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EXPLORING EQUITY THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF WHITE  
EQUITY-TRAINED SUBURBAN EDUCATORS AND MINORITIZED PARENTS

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
Graduate School of Leadership & Change  
Antioch University

In partial fulfillment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

David E. Lawrence

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June 2021

EXPLORING EQUITY THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF WHITE  
EQUITY-TRAINED SUBURBAN EDUCATORS AND MINORITIZED PARENTS

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Been approved by the committee members signed below  
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Graduate School of Leadership & Change  
Antioch University  
In partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Dr. Laurien Alexandre, PhD, Committee Member

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my sister Tanza “Taw-knee” Lawrence, my brothers Al and Larry Tompkins, and my Aunt Juanita Trammell. They are unable to be part of my doctoral journey, but I know how excited they would’ve been to witness the conclusion of my research.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my parents James and Eva Lawrence. My dad worked in a factory for 30 years and self-taught himself by reading the great classics. My mother is brilliant and the first working-class person I knew that spoke a foreign language. Their intense interest in science, reason, history, and scholarship is why I am able to complete my research. And to my sister Debbie, you are the most eclectic and intelligent person I know and I am acknowledging that in writing.

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To my wife, Kim, I don't know of anyone tougher than you. You continually support whatever challenge I decide to address. I am indebted to you eternally. To my daughters, Davishay and Kimea, you are smarter, better writers, and better people than your dad. That was the plan.

Joey Dwayne Williams has witnessed the journey. We've been friends for 40 years. You have provided opportunities and support as I've navigated this odyssey called life. Undeterred by your own obligations or challenges, you always found time to lend an ear and a helping hand.

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## ABSTRACT

### EXPLORING EQUITY THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF WHITE EQUITY-TRAINED SUBURBAN EDUCATORS AND MINORITIZED PARENTS

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The intent of this qualitative critical incident study was to explore the interpretation of equity by White equity-trained suburban educators (WETSE) and minoritized parents (MP) in a Midwestern suburban school district to address and change inequitable student outcomes. WETSE and MP participated independently in focus groups. The research design used critical incident technique (CIT) as the methodology; focus groups as the data collection tool; and thematic analysis (TA) as the analytical tool. Zones of Mediation (ZONE) and Transformative Leadership Theory (TLT) were used to distill and categorize the research findings. WETSE and MP established an agreement on four themes thought to represent impediments to achieving equity in schools (implicit bias, White privilege, diversity, and power). Two divergent themes (WETSE—deficit thinking and MP—stereotyping) and one emergent theme (Equity Training) were generated. The singular stand-alone theme, assimilation, was a complete outlier, and it was generated by MP. All themes were categorized as “normative” or “political” elements of ZONE, demonstrating that technical changes are disconnected from WETSE and MP equity perspectives. Transformative leadership theory (TLT) is composed of eight tenets. WETSE and MP prioritized two of the eight tenets as essential to achieving equity. These findings indicate that changing mindsets (tenet #2) and redistributing power in more equitable ways (tenet #3) are central to achieving equitable school conditions. This study contributes to existing, albeit



minimal, literature detailing longitudinal equity training's effectiveness at deconstructing beliefs and ideologies of White equity-trained suburban teachers and comparing them to minoritized parents' interpretation of equity using critical incidents. There is a disconnect between this study's findings and what researchers and practitioners are doing to achieve equitable school outcomes. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA, <http://aura.antioch.edu/>, and OhioLINK ETD Center, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/etd>

*Keywords:* equity, White educators, suburban schools, transformative leadership, minoritized parents, social justice, school improvement, school reform, implicit bias, professional development, equity training

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is being written during a time of unprecedented social disruption. The nation and the world are in the midst of protests against the unjust and inequitable treatment of minorities at the hands of police, a global pandemic killing tens of thousands per day, and extraordinary income inequality (Alverado et al., 2017). Schools are but an outgrowth of society, and just as acting to solve racism and inequities in society is formidable, that task is no less herculean in schools.

I am an Antioch doctoral student studying equity as well as being an African American male whose lived experiences influenced this study. I would be remiss as an Antioch student if I did not begin this research by quoting the first president of Antioch, Horace Mann. Shortly before the Civil War, itself a battle fought to eradicate inequality, Mann (1848) said, “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance wheel of the social machinery” (para. 9).

The idea of achieving educational equity has been central to antebellum public education discourse and is not a novel concept (Counts, 1939). Unfortunately, there are technical, normative, and political dimensions of change that still serve to recreate and perpetuate educational inequalities (Holme et al., 2014) more than 150 years after Mann first gave voice to the importance of education as the great equalizer.

This study will explore how White equity-trained suburban educators (WETSE) and minoritized parents (MP) interpret and understand equity. The investigation of their interpretations through critical incident technique may provide the field of education with new insights into doing successful equity work.

By placing critical incidents indicative of inequities within the school district at the core of this inquiry, participant responses have the potential to transcend transactional rhetoric. We often accept language that is cliché ridden and does not address the realities of the moment. It is quite common to listen to educators speak about “closing the achievement gap” (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and using tools that have already failed to address inequality (Holme et al., 2014). Normative dynamics (beliefs and ideologies) and political dynamics (power and politics) are the dimensions that measure equity (Renee et al., 2010; Riehl, 2005) and seek to ameliorate inequalities. Equity-minded change involves confronting power structures, historical deficits, and is inherently political (Freire, 2007). It requires a degree of social activism (Burns, 1978) and moral courage (Shields, 2016, 2020) not generally seen because there are consequences associated with displaying values and confronting danger (Kidder, 2005) in the pursuit of equity.

I argue that rapidly changing suburban demographics, the homogeneity of suburban educators, and an emphasis on technical solutions will lead to the continuation and perhaps exacerbation of educational inequity. I and others (Giroux & Aronowitz, 1985) draw a link between an inequitable society and inequality of outcomes for minoritized youth. There must be another way forward to achieving equity in schools outside of the current school reform and improvement proposals.

This chapter begins with a statement of the problem, the purpose, and the research questions. It is essential that the proposed study be squarely rooted within its theoretical and practical context. Chapter I will do so by considering the following philosophical and utilitarian terms: equity and equality, zones of mediation, suburban educator, minoritized parent, transformative leadership, and the historical development of the suburbs in the United States.



The chapter concludes by considering the significance of the study as well as providing an overview of the entire study. Let us now consider what I declare as the problem.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are persistent gaps in academic achievement and outcomes between White students and minoritized students (Ravitch, 2013). There are others that argue that achievement gaps are improperly named and are indeed an educational debt owed to minoritized populations (Ladson-Billings, 2006) based on structural, systemic, and historical inequities. Nonetheless, the solutions put forward to address the inequities are primarily technical in nature and have been failures (Oakes et al., 1998). We hear consistently that parents and teachers (Elmore, 2000) are the most important factors with respect to closing achievement gaps and improving student educational attainment. However, they are rarely studied *together* when deliberating solutions to inequitable conditions and outcomes, e.g., I found no studies where this occurred.

The education profession is overwhelmingly White (Hodgkinson, 2002) and research has revealed racial prejudice by White children as early as five or six (Katz, 2003). As those White children age and become adults, racial prejudice takes on a more implicit form (McGillicuddy-DeLisi et al., 2006). Those children grow up to become educators and harbor biases, prejudices, and negative stereotypes of minoritized populations (Wilson & Soslaw, 2020).

The U.S. Department of Education (2016) reports that as of 2012 the U.S. teaching force was 82% White; 74% of the preservice teachers in traditional education programs were White, and of those enrolled in non-traditional pathways such as Teach for America, 65% were White. In addition, White teacher candidates complete all requirements for teaching licenses at significantly higher rates than minoritized candidates. What this effectively and statistically means is that the U.S. teaching force will be overwhelmingly White for at least the next century.

The analysis of WETSE teacher beliefs, ideologies, and political perspectives and how they might relate to MP interpretation and understanding of equity is the foundation of this study and may provide remedies to minimize or eliminate inequality across a wide educational spectrum.

Currently and historically, academic, opportunity, and educational attainment gaps exist between minoritized students and White students (Fullan, 2010). The gaps suggest that equity is a consideration for the education community specifically and society writ large. These gaps are longitudinal (Ravitch, 2013), dialectically woven into society (Ladson-Billings, 2006), and seemingly immutable.

Technical solutions used to close the aforementioned gaps have been researched exhaustively and have been implemented with very little longitudinal success (Carter & Welner, 2013). Technical solutions do not address beliefs and ideologies with respect to equity, therefore they are inadequate at closing the gaps when implemented in isolation. Normative and political change must be the precursor to technical change (Oakes et al., 1992) if equity is to be achieved. We know from analyzing longitudinal data that U.S. students during the last 50 years have achieved uneven results (Silver, 2017) as measured by National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), the nation's report card. NAEP is the only assessment universally administered to the world's youth. An abridged version of the failed technical solutions can be found in Appendix H.

Scarce empirical research exists highlighting the interrelation and distinctiveness of beliefs and ideologies of WETSE and MP. Understanding how these two populations understand equity may inform future equity work and redirect unsuccessful attempts at achieving equity of outcomes. Equity is a complex and often misunderstood concept (Secada, 1989). By clarifying

how WETSE and MP interpret the complex and often misunderstood term *equity*, I hope to uncover findings that outline where the equity work in suburban schools should begin.

Equity can be a ubiquitous pursuit! My study hopes to provide early research, identifying equity next steps, i.e., where do you start if you are a suburban school district with an increasingly diverse student population? Concurrently, the educational theory most closely aligned with creating equitable school communities, transformative leadership theory (Shields, 2016), necessitates additional empirical research in order to guide practitioners in their work.

Finally, this study specifically highlights a suburban school district. The preponderance of educational studies focus on urban school districts when the majority of students are housed within suburban schools and most low-income students are now suburban residents (Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The intent of the qualitative critical incident study was to explore the understanding and interpretation of equity by WETSE and MP in a Midwestern suburban school district. Noticeably, most minoritized students attend suburban schools and the trend suggests increases in the minority suburban student body population for the foreseeable future (Frey, 2001, 2015). Meanwhile, suburban public school educators' percentage of White teachers and principals continues to increase (Diamond et al., 2020) and I found no research that specifically documented "equity training" effects on practicing suburban educators. Additionally, when searching using the qualifiers "equity, diversity, inclusion" and "suburban educators," I found no empirical studies documenting the effects of training or the relationship between their understanding and interpretation of equity pertaining to MP. My aim was to compare and contrast two very distinct populations (WETSE and MP) with respect to interpretations of equity.

## Research Questions

The questions include a main central research question and one sub-question:

**Central research question:** How do White equity-trained suburban educators (WETSE) and minoritized parents (MP) interpret equity?

**Research Sub-Question 1:** Are there themes that emerge from WETSE and MP interpretation of equity and are they similar or divergent?

## Equity Versus Equality

The terms *equality* and *equity* are often used interchangeably. Despite their phonetic similarity and philological connections, they are quite distinct. Inequality of income and wealth distribution is a matter of fact and is, therefore, basically objective. Equity of the same distribution is basically a matter of moral judgment and is, therefore, essentially political (Bowman, 1975; Espinoza, 2007). The redistribution of wealth, power dynamics, and the deconstruction of mindsets fall squarely in the dimension of equity. Just as questions of implicit bias, deficit-thinking, racism, democracy, and social justice align seamlessly with the question of equity (Shields, 2016, 2020).

Equity as a concept is interconnected with social justice, fairness, and takes into consideration individual and societal circumstances, such as unresolved problems of racism and poverty (Corson, 2001). The idea of attempting to explore equity is an intricate undertaking given the differences in lived experiences between the study's two participant groups (WETSE and MP). The dissimilar lived experience creates distinctive meaning when fairness and justice are interpreted.

Furthermore, the cause-and-effect of inequalities is bound with individuals' theoretical, practical, academic, and spiritual journey (Espinoza, 2007). Educational equity is generally

thought to mean each and every child receiving the resources that are necessary to learn and thrive, consequently a contradiction occurs within the framework of capitalism, which is designed to create inequality (Marx, 1933). There is a debate concerning the viability of equity and equality co-existing within the framework of capitalism (Konow et al., 2020).

Equality involves strictly quantitative measures, such as class size, textbook distribution, educational attainment, and other technical measures. Equity encompasses qualitative measures and subjective moral or ethical judgments. Equity analysis is complicated because humans differ in the connotations that they associate with the concepts of democracy, equity, justice, moral courage, and power (Espinoza, 2007).

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) thought that inequitable effects of schools do not have to be consciously orchestrated. He wrote, “To penalize the underprivileged and favor the most privileged, the school has only to neglect, in its teaching methods and techniques and its criteria when making academic judgments, to take into account the cultural inequalities between children of different social classes” (p. 37). In other words, by treating all pupils, however unequal they may be in reality, as equal in rights and duties, “the educational system is led to give its de facto sanction to initial cultural inequalities” (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 37–38).

Functionalist researchers suggest that inequality is a foregone conclusion. They view inequality as natural, necessary, and inevitable (Coleman, 1968; Radcliff-Brown, 1965). The functionalist view equality as a quantitative venture, such as class size, graduation rate, degree attainment, and subscribe to the concept of meritocracy. If equal resources are provided, relatively speaking, equal outcomes should occur. Equality is correlated to the performance of the school system itself (Farrell, 1999) and its relation to the labor market.

Critical theory affirms that educational systems in capitalist societies are intimately involved in the reproduction of class relationships and cannot be simply understood by illuminating numerical school outcomes (Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1975; Gamoran, 2001; Gimenez, 2001). This study's underpinning theoretical framework, transformative leadership theory, is grounded in critical theory. Critical theory is predicated on questioning assumptions related to existing forms of practice (Bonner, 2011; Kataras-Ozkan & Murphy, 2010). Thus far, this thesis has focused on framing equity within the context of education and differentiating it from equality. Let us now move to suburban educators' relationship with equity.

### **Suburban Educators and Equity**

This study takes place in a climate of intense scrutiny of how citizens globally process equity, diversity, and inclusion. Weick (1994) noted the importance of understanding the "ways people generate what they interpret" (p. 13). Weick (1994) goes on to reason that there is a dialectic between the socially constructed ideas regarding one's self and their behavior. This conclusion causally relates to the comparison and contrast between minoritized parents and White suburban educators' interpretation of equity. Context contributes to intricate and multidimensional intersections within the broader institutional makeup that define socially accepted norms and behaviors, i.e., the intersection between suburban educators, minoritized parents and equity-oriented beliefs, ideologies, and actions. Comparing and contrasting beliefs and ideologies may lead to the discovery of common goals or polarizing differences.

As suggested by Cookson (2013), race, ethnicity, religion, and class all contribute to the assumed understanding of school, with "class playing the leading role, if not the starring role, in the drama of social life" (p. 2) and the national conscious and unconscious of society (Brooks, 2000; Douthat, 2005; Gilbert, 2011). The intersection of class and race at the crossroad of

structural inequality addresses a very profound and informative dynamic.

White educators struggle with discussing race as a byproduct of equity (Ladson-Billings, 2007). White educators' disengagement in the race conversation stem from their deficit perspectives associated with minoritized youth (Valencia, 2010), dearth of understanding and education about race (Sleeter, 2001), and failing to see themselves as racial actors (Hagerman, 2018). The following section discuss extant research pertaining to deficit thinking, race dialogue, and White educators as racial actors.

Deficit thinking is a mindset that embraces the myth that low-income MP do not value education, White students are superior academically, and disregards educational structural barriers (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Deficit thinking mindsets create fertile conditions that allow limited access to gifted programming, disproportionate suspensions and expulsions, and racialized tracking (Oakes, 1985). Deficit thinking is not the exclusive domain of White educators and not all White educators exhibit deficit thinking; however, the study takes place in the environment of suburban schools. According to Frankenberg (2013), approximately 84% of the U.S. teaching force is White and that percentage is even higher in suburban schools. How are the MP navigating the suburban environment?

### **Suburban Minoritized Parents and Equity**

Minoritized parents are described by Shields et al. (2005) as more than numerically less than, but have the characteristics of a minority and are treated as inferior based on power relations. Minoritized groups vary based on the country, but routinely include students of color, new immigrant children, Indigenous students, and students whose families live in poverty.

According to the extant educational literature, equity theories and practices are not often grounded in the "lived theory" (hooks, 1994) of minoritized families, and have yet to become

central to broader educational reform movements. Instead, minority families continue to hold spaces in education as clients and beneficiaries, or as instrumental levers of power as individual consumers (Barajas-Lopez & Ishimaru, 2020).

The guardrails used to frame MP voice include parent involvement, school choice, collaboration between teachers and parents, and communication with the school or school district (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Lawson & Lawson, 2019). Minoritized parents are generally fearful of structural and cultural mistreatment of their children with regard to academic and social concern (Lewis-McCoy, 2016). To understand their fear and concerns that their children will be treated equally and with an equity focus, more research is needed.

There have been contemporary models of parent engagement that are not defined by deficit-thinking, power, oppression, and assimilation factors. For example, Community-Based Design Research (CBDR; Bang et al., 2013; Bang et al., 2016) grounded in the learning sciences seeks to analyze and act on the complexities of context and environment. CBDR (Bang et al., 2013, 2016) juxtaposes parents and researchers as collaborators in the design and testing of educational interventions, particularly in U.S. science learning space (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Bell, 2004). CBDR takes up the challenge “to make explicit the position and power of decision makers as well as potential opportunities to reconfigure aspects of design toward equity” (Bang et al., 2013, p. 711).

Community-Based Design Research (2013) aligns with this study’s emphasis on the equity experiences of suburban minoritized parents and the comingling of suburban educator beliefs, ideologies, and actions. CBDR is an iterative process that focuses on the theory and real-life experiences (critical incidents) of engaging minoritized parents in research and decision making (Bang et al., 2010). CBDR suggests that in order to achieve equity, MP must “make



explicit the position and powers of decision makers as well as potential opportunities to reconfigure aspects of design toward equity” (Bang et al., 2013, p. 1). As explained earlier, the primary focus of this study is the interpretation of equity and MP engagement was critical to the discussion of community-based advocacy for equity. CBDR serves as a model to connect MP to normative decision making in the interest of ameliorating inequitable outcomes.

Gutierrez and Jurow (2014) argued that researchers concerned with social transformation and improving the well-being of communities would do well to target consequential interventions such as addressing equity. Other current empirical studies that explore approaches to interpreting and engaging parents are African American parent mentor programming (Denise & Marguerite, 2018); Chinese culturally responsive and linguistic appropriate parent engagement (Baba, 2016); students with disabilities parent engagement (Gan, 2015); and early learning parent engagement (Shepherd et al., 2012).

The previous sections were framed around the research questions’ critical inflection points; equity, WETSE, and MP. The following section will outline key elements of the study’s framework, Zone of Mediation (Oakes et al., 1998) which helps to place equity in the context of the research questions to be followed by an overview of the study’s theoretical framework—transformative leadership theory (Shields, 2020).

### **Zone of Mediation (Technical, Normative, and Political Dimensions)**

Zone of Mediation (ZONE) is a framework that sets parameters based on the policy, behavior, beliefs, and actions within schools and the immediate community (Oakes et al., 1998). Each school district with its own context, history, and political situation is defined by its own unique zone (Oakes et al., 1998). Although each school district is unique, I would argue that groupings of schools would serve as directionally correct designations, e.g., urban, rural, and

suburban. ZONE comprises three dimensions (technical, normative, and political), and each zone is ascribed varying degrees of importance based on the particular school district and its commitment to equity.

Most educational change literature spotlights the technical aspect of school reform and routinely avoids the normative and political dimensions of change (Holme et al., 2014; Oakes & Lipton, 2002; Oakes et al., 2005; Welner & Oaks, 2008;). The technical component of change is the least contested and the most researched. All three ZONE dimensions are interrelated and important to document. This research will focus on the normative and political dimensions of change given the saturation of technical change literature and studies (Oakes et al., 2005; Riehl, 2005). The next section provides an overview of Zones of Mediation (Oakes et al., 1993; Riehl, 2005) which set parameters for policy, behavior, beliefs, actions and their relationship to change.

### **Technical Dimension**

Technical changes broadly refer to “structures (e.g., arrangement of space, time, people, and materials), strategies (e.g., curricular, pedagogical, governance), and knowledge (e.g., adolescent development, teacher training)” (Oaks et al., 1992, p. 463). I have worked in multiple school districts and observed numerous superintendents. The initial “change” to become more equal as a school district customarily consists of reassigning principals and/or central office staff, modifying a few titles, rearranging the organization chart, and purchasing new materials. Additional technical changes consist of, but are not limited to, new technology, co-teaching and inclusion, school-based clinics, extended school day, and a host of other technical reforms that have demonstrated failure in closing the achievement, opportunity, and socioeconomic gap (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Ravitch, 2013; Reardon, 2013; Reardon & Bischoff, 2011; Appendix H).

Technical reforms are usually touted as closing the achievement and opportunity gap antidote. Technical reforms are rarely tendered as a socioeconomic gap remedy. That seems to be expressly reserved for social activism and politics. Technical change much like equality has defined limits based on systemic structures and the ability to achieve consensus (Espinoza, 2007; Oakes & Lipton, 2002). Data coaching, teacher-based teams, building leadership teams, and the identification of minoritized and gender subgroups are just a few technical reform schemes used to give the illusion (Elmore, 2000; Appendix H) of activities focused on closing the achievement and opportunity gap. These strategies are touted as creating equity within and among schools because consensus can be reached on technical change. Far more difficult to achieve and longitudinal in their nature are normative and political change because they fall outside of the boundaries of technical change (Welner, 2001).

### **Normative Dimension**

The documented failure of technical initiatives should give rise to seriously addressing the more complex undertaking of reaching equity—which is fundamentally a normative and political endeavor. In order to pursue aspects of the normative dimension (beliefs and ideologies) a few requisites are required. School communities should acknowledge and work toward innovative approaches that they feel morally obligated to as social activists in search of equity (Oakes et al., 1993).

New techniques have been introduced for decades to no avail. Student academic, opportunity, and educational attainment outcomes continue to disproportionately represent deficits between minoritized students and White students (Diamond et al., 2020). With this understanding as a backdrop, without significant modifications in how we do business, so to speak, “new techniques will inspire only reluctant compliance and will simply be forced into

traditional conceptions of schooling” (Riehl, 2005, p. 468). Normative change is a necessary construct or precursor for technical change success. Holme et al. (2014) observed the following:

Response to demographic change focused intensely on technical changes in curriculum and instruction. Such technical changes we found were explicitly adopted to address the needs of the increasing population of low-income and students of color. At the same time . . . the district failed to address the more challenging normative and political dynamics. This failure . . . placed significant limits upon the technical reforms that were adopted. (p. 35)

Normative change is derived from equity-based shifts in a school’s core beliefs, values, and actions. Technical changes may not take hold in the absence of understanding implicit bias, eliminating racism, addressing social class and poverty, and understanding school in the context of the community and politics.

### **Political Dimension**

Education has a storied history of espousing care and concern for all students while at the same time disavowing the existence of systemic inequalities and concurrently using policy to reinforce those inequalities. Historically, there was a time when the political dimension of change was embraced by educators (Counts, 1932; Dewey, 1939) or when acts of moral courage were common. Education scholars and practitioners spend their time in the technical dimension while turning a blind eye to the normative and political dimensions.

Equity-minded change involved confronting the political dynamics of school which include power struggles over the distribution of resources (Riehl, 2005). That struggle pits MP against the political structures of school that are vested in policy and politics of perpetual inequity. Extant scholars (Welner et al., 2010) have observed that implementing equity-oriented

educational change might only be possible when members of less powerful minority communities actively participate. As observed earlier in the study, MP understanding and interpretation of equity is rarely studied (Fennimore, 2017), and when studied, infrequently addresses parents' position on the redistribution of resources or opining about equity. That omission influenced the design of this research study.

The participation of MP in the name of equity is the pursuit of social activism (Fennimore, 2017). Riehl (2005) observed the following, "In this charged policy environment, the pursuit of equity has become a political and practical necessity as well as a moral obligation" (p. 422), and the environment has become exponentially more charged in the ensuing years. Political resistance within and beyond the school community generally finds its nexus among middle and upper middle-class White parents (Posey, 2012; Wells & Serna, 1996). Their intransigence is routinely revealed as influence over issues such as gifted and talented identification, advance placement courses, school boundaries, and selection of school/district level personnel, district policies, and opposition to equity-based practices. Any attempt to introduce and execute equity-based reforms is an attempt to change power relations within a school and amongst the community (Fullan, 1993; Quartz et al., 1991; Shields, 2016, 2020). The attempted execution of equity-based practices at the technical level would be considered a political act (Oakes & Lipton, 2002; Oakes et al., 2005). Consequently, the identification of oppressive norms with the intent to change mindsets and beliefs is, to say the least, political.

With equity defined and understood, school change mechanisms interpreted, and research participants identified, one cannot embark on any journey without a philosophical conductor. Transformative leadership will serve as the theoretical canopy for this study.

## **Transformative Leadership Theory**

The importance of the study of transformative leadership (TLT) is borne from the assumption that educational organizations need to “articulate and attain purposes related to equity and excellence, public and private good, and individual and collective advancement” (Shields, 2011, p. 6). The origins of transformative leadership can be traced to James McGregor Burns’ (1978) seminal book called *Leadership*. He introduced topics such as moral leadership, political leadership, reform leadership, and even revolutionary leadership. Burns (1978) argued that moral leadership is “the kind of leadership that can produce social change” (p. 4).

Shields (2011) has drawn on themes such as revolutionary, political activism, and moral leadership from Burns’s (1978) work. In Shields’s (2020) contemporary iteration of Burns’s (1978) work, “moral leadership” is recast as “moral courage”; revolution is reified as essential to change mandates; and she makes clear that transformative leadership is not a neutral theory. It takes the side of social justice, democratic norms, and equity. She declared that “transforming an organization to be equitable, inclusive, and socially just” (p. 164) is to exhibit moral courage. Leading for equity requires moral courage and moral leadership.

Specifically, Renee et al. (2010) claimed that to succeed in doing equity-focused work, a marked change in direction must occur targeting normative and political change. Transformative leadership treats equity as a preoccupation concerned with doing more than documenting inadequacies but demonstrating through actions, moral courage, and noticeably clear reform initiatives that address fundamental barriers to increasing student opportunities and challenging the beliefs of educators (Gay, 2010, 2018; Henfield & Washington, 2012; Hinjosa & Moras, 2009).

The exploration and analysis of beliefs and biases of WETSE and MP is complex and fraught with ambiguities. The study takes place in an organization that is inequitable by its own admission. The leadership of the organization have structured their strategic plan to expressly address inequitable practices. Transformation of inequitable organizations is the starting point for TLT (Shields, 2020). Transformative leadership's eight tenets were used to generate the interview questionnaire (Appendix C). In addition, the research findings were aligned with TLT eight tenets and used to enumerate which tenets WETSE and MP interpreted as essential to achieving equity.

This study took place in a Midwestern suburban school district. The preponderance of studies are situated within the urban environment (Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020). More recently, the suburbs have surpassed the urban centers as the population and diversity core of the United States (Frey, 2015). The next passage provides a brief examination of the history of suburbia and recent demographic trends.

### **Changing Complexion of Suburban Schools**

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000), suburbs are communities adjacent to and integrated with a core city. For decades after the second World War, the suburbs isolated middle-class White families in racially and socioeconomically homogeneous neighborhoods with new housing and schools (Dougherty, 2012; Rury & Saatcioglu, 2011). The legacy of the discriminatory policies that largely restricted suburban access to minoritized families, including block busting and redlining, continue to affect families today and contributes to the achievement, opportunity, and socioeconomic gap. These policies and practices also calcify and entrench racial residential segregation patterns (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006) and class antagonism.

Diversification of suburban public schools presages a changing class dynamic that is seldom mentioned. Kneebone and Carr (2010) pointed out the following, “suburbs saw by far the greatest growth in their poor population and by 2008 had become home to the largest share of the nation’s poor” (p. 1). As school educators interpret and act on issues related to race and demographic change in the suburbs, frequently class is excluded from the conversation. Social class is a significant factor in how educators contextualize equity (Nesbit, 2006; Seabrook, 2002; Tokarczyk, 2004). White families actively seek neighborhoods and schools that are racially and socioeconomically homogeneous (Saporito & Lareau, 1999). As the United States becomes more diverse and the teaching force maintains its White homogeneity (Utt & Tochluk, 2020), equity becomes increasingly the subject of generative metaphorical differences (Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990) between how minoritized parents and White teachers understand and interpret equity.

### **Positionality—Why this Study is Important to Me**

During my career, I have witnessed and been the victim of opportunities denied, marginalization, and being stereotyped as an inferior educator based on my race, gender, and perceived class position. The critical incidents that I recall and have synthesized during the last two decades provided the impetus for this exploration of the congruence and conflict between how White educators and minoritized parents perceive equity. Furthermore, I wanted to understand the congruence and conflict between WETSE and MP equity understanding and perspective in order to develop coordinated action steps to address inequality in schools specifically, and society writ large.

As an African American male who has been involved in education during the previous 26 years as a public school, charter school, and suburban educator, I have observed dozens of technical innovations (see Appendix H) in education that have not yielded the desired academic



outcomes for minoritized students. I began my career working as a middle school teacher in a very poor urban district. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) most recent statistics (2018), approximately 7% of public secondary and elementary school teachers were Black, non-Hispanic. Correspondingly, 5.7% of public secondary and elementary principals were Black-non-Hispanic.

Approximately 2% of the nation's teachers are Black males and less than 1% work in suburban schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), in 2017–18, approximately 11% of principals are Black, but that number is less than 3% when “Black” and “suburban” are added as qualifiers. I have a very unique experience as one of the few African American males who list teacher (10 years) and administrator (15 years) in urban and suburban settings as a role.

Glesne and Peskhkin (1992) argued that workplace data collection can be compromised in lieu of power relations. James Reeb Suburban Schools (JBSS) strategic plan highlights equity as one of the district's five strategic goals. The alignment between my research and the district's strategic plan provides the study participants a license to engage in equity research since the school board, superintendent, and entire leadership team are dedicated not just to the study of equity, but the implementation of equitable practices. Appendix E lists the letter of support from the district's Assistant Superintendent of Instruction. The communique from the Assistant Superintendent was forwarded to the White educators as verification of the district's support of my research.

James Reeb Suburban Schools (JRSS) is a suburban public school district, my current employer, and the research site. James Reeb was a White American Unitarian Universalist minister who was killed in Selma, Alabama in 1965 while participating in the historic Selma to

Montgomery march. I used his name and now initials for the remainder of this thesis as a pseudonym for my school district per IRB protocols. As mentioned earlier, JRSS staff are overwhelmingly White, and it is my hope that this research will lead to the identification and development of more James Reeb's inside school districts across America.

Equally important, as a Black male, minoritized parents who participated in the research reported it was important that a Black researcher was exploring equity questions and collecting data that focused on minoritized families. The uniqueness of the interrelation between the study's participants, research design, and equity signify the importance of this study.

### **Significance of the Study**

Henfield and Washington (2012) pointed out the dearth of research identifying what educators do and think in suburban public-school districts with respect to equity. Most education studies concentrate on urban schools rather than suburban ones, e.g., between 2000 and 2018, of the articles published in the top five American Educational Research Association Journals, 80% explicitly focus on urban schools, ~12% on suburban, and 8% on rural (Diamond et al., 2020). This study has dual implications in that it sets out to discover what educators think about equity, and it is positioned within a suburban school district.

This study is also distinctive because not only does it investigate what educators think, but it compares and contrasts that with what MP think. Comparing and contrasting perspectives of equity between WETSE and MP is noteworthy given the complexity of the query and its novelty.

The ways in which WETSE and MP interpretations align or not may result in identifying actionable steps directed at developing common goals to ameliorate inequities within educational systems? Although this study's focus is narrowly aligned to White suburban educators and

minoritized parents, the outcomes are potentially expansive given the rapidly changing demographics (Frey et al., 2009) of suburbs. On the contrary this research may reveal intractable deficits in the soul of the United States, and it may be possible that the scourge of racism is beyond reconciliation and no remedy may exist. Let us hope that is not the case.

During the last 50 years, policy makers have pushed for equity by using a variety of policy instruments (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987) which include, but are not limited to, least restrictive environments, highly qualified teacher mandates, national and state standards accountability. This study may assist in teacher/leadership candidate selection, district/school-based candidate selection and evaluation, K-12 district/school-based professional development and demonstrate the dichotomy between the degrees of transformative leadership among suburban public-school educators. This study may also aid in the selection of an equity-based leadership cadre to be utilized as early adopters and exemplars of race, equity, and inclusion practices.

Concurrently, the minoritized parent focus group and interviews will provide a comprehensive view of equity interpretation and understanding within a suburban school district. The minoritized parent examination of equity must be harvested in order to provide balance to this study since all of the educator participants are White. Finally, this research may answer questions about why leading for equity in suburban schools is so difficult. Why does addressing racism in suburban schools get lost? And what social justice strategies are most effective in suburban environments?

### **Study Overview**

The broad themes introduced in Chapter I are analyzed and challenged in more depth in Chapter II. This includes a deeper look at what the literature says about equity, equality, teacher

and minoritized parent's equity beliefs, and the construction of suburbs in America. Chapter III returns briefly to the study's purpose and research questions to be followed by an outline of the study's methodology and research design, including its use of critical incident technique (CIT); its data collection procedure of focus groups; and the data analysis technique the study employed, thematic analysis (TA). Chapter IV reports the findings and relates them to the study's research questions, framework (ZONE), and leadership theory (TLT). Chapter V concludes with discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER II: CRITICAL REVIEW OF RELEVANT THEORY, RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE**

The purpose of the literature review is to set the broad context of the study as it pertains to the research questions, what should be in the study, and what should not (Boote & Beile, 2005). It clarifies problems within the field of study and determines what additional research needs to be done while demonstrating the ability to advance the collective understanding of education conundrums (Boote & Beile, 2005). To define educational equity in this research study, I am choosing to use inequality as a qualifier in addition to equity when I frame the empirical literature important to this study. This literature review will begin by addressing the central element of the study—equity and inequality.

### **Educational Equity (Inequity) Defined**

Broadly speaking, educational equity is viewed as an attempt to redistribute resources on behalf of minoritized and poor students (Oakes & Lipton, 2002). The redistribution is typically met with normative and political obstacles (Holme et al., 2014; Oakes et al., 1993). Additionally, the redistribution of resources is routinely acknowledged as a way to close gaps such as achievement, opportunity, and educational attainment (Carter & Welner, 2013). Let us examine one of the outcomes that is purported to be achieved by redistribution of resources.

### **Achievement Gap**

In its simplest form, according to many scholars (Boykin & Noguera, 2011), achievement gaps between White and minoritized students are measured by state testing, common college entrance exams (ACT/SAT), and the nation's report card as represented by National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). Scholars use this data to draw conclusions that testify to statistically significant differences between White and minoritized students. School reform and

improvement proponents point to the achievement gap as justification to redistribute resources, but in the form of vouchers, threats to terminate teachers, close schools, and withhold funding if the achievement gap is not narrowed (Noddings, 2007; Ravitch, 2013).

Achievement gaps are linked to neoliberal reforms such as charter schools, vouchers, and accountability legislation. The imposition of NCLB (2003) and the Obama era Race to the Top (RTTT, 2008) reinforced rewards and penalties associated with performance accountability metrics provided grist for the school reformers to take aim at marginalized students and families. The development and implementation of NCLB (2018) was ostensibly aimed at solving the achievement gap.

A consistent claim in the education universe is that the achievement gaps are large and increasing every year (Ravitch, 2013). The reality is, significant progress in most grades and subjects has occurred during the last 50 years with a few exceptions (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Ravitch, 2013). The language associated with the achievement gap as its propagated by those who claim to seek inequitable school outcomes is steeped in deficit thinking. The achievement gap implies short term deficits in educators and children, particularly minoritized students (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2011), rather than wholesale inequality of reproductive forces, e.g., capitalism (Giroux, 1985).

Rather than focusing on “achievement gap” which has been shown to be consistent with the ebbs and flow of systemic inequality (Ravitch, 2013), if equity is the pursuit, might it be more prudent to invest in creating opportunities and minimizing the opportunity gaps (Carter & Welner, 2013)?

## **Opportunity Gap**

Opportunity and achievement are both members of the “gap” club, but the extant research draws clear delineations between the two. The achievement gap scholars generally focus on academic outcomes. The opportunity gap scholars invert the discourse seeking to highlight health, housing, safe spaces, extended school experiences, and nutrition (Carter & Welner, 2013). Darling-Hammond (2013) defined the opportunity gap as the “cumulative differences in access to key educational resources that support learning at home and at school: Expert teachers, personalized attention, high-quality curriculum opportunities, good educational materials” (p. 78) and abundant resources.

Creating opportunities for minoritized children and families is in line with a legitimate attempt to address equitable conditions as a comprehensive effort to redress inequalities. Darling-Hammond (2013) insisted that much less attention is paid to the opportunity gap than in comparison to the achievement and income gap. What is significant about the contrast is it returns to the study’s earlier assertion denoting the lack of engagement in the normative and political dimensions of change, which address mindset, beliefs, and structures. This type of work requires more than a focus on identifying numerical deficiencies and blaming the victim, but indeed, requires social activism.

The opportunity gap addresses the normative and political dimension of change and the rousing of social activism. Riehl (2005) and Oakes (1992) declared that equity-minded change to redress the persistent internal and external lack of opportunities for minoritized students must be remedied through the normative and political dimensions of the zone of mediation.

Opportunity scholars (Oakes et al., 1995) point to tracking, advanced placement course exclusion, increased representation in special education, remedial college counseling, lack of

access to high quality teachers, and deficiency of early college credits as illustrations of opportunity denial. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2010), the United States has one of the highest levels of stagnant mobility among intergenerational families. It is these disparities in conjunction with other complex influences, such as income, housing, and health care inequality, that explain the opportunity gap.

These dimensions of the opportunity gap have been largely absent from the education political discourse (Rury & Saatcioglu, 2011). It is common to discover advanced placement courses, gifted classes, International Baccalaureate curriculum, and music enrichment with not a single minoritized student present. The practice of redirecting and blocking minoritized students from academic and enrichment opportunities is commonly referred to as “tracking” (Oakes & Lipton, 1992; Oakes et al., 1991). The missed opportunities permeate throughout the entire K-12 continuum, minoritized students and poor students are disproportionately enrolled in vocational and remedial courses (Ozer & Perc, 2020). Qualitative studies denote race and class influence access to information, advice, and attention from school counselors (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1963), further exacerbating the opportunity gap.

Carter and Welner (2013) noted, “opportunity gaps that exist across racial and associated class lines are expansive, and they widen as income and wealth inequality continue to rise” (p. 2). In effect, the gap between achievement and income has been flipped. Income now accounts for the largest disparity in achievement and what follows in the next section is evidence of the empowerment gap.

### **Socioeconomic Achievement Gap**

Thus far, the literature review has identified the “achievement gap” and “opportunity gap” as two components of how educational equity is deliberated and measured. What follows



next is a discussion pertaining to the socioeconomic gap, or a direct indictment of global structural inequality (North, 2020).

As noted by Duncan and Magnuson (2011), the income gap is large when children enter kindergarten and does not dissipate during the remaining K-12 journey. Factors associated with educational attainment, commonly known as accomplishments such as degree completion (associate, bachelor, masters, doctorate), have remained steady for a half-century and suggest no statistically significant change. Family income is now nearly as strong as parental education in predicting children's achievement in the United States (Reardon, 2011) and globally (Chmielewski, 2019).

The income-achievement gap is not exclusive to the United States but finds its most grotesque contradiction in the wealthiest country in the world (North, 2020). Chmielewski (2019) studied the socioeconomic achievement gap in the context of 30 international large-scale assessments over 50 years. These studies found rapidly increasing socioeconomic achievement gaps in the United States (Reardon, 2011, 2013), South Korea (Byun & Kim, 2010), and Malaysia (Saw, 2016). The results indicated that when taking income into account, achievement gaps increased in a majority of countries.

There is considerable agreement among scholars Bowles and Gintis (1976, 2002), Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997), and Lareau (1989, 2003) with respect to the income-achievement gap and its debilitating effect on education. Suburban poor now outnumber the central-city poor by more than 1.5 million according to Brookings Institute demographic report (Frey et al., 2009). Income or wealth gap is associated with the opportunity to learn as opposed to the ability to learn.

Equity is dialectically in conflict with accountability measures and decontextualized consequences that are imposed on mostly urban school districts. As an example, if “some schools” were failing, why impose a universal threat of consequences? Who is accountable when children are hungry, have difficulty seeing, and do not have stable housing?

It has been argued that social justice is not possible without equity, particularly what has been called “strong equity” . . . which includes not only the redistribution of educational opportunities but also representation of all stakeholders in the development of what are taken to be common objectives and goals as well as recognition of the societal and educational systems that produce and reproduce inequity (Fraser, 2009, p. 7).

The persistent state of inequity may suggest a deficit that is beyond the boundaries of conventional deliberations. Indeed, some of the foremost scholars call for a complete reorganization of the education system (Burns, 1978) based loosely on the notion of education reparations or educational debt (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2007).

### **Educational Debt**

Thus far, this literature review has explained three of the most common identifiers of equity’s intersection with academic achievement, opportunity, and income disparities. In doing so, as stated earlier, the researcher chooses what to place in the literature review, what to leave out, and what to argue (Boote & Beile, 2005). I would argue that the word *gap* is ill-defined as we discuss the complex and nuanced interconnection between how equity is measured and defined.

Ladson-Billings (2007) took issue with the deficit leaning term *gap*, although it is widely used in the context of educational equity discourse. She has a semantic, substantive, and historical objection to the term *gap*. She commented below:

When we speak of an achievement gap (and believe me, everyone is speaking of it—regardless of their political or ideological position), we are suggesting that some groups of students are doing just fine and we have to find a way to get the groups that are not doing fine to catch up with them. This presents two problems. First, student academic performance is not static. Those students who are achieving at acceptable levels are not waiting for those who are lagging to catch up with them. Thus, the primary premise of closing the gap rests on a notion of slowed performance at the top while there is simultaneously increased performance at the lower levels. (p. 316)

Ladson-Billings (2006, 2007) introduced the concept of *educational debt*. She suggested that this consists of historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components. The educational debt as a metaphor is explained by Ladson-Billings (2006, 2007) through the comparison of the national debt versus national deficit. She argued that the educational debt is an accrual of yearly data focused on accountability—commonly discussed with respect to equity and test scores. To put it differently, each year states report which districts successfully meet performance indicators, and the relative success of sub-groups during that particular year is classified as the deficit. Each year minoritized groups are accruing or maintaining deficits that vary by region of the country, gender, ethnicity, and grade-level, but a deficit, nonetheless.

There are three elements essential to addressing the educational debt owed to children (Ladson-Billings, 2007). The first element is a historic debt that acknowledges the role education plays in a democracy and the historical legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, discrimination, and other forms of oppression that assisted in creating testing gaps that imply White students are superior to minoritized students. The second examines the debt through the maturation of capitalism and highlights the fundamental and inherent inequities of resource deprivation for minoritized groups

and its effect on school outcomes. Third, when measuring for equity, there is an ethical factor involved which implies society bears some responsibility for the inequities that permeate through school walls, i.e., with unbridled capitalism and the super exploitation of citizens globally, it is incongruent to disconnect poor school outcomes from unparalleled wealth gaps in society (North, 2020). To summarize, the educational debt is the accumulation of deficits each year during the course of American history that in sum, equal the education debt owed to minoritized children. That debt should be examined historically, economically, and ethically when measuring for equity.

To conclude this section, the literature identifies four equity discourses that define the conversation in education spheres pertaining to equity: academic, opportunity, socioeconomic, and political. Another significant aspect of the research questions, which determined what to put in and leave out of literature review, was the participants. The two groups of participants in this study are White equity-trained suburban educators (WETSE) and minoritized parents (MP). Let us now turn to the White suburban educators.

### **White Suburban Educators**

Suburban educators generally interpret equity-based initiatives or the indemnification of school inequalities along the following pathways: new racism defined as colorblindness and colormuteness (Lewis, 2001; Welton et al., 2015), educator belief systems (Gay, 2010, 2018; Hunt, 2012; Pajares, 1992; Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2006), and Whiteness (Helms, 1984, 1990, 1995; Leonardo, 2004, 2007; Picower, 2009). Additionally, the study's White educators were part of a 36-month equity, race, and implicit bias training or professional development, therefore this literature review will investigate professional development broadly and equity

focused training specifically. Having outlined the contours of this section of the literature review, we shall begin with the ideology of Whiteness in an attempt to explain who WETSE are.

### **Whiteness**

Whiteness as an ideology seeks to situate groups into hierarchies, defined relationships, and reify inequitable norms and standards (Putman, 2017). The belief in whiteness involves the systematic execution of beliefs, policies, and practices that maintain White domination in society of minoritized populations (McMahon, 2007). This ideology is used by Whites to account for racial inequality, meritocracy, and White success and minority failure. It is an imagined construct whose basis is found in liberal pluralism (Fairclough, 2001). Whiteness as an ideology may also explain the actions of White educators and the opening to reify the belief in their work settings through opportunity hoarding (Diamond & Lewis, 2019).

Any deliberate and thoughtful research exploring the construct of Whiteness must, in good faith, reference at least in passing Helm's (1984, 1990, 1995) White racial identity development framework. Helm's framework describes six statuses of development in which White people may place themselves as a relative state:

1. Contact: Obliviousness to own racial identity.
2. Disintegration: First acknowledgment of White identity.
3. Reintegration: Idealizes Whites/denigrates (people of Color).
4. Pseudo-independence: Intellectualized acceptance of own and others' race.
5. Immersion/emersion: Honest appraisal of racism and significance of White identity;  
and
6. Autonomy: Internalizes a multi-cultural identity with non-racist White identity as its core.

Although Helm's (1984, 1990, 1995) framework is powerful and practical, Utt and Tochluk (2020) contend that White people writ large, but specifically educators, must know their own racial background. Helm's (1984, 1990, 1995) racial identity framework employs the term "deep deliberative search" (Milner, 2003) required for self-reflection and understanding one's

self, school, and community (Shields, 2020). White people must undertake this deliberative search in order “to understand their own and other individuals’ racial backgrounds, racial heritage, and consequences of race that cause oppression and privilege” (Utt & Tochluk, 2020, p. 207).

For educators, this search is important because White teachers who do not see their racial identity as meaningful often allow unchecked expressions of White privilege, such as micro aggressions, to create unsafe and unwelcoming classrooms for minoritized students (Matias, 2013; Sue et al., 2010). Research exists analyzing the ways White educators identify and react to ways in which Whiteness impacts the doing of equity work (McIntosh, 2010; Sleeter, 2017).

As a researcher, I find the infusion of Marxism by Leonardo (2004, 2009) as critical to clearly understanding Whiteness at the convergence of equity, minoritized parents, and White educators within suburban school systems. Leonardo (2003) created the dialectic, i.e., interrelation of concepts, by asking the following questions: What is the knowledge for and to be used in what capacity to redistribute or reinforce power? How does this knowledge enable people to become more politically responsible subjects in order to advocate for or against equity? And how does research knowledge critically help us to understand schools as sites of change in order to develop scholar-practitioners as leaders in the service of eliminating inequity or continue the status quo?

These questions posed by Leonardo (2003) examine White educators biases, perceptions, fears, and beliefs. White educators have been, are, and will be a super majority of the educator workforce for the foreseeable future, so it is important to understand who they are. The next section will examine the demographics of school. Who are the educators we are studying?

## **White Educator Demographics**

The demographic statistics enumerating the racial composition of teachers in the United States are staggering. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2020), 80% of the K-12 teaching force is White. The next wave of teacher candidates enrolled in teacher education programs nationally is estimated to be 80% White, of which 93% are White females (Cochran-Smith, 2004). If this level of saturation were not alarming enough, 88% of the teacher candidates are taught by White professors (Ladson-Billings, 2001). These data suggest that a significant number of students will begin and end their K-20 education journey without exposure to a minority teacher. As an anecdote, there are over 500 educators in the district being studied and I am one of just 12 minoritized educators in the district being studied and the first African American male principal in the history of the school system (J. Wood, personal communication, May 1, 2020). The school district has been in existence since 1957.

Research demonstrably illustrates the profound negative ramifications of employing an entirely White educator staff with little critical understanding of race and racism (Delpit, 2006, 2012; Oates, 2003; Picower, 2009). Race matters as much or more in all-White settings like suburbs according to Evans (2007).

The demographic statistics suggest an imperative to understand how White suburban teachers interpret race, equity, and inclusion work. The diversity explosion is here to stay based on birth rates and immigration patterns (Frey, 2015). What this fact portends is an ageing White educator workforce, systematically trained to construct deficit-based narratives of minorities, while they, minoritized children are now the majority of children. Having discussed Whiteness as an ideology, explaining the demographics of public school systems, we now turn to asking—  
What are White educators thinking?

### **White Educator Mindsets (Beliefs, Attitudes, Stereotypes, Biases, & Prejudice)**

All educators hold beliefs related to their students, subject matter, role of school, self, race, and politics. Spend a few hours in any teachers lounge during lunch and you will hear their diverse beliefs, values, and perspectives of educators. Some of those mindsets are negative and manifest themselves as implicit bias, stereotyping of students, and prejudice (Glock & Bohmer, 2018) and have a deleterious effect on student outcomes and as such should be examined (Batchelor et al., 2019). In this research study, when I speak of educator mindset(s), I mean the composition of beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, biases, and prejudices. Nieto (2005) further explained what I mean by mindset:

It is no surprise that some teachers have negative perceptions, biases, and racist attitudes about the students they teach, and about the students' families, cultures, and communities . . . Teachers . . . pick up the same messages and misconceptions that we all do, and it is only by confronting the ones that get in the way of student learning that change will occur. This means encouraging prospective and practicing teachers to reflect deeply on their beliefs and attitudes . . . and providing them with the resources and support they need for doing this kind of difficult but, in the long run, empowering work. (pp. 217–218)

White educators have low expectations (Tenebaum & Ruck, 2007) that lead to stereotypes (Dukes & Gaither, 2017). Stereotypes are generated by prejudices manifested through deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997). Of course, not all White educators are inculcated with a deficit thinking mindset and inherently have low expectations for minority students, but the empirical evidence is significant and implies that many White educators either explicitly or implicitly harbour feelings of supremacy and negative thoughts regarding minoritized youth.

White educator mindsets generate racial and ethnic inequities in everyday experiences of



minoritized youth and their families in school. Those inequities occur through diminished educational opportunities, lower dropout and graduation rates, and of course, the inverse relationship between overrepresentation in special education and underrepresentation in accelerated coursework and gifted identification (Carter & Welner, 2013). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCEA, 2016) reports that 80% of school principals are White. Racial punishment disproportionality in teacher discipline office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions perhaps are a result of White principals' mindsets. Research from the Discipline Disparities Series indicates that the inequities in consequence disproportionately are longitudinal in nature (Skiba et al., 2014).

Recalling that WETSE are one of the two participant groups in this study, this literature review sought to provide extant literature informing the scholar and practitioner about the one of the study's primary participants. Thus far I have discussed Whiteness as an ideology, placed being white in its demographic public school setting, explored the mindset of the White educator based on empirical literature, and now we move to the phenomenon of "new racism" and its subcomponents that obstruct attempts to achieve educational equity.

### **The New Racism (Colorblind & Colormuteness)**

This study takes place in a rapidly diversifying suburban school district. There is very little research analyzing how demographically changing suburban school districts respond to increased diversity (Welton et al., 2015). But the available research points to what Bonilla-Silva (2004) called the "new racism." This new racism reinforces systemic White privilege through the adoption of race-neutral policies that are destructive socially, economically, and politically for non-Whites (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). After working to reinforce White privilege, the new racism employs an ideology known as "colorblindness." This denies the existence of race creating a

contradiction to which Rosenberg (2004) would note, this “ideology claiming to not see race while being conscious of it, as well as constituted by it” (p. 261). This literature review will focus on two important aspects of the new racism—colorblind individualism and colormuteness.

### **Colorblind Individualism**

Colorblindness is a derivative of the new racism according to Bonilla-Silva (2004). The new racism works insidiously through language to maintain the racial caste system through the adoption of race-neutral policies. This new racism is a post-Civil Rights era construction and picked up speed with the election of Barak Obama, America’s first African American president (Bonilla-Silva, 2011). Colorblindness as an ideology denies the salience of race and outs those who talk about race. In its most vile incarnation, it takes the form of “Make America Great Again.” As suggested by Bonilla-Silva (2011), this ideology proclaims that we are “all Americans” (p. 934) and anyone can achieve the “American Dream.”

Colorblind individualism (Leonardo, 2007) embraces accountability in the form of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and turns a blind eye to structural racism and discriminatory practices. In alignment with my earlier claim pertaining to the ineffectiveness of technical solutions, NCLB embodies the new racism. Welton et al. (2015) observed the following: “NCLB characterizes achievement gaps as simple technical challenges solved through tough sanctions and instructional reform, rather than the result of systemic inequities in society” (p. 47).

Colorblind individualism is a barrier to achieving equitable outcomes for minoritized students and strengthens two deficit thinking motifs, individual failure and limiting educator ability to self-reflect. The first impediment blames students and their families for academic failure while not assigning any responsibility to society. Second, it restricts an educator’s ability to engage in an essential practice of self-reflection pertaining to their own beliefs, values, and

assumptions—which according to Shields (2020) is critical to achieving deep and equitable change. Having addressed colorblindness, we now look at the second element of new racism, colormuteness.

### **Colormuteness**

School districts and schools' racial discourse is indicative of its policies and practices in the pursuit of equity (Holme et al., 2014). The less engaged in racial discourse the entity, the more reproduction and calcifying of inequities will occur (Lewis, 2001). Researchers have found that White educators routinely respond with a colormute response to issues of race (Pollock, 2004). The how, when, and why of race challenge the philosophical perspectives of White educators (Pollock, 2004). Race transcends the technical conversation of curriculum, assessments, and instructional delivery, which serves as a safe haven for colormute educators. White teachers, to varying degrees, and understandably, build a fortress dedicated to not discussing race for fear of being labeled a racist (Evans, 2007). Colormuteness takes the form of being exposed to off-color racial humor and allowing it to occur without objection or silence in the teacher's lounge, recess, or a meeting where racialized language is used and no objections occur (Evans, 2007).

Oakes (2003) and others (Evans, 2007; Pollack, 2004) have studied and documented how this colormute space reproduces inequities in the form of within-school resegregation. Tracking is the most common educational practice perpetrated by educational leaders and reinforced by White educators. Often there is silence while gifted classes, advanced placement courses, and early college opportunities are filled with White students. Meanwhile, special education classes are teaming with Black and Brown children. White educators in diverse settings are predictably, according to research— color mute (Ostango, 2008; Pollack, 2004). When there is discussion,

the default of meritocracy is one of the first lines of defense (Crozier, 2018). The dominant ideology attributes the achievement and opportunity gaps as talent and effort gaps. If minoritized students and families would just try harder the disparities would disappear (Bonilla-Silva, 2004).

So far this literature review focused on defining equity in the context of the research question, one of the two participant groups WETSE. This study is unique because it explores a group of White educators who have been participants in a longitudinal equity training. Training, or as it is known in education, professional development, is a common response to solving issues related to student achievement and educational attainment.

### **Professional Development for Equity**

Fullan (1994) argued that professional development (PD) is underutilized as a means of revolutionizing the education culture of public schools. He suggested quintupling our professional development budget and recognizing that it must be focused on White teachers given estimates that as many as 80% of teachers are White (NCES, 2016). This study's participants are White veteran educators, who have been part of three years of equity professional development, and have taught for a minimum of five years. Whereas there is significant research highlighting White preservice teachers and their beliefs (Batchelor et al., 2019), there exist very few peer-reviewed articles focusing on professional development aligned with practicing teachers that identifies race and equity as the central pillars of research (McManimon & Casey, 2018).

Exceptions are represented by two studies (Hyland, 2005; Pennington et al., 2012) examining White practicing teachers' racial identity. Hyland (2005) found that after three years of school-based racism PD, their training hypersensitized their defiance to seeing racism and examining Whiteness. As a companion study, Schniedewind (2005) held race and racism focus

group discussions with five teachers (three White, one Black, and one biracial) and found the diversity course yielded teacher actions correlated to actively supporting minoritized students. Additional research conducted by McManimon and Casey (2018) found that teachers “worked to educate all students about stereotyping and to address White privilege, and challenged institutional racism” (p. 390). Alternatively, critics would argue that multicultural and anti-racist professional development have been ineffective at galvanizing transformative educator mindsets given the persistence of inequality in schools (Levine-Rasky, 2000).

Hyland (2005) and Pennington et al. (2012) conducted ethnographies that examined Whiteness as a concept aligned with Helms (1995) conceptualization of Whiteness and the use of critical race theory as a theoretical lens. Pennington et al. (2012) explored four teachers’ normative beliefs based on Helms’s (1995) model after one year of training.

### **Minoritized Parents and Equity**

The primary difference between “minority” and “minoritized” are analogous to “equality” and “equity.” Minority and equality are both numerical constructs that enumerate a statistical fact. Minoritized and equity address how power operates by examining mindsets, beliefs, systems, and policies. Minoritized is used to identify individuals or groups who, in the context of social and educational institutions, are marginalized through deeply embedded forms of racism, exclusion of opportunities, and seen through deficit-thinking mental schemas (Pratto & Steward, 2012; Shields, 2020).

Minoritized parents with respect to the normative and political dimension of equity are frequently not heard (Edmonds, 1979; Fennimore, 2017) and there exists scant research that targets minoritized parents who reside in suburban environments (Lewis-McCoy, 2018). Parent engagement models that reinforce or counter hegemonic views of minoritized parent’s agency

and activism will be explored and defining of the term minoritized will be examined. This research builds on limited, but existing, scholarship by examining and analyzing suburban minoritized parents in the context of equity. By contrasting MP and WETSE interpretations of equity, I hope to have an indication of the effective contours of how and where to begin equity work.

Minoritized is a word increasingly used and generally understood to mean the same as minority. There is a significant difference in the meanings. Dryness (2011) explained the distinction:

Parents who have experienced marginalization because of their race, social class, language, or immigrant status have a rich critique of the structures of inequality that disadvantage their children, but they are seldom invited to express or act on this critique. (p. 36)

In this study, minoritized refers to the objective outcomes experienced by multiple groups, e.g., race, social, class, language, or immigrant status. This an important distinction because minority is generally understood to mean non-White. Minoritized includes social class as an additional qualifier. The outcomes take the form of exclusionary practices that prohibit “minority” students from accessing opportunities and are the result of historical and contemporary racism (Gillborn, 2005). Most extant research focuses on parent involvement in the pursuit of closing the achievement gaps (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005, 2007) and generally focuses on low-income urban parents (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Reynolds et al., 2015). Scholars frequently explain that engagement of minoritized parents is consistent with White educators’ deficit perceptions of families as lacking in knowledge, skills, and incentive to participate in their children’s education beyond sending them to school (Baquedano-López et al.,

2013; Valencia & Black, 2002). There is an important distinction between parent involvement and parent engagement, which will be explained in the following sections.

### **Traditional Parent Involvement/Deficit-Based Approaches**

#### ***Parent Involvement***

Extant research notes that conventional approaches to engaging minoritized parents, e.g., attendance at open houses, parent–teacher conferences, and parent–teacher association meetings, are based in beliefs about minoritized parents’ limitations (Valencia & Black, 2002). Race and poverty are generally used to attribute unequal school outcomes correlated to uninvolved parents (Kainz & Aikens, 2007). The proselytizing of minoritized families focuses on how to remediate “those” parents and families to conform to hegemonic norms (Cooper, 2009; Valdés, 1996). As a result, research focusing on the voices and reflections of minoritized families rarely is central to educational scholarship.

The traditional approach excludes parents on the basis of race and class. The hidden barriers to parent involvement are “entry requirements for fingerprinting, child abuse clearances, and criminal clearances in school districts” (Fennimore, 2017, p. 165). Lack of access to technology in the form of Progress book, Google classroom, Facebook, twitter, and email effectively exclude a portion of the parent population who most likely have minoritized status or are poor. As the suburbs rapidly expand the diversity of their population, language differences and immigrant status become additional barriers to achieving equity and equality in the parental involvement space (Olivos & Mendoza, 2009).

Darling-Hammond (2010) explained that deficit-based approaches to minoritized parents are certainly and logically manifestations of broader systemic inequities such as lack of representation in gifted courses, disproportionate rates of suspensions, disparities in graduation and grade point averages. Aligning directly with this study's intentions, Barajas-López and Ishimaru (2020) argue that the "lived experiences and insights of nondominant (minoritized) parents and families open more expansive and complex possibilities for change regarding the dynamics of race, culture, community, learning, and, ultimately, educational equity" (p. 55).

Suburban schools and minoritized parent involvement form the essential core of strength-based approaches that illuminate deficit-based assumptions about minoritized parents (Fennimore, 2017; Ippolito, 2010, 2018) in the same manner as activist-participant-observer paradigms, social activism, and Community-Based Design Research (CBDR). There are distinct differences between parent engagement and parent involvement. The following section will discuss the contrast between parent involvement and engagement.

## **Strength Based Approaches to Parent Engagement**

### ***Community-Based Design Research***

There have been contemporary models of parent engagement that are not defined by deficit-thinking, power, oppression, and assimilation elements. Community-Based Design Research (CBDR; Bang et al., 2016), grounded in the learning sciences, seeks to analyze and act on the complexities of context. CBDR (Bang et al., 2013) juxtaposes parents and researchers as collaborators in the design and testing of educational interventions, particularly in U.S. science learning (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Bell, 2004). CBDR takes up the challenge "to make explicit the position and power of decision makers as well as potential opportunities to reconfigure aspects of design toward equity" (Bang et al., 2013, p. 711). CBDR aligns with this



study's emphasis on the narrative or lived experiences of suburban minoritized parents.

Other current empirical studies that explore approaches to interpreting and engaging parents are African American parent mentor programming (Denise & Marguerite, 2018); Chinese culturally responsive and linguistic appropriate parent engagement (Baba, 2016); students with disabilities parent engagement (Gan, 2014); and early learning parent engagement (Shepard et al., 2012). These studies are important components of parent involvement and address the technical dimension of change. However, this research is steeped in the normative and political dimension of change and will add to the limited foci of minoritized parent voices as advocates and activist.

### ***Activist-Participant-Observer Paradigm***

Activist-participant-observer paradigm entails a partnership with minoritized parents and the researcher that allows the scholar to share in the experience of district, school-based resistance, and co-experience implicit bias experienced by minoritized parents. This activist-participant-observer paradigm, argued Irizarry and Brown (2014), sets the stage for minoritized families to “enter into discourses of power, (re)frame experiences, and challenges the ways in which social science research has historically excluded and denigrated them” (p. 65).

Activist-participant-observer paradigms are rooted in the work of Edmonds (1979) who espoused political activism on the part of minoritized parents. Fennimore (2017) argued that intensified study of minoritized parents as social activists holds promise for uprooting educational inequities. Additional studies (1995; Jasis & Ordana-Jasis, 2012; Lareau & Munoz, 2012) make note of targeted equity-based local, state, and federal mandates. Fennimore (2017) believed education research has the potential to disrupt inequities and provide a platform for minoritized parents writ large.

I argue in this study for the distinction of suburban minoritized parents in the context of equity given the systemic development of suburbs to the exclusion of minoritized families. One of the unique and understudied aspects of educational inequality is the relationship of the development of suburbs to the normative and political condition of equity. The suburbs have a unique history and are rarely explored as the inequitable nesting grounds of school inequity. Research routinely explores the comparison and contrasts between urban and suburban school environment and performance. This research is distinctive because it argues that suburban school inequity is an outgrowth of an inequitable environment that was structured to keep minoritized families out.

### **Suburbs—Precincts of Inequality?**

Inequality breeds inequality. It is difficult in contemporary America to not notice the distinct difference between urban, suburban, and rural enclaves. All schools mirror their local environments with respect to demographics, politics, and religion, however, the suburbs have a unique genesis. “The dominant social construction of suburban spaces and schools masks the fact that U.S suburbs are contested, and fragmented socio-spatial constructions shaped by racial imaginations, White supremacist ideologies, and rife with racial conflict” (Irby, 2015, p. 197, as cited in Andrews & Richmond, 2019).

Most Americans now live in the suburbs, and we are officially the first suburban society (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012). The term “suburban” often invokes images of an all-White enclave that is homogeneous in its affluence or social class, race, and beliefs (personal and political). If suburbs were created as inequitable entities, then by default, would suburban public schools not be derivations of an unjust circumstance? The segregation of school within school takes place by way of tracking, non-placement in advanced track course, and increased

designation of special education (Kumashiro, 2000; Oakes, 1992; Oakes et al., 1997; Rury & Saatciglu, 2011). Inequitable practices thrive and go unchallenged in unjust systems. Suburban school districts have undergone significant demographic change during the last three decades. The concept of how suburban school districts respond to providing equitable outcomes and opportunities (Welton et al., 2015) as a normative and political response is seldom studied (Oakes et al., 1998). Real estate inequality, public policy, demographic transformation, and systemic racism formed the infrastructure of suburban public schools and each of these perspectives will be explored below.

### **Real Estate Inequality**

The legal, political, and governmental coordination in the service of constructing American suburbs writ large and suburban public schools specifically are considered in some quarters an act of legal apartheid (Kozol, 2005). Spatial segregation is a central ingredient of American racism and the denial of opportunities to minorities (Cook et al., 2018). Segregation is but one of the many tools of systemic racism. The imposition of segregation is a form of domination. In order to fully examine equity dilemmas in suburban public schools, we must fundamentally address the environment in which they exist.

Cheap housing during the 1950s and 1960s subsidized by federally funded home mortgages and the construction of interstate highways (Dougherty, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2012) converged with White families' idea of the American Dream. That dream was anchored by owning a single-family home and relocating away from minoritized urban geographical real estate zones. Post-World War II, attending a high-quality public school was not a stated reason to relocate to the emerging suburbs. As noted by sociologist Herbert Gans (1967) in his study of

Levittown, Pennsylvania, less than 1% of the residents cited schooling as a reason for their move.

The role of schools in real estate decisions would dramatically shift in the 1970s and 1980s. As home prices began to increase, serving as another tool to prohibit minoritized families' entry into suburbs, families now began to expressly state as a condition of relocation, an interest in high quality public schools (Dougherty, 2007; Dougherty et al., 2009).

High quality public schools, relative low-cost housing, the expectation of homogeneity, and the promise of the American Dream converged with the 1960s and 1970s introduction of busing for racial segregation (Frey, 1979; Orfield & Monfort, 1988; Rury & Tyler, 2018). This cocktail of social variables embedded in the context of an already turbulent era of civil rights battles set the stage for what is commonly called "White flight." It is important to note that during the 1960s and 1970s most of the best human capital and facilities were concentrated in urban centers (Dougherty et al., 2009). This situation has diametrically changed as of 2020. Urban centers are struggling to pass school levies and bond issues with structural conditions continuing to deteriorate (Bowers & Chen, 2015). Meanwhile, suburban districts are building sprawling campuses with the most recent advances in technology. Most empirical research authenticates desegregation and court rulings as intermediate factors associated with White flight (Crowder & South, 2008), although this trend is rapidly changing with the ethnocentric nature of America (Frey, 2010).

### **Political Inequality**

White flight moved to segregate communities along race-based lines through the use of real estate coded language, red lining, and county covenants designed to decrease population density (Dougherty, 2007; Mirel, 1993; Tyack, 1974). Desegregation in the form of *Brown v.*

*Board of Education* in 1954 and *Brown v. Board of Education II* in 1955 began the judicial phase of creating suburban public schools as we know them today. Troesken and Walsh (2019) declared, “It is widely believed that laws, government regulations, and public agencies have played a central role in propagating and maintaining residential segregation in American cities . . . this process began as early as 1910 starting with Baltimore” (p. 289).

To many, *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) is representative of the magnanimous proportions detailing segregation, charter schools, vouchers, structural racism, and the politicization of the Supreme Court (Green & Gooden, 2016). The case reached the Supreme Court in 1974. The majority decision, a five-to-four ruling, effectively repealed *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). The Supreme Court in the *Milliken v. Bradley* 1974 ruling essentially emboldened and codified racial segregation of suburban and urban school districts.

As suggested by Underwood (2019), racial isolation that crossed school district borders was not required unless it could be shown that “racially discriminatory acts of the state or local school districts . . . have been a substantial cause of the inter-district segregation” (p. 74). Segregation and discrimination caused by White flight or racially isolated housing patterns could not be remediated through an inter-district court order according to the majority of the court, Justices Burger, Douglas, Blackmun, Powell, and Rehnquist.

The Fair Housing Act of 1968 (Jargowsky et al., 2019), in theory—but not practice—outlawed housing discrimination and many of the additional practices associated with the development of the suburbs. *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) demonstrated the continued existence of discrimination as a byproduct of school district segregation and the lack of material enforcement of the Fair Housing Act.

## Demographic Suburban School Enrollment Trends

As the U.S. population grows more diverse, we are now the first society in the world where suburban dwellers outnumber city and rural citizens (Frey, 2015). As such, the U.S. is now historically more diverse than at any time in its history and the suburban public schools are representative of a more diverse demographic than urban or rural schools. Frankenberg and Orfield (2012) suggested that “demographic shifts often receive little public attention, except among teachers who experience them daily and feel that they have scant support or resources to effectively meet the challenges” (p. 3). As a result of demographic trends, birthrates, and socioeconomic conditions, the terms *suburbs* and *suburban public schools* have become much more complicated than the binary consideration of White/Black and suburban/urban.

These population shifts affect suburban school enrollment which grew in the largest 25 metropolitan areas by about 4 million students, accounting for approximately 25% of all U.S. public school students between 1990 and 2006. There is an abundance of literature that details the statistical changes in suburban school populations (Frey, 2001; Harris, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2008; Reardon et al., 2019). Generally, when discussing demographic changes in suburban schools, race is the primary variable (Frey et al., 2009; Pfeiffer, 2016). Suburban public-school populations are complex alchemies of not just race, but also income.

Kneebone and Carr (2010) claimed:

Between 2000 and 2008, suburbs in the country’s largest metro areas saw their poor population grow by 25 percent. As a result, by 2008 large suburbs were home to 1.5 million more poor than their primary cities and housed almost one-third of the nation’s poor overall. (p. 1)

Midwestern suburbs, geographic home to this study, experienced the largest increases in poverty during the 2000s (Kneebone & Carr, 2010). According to the Brookings Institute (Frey et al., 2009), the profile of suburban poor and urban poor are strikingly similar. The spread of suburban poverty extends beyond the first-ring suburbs, and as a result, suburban public schools continue to see increases in free and reduced lunch percentages (Gill et al., 2016).

The suburbs were orchestrated as derivatives of systemic government interventions on behalf of segregation, racism, and exclusion. If the suburbs are the progenitor of suburban public schools, then is it a fair leap of faith to declare suburban public schools' inequitable institutions as well? Declarations are not enough; action is needed to eradicate inequality associated with school outcomes and opportunities. The impetus to acknowledge and act upon inequities is seminal in nature and a herculean task that is rarely achieved. The task is revolutionary in nature and there is but one leadership theory that espouses revolutionary change to the existing educational order—transformative leadership theory.

### **Transformative Leadership Theory**

I conducted earlier research analyzing many educational leadership theories in search of one or a combination that would align with the quest to eliminate inequities. I studied the following school leadership theories extensively; distributive (Gronn, 2002a, 2002b; Harris, 2009; Hatcher, 2005); culturally responsive (Khalifa, 2018); democratic (Moller, 2002; Woods & Roberts, 2016; Woods & Woods, 2012); and social justice (Ryan & Armstrong, 2016; Samataria, 2014). I found them critical to the educational discourse but lacking in revolutionary character and not far reaching enough to attain the goal of equity beyond academic outcomes.

Transformative leadership is a leadership philosophy that begins with questions of justice, democracy, and the dialectic between public and private good (Shields, 2016, 2020), or

individual accountability and social responsibility (Freire, 1998). There are two theories of actions undergirding TLT. The first is that the educational debt is so intractable that a revolutionary type of leadership is needed to enact incremental or large-scale change in inequitable conditions. The second theory of action is encapsulated in this study's research questions focus on equity. To achieve equity, a redistribution of resources and power along with a change in mindset is of fundamental importance. How or are the tenets of transformative leadership reflected in the participant responses to critical incidents involving race, racism, and equity, and to what degree?

Transformative leadership theory stood apart from other theories based on its adherence to critical pedagogy, enumeration of external non-school related concerns, and the declaration that transformative leadership is explicitly political. I will discuss the origins of TLT in the next section.

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

Transformative leadership began its journey as a term used interchangeably with transformational and transactional leadership (Burns, 1979). These three theories have preoccupied educational leadership scholars during the previous four decades. The most significant differences in the three rest in their emphasis, goals, and related theories.

Transactional leadership seeks a means to an end, presumes tacit agreement to advance a mutually accepted goal, and is steeped in the trait and style theories of leadership (Shields, 2010). Transformational leadership advances the organization as the primary consideration, organizational effectiveness as the primary goal, and school accountability, reform, and improvement as theories of action (Freire, 1998; Johnson, 2008; Shields, 2010).



In contrast to transformational-transactional leadership, transformative leadership's insistence on addressing deep and equitable change in social conditions, adherence to private and public good, and critical theory integration, uncouples it from phonetic similarity and philological connections to transformational and transactional leadership. Shields (2020) defines these distinctions, and is one of the most prolific scholar-practitioners currently exploring transformative leadership in practice. Together with Freire (1970/2007) and Burns (1978), they form the troika of scholar-practitioners dedicated to transformative leadership theory. Traveling backwards chronologically, I will introduce Shields's (2020) contemporary version of TLT and discuss TLT in relation to Burns (1978) and Freire (1970).

### **Shields and Transformative Leadership Theory**

In one of the more widely cited articles on transformative leadership theory, Quantz et al. (1991) reasoned that traditional theories of leadership are inadequate for democratic empowerment and that "only the concept of transformative leadership appears to provide an appropriate direction" (p. 96). Moreover, Shields (2020) remarked, "The starting point for transformative leadership is an inequitable organization" (p. 5). The evolution of transformative leadership has led to the most recent iteration of the theory, developed by Shields (2020). Her model comprises eight integrated and interconnected tenets (Figure 2.1).

### **Figure 2.1**

#### *Shields (2020) Eight Tenants Transformative Leadership Theory*

- Tenet 1: Accepting the Mandate for Deep and Equitable Change
- Tenet 2: Changing Mindsets
- Tenet 3: Redistributing Power in More Equitable Ways
- Tenet 4: Balancing Public and Private Good
- Tenet 5: A Focus on Democracy, Emancipation, Equity, and Justice
- Tenet 6: Interconnectedness, Interdependence, and Global Awareness
- Tenet 7: Balancing Critique and Promise
- Tenet 8: Exhibiting Moral Courage

This evolutionary iteration of transformative leadership theory is grounded in a theory of action that is undergirded by two general assumptions. The first relates to individual achievement and the second to the collective welfare of society.

The first informing principle is political because it considers students' environmental factors (nutrition, housing, and safety) outside of school part of an inclusive philosophy that addresses the need for a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment. This point of departure is unique because it categorically states the following, "Moreover, no new program or pedagogical strategy will succeed over the long term until or unless this kind of safe learning environment is in place" (Shields, 2020, p. 4). To put it another way, the educator who picks up the mantle of transformative leadership must be invested in creating conditions that address students' nutritional, safety, residential, health and wellness, and all other ingredients that determine academic achievement outcomes and educational attainment.

The second general informing notion promotes education as concurrently a public and private good. Freire (1998) would agree with this hypothesis and would restate it as a dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility. While the first underpinning takes note of the normative dimension, the second focuses on the political dimension of change.

These two understandings, individual achievement and the collective welfare of a democratic society, align with this study's primary research question(s): What are the views of White equity-trained suburban educators and minoritized parents concerning equity? Are the views of White equity-trained educators and minoritized parents similar or different? The research question combined with transformative leadership's emphasis on connecting systemic and structural inequities such as race and class through the analysis of critical incidents may yield promising perspectives that scholars and practitioners internationally may find useful.

Accepting the mandate for deep and equitable change and changing mindsets are the first two tenets. They serve as the anchor of the contemporary transformative model and are rooted in beliefs, values, and assumptions that perpetuate inequity based on deficit-thinking models. Redistributing power in more equitable ways and balancing public and private good are Tenets 3 and 4. These answer the critical race critiques of transformative leadership by highlighting implicit bias, race and racism, sexual orientation, gender identity, and power.

Tenets 5 and 6, respectively, focus on democracy, emancipation, equity, and justice and interconnectedness, interdependence, and global awareness reflect a global understanding of inequality. Democracy as a concept, equity, justice, and an acknowledgement that inequitable outcomes are not solely a U.S. phenomenon create a sense of interconnectedness with other social justice and equity leaders internationally. This sense of interconnectedness flows into Tenets 7 (balancing critique and promise) and 8 (exhibiting moral courage). Inequity is well documented as a critique of education and society (Giroux, 1985; Piketty, 2020). Alternatively, Tenet 7 argues that hope is integral to longitudinal adherence to the difficult work of advocating for equity. As an advocate and activist, moral courage (Tenet 8) is a cornerstone of leadership for equity. Moral courage has been defined as “the behavioral expression of authenticity in the face of discomfort or dissension, disapproval, or rejection” (Francis, 2018, p. x). After reviewing the contemporary version of TLT, let us now return to the origins of TLT.

### ***Burns and Transformative Leadership***

Burns (1978) frequently used the term transforming leadership and noted the revolutionary character of leadership for equity. He declared, “Revolution is a complete and pervasive transformation of an entire social system” (p. 202) and “real change . . . [is] a transformation to the marked degree in the attitudes, norms, institutions, and behaviors that

structure our daily lives” (p. 414). Burns (1978) explicitly attenuated morale and ethical issues related to the acquisition and use of power. Burns (1978) noted that power—akin to Shields’s (2016; 2020) Tenet 3, redistribution in equitable ways— was the most difficult and central question in the subject of leadership. Burns’s position was that power is misunderstood and treated obtusely. As a derivative of transformative leadership, Burns argued for the acknowledgment of power, but to not be overcome with it. In fact, he deliberated the fact that power should be distributed. Burns went on to ask, “Can we consider the far more complex, but more consequential exercise of mutual persuasion, exchange, and transformation?” (p. 2). Moreover, Burns’s reasons that transformative leadership raises the level of human conduct (Shields’s Tenet 4, private good) and ethical aspirations (Shields’s Tenet 8, moral courage). It also elevates the hopes and demands (Shields’s Tenet 7, critique and promise) of all participants, and he theorized that the process of transforming between leaders and followers begets a shared vision (Shields’s Tenet 1, accepting the mandate for deep and equitable change).

The relevance of Burns (1978) is the notion that transformative leadership is fundamentally about equity. Other researchers using Burns’s (1978) work have marshaled transformative leadership to address gender equity (Keddie, 2006) by arguing that a complete restructuring, in line with Burns’s revolutionary change, of the systemic frameworks that generate disadvantage are in need. There are other adherents to Burns, such as King and Biro (2000), who have spoken about dimensions of thought or restructuring mental schemas through a disorienting dilemma. Burns’s transformative approach to education has common elements that include social betterment; enhancing equity and are restated currently as a thorough reshaping of knowledge and belief structures.

Reform efforts directed at creating equitable conditions in schools have failed not because of implementation of new programs, curriculum, policies, and other technical dimension measures, but our “failure to acknowledge, power, privilege, and cultural norms of exclusion” (Shields, 2020, p. 9). The eight tenets of transformative leadership provide a framework to analyze and change inequitable practices in schools and communities from a theoretical perspective, but there is an imperative to do the equity work as a practitioner. Hence, the importance of Freire (1970/2007, 1998) and his work implementing transformative leadership as the secretary of education in Brazil.

### ***Freire and Transformative Leadership***

This study seeks adds to the empirical research by operationalizing transformative leadership in a suburban school district. Freire’s work as a practitioner provides intimations of the difficulty of enacting transformative leadership in the midst of inequitable organizations, communities, and political systems. Freire’s tenure as Secretary of Education in Sao Paulo, Brazil, from 1989 until May 1991, provided a practitioner-based exemplar of transformative leadership in action. One of the contemporary criticisms of transformative leadership is the disproportionate amount of theoretical literature in contrast to the scant amount of action research.

Freire’s philosophy of education dovetailed seamlessly with the modern incarnation of transformative leadership. He discussed human beings as unfinished in their development and that conscientization is an interminable attribute. He described (as quoted in Weiner, 2003) *conscientization* as follows:

The development of a critical consciousness is a necessary condition of freedom; that curiosity, both ontological and epistemological, is the keystone of the educational process

and the vocation of the human condition; that hope must be understood as a weapon against the fatalism of neoliberal ideologues; that we are conditioned and not determined; that we must not reify knowledge, but critique it; and that an ethics of respect, solidarity, and authority must inform all critical practices of pedagogical intervention. (p. 86)

One of the routine indicators that disentangles transformative leadership from other educational leadership theories is an understanding of global awareness, interconnectedness, and interdependence. Freire spoke of major transnational forces imbued with the propagation of a capitalist agenda dedicated to the disenfranchisement of large sections of the global population. He understood that the fight for equity was global in nature, not confined to educators' perspectives of the local, and he sought out common cause with fellow educators internationally. His magnum opus, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (Freire 1970/2007) is considered in many circles the equity bible.

In a like manner, transformative leadership calls on educators to “have one foot in the dominant structures of power and authority” (Weiner, 2003, p. 89), while at the same time, to be willing to democratize power in an environment organized and maintained by authoritarianism. As a transformative leader, Freire suggested his role was not to be an ideologue but rather the facilitator of a democratic project that is ensconced by liberation, freedom, democracy, and equity. Shields's (2012) Tenet 5—democracy, emancipation, equity, and justice—aligns with Freire's actions and doctrine.

Transformative leadership draws distinctions from other leadership theories by defining leadership beyond the technical and directing its attention squarely at hegemonic models of power and paradigms of oppression. Transformative leadership must ask questions such as, “Schooling for what? Opportunity for what?” This is what Freire understood and did during his

tenure as Secretary of Education.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

This study's main research question asks the following: How do White equity-trained suburban educators (WETSE) and minoritized parents (MP) interpret equity? The literature review begins by providing an outline of some academic, opportunity, and educational attainment outcomes and their interconnection with equity. When educators, scholars, and policymakers speak about equity and education, what are some of the conversations and how do they relate to the research question? Although not a proponent of the term "achievement gap," it is such a significant part of the current and past dialogue when inequitable outcomes are discussed, it must be acknowledged. I offer an alternative to the achievement gap in the literature review, opportunity gap, by suggesting that a loss of opportunity is the reason there is a lack of achievement.

The succeeding section provided an overview of the participants of the study, White educators and minoritized parents. I used Whiteness, the demographics of education, and the ideology of new racism to couch how the participants in the study may be thinking and acting as it pertains to minoritized youth. Another significant aspect of the study, minoritized parents were examined based on extant research outlining their role as either involved or engaged and elaborating on the difference. My claim was that a particular type of parent interconnection exists in the pursuit equity.

Having discussed equity and both participants in the study, I turned to place the suburban environment in which the study took place in the context of equity by recounting the inequitable construction and expansion of the suburbs, and the suburban environment as an important aspect of the research question. Finally, I conclude the literature review with a focus on the history of

the study's leadership theory, transformative leadership, and the current iteration of the theory to be used in the study.

Elements of TLT were used to generate the series of focus group questions. The literature review was used to develop the initial codebook used to categorize the qualitative data gleaned from the written transcripts of the five focus group sessions. Equally important, the literature review was used to discuss the multiple viewpoints of the significant themes, serving to add depth of analysis to the discussion section of the final chapter.

Chapter III explains the research design and methodology I used to explore transformative leadership in the service of equity through the critical incident technique.



## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY/GUIDING QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH PROCEDURES**

As demonstrated in Chapter II, the literature to date has not addressed how key stakeholders within educational systems view equity. Chapter III sets out the method by which this oversight was amended by my study and begins by restating the purpose of the study and enumerating the research questions. An overview of the methodology is followed by site and participant selection criteria, data collection procedures, and data analysis. Chapter III concludes with validation, reliability, and significance of the research design.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this critical incident qualitative study was to explore the interpretation of equity amongst two groups that are infrequently studied together (WETSE and MP) in relation to the topic of equity. I was unable to find any research that compared and contrasted the two (WETSE and MP) participants' interpretation of equity within the same study. An additional intention was to expand the empirical research into suburban schools. The preponderance of education research is focused on urban schools, when in fact the majority of students attend suburban schools (Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020)

### **Research Questions**

**Central research question:** How do White equity-trained suburban educators (WETSE) and minoritized parents (MP) interpret equity?

**Research Sub-Question 1:** Are there themes that emerge from WETSE and MP interpretation of equity and are they similar or divergent?

## Overview of the Methodology

When dealing with sensitive subjects like privilege and oppression, onset and offset of social inequality, and who is responsible for eradicating social inequalities, the construction of a questionnaire constrains one's ability to deconstruct research participants' complex emotions. Qualitative research is conducted when we need a complex understanding of a phenomena (Creswell, 1998, 2013), and this can only be achieved by talking directly to people, in their environments, and aligning with a worldview or paradigm. Qualitative approaches to research take many forms and the one I have selected for this study is critical incident technique (CIT).

The origins of CIT can be traced back to Sir Francis Galton in the late 19th century (Flanagan, 1954), and later developments of this method such as time sampling studies, controlled observation tests, anecdotal records, and interviews, were an outgrowth of the Aviation Psychology Program of the U.S. Army Air Force (Flanagan, 1954).

Creswell (1998) identified five features of CIT that help distinguish it from other qualitative approaches:

- CIT's focus is on critical events, incidents, or factors that help promote or impeded performance of some activity, event, or process.
- The method originated within industrial and organizational psychology.
- Data are collected primarily through interviews, either in person or post pandemic via Zoom, Google Hangout, or WebEx; data analysis is determined by the frame of reference (e.g., minoritized parents' interpretation of equity versus White teachers).
- CIT forms categories that concentrate on antecedents—events or thoughts that precede the critical incident; and
- The critical incident or experience is presented with detailed description; and accounts will include the outcome consequence, or impact of the incident.

Since its introduction, CIT has been used in the following disciplines and professions: communication (Stano, 1983), nursing (Kemppainen et al., 1998), counseling (McCormick et al., 1997), and education and teaching (Le Mare & Sohbat, 2002). CIT functionality is demonstrated

by its use in measuring performance, training, creating procedures, and determining motivation and leadership attitudes (Butterfield et al., 2005).

There have been four major departures from Flanagan's early CIT work that centralized behavioral observations without an emphasis on analyzing psychological states and experiences (Stano, 1983). First, CIT was initially behaviorally grounded and was not applied to the analysis of psychological mindsets (Stano, 1983). Second, Eibert (1983) used CIT to examine the psychological construct that was absent in the first iteration of CIT. Third, Herzberg et al. (1959) used CIT to study workplace motivation and finally Flannigan, the progenitor of CIT, used the method to study quality of life in America (1978). The evolution of CIT to also include revelatory experiences (Keatinge, 2002) created the flexibility needed to uncover sensitive topics.

Through the examination of related and common experiences of a broad range of occupational communities, critical incident researchers can uncover important patterns in these findings that can lead to selection criteria, training programs, evaluation tools, and professional development (Butterfield, 2005).

CIT provides the platform to conduct a comparative analysis of the understanding and interpretation of equity by two distinct groups: WETSE and MP who are critical to the creation of equitable systems (Elmore, 2000). This research is unconventional within the field of education in a number of ways. Although scant overall, current CIT research in education generally focuses on teacher and principal beliefs about student learning and school improvement (Ciriza, 2018; Conley, 2016); teacher collaboration and job satisfaction (Andreou et al., 2015; Kain, 2004) and; positive student behavior supports (Andreou et al., 2015; Bastable, 2018; Charlton et al., 2018). The research conducted here is perhaps the first to use CIT as a tool

to understand equity beliefs and perceptions of White suburban educators and minoritized parents. Using this technique, participants are invited to share their worldview, perspectives, and interpretations without cultural boundaries such as surveys, questionnaires, and in their own language (Vianden, 2012).

### **Participant Selection**

As the study sets out to explore WETSE and MP's views of equity, the study needed to engage both of these participants. WETSE were selected as a result of a local non-profit establishing a new effort to close the achievement gap—Equity Fellows. The Equity Fellows began their work in the summer of 2018. Equity Fellows are responsible for identifying and analyzing factors that interfere with minoritized students' educational success. The fellows track and monitor achievement and suspension data that will be disaggregated by race and gender according to the National Equity Project (2020).

JRCS has nine schools and each school was asked to recruit three teachers to make a three-year commitment to participate in bi-weekly meetings and activities. The bi-weekly meetings and activities were focused on drawing awareness and understanding of implicit bias, structural racism, generational wealth gaps, and White privilege.

There are 45 equity fellows in the school district, of which 36 are teachers and nine are administrators. I recruited educator focus group participants by requesting participation via email, phone calls, and personal visits. Twelve of the equity fellow participants agreed to be part of the study and eight attended both focus group sessions. The participants who agreed to participate are known in this study by the acronym WETSE. Focus group participants were selected based on common characteristics related to the research questions and purpose of the study.

The suburban school district's demographics have increasingly become more diverse. I used several minority parents as recruiters and asked if they would be interested in participating and asking other MP to participate. The school district's director of family and community engagement is specifically tasked with networking in the minority community, and I asked her for a list of parents who might be interested. The MP were selected using snowball sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study identified criteria, and parents who lived in the school district for one or more years, had at least one child in the school system, and self-identified as "minority" were the population from which I drew my sample.

The study included a convenience sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) of eight WETSE (F=6, M=2) and eight MP (F=6, M=2) selected via snowball sampling. The participants met the suggested number of focus group participants in order to maximize the depth of responses (Naylor & Foulkes, 2018). Each participant completed and signed a human participation form (IRB) at which time the researcher orally highlighted their options for departing the study.

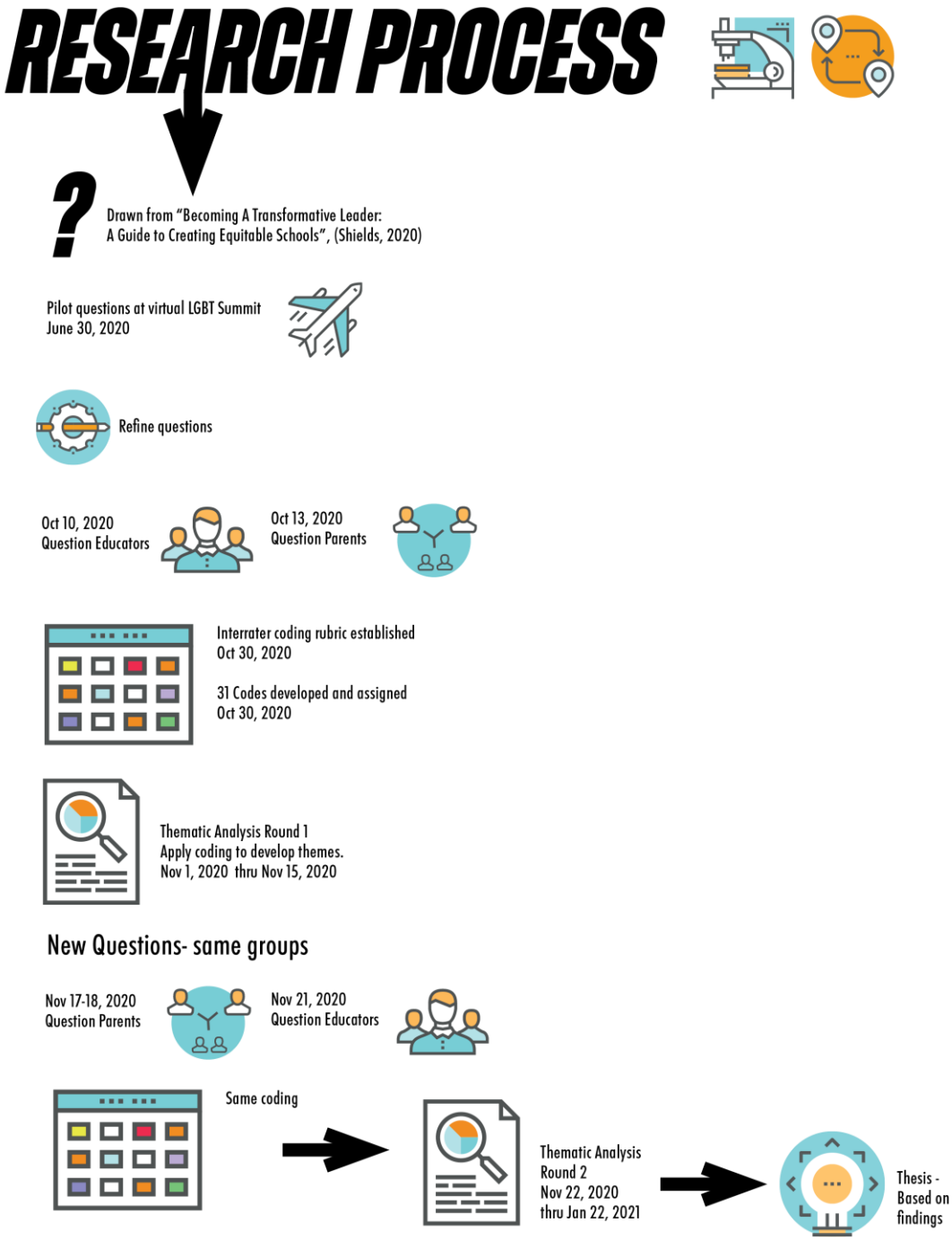
This study's participant groups are comprised of a nonprobability or convenience sample in which respondents were chosen based on their convenience. The WETSE were employees of the school district in which I was conducting the sample and the MP were parents within the same district.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative studies typically involve four basic types of data collection procedures: qualitative observation; qualitative interview; qualitative documents collection; and qualitative audiovisual and digital materials collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The entire data collection timeline and process is documented in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

Data Collection and Analysis Timeline



This study employed focus groups as a form of qualitative interviewing. Focus groups are used to understand how people think and feel about complex issues (Krueger & Casey, 2002). However, prior to convening a focus group, a list of questions needs to be developed. The goal is to ask questions that address the study. A good set of questions focuses on getting information that directly relates to the study's objectives (Krueger et al., 2001). The locus of my study is "equity." The research questions elicit critical incident responses by asking participants to recall what they "feel," "observe," and "witness." Hence, there were no binary responses in the data set. Furthermore, the questions were fashioned to align with an equity-based paradigm, transformative leadership theory. The first round of questions was transcribed from the text, *Becoming A Transformative Leader: A Guide to Creating Equitable Schools* (Shields, 2020). Each one of the eight tenets was represented as an equity-centered question. Equity was represented in the first set of questions with references to "inequities," "marginalization," and "assumptions."

Innovations in CIT suggest a second round of focus groups generally conducted after the data from the first round of focus groups has been analyzed (Butterfield et al., 2005). The purpose of the second focus group round is known as cross-checking in order to give the participants a chance to clarify, add depth, or delete previous statements (Alfonso, 1997). This CIT innovation is consistent with the concept of interpretive validity, which can be used as a credibility measure in most qualitative studies (Maxwell, 1992). For this reason, a second round of focus groups were conducted in this study.

The second set of questions to be used during the second round of the focus groups identified key words such as "inequitable practices," "systemic inequalities" and "equity training." Each set of questions focused directly on the study's objective as the empirical

literature suggests (Krueger et al., 2001). All of the questions were open-ended (See Appendix D) and deliberately provided flexibility so the participants could frame their critical incidents in the context of equity (Krueger & Casey, 2001).

Following the development of the questions, a codebook was created using the literature review. By virtue of the research design and literature review, my study was structured with prefigured categories and priori codes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The research design does not preclude the addition of discrepant meaning units and themes, but merely provides the researcher with guardrails supported by extant literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The codebook was developed prior to the focus group sessions.

The codebook and questions were sent to two researchers who checked it for accuracy, codebook redundancy, and flow of the questions. Several questions were slightly modified for each group, but there are questions that were universal and asked verbatim to both WETSE and MP. Those questions can be found in Appendices C and D. Once the co-researchers responded with feedback, one final step was taken prior to scheduling the focus groups.

I piloted the questions at the Health Equity, Racial Justice, & LGBTQ Summit. I was a featured presenter and used that forum as an opportunity to pilot the questions in order to determine flow, possible length of focus group session, and content validity of the questions. This pilot was prompted as a result of earlier scholarship, in which I was asked to pilot questions prior to using them (Ladkin, 2019: personal communication). The study's questions were then sent to WETSE and MP via email and embedded with a review of why the study was being conducted. I reminded participants that we would be discussing themes such as "racism," "perceived or real inequities," and the "lived experience" of both groups. Following the explanatory email, I used Doodle to schedule the first and second focus group session. In order to



ensure maximum participation, I also called each participant as a follow-up. Multiple communication reminders ensure maximum participation and engagement (Krueger & Casey, 2001).

It is unreasonable to recall the focus group conversation by memory. Focus groups can be recorded through field notes, tape recording, or with a laptop computer. The moderator cannot effectively facilitate the discussion and concentrate on memoing (Krueger & Casey, 2001). I commissioned two co-researchers, one White and the other Black, to act as assistant moderators. I was aware of my role as a Black male and surmised participants might have felt more comfortable with a co-moderator whose racialized identity was similar to their own (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The assistant moderators were both career educators who earned their PhD's in the assessment of women's leadership. They are both former teachers and administrators.

Five recorded sessions were completed over the course of two months. Typically, one would have generated two sessions for each group. However, the second MP session was divided into two groups because of religious commitments. Several of the MP were not available on Wednesdays because of church service. Those sessions were immediately transcribed using a web-based transcription service that provided digitized audio files and a written transcript of each focus group session. The digital files and written transcripts became the foundation for the data analysis of my study.

### **Data Analysis**

As discussed earlier, this study used CIT as the methodology, focus groups as the data collection tool, and thematic analysis as approach to data analysis. The study's framework (ZONE) and philosophical schema (TLT) are used to make sense of the findings and answer the research questions.

A complex study by which researchers are trying to understand how different people think and feel about complicated topics such as equity, require transcript-based analysis (Krueger & Casey, 2001). When using thematic analysis to analyze participant responses, words, context, frequency, and big ideas should be identified (Saldana, 2009).

### **Thematic Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis can be overwhelming given the volume of information gleaned. Although linear data analysis processes exist (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), my data analysis process was iterative and reflexive. The analysis, collection, and reflection of data occurred concurrently due to the research design and adherence to the overarching principle of “goodness of fit” (Edmondson & McManus, 2007).

Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Hayfield et al., 2017; Percy et al., 2015). Additionally, research that is experimental may require flexible approaches to data analysis. Clark and Braun (2017) describe TA as follows:

The hallmark of this form of TA is its *flexibility*—not simply theoretical flexibility, but flexibility in terms of research question, sample size and constitution, data collection method, and approaches to meaning generation. TA can be used to identify patterns within and *across* data in relation to participants’ lived experience, views and perspectives, and behavior and practices; ‘experiential’ research which seeks to understand what participants’ think, feel, and do. (p. 2)

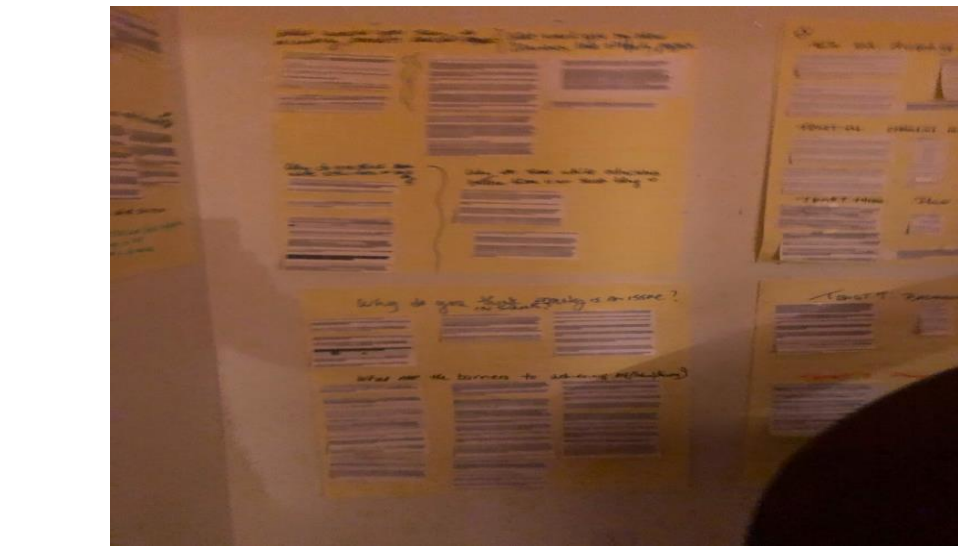
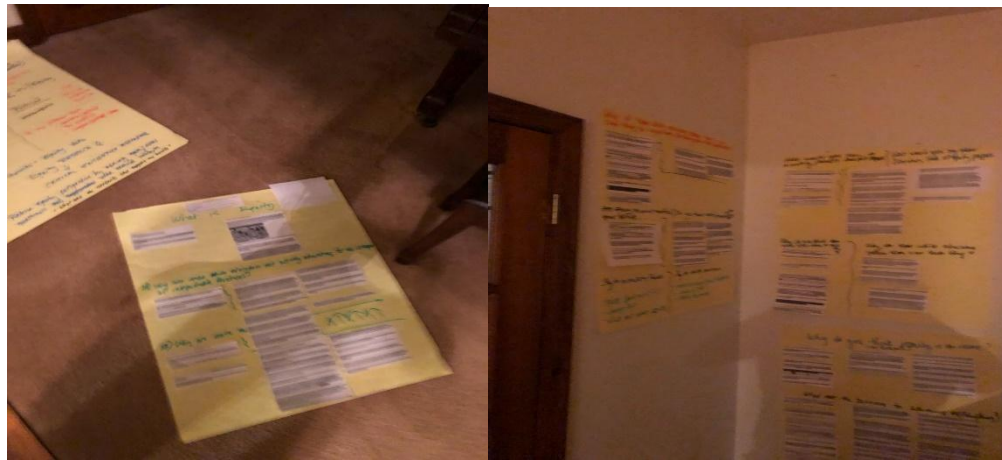
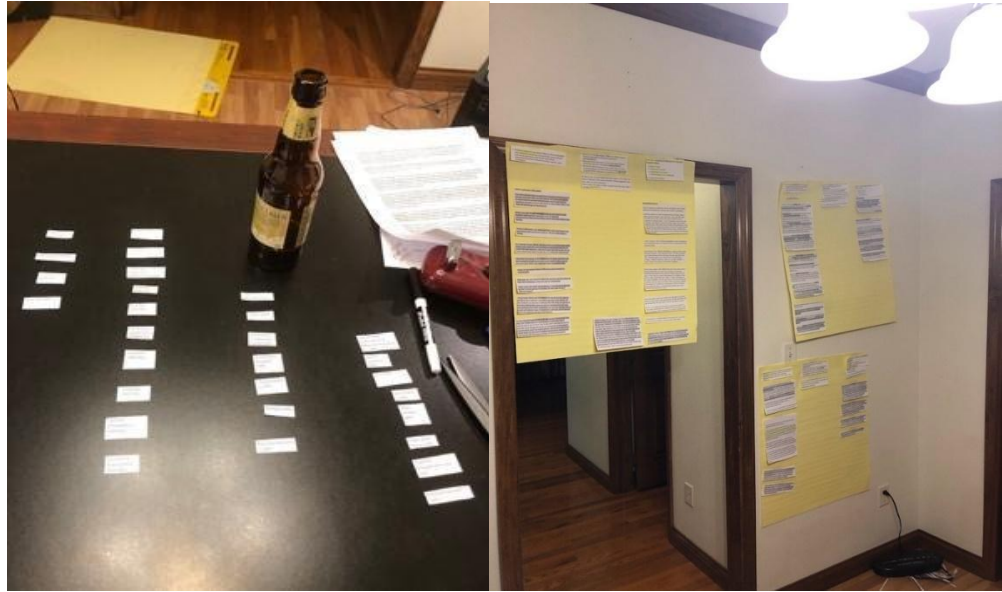
The focus group responses were designed to generate qualitative data exploring beliefs, ideologies, and philosophical positions held by WETSE and MP. Computer assisted data analysis software programs exist (Belotto, 2018), however, I decided to manually code and categorize my

data with the assistance of co-researchers and utilization of interrater reliability. Pictures of the process and the first stages of my data analysis can be found below.

**Step 1:** I read each of the transcripts several times and listened to the audio file of each focus group session daily. During the data collection process, I drove roundtrip to the state university while listening to the audio file. The drive time was ~150 minutes. During the seven weeks of travel, I listened to the audio file of each focus group at least ~ seven times. This was an iterative process that combined reading, listening, and with color-coding codes.

**Step 2:** Each excerpt was read and assigned one or more of the 39 codes that were retrieved from the literature review. After each excerpt was assigned one code, I reviewed the data again to determine if additional codes could be assigned to each narrative excerpt.

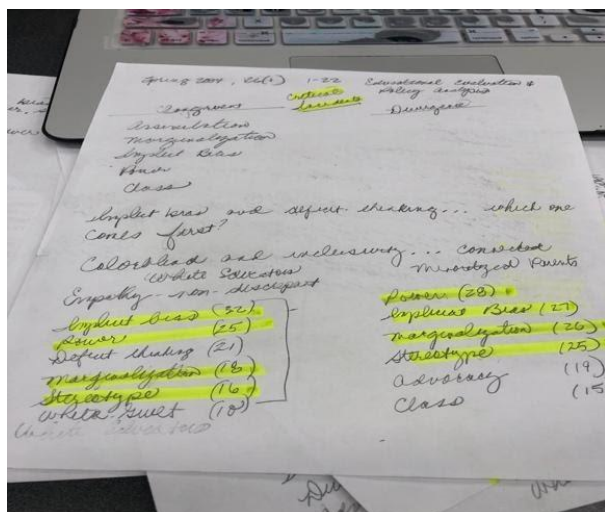
**Step 3.** Each transcript was printed and all of the narrative excerpts were cut out and placed in groups that corresponded to their assigned code number, e.g., all of the narrative excerpts coded as #18 (implicit bias) were grouped together by participant groups (WETSE and MP).



**Step 4.** The codes were rank ordered as a function of frequency of occurrence per each group. I first ranked the top five themes and found congruence. Although not in the same order, the same five themes occurred. Once a divergent theme occurred, I made note of what participant group was reporting divergence in their view of equity. This single outlier was important and eventually became a significant part of the analysis, findings, and recommendations.

**Step 5.** Once the similar and divergent themes were established, I looked for themes that would not fit any of the 39 codes that were already established. I found one theme that was not identified in the codebook. When categorization is complete, independent researchers are asked to sort the incidents into categories to see whether the categories can be replicated. There is no established criteria for the level of agreement, but acceptable classification rates have been noted as between 75% to 85% of primary category agreement and 60% to 70% if subcategories exist (Anderson & Nilsson, 1964).

**Step 6.** I sent the codebook and transcripts to four co-researchers who all hold PhD's in educational leadership, technology, and critical race studies. They examined the transcripts and provided feedback that aligned with my thematic analysis of the themes. Each co-researcher was assigned just one transcript and I reviewed their feedback to determine if any additional themes should be added or deleted. I did not discover any additional themes that were identified by the co-researchers, although their responses reinforced and altered the rank order of the findings, e.g., implicit bias was strongly cited as the most prevalent theme deemed as a barrier to achieving equity once the co-researchers' responses were included.



Equity	0	0	2	1	1
Multicultural	4	0	0	0	4
Social Justice	2	2	0	1	3
Policy	1	0	1	2	3
Curriculum	2	0	2	2	4
Socioeconomy	0	0	1	3	3
Meritocracy	1	1	0	3	4
Colorblind	1	1	4	7	8
Colorbute	0	1	0	0	0
Beliefs	0	0	0	0	0
Inclusivity	2	5	2	0	2
White fatigue	0	0	0	0	0
White guilt	10	1	6	4	14
Immigration	0	0	0	0	0
Diversity	6	12	12	6	12
Advocacy	1	19	20	2	3
Equity trainer	4	1	5	15	19
Implicit bias	32	27	10	14	36
Professional	5	0	5	15	20
Hegemonic	0	0	0	0	0
Whiteness	6	6	8	13	19
Deficit think	21	13	4	4	25
Class	8	15	7	2	10
Power	25	28	14	3	28
Oppression	3	3	2	1	4
Assimilation	0	20	15	0	2
Activist	1	14	11	0	1
Democracy	0	0	1	0	0
Public/Private	2	0	6	0	2
Stereotype	16	25	2	9	21
Marginalizat	18	26	13	8	26
White fragili	3	3	9	13	16
White privile	9	9	23	12	21
White suppre	2	3	15	5	7
Emancipation	0	0	0	0	0
Global aware	0	0	0	0	0
Interconnete	6	0	0	0	0
Interdepend	0	0	0	0	0
Moral courag	4	5	6	3	7
Lived Experiences					
Accountability					
Empathy					

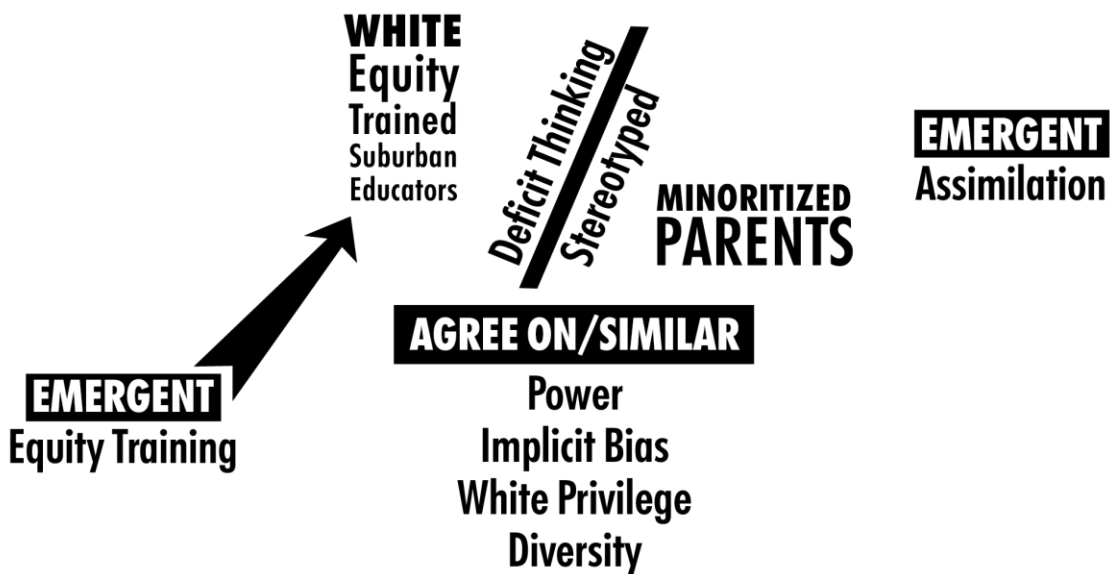
**Step 7.** I presented the findings to ~100 non-equity trained educators and eight equity trained teachers. The four WETSE found the findings paralleled their lived experiences in the district. I presented the findings to two MP and they agreed that the findings expressed the views on equity. Although the non-equity trained White educators were not part of the study, ~14 of the ~100 self-reported after the presentation that the findings were consistent with their observations as educators.

Interpreting qualitative research involves summarizing the overall findings, comparing the findings to the empirical literature, answering the research questions, and stating limitations and future implications (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Much of the aforementioned will be covered in Chapter IV and V of this research study, whilst a pictorial representation of the findings will be discussed next.

**Step 8:** Based on the results of the study, I developed a diagram depicting the findings and their association with the studies research questions (Figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2**

*WETSE and MP Findings*



**Step 9:** I used the results of the study to develop a diagram depicting the congruent findings and their association with the study’s framework (ZONE) and leadership theory (TLT; Figure 3.3).

**Figure 3.3**

*WETSE and MP Findings Interpreted through Zone of Mediation and Transformative Leadership Theory*



## Standards of Validation

Validity of findings occurs throughout the steps in the research process, and it does not carry the same association in qualitative research that it does in quantitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Correspondingly, according to Gibbs (2007), “*qualitative validity* means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, whereas *qualitative reliability* indicates that the research’s approach is consistent across different researchers and among different projects” (p. 14). A detailed account describing the study’s fidelity to the principles of validity and reliability follows in the next section.

### *Validity*

Clarifying the bias a researcher brings by including a reflexivity section noting how the interpretation of the findings was influenced by the researcher’s gender, culture, socioeconomic status, currently and historically, will add the strength of the research. This study notes the researcher’s reflexivity in Chapter III.

The presentation of discrepant information that runs counter to the themes or extant research adds depth to the study’s qualitative validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study found the participants’ themes associated with creating equity ran counter to current research proposing solutions to student achievement, e.g., technical solutions are recommended as optimal whilst the findings suggest normative and political solutions are recommended by WETSE and MP.

Extended time in the field develops in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. The more experience the researcher has the more accurate and valid the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I spent 20 months in the research setting with the participants and used participants as part



of my pilot study, which included learning journal reports and critical incident reports as preliminary phases before the study began.

Member checking or reporting back to the participants to determine their accuracy is fundamental to establishing validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I reported my findings to ~100 White educators at the conclusion of my second draft of the study. Approximately eight of the ~100 educators were part of the WETSE cohort identified in my study. I used the feedback to draw nuance distinctions between the findings similar, divergent, and emerging themes.

The use of peer debriefing serves to enhance the accuracy of the research findings emanating from the transcripts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The co-facilitators of focus groups also served as peer debriefers. They read through the entirety of the research and provided their interpretation of the findings. I also employed one additional peer debriefer who reviewed Chapter IV and submitted her interpretation of the findings. I emailed the request after reading her published empirical study. She was cited in my literature and asked to interpret the research findings. As mentioned earlier, reliability is critical to ensure research credibility.

### ***Reliability***

Verifying the procedures of the study with as many documents and enumerated steps as possible is recommended (Yin, 2009) so that others can follow the procedures, i.e., a sort of “cookbook” or “road map” of the study.

Reviewing and checking transcription of focus groups to determine if mistakes were made during transcription is a standard qualitative reliability procedure (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition to listening to the audio version of the focus groups, I read the transcripts several times during the coding process to ensure contextual agreement with the audio transcript.

Coordinating the communication among coders and detailing consistently scheduled meetings to share the analysis is an acknowledged form of reliability and using them for cross-check codes demonstrates qualitative reliability adherence and strengthens the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The following excerpt, dated January 21, 2021, was sent to seven co-researchers. All co-researchers have earned their PhDs or EdDs in the field of education.

*Okay everyone... REALLY need your help. Would you please do the following:*

- 1. Read the transcript with your name attached to it.*
- 2. During or after, jot down words (colorblind) or meaning units (angry black person).*
- 3. The words and meaning units can be your interpretation or taken directly from the transcribed comments.*
- 4. Email your "codes" or "meaning units" back to me by 2/1, but I'll obviously take them sooner.*

*If you have any questions, please call or email me.*

This study does not meet the criteria of Qualitative generalization; however, it does meet the measures of qualitative reliability, and validity is thus transferable.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations for focus groups are the same for most methods of social science research (Homan, 1991). I clarified in the email sent to the participants (10/1; 10/3; 10/5) the confidential nature of their responses. The White educators were given permission from the school district (See Appendix E) to be as candid as possible in their responses with the understanding that the research was going to be used to build district capacity, implementation strategies, and strategic planning targets with respect to equity. I explained the transcripts and audio recording would be accessed by only my co-researchers and me. The process and timeline of how and when the recorded information would be destroyed was enumerated during the opening of each focus group session.

## **Researcher's Role and Reflexivity**

We have multiple interrelated identities, hence sensemaking is derived from various aspects of our identity (Kezar, 2002). Features of our identities that shape our interpretations include political and philosophical biases, gender, lived experiences, and socioeconomic status (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study took place in an affluent Midwestern suburb which has historically been considered a “conservative” enclave. I have lived in the suburb for the last 25 years and engaged in political and philosophical conversations with community members prior to becoming an employee of the school district. I would consider myself a social justice advocate in all spheres of society, ranging from affordable housing to universal health care. I understood and reflected on what I believed to be an implied disagreement with WETSE and agreement with MP as it related to politics and philosophy.

Although a long-time member of the affluent suburb in which this study takes place, I was born in a neighboring city in the poorest section of town. My early upbringing was full of loving relationships with minority community members, but most of whom lived in poverty, rarely traveled outside of the confines of the western geography of the city, and were not college graduates. This working-class background allowed me to engage with the MP in a way that took me back to my childhood. In addition, my longitudinal tenure as a resident of the suburbs also provided me with some of the same lived experiences of being stereotyped, marginalized, and excluded within the mostly white suburb. The MP and I held similar experiences and it was rather easy to discuss inequality of treatment and outcomes with MP. This connection was vital to bringing about concrete, deep, and compelling critical incident reflections and revelations. In addition, the insertion of a African American female as a co-facilitator who was even more

familiar with the MP seem to provide the focus group with immediate trustworthiness as it pertained to the researcher.

Conversely, I employed Dr. Tim Floyd (pseudonym) as a co-facilitator. He is a white, Christian, heterosexual male, and also an educator. This was done to create a sense of trust with the WETSE. Dr. Floyd was also a student-teacher in my classroom 25-years earlier. Part of his role was to provide authenticity in my intentions as a researcher given his longitudinal relationship with me and his academic credentials. Although an important design consideration related to focus group, the WETSE provided frank and honest answers in my presence. The findings suggest not only did WETSE discuss their own association with implicit bias, deficit thinking, White privilege, and power, but implicated many of their colleagues through critical incidents and revelations related to personal communication with their colleagues. As one of the only minoritized employees in the district, I was more apprehensive in my questioning of WETSE than with MP. This reluctance could have limited the depth of responses from the WETSE, however, I believe the equity training and their enthusiasm to volunteer for my study were countervailing factors.

As a Black male working in an environment that consists mostly of White women and a school district whose student body is 67% White, I surmised that the question of equity would be somewhat controversial. My socioeconomic status (SES) at publication of this work would be considered upper middle-class. I grew up in a lower working-class neighborhood as a child. The contrast between the two experiences gave me an understanding of the WETSE and MP because I have lived in both spaces.

Finally, it is possible that my recognition of the lack of racial diversity among district employees and my own experiences with being stereotyped and marginalized might have led to

the development of the research questions and design. My positionality is aligned with my study's focus thus providing a great deal of enthusiasm while pursuing this study. My enthusiasm is borne from observing my father advocate for social justice and equity as an automotive worker and instilling that activism in me as a young man.

### **Significance of Design**

This study's research design is unique. Using the keywords "critical incident technique," "focus group," and "thematic analysis," I was able to find one study whose research design mirrored my study, Naylor and Foulkes (2017). This study's design employing two focus groups (WETSE and MP), thematic analysis, and asked the participants to recall the feelings, emotions, and beliefs associated with critical incidents that highlight inequalities is significant. The research design itself is rare, not to mention the design's focus on White educators and minoritized belief systems. Although not the intended purpose, by limiting the participants to White *equity-trained* trained educators, the study also explored the longitudinal belief changes of WETSE educators resulting from intense equity, diversity, and inclusion training during the course of three years.

This chapter explained the research design and process. The following chapter reports the findings generated from the study.

## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Chapter IV presents findings that materialized from my data analysis of critical incidents and lived experience reflections related to WETSE and MP views and interpretations of equity. Each of the focus groups was interviewed twice and asked 18 questions related to equity. The critical incidents which emerged from the focus groups were analyzed using thematic analysis based on codes developed from the literature review (particularly in relation to the tenets of Transformational Leadership Theory). The primary research question focused on understanding WETSE and MP abstract understanding of the term *equity*. The sub-research question explored the similarities and differences in their interpretation of equity. A subsequent analysis considered how the findings aligned with the (ZONE) framework and transformative leadership theory (TLT).

### Research Questions

The questions include a main central research question and one sub-question:

**Central research question:** How do White equity-trained suburban educators (WETSE) and minoritized parents (MP) interpret equity?

**Research Sub-Question 1:** Are there themes that emerge from WETSE and MP interpretation of equity and are they similar or divergent?

Equity as a general term was thought to be of significant importance prior to inquiring about “equity” fellows. WETSE and MP contributed almost identical understandings of the word equity. The following explains WETSE understanding of the term equity:

Really it’s looking at the circumstance and making sure we’re just addressing every student and seeing what their needs are and giving them the tools they need to succeed.  
(WETSE)

Not sure if I’m wording this correctly, but I read somewhere a definition that described it as providing everybody the opportunities they need for them to achieve the same

outcome, regardless of what those opportunities are and how much they need in order to reach that outcome. (WETSE)

In like manner, MP made note of their understanding of the term equity, and it was almost identical to WETSE perspective of equity:

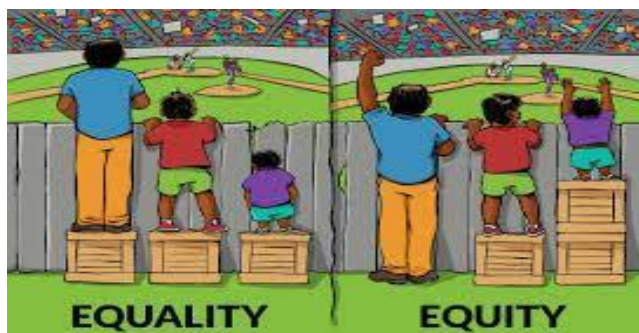
Oh, I think they both hit the nail on the head. We study, I go a step further and say, when you're looking at equity, what will be in the better is to remove the fence, remove the barrier. But yeah, that, that imagery that you put up exactly what Ms. Turner was saying would be my definition, whatever it takes for us all to have the same opportunity. (MP)

Well, what, what are the things that comes to mind to me about a year, year and a half ago, a drawing or a picture that someone had paid, posted online and equity was at versus equality. And I'm going to try and make sure I get that right. But equality, if I remember correctly, it gave everyone if there were three people and it is the racetrack or something, I don't totally recall. And I think the equality I think was listed as giving them all the same amount of classes to step up on so that they can look over. But some of the shorter people still couldn't see. So equity was giving them a few more boxes so that they can look over and all see that, that field out there. So, yeah, that's it. (MP)

Figure 4.1 is one of the most referenced depictions when discussing equity versus equality. WETSE and MP cited the image as a visual representation of what equity means to them. A critical starting point in any discussion, but specifically my research, is—do we agree on the definition of the central concept—what is equity? What does it look like? How do you know it when you see it?

## Figure 4.1

### *Illustrating Equality Versus Equity*



*Note:* 2021, Illustrating Equity versus Equality, [interactioninstitute.org](http://interactioninstitute.org) and [madewithangus.com](http://madewithangus.com).

Having discussed clear agreement on what the term equity means, and even what it looks like in illustrative form, I now turn to similar themes.

## Similar Themes

### *Implicit Bias (WETSE and MP)*

Implicit bias is generally recognized as the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner (Staats, 2016). Does implicit bias exist in suburban school districts within key constituencies such as teachers, administrators, and support personnel? WETSE and MP acknowledged the presence of implicit bias, although their interpretations of implicit bias were dissimilar. Additionally, implicit bias was not found to be a fixed concept, but was found to be interrelated with other themes designed to prevent the achievement of equity, such as White supremacy ideology, classism, and stereotyping.

### *Implicit Bias (WETSE)*

This study found WETSE identified implicit biases based on race, appearance of the child—which could be reflected as a race or class dimension of bias, and perceived academic ability or lack thereof. The subsequent vignette illustrates these assertions:



I'm going to say I'm ashamed to say this, but yes. I have definitely made assumptions based on how a student is dressed and even with the color of their skin. I assumed, I guess that when I was younger, and I didn't have the equity training. But if you weren't dressed a certain way, or you didn't have resources, I just assumed that you were low. (WETSE)

With some reservation, this participant described their implicit bias. In addition, the WETSE acknowledged in one statement the interconnection between race, class, deficit thinking, and implicit bias. These comments were used as evidence to support the claim that implicit bias was recognized by WETSE, but it could have been used in several other sections of the findings as evidence of a prevailing mindset amongst White educators.

In my literature review, I explicitly linked race with equity (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). I made the case that it was highly improbable that equity work could be conducted with fidelity, without the question of race being addressed. WETSE comments provided confirmation of this, by expressing a sense of “shame” (Leonardo, 2004) about openly making assumptions about students based on their skin “color.”

The literature review also linked students' socioeconomic status with equity (Reardon, 2011) and academic achievement. Such views described the way in which WETSE identified the appearance of students through their “dress” and made assumptions about their lack of “resources” and academic ability by stating the students were “low.” Shame and White Guilt (Leonardo, 2004; Tatum, 1994) were identified as additional elements in connection with implicit bias. Additional findings from the focus groups reinforced the race and class dynamic coupled with the identification of structural racism in association with implicit bias. The ensuing remarks exemplify the connection:

I would say especially if we're talking about schools in general, that we're raised to think that inner-city schools are going to fail, and that's just the way of things. And I don't think that a lot of people really believe that this is a situation that can change. I think that a lot of people, whether they're thinking that it's because of race or it's because of

income or whatever else, I think a lot of people think that the system just can't change and it's going to be what it is. (WETSE)

The invoking of "inner-city schools" and "failure" returns to the race/color component of implicit bias. While the inherent "failure" of inner-city schools aligns with existing stereotypes of urban schools (Ravitch, 2013). Race and income were explicitly mentioned in the aforementioned narrative excerpt; thus, the findings are reinforced when claiming that race and class are associated with WETSE analyses of implicit bias.

Additionally, the idea that inequality is immutable surfaced as an ancillary element associated with implicit bias. WETSE noted that "a lot of people think that the *system* just can't change and it's going to be what it is." As mentioned earlier, implicit bias is not a static category, and the findings suggest that implicit bias could be a proxy for the "system" according to WETSE. In like manner, the following WETSE comments return to the inevitability of inequity and implicit bias:

There's always a little bit of implicit bias no matter what you're doing. So that sometimes provides the equity issues as well. You might think you're doing what the students need, but in reality, maybe you're hindering what they need as well. (WETSE)

WETSE concluded that implicit bias is tangible and must be addressed if equity is to be achieved. This is an important finding because there are segments of the population who believe implicit bias, racism, and classism do not exist – that we are in fact living in a meritocracy (Bonilla-Silva, 2000; Shields, 2020).

Implicit bias can affect beliefs that educators hold about minoritized students' achievement, behavior, background, and ability. These beliefs can influence educators subjective thinking regarding minoritized students' abilities and reduce White educators' expectations

(Batchelor et al., 2019). In turn, this condition affects more than student achievement, it restricts opportunities and impedes educational attainment (Ravitch, 2013).

WETSE opining about the certainty of implicit bias and its immovability or as a fait accompli is relevant, but not a complete view of how White educators view the permeance of implicit bias. There are others (Carter et al., 2017) whose research with pre-service teachers (PST) and implicit bias would intimate otherwise. After studying reflections and responses of PST in focus groups, Carter et al. (2017) concluded that biases can be brought to the surface, examined, and expunged.

In conclusion, WETSE acknowledged the existence of implicit bias. Implicit bias does not seem to be a standalone. WETSE infused stereotyping, classism, and anti-urban school sentiment in their comments. James Reeb City Schools is surrounded by two much larger school districts that are predominantly populated with minoritized children. When one of those children transfer into James Reeb City Schools (JRCS), race, class, and stereotyping are regular features of the school environment.

### ***Implicit Bias (MP)***

As previously stated, implicit bias is generally recognized as the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner (Staats, 2016). MP noted the presence of implicit bias based on critical incidents reported to them by their children and their own life experiences. MP pointed out that routine behavior is perceived differently based on the race of the student. Their declaration is supported by contemporary research presenting disproportional responses to perceived misbehavior as a function of the students minoritized status (Skiba & Williams, 2014). The following is a brief account substantiating MP claim that incongruent reactions to similar behaviors occur:

They did like a little handshake kind of thing, like a little thing, and the teacher said to them. Don't do that. So my son, who's very vocal and he's in the seventh or eighth grade. I can't remember one of the, he was like, why does it have to be off? Cause we're black. And he's like, the white kids do stuff, do handshakes. And you don't say anything to them. It's like, it's cause we're black. So she kind of tried to dismiss him. And he was like, no, I want an answer like, you're doing that because we're black. (MP)

The MP with a biracial child recognized biases from an insider-outsider perspective. As the minoritized mother (White father) of biracial children, she observed biases based on which racialized identity her children selected. A more detailed account is given below:

And this comes from someone who my kids are biracial. So then their father was white. So my son had always identify as white. Who's always sitting with black kids and one who always identified as biracial? But as he got to that middle school, he said, I'm black. And I know that was one experience that really impacted him. He really saw the difference in how they were treated. (MP)

I found that MP consistently acknowledged implicit bias as a threat to achieving equitable outcomes. Their observations by way of critical incidents, life experiences, and analysis of situations that may not directly involve their children, but are part of their lived experience, and affirm their perspective of unequal treatment. In the context of the research question(s), which identified equity interpretation as central to the conversation, MP and WETSE agreed that implicit bias was a barrier to creating equitable conditions.

### ***Implicit Bias Summary (WETSE & MP)***

This study asked if there were any similarities or differences between WETSE and MP interpretation of equity. Both participant groups identified implicit bias as a barrier to creating equitable conditions within schools. Although the findings support this statement, distinctions in their agreement materialized.

WETSE assign race and class as primary factors associated with their acknowledgment of deficit thinking and stereotypical assumptions as antecedents to their implicit bias reactions. It is at this point that I return to Staats (2016) explanation of implicit bias. She mentions "stereotype"

and “unconscious” as two of the important inflection points in her definition of implicit bias. Analyzing WETSE responses, we distinctly see stereotyping and deficit thinking intersecting with implicit bias. When heard in conjunction with comments regarding class, I am suggesting WETSE are placing implicit bias within a suite of normative behaviors that are barriers to achieving equity. Furthermore, I am noting the key word, unconscious, as I analyze and interpret the findings. I leaned on the term unconscious to differentiate implicit bias from deficit thinking and stereotyping.

MP agree with WETSE concerning the presence of implicit bias within the educator ranks of the suburban school district. At the same time, the findings point to MP anxiety over how their children are treated, concerns regarding fairness and social justice, and there is congruence with WETSE around the inevitable prevalence of implicit bias. Let us consider the following remarks:

In addition to that, I know my thinking for my son was always, it’s going to happen in life anyway, get past it. Yeah. I can go up there and complain or put up, but things like this are going to happen. You’re going to have to figure out ways to navigate through situations where people aren’t always fair or people don’t treat you the way you feel like you should be treated or things that happen that you know, are detrimental to you. (MP)

The prevalence of implicit bias is concerning, as educational research has shown a negative association between implicit bias and standardized math and reading scores for minoritized students (van den Bergh et al., 2010). Two large scale quantitative studies Project Implicit (Xu et al., 2014) and the American National Election Study (ANES) 2008 Time Series Study demonstrate the existence of implicit and explicit bias.

Although both WETSE and MP concur implicit bias is an impediment to an achieving equity, conversely there are distinguishable differences in how implicit bias is perceived. Implicit bias was the most common theme found in the findings. As mentioned earlier, I discussed

placing the findings in the context of the studies framework (ZONE) and leadership theory (TLT).

Implicit bias as a theme emerging from the study's findings fits in the normative dimension of the ZONE. That zone, as previously mentioned, moves beyond neutral examinations of educators' assumptions and beliefs which underlie their support or resistance of inequitable practices (Oakes et al., 1998). Implicit bias is a normative concept and essential barrier to eradicating inequitable conditions.

There exists a contrast between this study's findings and the contemporary discussion in neo-liberal circles regarding implicit bias (Jost et al., 2009). Currently implicit bias is being contested as a politically correct invention by progressives. The fact that WETSE and MP identified implicit bias as the theme most coded implies there is ample evidence that implicit bias exists. The White educators have been equity trained. This created cognitive dissonance and they were now able to see the presence of implicit bias while MP lived experiences make it a daily reality for them.

Taken together, WETSE, MP, normative dimension of change, and TLT's changing mindsets, all point to concentrating equity efforts outside of the technical dimension of change. Implicit bias is part of a suite of views that the most reactionary elements deemed non-existent (Jost, 2009). White privilege is another barrier to achieving equity that is believed to not have standing.

### ***White Privilege (WETSE)***

Contemporary scholarship defines White privilege as historic structural benefits resulting in psychological advantages that create different "lived experiences" for Whites and minoritized populations (Bennett, 2012). White privilege is any advantage, head start, or protection from

systemic marginalization, which white people generally have, but minoritized people do not, or as McIntosh (1988) noted, unearned assets that I can cash in each day and I am unaware and oblivious to this fact.

WETSE recognized White privilege as tangible and an impediment to achieving equity. Equally important, WETSE drew distinctions between their understanding of White privilege, the effect of equity training on their awareness of White privilege, and those educators who were resistant to equity training. WETSE argued that White privilege arrives in many different forms. WETSE reported White privilege reveals itself as “victimization,” “reverse racism,” “meritocracy,” and “colorblindness.” The following commentaries are indicative of WETSE observations:

I think there are still educators, too, who believe that it’s the super old phrasing of, ‘If you just work hard and pull yourself up by the bootstraps, doesn’t matter what your background is.’ And I remember I think it was Mr. Phillips who was like, ‘Well people say pull yourself up by the bootstraps, but yet there’s people who have no boots.’  
(WETSE) (Meritocracy)

I have found the idea of White privilege expresses itself in comments integrated with additional topics. For instance, the comments above are a relatively common response from white people when the topic of White privilege is broached. They begin the meritocracy argument and imply that the playing field is “level” and “hard work will bring success in any endeavor undertaken.” This is one of many documented defense mechanisms (DiAngelo, 2016). In addition, colorblindness was coded as a subset of White privilege and one of the deflecting excuses based on the following comments:

I think a little bit of ignorance because I think if you’ve ever read the book White Fragility, I think that comes into play. I think a lot of white people are ignorant about the fact that there are problems and there are inequities. And they want to look at it as, ‘Well it’s 2020. We don’t have segregation anymore, so racism doesn’t exist anymore.’  
(WETSE) (Colorblindness)

So I do think there's some levels of ignorance that needs to be conquered or opening of some eyes to see that doing everything the exact same way for every single kid is not fair or equitable. (WETSE) (Colorblindness)

As a theme, White privilege's root cause was observed as a lack of "knowledge" and adherence to the philosophy of colorblindness. WETSE recognized what they perceived as the "pervasiveness" of White privilege, and this is significant. I move on now to consider how MP interpreted White privilege and to consider whether similarities and distinctions exist between WETSE and MP interpretation of White privilege.

### ***White Privilege (MP)***

Based on the research findings MP stated unequivocally the presence of White privilege as an imbued feature of White educators in the school district, as the following comment makes clear:

And then I think underneath all of that is still a belief of superiority. And so there's, there's not a genuine need to provide equity because they recognize those who recognize that there is a privilege. They, they want to keep their privilege. And so they're not like let's, let's fix this. (MP)

MP minimized education as countervailing factor to White privilege, but instead implied that White privilege is intentional and embedded as part of the current political climate. MP cited a "a belief in superiority" as part of their perception and that statement intimates MPs see White Supremacy as embedded in the mindset of white educators. White supremacy was not coded as frequently as White privilege, but one can see MP toggling back and forth between the two. The first MP focus groups took place a month before the 2020 U.S. presidential election and the second was conducted one month after the election. In fact, MP noted the exact opposite of WETSE and suggested there is a conscious attempt by white people to maintain White privilege,



which once again demonstrates the back and forth between White privilege and White supremacy. The section below illustrates the divergence of perceptions concerning White privilege:

We want to maintain their privilege. That's what make America great again is ... kind of one of the other undertones of what that means is that we want to keep the upper hand. So, you know, it's great in conversation to talk about it, but try to fundamentally change it. I think you begin to see and not all, but a lot of those educators, true belief systems and value systems come to light in those situations. (MP)

Although White supremacy was not coded as prolifically as other themes, when disaggregating the code frequency, White supremacy was mentioned by a more than two-to-one margin, i.e., MP were twice as likely as WETSE to see White privilege as White supremacy. This suggests the differences in lived experience may account for the divergent interpretations between WETSE and MP.

### ***Summary of White Privilege (WETSE & MP)***

Indeed, on the exterior, superficial agreement exists between WETSE and MP perceptions of the existence of White privilege as an entity within the environment of the research study. Although this may be true, there exists significant divergence as it relates to how each group understands the root cause and intent of this privilege to operate. WETSE deem the root cause as a lack of education. MP suggest a belief in superiority and a fundamental intent to stay in a position of power are the root causes of White privilege and MP lean toward identifying White privilege as White supremacy. White supremacy is far more controversial and may reflect the difference in lived experiences and the current inflamed political climate (circa 2020).

### ***Diversity (WETSE)***

Thus far I have covered implicit bias and White privilege as points of agreement amongst WETSE and MP, with the caveat that a deeper dive illustrates nuanced perspectives of implicit

bias and White privilege. Diversity was found to be a barrier to achieving equity by both WETSE and MP. At the same time, there were distinctions associated with how each group perceived diversity within the parameters of the school system. WETSE viewed diversity as interconnected with curriculum, hiring practices, and access to accelerated coursework, whereas MP see diversity as representation by non-White employees. WETSE considered the lack of minoritized youth enrolled in college coursework, their absence from advance placement and gifted classes as emblematic of a lack of diversity and by default an impediment to achieving equity. The following remarks support this assertion:

But what is the composition of our upper level courses? Because anecdotally, there have been years where I don't have a single African American male in college credit plus 101, where I've gotten a 40 to 50 kids. That's definitely not in line with our demographics. (WETSE)

David, I know we've talked about this before, quite a bit, and this is national issue too. NAGC is trying to figure out how to represent the population and gifted but I have predominantly white boys in my gifted classes. (WETSE)

WETSE recognized the lack of diversity in the teaching staff and the contradiction between the rapidly changing demographics of the district which mirror that of the country (Frey et al., 2009).

A more detailed account of the participants' remarks can be found below:

Well I think that gets at kind of the heart of why we even have this group and why you're doing this research. We are all white educators, and you are talking with black parents. And the reason for that is because almost all staff are white. And we have like 30 to 40% of our students are minority students, but there's not that representation in any of the decision-making spaces. (WETSE)

Similarly, WETSE questioned the hiring practices of the district and intimated that achieving equity and alleviating MP concerns were difficult. To further clarify this point, please see the comments below:

And so we know that people can be a great interviewers and that doesn't translate. So a little bit I feel like, too, if we have candidates that seem equally able in the interview field and they all have great recommendations and references, why would we not want to allow someone that is a minority . . . Why would we not want to promote them if it's pretty equitable? (WETSE)

And I also just had in mind that a lot of our staff is white, so maybe they were having a concern about that. I'm not sure that we maybe wouldn't . . . Making sure that we would be treating everyone equally. I don't know. Those are my two thoughts I had on that. (WETSE)

Curriculum representation was noted by WETSE as vital to realizing equitable conditions for all students. They claimed that students need to see themselves represented in the curriculum, e.g., books, magazines, and history. Curriculum considerations are generally technical solutions to achieving equality and have been shown to be ineffective:

So when you're looking at scientific breakthroughs and historical science practices, you get a lot of representation of white men. So I think in classrooms to just making sure that it's more equitable in the representation of discoveries from other groups of people. (WETSE)

Furthermore, WETSE opined that the representation of historical figures should be more than a token attempt to appease MP during "Black History Month."

I would piggyback on that with social studies. Jen, I did an activity with my eight graders that started this year, just to poll how they feel about history, like scale, one to 10 love it or hate it so and so forth and why, and I had a lot of kids. I think at one point, it was like 30% of the kids mentioned they're just tired of learning about the same old, same old. They want new things that they haven't learned, specifically targeted at Black history.

Next, I will discuss the stratification of MP perspectives in connection with research questions probing similarities and divergencies related to diversity.

### ***Diversity (MP)***

How is diversity defined in education? Most research defines educational diversity in terms of race, culture, and ethnicity (Grant & Gibson, 2011). For the purposes of this research

study, I used race and ethnicity when coding the transcripts. The lack of minoritized staff members was cited as one element indicating a lack of diversity:

We met with the superintendent at the time due to no diversity when they were at JRCS where there was one black teacher, Ms. McFadden. So we met with the superintendent (not the current superintendent) and her comment to us was there was no qualified black applicants. (MP)

MP also saw the contradiction in the superintendent's alleged response since one of the study's participants is a teacher who applied to work in James Reeb City Schools. The following remark refutes the former superintendent's response and corroborates MP perspective pertaining to diversity:

I've had a conversation with a teacher who taught in Brownsville city schools, but yes, she lived here and she was never, you know, and she, she has a very high degree. She had depth of experience and she was never given an interview each and every time she, she applied for, for a position. (MP)

Moreover, although there was agreement concerning hiring practices and the lack of minoritized employees, MP interpreted the connection between diversity and equity as a "state of mind" in addition to being just racialized. They acknowledged the difficulty in finding minority candidates, but challenged the seemingly universal thought process of suburban educators. MP identified the "mindset" of educators as equally important as their racialized identity. The following comments capture their perspectives:

And so that to me is a big problem with why you might see some of these issues because there's no diversity of thought everybody, I have one or two kids who are past James Reeb students who are now teachers in the district. And so that's my input. I didn't know. That was a question that was going to come down the line later, but yeah. (MP)

Patricia was saying, you know, the lack of diversity in thinking or approach or experiences And so that doesn't provide an opportunity for them to be able as teachers or the school community to be able to make connections with the students. (MP)

MP claimed that the lack of diversity was systemic and perpetuated at every level of government, not just the school system, as explained by a research participant:

I just want to say, I think that, especially if we talk about schools and the broader society, that if you look around James Reeb City Schools, if you look at the governments of both Clayton, as well as, as Inglewood, there's, there's a stunning lack of racial diversity.  
(MP)

In brief, MP view the lack of diversity as systemic and intentional as it relates to the exclusion of minoritized communities. As an addendum, the discussion pivoted to a solution-based discussion and MP proposed political action, e.g., running for school board themselves and continuing the equity focus group that my study assembled as an operational group dedicated to bringing equity to the forefront. While MP put forth solutions, WETSE simply blamed outside forces. I conclude this section with a summary of the similarities and differences in WETSE and MP diversity perspective, while identifying the intersection between diversity and the study's framework and leadership theory.

### ***Summary of Diversity (WETSE & MP)***

WETSE and MP both agree diversity is desirable and critical to creating equitable conditions in schools. The participants acknowledged the hiring practices have shaped a culture in which a child may proceed through their entire K-12 journey and never be exposed to a minoritized employee of any kind, including bus drivers, secretaries, and custodians.

Divergence resulted from WETSE diversity focus extending to curriculum and access to accelerated coursework while MP referenced educators' and staff members' "state of mind." MP noted the communal, and thus limited, lived experiences of the educators in the district as representative of a lack of diversity of thought.

It is common for white educators to deny the existence of implicit bias and White privilege by using colorblindness as a platform (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). So, it is not inconsequential that they agree in substance on the existence of inequities such as implicit bias and White privilege. Nor is it disputable given the miniscule number of minorities who are encountered in the suburban school environment that diversity is an issue.

So far, I have described implicit bias, White privilege, and diversity as themes that WETSE and MP established as impediments to achieving equity. Next, I discuss the fourth theme—power.

### ***Power (WETSE)***

I used Shields's (2020) definition of power to frame my identification and analysis of the study's qualitative findings. She defines it as the power over others, power with others, and power to (Shields, 2020). My research primarily focused on the power of others, e.g., the power to exclude, punish, or shame as described by tenet three of TLT.

Globally during the 2020–2021 school year, schools were in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. It completely reshaped how schools delivered instruction. Schools had the power to determine if or how instruction would happen. Most schools transitioned to a hybrid model of schooling that created two classes of students, one was face-to-face (F2F) and the other called remote learners. The following comments depict the school districts power at determining which kids were F2F or remote and how they would be treated:

The official communication that we're sending out to parents right now is that the in person education is going to be a higher quality than the online education. So the concern is, are we treating the kids who are going to be fully online the same as we're treating the kids that are going to be in the classroom, or are we saying that, in a sort of indirect way, if you're a risk you don't belong here as much as the kids who don't pose a risk?  
(WETSE)

The aforementioned comment demonstrates the power to exclude students who are deemed a threat to school culture. Another form of power is to suspend or expel students from school, but in this climate instead of suspension, minoritized students were redirected to become remote learning students, thus serving the same purpose as a suspension, but just another form of exclusion. Power operates in a pliable manner, changing form based on the circumstance.

Typically, when reviewing school suspension data, the historical evidence indicates that minoritized students are the students who are considered a threat (Gregory et al., 2018). WETSE were aware of MP feelings of exclusion as a byproduct of the power to remove students from school. WETSE acknowledged MP may even feel as though they do not belong in the school district. What follows is a school administrators account of discipline issues:

So I've heard it personally not necessary intentional, but yes, I've made parents and students feel they don't belong and a lot of that has to do with issuing discipline, and we have disagreements on situations and students involvement and I've had it where sometimes kids don't come back, or we have a rocky relationship afterwards, just based off of disappointing consequences given. (WETSE)

Disciplinary practices can be a relatively common starting point when schools are looking to create equitable conditions for students. As a sitting administrator, I know first-hand that the ability to discern the inner workings of specific situations is difficult. It requires that you make judgements based on the available evidence and sometimes the adjudication of situations happens in a matter of minutes. What follows is an account of an administrator making a decision that ultimately excluded a minoritized student from school.

Then the other incidents was, there was some sort of a fight in the lunchroom a couple years ago, and I wasn't involved in this. But one of my colleagues, she knows one of the students who was sitting at the table when the fight started and that kid went to the bathroom to remove himself from the situation. When he came back, the administrator, and this administrator is no longer in the high school but this administrator was basically deciding who was getting suspended and lumped this other kid in with that group, even though he had removed himself from the situation. (WETSE)

Although administrators or principals are primarily charged with officially removing students from school, teachers have the power to do so as well if they do not feel like a kid belongs.

Belonging would be tied to teachers' middle-class beliefs and their expectation that students assimilate to those values and norms. The ensuing comments demonstrate the teachers' power to exclude:

That brings to mind the situation that happened a few years ago, when there was a student that had some significant behavior problems in our building and there were a couple of teachers who were pretty passionate that that child should be at the ED unit in a different building. So instead of just doing the best they could for that child, there was a specific person that would purposely try to push the kids' buttons, and try to get the kid to act out to prove that that child should be in a different placement (18, 24, 31) and made it very clear to the parents and to others that that child didn't belong in our building because of the behaviors. (WETSE)

WETSE have identified principals and teachers who used power over others to exclude minoritized students from the learning process. Later in the study you will read accounts of not just teachers and administrators making MP and students feel excluded and shamed, but secretaries and attendance clerks as well. This paints a picture of an environment fraught with power imbalances and in need of redistribution of power for good.

Equally important is political power. Political power was described by WETSE as a barrier to achieving equity. WETSE noted the lack of diversity in elected leadership positions and MP will concur later in the study.

District, I would say you're about 30% minority. Yeah. But as a staff, we're very white. As a school board, we are very white. So it's about having a voice in the room where decisions get made. Yes, I agree. I think that would make a difference.



### *Power (MP)*

MP asserted that power was concrete and a distinctive feature of the James Reeb City Schools. Their stories aligned with my use of Shields (2020) definition of power over others, by way of punishment, shame, or exclusion. MP claim that power imbalances are a distinct feature of life, so much so that identifying the power imbalance as it relates to inequitable treatment will ultimately be to no avail. MP proposed accepting power imbalances and developing alternative coping mechanisms to persist in the environment. This particular sentiment is characterized below:

In addition to that, I know my thinking for my son was always, it's going to happen in life anyway, get past it. Yeah. I can go up there and complain or put up, but things like this are going to happen. You're going to have to figure out ways to navigate through situations where people aren't always fair or people don't treat you the way you feel like you should be treated or things that happen that you know, are detrimental to you. (MP)

At this moment I will rely on my lived experience as a Black man. It is quite common in black households to speak of the inherent unfairness of the "system" and how "the man" is always going to ensure fealty and servitude. The dialogue centers around making sure you are twice as good as white counterparts and in doing so, you may overcome the power imbalance. The following comment is an interconnection between power and White privilege, with power as the primary emphasis.

And as, as, as Molly mentioned, we don't teach advocacy. But then I think so many of us are about trying to survive. And what I mean by that is, you know, we're always taught that we have got to be better. We've got to take, you know, whereas our white counterparts would just have to take two steps. We've always got to be prepared. We've always got to do better. We've always got to be prepared. (MP)

MP referenced advocacy as a means to survive and change inequitable organizations and situations. MP maintained that advocating for your child may result in mistreatment of that child. They were concerned about the power imbalance between the school system and themselves. If

advocacy is a path to achieving equity, that path is being minimized by fear of targeted consequences resulting from parents advocating for their children. The advocacy usually takes the form of fighting against unfair disciplinary practices or exclusion from activities, events, and even daily mundane things like removal of recess. During the focus groups, MP consistently linked inequality in schools to inequality in society, while WETSE typically avoided structural inequalities in their interpretation of school inequalities. The vignettes below outline MP concerns:

You don't want, you don't want retribution to your child because you're the voice speaking up about things that are happening. And then now you're the that's so-and-so's child and, and unfortunately adults are that immature. (MP)

And it's almost like you got to pick and choose your battles of addressing it. Because on one end, you want to fight for your child. On the other end, you don't want them treated poorly by the staff or the other teachers or whatever, but you could definitely fill it just in going to events or just being in this district is felt. (MP)

We know from earlier critical incident analysis reporting from MP and WETSE that consequences are levied against minoritized youth in an unequal manner. It seems plausible they would fear retribution, given their experience and the overwhelming amount of research supporting the claim that minoritized children are treated unfairly when it comes to discipline (Gregory et al., 2018), among other things.

The power to shame and exclude has a class component when suburban schools are the environment studied and MP are the subjects of the exclusion and shame. Over half the low-income people in the United States live in suburbs (Lacy, 2016). The income disparity in suburban schools can lead to situations in which White teachers who are largely middle-class, create exchanges that shame and exclude minoritized youth. As cited below, middle-class values and socioeconomic strata are tools that can be used to marginalize minoritized parents and youth.

So everyone else was like, Oh, y'all go in my backyard. So then that wasn't even thing she thought about. She never even thought about the fact that she doesn't have a backyard, but now she's embarrassed because she was like, I'll have backyard . . . And I called the teacher the next day. I was like, you didn't even think about that. (MP)

In this case, it was assumed that all of the students lived in a residential home. As mentioned, half of the suburban population lives in poverty. Therefore, the idea that home ownership would be the norm in a suburban school places MP in an uncomfortable and compromising position. In addition to housing conventions, the idea that all families can easily produce on-call financial resources to the activities that occur in suburban schools creates a sense of exclusion, as noted by this MP:

Also being in the district and being a single mother. I'm like, you guys can't tell me this stuff at the last minute, you can't say, Oh, Tuesday night, you need \$70 for something on Friday. I need in advance notice. And it's like, they don't understand why you don't have any family. Is there, there's no one you can ask. And it's like, no, it's just me and the kids. So if you could tell me more in advance, I would appreciate that so that we can plan for those things. And it's, I just give you a blank stare. (MP)

The power to assume a last minute request for resources would be acceptable is borne from middle-class values and expectations regarding material resources available to children. As mentioned in the literature review, the construction of the suburbs was meant to create and sustain a homogeneous, White, and nuclear household. MP do not always fit neatly into that narrative based on generational wealth gaps (Ladson-Billings, 2006). They report later in the findings that the urge to assimilate into the White middle-class narrative is strong.

MP recognized the power to exclude kids from class. Earlier WETSE educators recounted an incident when a child was systematically removed from school by teachers. James Reeb City Schools allows parents the opportunity to spend a day in the school assisting a teacher. The following account from a MP who spent the day at an elementary school displays the power of teachers to exclude kids from instruction and social interaction:

The teachers don't seem like they care. I asked the question of Mr. Green last year, and that the question that I asked, well, the kid was going into class and he kicked him out the class and put them in the hallway. (MP)

MP experiences inside schools and during their daily lived experience provide them with reflections and critical experiences with the inappropriate use of power. It is common in elementary schools to send students to the office or to sit kids in the hallway as default strategies when children have misbehaved. Doing so is a form of exclusion and demonstrates yet another form of power imbalance.

Advocacy was viewed by MP as a means to addressing power inequities. They posed questions around running for public office, continuing the work in the equity group formed to provide focus group feedback for this study, and using those platforms to hold the school district accountable. The following statements provide testament to their claim that advocacy as a conduit to change the power dynamics:

We can't afford really to not have one or two people connected to every board that exists from, from economic boards to community boards and everything that's taken place. We've got to be having our voices in all those spaces. (MP)

And I think that we cannot make change from the outside. We got to do it from the inside. We have to be active. It, we gotta be a part of the PTL. We gotta be a part of different groups and stuff like that in order to make change. (MP)

The next section summarizes the similarities and nuanced divergences in perspective of WETSE and MP with respect to power.

### ***Summary of Power (WETSE & MP)***

Each summary section is distilled through the study's research questions, framework (ZONE) and theoretical paradigm (TLT). Returning briefly to the research questions, they asked

how WETSE and MP interpreted equity, if there were similarities, and how do the findings align with the study's framework and leadership theory?

The acknowledgement that power existed and was used inequitably found common cause amongst WETSE and MP. Both participant groups agreed that power was used for punishment, exclusion, and shaming of minoritized youth. Power generated the most congruence among the four agreed upon themes. The other themes (implicit bias, White privilege, and diversity) demonstrated significantly more divergence of interpretation after the initial agreement than did power. MP further concluded that advocacy was a means to combat the power imbalance or an avenue to work toward redistributing power.

Power is expressly discussed as a political dimension of change in the study's framework (ZONE). The political dimension pursues equity by confronting the political dynamics of school change, including struggles over power and the distribution of resources (Oakes et al., 1992). This falls into line seamlessly with TLT's third tenet, redistributing power in more equitable ways. Power is nested in the study's framework (ZONE) and leadership theory (TLT). Power is not represented in the technical dimension of change, which I claim has been ineffective in demonstrating longitudinal gains in student educational opportunities, attainment, or achievement. I also claim that the preponderance of school improvement and reform is carried out in the technical dimension of change, thus creating dissonance between what needs to be done and what is actually happening.

The importance of power's alignment with the study's framework (ZONE) and theoretical dimension (TLT) is based on findings that equity work should begin at the intersection of the normative and political dimensions of ZONE and tenets two (changing

mindsets) and three (redistributing power). All decisions should be concentrated at the junction of ZONE and TLT as illustrated in Figure 4.2.

### Figure 4.2

*Summary of Similar Themes and their Alignment with the Study's Framework and Theory*



### **Summary of the Entire Section (WETSE & MP and Implicit Bias, White Privilege, Diversity, & Power)**

There is a pattern that emerges in the findings. First, implicit bias and power are present. There was little doubt that they were the most prolific of agreed upon themes. Second, identification and acknowledgement of themes by WETSE and MP was more nuanced than agree or disagree with respect to the interpretation of equity. White privilege demonstrated the most divergence as both WETSE and MP acknowledged its existence in the school district, but MP leaned toward defining White privilege as White supremacy. Power revealed the most congruency among similar themes. However, even amongst similar themes, differentiation of agreement existed. Third, the similar themes all fit squarely in the normative dimension of change and tenets two and three of TLT. These findings suggest that equity efforts in suburban schools should begin at the intersection of two specified dimensions and tenets as noted Figure 4.2.

Although not a given, consensus around the identification and acknowledgement of the four emerging themes in the context of the research question, may establish baseline dialogue when outlining plans to address equity within suburban school districts.

The research question(s) ask about similarities and differences between WETSE and MP interpretation of equity. What follows next is an explanation of the interpretive divergence of equity between WETSE and MP within a suburban school system.

### **Divergent Themes**

In identifying divergent understandings of how MP and WETSE interpret equity, I made a decision supported by interrater reliability processes to code similar language into distinct categories. Regarding WETSE, I chose deficit thinking as the code to describe their comments, while I selected stereotype when coding MP statements.

#### ***Deficit Thinking (WETSE)***

I will provide a common definition of deficit thinking prior to providing qualitative data that supports my coding of WETSE data as indicative of “deficit thinking.” Sharma (2018), using Portelli (2014) as an inspiration, framed deficit thinking in the following manner:

Deficit thinking is a very common way of thinking which affects our general way of being in and constructing the world. Differences from the “norm” are immediately seen as being deprived, negative, and disadvantaged. It never questions the legitimacy of what is deemed to be normal nor does it consider that differences may actually go beyond expected norms. It discourages teachers and administrators from recognizing the positive values of certain abilities, dispositions, and actions. Deficit thinking leads to stereotyping and prejudging. It marginalizes certain people on the basis of misinformation and misconstructions (p. 137).

WETSE reported prejudging and stereotyping incoming students from the surrounding school districts which are predominantly black. In fact, one school district adjacent to James Reeb City Schools is the most densely populated minority district in the state with 98% of its students classified as minoritized students. It is from this adjacent school district that students enter the historically all White, but now diverse James Reeb City Schools. The following is what WETSE say about minoritized students upon their arrival:

Several years ago I got two boys that were from Brownville City Schools, and again, so kind of piggybacking off the first question and assumptions you have based on where they're from. I questioned not outwardly but inwardly if I'm being fully transparent, are they going to be able to keep up in the gifted classroom? I just had some preconceptions about what I thought they would be. (WETSE)

WETSE readily agreed that stereotypes were employed when interacting with minoritized children. The suburban school district routinely accepts transfer students from surrounding urban, poor, and mostly minoritized communities. Deficit thinking is based on cognitive thoughts directly related to the inferiority of non-White people, while implicit bias operates unconsciously and is not steeped in racism. Those incoming students are met with assumptions that were steeped in deficit thinking and debunked stereotypes of minoritized children's academic potential:

When you get those messages saying you have a new student coming from place X, Y, or Z (black districts) and the conversation starts before they ever met the child or the family about their behavior or if they are academically ready. (WETSE)

Deficit thinking creates conscious mental models of negative thinking about abilities and behaviors. Prior to entering the district, minoritized youth are faced with negative thoughts about the academic ability and behavior. Brownville City Schools, which is adjacent to James Reed City Schools, is routinely ranked as one of the worst performing school districts in the state. White educators often use that ranking as a rationale for prejudging students from Brownville



City Schools. I have also heard White educators critique the level of teaching and leadership based on assumed and real academic struggles of students entering the school district from non-White schools. So pervasive is the deficit thinking among the ranks that WETSE have reported White colleagues who claim to be able to look at a child's picture and thus determine their academic abilities:

I've seen middle school teachers look at a kid's picture when they are coming from the sixth grade and say, 'there is no way he/she should be in honors.' (WETSE)

This is an incredible statement. The most disturbing aspect of this statement is the racist tone. The idea that a picture provides evidence of a minoritized youths academic potential is more than intrinsically racist, it is explicitly racist. Valencia (1997) reminded us that the racist roots of deficit thinking originate from America's origins dating back to when America was settled. In addition, genetic pathology myths are associated with deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997), hence reinforcing the idea that a picture detailing what color students are is enough to form a qualified judgement of their abilities.

A network or structure exists among White educators who espouse deficit thinking. My research indicates they are not satisfied with holding on to their deficit thinking in isolation, they seek to create communication pathways to recruit and influence other educators. What follows is an account of how the attempt to pedal racist thoughts occurs:

I remember going through the recommendation process for students for algebra, and really trying to encourage those kids that you knew have the ability but just didn't have the background to go with it. They would get to the middle school and then I would get lots and lots of phone calls from people like, 'I can't believe this kid's in here, they're in the wrong completely wrong track, what were you thinking?' (WETSE)

I am not the first researcher to document deficit thinking in schools. This is not the proverbial "one bad apple" defense. Deficit thinking is a pervasive feature among White educators in the

United States. We know from empirical research (Pajares, 1992) White educators' beliefs mirror that of the country at large. A majority of White Americans believe systemic racism is non-existent and the advantages accrued by them exist as earned benefits (Gillette & Cicco, 2020).

The beauty of my position is I get to have the kids for four years, and they ended up being two of my favorite kids of all time and they added to the class. I can't imagine class without them. So, again, this was prior to equity training, but it's really made me reflect too, I kind of reflected on it beforehand about how I made a snap judgment. But then through equity training, too, I continue to go back to that and think how many times did I make assumptions unfairly that we're unmerited? (WETSE)

The "snap judgement" according to Valencia (2002) is a common feature of schools and this research supports his claims. Snap judgements are pervasive across spectrums related to academics, behavior, and family dynamics. A central element of deficit thinking is blaming the victim, or in this case, MP. The discussion below captures WETSE blaming parents for the conditions of their child:

Sandy, being a primary teacher, I feel like especially sometimes in the winter, when you see the little ones come in, and there's no coat or they're wearing short, they're not dressed for weather, sometimes things like that, you start to wonder, well, didn't their parents even leave in the morning? I used to think that when, once again, before we had all this training while thinking a little bit differently.

The idea that a parent would purposely send a child to school without a coat suggests a disconnect from the social economic realities of suburban minoritized youth. This thinking dovetails with the concept of assimilation which I will cover in the next section. Middle-class values are found to be embedded in deficit thinking (Davis & Mesus, 2019). Understanding the contrasting economic conditions between White middle-class educators and MP, based on the generational wealth gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006), reinforces the importance of this study's exploration of the suburbs and equity.

In summary, deficit thinking emerged as a barrier to achieving equity according WETSE. Deficit thinking was expressed in both explicit and implicit ways. The data indicated that explicit deficit thinking was simply racist, while the implicit thinking was assigned to White privilege. As stated earlier, I coded WETSE statements as deficit thinking and based on empirical literature, WETSE comments meet the definition of deficit thinking and the preponderance of the remarks in the qualitative study found deficit thinking to be a significant theme. Alternatively, I coded MP remarks as stereotype, as these statements indicated the MP believed they were being stereotyped. Based on the positionality of each participant group, the critical incidents have different interpretations. Having discussed deficit thinking, I will present the argument that MP experienced themselves as being systematically stereotyped based on the research findings.

### *Stereotype (MP)*

MP claimed that stereotypes exist and are counterproductive to achieving equity. Stereotypes consist of perceived attributes that the group shares and a common socially constructed language that is shared, e.g., “ghetto” (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Stereotypes develop with direct experiences with members of a specific group (Dovidio et al., 2001). Stereotypes are prevalent in pre-service and practicing teachers (Glock & Bohmer, 2018) and negatively affect grading (Bonefeld et al., 2017), produce lower teacher expectations of minoritized youth (Tobisch & Dresel, 2017), and ultimately effect student achievement (van den Bergh et al., 2010). There is significant reason for the study’s MP to feel that being stereotyped is an impediment to achieving equity and deleterious to their children.

What follows is an account of how language is used to stereotype minoritized youth:

Again. I’m at the times I would think that, you know, where Ms. Saunders, when they were at the elementary school and let’s go over at the middle school, you know that when my son and the teacher called her ghetto. (MP)

Additional language such as (them, lazy, shiftless, they) or generalizations like, (they are always late; they are violent; they are they so loud; where are the fathers?) ring clearly in the conscious of minoritized parents. My findings imply MP are aware of the tropes associated with their abilities and dispositions. They are in fact very sensitive to how society views them and concerned about the one person creating or defining the entire group (Cohen & Garcia, 2005). What follows next is a Latino(x) single mothers account of being stereotyped.

And I've been very vocal about how I am displeased with that. There has been instances where I've brought my entire family to the school. We will sit here all day and they will say things like, Oh, you don't have to go back to work. Are you asking the other single white mothers that are just me? (MP)

This study's primary participant pool consists of WETSE and MP. However, the previous comments imply stereotypes extend beyond the classroom and leadership. Ancillary support staff, all of whom are white, are prone to stereotyping MP as well. For the MP this gives the appearance of stereotyping as ubiquitous and permeating through every aspect of the organization. Together with language, appearance is another way stereotypes are imposed upon minoritized youth according to MP. The following account represents factors associated with being stereotyped and a return to the idea of being very concerned with how White educators view MP:

And one of the things that we were very conscious of that was always telling her being, and this is the black, you know, in us, that's coming out that we're thinking always be conscious about how you're dressing and be conscious about what you're wearing and your friends and everything else. (MP)

MP are concerned about being stereotyped based on their children's attire. In teacher lounges across America, you hear comments like, "They can afford to buy the latest Jordans, but don't have money for lunch" or "He dresses really nice, I can't believe they are having financial problems . . . my kids don't even dress that well." MP are not privy to these internal

conversations that I have heard as an insider-outsider, but they reported to feel it during their day-to-day interactions in suburban school districts.

MP also report being stereotyped as displaying violent dispositions and we know this comports with empirical research detailing minorities as being predisposed to violence (Dukes & Gaither, 2017). Perceptions, language, appearance, and now the hypothesis that MP and students are more violent than White students creates a false narrative that is used to enhance existing negative stereotypes. The next encounter illustrates the pervasiveness of stereotyping in this particular suburban school district and the idea that MP are violent in nature:

Here she come. And I'm like, yep. Got all this for you. Where do you want me to start? I shouldn't feel like that. I should feel like a parent coming to my school to talk to my administration about things that I'm concerned with. And that should be received in the same manner. But no, I'm not. We got to talk about all these other issues. We got to talk about why I'm not married. How do you have time? Let's you got to go back to work. And then when I, when I respond in an upset manner, then what are you doing to me? The same thing you're doing so much right now. I'm getting criminalized. Now. Now all of a sudden conveniently the police officer has walked in. (MP)

Sometimes they label us as parents. Did, you know? JRCS just because that we may challenge them intellectually, or what have you, is that you, you remember when I just wanted to have a meeting, one time to talk to one of the teachers is that he was prepared to come in and then the office called you instead, an angry parent was in the room angry. (MP)

If you decide to address this, you are now being an angry black person, instead of just addressing something that's going on with your child, I'm up for the fight. So I don't care, but I know other parents that won't say anything because they don't want to ruffle any feathers or make it a bigger issue. (MP)

Each one of the vignettes points to a nuanced version of fear, derived from being stereotyped. MP are apprehensive because of their experiences challenging authority within suburban schools. Their intent is to advocate for their children without retribution. Based on their comments, they feel as though their child will be targeted if they advocate for them. In the first instance, the authorities are typically the first default when dealing with minority children

(Dukes & Gaither, 2017). We have watched video footage of adolescent black kids being whisked away in handcuffs. And returning the school discipline, office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions are all forms of “calling the authorities, “i.e., alerting the principal who serves as the police figure in the building absent security resource officers. The second account demonstrates how Black males are treated. Intervention was requested before the parent even sat down for the meeting. This parent was a Black male, tall, and burly. He was meeting with four White women. The third account returns to the image of black people as a rule, being angry, but also reconveys the idea of how concerned MP are with how White educators view them. This encounter illustrates the changing demographics of suburban school districts and the continued homogeneity of the teaching staff—which is why this study was conducted.

This study is situated in a Midwestern suburban school district with a rapidly increasing minoritized student population right in line with existing demographic shifts (Frey, 2015). Conflict and contradictions will continue to grow in the study’s school district and other suburban school districts as diversity continues to increase. Before proceeding to an exploration of assimilation as a finding, it is important to review the findings to this point.

The findings found one divergent pathway that was bifurcated and noted as deficit thinking pertaining to WETSE and stereotype in relation to MP. The research findings identified WETSE statements as consistent with deficit thinking and MP proclamations as consistent with being stereotyped.

The findings will conclude with an analysis of assimilation as an emerging theme identified by MP, Equity Fellows as an emergent theme emphasized by WETSE but challenged by MP, and a summary of the findings that will lead to Chapter V’s discussion, recommendations, and conclusion of this research study.

## **Emerging Theme**

I utilized a content analysis table and grouped information by code, dimension, and tenet. Assimilation was the only code that was singularly identified by one group and completely ignored by the other. That qualified assimilation as the lone theme classified as different, i.e., completely assigned as identified by only one of the participant groups. All of the other themes have some interconnection.

### *Assimilation*

Imagine the trauma and additional burden that minoritized youth carry as they progress through schooling. MP and youth fully aware that their possible success is predicated on how they assimilate into the White suburban culture (Rodriguez et al., 2019). As indicated earlier in the findings, minoritized families are subjected to power imbalances, stereotyping, and deficit thinking. As an addendum to the aforementioned barriers to equity, minoritized families are being asked to share common traits and behaviors of their oppressors. Unfortunately, this study found MP and youth succumbing to the pressure as noted in the following passage:

So he takes all of that in. So he, he knows all of that, but it is very hard because right now he's relating more with the white kids and trying to explain to him about, wait a minute, now we're not going to have that view So white culture is the, it's the bridge to success and survival in suburban schools. So the more white I act, the more you won't bother me.  
(MP)

The differentiation between reported findings was most significant with respect to assimilation. As a category, no WETSE recorded responses could be transcribed as acts of assimilation and MP did so ~36 times. When the question of equity was broached in the normative and political dimension, assimilation was noticeably present as a barrier to achieving equity as framed by the research questions and the findings of this study.

Lash (2018) argued that archetypal theories of assimilation have treated it as a process of cultural subtraction by which the ethnic elements of the individual are stripped away and replaced with Anglo European cultural and linguistic norms. Assimilation within the context of sociopolitical and economic spheres is viewed as essential to neoliberal definitions of success (Rodriguez et al., 2019). In like manner, MP reported giving their children what they perceived as race neutral names in attempt to assimilate (sic):

I named my son Ryan Alexander. I knew if he filled an application out and had a black sounding name, he'd not get a call back. I wish I would've just named him what I wanted to name him. (MP)

I named my son Tate, so that when he interviewed, they wouldn't know he was a black boy. (MP)

Personal names, which oftentimes signify connections to elders, ethnic, or religious identity, are important to MP. Names can act positively, as a source of pride, and as cultural capital in widely differing student body populations. We know from numerous research studies (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003) that employers, after reviewing resumes, are more likely to call a Eurocentric or White sounding name back more frequently than one that is associated with a conventional African American name (Shields, 2020). The statement that follows indicates the way in which MP saw how their child's hair was styled as a function of assimilation:

I've definitely had my daughter come home with some of her, her teacher said to her year was inappropriate because she had a strand of color in her braids and I've addressed it. What's so different. What's so different than her having a strand of color in her braids than her white counterparts have ribbons in the same thing. It's exact same thing. And I've been met with nothing. Okay, please. Don't say that to her again. (MP)

Assimilation encompasses every aspect of minorities existence, not limited to, but including personal appearance in general and black girl hair specifically. As far as minoritized young ladies are concerned, the study presents a school district steeped in past practices of



marginalization. Black females have been singled out based on their perceived racial difference and appearance. Hairstyle and hair grooming is a way to express one's individual style and culture, political stance, or rejection of dominant beauty ideals (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). Much of their stigmatization is rooted in the histories of racialization based on racial difference associated with Black women's embodiment (King, 2018).

A Google Scholar search as of 2021 indicates several schools have attempted to ban natural and other African American hairstyles in the states of Kentucky and North Carolina. Despite the post antebellum cultural contributions of African Americans in 21st century, discrimination against African American boys and girls in K-12 settings, based on their hair and appearance is a key feature of inequality in the service of assimilation (King, 2018).

There is ample evidence to support MP apprehensiveness pertaining to the name of their child. African American, or "Black names," reflect unique and ingenious creative re-appropriation of the lived experience and identity of African Americans. Shall we say an attempt to unshackle themselves from names given to them by oppressors. These names are often perceived by White America as signifiers of poverty and limited education (Brown & Lively, 2012), hence, one can imagine the dual frustration of MP when naming their children.

Not surprisingly, none of the factors associated with assimilation surfaced amongst WETSE. As part of the dominant culture, even equity-trained educators did not mention assimilation as a barrier to achieving equity. Furthermore, MP frustration was linked to White educators not acknowledging assimilation, but in their opinion, downplaying it.

And because, you know, it's, it's to be normal is to go under the radar because it's like, again, there's no diversity, there's no initiative for that. You want to do what everyone else is doing. If all your friends are white and they're doing for lack of better words, white shit, that's what you're going to do. They want us to just fall in line, suffer quietly in silence and get through this, get out the district, and go on with our lives. (MP)

I interpret the MP aforementioned testimonial as an interconnection between lack of diversity, underscoring the power imbalance in suburban schools, and the frustration with being subjugated to the act of assimilating in order to peacefully co-exist and thrive within a suburban school system. What is not heard in the transcript, but can be inferred from the expletive used, is the anger associated with herculean task of being a working-class, single, MP—navigating suburban schools in America.

### ***Summary of Assimilation***

Challenges to dress, hairstyle, names, and the loss of identity all support my claim that assimilation is embedded in the suburban public school environment in which this study took place. MP described the painful subjugation of their struggle with wanting their children to be successful while still not forgoing the cultural capital earned by their lived experiences as minoritized families. There is a contradiction embedded in the findings. Assimilation is a form of cultural subtraction (Lash, 2018), however MP noted their acknowledgement of the cultural subtraction and conscious efforts to assimilate their children with the suburban culture.

Assimilation as an act finds space in the normative dimension of change. As was pointed out in the introduction and literature review, the normative dimension of change addresses mindsets and beliefs. Tenet two of TLT emphasizes the deconstruction of beliefs, assumptions, and mindsets that perpetuate inequity, and assimilation is composed of a set of beliefs, stereotypes, and convictions that imply white culture is superior. Before moving to the only emerging theme, equity training, I will recap the findings thus far.

### **Summary**

The four concurring themes amongst WETSE and MP (implicit bias, stereotype, diversity, and power) were found to have superficial agreement between WETSE and MP with

relative divergence of understanding and meaning, i.e., WETSE and MP agreed based on the context of the research questions that four themes served as barriers to achieving equity. It was at this point the interpretation of the themes revealed divergence and those variations were noted in the summary section of each theme.

There were two additional themes that demonstrated clear divergence. The findings showed WETSE demonstrated deficit thinking and the corollary to WETSE illuminating deficit thinking was MP declarations of being stereotyped. Taken together, MP claims of being stereotyped were validated by the preponderance of data supporting WETSE deficit thinking.

Finally, assimilation was noted by MP during their critical incident and lived experience reflections as a concern directly related to equity. Having explained all of the previous themes and their connection to the research question, the study's framework and leadership theory, I now turn to the final theme that surfaced in the analysis of the findings as emerging—Equity Fellows.

### **Equity Fellows (WETSE & MP)**

Repeatedly during the first focus group, WETSE noted the effect equity training had on their mindsets and beliefs. This was a very important finding that emerged from the data. As a researcher seeking to not just explore problems, I was also interested in solutions. My role as an insider-outsider suggested that educators overwhelmingly sustained beliefs and acted upon those beliefs longitudinally with very little, if any, deviance. A total of nine second round questions were presented, and both sets of questions can be found in Appendix C and D. The following question was asked directly to WETSE and MP with a slight variance in wording.

- Has equity training modified your beliefs with respect to implicit bias, deficit thinking, and systemic inequalities? (WETSE)

- Do you think equity training can alter the beliefs and actions of White Educators? (MP)

I addressed equity fellows training and how each group perceived its possibilities of changing mindsets, beliefs, and attitudes. As explained in Chapter III, Equity Fellows is a three-year training that White educators voluntarily agreed to participate in. They meet twice per month and are led in equity, diversity, and inclusion training by consultants from the National Equity Project. At the time of the focus group interaction, White educators, which includes principals and teachers, had been engaged in 30-months of training.

*Equity Fellows (WETSE)*

Every WETSE proclaimed the equity fellows training a success. They reported gaining an awareness and understanding of implicit bias, deficit thinking, and systemic inequalities based on the training. The following comments illustrate WETSE reflections on the equity fellows training:

I would say 100% because a lot of those things I didn't even think about before my equity training honestly. I had heard them, but I didn't think deeply about them. So I at least know the difference between them now. I know what they are. I know how to use them more in my teaching. So it has definitely helped that way. (WETSE)

I assumed, I guess that when I was younger, and I didn't have the equity training. (WETSE)

In an environment in which the analysis of slavery is frowned upon by some groups and others who deny that White privilege or implicit bias exist (1776 Project), this is significant to hear a White educator speak with such certainty about their experience. Not one to confine the experience to just their experimental group, WETSE noted the importance of ensuring equity fellows training for all educators in the district:

I agree. I feel like I had a lot of ignorance prior to it as well. So I feel pretty strongly that everybody should in education and should have to do this equity training just because you don't know what you don't know. And particularly at Northmont like we said, were

predominantly white staff. So it's easy to be blissfully unaware of ways and things that impact other races and just other things going on. (WETSE)

Strands of colorblindness, implicit bias, and the lack of diversity are captured in the aforementioned reflection. Equally important was the notion that universal equity training should be compulsory, since the staff is overwhelmingly White. The training has created spaces to reflect on White educators' previous biases as shown below:

I gave a lot of detentions, and they did not . . . That did not improve the class structure. So I do think that my implicit bias showed a lot, especially that first year of teaching. But the other thing it's taught me is I'm still . . . This is a process. It's not just, 'Oh, well I know not to be racist now. So we fixed the problem.' So I think that's something that this has kind of shown, too, is that it's something that we constantly need to be working on. (WETSE)

There is something profound about these comments. As an insider-outsider, who also participated in the equity fellows training, I have watched informally the growth of the White educators who were part of the training. As a researcher whose study targeted them as key participants in my research, I now have the opportunity to document in the context of empirical literature and research their growth during the previous three years. Indeed, one of the limitations of my study, documented in Chapter III, was the absence of pre-survey data detailing their mindsets and beliefs prior to the training. But, if their reflections are taken at face value, it is evident there has been growth in deconstructing mindsets and awareness of the challenges faced by MP.

### *Equity Fellows (MP)*

MP were a bit less sanguine when asked if equity training could modify beliefs and alter actions. MP claimed it was really a personal decision among White educators to determine if they had the inclination to become aware of issues related to diversity and inclusion. The mixed thoughts and feelings were conveyed in the comments below:

It, I think it really depends. We do a lot of training in HR and we're starting to do diversity and inclusion, more diversity and inclusion training. And I think some, some want to understand some, want to learn and ask questions. We just had a session. I think it was two weeks ago, but there are others who feel like that's not, that's not my issue. Like I'm, I'm here from eight to five or whatever. And I just deal with this from eight to five, it's all about the person's mindset. I just think that that's, it's about their mindset. (MP)

There does exist some overlap with WETSE when MP discuss two groups of educators; those that are committed to deep reflection and those who say it is just not their issue. MP used their own work experiences to try and make sense of the school districts commitment to equity fellows training:

I don't know about school districts, but companies they'll okay. We can check that off the box. No, it's not a check off the box. It has to be a part of curriculum or part of the, you know, training process. However, but it can't just be that, Oh, we did that one time. No, it has to be continuous. (MP)

I'm also part of a diversity and inclusion initiative for the air force. But I was gonna say whether or not the training could alter behavior and the extent to which it alters the behavior depends on the training and the educator. So it's not that it is impossible. (MP)

I think that this is the first time, you know, 38 years that I had training where you could, you could see yourself, right? You see yourself. When you going to make a comment, I don't see nothing wrong with it. And then you're, you got, you've got people from all over the world are saying, Hey, but look at this, look at what happened here. These white people went out sometime people don't understand or can't see the things that they don't understand. (MP)

Several of the MP held white-collar jobs in management and had been a part of diversity and inclusion training. Their work experience, coupled with the clear agreement with WETSE on how "equity" the term is defined, suggests the MP in this study have substantial experience dealing with trainings that are focused on discrimination and diversity. I am inferring that this creates a more nuanced response to my question pertaining to equity trainings effectiveness, because of the lived experience of my participants as subjects of diversity and inclusion training. MP voiced the opinion that accountability was critical to achieving success with equity trainings:

So it's like equity training is cool, but it has to be, there has to be accountability, true accountability. (MP)

Okay. Yeah, no, I, I just say, I think that it can maybe if it truly factors into how they get evaluated and how they are actually paid. (MP)

MP equated equity fellows training and the prospect of success with factors associated with accountability, personal internal incentives, and length of training, i.e., it must be ongoing and systemic in order to be successful.

### ***Summary of Equity Fellows (WETSE & MP)***

The possibilities of equity training successfully inducing White educators into reflecting on their own beliefs, values, and assumption was challenged as possible with accountability measures put in place as incentives according to MP. WETSE were adamantly opposed to including an accountability measure. They opined that their current teacher evaluation system was sufficiently constructed to address accountability and they presumed the complex and political nature of equity was inadequate to be inserted into their observation and evaluation process. However, WETSE considered equity training a unanimous success and proposed comprehensive training for all educators.

### **Summary**

The findings are represented in Figure 3.2 as similar, divergent, different, and emergent themes. The research questions ask if equity can be interpreted and if so, what are the similarities and differences? In addition, how do the themes align with the study's framework and theory? Thus far, the study has identified four similar themes, two divergent themes, one different theme, and one emergent theme. Their identification and acknowledgment by the participant groups (WETSE and MP) was relevant. However, of more consequence was the deviation after the initial agreement. All of the themes fit squarely within the study's normative and political

dimensions (ZONE) and tenets two and three of its leadership philosophy framework (TLT). The next chapter describes the synthesis and evaluation of the research findings in the context of the research questions, empirical literature, and the study's framework (ZONE) and leadership theory (TLT).



## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Discussion

Perhaps the most unifying belief among mainstream American politicians, thought leaders, and policy makers across the ideological spectrum is the potential of education to lift marginalized groups out of poverty and ameliorate inequality. Indeed, the widely shared belief that high quality education can lead to economic success and is available to all Americans is central to legitimizing the U.S. stratification system (Kluegel & Smith, 2017). This widely held axiom is the basis for virtually all educational research.

Despite this broadly held assumption, inequalities in schools continue to exist (Aud et al., 2010). As explained in Chapter I, those inequities are habitually identified as achievement gaps (Ravitch, 2013), opportunity gaps (Carter & Welner, 2013), and socioeconomic gaps (Rothstein, 2013). Because of the importance of equity, I sought to determine how WETSE and MP viewed equity. Were they speaking the same language and holding the same views when “equity” is deliberated? Is equity really about closing “gaps” or something more utopian?

This study was born from my observation that during the course of my 25-year experience in education, school practitioners and policy makers, took the expedient route of technical change, in the pursuit of equality of outcomes for minoritized students specifically, and all students in general. Inequality anywhere is a threat to equity everywhere (Misc, 2020).

The purpose of this qualitative critical incident study (CIT) was to explore how WETSE and MP interpret equity in order to find solutions to inequitable outcomes for students. This research took place in a Midwestern suburban school district and all of the educator participants included are White. Correspondingly, I endeavored to juxtapose WETSE with MP views in an attempt to determine whether or not those two groups, critical to student outcomes, held any

similar or divergent interpretations of equity.

This study was completed during the brutal murder of Minneapolis citizen George Floyd and after the 2020 U.S. presidential election. As a result, the discussion pertaining to racism and inequality was at the forefront of the national conversation and internationally as well (BBC, 2020) while the study was being finalized. Because this study's participants are White educators and minoritized parents, it is timely in its relevance to the social justice climate of the day.

This study asked two questions: First, how is equity interpreted by WETSE and MP? Second, are there themes that emerge from WETSE and MP interpretation of equity, if so, are they similar or divergent? Equity elicits beliefs and opinions that are complex and as such a flexible and a unique research design (Cheek et al., 1997) was employed to generate findings that answered the research questions. Two focus groups (WETSE & MP) participated in recalling critical incidents and revelatory incidents (Keatinge, 2002) as a way of capturing the unique experiences of equity-trained White teachers and minoritized parents.

**RQ1: How do White equity-trained suburban educators (WETSE) and minoritized parents (MP) interpret equity?**

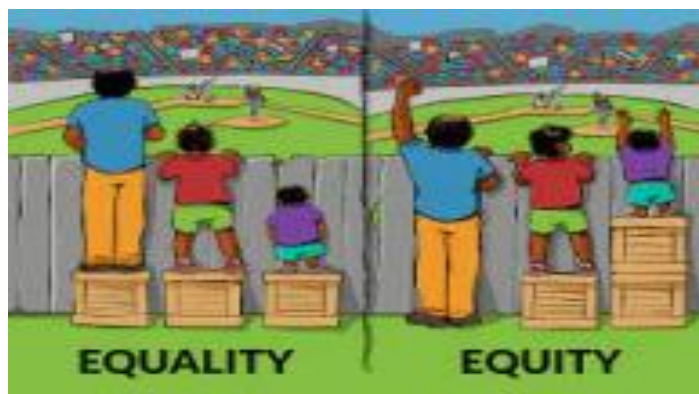
This study began by attempting to understand both participants' (WETSE & MP) baseline knowledge of equity as an abstract or theoretical term. This approach was important because it is relatively common among scholars, practitioners, and citizens to treat equity and equality as though they are interchangeable (Secada, 1989) as mentioned in the literature review. During the winter of 2020, I observed 150 parents, mostly African American, Latino(x) and a small number of biracial parents (according to their testimony at the microphone) campaign for equality of treatment for their children in response to a survey that was sent to all of the minority parents of a particular elementary school. One of the questions read: *What do we*

*as White educators need to know about your Black child in order to teach them?* This question set off a firestorm of anger, and MP packed a gymnasium during a listening session, of which I was a moderator. Unanimously, one by one, they approached the microphone and asked that their child be treated “equally.” I reflected on that moment and made a decision that my study must ask the question, how do MP interpret equity, if they are asking for equal treatment?

My research findings noted an agreement between the study’s participants (WETSE & MP) understanding of equity. Each group echoed the same language and observed that in order to achieve equity, “each group getting what they need in order to be successful” is how they interpret equity. Both participant groups referenced the depiction identified in Figure 5.1 as a concrete image of how equity resonates in their consciousness.

### **Figure 5.1**

*Illustrating Equality Versus Equity*



It is important to stress that although WETSE and MP arrived at comparable technical definitions of equity that align with contemporary research (Secada, 1989) the path to agreement was very different. This motif of, seeming agreement, to be followed by divergent paths to the agreement was indicated throughout Chapter IV and will also repeat itself throughout the discussion. WETSE intimated that they had not thought about equity as reallocation of resources

to meet the needs of students until they began their equity fellows training. WETSE further explained that they had a difficult time believing White educators not exposed to an equity training intervention would be capable of taking such a similar position on equity. Extant research (Chim, 2018) suggests the WETSE hypothesis, pertaining to equity training effectiveness is valid.

MP perceived their daily life experiences as inequitable and fraught with struggle. They spoke of having to be “twice as good as someone White” in order to even have a chance at certain opportunities. This aligns with colloquial narratives often heard in minority communities in reference to inequitable conditions imparted upon minorities. In essence, at every turn inequity is foisted upon MP (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1985). MP referenced a lack of after school activities such as Girl Scouts, unequal treatment in schools during and after school, and inequitable conditions in the community in which they live as evidence of inequities’ perverseness.

There are scholars who support the notion that MPs experience the ubiquity of inequality in virtually all spheres of life. For instance, Diamond (1994) and Bonilla-Silva (2006) view race as an arbitrary construction that shapes social structures, laws, organizations, and interpersonal relationships that perpetuate White supremacy in every sphere of life.

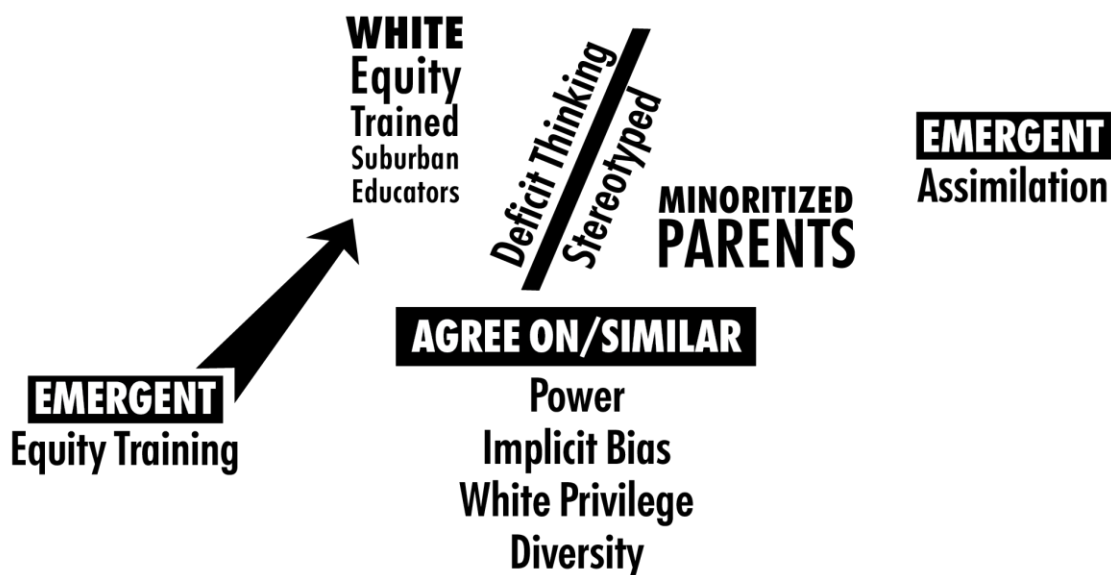
In summary, although both WETSE and MP coalesced around the technical definition of equity, their pathways to agreement were very different.

**RQ2: Are there themes that emerge from WETSE and MP interpretations of equity and are they similar or divergent?**

The second research question built on the central research question. Once an understanding of equity amongst the participants was established, the themes outlined in Figure 5.2 arose from the study.

**Figure 5.2**

*Similar, Divergent, Different, and Emergent Themes from the Study*



The findings from the study are overwhelmingly consistent with extant research documented in the literature review and will be reported in the following section as *confirming*. However, some of the research findings were independent of what was covered in the literature review and will be discussed as findings *disconfirming* or “outside” of the literature review. Equally important, the findings represent new empirical data that will be highlighted in the *new findings* section.

### **Findings in Relation to the Literature Review (Confirming)**

WETSE personal recollections of their own beliefs and observations of their White colleagues confirmed the literature review scholarship defining teacher beliefs as deficit thinking in nature. The critical incidents highlighted beliefs, values, biases, and prejudices WETSE hold, and the analysis of the data confirm Pajares' (1992) research chronicling White educators deficit thinking beliefs towards minoritized families.

Additionally, the WETSE narratives supported Helm's (1995) White racial identity framework as WETSE were oblivious to their own racial identity until they received equity training according to their responses. Furthermore, their responses aligned with aspects of White Fragility (DiAngelo, 2016). For example, colorblindness and colormuteness were factors that were discussed in the WETSE focus groups and the literature review as barriers to equity. The literature review drove home the point that demographic changes in the teaching profession between 1999 and 2018 have remained stagnant (NCES, 2020). In effect, the teaching force will remain predominantly (80%) White for the foreseeable future (NCES, 2020). The demographics of the school district studied find that 98% of educators are White (Sipes, 2021: personal communication). This aligns with national data chronicling the lack of diversity in the teaching force, writ large, and specifically in suburban districts which tend to be even less diverse than urban districts. In effect, this study's research focused on two demographics that are converging, increasing diversity in suburban school districts juxtaposed by White? homogeneity among suburban education ranks.

Demographic changes in the suburbs were addressed in the literature review and the suburban district studied exemplifies the suburban demographic shifts (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012). Research suggests demographic shifts receive little public attention except by educators

who are affected. The critical incident findings confirmed suburban educators' identification and displeasure with demographic shifts in their district. Several critical incident narratives identified the influx of minoritized children from the surrounding urban districts as an affront to the way we do things in our district, or the "JRCS way", which is associated with assimilation and conformity. The demographic swing and narrative responses to the change are consistent with research cited in the literature review.

The literature review covered Bonilla-Silva's (2006) new racism, the ideology of Whiteness (Leonardo, 2004; Picower, 2009) and the mindset or beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, and biases of White educators. The responses from the White educators in this study did not deviate from the empirical literature. For instance, just as Sobczic (2018) noted WETSE made comments concerning their untrained colleagues who viewed inequality as a matter of meritocracy or non-Whites not working hard enough in order to be successful. The playing field is level, and there are not structural barriers to success for minoritized families, according to the narrative provided in the study's data. With the emergence of unprecedented inequality, the theory of meritocracy is reconstructed frequently in western countries particularly (Sobczic, 2018). According to the theory of meritocracy, each individual has an equal opportunity regardless of gender, race, and immigrant status to achieve social and professional success (Sobczic, 2018).

The research findings from my study do not fit neatly into any of the "gap" categories. The similar, divergent, and emergent themes generated by this study suggest the term "gap" is a socially constructed term (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The findings from my study point to an "equity mindset gap." Education equity mindset consists of the understandings, beliefs, and dispositions supportive of advocacy and working toward eliminating inequity for students

(Walker, 2017). WETSE reported they believe they have closed their equity mindset gap as a result of the Equity Fellows training. Thus, they believe the gap can be closed by intensive equity training. This belief is supported by Batchelor (2019) and Chin (2018). Neither the equity gap nor the presumed achievement gap is addressed by the technical initiatives (see Figure 5.5) posed as solutions by most educators. The “equity mindset gap” operates in the normative and political dimensions of the ZONE and is addressed by tenets #1, #2, and #3 of TLT.

The study’s findings acknowledge that in addition to believing in meritocracy, many educators also perpetuate Bonilla-Silva’s (2004) “new racism” by claiming to not see color. WETSE reported that in discussions with their colleagues, meritocracy was a byproduct of new racism, i.e., color doesn’t exist, just hard work and talent is considered in America. In providing evidence for this I return again to WETSE conversation pertaining to equity training and the connection to new racism. As defined by Bonilla-Silva (2004), new racism consists of colorblind individualism and colormuteness. The ideologies, respectively, claim to not see color or remain silent in the presence of racist monologue from their peers. WETSE reported wishing they “had said more” in the presence of racist commentary by their colleagues. In addition, WETSE reported hearing coworkers claim to “not see color” when interacting with minoritized youth. This was disputed by WETSE via critical incident reporting. The equity-trained educators were courageous enough to commit to training, but also agreed to participate in this study. They provided numerous instances that detailed White educators taking into account *solely* a child’s race when making decisions on academic placement, discipline, and social status.

Stereotype and deficit thinking were examined in this study’s literature review and WETSE and MP critical incident and revelatory reflections align with current research defining each term. Stereotype and deficit thinking, taken together, were identified by coders more



frequently than any other single theme. The inverse relationship between the two codes align with the study's participants. WETSE described colleagues who explicitly made racist comments about students' skin color, hair, and dress. The totality of the comments implied that more than stereotype was being observed, but deep-seated ideas about the inferiority of another group of people. Taken in combination the findings suggest stereotype (Dukes & Gaither, 2017) and deficit thinking (Valencia, 1999) are relatively common mindsets pertaining to White educators (Chang & Demyan, 2007). I did not have a large enough sample size of critical incidents to claim non-equity trained educators were White supremacist. However, there was enough data to definitively say that White educators in suburban districts are prone to deficit thinking views and negative stereotypes of minoritized youth and parents in suburban communities.

#### **Findings in Relation to the Literature Review (Emerging)**

Assimilation was not identified in this study's literature review as a possible impediment to achieving equitable outcomes for minoritized youth. As a Black man, the findings correlating with assimilation were very difficult to read. The idea that minoritized families were so concerned about assimilating that they gave serious thought to how their children would be named, how they dressed, and how they wore their hair was shocking. Furthermore, the idea that minoritized youth must relinquish their social and cultural capital in order to be successful in suburban schools was appalling to say the least.

The identification of 'assimilation' in the context of this study as emerging is borne from the extreme contrast embedded in how it surfaced. WETSE after three years of intensive training didn't report any critical incidents or revelatory reflections associated with assimilation as a barrier to equity. Conversely, MP noted in great detail and often with harrowing recollections of

how they felt and were subjected to acts associated with removing their cultural capital from the school environment.

Current research supports MP commentary of how assimilation takes place. Bertand and Mullainathan (2003) pointed out that names are used against minoritized youth with respect to job acquisition, while King (2012) documented minoritized youth discrimination in school based on hair and dress. Lash (2018) supported my claim that the process of assimilation is a process of cultural subtraction. Finally, Rodrigues et al. (2019) reasoned assimilation is fundamental to neoliberal definitions of success, thereby framing “achievement” and “success” as an inherently White enterprise.

### **Findings in Relation to the Literature Review (New Contributions)**

My study’s intent was not to examine equity professional development and White suburban practicing teachers. In this way, the study’s results extend beyond what is in the literature review. The literature review noted there are very few peer-reviewed research contributions that examine longitudinal equity trainings’ (McManimon & Casey, 2018) effect on educators. Secondary findings from my research suggest three years of equity training universally altered the stated beliefs of the White educators who participated in equity training.

The findings concerning what White equity-trained educators and minoritized parents see as important to creating equitable outcomes found consensus around four emerging themes, thought to be impediments to achieving equitable outcomes for all children. This is a new contribution to educational literature. Prior to this study, no concurrent research exists documenting the simultaneous interpretation of equity and how the equity mindset (Nadelson et al., 2019) is deemed most significant by the two (WETSE & MP) most important constituencies related to student outcomes (Elmore, 2000). The literature pointed to the achievement gap as the

most studied term when referencing student academic outcomes, but my study's findings illuminate an equity mindset gap. The achievement gap was not mentioned once by WETSE or MP. When they spoke of equity, the conversation did not begin with school achievement, but focused on equitable opportunities and treatment. This is supported by Carter and Welner's (2013) work focusing on a lack of opportunities as the significant influencer of student achievement and Ladson-Billings (2006) detailing the historical legacy of oppression as the context for so-called achievement gaps.

Contrary to my research, equity is couched by many scholars (Ravitch, 2013; Rothstein, 2002) as deficits associated with state testing, college entrance exams, and reading and math data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) report. Contemporary scholarship also refers to opportunity gaps (Darling-Hammond, 2013) and socioeconomic gaps (Reardon, 2011) as indicators of inequitable conditions for minoritized students.

### ***What is Next?***

My purpose for conducting this study was my dissatisfaction with what I perceived as the continuation of ineffective measures deemed as solutions to providing education opportunities and creating equitable outcomes for minoritized youth. Not satisfied with just reporting the results of my study, I am most interested in how to effectively devote myself to "doing" equity work and figuring out where to "start?" What follows next is the discussion linking the study's findings to the study's framework (ZONE) and leadership theory (TLT) in pursuit of equity.

### **Findings in Relation to the ZONE of Mediation**

Most educational change literature highlights the technical aspect of the ZONE and avoids the normative and political dimensions of change (Oakes et al., 1998). The evidence is

overwhelming that the focus on the technical dimension of gap closing has been a colossal failure (Ladson-Billings, 2007).

My research findings show equity-based agreement between WETSE and MP that concentrates the discussion and subsequent next steps to achieve equity squarely in the normative and political dimensions of change. Based on the Oakes et al. (1998) definition of dimensions of change, the four agreed upon aspects of equity are disaggregated into two distinct groups and assigned two different dimensions of ZONE.

Implicit bias, diversity, and White privilege inhabit the mindset and beliefs section of ZONE, or the normative dimension of change. Taken together, they represent deficit thinking approaches to change that must be tackled if equity is to be achieved. Traditional scholarship associates deficit thinking (Riehl, 2005) with deficit views of minoritized students and families by white educators. My research demonstrated that those deficit views exist within the suburban district that was studied and that they are acknowledged as a cluster of themes that I contend fit into the normative dimension of change.

Power was the additional theme agreed upon by WETSE and MP. Power satisfies Oakes et al.'s (1998) characterization of being political in nature with respect to change. Notably, Oakes et al. (1998) argued that affluent suburban parents wield disproportional power as juxtaposed to the new demographics in U.S. suburban schools. Consequently, that power is manifested as the ability to “other” or marginalize minoritized groups. The relationship between the findings and the ZONE is illustrated in Figure 5.3 and serves as the first step in my identification of how we begin to “do” the work of equity.

**Figure 5.3***Zones of Mediation and Research Findings*

This indicates that in order to affect real change in terms of achieving equity, we must coordinate initiatives and policy around the participants’ (WETSE and MP) interpretation of equity as a starting point to achieving equity. The results of my research clearly indicate the focus should shift from academic and curriculum initiatives such as project-based learning, literacy and writing, mathematics enrichments, STEM, Montessori programming, single gender schools, flipped classrooms, and the (literally) thousands of “technical” solutions (Appendix H) to what are clearly normative and political issue–equitable outcomes for minoritized students. A cursory search of school district academic plans will routinely list many of the aforementioned “technical” solutions, but my research endorses a starting point that focuses the mindset and beliefs of White educators as the inflection point. WETSE or MP did not mention technical solutions at all during my research apart from brief mention of circular changes, technical solutions were not discussed. This fact reinforces my argument suggesting where to start when pursuing equity.

Mindsets, beliefs, and politics are indicators or clues to an educator’s philosophical or theoretical perspective. Whether espoused or not, all educators have philosophical and theoretical perspectives that influence their behavior. The next section discusses the theoretical

foundation of this study, transformative leadership theory, and its relationship to the research findings.

### **Findings in Relation to Transformative Leadership Theory**

Shields's (2020) transformative leadership provides the theoretical foundation of my research from a leadership perspective. I noted in earlier scholarship there are a number of other school leadership theories that are embedded in TLT (social justice, democratic, culturally relevant, and distributive). However, I selected TLT based on my research questions focus on equity and it was the only theory that referenced "revolutionary change" as interrelated and interconnected to factors that are not just school related. TLT is guided by a theory of action enumerated by two general hypotheses according to Shields (2020):

1. When students feel marginalized, excluded, and unwelcome, or when they are worried about where they will eat or sleep.... no new program or pedagogical strategy will succeed over the long term until or unless this kind of safe learning environment is in place. (p. 4)
2. Education is a private and public good. When students are taught about, and prepared for, life in a democracy rather than simply prepared to pass a required test, then the whole democratic society benefits. (p. 4)

The findings signify agreement between WETSE and MP that marginalization and exclusion are prevalent within the school district and align with the first general hypothesis of TLT. Concurrently, the themes that emerged for the critical incidents overwhelmingly focused on social justice, equity, and racism. There was scant conversation between WETSE and MP that focused on test results. Hence, the findings, although not explicitly stated, align with the second general hypothesis of TLT.

As mentioned in the literature review, TLT is composed of eight tenets that are interrelated and interconnected. That begs the question, where do we/I start in trying to implement Shields' (2020) theory? I concluded that addressing educational inequalities should

begin with point(s) of agreement between key parties. Based on my findings, WETSE and MP view the doing of equity work similarly, although not exclusively, within two main tenants of TLT (Shields, 2020). So consequently, if we are going to “do” the work of equity, the starting points are the following two tenets:

- Tenet Two: Changing Mindsets—this entails understanding implicit bias, eliminating deficit thinking, addressing racism, and addressing social class and poverty.
- Tenet Three: Redistributing Power in More Equitable Ways—this comprises understanding and addressing power over others; power with others; and power to as denoted by educators defending and illuminating their philosophical position on school, i.e., what are the ultimate goals of education?

WETSE and MP agreed that implicit bias, diversity, and White privilege must be addressed if equity is to be achieved. These themes fall directly under the umbrella of TLT tenet #2. The importance of tenet #2 resides in its focus on beliefs, values, and assumptions. The heavy lifting of challenging and changing inequitable conditions begins with understanding, continuous learning, and reflection by? Or in individuals’ roles as? educators and community members.

Additionally, the research findings indicate MP view empathy as a response or trait needed specifically from White educators as a precondition of actually believing and doing equity work. Empathetic concerns are to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion for others and adopt the psychological perspective of others (Davis, 1994). MP noted this was critical to ameliorating inequities. Using this early research testing TLT by identifying equity as a central component of the research, I propose that “empathy” is an element that could be added to tenet #2.

WETSE and MP cited power as a barrier to equity. These findings are consistent with the scope of TLT tenet #3. The findings noted unequal treatment of children during disciplinary incidents and the power to exclude minorities from becoming employees of the school system as examples of exclusion, marginalization, and power. The development of my equity change framework as derived from this research does include “assimilation” because it was a divergent theme emerging from the thematic analysis of the data. Assimilation would fit into the range of concepts covered by tenet #3. For instance, there is a power dynamic associated with the expectation that minoritized students “assimilate” to the norms, values, and behaviors of the White suburban school and community.

The results of the study, when assessing similar views, tangentially align with Shields’s (2020) description of tenet #2/changing mindsets as possibly the most important of the eight tenets. My research findings point to an equally important role for tenet #3/ redistribution of power in more equitable ways. When the additional findings or divergent and emergent themes are deconstructed in relation to TLT, two additional themes are apparent that align with tenet #2 (deficit thinking & stereotype) and (advocacy/activism) tenet #4—a focus on democracy, emancipation, equity, and justice.

This intersection between my research findings and TLT suggests that there are two core tenets (#2 and #3) and six supporting tenets based on my research design and findings. I would argue that a deep focus on the two core tenets (#2 and #3), would lead to addressing the other tenets of TLT, which my research indicate to be aspirational, critical, and important, but not foundational. Based on the research findings, neither White educators nor MP touched on the other six tenets with the brief exception of mentioning moral courage (tenet #8). What this indicates to me is that a deep dive by educators into achieving success in the core tenets of



transformative leadership (tenets #2 & #3) may lead to their development of what Freire (1972) calls “conscientization.”

Freire (1972) noted that adult educators acknowledged the need for social change and this aligns with my study’s findings. Freire’s (1972) work allows me to draw a parallel between my study’s middle-class educators and their primary focus with individual fulfillment. He declared that in order to be totally vested in seeking the elimination of inequality, conscientization must be achieved. Conscientization is a social process taking place during reflection and action upon the world, according to Freire (1972). The act of intellectual development combined with reflections and action creates critical consciousness, i.e., to make one aware of contradictions in social structures. Conscientization is found in tenet #1 of TLT; accepting the mandate for deep and equitable change in the form of reflecting on one’s own beliefs, values, and assumptions within the context of social structures.

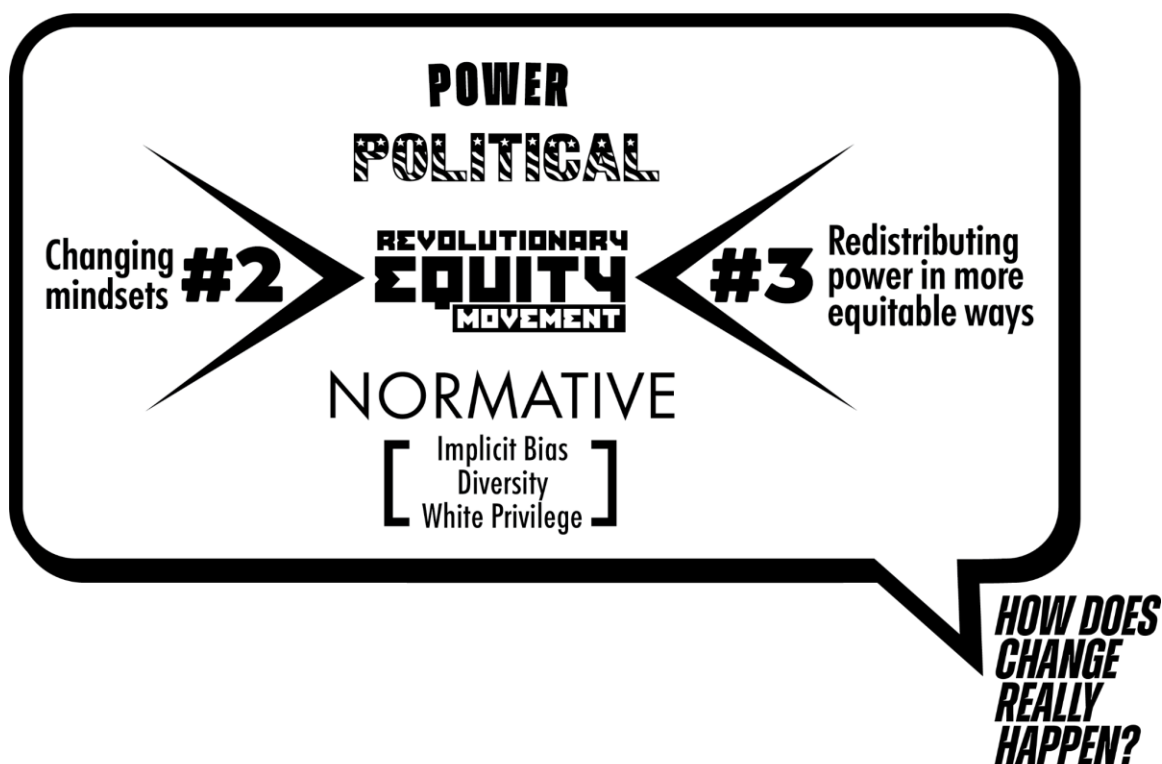
I would claim conscientization is essential to addressing the six “aspirational” tenets and becoming a complete transformative educator. The essence of change can be seen in the interconnection between the most critical elements of TLT and ZONE. This intersection, in conjunction with my research findings, form the origins of my equity change framework. That framework answers the question, how does change really happen?

### ***How Does Change Really Happen?***

After conducting my research and cross referencing the findings with the literature review, zones of mediation framework, and transformative leadership theory, Figure 5.5 captures the synthesis of the components of the study and attempts to answer the question; how does change really happen?

**Figure 5.4**

*How Does Achieving Equitable Education Really Happen?*



How does change directed toward equitable education really happen? According to my research participants, change happens when inequitable organizations focus their work through the normative and political dimensions of change—while acknowledging changing mindsets and redistributing power are interrelated and interconnected. The normative and political dimensions of change, intersecting with TLT tenets #2 and #3, are the core of what my research indicates could underpin a revolutionary equity movement that will lead to “real” changes in life conditions for children.

Figure 5.5 details a reprised list of all of the technical changes that are implemented in the name of school reform that have failed. School reform or improvement is used to label changes in schooling that lead to improved outcomes, generally focusing on closing the “achievement gap” between White students and minoritized students (Noddings, 2007). I settled

on the recent or “greatest hits” in the name of “school reform” in search of equity of outcomes. How do my research findings and the model I developed interrogate the school reform movement solutions in search of equity?

### Figure 5.5

*Technical Solutions That Have Not Worked!*

<b>SCHOOL REFORM BINGO IN AMERICA</b>				
<b>INSTRUCTION</b>	<b>STRUCTURE</b>	<b>LEADERSHIP</b>	Curriculum ↔	Programs
Teachers	Charter	Social Justice	STEM	Remediation
Best Practices	Voucher	Democratic	Early College	Head Start
Professional Development	HIRE A CONSULTANT	Transactional/Transformational	Early Literacy	Blended Learning
Classroom Management	Community	Trait/Style/Skill	Montessori	Career Tech
Data Driven Instruction	Alternative	Culturally Responsive	(i)Ready	APEX
Common Core Standards	Virtual	Distributive	One-to-One	Gifted

My findings challenge the major components of the school reform movement. Typically, when school improvement is discussed in conjunction with equitable outcomes, instruction, structure, leadership, curriculum, and programs are brought to the forefront as solutions to closing the achievement gap (Oakes et al., 1998; Noddings, 2007).

If we just had better teachers, we could close the achievement gap. This is a relatively common claim espoused by educators and non-educators (Kurilof et al., 2019). This claim is quickly followed by commentary around “best practices,” “classroom management,” and “data driven instruction.” These features of school reform are technical in nature and have failed. My research findings suggest that these elements do not fit in my model of change as foundational components of change. The instructional solutions to creating equitable outcomes proffered by

the school reform movement do not address beliefs, mindsets, and the politics of education.

WETSE and MP never mentioned instruction as a ticket to equity. Having discussed instruction,

I now turn to school structure.

### ***School Reform and Improvement***

In search of equity, the school reformers have sought to create “equitable” structures such as charter, voucher, community, and alternative schools. This argument suggests that if families had a choice and could select an alternate school structure, improved student outcomes would follow (Noddings, 2007). My findings and the failed results of alternate school structures (Berends & Kings, 1994) imply that this approach is misguided and unfortunately is reoccurring. My findings identify advocacy and activism as critical components of achieving equity, but as derived from the discussion pertaining to power.

School reformers declare that leadership is the problem by suggesting, “if we just had great leaders, we could achieve equitable outcomes for minoritized families.” It is the second most critical component to achieving equitable outcomes according to Khalifa et al. (2016). I would agree that leadership is critical to achieving equity, but what kind of leadership creates equitable conditions and outcomes? Although leadership is not expressly mentioned in my research findings, the themes that emerged are primarily concentrated within two primary tenets of transformative leadership theory. In fact, transformative leadership theory was the only leadership theory that was revolutionary in nature and addressed all of the themes that emerged from my equity research.

My research questions explored the interpretation of equity within the context of school and society through the perspectives of WETSE and MP. Their interpretation and suggestions for achieving equity run counter to the contemporary pathways to equity within the context of school

reform and school improvement. Although not generalizable, these findings could be transferred to suburban districts undergoing similar demographic shifts with predominantly White educators and urban districts with equity issues between and amongst schools.

This section has analyzed and discussed my findings in relation to theory (TLT), framework (ZONE), and contemporary equity reform solutions. I argued that my research has created a starting point for achieving equity in schools and will now discuss the implications of my investigation.

## **Conclusions**

### ***Leadership and Change Implications***

We know from 50 years of research that educational bureaucracies have grown, achievement gaps have widened, neo-liberal policies have expanded, and social conditions have eroded for most of the world's population (Piketty, 2019). Changes in conditions require revolutionary upheaval. We cannot expect significant changes in the living and working conditions of citizens without tectonic shifts in thinking and action. Advocacy and activism, as a function of changing power dynamics, are at the heart of social movements for change and are essential aspects of the study's findings. They form the core of why power is so important. Who wields power, and how power determines the life outcomes for millions students is critical. It was recognized by parents and educators in findings that political action is required to make wholesale changes to inequitable structures, organizations, and laws.

One could argue that the emphasis by researchers and practitioners in the arena of technical change is a form of avoidance. The moral courage that it takes to ask and answer questions that identify what belief system drives your actions is a risky endeavor not for the faint of heart. Is your job as an educator political and philosophical, and if so, what is your philosophy

and what are your politics? In pursuit of answers to questions like this, Counts (1932) asked if schools could even teach democracy, whilst Dewey (1939) examined the question of what democracy actually is.

While not expressly identified in my findings or any of the figures, this research's goal of achieving equity within public schools is to ultimately develop citizens whose aim is to understand and uphold democracy; campaigning for emancipation for the least of our global citizens; and fight for equity and justice.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

In light of the findings, I am suggesting that TLT may be utilized to bring about more equitable educational experiences as a tiered system. There are eight tenets and practitioners could find the number of tenets and their interrelation-interconnection overwhelming and complex. In order to simplify how they might be approached, Tenets #2 (Changing Mindsets) and #3 (Redistributing Power in More Equitable Ways) may be the starting point for commencing equity work amongst White educators and minoritized parents. The other tenets could be introduced as “aspirational” in lieu of deeply addressing mindsets and power redistribution.

What makes TLT unique and “aspirational” is that it is not particularly an educational leadership theory. In fact, being an education leader, and I use that word loosely, is not confined to the results of yearly test scores and artificially engineered gaps. The transformative leader is aspiring to build a world in which all citizens, dare I say it, have a chance to live and not just exist. The development of leadership capable of dialectically integrating historical, economic, and political realities while managing a school is ambitious and completely shatters all current leadership prototypes.

Additionally, it is important to point out that these two primary tenets of TLT align seamlessly with ZONE normative and political dimensions of change. The alignment between the change framework and change philosophy are revolutionary in that they focus exclusively on the most complex elements required in order to create deep-seated change.

There are three major leadership and change implications that were derived from this study of equity through the lens of WETSE and MP:

1. WETSE and MP agree that in order to create equitable conditions, the equity-work must be done in the normative and political dimensions of the ZONE. Additionally, I found the findings were concentrated in the two primary tenets of TLT: changing mindsets and redistributing power. Oakes et al. (1998) documented the predisposition of educators to focus their reforms within the technical dimension of change. Researchers write and explore equity in the technical dimension and is manifested by K-16 educators focusing on programming and professional development in the technical dimension. Meanwhile, WETSE and MP report that real equity work must be done in the normative and political dimension of change. Correspondingly, the themes that they agree on must be front and center in the pursuit of equity, and fall squarely within two central tenets of TLT (#2 Changing Mindsets and #3 Redistributing Power in More Equitable Ways). The real equity work must be realized at the intersection of ZONE and TLT (Figure 5.4).
2. WETSE reported a change in his or her disposition and belief system. There is significant research highlighting preservice teacher beliefs, but very few peer-reviewed studies focus on professional development aligned with equity, racism, and implicit bias, for practicing educators (McManimon & Casey, 2018). All of the

- educators have been immersed in three years of structured and repetitive equity training. My results indicate that equity training that is focused on mindsets, beliefs, and power must be central to any serious attempt to ameliorate inequality in schools and close equity gaps. That training must focus on a departure from the individual transformation claimed by WETSE in this study and focus on their understanding and actionable attempts to address systemic inequalities, i.e., developing conscientization.
3. The National Collaborative on Diversity of the Teaching Force (2004) estimates that 90% of the teachers in the United States are White. The numbers are directionally similar when administrators are added to the equation. Suburban schools are now bastions of diversity as we resegregate schools (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012) and urban schools become increasingly populated by minoritized students only. What has not changed, and probably will not in my lifetime, are the educators being predominantly White. If we accept this as a statement of fact, then we should begin to explore how we can educate and change the mindsets, beliefs, and perspectives of White educators. This study provides a pathway to accomplish the feat of educating White educators and moving them toward revolutionary equity movement.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Parent Advocacy***

This research indicates a pathway to reimagining how education systems interact with parents. MP expressed a desire to learn how to advocate in ways that go beyond traditional participation in the Parent-Teacher Organization, or PTO. MP armed with advocacy and equity training would now compose a powerful force to be engaged in bludgeoning the vestiges of structural racism in school districts and communities.



Congruence with respect to equity training was found amongst WETSE and MP in four categories. Beyond finding new ways of advocating to redistribute power, this research gives credence to the nouveau concept of educators and parents training together (Nguon & Guitierrez, 2019) by demonstrating their acknowledgement and agreement of complex equity factors associated with achieving equity.

### ***K-12 Professional Development (Equity Fellows)***

This study's findings have immediate application in all equity-based, suburban, K-12 professional development environments. The study demonstrated the self-reported change in WETSE beliefs during the course of three years of training and the questions used to generate qualitative data may be used as pre/post assessments of WETSE and MP. There is negligible research that addresses current equity trained teachers (McManimon & Casey, 2018) and resulting changes in their belief systems. The following quote speaks to the change in belief systems of WETSE.

I've got a long way to go but I feel like I'm doing the equity fellowship has compelled me to try to be more of an advocate, and as Christopher said, to say something when I see something. So, I have been better, I feel that when I hear something that I feel is racist, or I see something happening that I feel is racists, I try to advocate and say something, and I'm getting better at that, I've still got a long ways to go. But I feel like I am doing better. (WETSE)

### ***Colleges of Education***

Pre-service teachers and professors would find the results applicable to multicultural courses and student-teacher field-based observations, i.e., do your field-based experiences align with this study's findings and conclusions? The findings could serve as the basis of building the curriculum for onsite pre-service educator curriculums. The suburbs are now the most diverse school settings in the country and colleges of education previously stressed a field-based

experience that exposed students to “urban” culture when instead the suburban school population lends itself to creating opportunities to experience diversity of race and class.

### ***K-12 School and District Leadership***

School districts that report longitudinal achievement gaps can make practical use of the qualitative findings and theoretical analysis to redirect their strategic focus and the conversation around the purported “achievement gap” by instead directing their attention to “opportunity gaps”—which more closely align to my research findings. The opportunity gap defines achievement gaps disparities as a function of structural constraints and systemic biases (Welner & Carter, 2013). K-12 district leadership work has consistently been conducted in the technical dimension of change and has not addressed the key tenets (#2 and #3) of transformative leadership theory. Longitudinal equity professional development focusing on implicit bias, stereotyping of minoritized families, and White privilege should be institutionalized in suburban districts.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of the study are identified in two distinct areas: positionality of the researcher and limitations in the research design. As a Black male conducting research documenting White educators’ interpretation of sensitive topics such as structural racism, White supremacy, and White privilege, the research suggests White educators could have become defensive and not provide authentic responses (DiAngelo, 2016). The research design consisted of CIT as the methodology, focus groups as the data collection tool, and thematic analysis as the qualitative data analytic tool. They all have documented limitations.

Critics of CIT say it relies on memory and that researchers are generally asking participants to recall emotional or traumatic events (Butterfield et al., 2005). Detractors also note

that the critical events elicit additional opinions and forge into study participant beliefs—which is what this study intended to do as it relates to equity.

Focus groups were not originally devised as a stand-alone method of qualitative data retrieval according to Reed and Payton (1997). Reed and Payton (1997) believed that for the purposes of empirical research, additional methods should be employed to triangulate qualitative data. Researchers (Smithson, 2000) also question the possibility of a dominant voice setting the tone of the entire group, thus data is one-dimensional and reflects the beliefs and opinions of a singular focus group participant. This study avoided the dominant voice by use of pre-planning meetings with both assistant facilitators who agreed to remind me as the primary facilitator if one voice was becoming dominant. In addition, we limited the focus groups to the lower end of what is generally considered idea by inviting eight participants versus the maximum of 12 (Krueger & Casey).

The participants were limited to WETSE and MP. White educators and minoritized educators who opted to not participate in equity training were not invited as study participants and would be an ideal group to target as an addendum to my research. Furthermore, school systems are comprised of more than teachers, administrators, and parents. Classified staff, defined as secretaries, custodians, or non-teachers, have beliefs and perspectives about equity and are rarely included in studies. The tertiary individuals associated with schools (paraprofessionals, office staff, custodians, etc.) are not participants in this study, but should be in future studies.

Urban and rural educators and parents were not part of the study. The study's focus on a single suburban school district excludes a significant percentage of educators and parents. Thus, it is not generalizable but could be transferable.

### **Further Study Implications**

- Continuous study tracking WETSE beliefs and actions should be undertaken. The WETSE who participated in this study have completed three years of equity training. This experimental group should be tracked and compared to a control group of educators who refuse equity training. This study should be replicated with a quantitative component using validated implicit bias tools as pre/post assessments of White teachers. The mixed-method approach to the study may lend additional depth to the qualitative findings and provide generalizable conclusions.
- Minoritized staff members should be included in future equity studies. They may add confirming or discrepant qualitative data to the existing study's findings.
- WETSE voluntarily participated in three years of equity training. They represent less than 10% of the teaching force in this particular district. Future research may focus on non-participants and their rationale for not engaging in equity training.
- This study should be replicated in an urban environment in order to compare and contrast the belief systems of White educators and minoritized parents with the suburban findings of this study.
- Ancillary staff members should be included in empirical education studies. More research is needed to understand clerical, operational, and support staff beliefs concerning equity and social justice.

### **Researcher Reflection**

My research journey was the most cathartic experience of my lifetime. The past four years have been dedicated to the process of discovery, analysis, reflection, revision, and doubt. As predicted during the first residency session, I(we) have endured tragedy, triumph, and

shocking political developments during my PhD pilgrimage. My research is an outgrowth of our tumultuous times and should be read in the context of the global convulsions that materialized during my scholarship journey.

Whatever your political persuasion or belief, it is undeniable that the 2016 presidential election and the next four years, which paralleled my PhD journey, placed race, racism, equity, social justice, and democracy at the forefront of the American conversation. During the last two years, a global pandemic of epic proportions has besieged the world and many countries have been in a virtual state of lockdown. The pandemic has exposed levels of inequality on a global scale that are customarily avoided as part of general conversation, however, inequality and equity are now part of the world's daily discourse and unavoidable as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pandemic conditions have shortchanged my cohort's (C17) experience by robbing us of our final residency and ensuring that my journey would be even more solitary than is customary when completing a dissertation. That said, this process has been therapeutic and gave me a sense of purpose during a time when millions were losing hope in humanity. I returned to some of my early learning achievement writings and my autobiographical sketch that is required of all incoming Antioch PhD candidates. I wondered if my personal bias and thinking had changed during the PhD program. My hope that class antagonisms and inequality would be a thing of the past has not wavered. However, my thinking has been irrevocably altered as I now process each situation and interaction as an opportunity to listen, learn, and hone my research skills.

### **Concluding Statement**

This study argued, through critical incident analysis as a method, that White equity trained educators and minoritized parents share similar definitions of equity and corroborate

many of the primary barriers to achieving equity within schools specifically and society writ large. The results of the study run completely counter to the research and clinical practitioner work currently being done, i.e., teachers, principals, leadership teams, and schools of education are doing the exact opposite of what my research concluded by focusing on technical fixes.

Their actions have failed children and society—not just as a measure of test scores. The ability to develop rational thinkers capable of exercising reason is quickly fading. Examining the actions and statements of millions of citizens, who have been educated and are willing to accept dictatorial and fascistic leadership uncritically tells us something has gone terribly wrong with how we “educate” the masses. The inability to ask critical questions, decipher fact from falsehood, and a general ahistorical outlook manifests itself as an anti-democratic malaise cast upon the country. In essence, citizens are willing to give up on democracy. This is what happens when you operate in the technical dimension of change and refuse to hold the mantle of transformative leadership theory as a barrier to tyranny.

George S. Counts asked the following in 1932 during the midst of the great depression—dare the school build a new social order? Counts (1932) asked this question during one of the most difficult eras in world history. We have returned to formidable times as humanity is currently gripped by the trifecta of a global pandemic, environmental catastrophes, and unbridled capitalism—is now not the time to ask the question again—dare the school build a new social order?

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## **Appendix A: Suburban School Districts and Demographic Change**

### **Suburban School Districts and Demographic Change**

**Author:**

Jennifer Jellison Holme, Sarah Diem, Anjalé Welton

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**Appendix B: Permissions and Attributions to use Transformative Leadership Theory  
Framework**

Day: Thursday  
Date: May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020  
Time: 2:13 p.m.

Dear Dr. Shields,

I am formally writing to you to request permission to use the "Model of transformative leadership" represented in any or all of your works for use in my dissertation.

It is my understanding you are the developer of the model and own the copyrights. The specific image I'd like to use is attached to this email.

Respectfully,  
David Lawrence

You certainly have my permission to use this model  
Carolyn

"Until we transform our educational system into one that is more equitable, inclusive, and socially just, ... unrest will continue to challenge the well-being of our democratic society."  
"Transformative Leadership for Social Justice" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YEsZNbfg-c>  
[https://www.routledge.com/9780367203610?utm\\_source=shared\\_link&utm\\_medium=post&utm\\_campaign=B191213922](https://www.routledge.com/9780367203610?utm_source=shared_link&utm_medium=post&utm_campaign=B191213922)

Dr. Carolyn M. Shields, Professor, Educational Leadership  
College of Education, Room 397, Wayne State University,  
Detroit, MI



### Appendix C: First Round of Focus Group Questions

Transformative Leadership Theory	Critical Incident Technique Questions
Tenet One: Accepting the Mandate for Deep and Equitable Change	<p>Have you ever been made to feel that you did not belong? What happened and how did you feel? (Parents)</p> <p>Have you ever caught yourself saying something that unintentionally expressed implicit bias? (Educators)</p>
Tenet Two: Changing Mindsets	Can you think of any times when you made an assumption about someone based on the way they were dressed or the color of their skin? (Parents & Educators)
Tenet Three: Redistributing Power in More Equitable Ways	What examples of inappropriate use of power over others can you identify you from your workplace? (Parents & Educators)
Tenet Four: Balancing Public and Private Good	List the inequities in your own city or country and determine what your students (children) should know about them? (Parents & Educators)
Tenet Five: A Focus on Democracy, Emancipation, Equity, and Justice	Can you think of instances when our school(s) and classroom practices are not inclusive, democratic, and socially just? (Parents & Educators)
Tenet Six: Interconnectedness, Interdependence, and Global Awareness	What experiences have you had that help you empathize with others? (Parents & Educators)
Tenet Seven: Balancing	What groups or individuals can you identify that have been marginalized and could you give examples that

Critique and Promise	you've witnessed of this marginalization? (Parents & Educators)
Tenet Eight: Exhibiting Moral Courage	Can you think of a time when either you or someone you knew exhibited moral courage as it relates to school? A time when someone stood up for social justice or equity? (Parents & Educators)

## Appendix D: Second Round of Focus Group Questions

General Question – What is equity?

1. Why are more White educators not actively advocating for the disruption of inequitable practices? (WETSE)
1. Why are more White educators not actively advocating for the disruption of inequitable practices? (MP)
  
2. Why are more Minority parents not advocating for equitable conditions? (WETSE)
2. Why don't more minority parents advocate for equity? (MP)
  
3. Why or do you think equity is an issue in schools?(WETSE/MP)
  
4. Do you believe the school district and society are capable of creating equitable conditions for marginalized groups? (WETSE/MP)
  
5. What are the barriers to achieving equity in schools and society? (WETSE/MP)
  
6. Has equity training modified your beliefs with respect to implicit bias, deficit thinking, and systemic inequalities?(WETSE)
6. Do you think equity training can alter the beliefs and actions of White Educators? (MP)
  
7. Why do some White educators believe there is no such thing as inequitable practices, systemic racism, implicit bias, and deficit thinking? How do you know an inequity when you see it? (WETSE/MP)
  
8. What would you say to the minoritized parents about the progress or lack thereof with respect equity? (WETSE) What would you say to the White educators about the progress or lack thereof with respect to equity? (MP)
  
9. What are you planning to do in order to change practices, policies, behaviors and language that are rooted in the reproduction of systemic inequalities? (WETSE/MP)

**Appendix E: Letter of Permission from the School District**

NORTHMONT CITY SCHOOLS

4001 OLD SALEM ROAD  
ENGLEWOOD, OH 45322-2631  
937.832.5010  
937.832.5001 (Fax)

Office of the Assistant Superintendent  
Curriculum, Instruction, and Technology

July 2, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I am aware of David Lawrence's research plan and have reviewed the interview questions he will be using with parents and staff members. I give him permission to conduct his research and interviews at Northmont City Schools.

If you need further information, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Assistant Superintendent  
Curriculum, Instruction, and Technology

**OUR MISSION**

*The mission of Northmont City Schools is to provide students an exceptional education with diverse opportunities so they maximize their potential and are productive, responsible citizens.*

### **Appendix F: Email Request to Minoritized Parents to Participate**

I am conducting one of the first comprehensive studies in the nation detailing minority parent experiences in a suburban school district. I am asking minority parents if they would be willing to participate in a focus group that discusses their families experience in the school district with regards to the following issues:

- Race/Racism
- Implicit Bias
- Inappropriate use of power by educators
- Perceived or real inequities
- Social Justice
- Moral Courage

I polled a representative sample of minority parents/guardians and Tuesday, October 13<sup>th</sup>, 7:00-8:15 via Zoom was the best time. If this doesn't work for you, that is absolutely no problem at all. I'll be thankful for any/all the parents who are able and willing to tell their stories.

I attached a copy of the questions I will be asking you and the Zoom link will be embedded in the email. If you have already declined or accepted, would you forward my request to other parents who may be interested. They simply need to be parents of biracial or minority children to participate.

Respectfully,  
David Lawrence

## **Appendix G: Focus Group Informed Consent**

### **Focus Group Informed Consent Form**

This informed consent form is for the following individuals who we are inviting to participate in a doctoral research study titled: Exploring Equity Through the Perspective of White Suburban Educators and Minoritized Parents Using Critical Incidence Technique.

**Name of Principle Investigator:** David E. Lawrence

**Name of Organization:** Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program

**Name of Project:** Exploring Equity Through the Perspective of White Suburban Educators and Minoritized Parents Using Critical Incidence Technique

You will be given a copy of the Consent Form

### **Introduction**

I am David Lawrence, a PhD candidate enrolled in the Leadership and Change program at Antioch University. In addition, I am an employee of Northmont City Schools and my children are graduates of Northmont High School 12' and 16'. As part of this degree, I am completing a research study that explores how White equity trained suburban educators and minoritized parents interpret equity. I am going to give you information about the project and invite you to participate. You may talk to anyone you feel comfortable talking with about the project, and take time to reflect on whether you want to participate or not. You may ask questions at any time.

### **Purpose of the Research Project**

The purpose of this critical incident study will be to describe the congruency and/or dissimilarity of equity beliefs as interpreted by White suburban educators trained in equity and minoritized parents of suburban students.

My research will provide a starting point for professional development departments, demographically changing school districts, and educator preparation programs who are concerned with the equity of educational outcomes for minoritized students. An additional aim is to bring together the two groups most crucial to obtaining equitable outcomes and exploring congruent and dissimilar interpretations of equity.

Racial and socioeconomic equity are at the epicenter of our current national discourse. This study will contribute to the conversation in the field of education. Furthermore, the intent of this study is to influence scholars, practitioners, and community members in the pursuit of the less traveled normative dimension of change as an alternative to what has historically been a technical undertaking, i.e., exploring the beliefs and ideologies of both groups.

**Project Activities**

Two separate focus groups will be convened. The White educators will be convened first and followed within 72-hours by the minoritized parent focus group. Each group will be asked to respond to questions aligned with the eight tenets of transformative leadership. Each question attempts to bring about an event that happened in your life that you can recall.

The facilitator will briefly provide a researched based working definition of equity by email and prior to the focus group convening. The facilitator will provide a brief overview of each tenet by email prior to the focus group and will explain in fewer than 30 words the focus of each tenet prior to eliciting the critical incident dialogue. Each focus group may last a minimum of 90 minutes and a maximum of 180 minutes. The groups will be reconvened separately to discuss and reflect on the earlier findings for a second meeting of 90-180 minutes.

**Participant Selection**

In the case of the educators you are being invited to take part in this project because you have been involved in the districts Equity Fellows program and you self-identify as White. The parents are being selected because of their minority status.

**Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. You may withdraw from this project at any time. You will not be penalized for your decision not to participate.

**Risks**

I do not anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed as a result of participation in this project. However, I will be asking you to recount critical incidents that you've observed and you may be uncomfortable talking about them in a focus group setting. You may stop being in the project at any time if you become uncomfortable. The focus group format is meant to release any stress you may have by allowing you the opportunity to speak as freely as you'd like or to just listen and provide written or chat feedback.

**Reimbursements**

You will not be provided any monetary incentive to take part in this project. However, you may be given a gift card or an alternative form of remuneration.

**Confidentiality**

All information will be de-identified, so that it cannot be connected back to you. Your real name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the write-up of this project. I will be the only person with access to the list connecting your name to the pseudonym. This list, along with any tape recordings, Zoom meetings, Google Hangout meetings, will be kept in a secure, locked location. You may give me permission to use your real name if you so choose.

**Limits of Privacy Confidentiality**

I will be providing a full written report that you will have access to upon completion. It is possible this research study and its conclusions may be used to inform the education discussion among local, state, and national boards of education, university/college teacher and leader preparation programs, and K-12 school district professional development departments.

Generally speaking, I can assure you that I will keep everything you tell or do for the project private within the boundaries of the separate focus groups. Yet there are times where I cannot keep things private (confidential). I cannot keep things private (confidential) if I find out that

- a child or vulnerable adult has been abused,
- a person plans to hurt him or herself, such as commit suicide,
- a person plans to hurt someone else,

There are laws that require many professionals to take action if they think a person is at risk for self-harm or are self-harming, harming another or if a child or adult is being abused. In most state, there is a government agency that must be told if someone is being abused or plans to self-harm or harm another person. Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that I cannot keep some things private.

### **Future Publication**

Data from this project will be included in the final version of the published dissertation. Documentation of the project will only be shared internally with the Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program learning community.

### **Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

You do not have to take part in this project if you do not wish to do so, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without your job being affected.

### **Who to Contact**

If you have any questions, you may ask them now or later. If you have questions later, you may contact David Lawrence at [dlawrence@antioch.edu](mailto:dlawrence@antioch.edu)

If you have ethical concerns about this study, contact Lisa Kreeger, PhD, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership and Change. [lkreeger@antioch.edu](mailto:lkreeger@antioch.edu)



**DO YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT?**

**I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked to have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to participate in this project.**

**Print Name of Participant:**

---

**Signature of Participant:**

---

**Date:**

---

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Day/month/year)

**You will be part of Zoom focus group? I voluntarily agree to be audiotaped for this project. I agree to allow the use of my recordings as described in this form.**

**Print Name of Participant:**

---

**Signature of Participant:**

---

**Date:**

---

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Day/month/year)

*To be filled out by the person taking consent:*

### Appendix H: Education Technical Reform Failures

<b>SCHOOL REFORM BINGO IN AMERICA</b>				
<b>INSTRUCTION</b>	<b>STRUCTURE</b>	<b>LEADERSHIP</b>	<b>Curriculum ↔ Programs</b>	
Teachers	Charter	Social Justice	STEM	Remediation
Best Practices	Voucher	Democratic	Early College	Head Start
Professional Development	HIRE A CONSULTANT	Transactional/Transformational	Early Literacy	Blended Learning
Classroom Management	Community	Trait/Style/Skill	Montessori	Career Tech
Data Driven Instruction	Alternative	Culturally Responsive	(i)Ready	APEX
Common Core Standards	Virtual	Distributive	One-to-One	Gifted