ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS: A CASE STUDY OF A SCHOOL

DISTRICT'S COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

A Record of Study

by

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ABSTRACT

What happens when a school district commits to equity? The focus on the school

district is driven by the use of a framework that defined the school district as an

institutional actor in reform efforts. Accordingly, the school district plays a critical role

in all reform efforts, especially when making value judgments.

In order to understand the potential of a school district as an institutional actor,

the research was conducted as a qualitative case study. This singular focus on an

individual district enabled tools such as semi-structured interviews and document

analysis to convey the intimate journey of a school district making a value commitment

to equity.

The review of literature began with the topics of neo-institutionalism, the central

office and district leadership. Next, a description of Critical Race Theory was included

to critically review the district's role as an institutional actor. Following a recap of equity

and social justice literature, current research regarding the use of professional

development, especially professional development related to social justice, completed

the literature review.

A large suburban school district in Central Texas served as the research site.

Several experienced leaders, representing central office, school board, and principal

components of the organized collective, were individually interviewed. Documents

created or influenced by this group of leaders during the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and

2012-2013 school years were also reviewed. Restricting the case study to this time period allowed leaders to narrowly focus on a time of shared experience.

Findings suggested that while various members of the organized collective may collaborate to support a district value that aligned well with their personal values, this did not guarantee emergence of the school district as an institutional actor. A CRT analysis revealed a district primed by interest convergence yet hampered by the slow pace of liberalism and the continuing impact of institutional racism. This study affirmed the value of using a CRT approach when designing and implementing reform aimed at increasing student achievement. It is recommended that this case study become one of many seeking to understand the importance of the school district as an institutional actor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

How does a school district enact a value commitment to equity for all of its students? Rorrer, Skrla & Scheurich (2008) argued that the answer lies in the district's role as an institutional actor. The term "institutional actor" refers to the ability to influence an institution from the inside. A district in the role of an institutional actor makes use of its collective identity, comprised of district and campus leaders and the school board, to improve student achievement and advance equity. The value commitment made by this organized collective could become the tipping point for wide-scale change.

A public school district's transition from diversity awareness to the pursuit of equity for all of its students is a relatively undocumented phenomenon. Years of research on multicultural education, antiracist education, cultural competence, and other diversity-related topics has created at least a public relations-minded interest in declaring a commitment to ensuring that all students get what they need to succeed academically (Adler, 2011; Banks et al., 2001). Even beyond the equal employment opportunity statements and racial/ethnic demographic data required of public school districts, many educators have come to recognize that addressing the cross-cultural differences between educational staff and the students and families they serve is a necessary task (Brayboy, Castagno & Maughan, 2007; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia & Nolly, 2004). Unfortunately,

1

many turn to efficient summarized, stereotyped descriptions of their local communities that lead them to apply one-size-fits-all strategies advertised to increase student achievement without regard to other forces that may influence a student's ability, interest, and will to achieve (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b).

The reality is that this commitment to equity pronounced on the district website or casually mentioned in staff development sessions reflects a value judgment declared by an organized collective that has only recently emerged as a priority for both reform and research (Rorrer et al., 2008). Making a commitment to equity correlates with changing the culture, a fundamental aspect of a school district's role in advancing reform (Rorrer et al., 2008).

As clearly as I perceived the gap in the literature, it was the interest and excitement about this study expressed by participants that solidified the need to focus on how district leaders collectively approached a value commitment to equity. Participants wanted an opportunity to reflect on actual practice in Bluebonnet ISD, fully intending to then apply the results uncovered during their personal interview to their current practice in numerous settings. The demands of executive educational leaders within a public school district had not previously afforded interviewees with an opportunity for this kind of reflection and discussion, yet they immediately embraced the chance to contribute to both scholarship and practice through participation in my study.

Problem Statement

The apparent gap between words and actions in school districts that profess a commitment to equity serves as the catalyst for my research. Very little research exists

on the importance of a school district as an institutional actor (Honig, 2003, 2009; Spillane, 1996) or the tipping point factors that enable the district to make the value commitment to equity. My study aims to help fill this gap, by examining the district's role from the perspective of Critical Race Theory. Research exists that examines the individual impact or influence of superintendents, principals, and school boards on reform efforts (Rorrer et al., 2008; Spillane, 1996). Indeed, the seminal work by Rorrer and her colleagues (2008) provided a critical theoretical contribution to our understanding of the district's role in systemic reform.

Separately, there is research examining the relevance of multicultural education, antiracist education and educational leadership geared toward social justice (Bates, 2006; Brown, Benkovitz, Muttilo, & Urban, 2011; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997). There is not, however, a substantial body of research that combines these threads to examine the collective effort of campus and district leaders (Honig, 2006) to advance from diversity awareness to equity. That is, Rorrer et al. (2008) suggested that a critical analysis of a district's role as an institutional actor will lead more definitively to reform that serves all children well. However, left unarticulated is exactly *how* this process occurs. What are the actions taken by those personnel who comprise the institutional actor that is the district? Once a district commits to an equity orientation, what actions are taken, and by whom, to carry out this mission? This proposed study will seek to address this gap in the literature.

Purpose of the Study

Given the unanswered questions discussed above, my proposed research seeks to understand *what happens* when a school district in the role of institutional actor commits to the value judgment of equity. Case study research was used because this approach focuses on understanding an issue by studying one or more cases within a particular setting or context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cresswell, 2007). Hence, this case study began with the broad notion of the school district as an institutional actor using Rorrer et al's (2008) conceptualization of four, interconnected, roles and then narrowed to its role specifically connected to equity.

Research Questions

Stake (1995) suggested using issues, like equity, as the springboard for research questions forces attention to the complexity and contextuality of the research area. This happens because issues are so closely connected to political, social, historical, and personal contexts. This is certainly the case with the issue of equity as addressed by a school district acting as an institutional actor. Research questions "draw us toward observing, even teasing out, the problems of the case, the conflictual outpourings, the complex backgrounds of human concern" (Stake, 1995, p. 17). The complex concerns of the proposed study can best be expressed in the following research questions:

1) In what ways does the district act as an institutional actor?

2) In what ways do actions taken or decisions made by the school district in the role of institutional actor demonstrate or not demonstrate its commitment to equity?

3) What role do communities of color play when the school district in the role of institutional actor commits to equity? How are their voices represented in the process and what power dynamics are at play?

Theoretical Framework

As suggested by Yin (2009), the use of a theoretical framework within a case study helps focus data collection and analysis. Critical Race Theory (CRT) served as a tool for determining the nature of the commitment as well as the extent of the focus on equity. Data gathered through interviews and document review were viewed through the lens of CRT, enabling my study to uncover any silencing or marginalization of racial groups as the district implements its commitment to equity (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004). Recognizing that pronouncing a commitment to equity will not instantly erase the accumulated effects of previous inequity, a CRT analysis of the district's actions encouraged a deep, critical analysis of the district's actions that could possibly lead to a refinement of implementation procedures.

Definitions

Key terms related to the study are listed below in alphabetical order. The definitions are extended or contextualized as they appear in the ensuing sections and chapters.

Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical Race Theory is a theoretical framework and research paradigm that uses the continuing presence of racism in society and institutions as the springboard for an ongoing challenge to the social construction of race (Schwandt, 2007).

District as institutional actor. Refers to the influence and power held by the organized collective to develop, implement, and resolve policy and practices within the school district (Rorrer et al., 2008). The organized collective, or district, is comprised of the superintendent, school board, central office administrators, and principals.

Educational equity. Refers to the intentional distribution of unequal resources in order to create a system of schools that share a higher probability of becoming equalized (Brayboy et al., 2007).

Significance of Study

By studying the role of a public school district as an institutional actor making the value commitment to equity, scholarly understanding of the inherent educational administration issues will be enhanced. Because Rorrer et al. (2008) conceptualized the school district as an organized collective working collaboratively to effect change, this study is designed to examine combined efforts rather than focus on a select individual – like the superintendent or principal – which is more prevalent in the literature. Likewise, practitioners will benefit from the case study's description of precipitating factors and subsequent decisions or actions related to the school district's commitment to equity. Even though the results from a single case study cannot predict the results in a different setting, understanding the experience of one public school district can still be informative to educational leaders and policymakers considering a similar commitment.

Summary

Rorrer et al. (2008) characterized the school district as an institutional actor with sufficient power, influence, and responsibility to direct and support change that will

result in educational equity. In order to understand how the district as institutional actor enacts the value commitment to equity, a case study focusing on a large suburban public school district was conducted. The next chapter will review pertinent literature on institutionalism, central office administration, Critical Race Theory, equity, and professional development. These diverse topics formed the context for the case study. The plan used to conduct the case study will be described in the third chapter followed by analysis and results in chapter four. The record of study concludes with implications and recommendations for future practice and further study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea of the school district as an institutional actor implies a unity of thought, focus and purpose. As an institutional actor, the district's focus should be on progressive change resulting in increased student achievement. From this perspective, the district is considered to be an integral contributor to systemic change, rather than an irrelevant bureaucracy. To conceptualize a school district as an institutional actor requires the examination of its components, including the various positions and responsibilities that are held within central office. More specifically, the district's commitment to equity can be determined by examining how a district fulfills its interconnected roles as an institutional actor.

This literature review will begin by defining "institutional actor" as it applies to school districts. This will include research on neo-institutionalism, the central office and district leadership. Next, as suggested by Rorrer et al. (2008), a description of Critical Race Theory will be included as an interpretative lens illuminating the district's path toward the linked goals of instructional improvement and equity. The concepts of social justice and equity will then be explored, especially as they relate to education. The literature review will conclude with a focus on the school district's use of professional development, specifically social justice professional development, as a readily available tool for implementing a commitment to equity.

Neo-Institutionalism, Central Office, and District Leadership

Historically, the literature has characterized school districts as impediments to school-based reform efforts (Honig, 2003, 2006), or not relevant to reform efforts (Spillane, 1996). Spillane (1996) identified the back-to-basics movement, or the emphasis on traditional academic subjects, as the beginning of an era in which reform focused on either the role of state government or individual campuses, without any mention of the district's possible role. Yet, the same movement, coupled with the push for school desegregation, increased the level of concern districts had for instructional issues that previously had been left to the discretion of campuses (Spillane, 1996). When the literature included the district, it was described as a barrier to reform effort. Barriers seemingly erected by school districts would come in the form of inadequate policy frameworks purportedly supporting school-based reform, or in the form of micromanagement that limited the individual school's autonomy (Honig, 2006).

Twenty-first century education is requiring school districts to move away from unilaterally commanding relationships with schools, and move toward more collaborative partnerships (Honig, 2003, 2006) with their communities. More frequently, these partnerships require the central office to provide support to district schools in their development of community and family partnerships (Honig, 2003, 2006). As the partnerships between schools and their community partners evolve, so too should the support provided by central office to schools (Honig, 2006). Honig (2006) suggested that this new reality should encourage school districts to embrace new roles within their established routines. Further, Honig (2003) argued that districts actually

participate in organizational learning when they actively search for and utilize information about community-school partnerships. It is not the success of the eventual partnerships that matters; it is the process the district uses, especially the risk management component, which really illustrates the school district's role in supporting schools (Honig, 2003).

Moreover, Spillane (1996) contended that when districts implement policy, they are simultaneously making policy. Therefore, more state policymaking leads to more district policymaking as district leaders proactively seek instructional solutions that will best serve their students and communities (Spillane, 1996). Compliance with state policy served as a springboard for district policymaking as districts considered multiple sources of information, such as community circumstances and the beliefs of central office administrators, to determine exact changes (Rorrer et al., 2008; Spillane, 1996). Spillane (1996) further suggested that the variation in the knowledge deemed relevant by the district can lead to variation in the fidelity of state level policy implementation.

When approaching change efforts designed to implement collaborative educational policy, school districts will often employ boundary-spanners (Honig, 2006). Boundary spanners are central office administrators who are expected to cross the boundary between the stereotypical bureaucrat in central office and the less rule-bound practitioner on a campus (Honig, 2006). Boundary-spanning administrators are usually situated on the edges of the school district's hierarchy to further enhance their reception as non-traditional, more authentic supporters of school-community partnerships (Honig, 2006). Honig (2006) explained that rather than having direct authority over partnership

development, boundary-spanners are instead charged with translating the experiences of the schools to the district or vice versa. In this way, the district endeavors to provide less dictatorial support to campus implementation of collaborative education policy (Honig, 2006). Perhaps because of this existence in the middle, Honig (2006) emphasized the importance of executive-level district leaders' recognition of the legitimacy and importance of boundary-spanning administrators. This respect for their efforts can lead to more opportunities for boundary-spanners to use their knowledge gained in schools to influence district policy development (Honig, 2006).

A strong interdependence between boundary-spanners, or frontline administrators, and executive-level central office administrators is necessary to effect change because each level has its own capital related to policy building (Honig, 2003). Boundary spanners reported having capital such as more site knowledge, whereas higher level administrators reported having more knowledge about district systems (Honig, 2003). Honig (2003) argued that both boundary spanners and higher level administrators sacrificed a degree of expertise whenever they attempted to rectify their knowledge gap. This could be especially damaging for boundary-spanners because the addition of knowledge about district systems often required the addition of more bureaucratic approaches that negated their ties to the sites they were trying to serve (Honig, 2003). Consequently, Honig (2003) advised districts to maximize coordination between boundary-spanners and executive-level leaders in order to cultivate relationships that will support school-level reform efforts.

From Honig's (2003) encouragement to align the efforts of boundary spanning administrators and executive-level administrators, Rorrer et al. (2008) provided a logical progression to the conceptualization of the district as an organized collective. This organized collective is comprised of executive-level leaders, like the superintendent, other central office administrators, the board of trustees and campus-level administrators (Rorrer et al., 2008). Furthermore, this organized collective bound by interrelated roles and responsibilities represents an institutional actor capable of influencing the entire institution and the behaviors of individuals within the organization (Rorrer et al., 2008). As an institutional actor, Rorrer et al. (2008) asserted that a school district can move beyond the efforts of the individuals within the organized collective to a more influential position capable of effecting change based on a value commitment. Rorrer et al. (2008) described the district's value commitment as then becoming the "tipping point" (p. 334) guiding reform decisions. Consequently, "districts have an indispensable role, as institutional actors, in educational reform" (Rorrer et al., 2008, p. 336).

Critical Race Theory

Rorrer et al. (2008) suggested that a critical analysis of a district's institutional role will lead more definitively to reform that serves all children well. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is rooted in Critical Legal Studies, yet is considered interdisciplinary due to its inclusion of concepts from sociology, political science, cultural studies and other liberal arts fields of study (Horsford, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Early proponents of Critical Race Theory, like Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, were frustrated with the slow, incremental reform created through the legal system and sought a way to more

12

effectively and aggressively effect change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998). While Critical Legal Studies exposed the ways in which society reinforced and perpetuated limits on certain parts of the populace (Tate, 1997), this type of legal analysis failed to provide practical methods for interrupting or eradicating these limiting systems and structures once they were identified (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This missing component coupled with the absence of race from the analyses conducted through Critical Legal Studies (Tate, 1997), prompted legal scholars of color to design CRT in the mid-1970s. Delgado and Stefancic (2000) recognized that the true intellectual origins go back even further than the 1970s, yet identified 1989 as the beginning point of CRT's emergence as a self-aware, organizing entity.

Critical Race Theory, although not easily or consistently defined, centers on the premise that race is still an issue within the United States and is a viable topic of scholarly discourse (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez, 2003). Further, CRT has implications for efforts to change educational policy and practice because of its original goals in both the academic and social activist realms (Tate, 1997). Horsford (2010) identified the major tenets of CRT as the permanence of racism, counterstorytelling, the critique of liberalism, interest convergence, and the concept of whiteness as property. In the following sections, these tenets will be described as well as their connection to educational policy and practice.

Permanence of racism. Despite the scientific community's rejection of race as a biological construct, race continues to be a powerful social construct embedded deeply into various systems forming the core of life in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 1998;

Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Haney Lopez, 2000). Ladson-Billings (1998) argued that race is so embedded into the U.S. consciousness, that it is used as a separating characteristic even when it is nonsensical to do so. Tate (1997) described an educational research tradition informed by the belief that whites are genetically superior to people of color. This tradition, called the "inferiority paradigm", has been difficult to eliminate from educational research and policy, and continues to influence the quality of educational experience provided to children of color (Tate, 1997). Despite the realities of the intersections of race with class and gender, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) asserted that these other factors cannot fully explain the differences in educational performance and experience of students of color. Moreover, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggested that despite the presence of many races, racial conversations in the United States have positioned people as either white or non-white. As stated by Haney Lopez (2000), "race remains obvious" (p. 172).

CRT begins by identifying racism as the norm within U.S. society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lopez, 2003). Tate (1997) stated that asking whether racism exists is unnecessary, so educational scholars should instead ask how traditional U.S. values and standards regarded as the status quo limit the educational opportunities for students of color. A strategy associated with the reality of racism is unmasking racism in its various forms (Ladson-Billings, 1998) by examining policies that are considered race-conscious or race-neutral (Horsford, 2010). Failure to meticulously deconstruct the racism inherent in these policies weakens the collective ability to challenge systems created to serve only whites well (Horsford, 2010).

Additionally, this oversight fails to explain how certain policies benefit some while marginalizing others (Lopez, 2003). In fact, Lopez (2003) insisted that claims of racial equality currently existing in the United States are both false and insincere. Racism may be more subtle, rarely demonstrated as an overt act toward an individual, but it still exists within the institutions purported to serve all U.S. citizens (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Counterstorytelling. The second component of CRT is its use of counterstorytelling. These stories or narratives enable the voices of the "Other" to be heard, providing an important nuanced context or a direct challenge to the dominant culture's version of normal (Bernal, 2002; Horsford, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Included in the use of counterstories is the power to name one's own reality (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The personal act of naming reality assumes that reality is actually socially constructed through the exchange of stories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Consequently, telling stories that reflect one's own reality in contrast to the mainstream description can enlarge majoritarian understandings (Lopez, 2003; Tate, 1997). Further, sharing these counterstories enable those typically not included in mainstream narratives to reject the negativity toward difference often found in those versions (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Bernal (2002) cautioned, however, that counterstorytelling is not an effort to replace one alleged truth with a different one. Instead, counterstorytelling within CRT embraces the existence of multiple, sometimes situational truths (Bernal, 2002). Delgado (2000) argued that counterstories can help determine when to reallocate power. Additionally,

CRT recognizes that how people define issues influences the policies employed to address the issues (Horsford, 2010; Tate, 1997).

Counterstorytelling can also connect to the ahistorical review of society supported by CRT. Critical Race Theorists contend that the actual experiences of people of color are more relevant and essential to understanding their access to educational, and other, opportunities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Tate, 1997). Bernal (2002) reported that students of color did not feel recognized or respected as creators and holders of knowledge, but rather felt that their experiences are often considered invalid within academic settings. In contrast, CRT recognizes the significance of their stories and exposes those stories in such a way that could benefit people of color and whites (Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Counterstorytelling thus affirms the student of color while providing the white student or the white teacher a lesson on listening and valuing the messages in these atypical stories (Bernal, 2002). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) said that hearing these messages can then potentially disrupt internalized racism.

Critique of liberalism. The third key element is the critique of liberalism, which challenges neoconservative and liberal ideals that fail to consider race and racism (Horsford, 2010). Because racism is so pervasive, CRT asserts that liberalism's emphasis on reform through legal battles is too slow to effect the desired change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Tate, 1997). As a result, CRT includes the identification of the limits created by civil rights law (Tate, 1997). Moreover, Tate (1997) said liberalism's call for colorblindness actually creates a paradox within the law because an awareness of race is required in order to avoid using it as a determining factor. Lopez

16

(2003) labeled colorblindness as an idealistic goal that ignores the myriad ways that race and racism operate systemically within the United States. Similarly, the false belief in a unity of difference operating among the diverse cultures encompassed by terms such as multiculturalism belies the realities of individual experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Interest convergence. The fourth component of CRT is the idea of interest convergence (Bell, 1980; Horsford, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lopez, 2003). Interest convergence describes the intersection of concerns that benefit both whites and blacks and are, therefore, able to garner the support of white Americans. Accordingly, whites will only encourage or tolerate those racial advances that simultaneously promote their own self-interests (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Bell (1980) argued that white Americans are unwilling to fathom the necessary sacrifice of race-based privilege in order for people of color to access a more equalized experience. Consequently, if white interests diverge from those of people of color, even after prior alignment, the results of previously-won battles can unravel (Bell, 1980).

Whiteness as property. Whiteness as property is the final tenet of CRT (Horsford, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Historically, being white (or even regarded as being white) afforded individuals rights and privileges that were systemically denied to people of color (Horsford, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Bell (2000) asserted that whiteness as property is rooted in the slavery compromises made during the creation of the Constitution. Even poorer whites who did not own slaves were able to accept a smaller role in the political process in exchange for the privilege associated with

17

"owning" their whiteness (Bell, 2000). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) claimed that overlooking the influence of white Americans' notion of property rights may have undermined the potential success of civil rights efforts in the 1950s and 1960s. Critical Race Theorists state that the notion of whiteness as property continues, perpetuating systems that disadvantage people of color (Bell, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Critical Race Theory and Education

As scholars and practitioners contemplate the relevance of CRT to educational practice and policy, they should heed Tate's (1997) admonition to look beyond the "inferiority paradigm" (p. 236) that alleges the innate deficiency of students of color for opportunities to address both civil rights and education. Horsford (2010) also encouraged educators to appreciate how CRT's foregrounding of race enables a closer examination of race-based structures still found within education. Bernal (2002) furthered this admonition with the reminder that CRT's foundations in resistance to racism predisposes CRT proponents toward seeking social justice. Additionally, CRT can include examinations of the intersection of race with one or more other group memberships (or oppressions), like gender, class, or sexual orientation, which can further expand the implications on educational practice and policy (Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Lopez (2003) recognized that the critique of the status quo required by CRT is unfamiliar for many educators; nonetheless, he challenged educators to bravely embrace CRT anyway. Likewise, Ladson-Billings (1998) reminded educators that CRT can both expose racism and lead toward transformative resolutions. The potential of CRT to be

impactful cannot be realized without opposition from beneficiaries of the status quo

(Bell, 1980). Bell originally offered this still-true warning in 1980 as a reality check for

legal and educational scholars, and educators, working to improve school conditions for

students of color. Lopez (2003) concurred yet further emphasized that interrupting the

status quo for the sake of their students is part of the real work that must be done by

educational leaders.

Critical Race Theory is a dynamic area for educational scholars and practitioners

because the realities of race are impacted by the constantly changing society in which

students and their families reside (Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Tate, 1997).

Because notions of race, social justice, and equity can shift, CRT can serve as a unique

tool for addressing the needs of students of color without relying on a deficit belief, or

inferiority paradigm (Tate, 1997); suggesting students of color are inherently less

capable than their white peers (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997). CRT can also work

to expose the Eurocentric perspectives (Bernal, 2002) that have previously informed

educational policy and practice. Further, the use of CRT within education indicates an

awareness of the dual yet contradictory ability of the educational system to both

marginalize and empower its students (Bernal, 2002; Horsford, 2010; Solorzano &

Yosso, 2001), all of whom would benefit from a collaborative effort to seek racial

equality (Bell, 1980).

Equity and Social Justice

Brayboy et al. (2007) defined equity as the (re)distribution of unequal resources

to create schools that have a greater probability of becoming more equal. In other words,

equity becomes the means to achieving equality by providing access to resources that had been inaccessible. This definition of equity aligned with Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson and Koschoreck's (2001) definition of social justice, which added an emphasis on excellence within learning environments considered safe for all students. This definition of social justice clarified that access to resources, or equity, must connect to the same high standard historically afforded only to white students. Equality, defined as the sameness of resources and opportunities, was acknowledged by Brayboy et al. (2007) as the long-term goal of a just society. Nonetheless, that goal has yet to be achieved in the United States. In fact, it is precisely this failure that should motivate educational leaders to pursue equity and social justice (Bates, 2006).

Despite the variety of reasons proposed as possible explanations for the persistent inequality in education, ranging from a lack of parental support to individual student differences, the true culprits are the systemic, structural roadblocks that impede progress toward equality (Brayboy et al., 2007). Differences in individual characteristics simply cannot account for the pervasiveness of disparities in academic achievement among racial groups (Brayboy et al., 2007). Moreover, blaming students for individual differences or focusing too narrowly on any of the other reasons distracts educational leaders and teachers from effecting necessary change (Brown et al., 2011; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008).

Ultimately, if equality continues to be the goal of a U.S. society that purportedly values justice for all, there must be a phase of progress toward that goal characterized by a commitment to the unequal distribution of resources (Brayboy et al., 2007). The

populations that have been underserved by the current system's ineffective commitment to equality must have an opportunity to receive more and different resources in order to level the playing field (Bates, 2006; Brayboy et al., 2007; Delpit, 1988). Brayboy et al. (2007) clarified that this redirected focus on equity does not mean that new recipients of more resources will receive more than their fair share. The shift to an equity focus also includes a push for a truer sense of fairness demonstrated by the district as an institutional actor insisting that educators provide students of color with the unwritten rules and expectations hidden in the current educational system (Delpit, 1988). Without these explicit guidelines, underserved students will continue to be disadvantaged by a system that was not designed to include their diverse backgrounds, even if educators methodically work to change the system (Delpit, 1988).

Brayboy et al. (2007) suggested that assimilation, defined as the mandate for those who are not in power to adopt the practices and beliefs of those who are in power, should no longer serve as the prerequisite for academic success. School norms influenced by assimilationist policies disregard the right to self-determination for members of marginalized groups (Brayboy et al., 2007). Further, assimilative practices allow the unique abilities and needs of individuals to be overlooked (Bates, 2006), which seems to be in contrast with the foundational U.S. ethic of individualism. Members of marginalized groups can make the independent decision to accommodate by adopting particular practices and values considered personally beneficial as a response to assimilation (Brayboy et al., 2007). Brayboy et al. (2007) warned, however, that accommodation relieves the pressure for those in power to actually change. Further, the

21

continuing relevance of race within U.S. society means that those who physically look different from those in power can never fully assimilate (Brayboy et al., 2007). Consequently, educational leaders, as part of the organized collective, must challenge inequities previously considered norms within the educational system that fail to contribute to the academic success of all students (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005).

An examination of the years following the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision illustrates how equality became confused with equity (Brayboy et al., 2007). The Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) supported the expectation that equality could be achieved by desegregating schools because students would attend the same schools and share the same materials. The decision did not consider the potential resistance from whites, nor the cumulative effects of previous inequalities. Despite legal mandates to integrate, white students have continued to receive more and better resources than students of color (Brayboy et al., 2007). As a result, disparities in academic achievement continue to persist between white students and students of color (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). This persistent inequality signifies that the push for equity and social justice must continue (Skrla et al., 2004).

Inequalities are present in multiple areas of the educational system, including curriculum, instruction, assessment, and the distribution of resources (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The systemic racism embedded in these areas is often masked by the U.S. belief in individualism or meritocracy (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Again, because the belief is that everyone has equal access to educational opportunities, anyone who falls short is

believed to have failed as a result of his/her own personal deficiencies (Bates, 2006;

Ladson-Billings, 1998). Gallagher (2003) argued that meritocracy obscures institutional

realities that marginalize students of colors while maintaining privilege for white

students. Some teachers attempting to avoid marginalizing their students of color rely on

colorblind approaches, unintentionally perpetuating marginalization (Brayboy et al.,

2007).

　　　Colorblindness, as defined by Brayboy et al. (2007), is the unwillingness or

inability to discuss race, in the hope that doing so will emphasize the shared humanity

and equality of all. Gotanda (2000) calls colorblindness a technique that requires an

individual to ignore what one has already noticed. Nonrecognition, therefore, requires

one to first acknowledge the existence of race, and then attempt to disregard the social

construction and implications of race which is impossible to do in daily life (Gotanda,

2000). Linked to this idea is the assertion that those with power or privilege are

typically the least likely to acknowledge the existence of race or their own privilege

(Delpit, 1988; Wildman & Davis, 2000). Ignoring the realities of race and its impact on

education undermines the efforts of well-meaning educators seeking to improve the

academic futures of their students of color (Delpit, 1988). Further, this denial allows

those in charge to maintain dominance by redirecting the conversation to false hopes of

meritocracy or colorblindness (Brayboy et al., 2007; Gotanda, 2000). As a result,

Wildman and Davis (2000) insisted on the enforced visibility of privilege in reform

efforts.

In order to implement educational practices that break free from the negative implications of meritocracy or colorblind philosophies, teachers must be given knowledge and skills that lead toward equity and social justice (Brayboy et al., 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Bates (2006) suggested that one major component of this new skillset is communication across differences. Opportunities to participate in activities that enhance proficiency with cross-cultural communication must be included in the routine work of schools (Bates, 2006; Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). This could lead to the respectful recognition of the student as a fellow expert within the classroom, with both student and teacher seen as authorities regarding their personal founts of knowledge (Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). More fundamentally, educators must be attentive to race and remain conscious of how it impacts education (Brayboy et al., 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). Likewise, educators must be aware of the power they wield in the current system even if they individually do not ascribe to the status quo (Delpit, 1988) that fails to serve all students equitably.

Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) argued that educational scholars and the administrators they create in their preparation programs must engage in an ongoing critique of the educational system by seriously considering how issues of race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, disability and other types of difference impact teaching and learning. This continuous critique will help move educators from an awareness of inequities to transformative action (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). Furthermore, Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) asserted that simply protecting students from discrimination is insufficient; educational leaders must actively work to change the

structures and processes that advantage some students while disadvantaging others because these leaders are part of the district's role as an institutional actor.

The transformative, or "radical action" (p. 209), encouraged by Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) has to go beyond monitoring performance gaps among student groups on standardized tests. While this is valuable data, the simple act of disaggregation will not result in underserved students receiving an improved education (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). Additionally, McKenzie and Scheurich (2008) found that some teachers' perceptions of standardized tests and accountability systems as a means of external control can prevent them from supporting change efforts. Some teachers view any suggestion to change their practice in order to improve student performance as a negative, personalized attack (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008). Therefore, educational leaders must develop expertise in instruction and critical analysis and be able to effectively guide staff members toward a collective sense of responsibility for the academic success of all students (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; McKenzie and Scheurich, 2008; Skrla et al., 2004). More specifically, Brown et al. (2011) suggested that school leaders must model teamwork, balance, a strong sense of purpose and an insistence on high standards in order to achieve equity and social justice.

According to Skrla et al. (2001), school and district leaders can model teamwork and high standards within the current historical moment by working in practical ways with existing policy structures, such as using mandated accountability measures to monitor student performance. Skrla et al. (2001) also called for radical action,

25

emphasizing that context-specific, real-world relevance must infuse social justice efforts in schools. Beyond the efforts of lone administrators leading separate campuses, Skrla et al. (2001) insisted that widespread, large-scale policies must be implemented. Whereas Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) viewed narrow monitoring of standardized testing performance as potentially distracting from more comprehensive reform efforts, Skrla et al. (2001) and Skrla et al., (2004) saw helpful possibilities for accountability systems including these tests to create the broad impact necessary for social justice to be accomplished. This hope is based in part on the requirement within many of these systems to at least raise the minimum standard for performance for students of color to the same level that white students have historically experienced (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Skrla et al., 2001; Skrla et al., 2004). Admittedly, this standard does not meet the long-term goal of academic excellence for all students, and it may be reminiscent of failed attempts at equality (Brayboy et al. 2007); however, Skrla et al. (2001) defended the creation of a uniform baseline as an important step toward the long-term goal.

To further support the quest for equity and social justice, Skrla et al. (2004) proposed the use of equity audits that are different from the curriculum, civil rights or state accountability audits historically described in the literature. These re-conceptionalized equity audits enable educators to view discrete data in a clear, concise way that reveals levels of equity or inequity across a variety of indicators, such as teacher quality, program participation and student achievement (Skrla et al., 2004). The objective of equity audits as designed by Skrla et al. (2004) is to efficiently present data so that educators can more easily progress to finding solutions that result in more equity.

Skrla et al.'s (2001) consideration of test-based accountability systems as helpful in achieving equity led to Skrla et al.'s (2004) counter-intuitive conclusion that accountability is just one part of a larger, highly complex network that impacts the push for equity. Consequently, a more practical tool like the equity audit is necessary to analyze multiple factors within the U.S. educational system (Skrla et al., 2004). As Wildman and Davis (2000) noted, justice requires examining the whole person and, by extension the whole educational system, within a social context.

Professional Development

Once particular factors or aspects of the social context impacting student performance have been made visible, school districts can use professional development as a tool to effect change (Firestone, Mangin, Martinez & Polovsky, 2005; Scribner, 1999). Race-based professional development resides under many names - culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education, antiracist education, diversity training, and teaching for social justice were just a few ways mentioned in the literature. Grouped together, these names conceptualize efforts to provide educators with explicit knowledge and skills to serve students who are likely different from them in one or more fundamentally important ways. While there are significant differences among the various types of race-based professional development, they share a common focus on improving instructional effectiveness through respectful, mindful relationship building between teachers and students.

Race-based professional development is similar to all other types of professional development since the ultimate goal is increased student achievement. In order for this

goal to be attained, educators must accept the demographic reality of 21st century schools and the persistent differences in achievement that exist between students of color and white students. Through the use of intentional, comprehensive, long-term methods, teachers and administrators may start addressing these realities grounded in the necessity of doing more than just making their students feel good about themselves; they must enable students of color to achieve academically (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003).

Teachers in today's schools are asked to teach students who are increasingly likely to be racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically different from themselves (Taylor & Sobel, 2003). The likelihood of teaching cross-culturally is especially true for beginning teachers (Taylor & Sobel, 2003) who are often white and from middle-class backgrounds yet placed in schools that have large populations of students of color and/or students of high poverty (Kose & Lim, 2010). Sharing data from a national report, Kose & Lim (2010) said that 83% of teachers are white. Moreover, Taylor & Sobel (2003) found that numerous teachers considered themselves underprepared to handle diversity. National trends are seen in Texas where a teaching staff comprised mostly of white, female teachers with fewer than five years of experience is responsible for a student population that is comprised mostly of students of color (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

Despite this reality and evidence of disproportionately poor performance among a growing population of students of color, Gay (2002) said that professional programs are still reluctant to provide needed training. Adler (2011) suggested that this reluctance could be happening in an effort to avoid offending any students who might feel awkward

about discussing race. Moreover, Delpit (1991) alleged that what these programs provide instead are stereotypes leading teachers to believe that students of color have deficits. For instance, Delpit (1991) described research that showed that African-American girls are rewarded for displaying nurturing behaviors reminiscent of the mammy stereotype and not rewarded like their white peers for academic proficiency. As researchers (Delpit, 1991; Wiggan 2007) have noted, the cultural mismatch between teachers and students creates yet another challenge to effective instruction, especially since the relationship between teacher and student is critical to establishing a firm foundation for teaching and learning (Adler, 2011).

Tatum's (2004) observation that teachers did not expect academic excellence from their African American students, and were indeed surprised by it, reveals an important discrepancy between teacher expectations for white students and for those of color. As an example, Tatum (2004) mentioned the amazement expressed by white nuns regarding an African American female student whose academic giftedness failed to match their preconceived notions of African American student ability. Chavous et al. (2003) further suggested that differences in academic beliefs, and by extension in achievement, are influenced by various contextual factors, like peers, school experiences and family beliefs. Regardless, Ladson-Billings (2006) cautioned that focusing too narrowly on the achievement gap – and ignoring teacher belief systems - can lead to short-term solutions that do not address underlying inequities, especially since no consistent explanation for the achievement gap exists.

Whether performance on standardized tests - or some other measure or definition of achievement - is used, most agree that academic excellence for all students is a required component of equity (Delpit, 1991; Kose, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (2006) even interpreted the historical denial of access to quality education as a "moral debt" (p. 8) to students of color. Schools that pursue equity and social justice recognize that because strong instruction is the critical determinant of achievement (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003), strong professional development that directly addresses diversity is necessary (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Wiggan, 2007). Wiggan (2007) went even further by suggesting that increasing the quality of instruction may hold the best hope of eliminating the achievement gap.

Most teachers will require some kind of organized learning, or professional development, in order to improve the quality of their teaching and seek social justice within schools (Delpit, 1991). Kose & Lim (2010) cautioned facilitators of professional development to first determine individual teacher belief systems and experiences in order to determine readiness for organized learning that addresses social justice. This is of special importance because it is possible to mistake correlation with causality when looking at achievement scores or the learning styles research for students of color (Banks et al., 2001; Wiggan, 2007). Additionally, the National Staff Development Council ("NSDC Policy Points," 2009) stated that student achievement and instructional practice must be impacted in order for an activity or encounter to be labeled professional development. Valuable professional development is measured by its effect on many

teachers and students and is broad, sustained, and rigorous (National Staff Development Council, 2009).

Defining effective professional development in general does not automatically lead to an understanding of how effective race-based professional development creates teachers skilled in managing issues of diversity. Due to the absence of an accepted definition for a diversity-prepared teacher, Pollock, Deckman, Mira & Shalaby (2010) created one. Their definition stated that, when engaging issues of race, teachers prepared for diversity intentionally reflect on how their daily actions might counter racial inequality and racist notions about those different from themselves (Pollock et al., 2010). This reflection becomes the practice of "everyday antiracism" (Pollock et al., 2010, p. 212) which the authors ultimately equated to good teaching practices that challenge racism within the school system. Consequently, this is simply what good teachers do; they use a variety of teaching strategies and interaction styles in order to respond to their students' needs while meeting curriculum goals (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

As Gay (2002) pointed out, culture's influence on student and educator attitudes, values, and behaviors regarding teaching and learning mandates the inclusion of culture in any proposed resolution of achievement differences. Delpit (1991) said that the goal is not to create an idyllic learning situation that culturally matches every race or ethnic group; rather, the goal is to use cultural knowledge as a tool to design appropriate teaching and learning for students of color.

Likewise, learning how to use cultural knowledge as a tool requires deliberate, explicit professional development activities (Kose & Lim, 2010). Typical efforts to provide race-related professional development are often viewed as too vague to be of any practical use causing teachers to wonder what they can actually do (Pollock et al., 2010). According to Pollock et al. (2010), teachers express this confusion through three tensions: searching for specific actions they can take in their classrooms, doubting the potential impact of their actions on societal issues related to race, and questioning their individual willingness to develop into the kind of educator who participates fully in difficult race-based conversations. Accordingly, preservice and in-service educators are advised to avoid shallow and simplistic presentations in favor of deeper, more purposeful and complex approaches to diversity instruction (Kose, 2007; Lee-Thomas, 2008; Pollock et al., 2010; Taylor & Sobel, 2003). Gay (2002) said that explicit knowledge about cultural diversity is necessary, and that there is a place for it within every content area. Schniedewind (2005) advocated engaging teachers in an experientially-based program that gives them opportunities to apply daily what they are learning to their school contexts thereby enabling them to see that this type of caring instruction is action-oriented (Gay, 2002). Similarly, Taylor & Sobel (2003) found that preservice teachers wanted their cultural diversity training to provide more in terms of exposure to and discussions of real-life cross-cultural issues.

Speaking generally, Darling-Hammond (1999) found that states that did not invest in improving teacher education, whether pre-service or in-service, did not see significant progress in raising student achievement, regardless of other reform efforts.

She advised states to pay closer attention to preparing the teachers they hire and retain because well-prepared teachers can have a stronger influence on student achievement than background factors such as poverty, race/ethnicity, or language (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Informed teachers can help support students during the racial identity process (Tatum, 2004) by applying their developing understandings to their classrooms. This generates an unending cycle of strengthening student engagement while increasing teacher willingness to engage students further (Kose, 2007; Schniedewind, 2005). Critical reflection within a supportive atmosphere enables teachers to better understand the nuances of white privilege found within the educational system and to lead their students of all races in similar discussions (Schniedewind, 2005).

Without knowledge concerning diverse achievement patterns, teachers will not be equipped to promote social justice and may instead perpetuate notions of race-based deficiencies that prevent students of color from reaching their true achievement potential (Delpit, 1991). Both students of color and white students suffer because of these negative stereotypes that insinuate the marginality of non-white groups (Banks et al., 2001; Delpit, 1991; Gay, 2002). Delpit (1991) also said that seemingly positive stereotypes, such as Asian students being more skilled in math, can be detrimental as well. Consequently, Schniedewind (2005) emphasized the importance of teachers demonstrating the belief that their students' lives matter as much as subject content in school. Delpit (1991) argued that a teacher, who claims to not see color, does not see children in reality. This invisibility becomes internalized by students and negates efforts to improve performance (Delpit, 1991).

With knowledge about diverse achievement patterns, comes the creation of a blameless school environment and energized teaching force ready to chip away at systemic manifestations of racial injustice (Schniedewind, 2005). Using cultural validation and strength, teachers will be able to guide their students to academic success (Banks et al., 2001; Gay, 2002). Knowing more about the cultures of their students will also allow teachers to make more informed educational decisions and reduce the likelihood of inappropriately reacting to a difference demonstrated in the school environment (Banks et al., 2001; Delpit, 1991). Yet, educational leaders and commentators must remember that teachers can only be held accountable for ensuring academic success for all of their students if they have been effectively taught to do so (Delpit, 1991; Gay, 2002).

In general, successful professional development can lead to a collective commitment and sense of responsibility toward all students, not just the few in each teacher's individual classroom (National Staff Development Council, 2009). Collective commitment and responsibility are desired outcomes of race-based professional development (Adler, 2011). Teachers who participate in race-based professional development are more likely to share their new awareness with peers and supervisors, to search for unique ways to connect with the community, to seek additional knowledge about their own personal development, and to advocate for students of color to receive a more thorough education (Adler, 2011; Chavous et al., 2003; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Taylor & Sobel, 2003). As seen in a study conducted by Lawrence & Tatum (1997), teachers' heightened awareness of race as a social construct and of racism as harmful to

themselves and to their students enabled these educators to do more than just celebrate a few holidays, sample foods from other cultures or make minor changes to the curriculum. Eventually, this heightened awareness could translate into a willingness to confront inequities within schools directed at other aspects of diversity (Pollock et al., 2010). Adequately preparing teachers to handle race-related issues as manifested in schools could also lead to longer, more sustainable careers in education (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). Also, teachers may more strongly identify with the profession of teaching and see their work as a chance to give back to the community (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The results of an effective race-based professional development program are numerous and could lead to far-reaching social change. The stronger, more authentic relationships that teachers build with their students should positively impact student achievement. The success of these improved relationships could then lead to stronger connections with parents and community members. By expanding their scope, teachers who have become well-versed in multiple aspects of diversity could also tackle inequity as it relates to language, gender, sexual orientation and other differences. Equally valuable to continuing social progress would be the benefit of having well-trained, committed professionals who stayed in education for entire careers rather than just a few years (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). Cumulatively, these results may seem idealistic and unattainable. This review of literature suggests that this pessimistic view only exists because sustained, thoughtful, and honest race-based professional development has yet to be consistently implemented. Scribner (1999) further countered

35

the pessimistic viewpoint by advocating for the use of professional development as reform. Firestone et al. (2005) agreed that professional development is an important path toward effecting change in instruction.

Conclusion

Rorrer et al. (2008) argued that their framework centered on viewing the district as an institutional actor provides the necessary "proactive redundancy" (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p. 112) to handle the complexity of equity-driven reform. Proactive redundancy refers to the intentional, pre-planned overlapping of multiple systems collectively focused on ensuring the academic achievement of all students (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). For a district serving as an institutional actor, multiple components of the central office, including the superintendent, various central office administrators, campus leaders, and the school board, must coordinate their efforts to provide equity for all students. This shift away from a focus on equality toward a focus on equity means that the United States' reliance on the notion of meritocracy will be disrupted (Bates, 2006; Brayboy et al., 2007). More specifically, a school district committing to equity for all students should thoughtfully consider the tipping point influences of district leadership, CRT, social justice and professional development as they relate to the district's role as an institutional actor (Rorrer et al., 2008).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research is concerned with uncovering meanings associated with a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). Thus, this perspective nicely aligned with my interest in understanding what it means for a school district to commit to equity. A qualitative approach more readily connected me to the nuances behind responses because I could assume the role of participant observer (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Schwandt, 2007). From this vantage point, additional detail was gleaned than would be possible from a more distant quantitative perspective. In this way, I was able to collaborate with the participants (Cresswell, 2007). Additionally, the main sources of data for qualitative research – interviews, observations, and document analysis - provided the level of detail that thoroughly described the situation being studied, especially since data analysis occurred as data were collected allowing adjustments to be made throughout the research process (Merriam, 2002; Stake, 1995).

Qualitative research also acknowledges the subjectivity inherent in conducting research. The researcher is enabled, through the practice of reflexivity, to openly include personal values and interpretations as part of the research process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cresswell, 2007). Overall, the combined emphasis on this personal use of the researcher as a tool to develop understanding and an inductive strategy (Merriam, 2002) established qualitative research as the appropriate approach for my research topic.

Research Design: Case Study

Within the qualitative tradition, a case study approach enabled an investigation of

this phenomenon while observing the people directly involved in making this value

commitment. A case study allowed the opportunity to reveal aspects of this commitment

that represented both an important milestone in a district's evolving efforts to address the

needs of an increasingly diverse student body and the beginning of an ongoing,

potentially contentious series of decisions impacting all district stakeholders. As Stake

(1995) asserted, a case study allows for the observation of how an entity struggles and

copes with inevitable constraints and problems.

An observational case study model (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) was specifically

selected in order to focus on the specific group of people comprising the organized

collective. My study focused on the group of district administrators, campus principals,

and board members "who interact, who identify with each other, and who share

expectations about each others' behavior" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 61).

Case study reporting is not simply storytelling, although some stories may be

used (Stake, 1995). The possible inclusion of stories was considered as needed to clarify

the real-life context (Schwandt, 2007) of the district's decision to commit to equity. The

goal was to adhere to Bogdan and Biklen's (2007) notion of the case study as an

opportunity to gain understanding by casting a wide net that ultimately retains essential

elements of the case being studied.

Site. Bluebonnet ISD, a large suburban public school district in the Central

Texas area was used as the focus of the case study. Central Texas is home to a large state

university in addition to several smaller colleges and universities. Due to expansions or

relocations of major technology corporations, this area has sustained rapid growth in the

capital city and all surrounding towns. As a result, the selected school district reflects a

racial, ethnic, and language diversity that was also reflected in neighboring districts.

More recently, the percentage of students with economic disadvantages increased. In

2010-2011, Bluebonnet ISD had a student population comprised of mostly students of

color and more than half of district students were considered economically

disadvantaged as shown in Table 1. Ten years prior, the student population consisted of

a white majority with a significantly smaller portion considered economically

disadvantaged.

Table 1

Bluebonnet ISD Student Population Demographics

| | School Year | | | |
Group	2000-2001	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
African-American	17%	19%	19%	18%
Hispanic	24%	43%	44%	44%
White	50%	25%	25%	24%
Asian	7%	7%	7%	7%
Economically Disadvantaged	30%	51%	52%	52%
Limited English Proficient	7%	18%	18%	n/a
English Language Learner	n/a	n/a	n/a	19%
Total Number of Students	14,545	22,657	22,987	23,302

Note. Beginning in 2012-2013, Texas switched category titles from Limited English Proficient to English

Language Learner.

Participants. As described by Rorrer et al (2008), a school district as an institutional actor involves the coordinated effort of central office administrators, campus principals, and school board members. Accordingly, interviews with 14 representatives[1] from all of these roles served as the core of the case study. Interviewees were selected based on their district leadership position, beginning with the highest executive level leaders including the superintendent, deputy superintendent, assistant superintendents, and school board president. The social studies coordinator who jointly shared responsibility with the researcher for facilitating district diversity efforts was also immediately identified as a necessary participant. To identify possible participants who could represent roles with multiple members, a snowball technique was used by consulting these first participants. In this way, five principals, another central office administrator, and an additional school board member were selected to participate.

An unexpected additional level of objectivity was gained as a result of relatively recent personnel changes in the selected district. Both the superintendent and deputy superintendent who initiated the district's value commitment to equity were since employed by other districts. Consequently, they may have been able to reflect on the decision-making process and implementation without concern of how their reflections could have been interpreted by the board members who once supervised them.

Data collection. One of the major characteristics of qualitative research is the permission granted to the researcher to seize "opportunities to learn the unexpected" (Stake, 1995, p. 29). Correspondingly, this case study included procedures designed to

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[1] See Chapter Four for participant profiles or Appendix B for a descriptive list.

maximize opportunities to gain a comprehensive understanding of the district's role as an institutional actor during a commitment to equity. As Stake (1999) suggested "many of these early impressions will later be refined or replaced, but the pool of data includes the earliest of observations" (p. 49). Thus, even before the more intentional data collection strategies of individual interviews, document analysis, and observations were employed, initial impressions were formed as I became oriented to the selected research site. As advised by Stake (1999), "a connoisseur's appetite for the best persons, places, and occasions" (p. 56) was utilized in order to reveal data that lead to greater understanding.

  Individual interviews. Because the case study focused on the organized collective that enables the district to operate as an institutional actor, fourteen campus and district leaders were individually interviewed once. These individual interviews uncovered the unique experiences and personal stories that each member of the organized collective had to share (Stake, 1995). In addition, efforts to gain perspectives from multiple viewpoints were undertaken, including ensuring participant representation from various constituencies, particularly school personnel of color.

  The questions for the interviews[2] were designed to elicit specific information regarding the district's decision because an interview is an intentional conversation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A semi-structured format described by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) allowed interviewees to "shape the content" (p. 104). While I accurately expected these intentional conversations to be pleasant, my main goal was to serve as the

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[2] The interview protocol may be found in Appendix A.

repository for the descriptions and explanations offered by the interviewees (Stake, 1995).

Each interview was conducted at a time and location of the participant's choosing. Interviews ranged from twenty-five minutes to sixty-five minutes in duration. In addition to audio recording of every interview, participant responses were written into field notes. While a combination of exact quotes and paraphrases, these notes proved invaluable whenever technology failed. Immediately after each interview, journal-like entries detailing researcher impressions were also added to the field notes. These impressions included descriptions of interview location, nonverbal actions, and participant demeanor that later helped contextualize verbal responses and summative labels. Summative labels enabled the succinct characterization of each participant.[3]

Recordings of the interviews were professionally transcribed. The transcriptions along with other collected data were then reviewed to create codes aligning with the research questions. Codes were refined in a cycle of review to ensure comprehensive analysis. Results of this analysis will be presented in chapter four as themes that emerged in pursuit of responses to the research questions.

Document analysis. In addition to conducting semi-structured interviews with the aforementioned leaders, documents created or authorized by one or more members of this group of leaders served as evidence of their efforts. Although some participants continue to work as leaders in the district, all were encouraged to frame their answers within the context of the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and/or 2012-2013 school years.

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[3] See participant profiles in Chapter IV

Limiting the timeline enabled participants to reflect on actions taken during a shared time in the district. Conversely, this reflection-oriented time period minimized the relevance of current events, lessening the appropriateness of including 2013-2014 observations as originally planned. As counter-balance, observation notes from the targeted school years paired with the reflections shared during interviews allowed a glimpse into the district's actions.

Observation. Observations of school board meetings and leadership team meetings were initially proposed to further understanding. Stake (1995) said that researchers can "expect to become familiar with an entity by observing how it struggles against constraints, copes with problems" (p. 16). Accordingly, this case study planned to include observations of the organized collective constituting the district as an institutional actor in situations when members were most likely to convey the district's commitment to equity. Initial suggestions for observations included community meetings or forums and board meetings. The emphasis on listening to community stakeholders at public forums could unveil evidence of any struggles or success with the district's commitment (Stake, 1995). Likewise, the formality of school board meetings could have revealed specific instances of the district's influence as an institutional actor. These suggested observation settings heeded Stake's (1995) reminder that "major efforts to develop understanding from direct interpretation are more likely to succeed with early identification of situations in which the issues become apparent" (p. 29).

Although Stake (1995) said that observations were better at data-gathering than interviews, he acknowledged that insufficient time usually prevented their sole reliance.

In this case study, observations were eventually de-emphasized because of the refined focus on past actions rather than current practice.

Data analysis. Stake (1995) cautioned that in qualitative research there is not any particular moment when data analysis, or data gathering, actually begins. Instead, he said, "all researchers have great privilege and obligation: the privilege to pay attention to what they consider worthy of attention and the obligation to make conclusions drawn from those choices meaningful to colleagues and clients" (p. 49). The emphasis was on reconstructing the meaning conveyed by the respondents, rather than on exact transcription of their words (Stake, 1995). This search for meaning became a search for patterns and consistency, also known as correspondence among the data (Stake, 1995).

Once the fourteen interviews were professionally transcribed, a variation of a constant comparative method (Schwandt, 2007) was employed to identify themes. To ensure fidelity to the stated research questions, these themes were then refined to incorporate Rorrer et al's (2008) description of an institutional actor and CRT tenets. Representative quotes were selected to illustrate each theme within its named section in chapter four. Additionally, the frequency of responses given by one or more of the interviewees was reported to contextualize certain viewpoints.

As recommended by Rorrer et al. (2008), a critical analysis using the tenets of CRT was employed to glean additional understanding of the district as an institutional actor enacting the commitment to equity. The tenet of whiteness as property includes the perception of an exclusive entitlement to the best educational options reserved for White students. Examining the district's actions from this lens exposed how widespread the

implementation actually was and the real level of commitment to altering this skewed

reality.

Similarly, the district's decision to commit to equity could be interpreted as a

demonstration of interest convergence. So, rather than the decision representing a value

judgment to serve all students well, it could be more realistically seen as the district's

acceptance that its growing Latino and Black populations cannot be ignored if the

district wishes to maintain its reputation as a high-quality district with superior rates of

student achievement. The majority Anglo orientation of the "organized collective"

(Rorrer, et.al, 2008) leading this reform effort could be seemingly open to aligning their

quest for continued excellence with the needs of a community that no longer looks or

sounds like they do. Consequently, the incremental change previously supported might

not be considered the surest route to increasing student achievement for all students.

Additionally, the critique of liberalism further exposed the embedded philosophy of

color-blindness within the district's implementation, and within resistance to the

implementation.

In gathering accurate accounts from interviewees, care was taken to also gather

perspectives from personnel of color as possible counter-stories to the hegemonic

narrative (Delgado, 2000; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2001). Finally, collected data was

analyzed for influences indicating the permanence of racism and whether this CRT tenet

was explicitly considered during the decision-making or implementation process. To

conduct this CRT-specific analysis, definitions and explanatory examples from the

literature cited in chapter two were used as standards. Collected data were then

compared to these standards to determine relative correspondence. Essentially, researcher ability to convincingly argue this relative correspondence determined whether selected data were reported within the CRT section of chapter four.

Trustworthiness. Qualitative researchers "have ethical obligations to minimize misrepresentation and misunderstanding" (Stake, 1995, p. 109) which leads to consideration of trustworthiness. Validity, as a contributing factor to the trustworthiness of qualitative research, is defined as a test of the alignment between the research findings and the participants' assessment of their own reality (Cresswell & Miller, 2000; Schwandt, 2007).Cresswell and Miller (2000) argued that choice of validity procedures, alternately considered a subset or correlate of trustworthiness (Schwandt, 2007), is determined by the researcher's chosen lens and paradigm assumptions. The lens of the researcher, study participants, or of external consumers can influence the choice of validation strategy, as can the use of a postpositivist, constructivist, or critical paradigm (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Cresswell and Miller (2000) further emphasized that validity specifically references the conclusions drawn from the data, not the data.

In order to maximize the legitimacy of the impressions gained through observation and individual interviews, member checks were used (Stake, 1999). The process of member checking required the researcher to operate from the lens of the study participants to determine whether themes made sense, whether sufficient evidence was used to develop those themes, and whether the overall case was realistic (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). Since the belief that reality is socially constructed by participant perceptions forms the foundation of qualitative research, verifying the accuracy of final

46

accounts with participants was an important lens for determining validity (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). Schwandt (2007) cautioned, however, that member checking might just be another way of generating data, thus making it more of an ethical act than a true test of validity. Regardless, the use of member checking in my study endeavored to both respect the contributions of the participants while ensuring accuracy of the final account.

Consequently, every interview included a review of that participant's responses. Sometimes, the participant would ask to revisit an earlier response or I would repeat a response before moving on to the next interview question. Most of the time, member checking took the form of recapping major conclusions at the end of the interview. In this way, participants were able to verify that their responses accurately conveyed their desired contribution to the collective voice of educational leadership in Bluebonnet ISD.

Additionally, triangulation across interviewees and across methods (interviews and document review) was used to establish themes (Cresswell & Miller, 2000; Schwandt, 2007). In using this strategy, care was taken to precisely describe the different data collection steps taken to avoid any confusion that may be caused by the use of the term *triangulation* (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Triangulation began by correlating field notes with transcripts, enabling a more comprehensive picture to form. The transcripts and field notes were then compared to documents created, referenced, or authorized by participants. Pulling together observations of interviewees with their spoken and written words authenticated the themes reported in chapter four.

Throughout every phase of the case study, peer debriefing was used to refine data collection strategies, strengthen analysis, and pinpoint conclusions. As defined by Schwandt (2007), engaging in peer debriefing helped ensure dependability and validation of the gathered data. Peer debriefing was most often conducted with the supervising researcher who is especially experienced in qualitative research. A few times, peer debriefing occurred with current practitioners working in K-12 public schools who understood the nuances of working in that environment.

Finally, by disclosing personal assumptions, biases, and beliefs during ongoing reflexive practice while conducting the study, I strove to strengthen validity (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). This validity procedure uses the lens of the researcher while being "clearly positioned within the critical paradigm where individuals reflect on the social, cultural, and historical forces that shaped their interpretation" (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). To this end, the journal entries recorded within my field notes helped clarify collected data without inappropriately projecting my personal opinions. As the researcher, I was able to sift through the genuine thoughts and reactions recorded in the field notes to identify those themes that resonated with actual data collected from participants.

Positionality. While no longer directly employed by the school district, I conducted this study similar to a problem of practice. My interest was prompted by personal experience as a member of the administrative ranks comprising the possible organized collective. During my twenty-two year career in Bluebonnet ISD, I had been a principal and central office administrator, so I could relate to the theoretical and practical

considerations of a district serving as an institutional actor. Since my duties were directly related to implementation support during the years covered by the study, I had to maintain a level of objectivity while seeking to comprehensively understand how the district's decision was executed. As Yin (2009) stated, I had to guard against advocacy that goes against good research practice, so I conducted a self-interview after all other interviews were finished. The purpose of the self-interview was to disclose my thoughts in the same way I asked interviewees. My responses were not combined with those of the fourteen participants. Instead, they were used as the springboard for discussion of implications and recommendations included in chapter five. Qualitative research's general recognition that subjectivity cannot be cleanly divorced from any research guided my efforts to minimize any excessively personal mark that could have biased my study. As Stake (1999) said, my goal was to record what happened, not to recreate it.

Assumptions. My personal knowledge of Bluebonnet ISD triggered three assumptions before any data were collected. These assumptions were acknowledged through the use of reflexive practice. Results from actual data collection alternately confirmed and debunked my assumptions, which will be discussed fully in chapter four.

Most important to the premise of the study was my assumption that institutional actor status would be inherently present. Rorrer et al's (2008) conceptualization reported in scholarly literature may have been unknown to BISD practitioners; however, the reasonableness of the model amplified pre-study confidence in its existence in the district.

49

The five major tenets of CRT – permanence of racism, counterstorytelling, critique of liberalism, interest convergence, and whiteness as property – formed an integral part of this case study. Nonetheless, my second assumption prior to the study was that counterstorytelling would not emerge as a distinct aspect because this initial survey already sought to include multiple voices from the members of the organized collective facilitating the commitment to equity. I assumed that the participation of administrators of color would ensure the inclusion of stories that countered the existence of the status quo.

My third assumption even more directly stemmed from personal observations and experiences from my long tenure in Bluebonnet ISD. Because I had worked under the leadership of three different superintendents, including Hoya, I assumed that inconsistency caused by administrator mobility would lessen the impact of district efforts.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Review of Research Aims and Study Design

The clarity of this qualitative case study hinged on an understanding of district leaders as members of an organized collective, collaboratively responsible for effecting change (Rorrer et al., 2008). Likewise, the research questions sought to understand whether and how a commitment to the value of equity was demonstrated. Finally, the use of the CRT lens required analysis of how the organized collective sought to display the value commitment while considering the unique needs and perspectives of race. Using CRT's lens also mandated an examination of whether and how district leaders included the voices of administrators of color during the decision-making and implementation process.

Included on the list of fourteen interviewees were the superintendent and deputy superintendent who spearheaded the decision-making process for committing to equity[4]. Also, at least one principal representing each grade category (elementary, middle, and high school), two board members, and the social studies coordinator who served as co-facilitator for the district's diversity initiatives were interviewed. Other past and present central office staff members who contributed to operationalizing the commitment to equity were interviewed based on suggestions by initial interviewees.

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[4] See Appendix B for descriptive list of all fourteen interviewees.

Participants represented a highly veteran group of leaders with all having at least 19 years of experience in education. Only six of the fourteen interviewees had fewer than ten years of experience in Bluebonnet ISD; however, all of them had held other positions in the district prior to assuming their respective assignments during the time period studied. Both board members had taught in Bluebonnet ISD, while the others had taught and/or held other leadership positions before ascending to the leadership roles included in the case study.

Documents created by these leaders, or at their direction, also provided insight as to how the district operationalized its commitment to equity. Minutes of board meetings, professional development schedules and handouts, and campus improvement plans helped illuminate how the district's decision filtered throughout the district. Other documents posted online, such as the staff handbook, curriculum guides, and board policy were reviewed as well. These documents served as adequate substitutes for those situations or areas that could not be observed directly (Stake, 1995).

Participant Profiles

Based on the stated research aims, the interviews provided the bulk of collected data, serving as the catalyst for theme identification. Beyond the basic descriptors summarized in Appendix B, the following participant profiles enhance characterization of each leader.

Kevin Hoya. My first interview was with the former superintendent of Bluebonnet ISD, Kevin Hoya, who had just returned to his former district as superintendent less than a year prior to the interview. As an African American male

whose educational leadership experience came from central office rather than a classroom, he credited Bluebonnet ISD with developing him as a leader committed to diversity and equity. Throughout the interview, he was cautious, diplomatic, and completely at ease with his positional power.

Dr. Quentin Myers. Assistant Superintendent Quentin Myers originally joined Bluebonnet ISD as an executive director supervising middle school principals not long after Hoya became the district's superintendent. While diversity had already become a publicized priority in BISD by that time, there were still some community members who were surprised to have a second African American male at the executive leadership level. Although later promoted to assistant superintendent, Myers still seemed somewhat limited in the depth of his responses which were nonetheless still thoughtful and honest.

Dr. Adele Harrington. Technically, Chief Schools Officer Harrington outranked Myers within the superintendent's cabinet; however, she considered the two of them as partners equally responsible for supervising principals in BISD. Harrington, a white female, originally joined the district in 1990 after completing her master's degree. Her longevity in the district bespoke a loyalty that came across in the interview as shrewd, thoughtful responses that prioritized people over politics.

Dr. Naomi Schneider. Before becoming a board member, Schneider taught middle school science in Bluebonnet ISD. She self-described herself as "leftist" explaining that she espouses views that support more liberal ideas of inclusion compared to some more conservative members of the community. She had vivid memories of the affluent district from which she graduated as one of the 1200 white students which

prompted her interest in raising her children in a racially diverse school system. Throughout the interview, her responses reflected her liberal, religiously faithful, and teacher-focused approach to educational leadership.

Angel Moore. Social Studies Coordinator Moore was a member of my middle school history department many years prior to our joint responsibility for BISD diversity and equity initiatives. She readily used her status as a white female as teaching tool or resource while facilitating professional development sessions on a wide range of diversity topics. The arrival of a new superintendent in Bluebonnet ISD colored her interview responses as hopeful yet unsure whether equity remained a priority.

Jared O'Rourke. The former curriculum and instruction director, O'Rourke had been in his new position at a state educational agency for a year when I interviewed him in January 2014. A white male fluent in Spanish, O'Rourke used to routinely joke that he was never what anyone expected when he attended conferences in his previous role as BISD's director for multilingual programs and English language learning. His interview responses were completely aligned with my questions, yet tinged with political correctness as if he wanted to avoid divulging details that were not commonly shared with all central office administrators.

David Kincaid. As the former deputy superintendent for Bluebonnet ISD, Kincaid was a visible influence on all instructional and professional development. He said that his experience as a white male learning to move past the discomfort of race-based diversity conversations prepared him to navigate similar conversations in his current position as superintendent in another, smaller Central Texas school district.

During his interview, Kincaid projected an image of a privileged politician able to adapt to changing conditions like a chameleon changes colors.

Bob Pierce. High school principal Pierce said he almost fit the stereotype of a typical secondary administrator thanks to his background as a white, male coach, except his upbringing in a West Texas town during desegregation taught him to appreciate and seek racial diversity in schools. That tolerance was communicated in his interview responses as was a pride regarding the seeming racial unity among his students that he felt entitled him to disregard district talks about diversity and equity.

Denetria York. York is one of the few African American female principals in Bluebonnet ISD. Once an assistant principal in the district, she has since led two different elementary schools including the primary campus where she presently works. Her interview was the shortest of the fourteen, at just twenty-five minutes in duration. Her mostly complimentary responses hinted at a vague awareness of district efforts that resulted in an impression of disconnect between her and central office leaders.

Jennifer Thompkins. An energetic retiree, former Assistant Superintendent Thompkins is a frequent substitute administrator in Bluebonnet ISD, filling in while a campus' permanent leader is temporarily indisposed. In addition to being an experienced BISD leader, Thompkins also had two sons graduate from one of the district's three high schools. She said that her experience as a white female watching the impact of the district's diversity and equity efforts on her sons strengthened her support of widespread inclusion. She came across as relaxed, enthusiastic, and open to continued learning during her interview.

55

Margaret Shanahan. Retired middle school principal Shanahan spent her entire thirty-year-career in Bluebonnet ISD, serving in a variety of campus and district positions before becoming a principal. Her expansive career filled with multiple, long-term experiences may explain why her interview was the longest of the fourteen at nearly sixty-five minutes in duration. As a white female, she witnessed the district's transformation hosting a mostly white student population to a racially diverse population in which white students were in the minority by the time of her retirement. Her responses were expressive, layered, and demonstrated a network of district connections cultivated over so many years in BISD.

Martha Van Buren. Board member Van Buren's lengthy tenure in Bluebonnet ISD included experience as both a student and faculty member in district schools. Her heritage as a descendant of the white German and Czech farmers and business owners who founded the district fuels her commitment to serving as a board member. She takes her duties seriously, regularly participating in state and national conversations about education. Consequently, her responses conveyed her proud, ongoing, service-minded involvement.

Miguel Hinojosa. Principal Hinojosa proudly proclaims his status as a gay, Hispanic male, using his personal story as justification for challenging Bluebonnet ISD to prioritize equity for all students. His responses reflected the reputation he said he has in the district as a passionate, almost arrogant administrator who is unyielding in his standards for himself, his students, peers, and district.

Sandra Cunningham. Principal Cunningham's twenty years – the full span of her career – in Bluebonnet ISD have enabled her to achieve an established, comfortable perch within the district by her own description. While that was evident in her interview responses, she also displayed a savvy awareness of district politics once equity was announced as a priority. She acknowledged that diversity and equity conversations within the district made her aware of privileges she possessed as a white female which prompted her to routinely facilitate similar conversations on her campus.

Chapter Overview

Grouped together, these fourteen campus and district leaders informed the study with their recollections of work done to enact a commitment to equity. The remainder of this chapter compiles their responses into sections according to themes that emerged during data collection and analysis. First, there is a thorough description of the change mindset that served as the incubator for the ensuing steps of Bluebonnet ISD's process. Next, the two major steps, operationalizing the words and defining equity in BISD terms, are detailed. Those steps are then analyzed from a CRT perspective. Lastly, Bluebonnet ISD's process is screened through the ideal of institutional actor status to determine possible cohesion.

Change is Critical

Everyone interviewed mentioned the importance or relevance of change. For some leaders, changes in district demographics prompted their desire to work in the district. For other leaders, change sparked a renewed dedication to meeting the needs of a rapidly diversifying and expanding student population. For still others, change was

seen as a challenge, encouraging a search for ways to maintain the beloved community atmosphere even as the faces within the community's photo looked less like city and district founders. Regardless of its positive or negative interpretation, change served as a catalyst that focused district attention on diversity.

Initially, diversity was a topic of awareness, teaching long-time staff members about their new neighbors and students. Cultural activities like fairs, dances, and food tastings allowed newcomers, or previously homogenized residents, to briefly yet proudly step into the spotlight to share parts of their identity. Sharing of racial and ethnic differences benignly delivered in celebrations and presentations then opened the door to discussions regarding differences based on religion, gender, and sexuality. These conversations were even more uncomfortable than the ones based on race; however, in the spirit of embracing diversity awareness, complaints were minimal.

Later, heightened diversity awareness sprouted a growing interest among some district leaders in deepening the district's commitment to providing exactly what each of its students needed. The devotion already expressed in the district motto now seemed an appropriate catalyst to lead to conversations about equity and social justice in education.

Motive. Change was first explored within the context of personal interest in working in the district. This motive for connecting and remaining connected with Bluebonnet ISD was seen as a possible avenue of insight to help explain participation, or lack thereof, in the district's commitment to equity.

The majority of the participants cited Bluebonnet's reputation and community feel as the primary factor attracting them to the district. Of this majority, four agreed

with Assistant Superintendent Quentin Myers interest in the district's ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. Myers said (personal communication, December 10, 2013), "There was diversity within the top leadership at that time also, which caused me to say okay, this may be a place that I want to look at and consider." Seeing that Bluebonnet ISD's superintendent was also an African American male, Myers believed that his race would not hamper his professional progress in the district.

Less compelling but still prevalent as a motivating factor was the district's location in Central Texas. Board member Martha Van Buren pursued her leadership position because of a sense of duty to actively support the community in which she had been raised and her ancestors had founded. Board member Dr. Naomi Schneider's motive in running for the board blended an interest in diversity with civic duty. Schneider (personal communication, December 13, 2013) said, "I didn't want to compete against folks that I thought would actually expand the diversity of the district….I thought we needed more people to have different perspectives." As a result of her belief in increasing the diversity of voices represented on the board, Schneider opted not to run for an open spot for which several other candidates, including an African American male who ultimately won, had already filed. Instead, Schneider chose to run against an experienced incumbent who she described as "a nice guy, but represented kind of the good ole boy farmer…that had run [Bluebonnet] for a long time very well" (personal communication, December 13, 2013). In this way, Schneider hoped to provide the community with at least two new voices that leaned less on memories and more on the district's potential.

Change was also explored in terms of Bluebonnet ISD's motive for examining diversity and/or equity. Seven interviewees said that changing demographics moving Bluebonnet ISD farther away from its previous majority-Anglo population prompted district interest. Four others said interest was prompted by data showing gaps in performance among racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Individual passion for diversity and/or equity among district leaders and superintendent's prerogative were also considered significant stimuli sparking interest.

Goals. Change was next explored in terms of the short-term and long-term goals established by the district. Similarly to motive, the research interest examined who the district chose to help and how that help was expressed through goals and expectations. Former Superintendent Hoya said, "I think the board had a real dedication to meeting the needs of all students" (personal communication, December 4, 2013) which fueled goal-setting. He accredited this dedication with district readiness to embrace diversity and pursue equity.

Goal-setting was also infused with a deep-seated desire to perpetuate the small-town spirit that attracted employees and residents to Bluebonnet ISD. Retired Principal Margaret Shanahan said:

> How do we keep the small town feel, even though it was getting to be a big, big place? How do we keep that community and that team? I think that was one of the big challenges was to keep that, the belief that we needed to work as a team, we needed to work as a community even though we're getting huge. (personal communication, January 31, 2014)

Shanahan, who spent her entire thirty-year career in Bluebonnet ISD, believed that every goal in the district was somehow related to the superordinate goal of maintaining a sense of community.

Social studies coordinator Moore said that then-superintendent Hoya's support enabled her to launch the diversity conference despite any potential for controversy that might occur due to selected speakers as a demonstration of respect for the changing community. Moore said:

> I wanted a particular professor as the keynote speaker and the professor said I have to be able to talk about the fact that I'm gay. When I told the superintendent that, he shrugged and said 'well, that's part of the tapestry or fabric of the community' and so then I knew that it wasn't going to be an easy walk. (personal communication, December 17, 2013)

Despite her personal misgivings about how the greater Bluebonnet community might react, Moore accepted the superintendent's support which allowed her desire to create a conference broaden into a district goal. With this expanded mission in mind, Moore partnered with another central office administrator to move forward. She said (personal communication, December 17, 2013), "I did feel like we had a commitment, so I joined forces with the director of HR and we restructured how to put systems for diversity into place." Additionally, Moore secured the support of a board member who connected her to a vice president at a local university. In this way, a community partnership between the university and Bluebonnet ISD was formed that was united around diversity.

Approximately four years later, Moore said that a new goal began formulating. She said (personal communication, December 17, 2013), "You [the researcher] and I had a strong sense that we had moved beyond awareness and we really needed to work on the equity and social justice portion…Just being aware of that people have all kinds of differences wasn't enough; it wasn't leveling the playing field." After the initial push to increase awareness and understanding of differences, we now felt that a progressive goal focused on equity would be appropriate.

Values. Sometimes blurring the line between motives and goals, values expressed another nuance within the district's change effort. As interviewees struggled to confidently answer questions about the district's distinction between diversity awareness and equity, they nonetheless asserted their conviction that Bluebonnet ISD valued both. Further, Bluebonnet ISD's high valuation of diversity and equity echoed personal beliefs for most of the participants as well. Board member Schneider described this mixture of district and personal beliefs like this:

> [Bluebonnet ISD] really had the middle class ethic that I really liked. I liked the diversity. I had gone to high school in a district that was very well-to-do, very white. I graduated with almost 1200 people and I knew two black people. And, while I got a great education in that school district, I felt like it, there were a lot of things that were not good about growing up in a place like that where a lot of people suffer from affluenza…and have blinders on about how the rest of the world lives. (personal communication, December 13, 2013)

Instead, Schneider wanted her children to be raised in a more diverse environment like the one present in Bluebonnet ISD without the perceived negativity associated with a community exclusively filled with economic privilege.

Former Superintendent Hoya said that the school board clearly stated a high expectation for him to be an individual of integrity who would lead the district in a collaborative and transparent way. Board member Van Buren expected these qualities to apply to all district leaders. Van Buren said (personal communication, February 6, 2014), "I think that leaders, particularly public leaders need to…have integrity, honesty. They need to be transparent. They need to listen." Van Buren said that these esteemed characteristics should be displayed at formal and informal events so that constituents would see consistent character among district leaders.

Operationalizing the Words

The crux of this case study necessitated researching the actual steps taken by Bluebonnet ISD once a commitment to equity was made. The statement declaring a commitment to equity became the first step of the district's process for demonstrating the value commitment. Beyond messaging, the district utilized other methods, most often professional development, to demonstrate – or not – its new commitment.

Messaging. The public unveiling of Bluebonnet ISD's commitment to equity came as a call for presenters for the 2012 conference, which had previously been an annual, one-day diversity conference, free and open to the public. The explanation given on the electronically distributed document stated:

Why change the name? Sometimes, the term "diversity" causes people to identify differences. A focus on "equity" and "social justice" communicates our desire to do something about the inequities that exist in society. While we will continue to learn about the differences that make our district strong, we want to shift from discussion to action.

On that same document, the district included the following definition coined by University of North Carolina educational scholar Fenwick English to further contextualize the name change:

We proffer our definition of social justice as: schooling which recognizes and respects the fundamental differences in cultural identity and social experiences that place some children and their families at the margins of American culture and society, and which is aimed at removing such barriers which keep them there – not by assimilation (which is social silencing and erasure), but by working to remove the barriers, techniques, beliefs, and practices which put them there in the first place.

Before the change in nomenclature publicized through the conference, Bluebonnet ISD had adopted a motto created by the former superintendent that emphasized the district's focus on each individual student[5]. Because of this well-publicized motto, all participants acknowledged a general understanding of the district's

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[5] The uniqueness of the district's motto would identify the real Bluebonnet ISD, so in the interest of confidentiality, the motto is not quoted.

interest in diversity. A few said that the motto also paved the way for Bluebonnet ISD's eventual commitment to equity.

The co-facilitators – Moore and the researcher – were the most cited source of information and/or guidance regarding district beliefs and/or expectations regarding equity. Five leaders cited themselves as their source. Answers were varied, including peers, the district improvement plan, principal evaluation, and the Human Resources Department as informants.

After re-naming the annual conference, Bluebonnet ISD also renamed the district committee comprised of a representative, usually a teacher, counselor, or assistant principal, from each campus. In order to bring relevance to the name now attached to the previously-flagging committee, the first three meetings were spent designing a job description using the explanation from the 2012 conference call for presenters as a catalyst. From the February 4, 2013 meeting minutes came this update:

Reviewed Job Description – it works!

The Equity Advocate, after identifying specific campus needs through data collection, will facilitate conversations and increase support for the pursuit of equity and social justice on the campus, and throughout the district.

At next meeting on March 4th, be prepared to share examples of what you've done so far so that campus leaders can more easily determine how to use this role.

The district's central office-based diversity committee was frequently referenced as a resource and leading force in the district's pursuit of diversity, and later of equity. Not long after the committee was formed, Moore facilitated the creation of the following belief statements that were posted online:

Our Definition of Diversity:

Diversity in [Bluebonnet] ISD is inclusive of differences that affect a student's capacity to learn or interact in a school environment. By learning to embrace differences, [BISD] students are empowered to become productive citizens in an ever-changing global environment.

Our Position Statement:

Based on our belief that what makes us different can make us strong and increase student achievement, [Bluebonnet] ISD provides multiple opportunities to develop cultural competence. These opportunities include:

- Awareness of the characteristics of diverse groups
- Realization that diversity encompasses more than ethnicity
- Respecting and appreciating differences
- Producing a healthy diverse system demonstrating acceptance, appreciation, respect, tolerance

66

These statements provided a public pronouncement of Bluebonnet ISD's commitment. The placement of the statements on the diversity subsection of the general website may have limited the scope of public awareness.

Another demonstration of equity commitment came in the form of broadened language in its anti-discrimination policy. In 2012, the school board approved a revision that added sexual orientation, gender identity or expression to the list of groups protected by Bluebonnet ISD's anti-discrimination policy. Former Deputy Superintendent Kincaid said this was an important statement of support. Kincaid said (personal communication, January 23, 2013) "I think that was a step towards the district saying…we're having these conversations, but even in a time in which a state or federal definition doesn't include X, we're going to make that statement." Kincaid characterized the expansion of coverage as important, yet this step may have been missed by even district employees since it was a local policy update that did not receive widespread publicity.

Professional development. Obviously, by debuting the commitment to equity in the conference's call for presenters, the conference itself had to include a variety of sessions designed to empower educators to advocate for their students. The re-named conference still featured a suitably diverse selection of sessions with the added encouragement to presenters to include advocacy.

By the time of 2012's conference, district administrators had already participated in approximately two years' worth of monthly diversity training. These sessions, organized and facilitated by the social studies coordinator and the researcher, held reserved agenda slots on principal and general administrator meetings. Although not

required, principals were encouraged to recreate their training on their campuses. Additional, similar trainings were offered to all central office staff members through the district's participation in No Place for Hate, an anti-bias program conceived by the Anti-Defamation League. Beginning in 2012-2013, all campuses were expected to participate in this program.

The majority of participants said that professional development was the most-used method of communicating/demonstrating the district's distinction between diversity and equity. This was true despite many leaders' seeming inability to explain the exact nature of the distinction. Nonetheless, everyone agreed that a difference did exist. Moreover, everyone was generally complimentary of the diversity professional development, even when preferences for programming improvement were shared. Assistant Superintendent Myers said (personal communication, December 10, 2013), "I think the biggest thing that diversity training did was…it opened the eyes to people of some of the systems we had in place or that we were developing and I think when we were having some challenges or maybe losing funding or some changes, it helped keep those things moving forward."

Board member Schneider said that the content covered in the diversity professional development expanded learning while demonstrating the district's commitment to a wide array of constituents. Schneider said:

> The fact that we were doing training on how to work with LGBT youth, and …it
> was not something we're trying to hide, you know, or keep under wraps. You

know, we're not running around with a rainbow flag either, but we basically said

this is important. (personal communication, December 13, 2013)

According to Schneider, this example of the breadth of diversity topics covered in professional development demonstrated the depth of the district's commitment.

Other actions. Many interviewees emphasized how the Human Resources Department supported progress toward the goal of diversifying district staff. Assistance provided by the department included: recruiting and hiring, in addition to advising principals and department supervisors about staff evaluations and employee relations. Interestingly, only one participant minimized the importance of having a staff reflective of student race/ethnicity. Nearly analogous to this apparent minority opinion, most participants prioritized quality over a candidate's race/ethnicity. Retired Assistant Superintendent Thompkins exemplified the more oft-stated interest in hiring an ethnically diverse, high quality staff. Thompkins said:

If you hire just because of someone's skin color …and they're not a quality person, you almost create a problem because then they're blamed…but if you hire a person of quality, they become a model and they're not just a model for their own race, they're a model for other races. But if they have somebody that's not performing, not doing it, then I think it creates damage. (personal communication, January 31, 2014)

Although prioritizing quality, Thompkins still prized an ethnically diverse staff. Consequently, she, like other participants, greatly appreciated the face-to-face recruitment done by the Human Resources Department at job fairs. This demonstration

of Bluebonnet ISD's commitment was repeatedly credited with the broadening diversity among staff members at all levels of the organization. Principal Cunningham said:

> There are so many applicants, hundreds and hundreds of applicants for one position, and so you read through looking at credentials and qualifications, and then every once in a while you feel like hey! That might be a man, a male, it might be and when someone walks in the door, you are pleasantly surprised that there is a person of color, of whatever kind because there's just so many white women that are out there. (personal communication, February 19, 2014)

The abundance of applicants, whose race/ethnicity must legally remain unknown to hiring officials, meant that principals sincerely appreciated the personal information gained by the Human Resources department during job fairs.

Random, disconnected, yet oddly specific district expectations were delineated on principal evaluation and reference documents. For instance, campus achievement of the No Place for Hate designation was included on the leadership expectations for principals, which meant that it was also a part of quarterly evaluation conferences between individual principals and their supervisor.[6] Somewhat similarly, the superintendent's evaluation and board priorities also included discordant references to an equity commitment. Nothing explicitly described or instructed leaders on the need, context, or intent of this value commitment.

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[6] Because of title changes, a principal's supervisor could be an assistant superintendent, or later, the Chief Learning Officer. All interviewed principals as well as the CLO herself referred to supervisors as assistant superintendent.

Another seemingly detached requirement was participation on the campus-based diversity, and later, equity committee. The requirement was transmitted as a line item on a lengthy list of designees for various district committees that each principal had to name at the start of each school year. The committee's purpose had wavered between communication conduit and planners. In the year prior to the time period specifically addressed by this case study, a firm focus on training had emerged. The minutes from the October 29, 2009 announced:

> Your role as a Campus Rep has changed! You are now receiving training to further develop your facilitation skills with diversity-related topics. You'll personally experience a variety of activities that can then be shared with your campuses as appropriate. The goal is to honor Mr. Hoya's directive to make diversity efforts personal by bringing skills & resources to those on campuses.

This change was intended to clarify district expectations for representatives to not only attend the quarterly meetings, but to later facilitate on their home campuses the activities in which they had personally participated. This clarification also established the foundation for transferring the same expectations to equity efforts.

Although the majority of campus principals designated a representative, less than one half of the campus representatives usually attended the quarterly meetings. No formal method for monitoring their effectiveness existed, nor was the committee an explicit component of any general district plan. In short, principals really did not know where the committee fit into the larger structure of the district. Consequently, despite

individual attendees typically describing the meetings as enlightening, the actual impact of the committee on advancing the district's commitment is unclear.

Another foundational step towards preparing for an equity commitment was initiating classroom observations in 2009 on every campus to determine actual use of the district's curriculum. Each week, from September until March, separate teams of curriculum and instruction administrators would be assigned to two or more campuses to perform five to seven minute observations of nearly every classroom at the specified school. Afterwards, feedback from the curriculum and instruction staff would be compiled into a report by an assistant superintendent, or designated executive director or director. The principal would be present during the debriefing session as the report was created, and would then have a private follow-up conference with his/her supervisor immediately after the curriculum and instruction administrators were dismissed. With each succeeding school year, these campus walk-throughs evolved into a favored source of information about instruction and classroom management, especially regarding fidelity to campus and district priorities.

In preparation for the 2012-2013 round of campus walk-throughs, the intranet-based form was revised to extract additional information per requests from the superintendent and the school board. Likewise, principals, their supervisors, and curriculum and instruction administrators appreciated the potential of the walk-throughs to further reform and supported the revisions. Devoting a half-day from their weekly schedules to participate, central office administrators agreed that the walk-throughs were a worthy investment of district human resources. In alignment then with Bluebonnet's

new commitment to equity, a related prompt was added to the form. However, after several weeks of walk-throughs and subsequent feedback sessions, the group of observers realized that they didn't share a consistent understanding of the prompt, which led to less than helpful data that could be interpreted in a variety of ways. As a member of the 2012-2013 walk-through team, I included an opportunity for campus representatives to provide input on how to clarify the prompt during their February 4, 2013 equity committee meeting. Minutes from that meeting contained their suggestion to replace the original prompt, "Diversity/equity/access for all students to engage fully in learning?" with one of the following:

- Is there an observable example of diversity within the classroom – materials, student demographics, etc? {perhaps listed as a dropdown}

- Is there evidence of equitable access for all students to engage fully in learning?

- Perhaps format original question as a dropdown choice

- Does the questioning strategy involve a diverse array of students?

Their suggestions were shared with the assistant superintendents who facilitated the walk-throughs, however, it was determined that it was too late in the year to institute any changes.

The district's organizational chart was revamped in 2012-2013 by Hoya in an effort to incorporate a more noticeable emphasis on equity's prioritization. As the newly designated director of professional learning, my charge from Hoya was to infuse my

well-known beliefs about diversity and equity into the routine trainings of instructional and operational staff. As limitless and progressive as Hoya's vision sounded, in reality there were no clear opportunities built into the position for regular interaction with district leaders. Consequently, it was only through my reputation as an equity advocate and my relationships developed during more than twenty years in Bluebonnet ISD that I was able to randomly consult with those who truly influenced instruction and professional development. Regardless of Hoya's intent, the position functioned more as an event planner than as a catalyst for change. As the incumbent, I shared responsibility for this incomplete component of district efforts.

What Does Educational Equity Mean *Here*?

As defined earlier, educational equity refers to the intentional distribution of unequal resources in order to create a system of schools that share a higher probability of becoming equalized (Brayboy et al., 2007). Any discussion of educational equity must begin with an awareness of inequity in the system. Principal Cunningham said (personal communication, February 19, 2014), "You can't close your eyes and not pay attention to color in your classroom, which is kind of an old, traditional way of thinking; so everybody is saying you treat everybody the same. Well, no." Cunningham said district staff had to first acknowledge that an examination of race might reduce the performance gap among students on state-mandated tests. Correspondingly, Bluebonnet ISD leaders became more cognizant of possible inequities through an ongoing diversity discussion first. Former Assistant Superintendent Jennifer Thompkins described the district's data-oriented path toward defining educational equity:

We started a real conscious effort on having conversations about having equal

access to our curriculum, our documents, our website, our programs. I mean even

as far as even the high schools looking at how they elected prom queen, really

thinking through that whole little election process….We're having those

conversations and making headway and I think use of data helps, too. I think that

also takes in equity…which would have been overlooked I think without the real

commitment to data study. (personal communication, January 31, 2014)

Thompkins stressed the importance of data in order to achieve a comprehensive pursuit

of educational equity.

Retired Principal Shanahan agreed that a data-based assessment of each school's

needs began replacing the previous one-size-fits-all method for allocating resources.

Shanahan said:

Equity was not necessarily equal, but that schools had what they needed so that a

student going to one school was not disadvantaged when compared to a student

going to another school. Did the schools fall in economic and demographic areas

of the district? Yes, but I always had a sense that the district always tried to make

sure that schools had what was needed. That doesn't mean that all the schools

have to have it….It was more programmatic, then how do we make sure that all

schools have a way, or all students in the district have a way of accessing that?

(personal communication, January 31, 2014)

Whether programmatically or demographically determined, Shanahan said that Bluebonnet ISD increasingly allocated resources in unequal ways in order to ensure more complete access to all students in the district.

Equitable distribution of resources also had an even purer financial slant for Bluebonnet ISD. Along with dozens of other school districts in the state, Bluebonnet ISD participated in a funding equity lawsuit challenging the method used by Texas to determine the amount of money allocated to individual districts. Board member Van Buren challenged the logic of a neighboring district receiving $800 more per student from the state. Van Buren said (personal communication, February 6, 2014), "We all live in the same area, buy the same groceries, etc., etc. so in that situation, the board made the decision that we wanted to enter into the lawsuit… there should be more equitable and adequate funding for students across the state of Texas." Further, Van Buren said that being the victim of inequitable state funding limited Bluebonnet ISD's ability to ensure equitable funding within its boundaries.

When discussing equity, the vast majority of interviewees said that students were the primary focus. Even when staff or community might be referenced, these ten administrators insisted that students always came first. Notably, Principal Hinojosa's opinion was that talks were no longer happening regularly in Bluebonnet ISD, although he acknowledged that both students and staff had been included in previous talks. Hinojosa said (personal communication, February 13, 2014), "I think that's the big problem. Those conversations are not taking place often. If they do take place, they're sporadic with no follow through and usually on an informal basis." This predisposition

toward informal conversations prompted Hinojosa's argument that the focus on students had been reduced to a cursory reliance on a checklist of required activities like No Place for Hate.

Among students, a variety of groups emerged as recipients of special consideration during district equity talks. African American males were identified as an early special focus because of poor achievement on state-mandated tests, primarily in math. Additional concern was initially declared for this student group because of their over-representation on special education and behavior referrals. Four interviewees identified Hispanic students, especially English language learners, as another group that received concentrated consideration during equity talks. Moore expressed a mounting district concern, mimicked as a campus concern by Principal Pierce, regarding ensuring a safe educational environment for LGBT students. Moreover, Pierce expressed an interest in appropriately accommodating his school's growing Muslim population as well. Nonetheless, Chief Learning Officer Adele Harrington, insisted (personal communication, December 11, 2013) that in Bluebonnet ISD, "we are talking about all of our kids…we are talking about all students." Harrington thusly emphasized the comprehensive inclusion of all students within the commitment to equity.

Seven district leaders said the district's annual diversity conference signified the district's commitment to diversity and/or equity. Social studies coordinator Moore, as originator of the conference, was the only one able to recite the historical background of the conference although many other leaders had also been in the district at its inception. In addition to the conference as a large declaration of commitment, interviewed leaders

77

alluded to a general sense of diversity's importance expressed through a variety of means identified in the previous section.

Accordingly, district leaders identified a loose, varied list of expectations/beliefs regarding diversity or equity[7]. The beliefs were often characterized as activities rather than statements, with many interviewees explaining that few expectations were actually written. This was another area in which former Deputy Superintendent Kincaid said an "organic" development process was used. According to Kincaid (personal communication, January 23, 2014), "It was…being a part of a group that was kind of creating it on the fly…and I don't know if we ever developed a set of expectations and went out and shared and said here are the X, Y, Z expectations." Due to this relatively informal generation, the lack of awareness regarding exact expectations is unsurprising.

Assistant Superintendent Myers summarized Bluebonnet ISD's all-inclusive equity focus like this:

> We're implementing or having programs that meet the needs of all kids, but also making sure that all of our teachers and staff members that are working with our students at least have a strong background and understanding that the needs of all kids are different and being able to have a critical lens in terms of what are we offering in the classroom to students; what type of programs do we have as a district and making sure that we're constantly looking, evaluating, making sure we're making progress in meeting the needs of all of our students throughout the

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[7] Even after explicitly stating a commitment to equity, BISD leaders often interchanged diversity and equity.

district and also having parents, we're meeting their needs and community

members, we're meeting their needs also. (personal communication, December

10, 2013)

Myers said that this combination of professional development and programming would

lead to widespread student success along with community satisfaction. Still, board

member Schneider said that the focus must always remain on doing what is best for

students. She said (personal communication, December 13, 2013), "If you don't let the

things that bother adults get in the way of focusing on what's best for the students in the

district, it makes it easier to make sometimes hard decisions." Schneider believed that

this student-oriented focus solidified the district commitment to equity.

A Critical Race Theory Perspective

A major objective for this case study included an examination from a CRT

perspective. By viewing the district's actions through this lens, a clearer determination

of the inclusiveness of the district's commitment to equity could be made. Likewise,

CRT encourages a more careful consideration of the alignment between district words

and actions. In the following sections, an analysis using the CRT tenets of permanence

of racism, counterstorytelling, the critique of liberalism, interest convergence, and the

concept of whiteness as property will be shared.

Permanence of racism. Though difficult to accept, the district's diversity

committee insisted on at least discussing the racism inherent in some district policies.

Mindful of the enduring, albeit subtle, presence of racism, Hoya carefully selected his

words when engaging in these policy reviews. Hoya said (personal communication,

79

December 10, 2013), "I've learned when to use certain terminology, but in my heart, social justice is really what we're trying to accomplish here." According to Hoya, "social justice…is much more inflammatory because it's often affiliated with a leftist thinking and it scares people more. Equity is more easily explained, whereas for some people with some political bias, social justice really causes them concern if you use that." Hoya's words conveyed his agreement with the district diversity committee's recommendation to review district policies, yet also encouraged the committee to approach the task with diplomacy to avoid creating racial tension.

In addition to reviewing policies, Moore suggested a review of student performance data using a more refined emphasis on race. Since the state already reported the data by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic group, Moore believed her suggestion would be more readily accepted by district leaders. Unfortunately, the reverse was true. She said (personal communication, December 17, 2013) "You [the researcher] and I had a hard time getting them to connect equity and social justice to test scores. I guess equity and social justice is either too difficult or too messy or too amorphous." As a result, the familiarity of analyzing test scores by racial group failed to align with a willingness to explore the impact of race on performance.

Counterstorytelling. Unexpectedly, the strongest voice of counterstorytelling came from the Hispanic male principal, rather than the African American administrators interviewed for this case study. While all administrators of color agreed that their perspective was often different from that of their white colleagues, Hinojosa stood alone

in his determination to routinely disrupt any conversation in which equity for all students was not openly included. Hinojosa said:

> There's still a feeling of a good old boys' club….As a person of color, as a Latino male, I definitely sometimes feel as an outsider because I do feel that our district, although working in the right direction, is still predominantly white. The people in power, predominantly male. (personal communication, February 6, 2013)

Hinojosa said that because the power still resided in the hands of white district leaders, he worked harder at the campus level to ensure that his students were served well. This insistence on championing all students shaped the interview and selection process for teachers at Hinojosa's school. He said (personal communication, February 13, 2014), "You need to be willing to be a defender of equity and social justice overtly….I don't know that anybody else in this district is as overt as we are. I definitely know that the district is not." Hinojosa felt that while other district leaders may have agreed with his emphasis on social justice and equity, no one else demonstrated a commitment equal to his.

The chief executive spearheading the district's commitment, as well as the researcher working in my previous assignment as lead implementer, are both African American and frequently referenced this reality throughout the entire process of proclaiming and implementing a commitment to equity. Likewise, principals of color were routinely involved as agents of change, although their impact was more heavily influenced by personal convictions rather than district controls. The duality of being

present – even prominent – in district discussions regarding equity yet discouraged from including race/ethnicity in those talks created a perplexing position for administrators of color. Principal Hinojosa said (personal communication, February 13, 2014), "I don't look, sound, act, make decisions like most people in the district…. I know that I scare some of the leadership in the district, but I also know that they love me." Through sometimes conflicting words and action, Bluebonnet ISD placed administrators on a pedestal that honored their leadership while sidelining their race/ethnicity.

Critique of liberalism. The fast-growth nature of the district's changing demographics provided an easy springboard for discussions of pacing. Despite any possible lingering affection for the good old days when the vast majority of students were descendants from white German immigrants who settled in the area, no one could argue with the visible evidence of demographic change in the community. While the African American student population had been increasing, the Hispanic student population began increasing at an even faster rate. Instructional programs and educational issues that were present only because of state requirements now grew in relevance because traditional approaches were insufficient to comprehensively cover an array of needs. The CRT tenet critiquing liberalism highlighted the difficulty of adjusting district practices at a pace slow enough to avoid frightening old-timers with too much emphasis on the racial differences obviously occurring.

Assistant Superintendent Myers defended the district's pacing:

You're going to just have people that are early adopters or people that understand diversity because of their experience, but then I think if you have a certain group

82

or certain groups that haven't had a really rich experience with diversity, it becomes a little bit harder to influence their thoughts…but I would say…just having the conversation had some level of influence because it causes people to have to stop and think about it and really reflect upon their practice. It may not necessarily cause them to change, but at least it puts the idea and then if they do make some connections, it may ultimately, at some point, influence in the change. (personal communication, December 10, 2013)

While Myers defended relatively slow pacing in order to gradually influence beliefs, Moore argued that relying on more palatable programs like No Place for Hate sandbagged real progress. Although designed to encourage tolerance and inclusion, the voluntary nature of the district's implementation at central office enabled many to opt out of participation. Moore said (personal communication, December 17, 2013) said, "It's just people becoming more entrenched. You can choose the news forum that most fits your beliefs and …it just leads to huge antagonism." Consequently, Moore doubted the likelihood for real change to occur among those who chose to ignore district offerings.

Similarly, O'Rourke described efforts to regularly include diversity-related topics at administrator meetings as both helpful and hurtful. He said (personal communication, January 19, 2014), "It's sort of the double-edged sword of keeping things on the forefront all the time. You can keep it up there and keep it important, but…also people can start to become sort of immune to it or dull to it." For this reason, O'Rourke

recognized the beleaguered look some would have when meeting agendas circled back to diversity.

In a unique twist on the idea of a color-blind approach to equity, Principal Pierce shared his pride in his students' ability to interact positively with each other. Pierce said:

Our kids do like each other. It has to be the fact that they live together in the community, they grow up together, they just don't see differences. Or they see differences but it doesn't bother them. I know for a long time, especially in coaching I would hear, 'I don't see color, I don't see color.' Well, I would look around and I'd go, I see color, you know, I do and there's nothing wrong with that. I see color. I see differences, but that doesn't mean that it's bad. (personal communication, January 30, 2014)

Pierce was especially proud of the lack of direct effort by his staff to support an environment seemingly unbothered by issues of race. He repeatedly said (personal communication, January 30, 2014), "We don't do anything" as both explanation for what he considered healthy race relations among his students and as justification for his disinterest in district diversity discussions focusing on race. From his campus perspective, Pierce did not see the relevance of these conversations since he considered his school devoid of problems generated by race.

Interest convergence. As more and more companies chose Central Texas for their base of operations, more and more families looked for communities outside of the urban center that could provide quality education without the perceived negatives associated with inner-city schools. As a result, the once-sleepy suburb became a thriving

destination district known for its successful special education programs and general academic excellence. In order to maintain this reputation in the midst of white flight and tougher state testing requirements, the district had to re-examine practices.

The changing racial and socioeconomic demographics corresponded with a decline in academic performance for students of color. Bluebonnet ISD methodically analyzed performance data, searching for guidance that could increase achievement. Because the state's assessment system specifically disaggregated data by racial/ethnic group, district leaders included this characteristic in conversations about possible interventions or instructional strategies. Assistant Superintendent Myers said (personal communication, December 10, 2013), "I think on the surface, we would look at it and say, we need to close achievement gaps among all student groups and economic groups and really start just being a little bit more critical in terms of what we're doing to meet the needs of all students." Former Deputy Superintendent Kincaid concurred with Myers and highlighted the influence of race in the district's determination to identify better ways to increase student achievement. Kincaid said:

Sometimes, the first time a district thinks about diversity is when suddenly, I used to have all white kids from middle class households…and we used to blow the top off the state assessment and now, suddenly we're not and we have campuses that are academically unacceptable and why is that? Then I think people kind of wake up and begin to have that conversation. (personal communication, January 23, 2014)

The district's wake-up call was heralded by a state assessment system that published results available to current and potential residents, ensuring that district attention would be directed at improving test scores for all students.

Whiteness as property. Notably, the district's revelation of disproportionate representation along racial lines in its gifted and talented, special education, and advanced placement (AP) programs coincided with national attention in these same areas. Accordingly, the district used the national backdrop to contextualize the discrepancies found in their programs. Assistant Superintendent Myers said (personal communication, December 10, 2013), "Once that grant went away, I think the diversity conversations also helped that program, the AP representation of students stay pretty solid and people understanding the importance of recruiting and attracting diverse students…not only recruiting, but also making sure that we retained them in those programs." Therefore, in Myers' estimation, because the district was able to see the benefit of including more students of color in these programs, the effort to maintain this practice continued even after grant funds were no longer available. The point remains that grant funds initiated district efforts to interrupt a pattern that disproportionately favored white students.

The district's efforts to include diverse students in programs traditionally dominated by a particular demographic inadvertently led to an unforeseen challenge. To provide options for English language learners, Bluebonnet ISD piloted a Spanish dual language program on one of the newer elementary campuses that served a more affluent, whiter clientele. Myers said (personal communication, December 17, 2013) that the

stronger advocates for this program were the parents of the non-Spanish speaking kids. She appreciated their involvement, yet also stated "it becomes entitlement and it just feels awkward" indicating that the intent of the program could become overshadowed by the demands of those who were already privileged within the district's network of programs.

Conversely, Chief Learning Officer Harrington explained the variation in support among district constituents. She said (public communication, December 11, 2013), "If you're bilingual or monolingual, how much your everyday life inspires you to be thinking about different cultures" can determine the level of support or resistance toward greater inclusion sometimes seen in the district. Accordingly, she accepted that the different life experiences at times correlated with the willingness to provide the same quality services to all students in Bluebonnet ISD. Likewise, Myers said (personal communication, December 10, 2013), "It's very difficult for people to accept some of the things that you may need to do to make that situation equitable" which is why he felt that not everyone in the district supported the push to include a more diverse array of students in all district programs. He additionally stated (personal communication, December 10, 2013), "I think the reality of it is that it (demographics) changes faster than what some of the practices of [the] system is ready to make and adjust to, so the challenge [is] trying to keep pace or staying ahead of that." By doing so, Myers argued that the swiftness of demographic change could be managed in a less upsetting way for those who worried about the newcomers being served in Bluebonnet ISD.

87

Conclusion. In the district's journey from diversity awareness to equity commitment, a fatigue emerged that ultimately minimized the inclusion of race/ethnicity, especially anything related to the African American population (with the possible exception of AA male math performance or referrals for special education and discipline). Without an explicit inclusion of race/ethnicity, a preference for color blindness defined the disjointed effort to commit to the value of equity. Overall, communities of color were marginalized despite their presence and participation. In their defense, Hoya said (personal communication, December 4, 2013) of the board, "Behind closed doors, I always heard strong sentiments of we care about all kids, we want all kids to be successful." The tendency to express those sentiments more often behind closed doors may have undermined the board's sincere focus on universal achievement.

The Ideal of Institutional Actor Status

As conceptualized by Rorrer et al (2008), when a school district serves as an institutional actor, there is a unified effort displayed by the organized collective of district leaders. While not explicitly included in their description, awareness of institutional actor status is not a requirement to be one. However, evidence of intentional, cooperative effort is required. Seemingly, leaders in Bluebonnet ISD were appreciative of their fellow leaders without strategically including everyone's respective role, responsibilities, and influence into their change efforts. The various members recognized a general sense of connectivity but did not intentionally reference or view each other as parts of an organized collective jointly responsible for effecting change. In Hoya's estimation (personal communication, December 4, 2013), "they [other

88

administrators] could only do so much without a leader who is willing to embrace and allow and empower that work." Hoya knew that his support was crucial to the success of any district commitment.

Organizational structure. The former superintendent annually distributed a hierarchical organization chart during beginning of the year administrator meetings, seemingly conflicting with the collaborative approach he said he learned while in Bluebonnet ISD. Hoya explained (personal communication, December 4, 2013), "Ultimately it is my job to make the decision and take it to the board as a recommendation or a proposal, but I want to base it on any number of collaborative experiences." In this way, he justified his insistence for hierarchy mixed with collaboration. His approach created an organizational structure in which the titles on the chart were clear, however, the responsibilities attached to each position and the true connectivity between roles were often defined after new business cards were printed.

Everyone recognized official chain of command structures while simultaneously recognizing, and at times, exploiting the immense power of individual principals to convey and interpret the district commitment in whatever way aligned with their campus, or personal, priorities. The school board, executive team, and superintendent, working independently in their assigned role or in various combinations, were most often cited as the primary decision-makers in Bluebonnet ISD. Assistant Superintendent Myers described the organizational structure like this:

> I think it starts with the superintendent and I think the superintendent kind of working with the school board setting those district goals and making sure that

89

our district goals and what the expectations of our school board are aligned and then from that, making sure that those expectations are funded in a way that they are successful. From there, it's our executive leadership team or our cabinet also communicating those and being aligned at all times and making sure that all of our decisions reflect those commitments and those goals that we've set for the district and then from there, it's communicating it to principals in a way that they are supported and they understand and then they are able to lead the campuses to be able to reach those goals. (personal communication, December 10, 2013)

Still, no one alluded to the organized collective described by Rorrer et al (2008). In fact, former curriculum and instruction director O'Rourke argued (personal communication, January 19, 2014), "Between principals and central office administrators, sometimes you feel like you're on two different teams. You can use that to your advantage a little bit, but at central office, everyone is supposed to be us, but it doesn't always seem to work out that way." O'Rourke said that this disconnect between central office and principals, and among central office administrators created barriers to collaboration.

Understandably then, interviewees gave multiple, different answers identifying the person(s) responsible for communicating and/or demonstrating decisions made by the district. Responses ranged from whoever knows about the decision to variations of a trickle-down flowchart that could include central office administrators, board members, principals, or teacher leaders. Interviewees in the highest executive positions were more likely to include themselves in their responses. As Hoya (personal communication, December 4, 2013) said, "people want to hear from the leader." Consequently, he saw

himself as the main messenger even though he routinely chose to direct others to actually communicate his opinions and decisions.

Many participants said that communication posed an ongoing challenge. For instance, not everyone had access to information perceived as relevant at a time or in a form deemed helpful. Because of his executive level position, Assistant Superintendent Myers admitted (personal communication, December 10, 2013), "I may have had some insight that others may not have had in terms of that there was a commitment." Myers' position in the district hierarchy afforded access to information, but not always permission to share it with the principals he supervised. Regardless of supervisors' ability to directly inform principals, the nature of their position within the district organizational structure meant that information eventually became known to principals. Once aware, Retired Principal Margaret Shanahan felt that her status as a principal always afforded her an opportunity to at least comment on district decisions. Shanahan said:

> There was this level of how is this going to affect my school? I can push back and say, 'This is going to have a negative effect,' or whatever kind of effect on my school, and I felt like most of the time then that was listened to. Now, whether ultimately the cabinet or the other people above my pay grade decided that it was still going to be the way it was done, but I always did feel like you had that opportunity to at least voice it. (personal communication, January 31, 2014)

Shanahan's confidence in the district's willingness to listen to her demonstrated her secure positioning within the leadership realm.

91

More than half of the participants said that the superintendent's designated facilitators for diversity initiatives participated in decisions regarding diversity and equity. Conspicuously absent from that group was the social studies coordinator, who shared facilitation responsibilities with the researcher. Angel Moore said (personal communication, December 17, 2013) that her role as co-chair of Bluebonnet ISD's central office-based diversity committee did not include any power or influence beyond that provided in her middle management title of coordinator. Although my former title as director and previous experience as a campus principal afforded me more positional authority, Moore's assessment of limited involvement for both of us was accurate. We were visible champions and willing resources who advised, encouraged, and even pushed when given the opportunity. Nonetheless, the perception of our inclusion is significant.

Also significant is the apparent lack of confidence displayed in the responses. Every participant had an answer, yet no one was particularly certain that his/her answer was accurate. Board member Van Buren conveyed this lack of confidence and awareness during her interview. Van Buren said (personal communication, February 6, 2014), "Wow. I think that we would have to dig for that. As a school board member, I would have to dig for that. It's just not right out there." She said her perspective from the dais did not avail her to any explicit information source regarding equity. Even those who included themselves as part of the decision-making team for diversity- and equity-related issues directly stated or implied a lack of full understanding regarding all who might have been involved. Further, an arbitrary variety of possible decision-makers were

suggested, ranging from external community partners to campus representatives. The range of possibilities lent credence to one leader's response of "it depends". O'Rourke said (personal communication, January 19, 2013) that it was impossible to solely identify the superintendent and board as primary decision-makers because of the hefty influence of campus principals.

The interviewed principals were more likely to acknowledge the influence of specified district expectations on their duties or professional conduct. Leaders in other roles were more likely to rely on personal interpretations of less specific district expectations related to their positions. Leaders with longer tenure and/or higher executive level positions felt more involved in the development of district expectations and beliefs. Former deputy superintendent David Kincaid called this the "organic" nature of leadership expectations in Bluebonnet ISD (personal communication, January 23, 2014).

Collaboration. As one of the semi-structured interview questions, all participants described how they collaborate with others in the district. Everyone acknowledged the importance, and even the necessity of collaboration, yet the methods and avenues for collaboration varied widely. Former Superintendent Hoya said (personal communication, December 4, 2013), "I'm a very collaborative individual and my leadership style is very collaborative…I believe in bringing people to the table to talk about things that are going to affect them." He wanted the input of multiple voices, yet also maintained attentiveness to his vaulted position as superintendent. Most participants cited formal structures like executive team meetings, department meetings, principal

meetings, and general administrator meetings as usual platforms for collaboration. Other formal opportunities included meetings of the campus observation team (comprised of central office administrators from the curriculum department) and professional learning community meetings, during which principals were sub-divided by grade level assignment – elementary, middle or high school – in order to focus on topics unique to their group. As structured by the district, these professional learning community (PLC) meetings are designed as prime collaboration venues in which an environment of trust is delineated through protocols created by the group. Interviewed principals expressed a mixed reaction to the success of professional learning communities and other district efforts to promote collaboration.

Principal Hinojosa said (personal communication, February 13, 2014), "The truth is that there wasn't enough or sufficient training to actually make that [professional learning communities] happen." Hinojosa was frustrated by the lack of organization and structure for the five-member principal PLC of which he was a member. Further, Hinojosa said that the same lack of structure existed regarding collaboration between principals and central office. Hinojosa said:

> I've been blessed that I've created some pretty strong relationships with people in leadership positions at the administrative level and so I feel really comfortable in asking for support or bouncing ideas off people. But again, there's no formal way of collaborating with district personnel either. (personal communication, February 13, 2014)

Hinojosa argued that the lack of formality impeded the potential success of collaborative

efforts among principals as well as between principals and central office. On the

contrary, Principal Cunningham was very complimentary of her PLC. Cunningham said

(personal communication, February 19, 2014), "There is quite a bit of opportunity in the

past couple of years for more collaboration between principals." She enjoyed the

weekly meetings with her group that enabled the five members to share success stories,

collectively seek resolutions, and track progress of campus and district initiatives. This

difference of opinion regarding principal collaboration indicated the district's fidelity to

the intended independence of professional learning groups to implement their own

protocols as well as a possible gap between district expectations and actual practice.

Board member Schneider admitted (personal communication, December 13,

2013) that state guidelines governed, and sometimes hampered, frequent collaboration

among board members. Nonetheless, she said that these regulations encouraged board

members to respect their individual skills and expertise during school board meetings.

Schneider and Van Buren said that enduring community connections, especially with

teachers, added opportunities for community collaboration that enhanced their leadership

on the board. Hoya stressed the importance of working in conjunction with the board. He

said (personal communication, December 4, 2013), "It's an interesting dynamic because

it took the leadership, but it also took the board being supportive. But the board without

a superintendent who is supportive is not effective either, and a superintendent without a

board or support staff, it takes everyone being aligned with that one goal." Hoya's belief

95

in the team of eight – the partnership between the superintendent and the seven member school board – as the driving force behind all district level decisions.

Likewise, a few of the administrators stressed the benefit of personal relationships developed over lengthy careers in Bluebonnet ISD in their collaborative efforts. Rather than sticking to formal methods for collaboration, these administrators said they were just as likely to use informal methods to access resources or help from other leaders in the district. Two central office leaders described collaboration as challenging because of roadblocks built into the district's meeting structure limiting who could attend or participate on the agenda. Other leaders mentioned politics as a barrier to full collaboration.

Power and influence. Applying Rorrer et al's (2008) description, the ability of the organized collective to effect change comes from the combined power and influence of the various leaders. The efficacy of serving as an institutional actor could potentially be compromised if that power or influence is segmented too frequently. Former Superintendent Hoya said that the composition of the board predisposed an extra emphasis on honesty. "Having five of seven individuals who were directly either retired from the district or married to current employees of the district and one other who had lived and worked his entire career in that community, there was a high degree of accountability and relationships that the board was quickly able to triangulate anything I ever said to them," said Hoya (personal communication, December 4, 2013). Because of this strong connection to the community which elected them, Hoya recognized the

96

parameters defining his power in relation to the influence of citizens with ties to board members.

Although only the secondary principals openly included themselves on the list of primary decision-makers in the district, many of the participants acknowledged the power of principals to influence any change or reform intended for their campuses. Board member Van Buren said (personal communication, February 6, 2014), "I see the campus principal as being a very powerful person. The board can change and the superintendent can change because principals are just really, really people who make a difference." Van Buren's valuation of principals stemmed from their ability to interpret and implement district decisions in ways that directly impacted teaching and learning on their campuses.

In fact, three leaders specifically distinguished between decision-makers and influencers. One further clarified that while executive leaders would be assumed to exclusively hold the role of decision-maker, that this is often not the case. Principal Pierce boldly stated (personal communication, January 30, 2014), "Some of the things we hear…as principals, it goes in one ear and out the other. The reason it does is because we are leaps and bounds ahead." Pierce said that he often felt unaffected by diversity-related information shared in administrative meetings because his campus was comparatively more progressive than others in Bluebonnet ISD.

Impact. The inconsistency among district leaders comprising the organized collective led to inconsistency in results. Three interviewees claimed that no explicit expectations or beliefs existed regarding diversity while the majority of interviewees

admitted ignorance regarding any distinction between diversity and equity made by Bluebonnet ISD. Despite the ability to personally distinguish between diversity and equity, few interviewees said that a district distinction was clearly made. To be fair, explanatory conversations based on the renaming of the district conference attempted to provide contextualization, however, the limited scope of those conversations hampered widespread understanding and support of Bluebonnet ISD's equity commitment. Consequently, individual leaders were able to personally interpret the district's commitment which ultimately limited the scope of the equity commitment.

Nearly all interviewees said that administrators and staff had a mixed or positive response to district efforts regarding diversity and equity. Chief Learning Officer Harrington said (personal communication, December 11, 2013), "It may vary from campus to campus, meaning it's taken deeper roots some places than others." Harrington viewed this variance as expected due to the influence of individual principals.

Through the district-wide expectation for participation in No Place for Hate, participants felt that students reacted positively. More difficult for interviewees to gauge was the reaction of the overall Bluebonnet community. Importantly, two interviewees expressed doubt that the community was even aware of any district effort related to diversity or equity in spite of the frequency of parents to provide fairly enthusiastic support for campus cultural fairs or other activities that invited their participation.

The possible exception to a general lack of awareness among the community was the district's adoption of domestic partner benefits in the fall of 2012. Even as this was heralded as a triumph over institutional inequity, the ensuing divisive reaction by the

larger Bluebonnet community may have obliterated previous progress. Former Superintendent Hoya said (personal communication, December 4, 2013), "I feel like I could still stand by that decision today, but I feel like that decision in some ways moved off what had been our focus. Our focus had been on educational adequacy, and that was a loose connection…So, it may have harmed the district's diversity efforts by causing that negative full glare of that light and with such harsh conflict." Hoya viewed the unexpected antagonism toward the district's decision to offer health insurance benefits to domestic partners overshadowed prior progress in equity efforts. Assistant Superintendent Myers agreed (personal communication, December 10, 2013), "I think when we got off into some of the gender issues and some of the sexual preference issues…that caused some people to kind of shut the whole conversation down and they missed some of the other messages that I think they could have benefitted from." Myers believed that those community members who narrowly focused on gay and lesbian couples under the umbrella term of domestic partners hijacked the broader conversation about equity.

Conversely, board member Van Buren suggested that the equity conversation itself inappropriately shifted the focus away from educating students. Van Buren said (personal communication, February 6, 2014), "Schools focus so much on the socio-economic things of equity and diversity that if they could just focus on the education that that, the education of each student is the way they're going to break those barriers." She said that constantly providing favor through a focus on equity did not automatically lead to developing strong students.

Individual leaders intuitively understood without explicitly articulating the idea

of equity as a value commitment made by the district, just not in the full sense described

by Rorrer et al (2008). Two district leaders considered the commitment to equity more of

a personal charge than a district commitment. In fact, if presented with the

characteristics described by Rorrer et al (2008), most members would probably agree

that this concept of institutional actor could have been the missing component that held

back large-scale, sustainable change. Fully half of interviewees said that a well-

articulated plan should have been part of district efforts regarding diversity and equity.

Assistant Superintendent Myers said (personal communication, December 10, 2013), "I

think the reality of it is, the amount of attention that you give to your math and your

language arts curriculum, it almost needs to be that level of a plan because it's just a part

of what you do."

Other components identified during hindsight reflections included: allowing

more widespread involvement, especially in initial conversations, better management of

domestic partner benefits, creation of board policy, avoidance of attempts to regulate the

central office Christmas tree, continuation of separate equity conference, and refined

hiring practices. Retired Assistant Superintendent Thompkins precisely mentioned a

need to improve efforts on behalf of students living in poverty and those with special

needs. Myers said some leaders wanted a more directive approach. He said (personal

communication, December 10, 2013), "I think they are kind of like, 'I see that there is an

achievement gap' and they may have bought into some of the things or may not have,

but 'just tell me what to do and I'm going to do it.' I think that's where some people

were." Myers reasoned that this desire for directives still conveyed an interest in equity despite the seeming display of impatience.

Overall, all participants felt that more could or should have been done by Bluebonnet ISD in order to demonstrate a commitment to equity. Former curriculum and instruction director O'Rourke said:

> You sort of take things for granted a little bit when you're in the heat of it all. You think that people understand exactly where you're going and what you're talking about and then you find out a year later that they don't. That they had no idea what you were talking about and they just didn't bother asking. (personal communication, January 19, 2014)

He said that this combination of assumed understanding and insufficient management indicated a need for a more well-defined effort by Bluebonnet ISD to support their commitment to equity.

Nonetheless, there was also a general belief that something meaningful had happened. "I think in my seven years in that district, we did a good job of getting beyond simply awareness at a higher level in the organization, but I don't think we ever got as deeply as we could have to really be as collaborative as we could have all the way through the organization," said Hoya (personal communication, December 4, 2013). Hoya's words acknowledged both the progress and limits of the district's commitment.

Hoya's former deputy superintendent agreed. Kincaid said (personal communication, January 23, 2014), "I think we also started to make the connection between that understanding of equity and social justice towards really meeting our main

mission of educating kids to the fullest extent possible." Kincaid considered this connection a major accomplishment of the district's efforts that actually caused educational leaders outside the district to start asking about the district's approach. Kincaid said (personal communication, January, 23, 2014), "People were looking at us saying, 'what are you doing and how can we replicate from you?'" While proud of this outside interest, Kincaid said that more time and commitment are ultimately the critical components of any district effort regarding equity. Additionally, Principal Hinojosa said that a renewed dedication by all district leaders is necessary. Hinojosa said:

> If we go back a couple of years, there was a definite energy around the topic of equity and social justice….It was something that we were willing to go out on a limb and defend and take part of, 'cause it takes guts…to go there. I really do miss those days 'cause I think that we had started something wonderful. I don't know that we were at the end yet, but I know that if the support had been there, it would've had the opportunity to have a greater impact on truly meeting all students' needs. (personal communication, February 13, 2014)

Hinojosa's desire to intentionally unite with his fellow district leaders embodied the potential power inherent in Rorrer et al's (2008) conceptualization of a school district as an institutional actor.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to explore what actually happened when a school district committed to equity. The study narrowly focused on the actions of the campus and district leaders comprising a possible organized collective uniquely

102

positioned to effect this type of cultural change. The data immediately identified a general readiness for a committing to change, then revealed the two major steps of BISD's enactment process.

The first step, operationalizing the words, began with public messaging designed to notify district employees and Bluebonnet community members that the previous emphasis on diversity awareness was now transitioning to an action-oriented concentration on equity. The annual conference was re-named, as was the district committee comprised of representatives from every campus. Similarly, professional development offerings at the conference and other outlets also included equity-infused sessions designed to encourage advocacy rather than just respect.

The Human Resources Department played an integral role by changing procedures and processes to recruit and retain a more diverse staff. Principal evaluation and reference documents were updated to reflect the commitment to equity, although inconsistent enforcement of new expectations limited their impact. The addition of a new director within Superintendent Hoya's organizational chart charged with embedding equity into all district professional development was another visible component of operationalizing the district's commitment.

District leaders defined equity In BISD's second step. Defining equity began with regular, thorough examinations of data that led to shifts in the distribution of district resources. Financially, Bluebonnet ISD opted to participate as a plaintiff in a state funding lawsuit, arguing that they were comparatively underfunded. As leaders

constructed a definition that would best serve the district, they insisted that students were central to any discussion of equity.

Examining these steps through a CRT lens revealed that elements of all five tenets could be substantiated. The permanence of racism was seen in reviews of district policies and student performance data. Counterstorytelling was most prominently heard through the voice of Hispanic principal Hinojosa who routinely provided an alternate perspective on district actions. A critique of liberalism existed in the intentionally slow pacing of district efforts and the proud declaration of rejecting colorblindness yet not accepting the influence of race on student and staff relations.

The initial willingness to declare a commitment to equity indicated an interest convergence by district leaders who recognized that changing student and community populations coupled with widening gaps in student performance on state-mandated tests might impede Bluebonnet's positive growth. Converging interests with national attention on racial and ethnic representation within special programs led to the exposure of a whiteness as property mentality among staff and community members who resisted efforts to interrupt disproportionate patterns.

Lastly, Bluebonnet ISD's actions were analyzed through Rorrer et al's (2008) description of a school district as an institutional actor. The district's organizational structure separated district and campus leaders handicapping collaboration and communication. Personally-developed relationships tended to be clearer indicators of power and influence than strategic use of positions within leadership ranks. Unlike Rorrer et al's (2008) description of interdependence and co-evolution, BISD experienced inconsistent expectations and results.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This case study was designed to be illustrative rather than evaluative, yet there is much to be appreciated when reviewing the steps taken by Bluebonnet ISD once a commitment to equity was verbalized. By situating these steps within the framework of a district behaving as an institutional actor (Rorrer et al, 2008) coupled with a critical race theory analysis, a picture emerged of the real hurdles faced when making a value commitment to equity.

In order to establish the concept of a district as an institutional actor, Rorrer et al (2008) described four interconnected roles – providing instructional leadership, reorienting the organization, establishing policy coherence and maintaining an equity focus. Generating the will to reform and the capacity to do so are the two main elements of providing instructional leadership. To reorient the organization, refining and aligning organizational structures and changing the district culture are required. Establishing policy coherence requires mediating federal, state, and local policy as well as aligning resources. Finally, maintaining an equity focus includes owning past inequity and foregrounding equity. Unexpectedly because of this study's specific focus on making the value commitment to equity, yet true to Rorrer et al's (2008) characterization, centering this case study on the fourth role revealed how the elements of the other three roles converged. In fact it was determined that when a school district in the role of institutional actor commits to the value of equity, each of Rorrer et al's (2008) roles should prioritize the tasks identified in Figure 1.

106
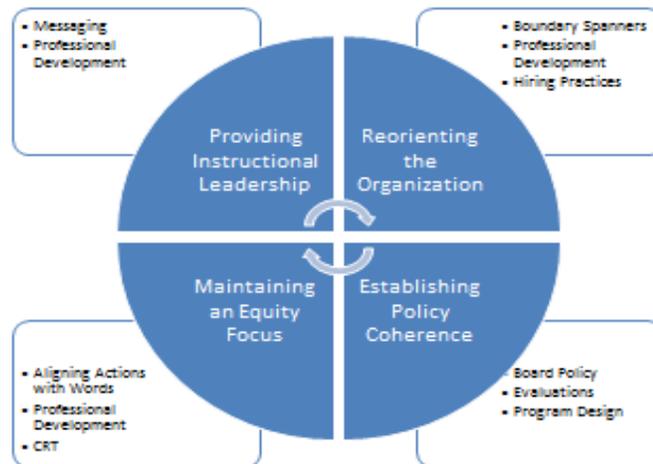
Figure 1. School District as Institutional Actor Committing to Equity. This case study's findings suggest that each of the four interconnected roles described by Rorrer et al (2008) prompts a school district serving as an institutional actor committed to equity to engage in the activities listed in the box adjoining each quarter-circle.

A case study such as this cannot lead to generalizations that apply to multiple sites; however, the insight gained through the examination of Bluebonnet ISD's value commitment to equity can spark sharper deliberation by educational leaders planning a similar step. As educational leaders extract practical considerations that may relate to their own unique districts and communities, educational researchers can explore how other districts demonstrated this commitment.

This chapter begins by answering each of the research questions in separate sections. Researcher reflections are then shared followed by implications for practice and recommended directions for future research.

Was Bluebonnet ISD an Institutional Actor?

As the case study on Bluebonnet ISD progressed, Rorrer et al's (2008) conceptualization of the school district as an institutional actor became increasingly clearer as a goal worthy of aspiration, rather than a reality intentionally employed by district leaders. Commitment to the value of equity was simultaneously flowing in top-down and grassroots ways. The gap that existed between these dualities prevented the emergence of a fully organized collective collaboratively molding a new culture in the district.

Expectedly, all of the members of the organized collective understood their distinct positions within the district's organizational structure. As distinguished by Rorrer et al (2008), the power held individually is superseded by the exponentially stronger leverage members share as an organized collective. Together, these leaders can use their role as an institutional actor to embed equity as both a value and a goal (Rorrer et al, 2008). Perhaps more difficult for the interviewed leaders to understand was exactly how their positions coalesced into this superordinate institutional actor capable of shifting the culture within Bluebonnet ISD. As described in the previous chapter, former superintendent Hoya was always involved in some way in the decision-making and implementation process regarding the district's value commitment. Hoya was instrumental in identifying district readiness for delving more deeply into diversity

awareness, and then later transitioning to the pursuit of equity and social justice. While the other leaders interviewed held varying opinions regarding his true ability to thoughtfully engineer the value commitment, no one discounted his personal devotion. However, Hoya's adoption of a hierarchy conflicted with Rorrer et al's (2008) description of the non-linear nature of systemic reform. In their view, the overlapping variability of roles increased district ability to respond to the numerous contexts in which cultural change happens. Rorrer et al (2008) said, "The feedback loops create opportunities for practices, policies, or structures in one role to be altered, specifically increasing alignment and coherence, as a result of changes [in] the other roles," (p. 339). They inferred that within a hierarchical system, the benefit of coevolving roles is lessened, thereby impeding the possible progress of the reform.

Beyond understanding the positional authority of their respective roles, other district leaders also recognized the bonds between the superintendent and the school board, and between the superintendent and his executive leaders. This recognition alluded to the role interdependence and interrelatedness presented in Rorrer et al's (2008) description of a district as an institutional actor. Principals simultaneously experienced the long-armed influence of these upper-level district leaders and their own unique independence as leaders of their campuses. Rorrer et al (2008) postulated that as the district's "sensitivity to its alignment or dissonance among its roles with its value commitments and intended goals occurs; changes become more acute and simultaneous" (p. 340). Administrators in Bluebonnet ISD developed a shared responsibility for equity during the years covered by this case study yet continued to see themselves as

109

individuals contributing to a district goal rather than an institutional actor effecting cultural change. The element of team connectivity (Brown et al, 2011) was missing.

The presence of boundary spanners (Honig, 2006) may have also prevented true institutional actor status to materialize. Social studies coordinator Moore and I shared this assignment as designated facilitators for all diversity-related initiatives in Bluebonnet ISD. Our visibility as co-chairs of the central office diversity committee and lead presenters at administrative meetings provided us a unique vantage point from which we could observe, and sometimes influence, both district and campus actions related to equity. From our peers on the central office diversity committee and in structured activities during administrative meetings, we were kept informed of activities happening throughout the district as well as concerns and questions regarding district expectations. As described by Honig (2006), our position on the lower edges of the leadership hierarchy did not afford us supervisory authority to oversee implementation; however, we were respected as diversity and equity experts by campus and district leaders. Regardless, the respect for our frontline positioning did not equate to the type of interdependence that could lead to institutional actor status (Honig, 2003, 2006; Rorrer et al, 2008). Our colleagues – peers, principals, and executive leaders – instead tended to view us as the exclusive bearers of the equity torch. As a result, the shared responsibility assumed by all leaders regarding Bluebonnet ISD's commitment to equity was not equally distributed.

How Did BISD Demonstrate an Equity Commitment?

As observed during this case study, the combination of personal values, changing demographics and requirements of the state assessment system created a viable launching point for a closer examination of diversity and equity in Bluebonnet ISD. Through the lens of CRT, a compelling need to follow through on this convergence of interests existed, which sharpened district readiness for the elimination of lingering inequities masquerading as norms within their systems (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). Likewise, Bluebonnet ISD's determination to excel within the state's testing and accountability framework further strengthened willingness to adjust longstanding practices in order to attain universally high achievement for their students (Skrla, 2004; Skrla et al, 2001). The efforts to aggressively dissect test performance data, referrals to special programs, and program participation, then using understanding gleaned from this analysis to revamp or design anew instructional interventions paralleled the use of equity audits (Skrla et al, 2004). As mentioned previously, the use of data figured prominently in the district's demonstration of commitment.

Predictably, most of the actions that followed Bluebonnet ISD's declaration of an equity commitment relied heavily on professional development (Firestone et al, 2005; Scribner, 1999). Professional development provided to administrators and teachers in Bluebonnet ISD adhered to guidelines for effective adult learning (National Staff Development Council, 2009); however, the additional consideration of personal readiness incorporated into multiple, ongoing, and experiential learning was absent. These additional criteria, considered hallmarks of anti-racism and social justice-oriented

111

professional development, limited the long-term viability of Bluebonnet ISD's

standalone sessions detached from a larger, pre-planned context (Darling-Hammond,

1999; Gay, 2002; Kose & Lim, 2010; Schniedewind, 2005; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003;

Wiggan, 2007). Nonetheless, most interviewees appreciated the diversity and equity

professional development because of the facilitators' efforts to embed reflection and

specific actions into every activity as recommended by Pollock et al (2010). The annual

conference, focusing first on diversity and then evolving to equity, was an oft-mentioned

example of Bluebonnet ISD's sincere commitment. The standalone conference, in

contrast to best practice extolling the merit of ongoing, connected activities, was cited by

district leaders as proof that a supportive climate for equity existed in Bluebonnet ISD.

As yet another component of successful equity professional development

(Schniedewind, 2005), Bluebonnet ISD again seemed poised for successful cultural

change.

Other efforts, which could have reinforced the commitment to educational

equity, were typically relegated to an association with a special program without ever

referencing equity. This was more likely a result of the compartmentalization of various

initiatives rather than any calculated move by district leaders to establish barriers

blocking the equity commitment (Honig, 2006). Although the consideration of privilege

became more visible in discussions regarding any Bluebonnet ISD initiative (Wildman

& Davis, 2000), administrators had not yet determined how to routinely counter its

effect, especially across multiple programs, within the time span of this case study.

Consequently, an opportunity to persuade any reluctant district leaders and staffers to

more heartily support the full value of equity was lost because Bluebonnet ISD had not yet created a strong enough case for a full-scale commitment (Delpit, 1991; Gay, 2002; Schniedewind, 2005).

How Were Voices of Color Included?

Quite possibly the hardest battle faced by Bluebonnet ISD was the struggle to include race in discussions and decisions regarding the equity commitment. According to Horsford (2010), sidestepping race minimizes leadership ability to dismantle systems that better serve whites. As stated by social studies coordinator Moore, principals were especially vocal about their fatigue with race-based conversations. Principal Pierce may have been alone in his fervent pride regarding the lack of intentional effort invested into supporting positive race relations on his campus; however, his lack of enthusiasm toward recurrent race-based conversations was expressed by multiple district leaders. Peers respectfully tolerated Principal Hinojosa's counterstory insisting that normal in Bluebonnet ISD was racially diverse without being swayed from their preference for race neutrality (Bernal, 2002; Horsford, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). In a way, the race-weary administrators viewed the transition to an equity focus as a relief from the perceived constant inclusion of race in all diversity discussions.

Noting this sensitivity, former superintendent Hoya refrained from too frequently drawing attention to his personal reality as an African American male. Admittedly, there were times that the central office staffers and principals were also allowed to lose sight of my own status as an African American female. Moore and I endeavored to strategically utilize our personal characteristics – she is a white female – in ways that

113

would allow difficult conversations about race to continue without overly upsetting those who preferred a race-neutral approach to all topics (Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Nonetheless, I regularly wrestled with frustration while facilitating professional development sessions because of my personal conviction that foregrounding race, especially through the inclusion of cournterstories, was necessary to disrupt systems that precluded students of color from achieving at the same high levels as their white peers (Delgado, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The case for including, perhaps even foregrounding, race during a commitment to equity is strong. Existing research has already demonstrated the benefit of having an instructional force knowledgeable about race (Pollock et al., 2010; Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). When coupled with the accessibility of professional development, an organized collective would have a virtually clear path toward effecting the cultural change necessary to increase the achievement of previously underserved student populations. Bluebonnet ISD recognized the importance of using professional development to effect change (Firestone et al., 2005; Scribner, 1999), but may have underestimated its usefulness toward solidifying district commitment to equity.

Researcher Reflections

Throughout the case study, I remained mindful of my status as one of the administrators directly involved in the implementation and management of Bluebonnet ISD's commitment to equity. While my position was not within the executive circle, the fact remained that I interacted with the superintendent, deputy superintendent, assistant superintendents, central office administrators, and campus principals. Other than a joint

114

presentation to the school board the social studies coordinator and I did in the year prior

to the time period covered by this study, my interaction with this group of leaders was

extremely limited. Nonetheless, board members – especially the former educators – were

aware of my contributions to the more public actions, like the annual conference and No

Place for Hate.

Consequently, I frequently wondered about the effect, if any, my status as

researcher and interviewer may have had on the participants. The individual struggles I

witnessed during interviews could have been caused by the attempt to define formally a

process that, as former Deputy Superintendent Kincaid repeatedly said, was organic and

informal. Conversely, realizing my prominent role as diversity champion and facilitator,

participants may have carefully phrased their answers to avoid hurting my feelings.

Although it's not possible to resolve this with absolute certainty, the consistent themes

that emerged over the course with multiple leaders indicated sincerity in their reflections

that had little to do with any possible concern for me.

This case study's findings align with Rorrer et al's (2008) assertion that "clearly,

districts do matter" (p. 332). Accordingly, the study's focus was on how Bluebonnet

ISD's possible organized collective used their positional influence to operationalize a

value commitment to equity. The key as described by Rorrer et al (2008) was to uncover

how their role in committing to equity was "connected to their collective identity and

their ability to create change by altering institutional scripts that tacitly and explicitly

govern behavior of organizational members" (p. 332). In effect, the case study compared

the impact of the stated words with actions actually undertaken by the district to determine the extent of the district's role as an institutional actor.

As stated repeatedly by interviewees, declaring a value commitment to equity was made possible by the prevalent personal commitments already made by individual district leaders in Bluebonnet ISD. Frequently, the values of leaders in their discrete roles were so strongly held that participants seemingly projected those same values onto a district platform. The predilection toward valuing all students was a necessary prerequisite for spreading the commitment to equity throughout Bluebonnet ISD (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008; Skrla et al, 2004). The depth of their individual commitment bespoke of their willingness as leaders to interrupt the status quo, regardless of possible motivation, for the sake of all students (Lopez, 2003). Further, even though a missionary's zeal, as expressed by board member Van Buren, rather than a respectful belief in everyone's ability to contribute, as believed by social studies coordinator Moore, may have prompted district commitment, the commitment was still made. As Delpit (1998) said, the goal when committing to equity is to ensure that previously underserved students now have both the written and unwritten rules in order to be successful. By combining their individually-held values prioritizing student care and concern, leaders in Bluebonnet ISD were able to collectively commit to the value of equity.

While the intent of educational reform is to increase student achievement, unspoken consideration is usually given to instructional staff members. Every proposed

116

change, regardless of how beneficial it may be to students, is tempered with consideration of how difficult it will be to get staff to buy into it. If the proposed change is deemed too difficult – in time, effort, or cost, then it could be rejected or abandoned. Before making that drastic of a decision, a school district can adjust its implementation approach. Rorrer et al (2008) said, "If equity is not a collective value…and the district begins to foreground it, the district may have to increase centralization and tighten control between roles to maintain this focus and achieve this outcome" (p. 338). Although many leaders within the Bluebonnet ISD organized collective personally believed in the importance of equity as a value commitment, some directives were necessary in order for equity to be seen as a true goal, hence the requirement for campuses to participate in No Place for Hate.

With the diversity and equity initiatives, staff responded as well as their principals helped them to respond. If the principal was supportive, then the staff was generally supportive. Similarly to this case study, administrators were the primary recipients of Bluebonnet ISD direct efforts related to diversity awareness and equity. Still, programs like No Place for Hate that made it to the student level were received very well, adding credibility to Principal Pierce's conclusion that students were light-years ahead of adults in their ability to embrace differences. The greater Bluebonnet community also enjoyed diversity awareness, looking forward to contributing to campus diversity fairs or cultural projects. Unfortunately for Bluebonnet ISD, the controversy surrounding the district's extension of domestic partner benefits inadvertently split public support regarding the equity commitment. District leaders may have avoided the

117

surprise of this split if they had truly placed equity in the foreground, rather than assuming that participation in campus fairs indicated an actual readiness to discuss and dismantle privileges held by a select few. Once again, a limit was placed on equity's possible scope because Bluebonnet ISD had not instituted the tight coupling and coevolution of all four district roles as recommended by Rorrer et al (2008).

Implications for Practice

A review of the literature focusing on diversity or social justice professional development did not reveal a comprehensive guide describing a structural, systemic process that seemingly would be necessary to provoke the kind of cultural change related to an equity commitment. While general planning and organizational theory exist, the unique dynamics of education combined with the personal yet political sensitivity of educational equity require a different approach that addresses the urgency of mandated testing and ever-increasing inclusion of students with special needs. For this reason, district leaders can become overly concerned with quick, rather than strategic, action.

As expressed by many of the participants, the missing component in the Bluebonnet ISD commitment to equity was intentional, thoughtful, systemic planning. Despite initiating deeper thought through the provision of quality professional development and encouragement, there simply was not a finely structured plan of action enabling district leaders to confidently follow through on a value commitment to equity.

Administrators in Bluebonnet ISD valued diversity and equity, enabling the district to verbalize an equity commitment. Absent from this commitment, however, was a willingness to continually include race in change efforts. Data disaggregated by

118

race/ethnicity for state-mandated tests should be a convenient platform for closely examining instructional practices and programs that disadvantage students of color, as long as leaders are willing to abandon a fictitious race-neutral approach (Horsford, 2010; Lopez, 2003; Tate, 1997). For Bluebonnet ISD leaders, the preference for race-neutrality often led to the substitution of socioeconomic status as a means for distinguishing the various segments of the district's student population and community. Repeatedly referenced by board member Schneider, a "middle class ethic" (personal communication, December 13, 2013) – assumed to be commonly defined and understood – could then be used as a standard for success. However, the lack of a clear definition lead to the emergence of a new, limiting type of interest convergence in which the goal was to embed equity into everything. As progressive as this sounded, the words did not prompt delineated, structured action to support this near-miss of foregrounding equity. Instead, the new inferred perception expressed during interviews was that equity no longer mattered because it was now embedded rather than highlighted.

Maintaining status as a destination district filled with a diverse array of high-achieving students also provided Bluebonnet ISD with strong motivation to re-assess program access and other policies that seemingly privileged white students (Bell, 1980; Horsford, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lopez, 2003). For those suburban districts that are nestled together near large urban areas, this is an especially persuasive argument for using a CRT lens to review programs and policies because of the ease with which residents can transfer their students to adjoining districts. Quite possibly, a visible CRT approach could have relieved the race-based fatigue experienced by some Bluebonnet

ISD administrators because CRT provides a lens to contextualize issues of race. Through this analysis, administrators could have more clearly seen, understood, and abolished elements of white privilege preventing the widespread academic success of all students. Even without the benefit of an explicit inclusion of CRT, district administrators understood the logical progression from a singular focus on race to the addition of myriad differences when pursuing equity (Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Yasso, 2001) which should have stimulated a faster-paced implementation of their value commitment to equity.

Figure 1 attempts to resolve these issues by categorizing the important tasks that should be embedded within the four interconnected roles identified by Rorrer et al (2008). As seen in Bluebonnet ISD, providing instructional leadership requires explicit messaging and professional development to create the will and capacity to enact a commitment to equity. To re-orient the organization, a district must use empowered boundary spanners whose reports from the frontlines are respected as relevant contributions to decision-making. Additionally, deliberate professional development and hiring practices will enable leaders to create the organizational structure and culture needed to sustain an equity commitment.

To establish policy coherence among local, state, and federal guidelines, board policies, evaluations, and program design must seamlessly balance regulations while equitably distributing resources. Completing these activities assigned to Rorrer et al's (2008) first three roles of a district as an institutional actor then enables the district to manage an equity focus. This fourth role requires aligning district actions with words

and specialized professional development that demonstrates the collective owning of past inequity. Managing an equity focus can more readily co-evolve with the other three roles when CRT is utilized as both a lens of analysis and a filter for determining additional steps.

Directions for Future Research

With many districts touting variations of a willingness to serve every child, there is a large supply of future case study sites. Each district's story detailing how it navigated an equity commitment strengthens educational leadership scholarship while simultaneously supporting the practice of administrators already embarking on this journey. Incorporating a CRT analysis could further ensure the exposure and elimination of systemic barriers to equity. Additional case studies could increase scholarly understanding, perhaps leading to the development of best practices that could guide other school districts in their quest to align their words with their actions. This development would stop short of the fictional one-stop solution, and instead record the variety of answers in response to Rorrer et al's (2008) practical question, "As districts begin to foreground equity, how do districts negotiate the change process" (p. 343)? The case of Bluebonnet ISD is among the first entries into this arena, offering a glimpse into the steps and missteps associated with the value commitment of equity. There are still countless, unknown responses to the charge from Rorrer et al (2008) to apply critical perspectives in the examination of practices taken by the district as an institutional actor once an equity commitment has been made.

This case study began with the positive presupposition that institutional actor status simply existed within a large suburban district. On the contrary, it was revealed that even without awareness of Rorrer et al's (2008) scholarly language, district leaders must strategically choose to collectively pool their roles and influence to achieve institutional actor status. Consequently, further study of this choice could illuminate the barriers and strategies for overcoming them en route to a school district becoming an institutional actor. Whether the bureaucracy inherent in large organizations is a hindrance or benefit to functioning as an institutional actor is determined by the decisions and actions of district, school board, and campus leaders.

Summary and Conclusion

While a review of the literature and the unpredictability of real-world practice nix the likelihood of a singular model supplying the perfect answer to managing issues of diversity and equity, this case study suggests the potential merit of using Rorrer et al's (2008) conceptualization of a school district as an institutional actor as a framework to understanding the intricacy of district work when striving for equity, despite their admonition to set aside any desire for an all-purpose solution. This idea of multiple district leaders collaborating as an organized collective to effect change encourages administrators to think more inclusively and strategically about who is involved in reform efforts because it shifts attention "to what can be learned from the complexity and adaptability of districts as well as the interdependence of the roles they enact" (Rorrer et al, 2008, p. 336). Further, when paired with a CRT perspective, institutional

actor status becomes an especially powerful approach to ensuring that all students truly get what they individually need to succeed academically.

In the end, this case study demonstrated the potential power of committing to equity by a district serving as an institutional actor. The organized collective is uniquely situated to effect the systemic cultural change necessary to ensure that all students receive the high quality education they deserve. Bluebonnet ISD's ability to make the value commitment was ultimately measured by the district's ensuing actions. Some actions confirmed, while others undermined the authenticity of the commitment. Overall, the clearest lesson to be learned from observing Bluebonnet ISD's journey is the importance of intentionally aligning words with actions through the strategic use of the district's potential role as an institutional actor. In this way, the tipping point factors of district leadership, CRT, social justice, and professional development can be effectively interwoven to accomplish this worthy goal. The words matter, however, it is the sustained, deliberate actions taken by the organized collective that determine the efficacy of making a value commitment to equity.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Questions listed are meant to initiate conversation with interviewees regarding themes
for this qualitative study. Additional questions may be asked depending on the responses
from each interviewee.

Background

1. Please state position in district; length of service in that position, in the district,
    and in education overall; briefly describe responsibilities of current position.
    Separately, collect demographic information such as race/ethnicity, education,
    gender, etc.

2. What interested you in this position? What attracted you to this district?

Determination of institutional actor status

3. In your position, how do you collaborate with others in the district?

4. Who are the primary decision-makers in the district?

5. Please describe any influence or impact district expectations and/or beliefs have
    on your duties or professional conduct.

6. Who is/are responsible for communicating/demonstrating any decision or
    commitment? Please explain why each person (or position) named is included.

7. Who is/are participated in decisions regarding diversity and/or equity? Please
    explain why each person (or position) named is included.

Determination of diversity awareness or equity focus

8. When did you become aware of any district commitment to diversity and/or to equity? Please describe the catalyst that made you aware of this district commitment.

9. Please describe district expectations or beliefs regarding diversity.

10. How, if at all, does the district distinguish between diversity awareness and equity?

11. How, if at all, is this distinction communicated or demonstrated?

12. What is your source for information and/or guidance regarding district expectations and/or beliefs regarding equity?

Consideration of Critical Race Theory tenets

13. How important is it for staff and administrator race/ethnicity to match student (or community) race/ethnicity?

14. What prompted district interest regarding diversity and/or equity?

15. Who is/are considered when discussing equity – students, staff members, community, administrators, and/or others? Is any group, or sub-group, given special consideration?

16. How have staff, administrators, students, and the community responded to the district's efforts regarding diversity and equity?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWEES

Last Name	First Name	Position	Years in District	Ethnicity	Gender
Hoya	Kevin	Former Superintendent	7	African American	Male
Myers (Dr.)	Quentin	Assistant Superintendent	8	African American	Male
Harrington (Dr.)	Adele	Chief Schools Officer	24	White	Female
Schneider (Dr.)	Naomi	Board Member, Former Board President	13+	White	Female
Moore	Angel	Social Studies Coordinator, Co-Chair of DSC	19	White	Female
O'Rourke	Jared	Former C&I Director, DSC Member	4	White	Male
Kincaid	David	Former Deputy Superintendent	5	White	Male
Pierce	Bob	HS Principal	9	White	Male
York	Denetria	Elem Principal	16	African American	Female
Thompkins	Jennifer	Retired Assistant Superintendent	15	White	Female
Shanahan	Margaret	Retired MS Principal	30	White	Female
Van Buren	Martha	Board Member	45+	White	Female
Hinojosa	Miguel	Elem Principal	6	Hispanic	Male
Cunningham	Sandra	Elem Principal	20	White	Female