District Leadership Practices That Foster Equity: Equity Talk Through Framing Processes

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DISTRICT LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THAT FOSTER EQUITY: EQUITY TALK

THROUGH FRAMING PROCESSES

Dissertation by

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DISTRICT LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THAT FOSTER EQUITY:

EQUITY TALK THROUGH FRAMING PROCESSES

By

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Abstract

Leading for equity is a challenging endeavor. One leadership practice that fosters equitable learning environments is engaging in dialogue and reflection. When district leaders participate in dialogue and reflection, their discourse helps them derive meaning, and in turn, shapes their understanding of the critical and complex issues related to fostering equity. As part of a group qualitative case study about district leadership practices that foster equity in one diverse Massachusetts school district, the purpose of this individual study was to better understand how district leaders used framing during dialogue and reflection. More specifically it addressed how they used framing processes (Bedford and Snow, 2000) when engaging in equity talk. Utilizing inductive reasoning for data gathered by semi-structured interviews, observations, and document review, this study identified equity talk manifesting as one of three themes: diversity as an asset, decision-making processes, and use of data and feedback. Understanding how and when specific framing processes are used can empower district leaders to be more strategic in impacting stakeholder thinking and language and maintaining an equity focus.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and my father who instilled in me a love of reading and learning and who exemplified compassion for others throughout their lives.

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CHAPTER ONE[1]

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement and Research Question

The United States offers the promise of opportunity for all students to have equal and equitable access to high-quality education that will prepare them for college and careers. Education is intended to strengthen and support a society by developing the knowledge and skills of each of its citizens (Cramer, Little & McHatton, 2018). However, our nation continues to struggle to deliver this promise as evidenced by persistent disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes for all learners.

Inequity in education has harmful implications for a healthy democratic society. For example, the gaps in educational achievement experienced by Black and Latinx students continue to widen to the point where many youth, especially low-income students of color, are unprepared for a labor market requiring increasingly complex skills (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Research of our prison population shows that over half of those incarcerated are high school dropouts and possess poor literacy skills and undiagnosed learning disabilities (Barton & Coley, 1996). Disparities in learning opportunities and academic outcomes have contributed to America's decline in educational performance in comparison with other nations (Blackstein & Noguera, 2016). Indeed, inadequate access to high-quality teachers and resources for non-Asian students of color threatens the strength of our democracy. As Darling-Hammond (2007) states, "Our future will be increasingly determined by our capacity and our will to educate all children well" (p. 319).

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[1] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Matthew Bishop, Deborah S. Bookis, Sandra Drummey, Allyson Mizoguchi, and Thomas W. Welch, Jr..

The persistent academic achievement gap (e.g. Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, and Koschoreck, 2001) still experienced by historically marginalized students is also reflected in significant measures such as graduation rates, advanced course enrollment, and college admission rates. Skrla et al. (2001) go on to assert that culturally and linguistically diverse students "experience negative and inequitable treatment in typical public schools" (p. 238). Such inequitable treatment has lasting effects for students, leading to national trends of over assignment to special education, tracking into lower-level academic classes, and facing disproportionate disciplinary measures and ultimately a disproportionate drop-out rate.

To address educational inequity, reform efforts have often taken the shape of federal legislation aspiring to provide historically marginalized students equitable opportunities to learn. Such efforts saw the creation of landmark legislation such as Title 1 of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, originally intended to solve the problems of poverty through supplementing school funding and providing more resources for children of low-income families. Nearly a decade after the Title 1 Act passed, more substantive guidelines for school districts led to the eventual development of further national school reform policies of the eighties and nineties designed to mitigate the achievement gap (Cohen, Moffitt & Goldin, 2007). In a push for national accountability and a heightened focus on closing achievement gaps, in 2001 the federal government tied state allocations of Title 1 funds through the attempted reform efforts of No Child Left Behind (Wrabel, Saultz, Polikoff, McEachin, & Duque, 2018). The most recent reform effort led by the U.S. Department of Education passed in December 2015 as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In a more refined approach to equity in schools, one of the guidelines specifically highlighted in the new ESSA policy calls for schools and school leaders

"to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps" (*Every Student Succeeds Act,* 2015).

ESSA represents the first time federal policy explicitly highlights the importance of leadership in fostering equity (Young, Winn, & Reedy, 2017). It reflects a recent shift in thinking that leadership is an essential component of achieving equitable outcomes and opportunities for all students. As Anderson (2003) and Alsbury and Whitaker (2007) state, nearly 50 years ago, researchers considered the teacher the most vital component for implementation of reforms; two decades later, research focused on the school as an institution as the means to educational change. The standards-based reform movement and accountability systems of the mid-1990s (Anderson, 2003; Waters & Marzano, 2006), along with the demands for the success of all students, led to the view that districts and district leaders had "unavoidable if not desirable" (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2007, p. 4) roles in reform.

Recognizing the importance of district-level leadership in student achievement and reducing inequity, we are conducted this study to gain a deeper understanding of the practices that district leaders leverage in their efforts to enact equity for all students. These practices may have direct influence on equity work at the district level, and may also support leadership at other levels within the district that in turn fosters equity work elsewhere. While the literature is replete with school leaders' practices that impact equitable access and outcomes of historically marginalized students (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010), there is a gap in the literature that explores how district leaders' practices might do the same. Specifically, we explored the following research question: How do district leadership practices foster equity? Our study examined several aspects of the school district leadership context, including:

fostering a sense of belonging, fostering equity talk, educating English learners, teacher

leadership, and succession planning to support leadership transition.

Individual Studies and Conceptual Lens

The dissertation in practice team identified equity practices in several aspects of the

school district context, with the intent of contributing to the field of educational equity research

by examining how district leadership practices foster equity. Thematically, each of the five team

members examined a specific aspect of school district leadership through a particular equity lens

and how leaders are challenged with prioritizing this vision to benefit all students (see

Appendices A through D for individual study abstracts). Table 1 summarizes the focus areas of

each of the five researchers in the group by investigator, research question and the conceptual

framework used to guide the individual studies.

Table 1

Five Studies of the Role of District Leadership Practices in Fostering Equity

Investigator	Research Question	Conceptual Framework
Bishop	How do district leaders help foster a climate of belonging for students of color?	Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL)
Bookis	How do district leaders use framing processes when engaging in equity talk?	Collective Action Framing
Drummey	How do educators enact or support culturally responsive behaviors for ELs?	Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL)
Mizoguchi	How do district leaders set the conditions for teacher-led equity work?	Teacher Leadership
Welch	How do the practices of district leaders foster equity through planning for future changes in leadership?	Human Capital Theory

Literature Review

The goal of the subsequent literature review is to orient the reader to prior research relevant to the team's dissertation in practice. In this section, we provide our definition of equity that will be used throughout the study after exploring various definitions from the research. Secondly, we highlight the challenges of inequity in Massachusetts. Third, we discuss the importance of leadership in fostering equity work at multiple levels of the district. Fourth, we describe both the internal and external challenges leaders face in keeping a focus on fostering equitable practices. Finally, we present a review of the literature that highlights promising practices of district, school, and teacher leaders guided by a vision for equity in education.

What is Equity?

Equity is a challenging and complex idea to define. Throughout the literature review we discovered variations of the definitions of equity and ways it can be explained. This may be one contributing factor to persistent inequities: if we don't know what it is, how do we talk about it? How do we create conditions for it and operationalize it? The inherent complexity may also explain the rationale for recent legislation to include equity in its purpose statement. Debates about equity often evoke a zero-sum scenario, a perception that if we do more for those who are disadvantaged it will mean there will be less for the advantaged (Blackstein & Noguera, 2016). In this section, we explore the multiple ways to understand the idea of equity and then present our research study's operational definition.

Equity, not equality. In an effort to define equity for our study's purpose, it is important to first clarify the distinction between "equality" and "equity." Since equality assumes that everyone receives the same share, one can define educational equality as students receiving the same support, opportunities, instruction, and resources in the spirit of fairness for all. With the

diverse needs of students, providing the same level of support for all is insufficient in ensuring positive outcomes for all learners. Consequently, each student must be provided with instruction and support based upon their individual needs. Therefore an equal education may be inherently unequal (Cramer et al., 2018).

Equity as outcomes. One way to approach the definition of equity is to describe the outcome or the aspiration for students, or the full talent development of every young person. Boykin and Noguera (2011) insisted that both access and outcomes are necessary to achieve equity: "Equity involves more than simply ensuring that children have equal access to education. Equity also entails a focus on outcomes and results" (p. vii-viii). In practice, this would entail defining the skills, knowledge and dispositions with which students should graduate, helping students explore their strengths and passions, and disaggregating school and district-based data by subgroups to assess student progress towards those goals.

Equity as opportunity. Some researchers and organizations define equity in terms of the educational opportunities afforded to students and/or the extent to which students have access to all the opportunities offered. For example, the Professional Standards for Positive School Leadership (2015) stated for Standard 3 that, "Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (p. 11). In practice this translates to removing barriers that exist to opportunities such as eliminating leveling within a discipline, creating a sense of belonging for all students, implementing effective instructional and family engagement practices, providing teachers with opportunities to lead and make equity-based decisions, and reducing or eliminating participation fees.

Equity as commitment. Closely aligned with access and outcomes is the commitment district leaders bring to their work of creating more equitable learning environments. District leaders are in a position to set policy and procedures that have profound ramifications on student access to opportunities, and as a result, the outcomes of those opportunities. How they approach this work - or the operational principle that guides this work - is another way to define equity. Hart and Germaine-Watts (1996) discussed equity as an operational principle that shapes policies and practices that impact the expectations and resources available. In addition to writing policy and providing resources, an operating principle also greatly impacts district leaders' practices, such as how they engage in equity talk, enact federal policies, and prepare for leader transitions.

Equity as affirmation. Recently, researchers have begun to define equity in terms of how educators view and affirm students, as this is what creates a foundation for operating principles and all other activities that ensure more equitable learning cultures. Pollack (2017) stated that "equity efforts treat all young people as equally and infinitely valuable" (p. 7), while Fergus (2016) went even further, explaining that each person's unique experiences should be considered in coordinating practices and outcomes. Egalite, Fusarelli and Fusarelli (2017) expanded the definition of equity by defining an equitable community as "one that pursues the common good by affirming the identities of constituent groups defined by race/ethnicity, gender, national origin, language, sexual orientation, religion, disability, and the intersection of these identities" (p.759). In practice, district leaders promote inclusive and strength-based practices and find ways to encourage cooperation among and between groups of students.

Equity as systems. Scott (2001) built on Egalite et al.'s (2017) idea of an equitable community by asserting that systemic equity is the "ways in which systems and individuals habitually operate to ensure that every learner--in whatever learning environment that learner is

found--has the greatest opportunity to learn" (p. 6). To further contextualize his definition, Scott (2001) enumerated five goals of educational equity: comparably high achievement and other student outcomes, equitable access and inclusion, equitable treatment, equitable opportunities to learn, and equitable resource distribution. The first goal, comparably high achievement and other student outcomes, focuses on maintaining high academic achievement while pursuing minimal achievement and performance gaps for all identifiable groups of students. The second goal, equitable access and inclusion, focuses on engaging all learners within a school by ensuring all students have unobstructed access and involvement in the school's programs and activities. The next goal, equitable treatment, asks leaders to strive for an environment that is characterized by respectful interactions, acceptance, and safety so that all members of the school community can risk becoming invested. The fourth goal, creating opportunities to learn, centers around ensuring all students have access to high standards of academic achievement by giving them the appropriate academic, social, and emotional support. Finally, equitable resource distribution calls for leaders to ensure that the distribution of all resources supports learning for all.

Our operational definition of equity. Our literature review confirmed that equity can be understood and addressed from multiple perspectives: outcomes, opportunity, commitment, affirmation, and as a system, making it even more challenging to discuss and address. For the purpose of this study, we drew on the different perspectives discussed previously to operationally define equity as the commitment to ensure that every student receives the opportunities they require based on their individual needs, strengths, and experiences to reach their full potential. Different aspects of our definition may have been highlighted in our individual studies, but overall, our work was anchored in our operational definition of equity.

Issues of Equity in Massachusetts

Within the context of inequity nationwide as described in our Problem Statement, Massachusetts is explicit in its commitment to equity. For example, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education stated the following in its 2015-2019 Equity Plan in response to ESSA requirements:

> The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) has set high standards and expectations for all students in the Commonwealth, and holds all accountable to those standards and expectations. However, while ESE may celebrate successes, we are aware of ongoing proficiency gaps and inequities. These give us a constant impetus to do better in eliminating all gaps and inequities on behalf of our nearly one million students. (p. 4)

However, despite a focus on equity, experiences for students of color in Massachusetts mirror the national trends. According to the *Number One for Some* report released by The Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership in 2018, even though Massachusetts is perennially affixed among the national ranking lists in state achievement, students of color still face "glaring and persistent disparities in opportunity and achievement" (p.1). While Massachusetts scores on the international PISA assessment would place the Commonwealth first among the 35 participating countries, the scores for Black and Latinx students would place the Commonwealth twenty-eighth (p. 4). Figures 1 and 2 below show that a significantly lower percentage of students of historically marginalized students (Black, Latinx, economically disadvantaged, English language learners, and students with disabilities) met grade-level expectations in both English Language Arts and mathematics than their counterparts based on 2017 MCAS data.

Figure 1

Percent of 3rd graders meeting grade-level expectations in
English Language Arts, 2017 Next-Gen MCAS
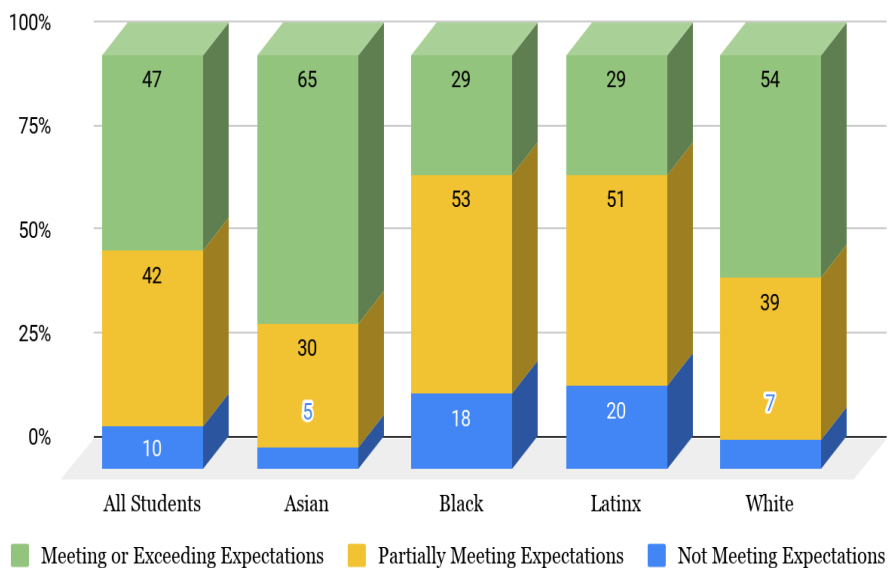
Adapted from Number One for Some (2018), p. 4

Figure 2

Percent of 8th graders meeting grade-level expectations in
Mathematics, 2017 Next-Gen MCAS
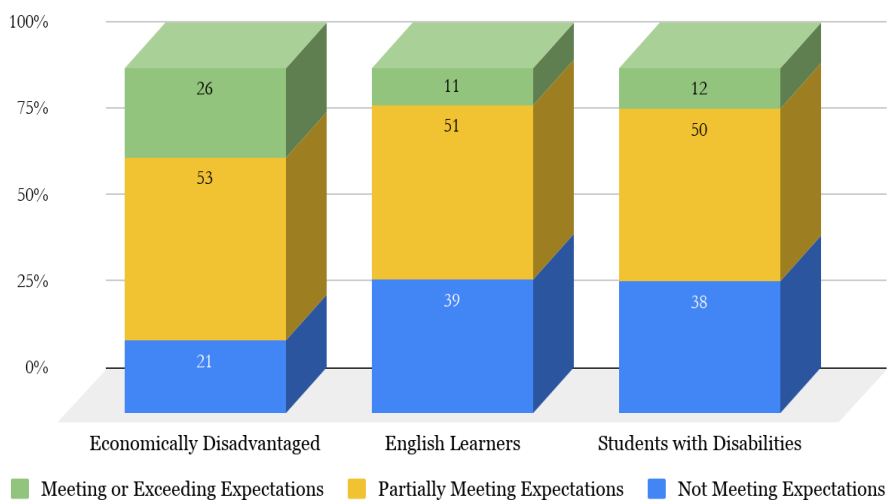
Adapted from Number One for Some (2018), p. 4

The achievement gap that students of color in Massachusetts experience is directly related to the opportunity gap in their access to early childhood education, high quality teachers, and rigorous programs of study. Black, Latinx, and Asian families in Massachusetts all have a lower rate of children enrolled in early childhood education compared to their white peers. Furthermore, students of color are three times more likely to have a teacher who lacks content expertise in the subject they teach, making closing any gaps they might have much more unlikely. At the high school level, students of color are completing rigorous programs of study at a lower rate than White students, and are underrepresented in Advanced Placement coursework. Such gaps in opportunity have dire consequences for students in four-year high school graduation rates (see Figure 3) and in the fact that over a third of Black students and a quarter of Latinx students at Massachusetts state universities have to take at least one remedial course. This leads to a more difficult path to college completion, and only 10 percent of Black and Latinx community college students graduate in three years. As concerning are the four-year college graduation rates, with less than half of Massachusetts students of color graduating within six years (*Number One for Some*, 2018).

Figure 3

Percent of four-year high school graduation rates for the class of 2016 and national rankings

White 92%/8th

English Learners 64%/29th

Latino 73%/43rd

All Students 88%/13th

Low-Income 78%/18th

Asian 93%/15th

Black 79%/19th

2016 Graduation Rate/National Ranking
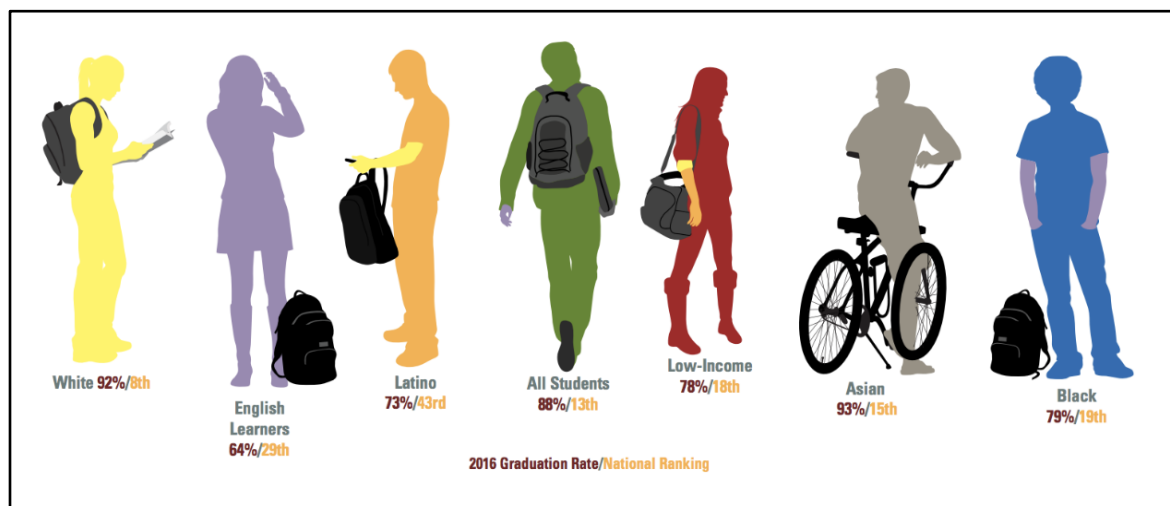
Number One for Some (2018), p. 5

Leadership Matters

Leadership for creating, sustaining and promoting equitable school systems is vital as evidenced by current research and the explicit statement for leadership in ESSA. Within school systems there are visible, clearly titled leadership roles, as well as others that are not quite as visible or defined. In this section we review the literature according to two different levels (district and school) of leadership and the roles contained within each level.

District-level leadership. One level of leadership whose positive impact on creating equitable learning systems and student learning outcomes that has become increasingly clear is district-level leadership. The Superintendency comprises one of the roles within district-level leadership along with those whose roles pertain to an area of focus across the whole district.

Superintendents. While some researchers question the impact of district-level leaders on educational reform, empirical literature demonstrates evidence that central office administrators can have a significant impact on student outcomes (Leithwood & Prestine, 2002; McFarlane,

2010). McFarlane (2010) argued that the superintendent is the pivotal leader at the district level and is the most powerful position in a public school system that can foster improvement reform. Effective superintendents create goal-oriented districts by focusing on the following: analyzing data, providing supports, communicating student learning outcomes, setting expectations, offering professional development (Bredeson & Kose, 2007), annually evaluating principals, reporting student achievement to the board, observing classrooms during school visits, and gathering resources for instruction (Waters & Marzano, 2006). The superintendent's leadership can either positively or negatively affect school cultures, climates, values, and motivation. McFarlane (2010) argued that the best way for superintendents to be effective is to improve their leadership practices "across districts through collaborative and participative leadership" (p. 57). Moreover, such effective leadership practices will "positively influence school personnel and school improvements to enhance student learning outcomes and performance" (p.55).

Other district-level leaders. Marzano and Waters (2009) asserted that district-level leaders have an impact on student achievement. Specifically, their meta-analytical study sought to determine the relationship between district level leadership and student achievement. Their analysis of 27 related studies that represented 2714 districts studied between 1970 to 2005 brought them to the conclusion that when district leaders are effective, student achievement across the district is positively affected. Furthermore, Marzano and Waters (2009) claimed that district-level leaders are effective when they are engaged in the following five initiatives: (a) ensuring collaborative goal setting, (b) establishing non negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, (c) creating broad alignment with and support of district goals, (d) monitoring achievement and instruction goals, and (e) allocating resources to support the goals for

achievement and instruction. Effectively fulfilling these responsibilities leads to a measurable positive effect on student achievement.

Epstein, Galindo, and Sheldon (2011) supported the idea that district-level leaders can have a positive impact on improving teaching and learning. As referenced in Young's (2017) literature review, "A growing body of research has consistently demonstrated that leadership is one of the most important school-level factors influencing a student's education" (p. 707). Specifically, by directing their organization, managing the people within the organization, leading vision and goal development of the school and district, and improving the instructional agenda in their schools and districts, leaders influence student learning and development (Leithwood et al., 2006). Epstein et al. (2011) also found that district-level leaders are a "persistent and significant variable" (p. 487) when fostering partnership and increasing outreach to involve all families in their student's education.

In their narrative synthesis of 81 peer-reviewed articles, books, policy and research reports, and other pieces on the subject of the role of school districts in reform, Rorrer, Skrla and Scheurich (2008) concluded that district-level leaders have an "indispensable role, as institutional actors, in educational reform" (p. 336). Rorrer et al. (2008) assert that districts serve four essential roles in reform: (a) providing instructional leadership, (b) reorienting the organization, (c) establishing policy coherence, and (d) maintaining an equity focus. It is the last role, focusing on equity, that they argue should give direction to the other three.

By focusing on equity, Rorrer et al. (2008) argued that school districts can disrupt and displace institutional inequity. Districts can displace inequity by owning these two roles in district reform: owning past inequities and foregrounding equity, especially through the use of data. Acknowledging and taking responsibility for past inequity in student performance, rather

than justifying it, provides the district with purpose and a moral response to improve outcomes for all students.

School-level leadership. At the level of the school, both building leaders and teacher leaders can have a significant impact on student achievement by creating new systems of support, engaging with families, improving instruction, and building a culture of belonging.

Principals. The vital role of principals in successfully implementing reform efforts to support the achievement of historically marginalized students is well-documented (e.g. Theoharis, 2010; Louis & Murphy, 2016; DeMatthews, 2018). In their analysis of 116 surveys by teachers and principals, Louis and Murphy (2016) determined that equitable student achievement outcomes correlated with the culture of curiosity, trust, and caring in the building that the principal had established. This degree of organizational learning, a direct result of the principal's professional trust in the teachers, had a positive result for historically marginalized students in particular. Analyzing the leadership strategies that six principals used to disrupt injustice in their schools, Theoharis (2010) found in the case of five principals, their efforts had a "significant impact on marginalized students and their learning" (p. 348). Specifically, on a structural level, these principals worked to (a) eliminate segregated programs, (b) increase rigor and access to opportunities, (c) increase student learning time, and (d) increase accountability systems for the achievement of all students (p. 342). Underscoring these efforts was an unwavering commitment to equity held by each principal; Theoharis stated, "The first breaking-the-silence lesson from these principals that can be offered is the importance of believing that equity is possible" (p. 367).

DeMatthews' (2018) secondary analysis of data from three former studies of social justice leadership also emphasized the importance of principals in student achievement. As

DeMatthews noted, the principal is at the intersection of the institution, the community, and powerful historical forces that have led to the marginalization of some students. Therefore, the potential impact of the building leader is extensive yet fraught: "Principals who lead for social justice must think about multiple planes and dimensions because marginalization is an intersectional issue without any one specific root cause or remedy" (p. 555). Working in tandem with the staff and the community to foster equitable outcomes for students, the principal has powerful reach (DeMatthews, 2018).

Teachers. The effect of teacher leadership on student outcomes is relatively unstudied; for example, in their 2017 review of 54 articles related to teacher leadership, Wenner and Campbell found that "the effects of teacher leadership were limited to the effects on the teacher leaders themselves and the colleagues of these teacher leaders" rather than student learning (p. 150). When it comes to teacher-led equity work in particular, research is scarce. However, much research has captured the importance and centrality of the classroom teacher in student outcomes, indicating that there is no greater impact on student learning than the effectiveness of the classroom teacher (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 1997). Also, we know from research on teacher leadership that when given the autonomy and trust by their principals to employ new instructional practices -- including those that positively impact learning for all learners -- teachers feel empowered, confident, and more engaged in their craft (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Wenner and Campbell (2017) also noted that a high level of teacher leadership in a school fosters a stronger sense of commitment among all teachers to educating their students and setting high expectations for them (p. 152).

Our research on why leadership matters revealed that leadership can positively impact student experiences, and thus student achievement. These actions -- establishing strong visions

and goals, creating systems to improve instruction, fostering family and community engagement and partnerships, and building productive and inclusive cultures -- are aligned with the practices of equity focused leaders as delineated in the aforementioned review of equity definitions. This piqued our interest to explore and to better understand how district leaders foster equity practices in our five research question areas.

Challenges to Leading with Equity

As district leaders leverage specific practices in their efforts to enact equity for all students, they may encounter challenges to their work, both from within their systems and from external sources. The research pertaining specifically to the role of superintendents in fostering an equitable approach to education has not focused on the challenges created by changing demographics (Shields, 2017). Furthermore, Alsbury and Whitaker's (2007) qualitative four year study of superintendents revealed that "practicing accountability, democratic decision-making, and social justice, in certain contexts, may be incompatible" (p. 170), indicating the complexity of the challenges with which district leaders contend.

External challenges. Some of the challenges of leading with equity come from sources outside of the school system itself, yet can have a significant impact on how and what decisions are made. Foremost among these is federal policy, most recently ESSA. Egalite et al. (2017) traced the historical efforts of federal educational guidance to better understand the equity impact of efforts to decentralize governance. Their findings suggest that the new law will need to be adhered to so that already existing inequities are neither reinforced nor intensified. ESSA also specifies an increased focus on educational leaders' roles in implementing federal goals for education. However, Young, Winn and Reedy (2017) contended that this focus on leadership and leadership development could be derailed by both state and federal activities. This finding is

exemplified by Mattheis' (2017) four-year ethnographically informed study which found that district leaders are policy intermediaries who interpret and implement state and federal policy. This requires district leaders to make decisions that, at times, prioritize external demands over constituent needs, "which can result in unintended consequences of implementing integration initiatives in ways that replicate, rather than disrupt, existing structural inequities" (Mattheis, 2017, p. 546).

Increasing resegregation of schools also poses an external challenge to equity-minded district leaders. Orfield (2001) noted that, "for all groups except Whites, racially segregated schools are almost always schools with high concentrations of poverty" and "nearly two-thirds of African-American and Latino students attend schools where most students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch" (p. 320). Clearly, race segregation collides with funding for schools. Property tax revenues and state funding formulas impact the resources available for teaching and learning from personnel to instructional materials and facilities (Darling-Hammond, 2007); "thus students most likely to encounter a wide array of educational resources at home are also most likely to encounter them at school" (Kozol, 2005, p. 320-321).

Cultural and racial deficit thinking among policy makers and the public in general can also inhibit district leaders' equity efforts (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). If the predominant thinking is that certain cultural or racial groups lack effort or practice poor child rearing, then shifting mindsets becomes paramount in the work of leaders. This is because those with power and influence will ensure that their priorities are given time, attention and resources (Rorrer, 2006; Roegman, 2017). Simultaneously, district leaders need to navigate shifting demographics within their local contexts that may bring conflicting norms and values. This necessitates the

need for leaders to expand their definitions of equitable practices, and impacts their decision-making processes and actions for equity (Shields, 2017; Shields, LaRocque, & Oberg, 2002).

Internal challenges. Factors within the institution may pose challenges to equity work as well, including the skill, will, and capacity of the leaders. It is well documented that leaders may not have the deep knowledge of culturally proficient practices required to advance equity work nor possess a disposition and identity that stays focused on this work (Skrla and Scheurich, 2001; Rusch, 2004; Lyman & Villani, 2002; McKenzie et al., 2008; Marshall, 2004; Boske, 2007). Brown (2004) and Mezirow (2000) describe the discomfort and disequilibrium that equity work causes for leaders. Additionally, a consistent focus on equity can be compromised by misalignment between the values of the building and district leaders on issues such as equity, especially during times of unexpected leadership transition (Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018; Tran, McCormick & Nguyen, 2018). With only 6% of district leaders and 20% of building leaders identifying as people of color, a sustained priority given to equity work is hindered (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017). Policies and practices within the institution may also impede equity efforts. For example, in her research on equity work in schools, Darling-Hammond (2007) noted that unequal access to college preparatory and Advanced Placement courses, tracking policies, and the relative shortage of well-qualified teachers in high-minority schools serve to thwart the academic advancement of students of color.

In his qualitative study of seven social justice leaders, Theoharis (2009) enumerated formidable bureaucracy, unsupportive central office administrators, and prosaic administrator colleagues as three internal barriers that disrupt equity work. Leaders felt the multiple layers of bureaucracy and addressing the minutiae of demands and expectations of district demands took valuable time, energy and focus away from their equity work. Furthermore, leaders highlighted

numerous cases in which district level leaders caused "extra work" with demands, and not understanding the inequities in the district, caused resistance to advancing equity efforts. Finally, colleagues, both district level and principals, not having the "drive, commitment, or knowledge to carry out an equity-oriented school reform agenda" (p. 101).

The consequences of both the internal and external barriers take a large toll on leaders. Theoharis (2009) highlighted that leaders for equity articulate the "stress, frustration, and pain" (p. 110) that accompanies this work, and acknowledged that maintaining an equity vision "came at a price" (p. 110). Furthermore, Theoharis (2009) asserted that navigating the barriers in the pursuit of equity has adverse physical and emotional effects on leaders.

As described above, we have learned that school leaders may encounter a variety of challenges to their equity work, including policy implementation, racially segregated school demographics, deficit mindsets, a lack of culturally proficient practices, and bureaucracy. To overcome these challenges and sustain their commitment to equity, leaders must thoughtfully adjust their current practices and develop new ones. With these challenges in mind, we were able to probe more deeply into the leadership practices that emerged from our individual studies. Which practices are a direct response to vexing challenges? Which practices have evolved and strengthened more effortlessly? As we embarked on our five research studies related to equity, we acknowledged the challenges implicit in each study and therefore anticipated a more comprehensive understanding of the promising leadership practices that foster equity.

Promising Equity Practices

Much research has been conducted on efforts by teachers and principals to achieve equitable outcomes for all students. For example, in his research of urban schools with comparatively high graduation rates, Noguera (2012) notes that "strong, positive relationships

between teachers and students are critical ingredients of their success" (p. 11). Probing more deeply into the leadership style of the principals at those schools, Noguera pointed to the importance of mentorship and personal connections between school leaders and their students in setting a culture of high achievement. Also related to the role of the principal, Kose (2009) noted the importance of the building leader in providing optimal professional development for social justice in order to realize "the long-term goals of creating and continuously improving socially just student learning, teaching, and organizational learning" (p. 654).

Leaders can also model equitable practices as a way of fostering equity work. One way is for district leaders to "explicitly model the learning and risk-taking that are essential to effective change as they reform their own practice" (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003, p. 13). Rusch (2004) stated that leaders need to learn to be able to facilitate discourse about controversial topics, specifically because it unearths values and biases and causes productive unease. When discourse challenges assumptions, new thinking and ideas emerge to address inequities. Other modes of learning in which leaders can explore new ideas and integrate these into existing understandings include: cultural autobiographies, prejudice reduction workshops, reflective analysis journals, cross cultural interviews, and diversity panels (Brown, 2004).

From our reading of the current research, it is clear that effective equity work requires sustained, diverse and reflective efforts occurring throughout the district leadership team. While much research has been conducted on the impact of building leadership and classroom teachers on equity, there is a gap in the research related to district-level leadership practices. The dissertation in practice team identified equity practices in several aspects of the school district context, with the intent of contributing to the field of educational equity research by examining how district leadership practices foster equity.

The Five Studies

Leading for and with equity is a challenging endeavor for any district leader. The goal of this dissertation in practice was to better understand how district leaders engage in practices that support and advance equity, defined as a commitment to ensure that every student receives the opportunities they require based on their individual needs, strengths, and experiences to reach their full potential. Each of the five individual studies addressed a specific district context for equity guided by its own research question (see Table 2). The next five paragraphs summarize the purpose and the methodology of each individual study.

Table 2

Researchers' Contexts for Equity and Research Questions

Investigator	Context for Equity	Research Question
Bishop	Sense of Belonging	How do district leaders help foster a sense of belonging for students of color?
Bookis	Equity Talk	How do district leaders use framing processes when engaging in equity talk?
Drummey	Culturally Responsive School Leadership	How do educational leaders enact or support culturally responsive behaviors for ELs?
Mizoguchi	Teacher Leadership	How do district leaders set the conditions for teacher-led equity work?
Welch	Leadership Transitions	How do the practices of district leaders foster equity through planning for future changes in leadership?

Climate of belonging. In order to foster equity, schools need to nurture an ecology of belonging for all students. However, Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, and Lash (2007) asserted that typical schools and school cultures may alienate students of color as they often are not

responsive to their needs. Therefore, district leaders pursuing equitable schools have a responsibility to ensure school environments cultivate a sense of belonging for students of color. Bishop (2020) examined district leaders' perspectives around efforts to foster a sense of belonging for students of color, and was guided by the following research question: How do district leaders foster a sense of belonging for students of color?

Equity talk. Another way to advance equitable changes is for district leaders to engage in equity talk. In Bookis (2020), equity talk is defined as discourse in which equity beliefs and values are challenged, inherent biases are examined, equity is at the forefront, and the notion of equity is framed in a way that supports common interest. The inquiry and reflection that occurs during discourse transforms new frames of reference. New frames of reference become the foundation for decisions and actions that create more equitable systems for learning. The purpose of this study was to better understand how district leaders use framing during dialogue and reflection. More specifically, it addressed the following research question: How do district leaders use framing processes when engaging in equity talk?

Culturally responsive behaviors. A review of research shows ELs are the fastest growing student population in the United States; however, successfully educating them has been and continues to be a unique challenge for our country's public schools. With the overarching theme of how district leadership practices foster equity, this particular study analyzed how culturally responsive behaviors employed by district and school leaders helped to maintain an equity focus for EL students. Although research about culturally responsive leadership has focused on urban and demographically diverse settings, less attention has been given to how these behaviors might be focused in support of ELs. Accordingly, Drummey (2020) explored culturally responsive leadership focused on supporting EL students. Specifically, this study was

guided by the question: How do educational leaders enact and support culturally responsive behaviors for ELs?

Teacher leadership. With their close proximity to learners, teachers play an integral role in establishing an equitable educational experience for all students. Thus, Mizoguchi (2020) explored how the district leadership cultivated and supported a culture of teacher leadership when it came to equity work. With equity serving as an overarching theme for this study, and using the concept of teacher leadership, this study addressed the gap in the research by studying the leadership practices of district administrators in supporting teachers with their equity efforts. Specifically, this study answered the following research question: How does the district leadership set the conditions for teacher-led equity work?

Leadership transitions and equity. Many leaders within a public school district embrace the principles of educational equity to guide transformative work that focuses on the growth of students and adults alike. However, the daily obstacles, cultural barriers, and competing priorities seemingly pull the focus of district leadership in multiple directions, making the prioritization of equity a challenge. Thus, Welch (2020) examined how district-level and school-level leaders leverage a proactive approach of assessing, selecting, developing, and promoting talented individuals who are aligned with sustaining and promoting educational equity within their district as candidates for future leadership positions. This study examined how school district leaders support equity through the transition of key leadership positions within the district. Additionally, the study investigated how the best practices of leadership development strategies were aligned with maintaining a focus on equity and elements of succession planning. Specifically, the research question addressed in the study investigated: How do the practices of district leaders foster equity through planning for future changes in leadership?

Synthesis of the Five Studies

As described in the preceding paragraphs, each individual study explored one facet of district leadership practices related to equity. Guided by the five perspectives of equity discussed earlier in this chapter, we looked specifically at practices that district leaders leveraged to lead with equity through a focus on outcomes, opportunity, commitment, affirmation, and systems. Viewed collectively, a synthesis of these five studies resulted in the creation of a broad framework that district leaders could implement in fostering equity (See Figure 4).

Figure 4

Synthesis of the Five Studies
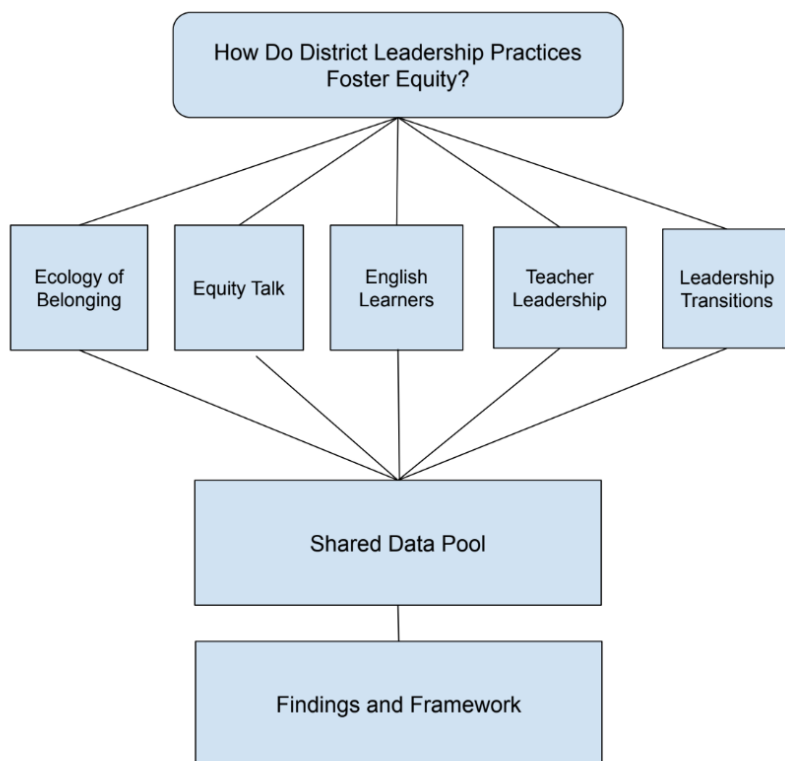
The following chapter will outline the methodology the team used to conduct the research on equity practices in school district leadership.

CHAPTER TWO[2]

METHODOLOGY

Methodology

Recognizing the importance and influence of district-level leadership on student achievement and reducing inequity, the overarching purpose of this dissertation in practice was to examine how district leadership practices foster equity. We conducted this study to gain a deeper understanding of the practices that district leaders leverage in their efforts to enact equity for all students. Specifically, the team focused on:

- Fostering a climate of belonging for students of color

- Exploring how the system engages in equity talk

- Ensuring equity for English learners

- Setting conditions for teacher-led equity work

- Preparing for future leadership transitions while maintaining a focus on equity

Chapter 2 describes the design of the study, site and participant selection, and methods that the team utilized to conduct the research. To answer the research questions, data was collected and analyzed by all members of the dissertation in practice team, and then presented in the findings section of the study.

Study Design

The dissertation in practice used an exploratory qualitative case study design to address the primary research question of this project: How do district leadership practices foster equity? As defined by Creswell (2013), the case study methodology attempted to answer how and why

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[2] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Matthew Bishop, Deborah S. Bookis, Sandra Drummey, Allyson Mizoguchi, and Thomas W. Welch, Jr..

questions that were designed by the research team, and provided a thorough description and representation of an individual or group within a defined setting. This study fits Creswell's (2013) criteria as the team's overall research question attempted to answer specifically *how* district leadership practices foster equity, as well as explored a single school district, which is a defined system. Furthermore, this case study was categorized as exploratory since it focused on developing an understanding of how leaders foster equity within the organization when there is no defined set of outcomes (Yin, 2003).

The team collected and analyzed data within a four-month period. Within that time, the goal of the team was to develop a sound understanding of how school district leaders at multiple levels and in different departments collectively worked toward fostering equity as a strategy to provide opportunities and to close achievement gaps that exist in the school district. Findings through this qualitative exploratory case study approach were detailed and insightful in nature, providing an opportunity for others to learn from promising practices and potential challenges facing the district designated for study.

Site selection. We conducted our research in a public school district located in the Northeast United States. For purposes of anonymity, we refer to the school district as Monarch Public School District (MPSD). Two distinct criteria drove our site selection process. First, we identified a school district that had a stated focus on equity. During our initial site selection process, we discovered that the newly hired superintendent of MPSD was highlighting equity at the forefront of his entry plan. Consequently, we discovered two documents that provided evidence of MPSD's focus on equity: the incoming superintendent's memo to the school committee explaining the creation of the Office of Educational Equity and Community Empowerment and a memo to the school committee with the job descriptions of the Chief Equity

Officer and Chief School Officer. Together, these documents indicated to us that MPSD was a district that had a focus on equity.

Second, we wanted to conduct our research in a medium- to large-sized public school district. Presumably, a public school district of 10,000-15,000 enrolled students allowed for access to an extensive district-level leadership team, multiple schools of different grade levels, the potential to interview a large percentage of school leaders, and more of a variation of policy and programmatic initiatives to explore through an equity lens. Another criteria for selection was a district with a racially and linguistically diverse student population. Targeting a district of this size with a diverse student enrollment led to more opportunities to examine how leaders foster equity (Mills & Gay, 2019; Creswell, 2013). We gathered information regarding student enrollment and school distribution from the state's education department website (School and District Profiles, n.d). According to the district profile, MPSD had a population of approximately 14,000 students, which consisted of about one-third Asian, one-third Hispanic, one-third White, and with small percentages of African-American and Multi-race. Furthermore, with regard to linguistic diversity, approximately one-third of students' first language was not English, one-quarter of students were English Language Learners, and there were almost 70 different languages represented in MPSD.

Participant selection. The members of the dissertation in practice group engaged with a variety of district-level leaders, school-level leaders, and other key stakeholders who provided insight to how the selected district fostered equity. In particular, this study included participants who were in a leadership role. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for the study. This strategy was necessary based on the short timeline for data collection and the need for the team to access key leaders in the district who were able to share their detailed experiences in

working with equity (Creswell & Clark, 2011). In addition, we employed a snowball sampling method whereby participants familiar with the district's work in equity led to the identification of others connected to how equity was fostered within the organization (Mills & Gay, 2019). In this study, the research team was intentional by engaging knowledgeable members of the district who both understood equity and had a leadership role in fostering conditions to support equity.

District-level leaders who participated in the study held both decision making and supervisory roles within the organization. Beyond the superintendent of the selected district, the other participants at the district level held positions within the organization that supported a team of administrators. The study targeted the experiences of the superintendent and others in the organization who may be one level under the districts' leader on the organizational chart.

To better understand how all leaders within the school district fostered equity, it was equally important to explore the roles of school-level leaders. In addition to the numerous aspects of direct influence that principals and assistant principals have on the students described in the review of literature, factors such as responsiveness to students of traditionally marginalized groups, intentional staff training in equity, and developing a sense of belonging and inclusivity are key elements in fostering equity at the school-level (Ross & Berger, 2009). Participants in the study included principals who supported a variety of grade levels.

Finally, the research team sought teachers' voices who had a wealth of knowledge about the organization but were not directly connected to the district office. A goal of including teacher voices and insights was to gain a fuller understanding of how the district approached its equity work in the eyes of constituents outside of the district office and school leadership role. In the following table (Table 3), participants are listed according to these three aforementioned categories.

Table 3

Interview Participants

Interview Participants

District-level Leaders (11 Participants)

Superintendent
Chief Equity and Engagement Officer
Chief Schools Officer
Chief Academic Officer
Coordinator of Family Resource Center
Coordinator of Special Programs
Coordinator of English Language Education Program
Coordinator of Teacher Academy
Confidential Secretary
District Support Specialist
District Attendance Coordinator

School-level Leaders (2 Participants)
Principals

Stakeholders (7 Participants)
Teachers

Data Collection

This collaborative dissertation in practice utilized four sources for data collection: semi-structured interviews, observations, document reviews, and field notes. We discuss each of these in turn.

Semi-structured interviews. We conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with district and school level leaders and teachers utilizing a snowball sampling method. The interviews were audio-recorded and conducted in person by at least two members of the DIP team. A semi-structured interview format provided the flexibility of using predetermined, mostly open-ended

questions and the option to ask follow-up questions based on the interviewee's responses

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each interviewee received a letter of intent, outlining that the

purpose of the interview was to gain a better understanding of the practices district leaders

leverage in their efforts to enact equity for all students. Before each interview began,

interviewees were required to sign a consent form.

Participants were interviewed separately for a maximum of 60 minutes using the same set

of core questions related to their equity work. Interview questions were crafted to capture both a

holistic picture of the district's equity leadership practices and to serve our individual research

studies. Throughout the interviews, we monitored information related to district leadership

practices that foster equity efforts. As Weiss (1994) noted, "Any question is a good question if it

directs the respondent to the material needed by the study in a way that makes it easy for the

respondent to provide the material" (p. 73) (see Appendix E for the interview protocol).

The interview questions were field tested with an educator outside of the study prior to

use to gauge applicability and sequencing. The DIP team transcribed individual interviews, and

major themes and ideas were coded accordingly.

Document review. The research team conducted an extensive review of documents

related to the district's work on equity. The team searched MPSD's website for publicly

available documents online, strategic implementation plans, district policy documents, and

coordinated program review findings that pertained to equity. Further, the team reviewed the

school committee links to locate documents such as school committee agendas, minutes,

policies, and procedures. Additionally, the team collected any documents that were made

available at superintendent coffees and the Family Resource Center. These documents were a

valuable source of information in qualitative research. They were also ready for analysis without

the necessary transcription that is required with observational or interview data (Creswell &

Clark, 2011). Specific documents used will be listed in each individual study.

Observations. The research team observed as many leadership meetings in person as

possible. This included six school committee meetings, two school committee policy sub-

committee meetings, one school committee finance sub-committee meeting, one school

community partnership sub-committee, two superintendent parent coffee hours, and one

professional learning workshop. A member of the research team was present for each

observation, which was recorded and later transcribed. Being present for each observation

allowed for "highly descriptive" field notes to be scribed such as room layout, participant

demographics, non-verbal language, and the overall tone of the meeting. These notes allowed for

the researcher to add a "reflective component" which provided further detail and understanding

of the collected data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 151). School committee meetings were

observed in person or by way of public video recordings to gather information about the

discourse district leaders use when interacting with the community.

Data Analysis

The following section will explain the general methods the team used to analyze the data

collected. A more detailed description of individual data analysis methods are discussed in

Chapter 3 of each individual study and a summary is listed in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Summary of Data Collection by Researcher

Individual	Methods
Bishop	Semi-structured Interviews; Document Review
Bookis	Semi-structured Interviews; Document Review; Observations
Drummey	Semi-structured Interviews; Document Review
Mizoguchi	Semi-structured Interviews; Document Review
Welch	Semi-structured Interviews; Document Review; Observations

Qualitative data collected by research team members was compiled and placed in a shared folder on a secure server for analysis. Interviews, document review, and observations were equally weighted in this study. The team found that the documents supported and confirmed the data collected in both interviews and observations. The team created an analytic memo to record observations, questions, and insights as the data was analyzed. This analytic memo used by the team was comparable to a research journal entry or blog, a place to "dump your brain" about the participants, phenomenon or process under investigation (Saldaña, 2013, p. 42). This memo served as "the transitional process from coding to the more formal write-up of the study" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 50).

Coding processes (Saldaña, 2013) were used by individual reserachers to analyze transcribed text from the audio-recorded interviews and focus groups. According to Saldaña (2013) "a code . . . is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data" (p. 3). Each individual team member read the transcribed data and worked to decode meaning of the text. A second read through the text enabled each reader to determine the appropriate codes. During a third reading, readers assigned codes, thus encoding the text

(Saldaña, 2013). Each team member employed an inductive process to construct a coding paradigm. This process included open coding (generating initial categories) and axial coding (identifying and refining key categories). The last step involved selective coding establishing the connections between categories, thus constructing a paradigm that enabled each member to explain and describe their findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Attempting to maintain inter-rater reliability with coding, each member asked another research team member to check the assigned codes to the data. Although disagreements were seldom, they were handled by discussing the different viewpoints about the appropriate code. After exchanging ideas, the final coding decision was left to the initial coding researcher. A more detailed description of each individual coding process is presented in Chapter 3 of each individual study.

Findings from each individual study were then brought to the entire team for analysis. The team used the five perspectives of equity described in Chapter 1 as a general framework and then contributed and organized their individual findings under each perspective. Subsequently, the team discussed the data, and identified the patterns within each perspective of equity. Next, the team looked within each component to identify further patterns. Ultimately, after discussion the team came to a consensus about the overall pattern of the data and used it to answer the larger group research question.

Methods Limitations

Limitations in this study are connected to the use of an exploratory case study design, time constraints, and the use of interviews, focus groups, and document reviews as collection tools.

Case study design. Using an exploratory case study design limits the study to a single school district. As a result, perspectives garnered from our descriptive data collection may not be

representative of the majority of other districts in Massachusetts. To minimize this limitation, we framed our results in terms of a particular district but still anticipated the findings to be useful in their application to similar contexts, of which there are many across the commonwealth.

New leadership team. The district leadership team of MPSD had only been assembled for four months -- with many people in newly created positions -- when the researchers began the study. Findings were based on data that had only begun to emerge following the superintendent's launch of the district's equity efforts. Thus, we studied district leadership practices that were occuring in the context of a great deal of change for the district and represented the very beginning of what we hope will be a years-long, sustained, systemic effort. A future study in five years of the district's leadership practices that foster equity could yield different findings than ours here because of the unique timing of our study.

Participant demographics. Through data collection and analysis, the team discovered that the superintendent of MPSD was trying to diversify the executive cabinet team. However, the research team did not ask each interview participant for demographic data. Collecting this data would have allowed the research team to consider each participant's positionality. Knowing this data might have impacted the research team's understanding of participant answers and subsequently the interpretation and analysis of the findings.

Individual Biases/Positionality

In order to provide insight as to how the research team might arrive at a particular interpretation of the data, we considered our positionality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since this study explored the concept of equity, it was important to note that all members of the research team demonstrated a passion and held a commitment to equity. Furthermore, each researcher approached this study from the perspective of their own identity. Our team of five consisted of

three women and two men, of which two are Asian-Americans and three are White researchers.

A more detailed discussion of individual positionality can be found in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER THREE[3]

EQUITY TALK THROUGH FRAMING PROCESSES

Description of the Research Question

Equity is the commitment to ensure that every student receives the opportunities they require based on their individual needs, strengths, and experiences to reach their full potential. Educational leaders have a social and moral imperative to foster equity in their contexts (Brown, 2004; Evans, 2007; Marshall, 2004; Shields, 2004). The Professional Standards for students' academic success and well-being through their practices and by "address[ing] matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership" (p.11). One leadership practice that fosters equitable learning environments for all students is engaging in dialogue and reflection.

As educational leaders participate in dialogue and reflection, their discourse helps them derive meaning, and in turn, shapes their understanding of the critical and complex issues related to fostering equity. This is due to the insights, ideas, and perspectives that participants contribute and are exposed to during "vigorous critical dialogue" (Webster-Wright, 2009 p. 722) during which assumptions are questioned, challenged, and lead to "clearer understanding by tapping collective experience" (Mezirow, 2000, p.11). This requires leaders to develop a curiosity stance, which involves being responsive to other points of view and concern for the impact of their actions, as well as self-awareness about the emotional states of oneself and others (Mezirow, 2000; Supovitz, D'Auria, & Spillane, 2019). Thus, purposely surfacing critical aspects of an issue through dialogue and reflection, and attuning to the way in which participants express themselves, keeps equity, and the decisions necessary to foster it, at the forefront of leaders' minds. To advance equitable changes, leaders then need "to maintain an

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[3] This chapter individually written by Deborah S. Bookis.

open conversation, to examine and reexamine [their own] perceptions and those of others, and [to] constantly look beneath the surface, seeking alternative explanations and ways of understanding" (Shields, Larocque, & Oberg, 2002, p. 134).

However, scholars have largely focused on school-level leaders when it comes to the topics of dialogue and reflection. Examples include Spillane's (2001) work on school-level leaders' promotion of knowledge sharing, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty's (2005) meta-analysis on school leadership and dialogue, and Avelar La Salle and Johnson (2019), Harris (2018), and Cruice's (2018) research on how school leaders impact their staff's ability to talk about students and reflect on their language use and beliefs. Coupled with research that explores how school leaders' practices impact opportunities and outcomes for historically marginalized students (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010), there exists a substantial body of work indicating that school leaders' engagement in dialogue and reflection to derive meaning and shape understandings fosters equity.

Despite the attention paid to school-level leaders, little attention has been paid to district-level leaders and their promotion of dialogue and reflection (Leithwood, et al., 2006; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Because it is essential that district leaders also "explicitly model the learning and risk-taking that are essential to effective change" (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003, p. 13), the purpose of this study is to better understand how district leaders use framing during dialogue and reflection. More specifically, the study addresses the following research question: How do district leaders use framing processes when engaging in equity talk?

Background

In the following section I describe equity talk and discuss how it fosters new frames of reference.

What is Equity Talk?

While general discourse may enable district leaders to gain insight into issues and develop ideas and solutions, equity talk prioritizes their discourse and transitions them, through the development of collective action frames, to decisions and strategies that distinctly address equity. As such, equity talk is different from other kinds of talk (e.g. discussion, debate, and conversation). Equity talk involves fostering new frames of reference. There are three ways to do this. The first way to foster new frames of reference is to express one's own beliefs and values. The second way is to unearth inherent biases in oneself and others. The third way is to position equity at the forefront of discourse such that it supports a common interest. I discuss each approach in turn below.

Beliefs and values. The expression of leaders' beliefs and values is vital to equity work because it provides the grounding for future actions. In general, discourse allows leaders the opportunity to test the validity of their own construction of meaning, to critically assess their assumptions and beliefs, and ultimately their frames of reference (Rusch, 2004). Equity talk differs in that it requires leaders to explicitly state their beliefs and values during discourse and to understand and accept that their beliefs and values will be challenged, constructed and shifted by "using the experiences of others to assess reasons justifying assumptions" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8).

Inherent biases. Equity talk also provides the means or conditions for inherent biases to be identified and examined. In short, leaders need to be able to facilitate discourse about controversial topics specifically because it unearths values and biases (Rusch, 2004). Because

equity work involves issues relating to race, gender, economic status, disability and language, dialogue about equity may be challenging. For example, educators discussing disaggregated student data might unearth unconscious biases such as color blindness or deficit thinking (Fergus, 2017). By examining inherent biases, the inquiry and reflection that occurs during this discourse can transform or create new frames of reference for participants.

Equity at the forefront and a common interest. "Insist[ing] that equity [is] at the forefront of instructional and policy discussions and of decision-making" (Rorrer et al., 2008, p. 330) is a non-negotiable action that equity-minded district leaders use to navigate the challenges and the overlapping contexts in which they function (Roegman, 2017). By keeping equity at the forefront, they "search for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 11) which brings clarity and coherence to their decision-making. Participants' proximity and relationship to the common understanding or interest can provide alternate perspectives, further clarifying communication with stakeholders.

By participating in equity talk in which they state their equity beliefs and values, examine their inherent biases, and position equity at the forefront of discourse such that it supports a common interest, district leaders can create new frames of reference. These frames become the foundation for decisions and actions "wherein equity becomes both a defining, explicit value and a desired outcome" (Rorrer et al., 2008, p. 334). Thus, new thinking and ideas emerge to address inequities, which expand district leaders' abilities to critically engage in issues of equity.

The Present Study: Framing Around Equity

During equity talk, district leaders establish collective action frames from which they can all speak and work in order to be effective in improving conditions for all students

(Horsford & Clark, 2015). In this section I define framing and collective action frames, outline the three framing processes, and illustrate how framing serves equity.

Framing, Collective Action Frames, and Framing Processes

As district leaders engage in discourse for learning, planning, and developing agency, they are engaged in meaning construction. Such work is what social movement researchers call framing (Benford & Snow, 2000). Framing results in "collective action frames" and involves three processes: discursive, strategic, and contested.

Discursive processes. According to Bedford and Snow (2000), there are two basic interactive discursive framing processes that generate collective action frames for equity activities: articulation and amplification. Frame articulation involves providing a new perspective or interpretation. For example, a leader might begin a discussion about the delivery of student services from the view of a student's daily schedule, thus allowing participants to see the incoherence of the day and the impact on learning. Frame amplification entails accentuating or highlighting an issue, event, or belief as being more important than others. A leader might amplify how strongly a stakeholder group holds a belief or a position on a particular topic.

Strategic processes. Strategic framing processes are purposeful and aimed at a specific goal or outcome. It is within this category of processes that, in order to promote equity, district leaders must "consciously or deliberately attract attention to the degree of inequity that exists and respond to the attention of others" (Rorrer, 2001, p. 304). According to Bedford and Snow (2000), there are four types of strategic framing processes: bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation. Frame bridging refers to linking two frames about an issue that may be philosophically connected but structurally disconnected. For example, leaders may provide the rationale for a new program by explicitly explaining how two existing perspectives connect to

the new program. Frame amplification pertains to embellishing or clarifying values or beliefs in order to reach a particular goal. Leaders might explain or consistently repeat a belief in order to ultimately gain support for strategic actions and goals. Frame extension involves extending the frame beyond a primary interest to include issues valued by potential adherents. For instance, during a discussion, a leader might interject an issue that is important to a particular stakeholder group. Frame transformation entails changing old understandings and/or generating new ones. An effective example of frame transformation is a leader interjecting new vocabulary to discuss an ongoing issue.

Contested processes. As stated by Bedford and Snow (2000), contested framing processes pertain to the challenges to generate collective action frames. There are three forms these processes take: counterframing, frame disputes, and dialectic tension. Counterframing comes externally from those who oppose the change; they challenge how the frame was designed and what it hopes to accomplish. An example might be a leader stating that the leadership team needs to better understand why a group of parents oppose the new school start time. Frame disputes, on the other hand, come from internal disagreement about the reality of an issue. For instance, a leader might express how a department is voicing the impact of the new bell schedule, which substantially differs from the leadership perspective. Dialectic tension framing is used to articulate the tension between a frame and the collective action events. We might find leaders discussing how they could modify district strategic actions to include more student voice if the goal was to increase stakeholder participation.

District leaders use all three types of framing processes as they engage in equity talk to learn from each other and construct meaning.

How Does Framing Serve Equity?

During equity talk, framing processes are employed to encourage varying perspectives, to challenge the norms of the dominant culture, and/or to arrive at a collective action frame that can be used to support district strategic actions for equity. This process also provides district leaders with opportunities to develop a more nuanced understanding of how their particular context matters towards achieving equitable change (Roegman, 2017). The purpose of arriving at a collective action frame is to define a condition or situation, "in need of change, . . . articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615). In school systems, these become vital as district leaders need to be able to effectively and coherently communicate the impetus for changes. The frames, "help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize district experiences and guide action," just as they "inspire and legitimate the activities . . . of social movement organizations" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614).

Through the discursive, strategic and contested framing processes involved in discourse, district leaders' beliefs and values may be transformed. The collective action frames, which result from these processes, create a foundation upon which district leaders can build their systemic, strategic actions and rely when challenged by various stakeholders.

Methods

The following section outlines the design of the study, site and participant selection, and the methods used to conduct the research. The qualitative nature of this study allowed me to develop an understanding of how district leaders within one school district collectively used framing processes when engaging in equity talk.

Study Design

I used a case study design approach, described in chapter two, to explore how district leaders used framing processes while engaging in equity talk. A case study allowed for better understanding how individuals make sense of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Further, it involves an inquiry into a specific phenomena in a bounded system (Mills & Gay, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell, 2013), which in this case was one MA public school district. This approach utilizes multiple data sources (e.g. interviews, observations, documents) in order to provide a more in-depth analysis. Specifically, this study explored the following research question: How do district leaders use framing processes when engaging in equity talk?

Study Site and Participants

The district for this study possessed a racially and economically diverse student population, and since the research examined the practices that foster equity, had a stated focus on equity embedded in publicly available, key district guiding documents. This individual study focused solely on district leaders (e.g. Superintendent, Chief Officers, Confidential Secretary) in an effort to better understand how they used framing processes when engaging in equity talk. These district leaders were knowledgeable about the district's equity work, able to provide insight to the district's strategic actions, and held a decision-making role within the district.

Data Collection

This individual qualitative study utilized three methods for data collection (e.g. observations, interviews, and documents) to explore the framing processes district leaders used when engaging in equity talk. The use of three methods allowed for a more complete triangulation and analysis of how district leaders used framing processes when engaging in equity talk. Table 5 provides information regarding the number and sources of each method.

Table 5

Method and Data Sources

Method	Source	Number
Observations	School committee meetings	13
	School committee subcommittee meetings	
	Superintendent parent coffees	
	Professional learning workshops	
Interviews	District leaders	5
Document	Publicly available documents	15
	Digitally posted information	

Observations. I used observations to hear the framing processes utilized by district leaders during meetings. Observation refers to a methodology utilized by researchers to better understand the environment in which study participants live without changing the natural interactions or course of events (Mills & Gay, 2019). This allowed me to gather objective information about the framing processes used by district leaders when they interacted with the community and the school committee. I could later compare this information to the processes they used during interviews.

Specifically, I observed 13 events in the district (approximately 23 hours total) either in person or through publicly available recordings. These consisted of six school committee meetings, two school committee policy sub-committee meetings, one school committee finance sub-committee meeting, one school committee community partnerships sub-committee meeting, two superintendent-parent coffees, and one professional learning workshop with district principals. Field notes on what was heard and seen directly were recorded by hand (Mills & Gay, 2019). These included phrases and sentences used by district leaders and community members as

well as who was present, the reason for the meeting, and what the physical location looked like. Field notes also captured my reflections, which were helpful in contextualizing the equity talk.

Semi-structured interviews. I conducted five interviews that followed a semi-structured format, which provided the flexibility of using predetermined, mostly open-ended questions and the option to ask follow-up questions based on the interviewee's responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The district and school leader semi-structured protocol, provided in Appendix E, was used to interview five district leaders defined as members of the executive cabinet. These members included the Superintendent, Chief Engagement Officer, Chief Schools Officer, Chief Academic Officer, and the Superintendent's Confidential Secretary. Each district leader was interviewed and recorded separately by two members of the research team for approximately 45-60 minutes.

The core set of questions in the district and school leader semi-structured protocol, and the follow up questions, related to possible district equity work. Specifically, questions one through seven were designed to gain insight into how the district currently meets the needs of all students. The questions were also tightly connected to the three framing processes; discursive, strategic, and contested, and posed to elicit examples of the subcategories within each process. For example, the question, "As you look around this district, what do you see going on to help individual kids be successful?" was intended to elicit a discursive articulation process, "We looked at our data from this new perspective," or a discursive amplification process, "The majority of our stakeholders felt that/strongly believed in _____ ," especially when used with the follow-up questions, "With English Language Learners? With accessing the challenging curriculum?"

The follow-up questions to another contextual core question, "Tell me how your work is helping to meet students' unique needs?" were planned to reveal the strategic and contested

processes used by the district leader. For example, "How did you respond to this challenge?" was intended to reveal one of the four strategic processes (bridging, amplification, extension and transformation), and "Tell me about a challenge doing this?" was purposeful to reveal one of the three contested processes (counter framing, frame disputes, and dialectic between frames and events).

 Document review. Fifteen documents were reviewed and served as the third source of data. Collected documents included information on the public website (Student Services About section; Family Resource Center Welcome page); job postings (Chief Schools Officer); school committee documents (agendas and meeting minutes, Policy Subcommittee meeting minutes, drafts of new policies); and district presentation documents (District Reorganization Plan, Strategic Plan Framework, Superintendent Entry and Transition Update) as well as other publicly available documents such as newsletters, invitations, and announcements. A review of the documents provided insight into the structural and communicative shifts the newly formed executive cabinet were creating to support their priorities, especially against the backdrop of existing organizational structures and responsibilities and means of communication.

Data Analysis

 The coding manual (see Appendix F) was used for ease of note-taking during observations and to identify framing processes in the moment. The suggested language enabled me to focus on specific words and phrases, which also allowed for ease of coding according to the three main framing processes and sub-processes through multiple cycles of coding (Saldaña, 2016). All interviews were recorded and initially transcribed using Otter, a mobile application and transcription service. Refined transcription was then completed by one of the interviewers and posted to a Google Drive folder, which allowed for coding by each individual researcher.

The coding manual enabled coding of the transcripts according to the three main framing processes during the multiple cycles of coding. While not all documents lent to a framing process analysis, contextual information about the progress of the district's priorities provided another set of data with which to compare the interview and observation data sets. Examples of framing processes in the documents, if found, allowed for triangulation of framing processes articulated during observations and interviews.

During the first read, I marked framing processes used directly on the field notes, transcripts and/or documents. I then rewrote the phrases onto documents organized by the framing (and sub-framing) processes. To compile the data, I used a Google spreadsheet to organize the three sources of data according to the framing subprocesses. This three-step process allowed for further examination and categorization of the type of framing process used. For increased reliability, a colleague reviewed the code assignments to the words and phrases and minor refinements were made based on the feedback. A second read of the words and phrases allowed for further examination of the statements according to the framework codes, and an opportunity to determine emergent language topic themes. These themes were color-colored for ease of visibility and to account for recurrence. Six language topic themes were identified and three themes emerged as more prevalent than the others. I then noted the specific ways in which these three themes were discussed. For example, when talking about the use of data and feedback, district leaders touched upon disproportionality, usable and appropriate data, perspective, student voice, and the purpose of data in feedback.

Throughout the coding process as well as the identification and analysis of themes, I maintained an analytic journal to record my thoughts and questions about the emerging themes and their relationship to the data collected. Groenewald (2008) calls this "memoing," which is

"the act of recording reflective notes [of] what the researcher . . . is learning from the data" (p. 505). I examined the three themes in two ways. First, I analyzed their relationship to the components of equity talk to determine if, in fact, district leaders were engaged in equity talk. Second, I accounted for the framing processes and sub-processes used for each theme. Another analytic tool used during observations was to observe other people's reactions to district leaders' use of framing processes. This lens is associated with discourse analysis in which "researchers examine the performative and productive functions of language in contexts" (Adei, 2013, p. 1).

Limitations

There are two significant limitations that may have impacted the collection of observation data: limited audio recording access and time alignment between study and district meetings. Personal audio recordings of meetings would have allowed for more timely and repeated listening and thus a much more thorough coding of the discursive, strategic and contested processes. To minimize this limitation, I practiced coding during my own district's leadership team meetings. The other limitation to data collection and coding was the study's time constraints and how it aligned with the frequency of meetings. Attendance at an increased number of meetings and greater access to equity talk would have yielded better and more diverse data across all three framing processes. To minimize this limitation, I viewed as many publicly accessible meetings as possible.

Positionality

My positionality is structured through being a White female growing up in a "blue collar" family where obtaining a college education was highly valued. While identifying as White and living in a very Eurocentric, White upper middle-class neighborhood, my Middle Eastern heritage often attracted unwarranted comments and questions about who I was and where I was

from. Admittedly, my interest in language and how it shapes thinking and culture, especially for students in school cultures, stems from these early life experiences. I maintain that having had these expereinces strengthen my positionality to be sensitive to the way language is constructed and used. Further it undergirds my firm belief that all voices need to be heard directly from the speaker.

Findings

In order for district leaders to effectively participate in issues of equity, and to lead the context-specific changes needed in their districts, they need to be able to facilitate and engage in equity talk. Equity talk is discourse that contains three main components: beliefs and values are stated, equity is at the forefront and is framed in a way that supports common interest, and inherent biases are examined. In this district, each component manifested in terms of one of three themes: diversity as an asset, decision-making process, or data and feedback. The following paragraphs describe how district leaders used framing processes to talk about these themes. Table 6 connects the equity talk component to one of the themes and the framing processes utilized by district leaders.

Table 6

Themes and Framing Processes Related to Equity Talk Components

Component of equity talk	Theme	Framing processes utilized
Equity beliefs and values are stated	Diversity as an asset	Strategic amplification Strategic transformation Contested dialectic tension
Equity is at the forefront: notion of equity is framed in a way that supports common interest	Decision-making processes	Discursive amplification Strategic bridging Discursive articulation
Inherent biases are examined	Data and feedback	Strategic transformation Strategic extension

Diversity As An Asset

The first component of equity talk is that beliefs and values are stated. District leaders in MPSD articulated their belief in and value of the city's diversity as an asset. When talking about diversity as an asset, district leaders used three framing processes: strategic amplification, strategic transformation, and contested dialectic tension.

Strategic amplification. Signs of strategic amplification involved embellishing or clarifying values or beliefs in order to make stakeholders understand them more deeply. I witnessed two areas in which strategic amplification was used. First, the superintendent repeatedly stated that the diversity of the city is a strength for the school system and should be used to provide opportunities for all students. This occurred on multiple occasions and throughout the district (e.g. parent coffees, school committee presentations, and within interviews). For example, on one occasion he told parents that diversity is the "greatest asset" of their city, later explaining how the city provided an opportunity for students to access a "global

experience." Indeed, during an interview he explained that "asserting his voice" among stakeholders was one of his key responsibilities, and that articulating his belief system was "the very first thing" he did when he became superintendent.

Second, district documents embellished or clarified beliefs. For example, the superintendent's entry and transition update to the community states that "Monarch's diversity is our greatest asset, but the district's services were not consistently structured in a way that makes them accessible by all families." This finding directly substantiates two goals outlined for the 2019-2020 school year: diversity recruitment and hiring to "increase alignment of staff demographics to that of the city and the [system's] student population," and communication and outreach to families of linguistically diverse backgrounds by increasing the district's translation services budget. Another example of embellishing or clarifying beliefs in documents was how district leaders emphasized diversity as an asset in the district's theory of action, which stated, "If we leverage the richness of Monarch's diversity by focusing all of our work on our fundamental commitment to equity, then . . . ." By continually embellishing or clarifying the belief that diversity is an asset, the superintendent and district leaders provided a rationale for the goals and coherence from his entry findings to the work of the district. An indication that embellishing or clarifying beliefs or values was being well received by other leaders in the district was a principal's comment to our choosing his district to study. He shared that, while a lot of discussion about equity has not taken place, the new district leadership has stated that equity is going to be a "central value for us. [The superintendent] has said it a number of times." He went further, adding that he "has a strong sense of their [district leadership's] values and [he's] really, really hopeful, very excited about it."

Strategic transformation. Indications of strategic transformation involved changing old understandings and/or generating new ones in order to achieve a specific purpose. In MPSD, the seeds for changing old understandings and generating new ones were evident at a school committee meeting at which the superintendent adroitly altered attendees' understanding of specific words and phrases by providing replacement vocabulary and/or alternate definitions. The old understanding was that certain schools were low-performing because they did not score well on the State's standardized test. When a member of the executive cabinet presented an update on the newly established school network, the superintendent intentionally called out the use of the word "underperforming" instead of "low-performing." The new vocabulary demanded a shift in thinking towards the inherent strengths and potential of the school and its students. Then, during a discussion of the previous year's budget he stated, "Bad bills are not bad. They are just the last and final bills." This set the stage for the superintendent to close the evening, stating, "Staying with the theme of the night, the language that we use - low or under, bad bills or last and final. The challenges that we face are *not* challenges of diversity. Diversity is our greatest strength. Diversity is our greatest asset."

Subsequent to this school meeting, at which the superintendent explicitly talked about language use, it was evident that changing old understandings and generating new ones was having an impact based on school committee member language. A school committee member stated that one of the district's middle schools is outstanding with regard to how it is taking a social-emotional learning approach with students, declaring "Monarch Middle School is not a low-performing school . . . it is outstanding." The old understanding was that it was a low performing school. The shift to include a mindset of growth as well as additional performance indicators has begun to change the thinking about the school. The chair of the school committee

agreed, stating that, "We have to walk away from labeling schools . . . from labeling students." Their own language use reflects a new way of thinking about how they define schools, students, and the work being done both at the district and school levels.

Contested dialectic tension. Signs of contested framing processes included the challenges to generating collective action frames. These challenges may come externally from those who challenge how the frame was designed and what it hopes to accomplish or internally from disagreement about the reality of an issue. In the present study, I witnessed contested dialectic tension, which exists between the frame and the collective action events. In response to a follow-up interview question, a new executive cabinet member expressed the tension between the district's symbolism of diversity (frame) and how diversity is enacted at the classroom, school, and district level (the collective action). He stated:

> I've only been here a couple of months, but it's been long enough for me to see that the
> discussion around diversity sits at more the symbolic level, but it hasn't really, I don't
> think it's leveraged as an asset, you know, like in schools and classrooms.

What he described is the tension between what he has learned about the community's thinking about diversity and the structures and actions he has witnessed that neither take advantage of nor promote diversity. His description of this tension underscores the district's need to not only continue the aforementioned strategic framing processes, but to also begin implementing strategic actions that leverage the community's diversity. One of the steps towards that implementation is to consider how decisions are made.

Decision-making Processes

The second component of equity talk, keeping equity at the forefront and supporting a common interest, manifested in their decision-making process. Specifically, they expressed the

authority and responsibility for the flow of ideas, the proximity to the common interest, the importance of multiple perspectives, and the need for creating a vehicle for the under-represented to be heard. Three framing processes were used to talk about their decision-making process: discursive amplification, strategic bridging, and discursive articulation.

Discursive amplification. Indications of discursive amplification involved accentuating or highlighting an issue, event or belief as being more important or appropriate than others during the generation of collective action frames. I observed discursive amplification in this district in two arenas. First, the superintendent highlighted his belief and actions for new ways of doing business. At the time of data collection, district leaders held the authority and responsibilities for decision-making. Yet, in complete opposition to those structures, the superintendent emphasized to parents his belief that decisions about school-based needs "should be made by those closest to [students] and supported by others further away." In return, parents at this event nodded in agreement and no questions were asked to challenge this potential change in practice.

At a different parent event, a member of the school's site council questioned whether there existed a strategy to encourage more involvement of linguistically and culturally diverse families in school and district business, aside from the town-wide parent council. While the superintendent responded with recent district efforts (asking questions to determine barriers to participation; going to where parents are; changing district messaging; and uncovering biases), the question underscored the need to explain how a belief will become operational in addition to highlighting its importance. Another example provided a paradigm shift for district level decision-making. In response to an interview question about how he can ensure that district actions have an impact on classrooms, the superintendent stressed that when he has to make

decisions based on disparate input, his decisions would be based on "what is going to support our young people that have the greatest need. And I kind of define that for everyone by saying my job is to be a voice for the voiceless." His beliefs would guide the decision.

Second, an executive cabinet member employed discursive amplification by highlighting parents as integral partners in the district's work. During a school committee community partnership sub-committee meeting, she deftly connected access to information to equity and decision-making. One of the slides used in her presentation stated that, "Access to information for making individual family educational decisions and participating in the broader decision-making process is a matter of educational equity," accentuating the belief of a family's role in the decision-making process as well as the district's obligation to be inclusive and interactive. Notably, she concluded that portion of her presentation stressing that, "Because I respect you and your opinion, I'm going to actively encourage you to come to events and meetings."

Strategic bridging. Signs of strategic bridging involved linking two frames about an issue that might be connected philosophically, but not structurally, in order to strengthen a goal or to propel the actions towards it. In this district, strategic bridging was exemplified in The MPSD Reorganization Proposal June 14, 2019, which outlined the new district leadership organizational structure, roles, and responsibilities. The Reorganization is one frame about how the district expects to conduct business; the collective actions of our staff is another frame that already existed in the district. In the proposal, the reorganization is connected to the actions of all staff, stating, "It will not restrict cooperation among staff members at all levels or the flow of ideas necessary in the decision-making process." In this example of strategic bridging, the expected behaviors and actions by district leaders and staff are now structurally connected towards a decision-making process.

Another example of strategic bridging occurred during the superintendent's interview when he linked his value about diversity as an asset to the inclusion of multiple perspectives in decision-making. In response to a question about creating an internal educator pipeline for leadership positions during times of transition, the superintendent began his response by restating the gap between their staff demographics and the student demographics, which more closely align with the city's demographics, and how, "It is a pretty powerful statement when you are in 2019 in Monarch, MA and a child says, 'I have never had a teacher in my life that looks like me.'" He went further by strategically bridging the need to hire a diversified staff to making decisions:

> And that matters. It matters in a number of ways. The literature is fairly clear on the impact in terms of relationships and in terms of outcomes for kids. You were asking earlier about different perspectives on feedback and decisions. All of that becomes better when you have different perspectives around a decision.

His concern was that an internal educator pipeline for leadership would perpetuate the chasm that exists between staff and student demographics and made it clear that achieving a more diversified staff begins by identifying how the district unintentionally creates barriers for diverse candidates to apply.

Discursive articulation. Evidence of discursive articulation included providing a new perspective or interpretation such that events and experiences were somewhat unified and compelling. I saw district leaders employ discursive articulation when a question was asked or a statement was made that caused the district leaders to think differently about a topic. An example was when an executive cabinet member asked a group of principals, "Do you have the vision and ability to mobilize your school around equity?" and then quickly realized she needed to pose the

subsequent question, "What do we even mean [when we say equity]?" That singular question created an opportunity to develop a new perspective and definition of the word (and the access, practices and outcomes that come with it), and also a different way for the leadership team to work together resulting in a unified voice or collective action frame. Throughout the decision-making process of defining equity, she grounded their work in the common interest of serving all students stating, "At least we started thinking right around different groups that are all part of our system and what is serving, what does providing access to our families look like . . . what does providing access to students look like?" because in the end it is what "principals need in order to lead these discussions at their school buildings."

Use of Data and Feedback

The third component of equity talk includes examining inherent biases. This manifested through the use of data and feedback including the intentional focus on data, the types of data and their sources, the lenses applied for analysis, and the purposes for data collection. When talking about data and feedback, two framing processes were used: strategic transformation and strategic extension.

Strategic transformation. As stated earlier, signs of strategic transformation involved changing old understandings and/or generating new ones in order to achieve a specific purpose. In this district, strategic transformation was evident in the articulation of a new cabinet level position and in how executive cabinet members spoke about their work in relation to data. For example, strategic transformation was employed in the description of the newly created Chief Schools Officer (CSO) position. The description created a new way to think about the role of the CSO and how the data will be used. While data collection often falls under the purview of the principals' evaluator, the position posting stated that the CSO is responsible for, " . . . (the) use

of data and first-hand observations to become an expert on what schools need and then working

with all relevant departments within the MPSD to achieve the district's goals for each school

site."

Other examples of changing old understandings and/or generating new ones in order to

achieve a specific purpose included how executive cabinet members talked about their work in

relation to the types and sources of data collected, the lenses applied for analysis, and the

purposes for data collection. During an interview, one member shared that a great percentage of

his time "is just looking at classroom practices, and then giving schools feedback around that,"

and that the "baseline is to examine information gathered from a data-driven decision making

standpoint." Both examining classroom practices and using it as data for principal feedback and

making data-driven decisions are new district orientations towards data. He provided a specific

encounter with a principal that exemplifies how he is trying to change the thinking of and

attitudes towards data:

> One leader tells me, my staff has never even looked at our accountability data. I say, well,
>
> that's a problem because they are directly contributing to that. If you're not making those
>
> intentional connections, there's no reason for them to do that.

The superintendent employed strategic transformation to generate a new orientation towards

data. During a school committee meeting, he employed a new lens to highlight what the data

revealed. He stated, "Typically what we are finding across any data point and across any

conversation [is] that there is a disproportionate impact on different racial groups, different

linguistic groups, and different income levels across the system," thus signaling to the school

committee that data will be viewed in a new way from now on in order to ensure that, "[they] are

achieving for all." One step to examining inherent biases during equity talk, is to clarify, through data and framing processes, the issues that exist within the district.

Strategic extension. Indications of strategic extension involved extending the frame beyond the primary interest to include issues valued by potential adherents. In the present study, I witnessed strategic extension when two executive cabinet members discussed the importance of utilizing many sources of data not traditionally gathered and examined in the district. For example, one member, after stating that a facet of his work is to unpack their accountability data, stated that it is "a small portion of what lives and breathes in the school each day. So that doesn't define us." Their work, he elaborates, is to define for each school "what else complements those scores, so that we make sure that we are then providing resources, setting expectations, providing the support, and then holding our folks accountable in those various areas." By expressing the need to include other sources of qualitative and quantitative data that might hold meaning for stakeholders, these members are extending the frame beyond the primary interest to include issues valued by potential adherents. Furthermore, the superintendent articulated the need to include student voice so that they hear the issues and concerns of this stakeholder group. He connected student voice to the iterative process of gathering data, sharing that the part they are really working on "is to make sure that students are part of that loop and getting student perspectives. That is an important perspective and an important part of the feedback loop that I think is often missing." Another step in examining inherent biases during equity talk is to uncover and understand the perspectives of others. In expressing how they purposefully value, intentionally gather, and thoughtfully consider multiple stakeholder positions, district leaders are using strategic extension processes.

Discussion

This research study explored the ways one newly formed district leadership team used framing processes when engaging in equity talk. Findings described how the three components of equity talk manifested as one of three themes: diversity as an asset, the decision-making process, or the use of data and feedback. I also outlined the framing processes district leaders utilized when discussing each theme. The data suggests that in all three themes, strategic framing processes were utilized towards specific goals. Only in discourse about the decision-making process were discursive processes used to either provide new perspectives or to highlight issues or beliefs as being very significant. A contested frame was only employed in discourse about diversity as an asset.

In the following sections, I first discuss how framing impacted stakeholder thinking and language. Next, I describe how framing brought coherence to district leaders' equity efforts. Last, I describe challenges to district leaders in maintaining an equity focus.

Thinking and Language

The results from this study indicate that district leaders' dialogue and reflection has the potential to alter stakeholders' thinking and language. It is well documented that dialogue and reflection are critical aspects of school leaders' work (Avelar La Salle & Johnson, 2019; Marzano et al., 2005; Shields et al., 2002; Supovitz et al., 2019) and how school leaders engage in discourse fosters equity and impacts student opportunities and outcomes (Cruice, 2018; Harris, 2018; Leithwood, et al., 2006; Leithwood, et al., 2010; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Through the intentional use of strategic and discursive framing processes, MPSD district leaders replaced existing vocabulary with language to support and rationales for their actions and goals. Their language use began to change stakeholders' understanding of data, redirect perceptions of family

engagement, and articulate how staff and school leaders would be expected to participate in the work of the district. The continued use of these framing processes has the potential to result in new frames of reference for stakeholders, thus providing a deeper understanding of the district's work, but more importantly, a stronger connection to that work.

As other district leaders unpack their most challenging and complex issues, they need to be intentional in how they talk about their work, both within the system and the community, especially because their framing can shape stakeholder thinking. District leaders' words can alter the two aspects needed for equity work to take hold, be supported, and have an impact on students' lives: 1) beliefs about the value and potential of every student, and 2) the actions or efforts that reinforce those beliefs (Pollack, 2017). Thoughtful framing allows for all stakeholders to see themselves in the work and know how they can contribute. As Pollack (2017) states, "It brings a level of ownership to equity work that nobody can disavow" (p. 9). Thus, district leaders should monitor how their words are received so that they can better understand who is impacted and how beliefs and actions have shifted. They could conduct periodic focus groups and/or surveys or hold community conversations on specific district goals. This feedback will, in turn, shape how they proceed with further communication or plans to operationalize their ideas and goals.

Maintaining an Equity Focus

Maintaining a focus is an essential role of equity-minded district leaders (Rorrer et al., 2008; Botelho, Cushing, Lawson, McIntyre, & McLaughlin, 2016). It comprises an ever-evolving process that entails district leaders negotiating a fit between their goals and the expectations or demands of their community (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Several steps enable district leaders to make progress towards achieving this fit: owning past inequities,

foregrounding equity, and/or providing an equity vision as the work unfolds (Rorrer et al., 2008; Meyers, Goree, & Burton, 2019). All three steps provide understanding for the district's work as well as engender trust among stakeholders, which in turn can help district leaders create a sense of coherence for the community. Through meaningful strategic and discursive framing processes, the MPSD brought attention to and raised stakeholder awareness of the inequities that existed in the district. This finding is significant because district leader equity talk began to make visible the needs of the most vulnerable students in the district, thus providing not only an imperative, but also coherence to the district's long-range goals. This imperative and coherence will allow for district leaders to maintain their focus and navigate competing demands. Thus, district leaders should continually make all types of disaggregated data known to stakeholders. They should also improve the capacity among themselves and others to analyze and discuss data as well as how to use it to describe what they want to change (e.g. policies, instructional strategies, programs, etc.) to achieve their vision of an equitable learning environment.

Taken together with the preceding section on how framing allows for all stakeholders to see themselves in the work and how they can contribute, discerning how equity talk manifests in a district by the framing processes utilized and the collective action frames that result can prove useful for district leaders. Equity talk can provide insight into how their words impact their stakeholders' thinking and language and how to maintain a focus on their equity efforts.

What About the Challenges?

Despite the importance of equity talk, there are challenges to engaging in it. These challenges include: the deficit discourse that is firmly ingrained in educational thinking and practice (Lyman & Villani, 2002; McKenzie et al., 2008; Rusch, 2004; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001); leaders own cultural identities (Boske, 2007); their underdeveloped multi-cultural

awareness (Hammond, 2014; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016); dominant community values that marginalize student groups (Rorrer, 2006; Roegman, 2017); and shifting demographics in which leaders' beliefs and actions may collide with stakeholder beliefs and values (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2007; Shields, 2017; Shields et al., 2002). While managing these types of challenges, district leaders simultaneously need to be able to balance actions to support equity while also maintaining legitimacy within the community (Rorrer, 2006). This requires district leaders to fully understand and embrace their vision and the challenges they may encounter. Schulze, Winter, Woods, and Tyldesley (2017) state that in order for all members to participate equally and fully, district leaders need to create environments that are physically and psychologically safe. It demands that district leaders build their capacity to engage with their community to have difficult conversations that unearth beliefs and values. Pollack (2017) maintains that it will require longer dialogues to explore new information, ideas and experiences in order to prevent statements that quickly summarize a group of people. Techniques that can be purposively used are provocative declaratives, which are "statements purposely formulated to elicit reactions to held beliefs and values" (Vavrus, 2002, p. xvi) and controversial readings alongside the strategic use of questions (Brown, 2004). It compels district leaders to develop an explicit and transparent implementation plan, with progress equity indicators and touchpoints for gathering and assessing stakeholder feedback.

However, one caution for *any* district is the palpable tension of time. The beliefs for equitable access, opportunities, and outcomes as well as the knowledge of what needs to be accomplished may be strong. Yet in the pursuit of their goals, district leaders may move too quickly, unintentionally leaving out or behind the very stakeholders they need to participate in the work. Managing this tension of time will require consistent, stable leadership at all levels

throughout a district, commitment to the district core beliefs and values, and leaders who continue to learn together through their equity talk.

In order to engage in this kind of reflective dialogue, Hart and Germaine-Watts (1996) propose that district leaders should think about equity as an operational principle that shapes all policies and practices that impact expectations and resources. Brown (2004) asserts that repeated, deliberate practice of the kind of extended dialogues Pollack (2017) describes will "evolve over time into a culture of careful listening and cautious openness to new perspectives" (p. 93) and provide district leaders with the skills to be able to engage with stakeholders. By participating in equity talk in which they state their equity beliefs and values, examine their inherent biases, and position equity at the forefront of discourse such that it supports a common interest, district leaders can create frames of reference that guide their equity work.

CHAPTER FOUR[4]

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Discussion and Recommendation**

Our research team explored how district leaders' practices foster equity. Each individual study examined a specific aspect of the school district context in order to better understand how the leaders engaged in practices that foster equity. Specifically, Bishop (2020) focused on fostering a climate of belonging for students of color. Mizoguchi (2020) explored the conditions for teacher-led equity work. Bookis (2020) examined how district leaders used framing processes when engaging in equity talk. Drummey (2020) investigated culturally responsive behaviors to support English Learners (ELs). Welch (2020) sought to understand how district leaders planned for future changes in leadership.

We defined equity as the commitment to ensure that every student receives the opportunities they require based on their individual needs, strengths, and experiences to reach their full potential. Equity can be understood and addressed from multiple perspectives: outcomes, opportunity, commitment, affirmation, and as a system. Figure 5 shows the focus of each individual study and a summary of five perspectives of equity that each member of the research team examined.

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[4] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Matthew Bishop, Deborah S. Bookis, Sandra Drummey, Allyson Mizoguchi, and Thomas W. Welch, Jr..

Figure 5

Five Perspectives of Equity
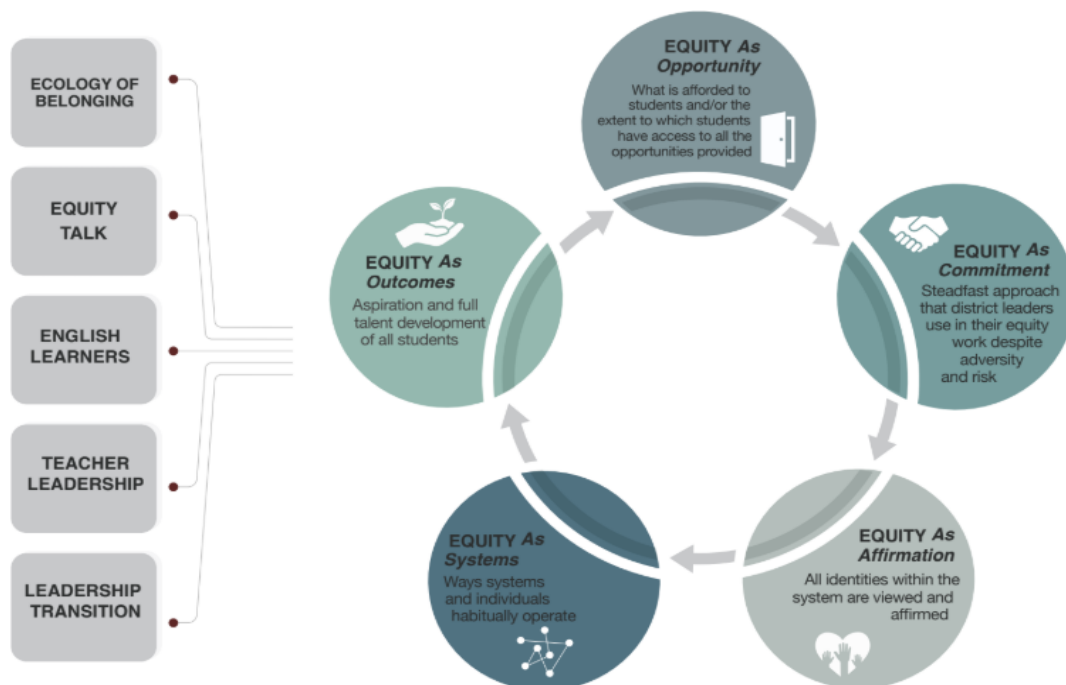
Below, we discuss the importance of each perspective and address the challenges for district leaders. In addition, we offer recommendations to overcome these challenges.

Equity as Outcomes

Equity as outcomes is the full development of students' talents. It also involves efforts to foster students' aspirations by providing them educational experiences to achieve their aspirations. In order to determine outcomes, educational leaders need to define the skills, knowledge and dispositions with which students should graduate. Consistent with equity as outcomes research (Nieto, 1996; De Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park; 2006), our research found district leaders should articulate outcomes for students. These student outcomes could

include a feeling of belongingness, dispositions and attitudes towards school, the development of passions and strengths, and extra-curricular participation. Examples from our studies included the analysis of English language proficiency data to monitor the progress of EL students (Drummey, 2020), monitoring disproportionality in enrollment, achievement, and suspension rates (Bishop, 2020), and the use of the iReady data system to uncover disproportionality in MCAS scores (Mizoguchi, 2020). Another way equity as outcomes manifested in MPSD was in students' freedom to explore their strengths and passions by participating in a Poetry Slam and an activism unit (Mizoguchi, 2020).

Our studies primarily found that MPSD focused on disaggregated school and district-based achievement data to assess student progress toward state-defined achievement outcomes even though we did find limited district leadership practices that focused on non-academic outcome data (Bookis, 2020; Welch, 2020). If equity means the full development of student talents, then it is important to have not only a broader definition of outcomes rather than one that is narrowly defined by only academic data, but also multiple avenues for student learning (O'Sullivan & Dallas, 2017; Shushok & Hulme, 2006). Such avenues could include the development of skills in Social Emotional Learning (SEL), the arts, technology, access to advanced curriculum, etc.. The data collected and analyzed by district measures should align with those defined outcomes.

One of the greatest challenges in equity for outcomes is defining a vision for student outcomes by articulating the skills, knowledge and dispositions with which students should graduate. Because equity work requires seeing the full potential of every child (Zygmunt & Cipollone, 2019), taking into account their own goals and passions, one challenge in defining outcomes is supporting the staff to develop "an asset orientation instead of one focused on

deficits" (p. 18). However, this takes time, persistent professional development, steady leadership, and planning to achieve. Furthermore, monitoring less measurable outcomes, such as a students' sense of belonging and relationships with teachers (Singleton, 2018) that are vital for student achievement, can be equally as challenging.

It is important for districts to establish a vision of equity that focuses on a full definition of student outcomes because over time, creating this vision will provide coherence to all of the district's work. This allows leaders to not only define the outcomes desired, but also to monitor progress and provide opportunity to periodically reevaluate the outcome objectives so continuous improvement is realized. Deciding on how to measure some of the data points can be an additional step. Building a timeline for this work and providing capacity for those responsible for its success is also recommended. Lastly, continuing to engage all stakeholders in conversations about equity and why multiple pathways for students are important to equitable outcomes is essential.

Equity as Opportunity

Creating and expanding educational opportunities for students is a cornerstone of equity work. Opportunity can be manifested in many different ways, such as students' access to services, technology, support, and a sense of ownership over their learning; families' sense of belonging within the district; and the staff's access to professional learning and leadership opportunities that enhance their equity work. Educational outcomes for students of color are much more a function of their unequal access to key educational resources, including skilled teachers and quality curriculum, than they are a function of race (Darling-Hammond, 1998). To ensure access to such opportunities, district leaders need to identify and address existing barriers

using clearly defined outcomes as a guide. For example, opportunity may be expanded via culturally proficient teaching, equitable resource allocation, and efficient structures and systems (Mattheis, 2017).

In line with this research, MPSD engaged in various approaches to creating and expanding educational opportunities for students. Examples of such opportunities included: classroom lessons that expanded student voice and choice (Mizoguchi, 2020); the creation of a new staff position devoted to family outreach (Welch, 2020); a racially balanced practice of school assignment for newly enrolled English language learners (Drummey, 2020); efforts to diversify district staff (Bishop, 2020; Welch, 2020); and increased resources for translation and interpretation (Bishop, 2020; Drummey, 2020). Indeed, we found it encouraging to witness leaders' persistent focus on heightening educational opportunity.

The challenge for districts is that students cannot achieve equitable outcomes without opportunities, and opportunities will not exist without a critical understanding of the barriers in the way. Research shows that identifying barriers to educational access and creating new educational opportunities can be challenging (Williams, 2018). For example, creating access requires a wholesale shift in mindset around inclusivity so that the teachers and district decision-makers can identify the needs of each unique learner and address them. Teachers need to understand the strengths of their students' community and family contexts in order to capitalize on them in the classroom (Zygmunt & Cipollone, 2019). They also need the skills to create and deliver culturally responsive lessons to their diverse students (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). This requires sustained professional development for all staff, which can be a challenge for districts in terms of time and resources. A mindful and committed approach to this work also requires a

shared lens of cultural responsiveness, persistent attention, abundant data related to student outcomes, and a strong dose of humility.

In order to address such challenges, leaders should consider the following purposeful steps. First, district leaders should develop a coherent system for identifying barriers, (such as using a district data analysis team with a defined data inquiry process), and hence heightening opportunities, that is based on defined outcomes (Williams, 2018). Understanding where opportunity can be enhanced, and where barriers to educational opportunity exist, should determine the district's priorities from an instructional, systemic, and philosophical perspective. Second, setting up conversations so that the flow of ideas is clear, ideas are connected to a common interest, and multiple perspectives are incorporated help to keep students at the focus of the decision-making process (Bookis, 2020). Lastly, district leaders should also have reflective structures (such as annual equity audits) to regularly assess how the district is working toward establishing equitable opportunities for students (Rorrer, et al., 2008). Being transparent about ongoing student achievement and areas of challenge will help determine new opportunities for students that are consistent with the district's definition of equity.

Equity as Commitment

Commitment is an essential aspect of leadership when undertaking equity work, especially since such work may come with adversity and risk. However, district leaders' commitment to equity makes a difference in students' lives and outcomes (Leithwood & Prestine, 2002; McFarlane, 2010). In accord with other scholarship (e.g., Rorrer et al., 2008; Meyers et al., 2019), our research found that commitment to equity took many forms, including:

consistent, clear messaging (Bishop, 2020; Bookis, 2020; Welch, 2020); the acknowledgment of current exclusionary practices (Bishop, 2020); the creation of new executive cabinet positions aligned with equity (Welch, 2020; Mizoguchi, 2020); the presence of a plan to recruit a more diverse staff (Drummey, 2020); and ensuring that the voices of historically underserved families and students were included in decisions (Bookis, 2020). These practices, while varied, publicly demonstrate district leaders' commitment to equity and creates a shared understanding of its importance throughout the community. Further it keeps those engaged in the work accountable to one another.

Creating a shared understanding of equity builds trust. This trust helps stakeholders understand the actions district leaders take and builds support for those actions, which enable district leaders to stay committed to enacting equitable outcomes (Horsford & Clark, 2015; Rorrer et al., 2008). Consequently, district leaders can not only more easily navigate the distractions and challenges of district leadership such as local and state mandates, and politics, but they can also focus on shifting the fixed mindsets of reticent stakeholders. Attempting to shift these mindsets requires resources, time, and especially district leader commitment.

By committing to equity, school district leaders can disrupt and displace institutional inequity (Rorrer et al., 2008). This requires district leaders to develop a strategy towards creating an equitable environment. District leaders should clearly articulate their beliefs about students and learning when talking with various stakeholder groups, ensure a common definition of equity within the district, engage in community conversations, and make equity data transparent by ensuring it is in a format understandable and accessible by the community. A true commitment requires the time and resources to keep equity front and center throughout the district. Furthermore, district leaders should build a team committed to equity. This entails hiring district

and school leaders who possess a commitment to equity work, providing training to build leadership capacity to engage in difficult conversations, and developing a pipeline of future leaders to ensure the commitment to equity is strengthened. By assembling a team who demonstrates a commitment to equity, district leaders can combat fixed mindsets, as well as ensure equity remains a priority in the district.

Equity as Affirmation

Equity as affirmation is how all identities within the system are viewed and affirmed. Affirming identities and encouraging cooperation among and between groups of students, educators, and leaders are essential components to foster inclusive environments. Schools serve as environments that intentionally and unintentionally communicate messages about individual capabilities, importance of their contributions, and expected outcomes (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013). Consistent with equity as affirmation research (Khalifa, 2018; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006), our research found that commitment to equity as affirmation took the form of: articulating statements about the value of the district's diversity (Bookis, 2020); employing staff who are representative of the district's demographic data (Bishop, 2020; Drummey, 2020); developing leadership initiatives that prioritize equity (Welch, 2020); and empowering educators to make equity-based changes in their practice including family engagement practices (Mizoguchi, 2020).

These findings were encouraging because affirming individual identities and encouraging cooperation among and between students and groups of leaders are key district leadership practices. Unless leaders actively work to foster identity affirmation, schools risk marginalizing

and alienating students of color (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007; DeMatthews, Carey, Olivarez, & Saeedi, 2017; Smith & Kozelski, 2005; Khalifa, 2018). Since Theoharis (2007) found that improving school structures and strengthening school culture improves student achievement, district leaders who are in pursuit of equitable schools should go to great lengths to ensure schools in their charge have an "ecology" of belonging (Bishop, 2020).

Even so, maintaining a focus on equity may be challenging for some district leaders, because school environments are not typically responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs of the diverse students they serve (Calkins et al., 2007). Consequently, students of color are more likely to be disciplined, referred for special education services, fail to graduate, and take vocational classes as opposed to college preparatory classes (Smith & Kozelski, 2005; Bal, Afacan, & Cakir, 2018). DeMatthews et al. (2017) furthers this claim by arguing that the marginalization and alienation of students of color are the "result of a myriad of factors, with one of the most important being systematic and interpersonal racism plaguing the lives of students of color, their families, and their communities" (p. 549). Such systematic racism can lead to an environment in which microaggressions go unchecked and are further perpetuated through such cues as verbal and non--verbal hidden messages and perpetuate feelings of inferiority (Allen, 2012).

To counter the challenges of alienation and marginalization, district leaders should create environments that validate cultures and identities. They can accomplish this by: ensuring Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) practices in the district (Khalifa, 2018; Mizoguchi, 2020), creation of identity-affirming spaces (Carter, 2007), using language and messaging that affirms equity work (Bookis, 2020), and engaging families and local community contexts to affirm the different cultures served (Bishop,

2020). Finally, district leaders who wish to foster inclusive school environments should deliberately and strategically ensure all students feel a climate of belonging (Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2009).

Equity as Systems

Districts' organizational systems that support equity can enhance or hinder those efforts. Systems pertain to anything from staffing to recruitment, from data analysis to professional development, and are critical to the operational efficiency of the district; in addition, these systems reveal the district's commitment and approach to equity. As defined by Scott (2001), systemic equity is "the transformed ways in which systems and individuals habitually operate to ensure that every learner has the greatest opportunity to learn enhanced by the resources and supports necessary to achieve competence, excellence, independence, responsibility, and self-sufficiency for school and for life" (p.6). Aligned with this definition, we found that MPSD had established some ways of creating systemic equity, including the prioritization of budget and staffing decisions that advance equity (Welch, 2020); the development of teacher and leadership pipeline programs (Bishop, 2020; Mizoguchi, 2020; Welch, 2020); and leveraging accountability systems for student assignment and professional development that address the specific needs of traditionally marginalized subgroups (Drummey, 2020).

These findings were promising because structures and systems within schools affect students' opportunities to learn (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). When a district ensures that long-term, sustainable systems are in place to support equity work, it is optimizing the conditions for educational opportunities for all students. Systems built on equity such as transportation routes,

school assignment, resource allocation, hiring practices, and professional development guide the actions and decisions of its staff (Berg & Gleason, 2018). Systems are also important because they reflect a district's values and beliefs; therefore, because they drive or inhibit action, a district should work collectively on shaping beliefs around equity *while* transforming systems at the same time (Berg & Gleason, 2018).

Establishing systems to support equity is challenging in the current context of many public school districts. The lack of continuity in leadership due to frequent changes in the superintendent position limits the coherence in the direction of a school district and can disrupt systemic equity (Welch, 2020; "Urban School Superintendents," 2014). Frequent changes in district leadership can stall or prevent initiatives and structure reorganization that support equity work. Furthermore, lack of capacity of the people leading the work to advance equity presents itself as a challenge when responsibilities are not solely focused on creating equitable conditions for students (Calkins et al., 2007). Educational systems do not always support authentic conversations about race among its staff (Singleton, 2018). Additionally, given the importance of regular self-reflection in equity work (Rorrer et al., 2008), effectively assessing how the organization is working systemically towards equity brings another layer of complexity; a critical yet challenging part of this effort is ensuring that everyone is familiar with existing systems (Berg & Gleason, 2018).

To mitigate the barriers of establishing systemic equity, district leaders should dedicate time to capacity building around equity issues and then assessing which systems need to be replaced. To begin, schools must engage in open and authentic conversations about racial achievement disparities supported by district leadership (Singleton, 2018). Equity initiatives and values should be truly owned by the culture of the district rather than a forced priority of one

individual leader. While having a systemic approach to equity at the school level is important, building systemic equity should be "unapologetically top-down" (p.30) and must be strategically developed and implemented by the district leadership team (Singleton, 2018). Even when preparing for or managing through leadership changes, the systems that support an overarching vision promoting core values of educational equity must be maintained (Cruickshank, 2018). To accomplish this, district leaders should focus on communicating priorities of establishing an equitable system, with clearly articulated aligned goals for each department and periodic evaluations of those goals. In short, a goal of establishing systemic equity requires a planful approach to make the district "leader-proof," and therefore resilient to the inevitable changes in the superintendent position.

Conclusion: A New Way to Look At Equity

As Darling-Hammond (2007) states, "Our future will be increasingly determined by our capacity and our will to educate all children well" (p. 319). In order to effectively educate all children, district leaders need to foster equity. This qualitative case study examined how district leadership practices foster equity. As we explored the practices of district leaders, we noted that examining equity through the five perspectives of outcomes, opportunity, commitment, affirmation, and systems provided a framework for district leaders. As such, we recommend that district leaders utilize the five distinct perspectives as interrelated components of a framework to foster equity within their district.

Using this new framework to foster equity will provide a systematic approach for district leaders. As we have demonstrated, fostering equity at a district level requires leaders to address each of the five components. To this end, we offer to think about the five components not as a hierarchy, but rather as a system of gears (see Figure 6); each gear is deeply interconnected with

the others and none is more important than the other. Each gear relies on the speed, force, and direction of the others, and for district leaders this means that once they start equity work, all gears will start to turn. In our framework, speed refers to how quickly the district enacts the work associated with a particular gear; force refers to the amount of pressure applied on a particular gear at any one time; and direction refers to the vision of an equitable learning environment.

Figure 6

Equity Framework

| Equity as outcomes is the aspiration and full talent development of all students. | Equity as opportunity is what is afforded to students and/or the extent to which students have access to all the opportunities offered. | Equity as commitment is the steadfast approach that district leaders use in their equity work despite adversity and risk. | Equity as affirmation is how all identities within the system are viewed and affirmed | Equity as systems are the ways in which systems and individuals habitually operate |

District leaders should understand that not all gears will require the same force, turn in the same direction, nor turn at the same speed. We strongly suggest that districts assess what their strengths and improvement areas are for each component. From there, districts can decide which components need immediate attention, and those that require a longer, more strategic plan to address. For example, if districts are just starting equity work, they may choose to start with equity as outcomes by defining their vision for the aspiration and full talent development of all students. However, if a district has clearly defined equity outcomes and opportunities, then the district may want to create the systems for equity and plan future work around affirmations and

commitment. Ultimately, all five gears of the equity framework need to be addressed for district leaders to be successful in fostering and maintaining equitable learning environments.

Our nation continues to struggle to deliver educationally equitable experiences for all of its students. Therefore, today's district leaders need to be adept at not only examining equity within a district, but also addressing equity within the district. Literature contends that district leadership practices can have a significant impact on student outcomes (Leithwood & Prestine, 2002; McFarlane, 2010). Consequently, we offer district leaders this framework to fully address all five components of equity. Utilizing this framework will provide support and guidance for district leaders as they engage in this very challenging work.

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Appendix A

Abstract for Matthew Bishop's Individual Study

District Leadership Practices That Foster Equity: Creating an Ecology of Belonging

In today's educational landscape many school environments alienate students as they often are not responsive to their cultural and linguistic needs. Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) is a high leverage strategy that helps meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students by guiding school leaders towards fostering a climate of belonging. While much of the CRSL literature centers around building-level leadership, a gap exists in better understanding district leader efforts to foster a climate of belonging. As part of a larger qualitative study of district leadership practices that foster equity, the purpose of this individual case study was to explore how district leaders in a large Northeast school district foster a climate of belonging. Interview data from ten district leaders as well as an examination of public and local documents provided data for analysis using CRSL as a conceptual framework. Findings indicate that while the district was engaging in some individual CRSL practices by working to promote culturally responsive school environments and engaging students, parents, and local contexts, a systematic and strategic approach to fostering a climate of belonging was absent. Recommendations include developing a district-level, deliberate approach to fostering a climate of belonging, conducting a detailed equity audit, and instituting a comprehensive CRSL professional development plan for building-level leaders.

Keywords: Leadership, Equity, Culturally Responsive School Leadership, Climate of Belonging

Appendix B

Abstract for Sandra Drummey's Individual Study

District Leadership Practices that Foster Equity: How Educational Leaders Enact and Support

Culturally Responsive Behaviors for English Learners

Demographic shifts in American society and public schools have increased the urgency among educators and other stakeholders to ensure educational equity and excellence are a reality for all students (Brown, 2007; Dean, 2002; Gay, 2000; Johnson, 2007). One very notable shift in the United States has been the dramatic enrollment increase of English Learner (EL) students. Supporting ELs' achievement on standardized testing and increasing their graduation rates have been particular challenges, the meeting of which has required school districts to think differently. Culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) has been one solution, through the application of which districts can focus on teacher preparation, culturally responsive curricula, school inclusiveness and the engagement of students and parents in community contexts. This study is part of a larger study that examined leadership practices that foster equity, included twenty semi-structured interviews of district leaders, school leaders, and teachers. Findings from this study indicate that school leaders have enacted and supported culturally responsive behaviors to educate ELs and suggest how leaders might employ CRSL behaviors for the dual purpose of supporting ELs' achievement on standardized testing and increasing their graduation rates.

Appendix C

Abstract for Allyson Mizoguchi's Individual Study

District Leadership Practices that Foster Equity:

The Role of District Leadership in Teacher-Led Equity Work

As a result of pressing educational inequities that can be traced to students' race, ethnicity, class, home language, and learning needs, many districts prioritize equity work in their strategic plans and mission. With their close proximity to student learning, teachers can play an integral role in furthering equity efforts. Studies have pointed to the building principal as the leader most influential in creating a culture of teacher leadership; however, there is a gap in the research related to how the *district* leadership sets the conditions for this culture. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how district leaders in one Massachusetts school district set the conditions for teacher leadership, specifically in enacting efforts to support the learning of all students. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and document review. Findings indicate that district leaders can cultivate teacher leadership in equity work when they provide meaningful professional development opportunities, when they consistently support building principals, when their messaging about the importance of equity is clear, and when they provide formal leadership roles and opportunities to teachers. Although several steps removed from the locus of the classroom, district leaders can play a critical role in fostering a culture in which teachers are trusted, supported, and prepared to reach every learner.

Appendix D

Abstract for Thomas Michael Welch, Jr.'s Individual Study

District Leadership Practices that Foster Equity:

Succession Planning Guided by Equity as a Tool for Leadership Development in School Districts

Oftentimes, during the transition of key leadership positions in the public school district setting, multi-year initiatives and core values are disrupted as a new leader assumes their role. The purpose of this research is to examine how district leaders leverage a proactive approach to planning for transitions in key leadership positions. This dissertation used a case study of an urban district with a stated core value of equity to examine the approach of assessing, selecting, developing, and promoting future leaders. Through document reviews, meeting observations, and 14 interviews, this study examines the transition of key leadership positions within the district by addressing the following research question: How do the practices of district leaders foster equity through planning for future changes in leadership? Using the framework of succession planning, findings of the study included the complexities of the district's approach to planning for future human capital needs in alignment with the values of equity, through both existing strategies and the goals of a new superintendent. Additionally, the bar was raised for initiatives to develop talent from within the organization as pipeline programs were re-emphasized and meeting the needs of students and families were prioritized. Finally, the district aspired to sustain these efforts through systemic equity and a recommitment to ensuring linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity among leadership positions. This case study suggests the complex nature of organizational change and the importance of coherence in supporting the vision of the district during periods of leadership transition.

Appendix E
District Leader Interview Protocol

Opening Reminders

We will begin the interview with reminding the participants of the purpose and procedures of the interview.

● The interview is being recorded. However, you can request that I turn off the recording during any point in the interview.
● Anonymity will be protected and pseudonyms will be used in final data reporting.
● All questions are optional and you can end the interview at any time.
● Interview focus: This interview will focus on your experiences and work in MPSD.

1. Tell me how you see your work fitting into the district's mission.

2. As you think about your job, what gets you up in the morning?

3. As you look around this district, what do you see going on to help individual kids be
    successful?
    a. With English Language Learners?
    b. With accessing the challenging curriculum?
    c. Partnering with families?

4. Tell me how your work is helping to meet students' unique needs.
    a. Tell me about a challenge doing this.
    b. How did you respond to this challenge?
    c. With English Language Learners?
    d. With different cultures?

5. When you look around the district, what do you see teachers doing to meet students'
    unique needs
    a. How much are they doing on their own?
    b. How much is formal?

c. How much support do they need from you?

6. How do you and your team evaluate whether teachers are meeting students' unique

needs?

a. How often do these discussions occur?

b. What do you do when they are not?

7. Tell me about your department/team's planning processes to ensure your work is aligned
with the needs and priorities of the district.

a. How do you determine the needs, priorities, and equity issues?

*b. Who is involved in the planning process to ensure MPSD is meeting the needs of all
students? Are community stakeholders involved in the process? School-level
leaders? District-level leaders?*

*c. Is this planning done on a yearly basis? More or less frequently than once a year?
Are multi-year plans created?*

8. Now we are going to think about when significant leadership changes occur at the
school or department level. Can you describe the process of identifying candidates within
MPSD to take on leadership roles and the process of transitioning these candidates to new
leadership roles in the district?

*a. How are potential leadership candidates who understand and embrace equity and
other core values of MPSD identified and developed over time?*

*b. What role does the Human Resources, Personnel, and Recruitment Department
play in purposefully providing an opportunity for leaders to advance within the
school district?*

*c. Are future district-level and school-level leaders identified over time through a
specific process (district-driven or in partnership with an external organization such
as a local university)? If so, explain how candidates are identified.*

*d. Can you tell me about a district leader who you have identified for promotion in
the past? Moved up in the ranks? What qualities did they have that are aligned to district
values?*

e. How does specific training aligned to district values occur?

9. Did you personally experience intentional leadership development opportunities as you were
promoted as a district-level or school-level leader? If so, please explain one example of how
MPSD prepared you to understand its core values.

a. In your experience, describe the strategic onboarding process for district-level and school-level leaders as they transition into their new role. Is there typically an overlap in responsibilities as a succession in leadership occurred?

10. MPSD has a very diverse student population. How does the staff learn about the different cultures they serve?

a. How does this knowledge make its way into the classroom?

Appendix F

Coding Manual

Code	Definition	Examples
Discursive processes: used to generate collective action frames		
Discursive articulation	Providing a new perspective or interpretation	Observation: It might be interesting if we consider . . . Interviews: We hadn't thought about it that way until . . . Documents: After discussion (the notes will reflect the perspectives of the group-including new or differing perspectives), the group decided to _____.
Discursive amplification	Accenting or highlighting an issue, event, or belief as being more important/ appropriate than others	Observation: The majority of our stakeholders think/feel that _____. Interviews: The stakeholder group had a lot to say about _____. Documents: _____ stated or highlighted (the issue or event).

Code	Definition	Examples
Strategic processes: are purposeful and aimed at a specific goal		
Strategic bridging	Linking two frames about an issue that may be philosophically connected but structurally unconnected	Observation: These two perspectives on _____are quite similar. Interviews: with these two perspectives, we can move forward with _____. Documents: After considering multiple perspectives, the committee decided to _____.
Strategic amplification	Embellishing or clarify existing values or beliefs	Observation: How are our values expressed? Interviews: It's important that _____understand why equity is central to our work? Documents: It was clear that further clarification and/or communication was necessary.
Strategic extension	Extending the frame beyond primary interest to include issues valued by potential adherents	Observation: What else do our stakeholders value beyond this reform? Interviews: If we can figure out what's valued by stakeholders, then we can _____. Documents: The feedback indicated that they also held strong beliefs about _____.
Strategic transformation	Changing old understandings and/or generate new ones	Observation: What evidence can we use to demonstrate why the reform is vital? Interviews: We've used _____research to argue why this reform is necessary. Documents: The empirical research suggests that ____.

Code	Definition	Examples
Contested processes: refer to the challenges to generate collective action frames		
Contested counter framing	Comes externally from those who oppose the change as they challenge how the frame was designed and what it hopes to accomplish	Observation: What do we think is the underlying opposition to the reform? Interviews: Once we announced the reform, we found we needed to better articulate _____. Documents: The parent survey/focus group synthesis results revealed that _____.
Contested frame disputes	Comes internally from disagreement about the reality of situations	Observation: Why is it that our educators think this when we know/have evidence otherwise? Interviews: Our educators don't have the same perspective that district leaders have. Documents: The results of the educator survey revealed that they disagree with_____.
Contested dialectic tension	Exists between the frame and the collective action events	Observation: How can we best align our strategic actions with our goals? Interviews: When we planned the strategic actions, we didn't think there'd be a disconnect. Documents: Two of the strategic actions were modified to include more _____.