previously not even realized was asleep. I have always prided myself on celebrating differences, being culturally aware, being culturally sensitive, honoring diversity, and embracing all the beautiful colors that make up the rich tapestry of the human race. But having been poked at, nudged, provoked and agitated to accept the undeniable truth that I have more growing to do was challenging. Examining the brutal history of discrimination, stereotypes, and racism in society was a valuable and life-changing exercise. Coming to grips with the reality that racism still exists today, even if I don't want to see it, believe it, or take part in it-overwhelmed me. Racism is like a train wreck so tragic, that even though I want to look away, I cannot help but see the destruction and the devastating, irreparable damage it causes. The skin I am in allows me to effortlessly carry many privileges in my pockets that people of color do not. I may be misunderstood or fall victim to a wide range of stereotypes, but I carry less fear of racial injustices and often take for granted the ease at which I walk through this life. I NEED to be mindful of this in order to maintain compassion and sensitivity toward people of all colors. I MUST continue to have courageous conversations about race in an effort to foster hope that this world will be a safer, more peaceful place for people of ALL colors in the future.

Reflection of a CFEE participant, February 2012

The purpose of this study was to examine how white school leaders understood their white identity and approached creating socially-just schools. I examined what concerns, if any, white school leaders had with regard to shifting their staff members to become racially and culturally literate. Additionally, I wanted to examine their attitudes towards understanding white identity and how this understanding contributed to their effectiveness as social justice leaders.

This study tells a story about my journey to becoming a culturally proficient white woman in education. The vignettes in four of the chapters chronicle a part of the journey: ignorance, enlightenment, speaking the truth on our struggles as white people, and mentoring others to grow and learn about race and identity leading to cultural proficiency. Through making my journey explicit, I am partnering with the five white principals to tell a story. Their journey tells the challenges, successes, and the courage shown to open the door to their practice.

In this final chapter, I restate the research questions posed in Chapter 1 and review the methods used to gather and analyze the data. I will discuss the research questions and share the key findings and the implications of this research. This discussion is followed by recommendations, limitations of the study, suggestions for further research, and concludes with my personal reflections on the study.

Summary of Methods and Research Questions

This qualitative research study helps fill the gap in the research surrounding social justice principals in the field working on issues of equity. It provides interviews with principals immersed in the work and gives light to the struggles and complexity of leading for equity. While there is a great deal of research on social justice leadership (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Marshall & Oliva, 2010; Theoharis, 2009), cultural proficiency (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989; R. B. Lindsey et al., 1999), and theoretical frameworks (Cross et al., 1989; R. B. Lindsey et al., 2005; Pedersen, 2000), I found little research that spoke to the “work in the trenches” or the principal practitioner experience. Practitioners need the support of real life experiences in the field as everyday principals struggle with the notion of transforming schools to places where all students use their minds well.

The following questions guided the study: 1) How do white school leaders view white identity and the impact, if any, it has on their leadership? 2) How do white school leaders relate to students of color, their parents, and the community? 3) In what ways do white school leaders engage in race talk and address issues of white identity, privilege, and power? 4) What challenges do white school leaders experience as they attempt to end racism in their schools?

These research questions were examined through a qualitative approach using constructivist theory, critical theory and critical race theory lenses to carefully examine the leadership practices of five white principals who had attended the Coaching for Educational Equity (CFEE) seminar prior to the study. I chose qualitative methodology because it is naturalistic inquiry to study real-world phenomena and is open to whatever emerges. The data-collection process pays

attention to the notion that systems being studied are dynamic in nature. This methodology also allowed for my personal experience and involvement to be a part of the inquiry (Patton, 2002).

Data gathering in this study occurred through two individual interviews and two focus groups. The interviews and focus groups spanned an 18-month period of time. Field notes from observations of the principals, a researcher journal, and researcher memos also provided secondary sources of data. The study began with interviews where participants responded to questions related to my research questions. Focus groups were conducted where the group reacted to a series of questions that provoked an open dialogue around the research questions (See Chapter 3 for questions and protocols). Throughout the 18 months of the study, I kept a research journal and researcher memos noting my individual learning, insights, reflections, concerns, and questions which formed throughout the study. The data collection concluded with an individual final interview. Data analysis included member checks, cross-case analysis, and multi-cycle coding processes. During this process, transcripts of the interviews and focus groups were sent to the principals to review and make changes if needed. This assured my accuracy in reporting their responses to the questions. I also did two Coding Cycles to examine the data for commonalities, themes, and differences. As that data were captured, I then wrote summaries of the responses to each process. To evaluate the responses to the questions asked at each interview and focus group, I then did a cross-grid analysis of the responses with the four research questions.

In the coming discussion, I will share the findings of each research question and then discuss the findings as a whole. I will also return to the literature I reviewed that is related to the findings.

Summary of Findings Related to Research Questions

In this section I return to my original questions and synthesize key findings related to those questions.

Research question 1: How do white school leaders view white identity and the impact, if any, it has on their leadership? This first research question points to

the notion that race has an impact on leadership in schools, no matter what skin you are in. Because of the lack of awareness around what it means to be white, this question was to probe the thinking of the principals on leadership and race.

The principals all shared that prior to attending the CFEE seminar they did not have an understanding of white identity. They spoke about previously believing they were non-racist and looked at all people equally; yet, the notion of whiteness, and the privilege and power that accompanied their race was a new way of thinking. Participants' perceptions ranged from "this is such personal and emotionally hard work" to "How can I be 50 years old and just be learning this?" Sue (2003) speaks to understanding what it means to be white and the difficulty white people have accepting this notion. The comments of the participants showed they gained awareness because of the equity seminar they attended. As these principals grappled with the concept of whiteness, they struggled to understand how to overcome or minimize their privilege and power, a concept discussed by Levine-Rasky (2000) and Sue (2003).

One principal referred to her grasping of white identity as life-changing, to the point of "changing the color of my cells." This shift in perspective carries out to all aspects of her personal and professional life. Others noted the constant questioning of actions and interactions they face on a daily basis; there is frequently uncertainty as to whether an issue is race-based or not. The ability to open their minds to other perspectives was a take away as well. One principal spoke to the fact that he was more willing to consider other ideas as he understood his perspective was limited to his white, male lens. Understanding the dynamics of communication and leadership roles is a continuous learning process. Sue (2003) talks about the necessity to remain vigilant in power roles:

When you possess greater authority, influence, and power, you seldom are placed in a position where you need to listen to someone lower in the status hierarchy. If anything, it appears that those with the least power are more sensitive and aware of the habits and motives of those who can influence their lives for the better or worse. (p. 242)

Whether non-dominant culture was staff or parents, the ability to solicit the open feedback and input from all levels of the system communicates a culturally proficient view of communication and decision making processes.

Awareness of their white identity shifted their listening to other white people as well. The principals shared that they were hearing their staff and colleagues differently and noticing the way they talk about issues of color and diversity. They remarked on viewing the discussions and dialogue in their meetings and being curious about the subtle and veiled meanings of what they would never have questioned before.

One principal shared that he saw his whiteness as an asset in his leadership. In a predominantly white system and community, white leaders are able to influence and take on social justice issues as part of the dominant culture. This disposition speaks to the issue of power in the leadership role and the responsibility that accompanies it (Fine, 2004; Sue, 2003). This principal knew that he could leverage not only his whiteness, but the fact that he was a male added to his influence.

The notion of mistrust among their colleagues of color surfaced in their conversations. This perception was not new to the participants, but they had attributed this mistrust to other relational factors common in school administrative teams. A new understanding attributing this mistrust to the white principals' lack of racial literacy, thus inability to show up as an ally, was now understood. Their colleagues of color spoke to needing their visible support at the table, not in the parking lot after the meeting. Factoring in the years of oppression people of color have experienced, there was an acknowledgment and understanding of why their colleagues of color would be suspicious and mistrustful of them as leaders. In the CFEE seminar, the principals were able to hear honest dialogue from people of color, a new experience for most. Hearing experiences of racism first hand was uncomfortable for the principals, but unforgettable, and a motivator to stay vigilant in this work.

A new understanding of the notion of silence was mentioned by all. In the CFEE training, people of color shared that the silence of white people can easily be

construed in a variety of ways, such as weakness, fear, conditional support, or agreement with the status quo of current inequitable conditions. In conversations about race, white people often remain silent to avoid making a mistake, because they are afraid, to keep from feeling uncomfortable, or to avoid the conversation. The participants heard from their colleagues of color that staying silent communicates an unwillingness to take a stand for them and their children or to support them in a conversation on equitable practice. While there was much talk about the reasons white people are silent, the understanding was present that they must speak up if they are to be social justice leaders and gain the trust of their colleagues of color.

An important notion was expressed on the difficulty of keeping one's whiteness front and center to everyday work and life. The pull to comfort, where there is no struggle, is strong. Principals commented that fighting the ability to forget they are white is a difficult habit to establish and requires a network of allies to support their efforts. They do catch themselves and regain their lens, but it troubled them to notice when they had forgotten. The example given by Bruce created a visual image that resonated with the group:

It's almost like you need a light bulb, like an outlet. You take a white person, stereotypically here, who's learning to teach, you teach them all this stuff but then [they] default to what they know at birth, first 3 or 4 years of your life, right? Those are the years beliefs are solidified...so it's almost like you need a socket, and every other day you've got to stick your finger in the socket to remember what you're doing, to interrupt.

While Bruce was making a joke in his example, the visual image he created spoke accurately to the issue of falling back to prior dominant culture patterns.

Nearly all principals spoke to the notion of the doors they opened with their understanding of whiteness. The understanding they gained inspired a humility that was communicated to the parents; almost, a willingness to be vulnerable and acknowledge they understood they were white and unable to understand the experiences of their parents of color. They stated that knowing they were white instilled in them a responsibility to bridge the connection with parents.

Research question 2: How do white school leaders relate to students of color, their parents, and the community? Question two speaks to the ability of white leaders to connect and establish relationships with the families and students of color in their schools. This question appeared to be where principals experienced the most success and the most awareness of their efforts.

White awareness contributed to their ability to make alliances with their students and the families. An understanding of the mistrust of the system that families of color bring to the school was apparent. Principals shared their experiences at the CFEE seminar with parents and students, mentioning they were learners in this process of understanding race and privilege. They stated they understood the role their white perspective had in their ability to understand the experiences of families and students of color. This comment was followed with the principal sharing they wanted to fully understand the parent or student's point of view and understand if the issue could be racial in nature. One principal shared that sometimes, families had one or two extra hurdles to jump before they believed the principal or the school was trustworthy. Without exception, each leader shared that explicitly acknowledging their race in the conversations created a sense of relief in the eyes of the parents and students. The principals noticed a shift in the demeanor and it was as if parents and students felt they would have a chance of being understood in the meetings. As nods of agreement were exchanged in the dialogue, the principals noted that this practice was something they did without exception now because of the trust that grew and the openness that resulted in their families of color.

Related to building trust, consistency of message and actions was also mentioned. Families and students of color watch closely to see if this is now a regular practice of the school, or a one-time event. Principals had to be vigilant with themselves, office staff, and teachers that what they espoused to students and families was consistently seen in action.

An awareness of the needs of students and families of color was discussed in depth. Principals spoke about prioritizing scarce dollars to make sure office staff could

communicate with second language families by hiring bilingual staff. In one school, a bilingual family coordinator was a pivotal team member in creating connections between families and the principal. She linked the principal to families with needs, and families who have complaints, and supports the principal to create an environment where non-English speaking families feel welcome. The group was committed to language not being a barrier to relationships or learning.

Connections with older students have been strengthened through principals' efforts to acknowledge their whiteness. One principal shared he asked the black students in his school for their help in understanding their experience. Trust slowly began to develop as students shared what it was like to be a person of color in the school and began to ask the principal questions as well. Another principal arranged for his black students to attend an African American Leadership Conference where he saw students open up in a way he had never seen before. Spending time with other students who look like them and have common experiences let the principal see a new side of the students and their thinking. His concern remains as to how he can create an environment where students are comfortable being themselves.

Research question 3: In what ways do white school leaders engage in race talk and address issues of white identity, privilege, and power? This question appeared to cause passionate and somewhat emotional responses in the principals. Reflecting on this question brought up feelings of inadequacy, feelings that they should have accomplished more by now, and confusion around not knowing exactly what to do. I also observed occasional shifting away from the question during both focus group sessions.

Each principal felt it was critical to get staff members involved in this conversation. Ideally, they wanted each staff member to experience the 5-day training. Because of the cost and difficulty for staff members to be out of their buildings for 5 days, they worked with CFEE to design a 2 day program called Taking It Up. Their initial frustration with this plan centered on limiting the number of staff they could send, delaying their ability to create a large enough group to create change. They also

faced group dynamic issues as they managed the concerns of other staff in the building who felt excluded or not in the “know” as staff returned from the training full of enthusiasm and determination to get moving. The principals shared it was important not to use “equity speak” which is the common language or terminology staff at the training begin to use, which leaves out the staff members who were unable to attend. The result is the creation of groups that see themselves as either in-the-know, or out-of-the-loop.

Working with their staff on their understanding of race and what it means to be white was a daunting task for all. A common theme in the interviews was their concern that they were not skilled or knowledgeable enough to lead this conversation with their staffs. They all acknowledged they had much learning to do for themselves as they explored the concept of whiteness and saw their work environment through a new white lens. In some cases, this showed up as inaction with staff rather than modeling what they learned and addressing issues as they arose.

Bruce’s comment in Chapter 4 summed up a consensus feeling of principals: “It’s like anything, whenever you have an emotional big experience like that you come back wanting to change the world and then you hit the reality of where everybody else is at.” Principals all spoke to the notion of thoughtfulness in their approach. Some principals spoke openly about the CFEE seminar and what they learned. Others did not mention it and began to have conversations with key teacher leaders in their buildings, a “testing the waters” approach. One principal used the district equity coordinator, skilled in equity training, to come regularly and lead her staff in dialogue and learning. As several of the principals talked about stepping into these talks, words like racism, white privilege, and racial gap were mentioned as showing up in teacher meetings and around the school. These principals showed great courage in stepping into this work. And even while doing so, some comments shared by principals around talking about race included: “I’m not brave enough to do this on my own yet;” “I worry that I will make a mistake;” “I’m not competent to lead this yet;” and “The district needs to take the lead on this and support it.”

As these strategies were taking place throughout the district, the word began to spread and early adopters were very interested in attending the training. There were also staff members who were not interested in this at all and began to push back on the idea that they were not culturally proficient teachers. Principals shared how they took the opportunity to have courageous conversations with individual staff members and developed skills to listen and respond with their own point of view. They all agreed as a district that each principal would publicly share their personal stance on equity in front of the regional teaching staff at an inservice training. This public stance sent a strong message throughout the district that they were all in this together. Their goal was to educate and influence, not make anyone wrong. A few mentioned asking for help from their colleagues as they crafted responses or planned meetings to address the issues being raised.

Involving students in the dialogue on race was occurring in several schools. Principals knew that student awareness could help inform staff about the issues happening in the school, especially the ones that never got reported. Schools were partnering with other levels in the district, with the university, and parents to engage in racial dialogues and activities with their students. One principal instituted AVID, a college readiness program for elementary and middle school students, and was seeing results on student attitudes toward achievement and their futures.

The notion of allies in this work was strong in the principal focus groups. They wanted to know how to get colleagues of color to challenge them and speak up when they made a mistake around a racial issue. One principal noted he “did not want to be the only one responsible for it.” Most understood the power dynamics in staff members challenging a principal, let alone a staff member of color. Still, they had a strong desire to create the safety for staff of color to call them on their missteps. A few did acknowledge that they knew it was their responsibility to become culturally proficient, so they were conflicted on this notion.

The importance of the district office in this work was mentioned many times. Principals felt they needed a clear message of support and understanding of the work

by the district leadership. Two reasons were mentioned for this need: 1) as they take difficult stands around racial issues, they are faced with threats of complaints, going to the media, etc. Knowing that their supervisors were knowledgeable and would stand behind their efforts to create an equitable school was critical; 2) culturally competent staffs are required to do this work. As principals began to address the skills of staff in this area, there could be complaints. They were pleased with cultural proficiency items being added to the teacher evaluation process and the leadership the district demonstrated in this area.

In spite of their difficulty in initially addressing this question, principals listed many ways they were taking up the work of leading their schools to become culturally proficient. As time in the study passed, principals shared more of their activities and progress as I encountered them in training settings in their district. Their work described at the beginning of this study expanded throughout the following year.

Research question 4: What challenges do white school leaders experience as they attempt to end racism in their schools? Challenges were plenty in the conversations held with principals. Some they mentioned seemed daunting with no solution, and others they handled with ease. Since I held the interviews over an 18-month time span, I also noted growth and change in how they viewed the challenges over time.

The greatest issue they faced in taking up this work was time to work with staff. Staff development days were few and far between, and most were taken up with district-directed training. They agreed as a group that this work could not be done well or effectively in 1-hour increments at staff meetings. They identified a background context one must have to engage in this work effectively. Without intensive understanding of the history of race and immigration, an opportunity to hear and understand the experiences of their colleagues of color, and a clear presentation of white privilege and power, it was difficult to place one's self into this conversation effectively.

Another challenge they faced regularly was leading this work. Principals spoke about their view of themselves as learners and not skilled to take on the leadership of the work. Some viewed themselves as still having an inward focus on learning about themselves. Facing one's own ignorance took a personal toll on several of our leaders. One principal spoke to the need to change people's hearts on the issue of race and racism. Some staff members were not resonating with this work and were unwilling to learn about it. Concerns about their commitment to all kids succeeding emerged. There was group awareness of the fact that some staff, though they would never admit it, did not believe students of color could learn.

Feelings about the district role in the equity initiative varied. Some felt the district office administrators were very supportive of the work. Others felt the district staff was disconnected, other than the equity coordinator. Support was observed by the participants through retaining the equity coordinator to support their work during budget cuts. Most examples of support related to the equity coordinator helping with their questions, leading trainings, and helping brainstorm strategies to educate staff about race and identity. The examples given around lack of support were mostly related to competing initiatives. The lack of sustained focus and failure to infuse equity into the data and curricular efforts was troubling. Staff development time for equity work was seen as a stand-alone and competed with Response to Intervention (RTI), literacy, data teams, professional learning communities, and other learning initiatives. The principals did not talk about ways to interrupt and refocus or integrate the staff development sessions.

Most of the challenges conveyed during our talks were ultimately about budget and scarce resources. This region of the country, like all others, struggled to maintain important initiatives in the face of declining resources. Doing more with less had challenged their ability to keep the equity work as a priority.

Several principals identified that funding all staff to take training prior to school starting would allow them to take up this work with velocity and not require staff time out of the classroom. This strategy would provide all staff with a common

language and increase the speed in which change in the schools would occur. Just as principals publicly gave their equity stances, this action would be the district's equity stance.

Principals noted there were no components on race, identity, or equity in their teacher or administrative preparation programs. As they thought back to their programs, most could not remember anything taught other than diversity or multicultural topics that were weak in discourse. A more recent graduate from an administrator program recalled having conversations about race, and they quickly deteriorated into adverse, confrontive, and hostile incidents that the professors seemed ill-equipped to manage. Principals felt preparation programs were still lacking as they hire newly graduated staff members and saw they did not understand what it meant to be white or how it impacted their classroom and their teaching.

Hiring teachers of color was another challenge principals faced. They strongly believed it was critical that students of color see staff that look like them in teaching and administrative roles. One principal commented that he knew teachers of color were out there as they student-taught in his building. He noted that when he interviewed the candidates from the pool human resources provided, he was aware of how white the candidate pools were. The group wondered why their district was not more successful in recruiting, hiring, or keeping teachers of color in their schools. Principals with higher numbers of non-dominant culture students were puzzled as to why teachers and staff of color were not prioritized to work in schools with higher numbers of students of color. They felt frustrated to see schools with few or no students of color receiving teachers of color. This issue was attributed as a problem for the district office to solve, and they did not express a way they could impact this practice.

Keeping race and identity in their everyday consciousness was another challenge principals reported. They commented on how easy it was to forget all about it and sit in their privilege. The pull to comfort is strong, and it was evident to them that equity and race work was hard, painful, and demanding. They shared they did not

occupy the space of not seeing race for long. Something would happen to wake them up and remind them, but they were quite hard on themselves as they saw the pattern repeating,

A final challenge related to mentoring in this work. Principals noted that when they had someone knowledgeable to consult with, they were more confident to take action. The equity office did not have the capacity to serve this role, though it made valiant efforts. Assigning a mentor to schools to support their work around cultural proficiency would provide them knowledge and skills to implement the changes they sought. One principal felt a mentor of another race would help them see things they miss. It would also help them remain vigilant in their ability to keep a racial lens in front of themselves day-to-day.

Analysis of Findings and Related Research

This section will provide analysis of the findings of this study. It will also include further review of research related to the study. As the study progressed, it became clear that white identity, cultural proficiency, and the ability to engage in difficult discourse were major themes throughout the data. I chose to go into more detail about these concepts and reference the pertinent research throughout the discussion. I will also tie the findings back to the initial literature review for analysis.

White identity. My initial focus in this research study was white principals examining power and privilege. The data collection and participant responses to the interviews and focus groups identified a neglected area of my study. As I finished the first round of interviews, it was clear that white identity had to be a component of my research.

The response of white educators to understanding what it means to be white in the United States is frequently guilt, shame, and anger. McIntosh's (1990) seminal work spoke to her realization that racism shows up to many white people as "acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth" (p. 12). My experience as a CFEE facilitator confirms the conclusion McIntosh (1990) draws. Educators have a view of

themselves as caring for all students, almost a colorblind approach. We were taught early on to accept all people no matter what they looked like, and without regard to race. Unfortunately, this practice is not useful in our work and people of color find it ridiculous and insulting for us to espouse we do not see color.

The most difficult notion for white people to face is that we look just like the bad white people referenced by Levine-Rasky (2000). People of color in our seminar share that the only way they determine what kind of white people we are is through our words backed up by our actions. It is one of the reasons that silence by white people creates exactly the condition we want to avoid, looking like a racist. As I came to understand this reality, it was difficult to move past the “I’m one of the good ones” mentality.

Because white people have such difficulty hearing responses that implicate our complicity in racism, people of color tend to withhold their truth. One can only give feedback that crushes people so many times and deal with the implications of lost friendships, lost jobs, and being labeled hypersensitive. A trusted ally of color once gave me a difficult but important message. As I was sharing proudly all that I had done around equity and was clearly looking for her approval, she candidly said, “If you are looking for a thank you, you can forget it. These are things you should be doing and should have been doing all along because it’s the right thing to do.” While I was shattered and a bit indignant, months later, I understood she was exactly right and I was grateful that she shared her truth, one usually withheld. She trusted that I could handle it and grow. I knew that I had made a shift in understanding my identity when I understood her actions.

While it is essential we work with white children at a young age to be racially aware, we must see the urgency in educating our white teachers and white principals about their identity. Identification of “whiteness as a social marker of power and privilege has begun to make inroads” into the literature around multicultural studies and diversity (Levine-Rasky, 2000, p. 272). It is likely that as one reads books on these studies, a chapter on whiteness will be included. In educator preparation

programs, professors must make white identity explicit; especially when over 85% of our educators nationally are white. The percentage in the Pacific Northwest is even higher. School leaders are predominantly white – around 95% in our region. The urgency exists now.

Understanding our whiteness is complex and often brings up difficult issues that can be disturbing to white people as deeply held beliefs, of which they may be unaware, are exposed. I believe that understanding their white identity was the seminal work each principal did during this study. As they struggled to find their place in the world, they saw what was needed in their schools – for the teacher, the students and the families.

One must take up this work with love and care because I do not know of many white educators who are intentionally and consciously racists. In the next section, I will talk about cultural proficiency and a theoretical model that will provide support in understanding our development.

Cultural proficiency. As I researched and examined terminology around one's understanding of race, white identity, oppression, power, and racism, I was inundated with examples and models that all contained different terminology. What I know for sure is that when we use terminology like diversity, multicultural, culturally competent, culturally proficient, social justice, and culturally responsive, there is no mutual understanding about what is being communicated.

A model that provides a clear understanding of the continuum of development white people go through was originally developed by Cross (1989) and adopted by Lindsey (2007; 2010; 2005; 1999; 2002). Cross et al (1989) viewed cultural proficiency as an inside-out process of personal and organizational change. The heart must be involved in this work. He spoke to the notion that unless we are willing and able to recognize that change is an inside-out process in which we are students of our assumptions about self, others, and the context in which we work with others, using tools of cultural proficiency will have little impact. Lindsey et al (2005) concur that

self-examination of ourselves and our schools is a fundamental requirement if change is to take place.

In Table 5.1. (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009), a shift from tolerance to transformation is shown that shapes a different paradigm of cultural proficiency. The term tolerance is linked with Cultural Destructiveness, Cultural Incapacity, and Cultural Blindness. Transformation is linked with Cultural Pre-competence, Cultural Competence, and Cultural Proficiency. This terminology moves us from deficit-based language which tends to see fault in the learner or the culture, home life, or conditions they bring to school. We must recognize the transformation must be in our approach to how we see and work with our students. Understanding the assets children of color bring to us is essential in our work if we are to be successful in helping them reach the high expectations we must hold for them.

As I reflect back on the principals interviewed, I watched them move collectively from Cultural Blindness to Cultural Pre-competence. Many of them spoke of being raised to be colorblind; the notion that we are all the same. While they spoke to the fact that they saw and recognized color, they were initially confused about how to address it. Questions like: “Is it ok to mention color?” “Should I use the word black or African American, Latino or Hispanic?” “How do we talk about race without upsetting our staff members of color and what if we make a mistake?” These questions bring up the concern about silence and the reluctance or unwillingness to engage in race talk or colortalk. Pollock (2004) talks about the concept of silence about racial issues and shared teachers and administrators often discuss racialized issues without using racial terms because of the worry of appearing racist. These white principals are forging through their discomfort at their own pace, and taking courageous steps moving them into the realm of pre-competence and sometimes to competence on Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Cultural Proficiency Continuum

	Cultural Proficiency Continuum	
Compliance-Based Tolerance for Diversity	Cultural Destructiveness.	See the difference, stomp it out. Negating, disparaging, or purging cultures that are different from your own.
	Cultural Incapacity.	See the difference, make it wrong. Elevating the superiority of your own cultural values and beliefs and suppressing those of cultures that are different from your own.
	Cultural Blindness.	See the difference, act as if you don't. Acting as if the cultural differences you see do not matter, or not recognizing that there are differences among and between cultures.
Transformation for Equity	Cultural Pre-competence.	See the differences, respond inadequately. Recognizing that lack of knowledge, experience, and understanding of other cultures limits your ability to effectively interact with them.
	Competence.	See the difference, understand the difference that difference makes. Interacting with other cultural groups in ways that recognize and value their differences.
	Cultural Proficiency	See the difference and respond. Honoring the differences among cultures, viewing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully among a variety of cultural groups.

There were moments of Competence and Cultural Proficiency that showed up in their work, but I believe they would say it was not consistent to date. Competence showed up in their approach to working with families of color and understanding how they showed up as a white leader. I also heard competence in their interactions with students and their ability to self-identify as white to build bridges of understanding. The example that remained in my heart, as discussed in Chapter 4, came from Tricia as she shared her concern about the worries she had for black youth in her school. Tricia's reflections demonstrated cultural competency and showed an insight around honoring the differences in culture. She showed knowledge and awareness of the

potential for students of color having to adapt to a way of being. The raising of the question alone showed an understanding that is not often found in white leaders. I believe the principals' pre-competence showed up in their need to develop a sense of comfort and confidence to be in front and leading this work. This skill would only develop by standing up and stepping into the dialogue with staff. One principal had started that recently and while worried, is taking the risk.

The Table 5.1 provides a powerful reference point for evaluating growth through the continuum, both personally and structurally, as school programs were examined and evaluated. It was not a linear process and one could be at all levels at once depending on the issues that arose.

Discourse II. I feel compelled to examine Discourse II (DII) in my analysis as it provided a conceptual picture to staff of the way we must think and talk about the work of change in our schools. Eubanks et al (1997) wrote what I consider to be a seminal piece in understanding the work to be done in schools. Here I must confess that this article has been used in our training for six years, and through this research study process, I can now say I understand the depth of what the authors are saying. In their work, they state two very simple ideas:

First, if American schooling is to be transformed, its participation in the reproduction of long-term unequal social arrangements must be eliminated. Second, the current dominant discourse in schools (how people talk about, think about, and plan the work of schools and the questions that get asked regarding reform or change) is a hegemonic cultural discourse. (Eubanks et al., 1997, p. 151)

They go on to share that the most serious question facing substantive school reform is how to create DII in school cultures.

As white educators step into conversations “focused on issues that are about uncomfortable, unequal, ineffective, prejudicial conditions and relationships in a school” (Eubanks et al., 1997, p. 156) they face a dissonance that they need support to resolve. Eubanks et al (1997) give language to the work of schools striving to eliminate prejudicial and unequal conditions. They define this work as stepping onto the paths of Discourse II (see definitions in Chapter 1). Discourse II is a way of

approaching issues in schools and education to move out of hegemonic discourse that maintains the status quo:

Everything we have learned about change so far tells us that until high intellectual development for all becomes the common cultural purpose/discourse of schooling, the reforms that can change schooling will never be implemented. This is the "stuff" of Discourse II." (Eubanks et al., 1997, p. 164)

The Table 5.2 illustrates the contrast between Discourse I and Discourse II.

Table 5.2 Contrasting Discourse I and Discourse II

Discourse I deals with....	Discourse II deals with...
Singular truths	Multiple stories
"The change process"	The desired circumstances
Improving what exists	Changing something significant
Techniques, methods, and content	Learning and school relationships
Symptoms	Causes
The way things are	What could be
Blaming others for not meeting our standards	Questioning whether our standards are hindrances
Discipline and control	Alienation and resistance
Competency	Relevance
The familiar	The uncomfortable
Answers and solutions	Dilemmas and mysteries
Information transfer	Knowledge creation
Ability and merit	Privilege and oppression
Dropouts	Pushouts
Reproduction	Transformation
The work of adults	The learning and experience of students
World-class standards	Re-creating our society
Limited time and ability	Getting started anyway
Adapted from Eubanks (1997) by BAYCES	

Examining the descriptors of DI and DII, in Table 5.2, one can see how issues in schools are often presented in DI and how the language of the DII examples reframes the issues (Eubanks et al., 1997). An example Eubanks et al (1997) mention pertains to words like “staff development,” “inservice,” and “school improvement.” Schools routinely schedule these events with the intent to improve practice and increase student learning. The authors critically comment that these processes actually maintain the status quo while appearing to be responsive to outside demands for improvement (Eubanks et al., 1997). Schools have participated in these events for decades with intent to change schools and improve student learning. They argue that “in fact, it has not resulted in any substantial improvement of student learning” (Eubanks et al., 1997, p. 156). These processes are cultural ways to maintain the status quo without appearing to be unresponsive to outside demands for improvement. As a principal, I agree with Eubanks et al (1997) that in the schools I led, many district inservices were scheduled and attended by staff with very few resulting in significant change for students.

The principals in the study became familiar with DII language and the descriptors, leading them to engage in uncomfortable conversations that named the real conditions of their schools. While not easy and a little bit scary, I believe that until principals were able to navigate the prickly issues of how we are failing students, and focus on the learning and experience of students rather than the work of adults, we would continue to reproduce what we already have.

Navigating the transformation needed in schools requires an understanding of the struggles one will face:

Discourse II paths are full of land mines and ambushes. It takes courage, intelligence, guile, determination, sensitivity, patience, caring, and time. We do not fully understand how to develop, prepare, cajole, or entice the type of people to lead and carry out a Discourse II agenda, especially in urban schools, but we are looking and trying to find these ways because we are convinced that anything else is just Discourse I window dressing. This is our issue and dilemma: Where are the people who are willing and committed to engage in the struggle? The ones who will find joy in Discourse II paths to Discourse II

schools? That is, people who will claim Discourse I as their terrain of contestation. Given the contest, Discourse II becomes an overriding project of possibility and hope for change. (Eubanks et al., 1997, pp. 166-167)

School leaders who have the courage to lean into the discomfort, and support their staffs in doing so as well, will have a better chance of creating a learning environment for their staffs and students. A common concern among the principal group was their feeling of inadequacy to lead this conversation on race and white identity. The only way to move past that barrier was to step into it and do it. Learning alongside one's staff is a powerful way to influence and model adapting to change. The notion that the principal must be all-knowing, and should enter already knowing, is a fallacy that never seems to get debunked in leadership practice.

Coupled with the discomfort of dealing with issues of race is the requirement that principals become able to name the issues facing staff without freezing the room. The balance between advocacy and the fear it can create is a fine line to walk. Wheatly (2002) speaks to the phenomenon of willing to be disturbed:

Noticing what surprises and disturbs me has been a very useful way to see invisible beliefs. If what you say surprises me, I must have been assuming something else was true. If what you say disturbs me, I must believe something contrary to you. My shock at your position exposes my own position. When I hear myself saying, "How could anyone believe something like that?" a light comes on for me to see my own beliefs. These moments are great gifts. If I can see my beliefs and assumptions, I can decide whether I still value them. (p. 34)

As a principal, my candor and straight talk often put people on the defense which limited my ability to lead and influence. Listening and observing staff responses is critical to anticipate the needs and learning staff requires to feel competent and regain equilibrium. But walk the line we must. Avoiding the discomfort of feeling we are incapable of leading the effort puts the students who need our advocacy most at risk. Wheatley's (2002) notion of unearthing invisible beliefs speaks to the notion of the emotional discord felt by educators as issues of race surface when they take up this work. That discord, however, must not stop the work. It is an emotion we must work through to change the status quo; it will require the courage and support of all educators to do so.

Transformative learning. Transformative learning informs this study as it describes a process of effecting change in one's frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997). This theory discusses the notion of adult frames of reference, ways in which we form our assumptions and define our world and experiences. In working with the white school leaders in my study, it was apparent that the CFEE experiences allowed participants to critically reflect on their assumptions and habits of mind around race and white identity.

Mezirow (1997) shares that adults have acquired a coherent body of experience—associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses—frames of reference that define their life world. Frames of reference are the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and restrict expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings. He goes on to share an example relevant to this study. He gives an example of a habit of mind, such as ethnocentrism, which is the “predisposition to regard others outside one's own group as inferior. A resulting point of view is the complex of feelings, beliefs, judgments, and attitudes we have regarding specific individuals or groups” (p. 6).

Referring to the ethnocentric example, Mezirow (1997) identifies four processes of learning:

- 1) Elaborate an existing point of view – we can seek further evidence to support our initial bias regarding a group and expand the range or intensity of our point of view.
- 2) Establish new points of view. We can encounter a new group and create new negative meaning schemes for them by focusing on their perceived shortcomings as dictated by our propensity for ethnocentricity.
- 3) Transform our point of view. We can have an experience in another culture that results in our critically reflecting on our misconceptions of this particular group. The result may be a change in point of view toward the group involved. As a result we may become more tolerant or more accepting of members of that group. If this happens over and over again with a number of different groups, it can lead to a transformation by accretion in our governing habit of mind.
- 4) Finally, we may transform our ethnocentric habit of mind by becoming aware and critically reflective of our generalized bias in the way we view groups other than our own. Such epochal transformations are less common and more difficult. We do not make transformative changes in the way we

learn as long as what we learn fits comfortably in our exiting frames of reference. (p. 7)

These processes provided insight into the experience the principals had at their CFEE training. I believe that principals transformed their point of view through observing a side of people of color in this seminar that they may have never experienced. The honest and candid sharing by people of color provided new learning and allowed misconceptions to be pierced. I also saw a critical reflectiveness in the principals, which led them to continually examine their bias and the way they viewed the “other.”

While these principals transformed their frames of reference, there are other leaders and educators who may not welcome an opportunity to do so. In an article addressed to leadership preparation faculty, Rusch and Horsford (2009) speak to the responsibility of college faculty and educational leaders to step into this work:

The authors of this article are convinced that helplessness should not be an option for individuals committed to the preparation of educational leaders. Thus, the dynamics and tensions described above became an impetus to frame a theory for understanding and demonstrating the dispositions and skills academics and educational leaders need to break the silence and engage in constructive talk about race across color lines, talk that might touch hearts and minds. (pp. 302-303)

I believe the same engagement in talk about race is necessary at all levels of education if we are to transform educators to critically examine their long-held, unconscious biases and beliefs about the children and families they serve. Principals learning alongside their staff members approached the conversations in a powerful way. Brookfield and Preskill (2009) write about learning leaders below:

These leaders led as equals to their followers. They were as ready to be guided as to guide, as willing to listen as to speak, as eager to be part of the group as to stand out from it. In fact, for these leaders it didn't matter much at all whether they were seen as leaders or not. (p. 214)

However leaders decide to take up the learning and conversations with their staff members, actions are what is called for and an indicator of social justice leadership.

Implications

The findings in this study have implications and recommendations for administrators, both building and district level, and teacher/administrator preparation programs. In the following sections I will explore what I see as implications for improving the cultural proficiency of white leaders in school districts.

Implications for administrators. It is apparent that the white leaders studied learned a great deal at the CFEE training on understanding their white identity and the needs of their colleagues, students, and families of color. Administrators must find a way to learn and grow into culturally proficient leaders. Based on the comments of the principals I studied, they did not know they did not know. They believed they were racially competent until they delved deep into a training experience that helped them see another perspective. They were creating trust and authentic relationships with their families of color as they shared their experience of learning what it meant to be white. Principals must demand opportunities from the variety of trainings available, to deeply **understand how their white identity impacts their leadership.**

Once principals have developed a sense of what it means to be a white leader, they must find ways to **help their staff understand this work** as well. They must take the courageous stand of insisting teachers become culturally proficient, especially if they are serving students of color. Leaders must say, “You can’t say you don’t do race” with their staff. They must consider hiring practices that screen out teacher candidates who are culturally unaware. One year of a racially biased teacher, even with good intentions, can slow the growth of students of color, and in some cases do harm.

Efforts to recruit and maintain staff of color are critical for students to see people who look like them in their schools. We have many excuses as to why we do not have these staff in our building. My challenge is to ask why a teacher or principal of color would want to come to your school or district. Examining the dilemma from that perspective may give some important insight. Once staff is hired, support is required to determine their needs, especially if a staff is not culturally proficient. People of color can give many examples of why schools lose staff of color. It is

important to build relationships and create a climate where they are able to tell us the truth. Then we must believe them.

Principals must **communicate their needs** to their colleagues and district office administrative team, especially the superintendent. In the district I studied, there were clear board goals around equity and a goal to eliminate the racial achievement gap. However, as time passed and leadership changed, the initial equity efforts were sometimes viewed as something checked off when, in fact, the work had only just begun. Just as principals must work to create schools where Discourse II discussions occur on the real work of schools, so must the district. This district took incredibly courageous steps in training all their administrators and continuing on with teachers. The next step must be infusing their learning into the day-to-day work around curriculum and teaching practice.

Finally, without a mentor or a support group, this is nearly impossible work. Principals must find others to talk to for support of their work as they undertake this effort. One cannot do it alone in isolation. Merely bringing the principals being studied together for the two focus groups was a huge support to them. They were able to talk about race and ask for help, share frustrations, and find out they were not alone in their struggle. A mentor who is skilled in cultural proficiency can support principals in navigating or avoiding roadblocks to help them see unanticipated outcomes, and support their learning through sharing experiences of others.

Implications for leadership preparation programs. The recommendations I make around preparation programs are not necessarily new or insightful. Researchers have been calling for these programs to examine their institution's ability to deliver culturally competent candidates to the field (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Capper et al., 2006; Rusch, 2004; Scheurich & Laible, 1995). I question what it will take for this critical group to competently turn out social justice leaders. My recommendation would be that **if an institution does not have the capacity to hold the space for racial conversations, bring in people who do and allow them to facilitate the dialogue.** There are many competent white people who are grasping and

sharing their learning in the region I studied, and I believe this would be true nationally. I will add, however, that one cannot become competent without doing what one fears and making errors, just like one cannot learn to ride a bicycle without falling down a few times.

Another issue that I see many institutions taking on is **the recruiting and supporting of aspiring teachers and administrators of color** to enroll in their programs. An important next step is for educator preparation programs to communicate with area schools about candidates of color who might be available each June. Having a relationship with K-12 districts to support their effort to hire candidates of color would be a powerful partnership.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study sought to understand how white leaders examine white identity, privilege, and power; and, lends itself to many opportunities for future research. With the world changing as rapidly as it is, and the United States birth rate in 2011 reaching over 50% non-dominant culture babies, there is an urgency for educators to become culturally proficient so they are effective in their efforts to work with an even more diverse population in our schools. Current reality demonstrates that we do not have the skills to do so yet.

There are many questions that I believe have an urgent need for further research. The following include some of my thoughts in this area, in no particular order:

- Would I have found similar results with a larger number of principals?
- How would principals of color have responded to the research questions?
- How would administrators of color see white administrators' work to create culturally proficient schools? and How would they identify issues in schools that contribute to the racial achievement gap?
- How would principals in large urban school districts with a majority of students of color have responded to the research questions?

- How do principals who demonstrate cultural proficiency in their schools explain their ability to be effective, especially if they have had no equity training?
- Can practice become culturally proficient without training on white identity, privilege, and power?
- Does placing an equity lens on principal and teacher practice, through the evaluation process, increase the likelihood that they will shift their practice?
- How does “effective” racial literacy and identity training support graduating teacher and administrator candidates in their move towards cultural proficiency in schools?
- How culturally proficient are teacher educators? How ready are they to take on this work?
- What role should teacher licensure take in assessing the cultural proficiency of educators?

Limitations of the Study

As a researcher, it is important to be aware of the biases I bring to any study I conduct and how they might influence the conclusions I might come to in my research. In studying white school leaders, I have three obvious areas of bias – 1) my experiences as a white woman, 2) my experience as a school principal, and 3) my role as a CFEE facilitator.

As I spoke with and observed and recorded data with my research participants, it was done through a white lens, the only lens I have being a white woman. Having been a school leader for over 20 years, I brought my beliefs about leadership, the principal role, and how principals create change in schools into my perspective. It was important to set those beliefs aside to be open to the participants’ approaches to leadership. At times, I did not recognize a belief I had until I felt a reaction to what I was seeing and hearing. I learned as time went on to record those in my researcher journal and note my reactions to help eliminate bias.

Another possible limitation is the fact that, regarding a sensitive topic such as race, participants may not have told the truth about their feelings or actions. It can be risky to honestly disclose one's feelings and reactions to the workplace and/or the staff one is working with daily. I believe the participants were very candid in their responses; two were concerned about possible repercussions about their comments.

A limitation may exist as the study involved the use of member checking. Though transcripts were sent out after each interview and focus group, I received only two responses about the content of the transcripts. I believe the hectic and demanding schedule of the principalship prevented the participants from reading and responding throughout the study. This is an assumption on my part.

The sample size is a limitation as well. A larger sample and/or a sample that drew from several school districts, rather than one, might yield broader results.

This inquiry was conducted in a single district located in a suburban community in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. The location could be considered a limitation since the demographics of the northwest are unique to the region in some ways. I believe a predominantly white region or district would benefit from understanding the experiences of the principals studied.

Concluding Thoughts

As I come to the end of this milestone, my research study, I am compelled to reflect on my learning. As I started this study, I expected to be disappointed in the results I would discover. Again, I am faced with my unrealistic expectations and impatience as they overcome my understanding of systems and change. Throughout the study, my journal shows I was a bit disappointed in some of the results and discussions in which I participated. However, as I started writing my study and reexamining the research, I experienced a shift in how I saw the data. In fact, I was surprised at all the actions principals were taking toward shifting their staffs' level of cultural proficiency. I actually wondered what I had been doing as they were speaking with me and around me. Suffice it to say I realized that my first impressions may not always be as accurate as I believe.

I cannot end this study without expressing tremendous gratitude to my five white principals. Their willingness to take time from their overwhelming schedules, lay open their fears and concerns, risk alienating colleagues, and be vulnerable with each other so that others may benefit from their experience required great courage. They understood my concern that much of the literature on social justice and culturally competent leaders gives the impression that if you just follow these steps, you are there. While researchers have talked about resistance and barriers leaders may face (Marshall & Oliva, 2010; Theoharis, 2009), leaders I know, including myself, read this information and feel they should be able to do it. There are no real life examples of what the struggle looks like and sounds like. As Tricia, Cara, Bruce, Mark and Jason made public their thinking about race, their learning about what it means to be white, and their struggle to find the courage to speak to their staffs about it, my hope is that other principals will step into this complex and sometimes dangerous work of leading for equity.

Many of my long-held beliefs were validated through dialogue and observations of my participants and the research; some of these include: principals must be avid readers and learners; must be willing to take up the uncomfortable; must be willing to speak the unspeakable; must be willing to be vulnerable; must learn with staff and not be the expert; must be willing to make public mistakes; and must be transparent around the work of leading the school.

I have learned that principals are courageous for stepping into the leadership role. Fewer and fewer educators are willing to serve as leaders as they see the impossible expectations of the position. Yet, those who I studied made valiant efforts to serve the needs of students and facilitate risky and difficult staff dialogue.

I have learned even more about my white identity. As I initially met myself in 2006, as a white woman, I have read all I can find on what it means to be white. In doing this research, I now know I must continue to take action on what I learn. Knowing is not enough and does not have an impact on the systemic institutional racism that exists in schools. I have also learned to be more humble as my

expectations are often unreasonable and show up as impatience at the slow rate of change I see.

My insight into the CFEE work I am involved in has also grown. I must have patience and understanding about the competing interests educators face as they attempt to become culturally proficient while leading and teaching on a daily basis. As I recall my first CFEE seminar, I spoke with my colleague after the first day and said, “What the heck did we sign up for!?” I was ready to leave and never come back as the knowledge that I was complicit in racism was too much to bear.

Yet today, I can easily admit I am a racist. I do not want to be but I was brought up in a system of white privilege and continue to benefit daily from the color of my skin. My colleagues of color smile when I say this as they know I am not personalizing it and feeling blame, shame, and guilt. In the skin I am in, I have dedicated my work to helping other white people like me, who grew up in culturally encapsulated environments understand and examine their privilege. I know that any racism I carry is unconscious and unintentional and I am open to receiving feedback when I demonstrate a thought pattern that exhibits racist beliefs. But I also know that just being against racism, or non-racist is not enough. For me, I have moved into the anti-racist stance and will remain there.

If someone had told me I would write a dissertation on race when I began this process, I would have looked at them like they were crazy. In fact, I was cautioned away from the topic because it would be too complex, too hard, and besides, I was white. My response now is white people must step into this work and be allies to the people of color who have carried this burden for all of my lifetime and beyond. For too long we have relied on people of color to graciously come talk to our white staffs and publicly bleed for us about the impact of racism and what they want and need for their children in our schools. It is time for the white voices to step forward as well.

In conclusion, I will share the seminal moment for me as I came to this work. Warren (2010) shares from her research that white activists usually have a seminal moment that propels them to do this work. As I attended the first CFEE, I was a real

project for the facilitation team. I had to be taken on walk and talks as my shame and guilt around my unconsciousness about race overwhelmed me. I am sure the team figured they had a real undertaking ahead of them with me in the seminar. At the end of the session, I was renewed and ready to take this on regionally. At the closing circle, I stood up and shared, “I am committing to take up this work so that white educators will not face the experience I just had – finding out after 30 years in education that I totally missed race in my work with students.” Six years later, I continue to hold this stance. I will continue to be an ally and speak my truth as a white woman. My hope is that this dissertation will encourage more white people to step into the work. If not you, who? If not now, when? (first-century Jewish scholar named Hillel).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Initial Survey Instrument



Participant Survey

Name _____ Age _____

Gender _____ Race _____ Number of years in region _____

Years as a principal _____

Current Assignment _____

Please indicate where you were born/grew up _____

Contact Information:

School _____ Position _____

Address _____ City & Zip _____

Office Phone _____

Email _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Questions? Contact Julie McCann, (503) 730-1587 or mccannju@onid.orst.edu or Dr. Karen Higgins at (541) 737-4201 higginsk@orst.edu.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Document for Participants



Informed Consent Document

Project Title: White Leaders Examine Power and Privilege:

The Challenges of Leading for Equity

Principal Investigator: Karen Higgins, Professor, OSU School of Education

Student Investigator: Julie M. McCann, PhD Student, OSU School of Education

This form contains information you will need to help you decide whether to be in this study or not. Please read the form carefully and ask the study team member(s) questions about anything that is not clear.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You are being invited to take part in a research study that examines White school principals' dispositions, actions, and struggles around leading for equity. This study investigates the following three research questions: (1) How do White school leaders view White identity and the impact, if any, it has on their leadership? (2) How does White school leaders' identity impact how they relate to students of color, their parents, and the community? (3) In what ways do White school leaders engage in race talk and address issues of White identity, privilege and power? The results will be used in a student dissertation and presented during the defense of the thesis. Publications will be an additional outcome of the research.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?

This consent form gives you the information you need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study or not.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You are being invited to take part in this study because you are a White principal who attended the Coaching for Educational Equity seminar.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY AND HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

Participation in this study involves individual interviews and focus group discussions. The questions in the interview provide the researcher information about your school, your experiences as a principal, and the different actions, if any, you've taken around equity in your school. The interviews may take place in your school office and the focus groups will take place at a school or a meeting room at the 4J District Office.

This study involves individual interviews (approximately one hour) and focus group discussions (approximately 90 minutes). If you agree to take part in this study, your time commitment is a total of approximately 6-10 hours. The proposed schedule and timeline follows:

Initial Interview #1: Open-ended with prompts/probes

Purpose: Develop relationship and understand context of work

Focus Group #1: Open-ended with prompts/probes

Purpose: Principals talk about experiences and challenges in leading for equity

Observations: Attend staff meetings, district administrative meetings, and school board meeting as an observer.

Interview #2

Purpose: Probe more deeply into White Identity (understanding of being white, privilege, power, oppression, etc.)

Focus Group #2

Participants are provided a reading related to White school leaders struggles around leading for equity. This focus group provides an opportunity for participants to process the reading and relate their work to the experiences in the article.

Additional Interviews (2-3 TBA)

Follow up interviews are conducted to discuss information from interviews, focus groups, and observations should they be needed.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?

There is minimal risk in this research study. Given the nature of the research topic it is possible that participants will experience an emotional reaction or feel uncomfortable discussing some of the issues.

There may also be concern or embarrassment about being identified in the research. All participants are given a pseudonym at the beginning of the study which is used throughout the research process. Although the participants in the study know each other through the focus groups, it is made clear to them that confidentiality is preserved through the use of the pseudonyms. You are given the opportunity to have input into the researcher's analysis of the data. Audio tapes are used solely for the purposes of transcription. Audio tapes will be destroyed and transcription material will be stored for 3 years before being destroyed. Material will be kept under lock and key at OSU School of Education. Future educational articles will use the information from the study.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

We do not know if you will benefit from being in this study. However, we hope that you and other people might benefit from this study about leadership for equity. Taking time to examine and reflect upon your leadership practice around equity and reflect on your White identity may lead to personal and professional growth. You have the opportunity to engage in the topic alongside your colleagues and the researcher, and may gain new insights about power, privilege, and leadership for equity issues.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

There will be a Starbucks gift card of \$10 provided to participants of the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?

The information you provide during this research study is kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Data is kept in a secure location with access limited to the researcher and student researcher. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that personally identifies you. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

DO I HAVE A CHOICE TO BE IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. While taking part in focus groups and interviews, you are free to skip any questions that you would prefer not to answer. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Julie McCann, (503) 730-1587, mccannju@onid.orst.edu or Karen Higgins, (541) 737-4201, higginsk@orst.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed): _____

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

