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# Developing Equity Literacy: A Collaborative Approach

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# Developing Equity Literacy: A Collaborative Approach

by

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**Abstract**

Historically, students of color, learners with special needs, non-English speakers, etc. are at risk for underperforming academically and behaviorally in school. To meet the needs of these marginalized populations and ensure academic and behavioral success for *all* students, it is necessary for teachers to develop *equity literacy* (EL). Equity literacy is the knowledge, skills, and awareness needed to provide equitable opportunities in the school setting. A great body of research has linked teacher efficacy with improved student performance. Yet little is known about how teachers develop efficacy regarding equity concepts. In this case study, a group of four teacher-leaders worked within a hybrid Community of Practice (CoP) and Professional Learning Community (PLC) called an Equity Council (EC) to develop their abilities to address inequities in school. Qualitative methods were utilized to determine a) how participation in an EC affected teachers' understanding and application of EL concepts, b) the degree of self-efficacy (SE) teacher leaders felt after participating in an EC and c) what processes of the EC promoted EL development. Results suggested that participants experienced EL growth in their abilities to *recognize* some barriers to equity but their ability to *respond to* and *redress* school-wide inequities was impacted by their inability to recognize other barriers. Additionally, participants' SE was generally related to perceptions of other colleagues' (i.e., non-EC members) receptivity. The processes of the EC format that enabled EL development were a) opportunities to work in small-groups to promote trust and sharing of ideas, b) storytelling to enable perspective-taking and inform problem-solving and c) face-to-face communication. Implications for utilizing ECs as methods for increasing teachers' EL in practice included a) disrupting deficit thinking, b) engaging in long-term EC dialogue, and c) providing support systems to build the

efficacy, knowledge, and skills for EC members take on leadership roles promoting EL concepts outside the EC.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the early days of American public education, a central aim of schooling has been to reduce societal inequities like poverty and lack of opportunity by providing an accessible education for *all* students. Horace Mann—American educational pioneer—described American schooling in 1868 as the "great equalizer" that could educate diverse learners through a publicly funded, non-sectarian system led by a professional staff (McCluskey, 1975). The importance of ensuring excellent, equitable education so that learners can fully participate in society is just as relevant today as it was more than a century ago. However, American schools are falling short of achieving Mann's vision. Persistent structural inequities like racism, economic injustice, xenophobia, sexism, etc. permeate the policies and practices of educational systems and contribute to academic and behavioral disparities that marginalize students (e.g., Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009; Carter, Skiba, Arrendondo, & Pollock, 2014; Gorski, 2016a; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Gorski (2016a) wrote that marginalized students are defined as those learners who historically and currently experience less favorable academic and/or behavioral outcomes in the school setting due to pervasive systemic inequities (e.g., racism, sexism, xenophobia, etc.). Students whose identities vary from the mainstream White, English-speaking, academically/behaviorally on-level, middle-class norm are historically considered to be members of these marginalized student populations (e.g., Kena et al., 2015; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).The marginalized student populations discussed in this paper include students of color, Dual Language Learners (DLLs), students living in poverty, learners who receive special education services, and those with intersecting identities (e.g., learners who have experienced marginalization as a result of identifying with two or more historically oppressed categories according to race, socio-economic status, language, ability, etc.). Extant literature indicates that

historical and current inequities marginalize student populations and exist within the school context (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, & Chung, 2005; Sullivan, 2011).

It is critical to address these inequities so that *all* students have access to learning opportunities that are safe, inclusive, and just. Therefore, it is essential that schools make concerted efforts to address academic and behavioral disparities of marginalized students before gaps in achievement widen further. Recent statistics highlight the prevalence of students from historically marginalized populations in American schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics'(NCES) Condition of Education Report 2015 (Kena et al., 2015), overall school enrollment is increasing while White (e.g., historically privileged) student enrollment is declining. However, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial student enrollment is on the rise. Therefore, the number of learners for whom English is not their first language is rising as well. Additionally, in 2012-2013[1], a significant number of American students (approximately 13% of the student population) received special education services. In 2013, a significant percentage of students (approximately 21% of school-aged children) were living in poverty (Kena et al., 2015). It is important to note that the poverty rate is increasing across the country but is increasing at more rapid rate in suburbs than in major cities (Allard & Roth, 2010). Therefore, it is important to address inequities in schools across America—not just schools located in urban areas.

To effectively and *equitably* educate such a prevalence of learners from historically marginalized populations, it is essential that teachers are equipped with knowledge and abilities to a) work with students whose backgrounds may be different from their own (Brown, 2007) and b) understand the complex social, political, and structural conditions within schools that

[1] Reported statistics are from the most recent data available from NCES.

contribute to continued marginalization (Gorski, 2016b). Despite the growing numbers of learners from marginalized groups in schools, the American teaching force has remained predominantly White, middle-class, English-speaking and female (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Jay (2003) wrote that cultural norms that permeate classroom interactions are often based on teachers' White, Euro-centric, middle-class values. She continued that it is implied that all students will be able to conform to these typically unspoken, untaught expectations. This *hidden curriculum* (i.e., the ways that culture manifests in the classroom), may contribute to dynamics of power, privilege and bias that undergird school practices and result in inequities that—if left unchecked—can negatively impact student achievement.

**Disparity in Student Outcomes**

A growing body of research highlights the disproportionality in school success for marginalized student populations (e.g., Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Okonofua, & Eberhardt, 2015; Sirin, 2005). Systemic inequities within the current school system—and our society at large—disproportionately affect the school achievement of these students.

In an effort to understand and address these inequities, there has been a national effort to gather disaggregated data about school-wide academic and behavioral outcomes for marginalized student populations. *Disproportionality* is defined as the over or underrepresentation of a group of students proportionate to their representation in the population (National Association for Bilingual Education [NABE], 2002). Recent disproportionality data has provided educational researchers with opportunities to pinpoint inequities and devise innovative strategies to address and ideally eradicate them. Although the characteristics that I will now describe are often confounded (e.g., socioeconomic status is often confounded with race), the figures paint a clear

picture of school-wide inequities that regularly face these student groups. The following statistics provided on socioeconomic status, race, special education status, and dual language learner status call attention to the need for further research to reduce disparities in American schools across every demographic region. It is important to note that current research in the field of educational/social justice no longer uses the term *minority* to refer to groups of non-White people. Instead, *persons of color* (POC) is the language presently utilized to be a more inclusive term that stresses the shared experiences of systemic racism amongst a variety of groups (Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly, 2006; Jackson, 2006). Throughout this paper, I will utilize this newer terminology.

**Socioeconomic status.** Approximately half (49.6%) of students across America are eligible to receive free and reduced lunch due to their family's economic situation. Research shows a clear link between students living in poverty and reduced academic performance (Kena et al, 2015) and at-risk behavioral outcomes (Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012).

**Race**. The Children's Defense Fund (1975) first called attention to the racial disproportionality facing Black students in America. Research uncovered that Black learners were two to three times more likely to receive school suspensions compared to their rates of enrollment across the country. Over the past 30 years, national and state data continue to reflect consistent patterns of racial disproportionality regarding suspension rates (Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2004), expulsion (KewelRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007) and office discipline referrals (Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002).

In the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress Report (NAEP, 2015), Black students in fourth grade were less proficient in reading (18%) and math (19%) than their Asian (57% reading/65% math), White (46% reading/51% math), Hispanic (21% reading/26% math),

Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (28% reading/30% math), American Indian/Alaska Native (21% reading /23% math), or multi-racial (40% reading/45% math) counterparts.

Several factors can contribute to differences in student outcomes. Many students of color disproportionately live in poverty. Additionally, these students often do not attain the same levels of academic achievement as their peers and are more likely to be taught by novice teachers (Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013; Kalogrides, Loeb, & Beteille, 2013; Kena et al., 2015).

**Special education status**. The National Assessment of Educational Progress Report (NAEP, 2015), showed that fourth graders who received special education services had average scores of 187 in reading and 218 in math compared to their peers who did not receive these services (228 reading/244 math). Students of color receive or do not receive special education services at disproportionate rates. Conflicting research findings suggesting the overrepresentation of students in poverty in special education programs (see Blair & Scott, 2002; Harry, 1994) and underrepresentation in these same programs (see Morgan et al., 2015), highlight additional disproportionality. American Indian/Alaska Native students in American schools received the highest percentage of special education services (16%) compared to other racial/ethnic groups even though they represented only 1% of the overall student population (Aud et al., 2013). This type of disproportionality regarding special education status is also linked to student behavior. The U. S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014) suggested that students with disabilities are twice as likely to receive out-of-school suspensions than students without disabilities.

**Dual language learner status.** The Office of Head Start (2008) uses Dual Language Leanrer (DLL) as an overarching term to describe other commonly used language classifications (e.g., Limited English Proficient [LEP], bilingual, English Language Learners [ELL], and those

learners who speak a Language Other Than English [LOTE]). In 2015, fourth grade DLLs had average scores of 189 in reading and 218 in math compared to their peers who were not classified as DLL (226 reading/243 math) (NEAP, 2015). Historically**,** DLLs have been historically under-represented in academically gifted courses (Ford, 2008; Robinson, 2003) and over-represented in special education courses (see Artiles & Klinger, 2006; Gardner & Miranda, 2001; Rueda, Klinger, Sager & Velasco, 2008). According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction [NCELA] (2007), the DLL population is currently the fastest growing population in American schools.

**Need for Equitable Opportunities for All Student**s

These disparities and potentially many more exist within the walls of American schools on any given day. Since the population of marginalized students in schools is prevalent—and in some cases increasing—it is important to examine these inequities, assess gaps in teacher understandings, and take steps to revise practices to reduce or avoid negative outcomes (e.g., increased behavior problems, decreased academic performance, disengagement from school, and a loss of motivation) (American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health, 2013). Yet meeting the needs of these learners may be difficult if the American teaching force lacks experience or efficacy working with students from these marginalized populations (Sleeter, 2001).

**Equity literacy.** A promising method of reducing disparities may be to increase teachers' *equity literacy* (EL). Equity literacy is a developing framework by Gorski and Swalwell (2015) that is rooted in multicultural education principles. A key goal of EL is to develop teachers' abilities to recognize, respond to, and redress discrimination, inequity and bias. Another goal of EL is to cultivate teachers' abilities to *sustain* communities free from bias and discrimination. In

other words, EL challenges educators to deepen their understandings of students, themselves, and society by moving beyond common multicultural approaches like cultural competence and cultural responsiveness. Instead, EL utilizes the strengths of these existing multicultural education frameworks and extends them to improve teachers' abilities to examine reciprocal interactions between teachers, students, and school environments (Swalwell, 2011). Gorksi (2015, 2016b) argued that to achieve EL, teachers need to shift their focus from cultural mastery (i.e., cultural responsiveness, cultural competency) and place equity at the center of their educational practices and discourse. This will require teachers to deepen their understandings about themselves and others while simultaneously using problem-solving strategies like brainstorming, community resource mapping, discourse, and journaling to grapple with complex issues. Through this personal and collaborative journey, teachers can pinpoint areas of need and work to apply their knowledge to reduce inequities within the school—thus increasing their EL and developing a repertoire of strategies for future use.

Teachers have an incredible impact on learners. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model of human development provides a solid theoretical framework for understanding how relationships between students, school, home and community can impact learner outcomes. Viewed from an EL perspective, teachers need to understand the issues that students face in their schools, homes and communities. Furthermore, teachers need to understand how their own beliefs/actions can support or impede students' success. Educators can improve their EL by a) acknowledging and reducing personal and school-wide inequities in teaching practices, b) integrating EL concepts regularly into cross-curricular instruction at all levels, and c) improving relationships between students, teachers, families, and communities.

Teachers' development of EL has the potential to positively affect learners' academic, social, and emotional achievement in school. Yet, little research to date has explored teachers' equity literacy development (see Swalwell, 2013). However, numerous studies have suggested that students and teachers can benefit from increasing their understandings about the roles that culture, bias, and equity play within schools (e.g., Aragona-Young & Sawyer, under review; Banks, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995). For example, researchers have found that teachers often minimize cultural differences between students (Mahon, 2006), lack knowledge to work effectively with culturally diverse learners (Sleeter, 2001), and lack abilities to articulate solutions to problems rising from cultural conflicts or inequities (Aragona-Young & Sawyer, under review). These underdeveloped pedagogical abilities may be contributing to less than favorable academic and behavioral outcomes for students.

**Efficacy**

Whereas little is known about the association between teachers' EL development and student achievement, a teacher variable that *has* been associated with improved student outcomes is *self-efficacy* (SE). Self-efficacy is grounded in Bandura's (1977, 1997) social cognitive theory that states that one way people learn is through observation as well as through social reinforcement, vicarious experiences, and mastery experiences. In Bandura's theory, the likelihood of a person reproducing observed behavior is affected by personal, behavioral, and environmental factors.

There are two types of efficacy: (a) individual and (b) collective. Individual efficacy is the belief one has to perform the required behaviors to produce desired outcomes and results in the ability to control one's motivations, behaviors, and social environments. *Collective efficacy* is the belief that a group's efforts will yield positive outcomes. According to Bandura's social

cognitive theory, each organization (e.g., school) has its own culture and belief systems. Therefore, teachers who possess collective efficacy believe that the efforts of all teachers in their school will yield positive outcomes for learners. Teachers who possess individual and collective efficacy believe that they and their colleagues will put forth effort to consistently persist when facing difficult teaching situations, manage stress, and have a positive effect on learner achievement (Caprara, Barnaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy, 2000; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk, 2000).

Research findings indicate that teachers with high SE have a positive impact on student achievements in school (Bandura, 1993; Mojavezi, & Tamiz, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). In other words, when teachers feel more efficacious, students benefit academically, socially, and emotionally. Bandura (1997) wrote that SE beliefs are powerful predictors of behavior. In the educational realm, this means that teachers who believe they can positively impact student achievement typically persist longer in the face of difficulties, put forth more effort to impact student achievement, and sustain their motivation when confronted with stress compared to teachers who possess a low sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Gibson and Dembo (1984) added that teachers with high SE also spend more time on instructional tasks, provide learners with the help they need when they need it, and praise learners for their accomplishments.

Importantly, Ross, Cousins, and Gadalla (1996) found that educators do not feel equally efficacious in all areas of teaching. The context-specific nature of teacher efficacy results in teachers feeling more efficacious in some content areas and less efficacious in others. In terms of this study, teachers may feel efficacious when they are teaching academic content but less efficacious fostering relationships with learners from marginalized populations or students who

have academic or social behaviors that teachers perceive to be challenging. Two aims of this study are a) to help teachers develop their individual SE working with diverse learners through the development of equity literacy while b) simultaneously helping teachers to uncover personal, pedagogical, and structural barriers that may be influencing their SE.

At this time, no extant research has explored how teacher individual self- and collective efficacy is associated with EL development. However, it is a plausible hypothesis that teachers who are more efficacious in EL and who work in schools with greater collective efficacy regarding working with students from marginalized populations, have increased student achievement, reduced behavioral disproportionality rates, and more equitable school environments. Since little is known about the role teacher SE plays in EL development, this study will provide a promising opportunity to learn more about the strengths and weaknesses regarding efficacy working with students from marginalized groups in a specific school context. Furthermore, this study will uncover how the staff's underlying beliefs contribute to the school climate and affect teachers' collective efficacy.

**Teacher Professional Development**

One way to build teachers' efficacy surrounding issues of equity may be through professional development opportunities. Typically, to address the diverse needs of students, teachers are required to take pre-service coursework in multicultural education or in-service workshops on cultural diversity (Ross, 2013). Ross argued that these sessions do not adequately cover the depth and complexity necessary to tackle difficult equity issues. In fact, these approaches are typically ineffective as they skim the surface of pertinent cultural topics, are often presented in a one-stop workshop type manner, and concepts are rarely integrated into other PD topics throughout the year (Johnson, 2008).

Meaningful and sustainable PD integrates elements of adult learning principles and requires that teachers study content that is relevant, apply what they have learned to their authentic teaching environments, and reflect upon what they have learned and/or applied (Fogarty & Pete, 2010; Guskey, 2000).

**Communities of practice and professional learning communities.** Two types of PD that are founded upon adult learning principles and the social cognitive theory of teaching and learning are Communities of Practice (CoP) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000; Zemke & Zemke, 1995). These groups are collaborative learning groups comprised of people who share a common vision and are interested in furthering their knowledge about their particular field or profession (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Furthermore, they can provide a forum for teachers to develop their EL and share their expertise working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Teachers can work within a supportive, collaborative setting to share ideas, learn from one another's experiences, interact with content material either in face-to-face or online formats, and discuss potential solutions to problems.

The foundations of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory can be applied to EL development. For example, when working within a social environment and engaging in mastery experiences or moments of physiological/emotional challenge, teachers may develop EL. When teachers experience these mastery experiences or physiological/emotional challenges and navigate them effectively, they may experience a heightened sense of efficacy. Since teacher efficacy is closely linked with student achievement, it is important to foster teacher development in this area.

It is critical that teachers—regardless of their own backgrounds—become more efficacious grappling with equity issues in school to increase positive outcomes for the prevalent number of students from marginalized groups. To accomplish this goal, an Equity Council (EC)—based on the CoP and PLC models--was formed to enable school leaders to examine issues of equity in a contextualized, school-based environment and harness the collaborative strengths of the group to develop EL competencies through readings, videos, and other assorted activities while simultaneously working to identify, address, and alleviate inequities within the school. The EC met six times face-to-face (F2F) and three times online to a) engage in discussions that defined EL, b) identify inequities within the school, c) explore the role ideologies play in school-wide and personal decision-making, d) identify opportunities for and barriers to EL, e) assess partnerships between the school and other entities to facilitate equity, f) engage families in collaborative ways to promote equity, and g) design an action plan to alleviate inequities in the school in a sustainable manner.

**Distributed Leadership**

The rationale for engaging voluntary participation from school leaders in this type of PD structure aligns with principles of distributed leadership. These include relevance to the teaching experience and opportunities for application and reflection. The distributed leadership model suggests that teachers can work collectively as leaders to effect sustainable change and maximize collaborative expertise in educational systems (Harris, 2004; Ritchie & Woods, 2007). Yet few schools have been able to harness the power of high-level, collective inquiry through the distributed leadership framework (Copland, 2003). This study, however, aimed to add to the body of research on this topic by a) having a structured yet flexible focus on EL concepts, b) encouraging willing participants to engage actively in equity-related dialogue, c) ensuring the

quality and coherence of the materials used to facilitate this dialogue, d) fostering strong participant relationships with colleagues and administrators, e) acknowledging the influence participants have over their colleagues and administrators due to their leadership roles within the school and f) making plans to sustain equity-related practices over time. Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) found that these key factors positively and significantly impact teachers' knowledge and practices during professional development.

**This Study**

No research to date has examined how using a collaborative, distributed leadership approach centering on EL principles affects teachers' knowledge and efficacy regarding EL. The aim of this study was to address these gaps. With a rapidly changing student population, teachers need to improve their EL as well as their self- and collective efficacy to ultimately—although not tested in this study—be better able to meet the needs of their students and yield improved learner outcomes.

Anderson's (2005) theory of change model was utilized to develop a collaborative PD intervention based on principles of EL and promote EL knowledge and SE. This approach featured a backwards, iterative design and was based on five steps. First, long term goals to address inequities were identified. Second, a pathway of change was developed to map out the relationships between actions for the purposes of addressing equity concerns and determining probable outcomes. Third, outcomes were operationalized by specifying evidence that showcased movement toward group goals (i.e., markers of equity). Fourth, the necessary interventions to achieve the desired outcomes were drafted as activities within the EC and fifth, hidden assumptions that undergirded each step of the process were articulated and addressed in the form of collaborative discussions throughout the process. See Figure 1 for a visual

representation of this theory of change model as it was envisioned to apply to participants' development of EL.

This study explored how four teacher leaders—using this theory of change approach—engaged in an EC to enhance their EL, problem-solved strategies to reduce inequitable practices, and generated a plan for disseminating principles of equity literacy to the entire school staff.

The research questions were:

1. How did participation in an EC affect teachers' understanding and application of EL to address inequities within school?
2. Upon completion of the EC, how efficacious did teachers feel about leading equity initiatives in the school?
3. What processes of the Equity Council promoted Equity Literacy development?

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

America's school population is comprised of a prevalent number of students from historically marginalized populations (Ford, 2012). Students from these populations—defined in this project as those learners who possess cultural, socio-economic, and linguistic backgrounds that differ from the mainstream, dominant culture (Perez, 1998)—have historically experienced less favorable outcomes in school than their mainstream peers (see Orosco & Klinger, 2010; Sirin, 2005; Tapper-Gardzina & Cotunga, 2003; Taylor, 2005, U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Although the scope of these marginalized groups could be broader (e.g., encompassing religion, political affiliation, gender, and the like), this current study will focus on the following four populations: students in poverty, students of color, Dual Language Learners (DLLs), and special education students because they frequently experience inequities and disproportionate representation throughout their schooling experiences. In an effort to respond to the needs of prevalent populations of marginalized groups, narrow the opportunity gap, and create more equitable learning environments, schools have begun to gather academic and behavioral data about these four specific populations in schools.

First, I will discuss the sizable—and in some cases increasing—population of marginalized student groups in schools. Next, I will reveal patterns of inequities and how they manifest themselves within the educational system. I will then explain the critical need for addressing these inequities and devising sustainable plans to systematically alleviate them. Through the formation of an Equity Council (EC)—a collaborative, professional group dedicated to increasing individual and collective efficacy surrounding equity literacy—I will discuss how teachers may be better equipped to acknowledge, address, and reduce these inequities over time. Providing teachers with a framework for developing their personal understandings and

professional practices may enhance teachers' self- and collective efficacy working with students from marginalized student populations and ultimately yield more equitable learning environments for all learners.

**Students from Marginalized Populations**

The four groups of students from historically marginalized student populations that I have chosen to focus upon for this study are students in poverty, students of color, DLLs, and special education students. The following statistics illustrate the diversity of our nation's classrooms and the substantial—and in some cases increasing—size of these student populations. These characteristics are important to explore because students may possess one or more of these characteristics that put them at risk for unfavorable educational outcomes if school policies and procedures remain status quo. Since many of these characteristics are inextricably linked with one another, it is difficult to isolate one characteristic without describing it in the context of several others.

**Socioeconomic status**. In 2014, 15.5 million (21.1%) children under 18 years of age were living in poverty (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015). According to the Child Trends Databank (2015), poverty status is determined when household income and the number of people living within the household are combined with what the U. S. Census Bureau determines to be the poverty threshold. Households are defined as all families in which children are related to the householder by birth, adoption or marriage. Householders are those who maintain the dwelling. In 2014, the poverty threshold for a four-member family with two child dependents under 18 years old was $24,008 or less.

From 2000 to 2012, the number of students in poverty increased in 44 states and remained unchanged in the remaining six states and in the District of Columbia. Poverty rates

were higher for Black (39%), American Indian (36%), Hispanic/Latino (33%), Pacific Islander (25%), and mixed race (22%) students and lower for Asian (14%) and White non-Hispanic/Latino (13%) students (Kena et al., 2014). One of every three African American children live in poverty and one of every four Hispanic/Latino children live in poverty. This is nearly double the rate of White non-Hispanic/Latino children (National Poverty Center, 2009).

In schools, students' socioeconomic status is typically measured as whether they are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals, which is a less conservative estimate of poverty. Aud et al. (2013) reported that the number of students eligible to receive free and reduced price lunch also increased from 38.3% in 2000 to 49.6% in 2012.

It is important to note that suburban areas are experiencing the greatest rate of growth of people living in poverty. From 2000 to 2010, the percentage of people living in poverty in suburban areas grew at a rate of 52.6 percent, double the rate of growth in principal cities (21.5%) or rural areas (23.1%) (Hexter, Rog, Henderson, & Stevens, 2014).

**Race.** In 2014, the student racial/ethnic enrollment in public schools was 51% White non-Hispanic/Latino, 16% Black, 24% Hispanic/Latino, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% American Indian/Alaska Native and 3% two or more races (Kena et al., 2014). According to the NCES (2013), between 2010 and 2021, White student enrollment is projected to decline by 2% whereas enrollment of students of color is projected to increase (Black, 5%; Hispanic/Latino, 24%; Asian/Pacific Islander, 26%; American Indian/Alaskan Native, 16%; multi-racial, 34%).

Currently, 63 of the 100 largest school districts in the U.S. are comprised of a majority of students of color—indicating a marked shift in our nation's classrooms and highlighting a need for teachers who can engage all learners (Dalton, Sable, & Hoffman, 2006; Howard, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008; Milner, 2010).

**Special education status**. According to Kena, et al. (2014), a considerable amount of American students receive special education services (6.4 million students = 13% of student population). In 2012-2013 school year, the percentage of students who received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 1975 was highest for students who were American Indian/Alaska Native (16%), followed by Black (15%), non-Hispanic/Latino White (13%), students of two or more races (13%), Hispanic/Latino (12%), Pacific Islander (11%) and Asian (6%). More than 50% of these students received services for specific learning disabilities and/or speech or language impairments.

**Dual language learner status**. According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA, 2007), Dual Language Learners (DLLs) are the fastest growing group in American schools. Currently, there are approximately 10 million DLLs in U.S. schools. However, NCELA projected that one out of every four students will be a DLL by 2025. Today, 66% of students who are DLL come from low-income homes and 75% of DLLs are Spanish-speaking.

**Inequities for Students**

It has been well-documented that marginalized student populations like students living in poverty, DLLs, students with disabilities, and students of color experience inequities within the American school system that often result in diminished academic, social, and behavioral performance (e.g., Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Sirin, 2005; Tapper-Gardzina & Cotunga, 2003; Taylor, 2005, U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Additionally, these learners often experience educational deficits because they are not provided with learning experiences that meet their specific needs (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Blanchett, Klingner, and Harry (2009) wrote that many students from these groups—especially those with disabilities—attend schools

where instructional decisions are not often made around the issues of race, culture, language, ability, etc., even though the student body reflects these diverse characteristics. Poor outcomes can be described as both emerging from empirical studies that examine the outcomes of students from certain populations as well as examining the groups experiencing marginalization. These following inequities are widespread in American schools and they manifest themselves in myriad ways within the educational system.

**Defining disproportionality.** Disproportionality in the field of education means that a percentage of learners from certain classifications are over or underrepresented. These classifications can include race, DLL status, special education status, etc. This over or underrepresentation occurs in educational measurements of academic or behavioral classification or performance proportionate to their representation in the population (Fenning & Sharkey, 2012). In other words, if a group is not represented as much as it is expected to be—based on the proportion of students in the group compared to the total population—this would be considered under-representation. Conversely, if a group is represented *more* than it is expected to be, this would be viewed as overrepresentation.

According to the IDEA Data Center (2014), there are several methods currently being utilized to identify disproportionality in schools like risk ratios, weighted risk ratios, risk difference, composition and e-formulas. For example, in order for Pennsylvania (PA) to earn a designation of disproportionality in special education identification, placement, or discipline, the weighted risk ratio must be higher than 4.0 for three consecutive years. A weighted risk ratio helps districts determine how many times greater the risk is for one racial/ethnic group to be identified as eligible to receive special education services compared with all other racial/ethnic groups in the district. This weighted risk ratio accounts for variance in the population of

subgroups. This enables researchers to compare risk ratios across districts. While some states set the minimum number of students in any subgroup at 10, Pennsylvania requires a minimum of at least 40 students. Therefore, if a district has a small number of students (<40) in a certain racial/ethnic category, the data is not included in the weighted risk ratio calculations. Despite this conservative approach to measuring disproportionality, PA special education data reveal that Black or African American students are referred to special education programs at rates disproportionately higher than their overall school/district enrollment (IDEA, 2011). Other areas of disproportionality may exist as well but specific data on disproportionality is not typically available to the public.

Since each state sets its own threshold for disproportionality identification and different metrics are utilized to identify evidence of disproportionality, calculations are often inconsistent. However, research consistently shows that some groups of students fair worse than others in our American educational system (Carter, Skiba, Arrendondo, & Pollock, 2014; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Disproportionality data can help researchers pinpoint areas of concern and develop strategies for addressing these inequities.

***Academic underperformance.*** Some student populations of learners traditionally academically underperform compared to their grade-level peers. The following section will explain how data can be utilized to explain relationships between several interrelated variables as well as the effects that these variables have on students' academic performance.

In addition to socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity is often related to academic outcomes for students. A wide body of research shows a recurring trend that White and Asian students perform better on standardized tests of achievement compared to Black, Latino and American Indian learners (Gregory & Weinstein, 2004). However, Lee and Burkham (2002) found that

when taking race differences into account, students from different socioeconomic groups performed at different levels. In other words, socioeconomic status plays a larger role than race in student performance. Disparities like these are referred to as the *achievement gap*. However, Gorski (2013), Milner (2010), and the NCES (2013) encourage researchers to view this disparity as a difference in *opportunity* citing that "focusing on an achievement gap inherently forces us to compare learners from minority populations (e.g., students of color) with White students without always understanding reasons that undergird disparities and differences that exist" (Milner, 2010, p. 8). Students in poverty often experience less optimal school success and a decreased likelihood of completing their schooling. These less than optimal academic outcomes are highly linked to other demographic factors that put families with low SES at risk such as decreased parent educational attainment, limited access to quality health care, food insecurity, and a host of other factors that could negatively impact learner success both in and out of the classroom (Kena et al., 2015).

Race and ethnicity is even related to school staffing trends. Schools with high concentrations of students of color from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds are often staffed by less skilled teaching professionals (Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013; Kalogrides, Loeb, & Beteille, 2013). This can also negatively impact student learning.

Historically, students from marginalized groups often underperform academically. Research has overwhelmingly suggested that these students have been disproportionately represented in special education programs (Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004; Blanchett, 2009, Gardner & Miranda, 2001; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, & Chung, 2005). Research has shown that students who are living in poverty are referred to special education programs at higher rates when the learners' family income is less than $25,000 (Blair & Scott,

2002; Harry, 1994). Dual Language Learners are disproportionately referred to special education services (Sullivan, 2011) and lag behind their peers academically (NCELA, 2007). Furthermore, inequities in special education programs are further exacerbated by trends that indicate a lack of students from certain marginalized groups being referred to *gifted* education programs (Aud, et al., 2013).

A provocative new study by Morgan et al. (2015), however, challenged extant research findings and suggested that minority students are *underrepresented* in special education programs. This longitudinal study of the nationally representative Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten cohort 1998-1999 (ECLS-K) followed 20,100 students to determine whether or not—and to what degree—learners from historically marginalized populations were over or underrepresented in special education programs compare to their White, English proficient peers in elementary through middle school. The researchers controlled for a vast array of variables that may have confounded the directional estimates based upon characteristics of a child's a racial, ethnic, or language ability. The findings from this rigorous analyses indicated that students from marginalized groups were *underrepresented* in special education programs across the nation and were less likely to be identified to receive services for disabilities, impairments, or emotional disturbances. Viewing these findings through the social justice lens, it appears as if special education enrollment procedures favor White, English-speaking families. This favoritism may be impacting access to the special education services that students from some marginalized groups desperately need to ensure their academic and/or behavioral achievement. Therefore, Morgan et al. recommended that to create more equitable opportunities for all students, teachers should focus on increasing their knowledge about the cultural and language barriers that may be

interfering with the special education services for which these students from marginalized populations are entitled.

Outcome disparities for these students are not confined to the academic realm. Rather, disproportionality regarding behavioral sanctions is regarded as one of the most pressing problems in American schools today (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2013).

***Behavioral underperformance.*** Students of color, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty often experience more exclusionary discipline practices like discipline referrals, suspensions, expulsions than their Caucasian, higher SES peers who are typically developing (e.g., Fabelo et al., 2011; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera; 2010; Shaw & Braden, 1990). Additionally, children from low-income families may experience chronic stress that could negatively impact their coping and self-regulation abilities and have adverse effects on behavior in the classroom (Evans & Kim, 2013).

Research by Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, and Belway (2015) found that in 2012, 2.6% of the nation's elementary school students were suspended. Of those learners, special education students (5.4%), and Black students (7.6%), were suspended at disproportionately higher rates than their peers (e.g., Latino 2.1%; White 1.6%,). Although rates of suspension are higher in low-income, urban districts (Losen & Skiba, 2010), the rate of disproportionality between Black (overrepresented) and White (underrepresented) students in terms of suspensions was higher in well-funded, suburban schools (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Furthermore, according to Wallace, et al. (2008), this disproportionality is more pronounced at the elementary level than at the high school level. Evidence of exclusionary behavioral disproportionality is found across geographic regions, yet poor, urban districts have the highest

suspension rates in the country (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010).

Exclusionary discipline is an issue that must be addressed because it has a well-documented history of detrimental effects on learner achievement (American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health, 2013). Losen (2011) explained that severe exclusionary discipline practices negatively impact student self-esteem, peer and teacher relationships, school engagement, and the likelihood that the child will complete his or her schooling career. Academic and behavioral disparities often go hand in hand. If students are excluded from school due to expulsions or suspensions, they cannot access academic content in the classroom—thus impacting their academic performance and increasing the likelihood that they will enter into a cycle of academic hardships, disengagement, and additional behavior problems (Arcia, 2006; Williams & McGee, 1994).

***Approaches to reduce disproportionality.*** Schools utilize a variety of different approaches to reduce exclusionary discipline, increase student success, and improve the school climate. While approaches may differ ideologically, the desired outcome is similar—increased student academic, behavioral, and social success. Vincent, Cartledge, May and Tobin (2009) asserted that schools with established positive behavior support programs (PBS) have more success eliminating behavioral disproportionality than schools without PBS in place. These programs a) teach students behavioral expectations explicitly through instructional programs; b) provide tiered behavioral support interventions that collect, use and report data disaggregated by race/ethnicity, DLL status, special education status, etc., and c) provide teachers with training to eliminate bias in behavioral decision-making. Other approaches like Conscious Discipline, Character Counts, and Second Step teach students skills to regulate emotions, promote academic

achievement, and foster social relationships between peers and adults. These approaches have been found to promote pro-social behavior and increase academic performance (Hoffman, Hutchinson, & Reiss, 2005; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). While these techniques are important components to affecting student behavior and socio-/emotional skills in schools they do little to enhance teachers' competencies understanding the obstacles that students from marginalized groups face. Therefore, there is a need to increase teacher development of EL to yield better outcomes for learners.

It is important to note the irony of using standardized tests and behavioral data tracking as evidence (or lack thereof) for student achievement when these measures—as many equity-minded experts would argue—are inequitable themselves. While much educational focus is placed on narrowing the "achievement gap" and reducing anti-social behavior, these approaches may be misguided because they do little to address the structural inequities of society like racism, ableism, sexism, etc. that impact marginalized students' abilities to succeed in school.

**Need for Equitable Opportunities for All Students**

Therefore, there is a critical need to reduce the academic and behavioral rifts for marginalized student populations. To address inequities within the educational system as a whole, teachers must deepen their understandings of their students and their schools to ensure that *all* learners are provided with opportunities to excel (Goldenberg, 2014).

Gay (2004) emphasized that culture and cultural perceptions are central features of the teaching and learning process—affecting how students and educators communicate, interpret, and apply information. The diversity of American schools challenges educators to deepen their understandings about students' intersectional cultural identities, the role these characteristics play in the classroom, and ways teachers can adjust their practices to provide equitable

opportunities for learners from all backgrounds (Grant & Wieczorek, 2012; Rueda, Lim & Velasco, 2007). This presents a challenge to the educational field because despite the uptick in the racial and language diversity of American students, the teaching force has remained predominantly White (82%), middle class, English-speaking, and female (76%) (Aud, et al., 2013) and may have little experience working with those whose views or life experiences may be different from their own (see Sleeter, 2001).

**From Deficit to Strength**

To reduce inequities, decrease disparities in academic and behavioral performance for marginalized groups, and ensure that *all* students succeed, it is imperative that teachers acquire skills to acknowledge the existence of these inequities, understand the reasons they exist (e.g., inequities may stem from the fact that some students have access to opportunities and resources that others do not), address them, and work to eradicate them within school and the society at large. According to Gorski (2016b), the ways we conceptualize these issues drive the capabilities we possess to problem-solve responses to them. Therefore, a first step to achieve these aims—within the scope of this project—was to increase teachers' *equity literacy* (EL). Equity literacy is the ability to recognize, understand, respond to, and redress occurrences of missed educational opportunities for learners. Increased EL may result in improved overall student achievement and more equitable school systems.

Although schools are regarded as great equalizers among different groups of students, research refutes this claim—as generally the most privileged students (i.e., White, economically advantaged, etc.) experience more opportunities in school than their less privileged peers (i.e., students of color, economically disadvantaged, etc.) (see Gorski, 2014b). Although equally

capable, learners from some marginalized populations are often viewed and treated differently by teachers and peers.

**Deficit ideology**. This ideology seeks to explain social conditions by blaming members of disenfranchised communities for the inequalities they experience rather than explaining how the inequalities themselves are burdening disenfranchised communities (Weiner, 2003; Yosso, 2005). For example, teachers who are frustrated with their students' poor academic or behavioral performance may decide to host parenting classes. This is a form of deficit ideology because teachers in this situation place the blame of poor student performance on their parents for lack of support or involvement. The teachers hope to teach the parents how to be more involved in their child's educational experience—which may result in misguided interventions to *fix* the learners' parents' approaches to parenting. When parents do not attend the classes, teachers often make the assumption—almost always a faulty one—that the parents do not care about education. As a result, teachers may be less likely to reach out to those families in the future or lower their expectations for the students—thus perpetuating the deficit cycle (Gorski, 2010). However, the reality may be that parents are working multiple jobs to provide for their family or are not permitted time off from work, with or without pay. When, in fact, if parents had living wage jobs, they could be more available for their children and take a more active role in their schooling experiences.

Teachers must recognize that parents can engage in their children's education in multiple ways. The direct participation style of involvement typically favors those parents who are married, not currently employed, and highly educated (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004; Manz, 2012). Parents from poor backgrounds or those who are members of historically marginalized groups may be more likely to participate in a child's education within

the home rather than in the school (Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, & Nero, 2010). Robinson and Volpe (2015) found that some parents (e.g., infrequent direct participators) may stay out of schools due to the in-group marginalization they experience from parents who participate frequently in school activities. Therefore, it is critical to provide teachers with the skills and abilities through professional development opportunities to foster strong home-school partnerships, facilitate open communication, and a welcoming environment for all (Naughton, 2004).

Unfortunately, according to Gorski (2014b), some popular professional development programs aimed at American teachers utilize a deficit approach that fails to address structural, societal inequalities that many families face (e.g., Ruby Payne, Paul Tough, Eric Jensen, etc.). For example, Ruby Payne's deficit framework blames low-income people for their lack of financial security, describes people in poverty as a homogenous group, and fails to address the pervasive, systemic inequities within our schools and our world (see Bomer, Dworin, May & Semingson, 2008; Gorski, 2008). Additionally, Gorski (2016) wrote that educational and professional development programs that center the idea of culture like the cultural competency model, the culturally responsive teaching approach, or general multicultural education practices do little to eradicate stereotypes or unmask the myriad of intersectional inequities that contribute to disparities. Since many schools have adopted professional development programs like these, many teachers and administrators have adopted the deficit perspective (Gorski, 2014b)—after all, this is generally the perspective that permeates mainstream American society. While teachers may not be able to solve the ills of society, they *can* do their part to make themselves aware of the structural inequities that exist to ensure that they are not inadvertently contributing to the problems.

Vang (2006) attributed structural inequities to the *hidden curriculum* that exists within schools. Posner (1995) explained that a hidden curriculum consists of the norms and values that are not explicitly addressed by teachers or school administrators. Issues of race, class, ability, and authority are all components of the hidden curriculum that underlie the day-to-day occurrences within a school. This hidden agenda "is a hegemonic value system under which schools operate" (p. 20, Vang, 2006). A simple example of this hidden curriculum could be the posters hanging along the school walls. Educators should ask themselves the following questions to help them uncover the hidden curriculum or *message* that the posters convey: Who is in the posters? Do they reflect the racial/ethnic diversity of your school population? Are they inclusive of people with different abilities, socioeconomic levels, and/or languages? What is the content of the posters? Does this content shed insight into what the school views as important? What messages, people, or ideas are missing? The hidden curriculum is the unspoken set of rules that permeates the ordinary, everyday occurrences and practices within schools—ranging from selection of curricular materials to line-up procedures in the lunchroom to expectations for interactions with peers or adults. Teachers who may be unaware that this hidden curriculum exists may be more likely to perpetuate inequities like adopting more severe disciplinary practices or under-referring student from marginalized populations for gifted education (Posner, 1995).

Gorski (2013) provided another explanation for the continuation of inequities in schools. Upon investigating 30 years of research, he cited ideological barriers, including the existence of the hidden curriculum, as salient and formidable forces that block access to opportunity in schools. Teachers sometimes unwittingly contribute to limited opportunities—and therefore

perpetuate inequities—by adopting deficit perspectives about students without understanding the cultural background or situation of the child.

Teachers need EL to understand the context of their learners' home and school experiences to unpack the "hidden curriculum" of the school and how it aligns or does not align with the lived reality of students. Developing EL may provide a solid foundation for examining how some students are afforded more opportunities than others (i.e., the opportunity gap) and help teachers improve their instructional practices, interactions with learners, and ultimately student outcomes (Milner, 2010).

**Equity literacy.** According to Gorski, (2014a) the emergent EL framework "is the cultivation of the skills and consciousness that enable us to recognize, respond to, and redress conditions that deny some students access to educational and other opportunities enjoyed by their peers" (p.1). Equity literacy is the alternative to deficit ideology and builds upon Banks' (2004) framework of multicultural education. The concept of multicultural education began in the 1970s and continues to develop today. Its purpose is to increase educational equity for all students. Multicultural education fuses concepts from a variety of fields (i.e., ethnic studies, women's studies, etc.) with key ideas from social and behavioral sciences. Furthermore, within their respective disciplines, multicultural education aims to a) integrate content that is reflective of diverse cultural groups, b) increase understandings about the values and implicit cultural assumptions within curricula, c) use a wide range of pedagogical strategies to modify instruction to raise achievement levels for all students, d) employ strategies to help learners develop more positive attitudes toward students from different cultural backgrounds and e) actively address disproportionality in achievement, opportunity and representation within the school (Banks & Banks, 1995). Multicultural education proponents (see Banks, 2004; Gay, 2002) challenge

educational professionals to alter their curricula and practices to become more inclusive and equitable for learners. Banks (2004) suggested that this process should also include an examination of teachers' personal belief systems and attitudes toward diverse cultural groups.

There are also a host of other common multicultural approaches. These include *cultural competence*—possessing the knowledge, skill, and attitudes to teach learners from another culture than your own (Diller & Moule, 2005), *culturally relevant pedagogy*—developing students' academic, cultural, and critical abilities (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and *culturally responsive teaching*—using students' extensive cultural knowledge and experiences as a way to engage them and make instructional decisions that best fit their strengths (Gay, 2000). Yet despite the array of available multicultural approaches available for teachers to utilize, research suggests that some educators lack certain experiences or skills that enable them to work efficiently with diverse student populations (Garmon, 2004). Teachers who lack a) multicultural training, b) understandings about multi-faceted aspects of culture, c) awareness about cultural characteristics, d) a comfort level facilitating cultural conversations, and e) experience interacting with cultures different from one's own often do little to eradicate inequities (e.g., providing some students opportunities over others, perpetuating personal biases, failing to self-examine one's role in perpetuating inequities) (see Ford & Kea, 2009; Garmon, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Sleeter, 2001). These teachers are more likely to adopt culturally sterile curricula (Boutte, 2008) or avoid addressing inequities altogether due to pressures from time constraints associated with high-stakes standardized testing (Bohn & Sleeter, 2000).

Gorski and Swalwell's (2015) EL framework expands upon traditional approaches to multicultural education because it challenges educators to a) challenge the status quo by rejecting deficit viewpoints, b) remove barriers to opportunity for students and their families, c) advocate

for relevant and equitable school-wide practices, and d) cultivate safe learning spaces that are conducive to honest and open discussion. Gorski and Swalwell provide five guiding principles that teachers can apply to their curricula and strengthen equity literacy in their classrooms. These principles may serve as helpful guidelines when designing collaborative professional development around increasing teachers' EL.

*Principle 1. It is important to teach EL in every curricular area.*

When teaching for and with EL, teachers do not need to abandon their lesson plans. Rather, they should teach their content—whenever possible—through an equity lens. For example, when teaching a guided reading group, a teacher can guide his or her students through a text (e.g., Jeanette Winters' *Malala, A Brave Girl from Pakistan,* 2014) and teach concepts regarding fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension while also engaging children in discussions surrounding the authentic social and political problems embedded in the story.

*Principle 2. The most effective equity literacy approach is integrative and interdisciplinary.*

Whenever possible, teachers can strengthen their EL by crafting lessons with authentic, interdisciplinary (i.e., combining math, music, social studies, reading, etc.) opportunities to redress inequities. Fostering EL through a whole school, integrated, cross-curricular approach is more impactful than cultivating EL in a haphazard manner in isolated classrooms.

*Principle 3. All students, regardless of age, are able to engage with EL concepts.*

By encouraging young students to discuss and grapple with issues of equity, teachers can help learners develop the skills and language they will need to

be active participants and decision-makers regarding complex and potentially controversial issues within the home, school, and/or community. Teachers who engage students in this manner communicate that *all* students' voices are important and that biases and privileges are issues that are important to discuss. Students often become more likely to pinpoint and challenge stereotypes and acknowledge areas of privilege after engaging in these types of EL-based interactions.

*Principle 4. All students—regardless of cultural background—need EL.*

Commonly, integrated multicultural programs are found in high-poverty schools with high percentages of students of color and DLLs. This may perpetuate the widespread belief that White, economically advantaged students would not benefit from improving their EL. However, it is these students that may have the most to learn about the ways bias, inequity and discrimination impact the world in which they live. Common "tourist multicultural" (Derman-Sparks, 1989) strategies like celebrating diversity via time-constricted (i.e., week-long or monthly) approaches do not focus on equity. Rather, they operate under the false assumption that all cultural groups start on a level playing field.

*Principle 5. It is just as political to teach* for *EL as to* not teach for *EL.*

Teachers must always make the decision whether or not to disclose their personal thoughts or views about certain issues regarding curricula, community activities, or world events. Engaging in discussion or instruction that fosters EL is a crucial and political step to develop a diverse society with equity as its optimal goal.

The theoretical underpinnings of EL are grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model of human development. Bronfenbrenner's model provides a framework for understanding how facets of a child's environment are influenced by interdependent systems. This model shows that children are influenced by the people in their lives and that the people in their lives are also influenced by the child. The more nurturing, inclusive, and supportive a child's environment is, the greater the likelihood that the child will excel in school. A child's *microsystem* refers to the environments and people he or she interacts with directly. For most children, this would be the family in the home environment and peers and teachers in the school environment. A child's mesosystem refers to the interactions between the microsystems. A child's exosystem refers to the people and environments that he or she may not interact directly, but still influence the child significantly, such as the state government that funds the public school system in which the child is enrolled. A child's macrosystem encompasses the cultural environment in which he or she lives as well as all the other systems that may affect them, such as the local community, the country, and society at large. Finally, a child's chronosystem is the pattern of events and transitions that he or she experiences over the course of a lifetime.

When considering EL through the ecological model, it becomes apparent that a child's educational outcomes will be much more positive if the proximal influences of the relationships with teachers and peers (i.e., microsystem) are welcoming, inclusive, well-resourced, and supportive. Teacher and parent communication within the mesosystem is an important distal relationship that teachers need to consider as well. This will require teachers to understand the role of honest and frequent communication with the child's family members and an openness to acknowledging and incorporating a child's strengths, interests and needs into both classroom instruction and school-wide practices. Teachers will also need to learn about more distal external

influences like parental job security, sibling's chronic illness, etc. that may be negatively impacting a child's performance. This will require teachers to hone their awareness and self-reflection abilities so that they can respond accordingly. School culture, especially a school's hidden curriculum, will be important to explore in order to uncover hidden biases or inequitable practices that may impede learner success within the macrosystem. Finally, teachers must be cognizant of the events happening at this moment in their students' lives that may be shaping their views of themselves or others within the chronosystem. Furthermore, this model acknowledges the strong influence that teachers', students', and families' attitudes, beliefs and judgments about culture have on influencing themselves, others, and the environments in which they work, live, and learn (Gay, 2010; Milner, 2010; Pajares, 1992;).

A pilot study that I conducted during the 2014-2015 school year aligns with prior research and confirmed my intuition that local suburban teachers need professional development in creating anti-bias learning environments and highlighted teachers' limited knowledge about ways to address inequities in the classroom and school-wide (Aragona-Young & Sawyer, under review).

**Pilot Study Findings**

In the Spring of 2014, I conducted a study to determine a) how elementary school teachers define culture, b) what multicultural practices they utilize, and c) what factors—including the racial demographics of the school, teacher development and coursework, grade level, comfort level facilitating multicultural discussions, and definitions of culture—are associated with teachers' multicultural practices. Quantitative findings indicated that on average, teachers endorsed low-level (versus high-level) multicultural practices. For example, rather than

collaborating with students to solve a problem, teachers indicated that they would most likely solve the problem for their students or have the school principal address the problem.

Additional qualitative findings from open-ended survey response items indicated that teachers lacked comprehensive understandings about culture and in general, recommended low-level practices. For example, many teachers defined culture narrowly using language or race/ethnicity only and did not incorporate multicultural topics into instruction due to time or curricular constraints. Findings also indicated a lack of teacher understanding about the cultural characteristics of their students. Teachers often did not incorporate multicultural topics in their classrooms because they a) perceived their classes to not be diverse, b) did not have time, c) did not want to vary from the existing curricula, and d) did not view cultural conflicts to be a problem in their school. Furthermore, there was a positive correlation between teachers who recommended high-level practices and their ability to define the multifaceted aspects of culture. These findings suggest that teachers would benefit from a deeper understanding of culture, a key component of EL, to improve their instructional practices.

Pilot findings also indicated that teachers emphasized the importance of building a strong classroom community and strengthening relationships with their learners. However, although teachers may express commitment to building strong classroom bonds, they may not possess the knowledge or skills to do so. In fact, if a teacher seeks to build his or her classroom community without equity at the epicenter, it may send unintended messages that negatively impact marginalized students. That said, it is important to build strong classroom community—centered around equity— with students and their families *as well as* understand the cultural context of the classroom environment. In an effort to strengthen student and teacher relationships, build community with families, increase student academic and behavioral achievement, and provide

teachers with the language and tools to talk about sensitive topics with their students, it is essential to acknowledge the characteristics that make all people unique. Therefore, we must examine a) the societal power structure at play that works to privilege some while marginalizing and denigrating others and b) discover ways to extend equitable learning opportunities to all students. Additionally, all teachers need to *see* and *identify* inequities and their implications in order to remove existing barriers. These findings inspired me to pursue this dissertation project to determine if providing professional development in principles of EL could impact teachers' knowledge, skills, and efficacy and help them to evaluate (and potentially change) school-wide practices that may inadvertently be contributing to inequities within the learning environment.

**Efficacy**

Personal attitudes, beliefs, and judgments can also strongly affect one's *self-efficacy*. Self efficacy is the strength of belief one has in his or her ability to achieve goals (Ormrod, 2006). The theoretical basis of self-efficacy (SE) is grounded in social cognitive theory (Bandura; 1977, 1997). This theory assumes that people have human agency (i.e., they intentionally pursue courses of action) that function within a process called *triadic reciprocal causation*. Henson (2001) explained that our belief in our own agency results in changes to our future behavior. This future behavior is a function of our interrelationships with the environment, our behavior and personal factors like cognitive, affective, and biological processes. From the social cognitive theory perspective, since agency is mediated by our efficaciousness, SE beliefs influence choices, effort, and persistence when facing adversity as well as emotions (Pajares, 1997).

Efficacy is important because in the context of this study, when teachers feel more efficacious helping students navigate the complex, interrelated systems (i.e., micro-/home and school, meso-/family and teacher, exo-/parent's workplace, macro-/uncovering hidden

curriculum within school and chronosystems/current events and their implications for school), they are more likely to create and sustain changes to enhance student learning (Bronfenbrenner, (1994). Teachers who are efficacious have a more salient impact on learners. Therefore, increasing teacher efficacy surrounding EL may lead to improved student outcomes—especially for the most marginalized learner populations.

Structured professional development may strengthen teachers' self- and collective efficacy, thus enhancing teacher understandings about the role of structural impact in the classroom, influencing individual and collective teacher practices and procedures, and ultimately yielding improved learner outcomes. The differences between teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy will be discussed next.

**Teacher self-efficacy.** Teachers who possess high self-efficacy are more likely to incorporate new teaching methods, prepare quality instruction that improves learners' perceptions of their academic abilities, persevere when students fail, support their learners, and posses more cognitive and emotional resources to help their learners achieve complex learning goals and develop richer understandings about content (Allinder, 1994; Guskey, 1998; Stein & Wang, 1998; Woolfolk Hoy and Davis, 2005). Efficacious teachers are more likely to advocate to place economically disadvantaged students into regular education classes and refrain from referring them for special education services (Meijer & Foster, 1988; Podell & Soodak; 1993). Additionally, efficacious teachers persist with academically underperforming students and are less critical of incorrect student responses (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). These characteristics of efficacious teachers combine to create supportive learning environments in which students, especially students from marginalized groups, will likely thrive.

A large body of educational research has focused on teachers' domain-specific, pedagogical knowledge and the ways that key concepts should be taught (e.g., Staub & Stern, 2002). However, a body of research has explored the ways that teachers' prior knowledge, self-efficacy, and intrinsic orientations (i.e., their ideologies) contribute to effective teaching practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hachfeld, Hahn, Schroeder, Anders & Kunter, 2015) as well as academic performance and self-regulated learning (Zimmerman & Schunk, 1989). Furthermore, although a causal relationship cannot be determined, teachers' self-efficacy has been linked to higher student self-efficacy and motivation (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001), is correlated with student performance using a variety of scales on standardized achievement tests (Anderson, Greene & Loewen, 1998; Bandura, 1994; Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Ross, 1992), and is related to teachers' abilities to provide appropriate accommodations for learners with special needs (Allinder, 1994).

Efficacy is not a universal, stable trait (Bandura, 1997). This means that teachers can be efficacious in one area of their practice, but not in another. For example, teachers may feel very efficacious teaching their content area of expertise but less efficacious working with students from marginalized groups. Therefore, teachers who develop their efficacy working with students who come from different backgrounds or who possess differing life experiences than themselves may yield positive outcomes in learner achievement.

**Collective efficacy**. When teachers perceive that their faculty will have a positive impact on learners, they possess collective efficacy (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk, 2000). Hoy and Miskel (2008) suggested that that schools share mores and belief systems that are unique to their specific contexts. These shared values unite teachers and help to establish schools' distinct identities. High collective efficacy as a teaching staff has been associated with lower rates of school

discipline infractions and higher achievement in elementary schools. In fact, Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk (2000) found that collective efficacy had a greater positive influence on student achievement than the school's location (i.e., rural, suburban, urban) and student demographic characteristics (i.e., race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.). There is a gap in the literature exploring collective efficacy in terms of teachers' knowledge and practices regarding equity in school.

***Multicultural education and self-efficacy.*** There is an emerging but small body of work that is focused on multicultural education and SE. However, while results are promising, more work needs to be done. In a multicultural context, teachers' SE has been associated with culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002; Siwatu, 2011) and confidence mediating cultural conflicts (Siwatu & Starker, 2010). A recent study by Hachfeld, Hahn, Schroeder, Anders & Kunter (2015) found that teachers who possessed multicultural beliefs reported higher self-efficacy and enthusiasm for teaching, more positive values, and were willing to incorporate flexibility into their teaching. These beliefs included valuing classroom diversity, responding to cultural backgrounds of students and their parents, and affirming the need for training in cultural diversity. Teachers who possessed colorblind beliefs showed no relationships to the aforementioned constructs and did not demonstrate flexibility in their teaching or a willingness to adapt their instruction for culturally diverse students. These colorblind beliefs included the perspective that all students should be treated and viewed as *the same* regardless of their racial and/or ethnic backgrounds.

***Equity literacy and self-efficacy***. It is important to examine efficacy in the context of EL in particular. Historically, efficacy has been viewed in a global sense, yet without the context specificity that Bandura intended. Bandura (1997) argued that it is possible to transfer efficacy

judgments depending on the level of context resemblance and prediction of task demands. According to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, this can be built through mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological or emotional arousal. Therefore, the focus of self-efficacy must be clearly specified. In terms of this study, the focus of teachers' self-efficacy will be EL development.

In sum, when teachers feel more efficacious—both personally and as a member of the larger faculty, they do a better job—reflected by learners' improved academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional outcomes. These improved outcomes can be operationally defined as improved standardized test scores, a reduction in discipline referrals, and abilities to successfully manage cultural conflicts. Although ample research has been conducted to determine teacher beliefs regarding cultural values, beliefs, and motivations (see Hachfeld et al., 2015), no research to date has been conducted to determine how teacher self- and collective efficacy is associated with EL development. In order to address this gap in the literature, I developed a professional development intervention to enhance teachers' self- and collective efficacy when working with students from marginalized groups by utilizing a strategic process to increase their EL.

**Teacher Professional Development**

The intervention I developed and implemented to increase teachers' efficacy regarding EL was targeted and specific. The design for this case study was based upon pilot study findings, recommendations from social science research, guiding principles of EL, and research-based recommendations about the structure and content of adult learning experiences.

Additional findings from my pilot study indicated that a majority of teachers did not receive professional development in multicultural topics within the past two years. Furthermore, teachers indicated that they would like more opportunities to discuss multicultural topics in a

collegial setting and also that they requested additional professional development to address cultural and social issues within the school. These pilot study findings highlighted the lack of professional development surrounding multicultural topics and are consistent with other research studies that confirm the dearth of multicultural programming options offered as PD for in-service teachers (Johnson, 2008). That said, this research established the need for collaborative professional development sessions targeting EL concepts with the aim of strengthening teachers' awareness/knowledge, skills/practices, and abilities to address issues of concern like applying knowledge and practices to address complex social problems in a collaborative manner.

Orellana and Bowman (2003) suggested that future work in the field of social science research regarding socioeconomic and other social issues related to race, ethnicity, etc. should uncover the meaning of these categories and define groups through experiences and interactions like activities, dialogue, and meetings rather than through a priori classifications. They recommended that this process should help identify cultural strengths, identity markers, contextual barriers and access to opportunities. In other words, professional development sessions could provide teachers with social opportunities to grapple with these complex and sensitive topics.

Current research by Swalwell (2013) highlights some promising examples of professional development focused on how to engage students from privileged cultural backgrounds in EL learning experiences. In one private K-8 school, a group of teachers met in professional development sessions centered on topics of race, gender, class, etc. to design effective curricula and disseminate their work. Teachers differentiated their instruction based upon their learners' developmental and age levels. For example, 8th grade teachers had their students examine authentic wealth gap data in both historical and current contexts, 4th grade teachers had their

students use journals to define what it means to be rich versus what it means to be poor, and kindergarten teachers designed a visual, interactive simulation of unequal distribution of resources. The teachers also compiled a working list of ways that economic privilege remains unexamined within their school. Their overall intention was to help their students and faculty understand that in order to establish true equity, students and teachers have to do move beyond simply "being nice" to others who are less privileged than them. Therefore, EL is about more than building community. Instead, these teachers wanted their students to commit to advocating for and working toward a world that is less biased, less inequitable, and more inclusive of all people. While Swalwell's study is important because it provides a framework for identifying areas of inequity, my study aimed to do this *and* determine how efficacious teachers feel about their EL after their involvement in an EC.

To build the EL competencies necessary to achieve these goals, collaborative professional development groups can be formed to a) identify barriers to equity, b) ask questions related to equity and current practices, c) develop solutions to address inequities, and d) create a plan for sustaining solutions and making progress toward equity (Organizing Apprenticeship Project/Education Equity Organizing Collaborative, 2013). See EL section above for key principles of EL.

Research regarding adult learning also sheds insight into ways that teacher professional development can be structured to yield impactful results. Effective professional development is self-directed, available when teachers need it, collegial, interactive, differentiated, practical, authentic, long-term, and data-driven (Fogarty & Pete, 2010; Guskey, 2000). Furthermore teachers who are given opportunities to practice the skills they learn through professional development are more likely to adopt new practices when their understandings develop. Yet, few

teacher programs have begun to address ways that equitable practices affect student learning (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). Therefore, the current teaching force has had little formal training in conceptualizing and viewing instructional practices through a cultural, equity-focused lens (King, Artiles, & Kozleski, 2009). It is imperative that schools provide professional learning opportunities for teachers to examine and transform their practices in ways that acknowledge the powerful role that equity plays in the learning process.

In summary, with prevalent marginalized student populations in American schools, teachers can combat historical inequities by increasing their EL and following the five aforementioned principles. Focused professional development can provide opportunities for educators to take steps to ensure that their schools offer equitable opportunities for *all* learners to achieve. Two types of collaborative professional development approaches that adhere to the aforementioned recommendations and may aid teachers in their development of EL are Communities of Practice (CoP) and Professional Learning Communities (PLC).

**Communities of practice.** Communities of Practice and PLCs adhere to Knowles' (1984) adult learning principles. These principles include autonomy, the utilization of prior experiences, goal-orientation, relevance, practicality, and collaboration. According to Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, *Communities of Practice* (CoP) are learning partnerships where participants share information and problems within a particular domain and gain deeper understandings about the domain as a result of sustained interactions with the group. The authors describe these communities as having three fundamental structures: *domain* that is a shared area of interest, *community* that is a group that works collaboratively on activities to address area of interest and *practice* that is a shared collection of resources including experiences, stories, tools, and methods for solving problems. While CoPs share similar characteristics to other popular

educational collaborative groups like Professional Learning Communities (PLC) (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 2004) and Whole-Faculty Study Groups (Murphy & Lick, 2004), CoPs differ because roles within the group are not formally assigned, participation is voluntary, work is approached by generating solutions to problems, and there is no set agenda or pre-determined outcome. Rather, the goal of the CoP is to help improve practices over time using authentic inquiry. Anderson and Herr (2011) added that in this authentic, situated learning environment, answers are not known ahead of time. This inquiry is then data-supported—as opposed to data-driven—and participants within the CoP can use data to open up their dialogue and questioning. Therefore, one measure of achievement within the CoP can be the amount of practices it develops, shares, and sustains. Members of the CoP all share a common interest in improving practices within their specified domain that can be integrated into existing practices (Lesser & Everest, 2001). In other words, these communities serve as hubs for creative innovation and flexibility in which practitioners alter their behaviors to challenge the status quo (Brown & Duguid, 1991).

The model that will be utilized in this current study in the field of education is used in other professional fields (e.g., business) as well. Research about CoPs in these other professional fields can aid the structure and design of CoPs for educational purposes. Probst and Borzillo's (2008) research with 57 international CoP business leaders revealed ten governance mechanisms of successful CoPs. Key points from the "Ten Commandments of CoP Governance" included: having clear objectives; dividing objectives into sub-topics; having sponsors and CoP leaders who control best practices; providing the CoP with external resources; promoting access to other organizational networks; having a CoP leader who promotes the advantages of the CoP; cultivating a risk-free, idea-sharing environment; and illustrating results for members. The

researchers also identified five indicators of CoP failure including: lacking a core group, having a low-level of individual interactions among members, having rigidity among competencies, lacking identification as a CoP member, and practicing intangibility which is not interacting with fellow group members in a manner that enables them to showcase their practices or interacting in such a way that others in the group cannot derive concrete meaning from your actions. In summary, successful CoPs set their own objectives and are indirectly controlled by top management by ensuring that the risk-free space for idea-sharing is maintained and the self-guided, organically evolving nature of the CoP is preserved (Wenger & Snyder, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Yet, in the context of this study, allowing participants to have complete control of the objectives would be problematic because without focused EL activities and aims, objectives for the study would not be met due to the time constraints of the school day.

**Professional learning communities**. According to Blankenship & Ruona (2007), Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), like CoPs, are collaborative groups of teachers who share a similar vision and goal. Typically, PLCs utilize a distributed leadership approach—discussed in more detail later in this paper—where formal and informal leaders from within and outside the community play an active role in decision-making and the generation of new knowledge. However, PLCs do not regularly feature voluntary membership. Rather, membership in PLCs is often a foregone conclusion based upon one's identity as a staff member within the school. Teachers also can be randomly placed into PLC groups based upon needs that the school administrator or principal has identified. In some cases, teachers self-select their groups. The random or non-voluntary assignment of PLC groups may be problematic because teachers may not be interested in learning about certain topics and may be less likely to participate.

Furthermore, the set agenda of PLCs may inhibit teachers' abilities to discuss topics that are important to them and their practice.

**Hybrid equity council.** Since this study took place during the school-year and time for discussion and development of emergent content was rather limited, the CoP model was not entirely feasible. The PLC model was not a good fit either because of its scripted and constricted nature. Therefore, the intervention I used for this research project maximized the strengths of *both* approaches (CoP vs. PLC) while minimizing the weaknesses. Similar to the CoP model, my intervention featured voluntary participation to maximize buy-in from participants. It also featured a collaborative approach to problem-solving and a somewhat emergent agenda. Though partially emergent, planned agenda items and overall projected project aims were provided to participants due to the limited amount of time in the participants' teaching schedule. Similar to the PLC model, I assumed the role of group facilitator. However, in keeping with the emergent characteristics of the CoP, I was flexible and responsive to the direction of the group. Therefore, this hybrid CoP and PLC group intervention was named an Equity Council (EC). A more detailed explanation of this intervention will be described in Chapter 3.

**Distributed Leadership**

Change agents in schools do not have to necessarily be administrators. The distributed leadership model suggests that teachers can work collectively as leaders to effect sustainable change and maximize collaborative expertise in educational systems (Harris, 2004; Ritchie & Woods, 2007). Distributed leadership means that although the administrator(s) share(s) authority and power, teachers' roles and responsibilities are vital to key decision-making in the school. This does not mean, however, that all teachers in a school control decision-making. In contrast, administrators create leadership positions that allow interested, committed and capable teachers

to meet goals in a focused fashion (Loeser, 2008). Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2001) believed that this framework could extend school-wide leadership development and help leaders develop an awareness of the tools they construct and utilize in their daily practices.

In schools that practice effective distributed leadership, committees are already formed to carry out emerging initiatives. Unfortunately, Kellerman (2004) found that those engaged in leadership roles may not necessarily be good leaders. In other words, extant leadership committees may not be proficient in equity literacy or have self- or collective efficacy surrounding it. In the context of this study, the school had a previously formed committee of teacher leaders committed to developing equity yet members may not yet possess the knowledge, skills, or efficacy to disseminate their understandings to others, alter their teaching practices, or explore their own beliefs regarding issues of equity in school. Exploring equity through the EC enabled members to improve their leadership abilities by having a better understanding of personal ideologies, school-wide practices, and the forces at play that undermine both individual and collective attempts at achieving equity.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how teachers' participation in an EL-focused EC a) affected teachers' understanding and application of EL concepts and their abilities to address inequities within school, b) impacted teachers' efficaciousness surrounding EL and c) generated insights about EC processes that contributed to EL development. I initially hypothesized that teachers' levels of EL—as related to their knowledge, self-reflection, and abilities to recognize and redress inequities—would be related to their personal ideologies (i.e., deficit vs. equity).

Utilizing the Theory of Change (TOC) model (Anderson, 2005; see Figure 1), this research aimed to develop teachers' EL in the long-term—thus increasing their efficacy surrounding it—by engaging participants in conversations and action-planning to reduce school-wide inequities, increasing personal knowledge, and challenging personal ideologies through the EC intervention.

## Chapter 3: Methods

### Study Context

The study took place in a suburban elementary school (K-4) in Northeast Pennsylvania. The student body was comprised of 724 students--365 females (50%) and 359 males (50%). Thirty-one percent of students in the school were economically disadvantaged and qualified for free and/or reduced price meals. The student population was 88% White, 4% Latino, 3% Asian, 2% Black, and 3% multiracial. Thirteen percent of students in the school received special education services, 2% received gifted services and 2% received DLL services.

The school faculty was comprised of 40 classroom teachers and 60 support staff members (i.e., specialist teachers, special education teachers, speech teachers, DLL teachers, etc.). All teachers were considered highly qualified in their subject areas.

Academic and demographic student data were maintained within the school's PowerSchool program (www.powerschool.com). Behavioral data regarding student discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions were maintained within the SWIS program (www.pbisapps.org).

During the 2014-2015 school year, a group of five teacher leaders from this school worked as a team to review their school-wide discipline program and determine whether or not certain subgroups of students were receiving more frequent or more severe disciplinary infractions than others. Using data from the behavioral database called SWIS and the student information database called PowerSchool, the team determined that students living in poverty, Latino males, and special education students received discipline referrals at disproportionate rates than students from differing economic, racial or academic groups. A school-wide positive behavior support (PBS) program to reduce the amount of overall student discipline infractions—

with a focus on reducing outcome disparities for key student groups (e.g., special education students, low income students, students of color, etc.)—had been in place throughout the building 18 months before the study and Conscious Discipline (CD), a classroom management framework for teaching social-emotional skills, was introduced three months before the study commenced. The extant systems of PBS and CD were helpful to this study because these programs were put into place to address the school's need to a) reduce disproportionality in behavioral referrals and increase equity and b) extend teachers' understandings about ways to work effectively with all students. Thus, educators had a common framework and language with which to begin their work exploring EL. The existing leadership team was also an asset to this study because members had a strong rapport, trust in their team members, and a vested interest in increasing equity within the school—all necessary components for a successful CoP/PLC.

**Participants**

The participants for this study were four out of five of these elementary teacher leaders. One teacher declined participation due to a change in his teaching commitments. The four teachers—Ali, Dom, Kelley and Megan—who agreed to participate in the study had a pre-established group dynamic since they worked collaboratively for one year prior to this study as part of a grant project to reduce disproportionality within the school. They were Caucasian (100%), middle-class (100%), predominantly female (75%) and held different positions within the school, including a first grade special education teacher, fourth grade general education teacher, academic coordinator/third grade teacher, and school librarian. Three of the four participants had Master's degrees (Dom, Kelley, and Megan) in their teaching areas. Ali had a Bachelor's degree. Participants ranged in teaching experience between 8-13 years.

Participants, along with the rest of the school staff, received approximately three hours of professional development training in the principles of Equity Literacy (EL) one year prior to the study. Participants' basic knowledge about the principles may have provided a foundation for them to understand and articulate EL concepts at the onset of the study. However, although these teacher leaders may have possessed foundational knowledge about equity concepts, it did not necessarily mean that they possessed deep understandings about EL. Therefore, the intervention in this study aimed to a) build upon the foundational EL concepts learned through professional development and the work completed in the 2014-2015 school-year, b) extend participants' understandings of EL by providing them with a forum to discuss EL concepts within a collaborative setting, and c) facilitate the creation of a sustainable action plan for enhancing equity school-wide.

**Intervention**

The intervention for this study was the formation of an Equity Council (EC)—a group that strived to develop participants' efficacy in EL to identify, address, and reduce inequitable practices within the school. This intervention consisted of the following activities: six face-to-face (F2F) sessions discussing equity topics, three written responses to online prompts, and the creation of an action plan to address inequities.

Principles of effective group dynamics require that members a) ask questions, b) acknowledge that mistakes will be made and that people will misspeak, c) understand that participants will experience discomfort when discussing perspectives that may vary from one's own, d) play an active role in problem-solving, and e) utilize opportunities to engage in critical conversations about inequities within the school (Carter et al., 2014). Stanley (2011) suggested that a portion of the first meeting should be devoted to discussing these concepts and setting

group-specified ground rules for acceptable interactions. Therefore, one of the first tasks of the EC was to establish common guidelines for collaborative interactions. This provided the foundation for participants to speak openly and honestly with one another throughout the intervention.

The Organizing Apprenticeship Project/Education Equity Organizing Collaborative (2013)—a Minnesota-based organization dedicated to promoting educational equity for all students regardless of differing characteristics—provided a framework for measuring progress toward equity. Topics of EC discussions revolved around the first three indicators of equity enhancement. These first three steps are a) identifying equity barriers, b) asking equity questions, and c) developing equity solutions. The final two steps—implementing equity solutions and sustaining equity—are long-term goals of the EC but due to time and resource constraints, they were not measured in this study.

Agenda items were provided around central goals of increasing EL in the three different domains listed previously. Meetings were not designed to strictly adhere to the agenda because all sessions were flexible and provided open-forum opportunities for participants to share their thoughts about equity in an authentic, emergent, and organic fashion, as is dictated by the CoP format. Emergent agenda topics were related to teacher observations or concerns about issues of equity within the school—including their own classrooms.

After face-to-face (F2F) sessions, participants engaged in online activities about topics that surfaced during meetings. I reviewed the transcripts from the previous F2F session, determined the topics of interest and/or those worthy of further exploration, and crafted activities for participants to complete prior to the next F2F meeting. These activities included responding to articles, videos, and researcher-created prompts based on previous F2F meeting conversations.

Since participants were already familiar using the school's Google tools like Gmail, Google Docs, Google Slides, Google Sheets, etc., collaborative activities were presented and stored in an EC folder housed in the school's Google drive. These collaborative activities included Google documents and embedded videos. Prompts requiring individual responses were kept within a separate folder within the EC folder and were shared between the researcher and individual participants. In other words, individual responses were not able to be viewed by other EC members.

In the final two weeks of the intervention, participants worked collaboratively to create a sustainable action plan to address issues of inequity within the school. As this plan was being created, I asked participants about how efficacious they felt about developing and implementing this plan with non-EC members in the future. This action plan was constructed and stored in the EC's Google drive folder. Although the execution, evaluation, and sustainability of this plan was beyond the scope of this current study, the construction of this action plan fits the original scope of the study and will be enacted in the future by the teacher-leader members of the EC. In other words, the action plan served as a product of the group's work together, and reflected key concepts embedded in EC sessions. This action plan included a) identification of inequitable school practices, b) a list of possible factors that contributed to these inequities, c) a list of possible solutions to address inequities and the necessary resources to achieve these solutions, d) an action plan to introduce these solutions to faculty and staff members, and e) a method for implementing the plan that includes all necessary resources. See Appendix A for a suggested template.

In my role as group facilitator, I provided resource materials, prepared an agenda of activities to guide discussions, facilitated dialogue surrounding equity issues, and provided

participants with a forum for continuing dialogue beyond our group meetings via online opportunities.

I made a conscious effort to remain unbiased during group discussions so as not to influence participants' statements. This means that I did not offer my opinions on topics raised. Rather, I asked probing questions to elicit participants' responses. For example, I asked questions like, "Could you explain your statement in more detail?" In this manner, I retained the role of group facilitator and active participant without swaying group members' natural responses to prompts. I kept separate researcher memos in a reflexive journal to record my observations throughout the intervention. Sample agendas, revised meeting times, and meeting minutes were available for all participants to review at any time in the EC folder on the Google drive.

The intervention timeline with dates/topics/activities is included below:

**Intervention Plan and Timeline**

1. **Equity Literacy Pre-Survey** (see Appendix B) – March 20th, 2016.
2. **Meeting 1: "Overview of EL" Agenda** – March 31st, 2016

    A. Established and recorded group rules and participant roles and revised future meeting dates.

    - The EC created a plan for acceptable group interactions. This laid the groundwork for communicating respectfully, responding to disagreements, honoring the confidentiality of group discourse, participating actively in written and oral dialogue, etc.
    - Explained my role as facilitator. Discussed expectations for participants. Discussed the requirements of participation (amount of

written responses, minimum one-paragraph length of written responses, active participation in discussions, etc.)

- Determined if additional meetings needed to be added to the suggested schedule to continue discussions or complete tasks.

B. Demonstrated how to navigate the EC folder on the Google drive.

C. Provided a general overview of EL using an electronic copy (located in the EC folder) of Gorski and Swalwell's (2015) "Equity Literacy for All" article. Discussed implications of increasing EL in the school's unique context.

D. Discussed overarching goal of the EC—increasing EL so that participants a) develop deeper personal awareness of equity issues, b) experience enhanced efficacy working with diverse students, c) develop knowledge and skills to create an action plan to help colleagues outside the EC identify, address, and reduce areas of school-wide inequity.

**3. Online Activity #1: "Inequities in Our School" Discussion Contribution** – March 31st, 2016

A. Responded to the following prompts*:* (Prompts and others' contributions were viewable to all participants. Each response was a minimum of one paragraph in length.)

- Please respond to the following questions by posting to the collaborative Google document. Then, read at least one other participant's post and provide feedback on it. "After reading about EL and participating in our first meeting, what do you think are the most

pertinent areas of inequity that we need to address within our school? Why?"

**4. Meeting 2: "Exploring Ideologies" Agenda –** March 31st, 2016

A. Debriefed Meeting 1 and reviewed big ideas generated from topics discussed.

B. Viewed Paul Gorski's (2015) Ideologies of Inequality: Toward a Structural View video located in the EC folder (https://youtu.be/f8vYUBIDlmg). This resource provided a succinct overview of deficit, grit, and structural ideologies and the ways they impact educational policy and practice.

C. Debriefed the video and discussed agreement or disagreement with Gorski's perspectives. Discussed how deficit, grit, ideologies impact decision-making and practices within our school.

**5. Online Activity #2: Individual Ideology Reflection –** April 1st, 2016

A. Completed the following independent reflection by responding to the following questions (on an independent Google document):

- What about Gorski's (2015) perspectives about ideologies resonated with you?
- What past experiences may have contributed to the development of your perspective?
- Describe an example from your teaching career that is illustrative of your current ideological perspective.

- How would shifting to or enhancing a structural ideology impact your personal teaching practices? Provide a concrete example.

**6. Meeting 3: "Identifying Opportunities and Barriers to EL" Agenda**

– May 6, 2016

A. Debriefed Meeting 2 and reviewed big ideas generated from topics discussed.

B. Completed the National Education Association's (NEA, 2011) self-reflection check-in on culture entitled "How am I Doing?" (see Appendix C). I provided handouts of this document. As participants completed this document, they worked through the domains of the Organizing Apprenticeship Project/Education Equity Organizing Collaborative's (2013) framework (see Appendix D).

- This resource enabled participants to reflect upon their own practices (i.e., everyday classroom behaviors) and helped them to identify barriers toward equity on a personal level—a critical first step of enhancing EL. (Domain 1 of Equity Rubric: Identify Equity Barriers)

C. After selecting the three items they would like to explore further, we engaged in dialogue. Discussed the barriers or opportunities that affected whether teachers perform indicators of cultural responsiveness "a lot," "a little" or "not at all." Brainstormed some possible solutions to overcome these barriers. Recorded these solutions on a Google doc and re-visited at future meetings as a reminder of the group's ideas. (Domain 2 of Equity Rubric: Ask Equity Questions)

D. A reference sheet was provided to help teachers pinpoint areas of need in the school and aid in their discussion. This sheet included disaggregated student academic data from PowerSchool and behavioral data from SWIS (see Appendix E). For example, upon reviewing this document, the group discovered that students who were socioeconomically disadvantaged were receiving office discipline referrals at a disproportionately higher rate than their socioeconomically advantaged peers. I facilitated a discussion by prompting participants to examine the content and procedures within our school-wide discipline program. I asked, "What components of our extant program may be barriers to equitable opportunities for socioeconomically disadvantaged students?" All prompts were aligned to teachers' observations about the data and were framed in a way that challenged them to think about the structural pieces of the school's systems that may be unintentionally contributing to disparities in outcomes.

**7. Meeting 4: "Assessing Partnerships and Available Resources"**

**Agenda –** May 17, 2016

A. Debriefed Meeting 3 and reviewed big ideas generated from topics discussed.

B. Completed the "Assessing Partnerships" reflection sheet independently (see Appendix F). I provided handouts of this document. Then, discussed and compared ratings. Determined if group members agreed or disagreed about certain topics. Provided rationale for rating if there were discrepancies.

- The purpose of the "Assessing Partnerships" reflection sheet was to help participants pinpoint areas of strength and weakness in terms of school climate, outreach, communication with parents and community members, policy and procedures, parent and community activities and reporting children's progress to parents. This resource also enabled participants to reflect upon and identify the many resources that can be tapped and/or created to generate solutions to address inequities. (Domain 3 of Equity Rubric: Develop Equity Solutions)

C. The group generated a list of additional resources that are available to our school community that may also increase family and community partnerships. Recorded these solutions on a Google doc and re-visited at future meetings as a reminder of the group's ideas.

**8. Online Activity #3: "Engaging Families" Discussion Contribution—**

May 18, 2016

A. Each participant responded to the following prompts and viewed other participants' responses:

- Read through NEA's (2011) "100 Ways to Make Your School Family Friendly" suggestions (see Appendix G). Select five strategies that our school currently uses. Then, select five more strategies our school does not currently use that you think will entice more families to feel welcomed and included.
- Identify additional resources (if any) that we may need to enact these strategies in the future.

- What message (i.e., hidden curriculum) may our current practices be conveying to families? Respond to at least one other participant's post and provide feedback.

**9. Meeting 5: "Action Planning for Equity" Agenda –** Week of May 19, 2016

A. Debriefed Meeting 4 and reviewed big ideas generated from topics discussed.

B. Discussed the qualities of distributed leadership that could be utilized to increase teacher EL beyond the EC.

C. Provided another copy of the snapshot of SWIS behavioral data, current free/reduced lunch numbers, etc. used previously in Meeting 3 so that the EC could begin to devise plans to a) address existing inequities and b) disseminate plans to staff.

   - This snapshot was a one-page handout that teachers could utilize throughout the planning process (see Appendix E).

D. Re-visited Google docs generated from previous meetings to help participants craft ideas and synthesize the knowledge they have acquired.

E. Began Collaborative Action Plan (see Appendix A).

   - This document guided participants through systematic steps to address inequities and helped them to counteract implicit biases. Participants first identified a problem area in which they thought they could positively effect change. Next, they assessed how current school practices in this area may be unintentionally contributing to

existing inequities or perpetuating bias. Then, they generated several options for addressing this problem as well as the necessary resources to do so before deciding upon the action that they ultimately would like to take. Finally, they generated ideas for how to sustain those changes so that they could become an inextricable part of school culture.

- The document was stored in the Google drive in the EC's folder so participants could easily edit, share, or review it at any time.

**10. Meeting 6: "Action Planning for Equity Continued" Agenda** – June 1, 2016

A. Debriefed Meeting 5 and reviewed big ideas generated from topics discussed.

B. Revised and continued to develop Collaborative Action Plan Document.

**11. Equity Literacy Post-Survey** (see Appendix H) – June 6, 2016

**12. Exit Interviews** – June 13, 2016

A. See Procedures for individual Exit Interview questions.

**13. Group Debrief** –June 13, 2016

A. See Procedures for Group Debrief questions.

**Procedures and Measures**

Permission to undertake this study was provided by Lehigh University's Institutional Review Board. Then, additional permissions were gathered from the participants from the school of study (Appendix I). I met with the participants as a group to explain the purpose of the study and what it entailed. I then provided participants with opportunities to ask questions. When all

questions were answered, I distributed paper copies of the consent forms. I made participants aware that participation in this study was voluntary. Once signed, consent forms were kept confidential and were stored in a locked cabinet within the school building.

Then, a 10-item Qualtrics pre-survey entitled Equity Literacy Pre-Survey (Appendix B) was distributed to obtain individual participants' demographic information (e.g., race, socioeconomic status, years of teaching experience, etc.), baseline feelings of efficaciousness surrounding issues of equity, and initial abilities to identify and address strengths and weaknesses in equitable school practices. It was emailed to all four participants in late March, 2016. Participants had one week to complete the survey.

Once all survey responses were collected, a schedule of suggested F2F group meetings was shared via email with participants that outlined potential topics of discussion as well as meeting dates, locations, and times. This schedule consisted of six, hour-long F2F meetings with the option to add more meetings or time if necessary. Meetings were conducted from March-May, 2016 in an unoccupied classroom within the school building. Audio recordings were collected on a digital recording device during each of the six F2F meeting sessions and later transcribed. Data from online responses were recorded on individual and collaborative Google documents and stored in the EC folder on the school's Google drive.

At the conclusion of the intervention, an Equity Literacy Post-Survey (see Appendix H) was emailed to participants to measure their feelings of efficaciousness surrounding issues of equity and their post-intervention abilities to identify and address gaps in equitable school practices.

Semi-structured Exit Interviews were conducted with each participant during the final week of the study prior to the Group Debrief session. These interviews were audio recorded on a

digital recording device and transcribed for analysis. The timeline for the Exit Interviews vs. Group Debrief was structured as such because I did not want the group discussion to influence individuals' responses. Exit Interview questions were:

1. Regarding your participation in the EC, what was most rewarding for you? What was most challenging for you?

2. If at all, how did your involvement in the EC affect your understanding of EL?

Follow-up questions to probe for deeper understandings:

a. *What was your biggest "takeaway" from your involvement in this EC?*

b. *How will you incorporate this "takeaway" into your future EL work?*

3. If at all, how has your involvement in the EC affected your comfort level regarding EL concepts?

Follow-up question:

a. *What, if anything, could be done to enhance your comfort level in the future?*

4. How do you anticipate the staff will respond to the action plan created by the EC?

Follow-up question:

a. *What may these anticipated responses suggest about the hidden curriculum of our school and/or other barriers that may need to be addressed?*

I utilized a semi-structured interview protocol—remaining responsive to the emergent nature of this intervention—and crafted interview questions specific to the EC's direction and focus.

Participants' whole-group responses during the debriefing session were audio-recorded and transcribed. This debriefing session was also semi-structured and held with all EC members during the final week of the study. Guiding questions for the Group Debrief were:

1. How did meeting as a collaborative team affect your understandings of EL?
2. What topics does this group feel efficacious enough to facilitate EL conversations and/or activities with colleagues outside the EC?
    i. Why do you think this is?
3. What topics does this group not feel efficacious enough to facilitate EL conversations and/or activities with colleagues outside the EC?
    i. Why do you think this is?
4. What could be done to improve the effectiveness of the EC if this intervention were to be conducted in the future?

Additional data sources included transcripts of meetings and interview/debrief sessions, responses to online activity prompts, open-ended survey responses and the collaborative action plan document. These data shed light on participants' evolving understandings of equity on personal and school-wide levels.

Since teachers' responses to students can be linked to teachers' own interpretations—which may or may not be biased (see Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015)—and/or be representative of their sense of efficacy working with students from diverse backgrounds (see Beasley, Gartin,

Lincoln, & Penner-Williams, 2013), it is important to examine teachers' current beliefs and understandings about equity. This examination may foster equity literacy development over time.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis in case studies involves "examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing or otherwise re-combining evidence to draw empirically based conclusions" for the purposes of explaining complex phenomena (Yin, 2009, p. 126). Following Yin's (2009) recommendations, I used a descriptive framework to organize data based on theoretical perspectives regarding equity literacy, self-efficacy, and effective practices in professional development.

I uploaded all meeting transcripts and written data from online responses and surveys to the Dedoose qualitative analysis program (www.dedoose.com). I highlighted sections of data using this technology and applied both a priori and emergent codes. First, I used Organizing Apprenticeship Project/Education Equity Organizing Collaborative's (2013) rubric for determining progress toward equity to determine a priori codes (see Appendix D). These codes were: access and inclusion, opportunity to learn, school climate, disciplinary policies and practices, resource allocation and distribution, and achievement and outcomes. I used other a priori codes to provide links between theoretical frameworks surrounding efficacy (code= indicators of collective and individual efficacy) and sound professional development practices (code= distributed leadership). Codes were then applied to open-ended pre- and post-survey items, transcribed EC session data, interviews, and the action plan document. Next, I used Yin's (2009) coding procedures to record additional emergent codes that may not have been based upon the existing theory but were linked to phenomena inherent in the data (e.g., code= storytelling).

Applying the constant comparative method championed by Glaser (2002), I simultaneously coded and analyzed the data systematically and looked for patterns in participants' responses. This means that I compared data (e.g., interviews) with other data I collected (e.g., online written prompts) to look for similarities and differences. To aid in this analysis, I exported codes into an Excel spreadsheet and examined the relationships between codes. According to Tesch (1990), the purpose of this comparison method is to identify important constructs, group big ideas into themes, and find conflicting evidence. My intent was to generate theory could be clearly linked to these data.

Next, I used data reduction techniques (i.e., structural, descriptive, in vivo) throughout the study to simplify and summarize raw data from researcher memos, open-ended survey items, recorded EC sessions, interviews, and documents while taking care not to lose the context or content of the information I gathered (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). I utilized these techniques to delve deeper into the data with each read-through and applied them to the first stages of emergent and *a priori* coding. *Structural coding* helped me to label data from multiple participants' responses so that I could easily access them for future analysis. *Descriptive coding* was used to summarize the topic of a data passage. *In vivo* coding was used to quote terms from the data in a verbatim manner (e.g., Increasing equity in our school is difficult. code=difficult).

Following Strauss & Corbin's (2008) recommendations, I then used axial coding. This means that I disaggregated the themes that I uncovered during the first round of analysis by refining my initial codes, collapsing them into categories, and determining the connections between those categories. Throughout this iterative process, I continually questioned, compared, and utilized inductive and deductive reasoning strategies to relate subcategories to main categories so that I could explain and understand the relationships between these categories and

relate them to all phenomena related to the EC intervention. Finally, to ensure that the relationships between categories existed, I validated them through the triangulation of data from multiple sources including surveys, sessions, interviews, and documents. Concurrently, I displayed data using diagrams to further refine these relationships. Supported by Knafl & Breitmayer's (1989) research, the collection and cross-verification of multiple data sources through triangulation aided the validity and reliability of my confirmed findings. See Figure 2 for a visual representation of codes, their relationship to themes, and the data sources that support them.

**Avoiding Researcher Bias**

I took steps to ensure that my personal biases did not affect interactions with participants or interpretation of data because I am a teacher in the school where this research was conducted (i.e., an indigenous insider; Banks, 2008). Following Strauss and Corbin's (1990) recommendations, I avoided sensitivity bias—the avoidance or falsification of responses due to sensitive subject matter being discussed—by ensuring that participant data was captured accurately and verbatim. My indigenous insider status enabled participants to feel safe to take risks and provide honest responses throughout the study. An outside researcher facilitating the EC sessions (i.e., an external outsider), may have made the participants feel more guarded. Although an external outsider may have been less biased because he or she would not have any preconceptions about the school, its culture, or its teachers, he or she also would not have had the same nuanced view of these phenomena as I did after working with these teachers for many years. That said, I tried to facilitate the EC using neutral techniques like questioning the data, using skepticism, and following research procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) so as not to lead the group in one direction or another so as not to influence the content of the group or the

contributions of its individual members. Additionally, I used indirect (i.e., structured, projective) questioning techniques to reduce social desirability bias (Fisher, 1993) and limited my commentary regarding participants' responses so they did not feel that I was judging their contributions in ways that could influence collegial relationships outside the EC. Finally, I avoided bias by adhering to the following processes—thereby increasing the validity of this study.

**Validity**

Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations, I ensured the validity of this qualitative study by evaluating its credibility thereby ensuring that the study measures what it was intended to measure. I also took steps to increase the study's transferability which is the degree to which findings from this study can be applied to a wider population. Additionally, I enhanced the study's dependability by utilizing techniques to ensure that if similar research was repeated in the same context with the same methods and participants, similar results would be obtained. Finally, I improved confirmability by taking care to ensure that findings resulted from participants' experiences rather than from my preferences.

**Credibility.** I fostered honest contributions from participants by encouraging truthful dialogue before each session. I stressed that there were no right or wrong answers and that participants could speak freely without any threat to their participation in the EC.

Throughout this intervention, I conducted member checks to ensure the accuracy of the information obtained (Cresswell, 2007). Member checks occurred during F2F sessions and after data collection was completed. Following Merriam's (2002) suggestions, I a) provided participants with transcripts of interviews and asked them to verify the accuracy of their recorded statements, b) created a well-defined audit trail to explain how data was collected and analyzed

throughout the course of the study, c) triangulated data from surveys, interviews, audio recordings, written responses, documents, and researcher memos to identify key trends and d) facilitated other researchers' decisions regarding the transferability of my work by using rich, thick descriptions to describe phenomena. Additionally, I cross-checked themes with participants to determine, when appropriate, if they could explain particular patterns that I uncovered.

**Transferability.** While findings may not lead to broad generalizations—as is typical with most qualitative research (see Cresswell, 1998; Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985)—findings may lead to what Patton (2002) referred to as "extrapolations…modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations" (p. 584). These extrapolations may highlight effective strategies for a) designing professional development around issues of equity and b) disseminating and addressing EL concepts with school stakeholders via situated learning approaches. In other words, the findings may not be directly transferable to other school settings; however, this study may generate a useable framework for schools to evaluate equity practices within their specific environments and share their discoveries in ways that will best fit the unique needs of their staff and students.

**Dependability.** Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations, I explained my procedures in detail so future researchers can attempt to replicate it—even if they may gather different results. Thorough descriptions of these practices can enable readers of the report to determine the effectiveness of the research design and implementation and operational details of data collection. Furthermore, I increased dependability by utilizing overlapping methods like whole-group interviews, individual interviews and reflective writing tasks.

**Confirmability.** Throughout the research process, I kept a reflexive journal to acknowledge my personal biases, explain methodologies, and engage in critical self-reflection

about my relationship with the participants and my role in the study (Ortlipp, 2008). This journal helped make my beliefs and assumptions transparent (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure that the data I gathered was objective and reflective of participants' experiences and *not* my personal preferences, I utilized data triangulation from multiple sources to support all conclusions. Furthermore, I clearly explained my rationale for the approaches I took throughout the study and admitted their strengths and weaknesses. Finally, I created an audit trail of my work—enabling readers to see the step-by-step processes this research entailed—by utilizing diagrams to showcase a) how data led to recommendations, conclusions, etc. and b) how ideas related to the research question generated directions for future work regarding EL development.

This research project's aims were to determine a) how participation in the EC affected teacher leaders' understanding and application of EL to address inequities within school, b) how efficacious teacher leaders felt after participating in an EC and c) what processes of the Equity Council promoted Equity Literacy development.

## Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I will explain the overarching themes of application, efficacy, and process respectively as they pertain to findings related to each research question. In regard to research question one, I will discuss four themes regarding participants' understanding and application of EL, namely: a) how participants' growth in their EL was related to their entry level understandings of EL, b) participants' increased self-awareness regarding beliefs and practices related to equity, c) EC members' collective abilities to identify barriers to equity, and d) participants' collaborative problem-solving abilities to generate solutions to identified barriers and the consideration of additional resources. In regard to research question two, I will discuss one theme focused on participants' self-efficacy that suggested that participants' efficaciousness regarding EL was primarily related to their perceptions of their colleagues' receptivity to hearing about equity concerns. In regard to research question three, I will discuss three process themes related to EC development including utilizing a) small-group, long-term structure to promote trust and idea-sharing, b) storytelling and shared experiences to view and solve problems from different perspectives, and c) F2F opportunities for group interaction. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of my findings.

**Research Question 1:** How did participation in an EC affect teachers' understanding and application of EL to address inequities within school?

**Understanding and Application Theme 1: Overall, participants in the EC demonstrated growth in their EL language and knowledge of equity concepts; however, this growth appeared to be related to their entry-level understandings of EL.**

Participants' language evolved to showcase emergent understandings about EL. Although equity language like grit, deficit, and structural ideology seemed to impede initial conceptual

understandings for Kelley and Megan—who had limited pre-study experience exploring equity—they eventually began to incorporate equity language in their questioning, reflection, and group dialogue. Dom—who began the study with some foundational knowledge of equity concepts—demonstrated more refined understandings by its conclusion. Ali—who entered the EC with a solid foundation in equity concepts—did not seem to struggle with equity terminology yet demonstrated growth by learning how to engage colleagues in equity work. Over time and with practice, equity language became a commonly utilized and universally understood vocabulary within the group. However, it became clear that EC members who had prior experience examining equity utilized more nuanced language to convey their understandings.

Kelley and Megan had similar responses to learning about equity concepts at the onset of the study. Both expressed that at first, it was a challenge to understand the new terminology and apply it to EC discussions. Kelley illustrated this point when she reflected back to watching Gorski's ideology video during Meeting 2: Exploring Ideologies. "There [were] a lot of big words and [I had to] keep looking them up to see what they meant. I had to write down Gorski's grit [ideology]…and keep going back to look at the vocab." During the Exit Interview, I asked Kelley if she had mastered the vocabulary over the course of the study. She responded, "It's a growing thing." This indicates that her understandings are still evolving. Megan also expressed her initial confusion about equity vocabulary but that she was able to grasp it over time. She added that other teachers outside the EC may not understand the terminology either. "I don't think it's even in peoples' language, you know what I mean? I think for some people it is, and they don't necessarily call it that, maybe" (Meeting 6). She was referring to the notion that some people may understand the concept of grit ideology but may not necessarily use that specific terminology to describe it. As Megan reflected upon the vocabulary of her colleagues, she

mentioned “peoples’ language” but did not specifically articulate the equity terms she was thinking about. These examples illustrate that while Kelley and Megan’s initial exposure to equity terminology increased their understandings over time, they were not yet fluent in utilizing and describing equity-related terms.

Dom voiced more specific understandings about equity than Kelley and Megan. He expressed that as a result of learning more about equity, he realized that he must continue to develop his *personal* understandings—especially related to reducing disproportionately negative outcomes for students living in poverty. Dom wrote:

> In order to move forward with addressing specific areas of concern, we as individuals, need a better and deeper personal understanding of our beliefs of equity. Once that is established, the number one area of need I see is the disproportionate opportunities provided to students from different socio-economic backgrounds; specifically in terms of learning opportunities and supports. Transparency and communication are two other critical elements to ensure that the work is progressing and to make sure pertinent areas are addressed. I absolutely agree with the need to address inequities of opportunity experienced by our families (Online Activity 1).

This indicates that Dom was able to recognize inequitable outcomes as problematic within the school. Dom was able to recognize structural barriers to student success and was willing to communicate plans for reducing or eliminating those barriers. He did not, however, indicate the content of those plans or to whom he would communicate them.

In a similar example, Dom again acknowledged that some students in the school have advantages over others and he made a personal commitment to learning more about his students. However, he did not link those advantages to structural inequities or view himself as a part of the

system that perpetuates them. This exchange occurred after Online Activity 2 when—in response to his online post—Ali questioned, "I often wonder how much we reward and assess students based on their support system and not necessarily on their ability." In other words, students with the most resources (e.g., a parent who helps with homework, makes sure the child is prepared each day with supplies, reinforces school behavior expectations in the home, etc.) may be more equipped academically and behaviorally to succeed. Students whose family members must work extra jobs may not be available after school hours to help give their children the same advantages. Dom agreed with Ali's assessment and added that rewarding and assessing students based on their support system is probably unintentional yet probably something that teachers do not think about. He went on to explain that he had a renewed sense of commitment to learn more about his students and families. After this online exchange, his own personal awareness was piqued, his prior knowledge about equity was activated, and he committed to learn more about his students' families and their situations. Although Dom grasped some foundational EL concepts including the acknowledgement that structural inequities within the school system exist, he lacked in-depth understandings. In other words, he did not name the practice of rewarding student support systems as part of the hidden curriculum of school culture or grapple with the idea that families' values may differ from the schools' values. Rather, he acknowledged the practice as something that teachers should examine more thoroughly.

Conversely, Ali's response to the initial equity topics covered in the study reflected ease with equity terminology and enabled her to apply it to her assessment of the video. Ali's language reflected core principles of EL—which she knew prior to joining the EC—but also highlighted new insights she gleaned from the EC activity regarding ways to engage others in equity work. She incorporated equity language into her responses with fluency and applied a

critical lens to approaching equity initiatives. She wrote:

> The litmus test he offered to examine equity initiatives by asking, "Are the [initiatives] about *fixing people* who are marginalized or are they about *fixing the structures* in place that cause people to be marginalized?" [This] is the most powerful, powerful question to ask in equity work. It's Gorski's unwavering vigilance to always flip the conversation or focus from being about that of the powerful to that of the powerless [that] resonates with me. He adeptly provides a nod to the good intentions of so many individuals while breaking down widely held perceptions and dogma. I agree, wholeheartedly with the views he espouses—that isn't a question. What resonates with me is the intentionally crafted way that he presents his message and how adeptly he connects it to the learner; always with a lens of compassion, but holding all accountable (Online Activity 2).

When developing EL, language matters. This is because the language one uses to explain a problem affects a) how the problem can be interpreted and b) the available options for solving it. Having EL also means that one can identify injustice as the result of imbalances in power and opportunity. As participants began to engage in group dialogue surrounding equity concepts, they utilized equity language to reflect their understandings. Since knowledge and language are confounded, they cannot be disentangled from each other. In the following example, participants discussed the language they typically used in the classroom to engage their students in addressing injustices related to the Holocaust (Meeting 3). This anecdote illuminates the emergent language participants used to articulate their understandings yet also highlights gaps in their knowledge and misconceptions about EL.

Kelley described a time when she was working with fifth grade teachers who were reluctant to have their classes read a book about the Holocaust because they questioned its appropriateness for the age of their learners. She implied that some teachers were hesitant to read the book because the content may be too troubling or sad for fifth graders to handle. Kelley thought that the book *should* be used because, "there are ways—if you're in fifth grade, third grade, or even first grade—that you can take a topic and address it in a way that's appropriate for students to understand the bigger issues at hand." This is a reflection of Kelley's growing willingness to discuss tough topics with learners regardless of grade level. Kelley's comment is in contrast to Megan's who said that coverage of topics like the Holocaust *is* dependent upon learners' grade level. Considering kindergarten and first grade learners, Megan said, "I think you can compare racism to something that is more relevant to them so that you are building that foundation." Although she did not describe the specifics of how she would explain racism in ways that were "relevant" to students, she continued to explain that if teachers describe racism in more child-friendly language, then by the time students hear the term *racism* in second or third grade, they would be able to understand more complex definitions because of their previous exposure to the term. Megan was reluctant to name the construct of racism with her learners and instead, selected an option that she believed to be more age appropriate. She also implied that racism is not "relevant" to students in her classroom—even though in reality, students may be experiencing the very real and immediate effects of it. This practice does not reflect deep understandings of the pervasive causes and effects of racism or acknowledge classroom opportunities to engage students in authentic discussions that name race and racism and address these topics in ways that young learners can understand.

Dom then challenged, "Yet we pigeonhole certain grade levels—like you can't teach the Holocaust until you get to fifth or sixth grade because it's age appropriate. Who is determining age appropriateness? What about prior experiences?" Dom's comment alludes to honoring lived experiences of students and making authentic connections with learners who have experienced complex phenomena like religious persecution, racism, segregation, etc. Yet his words lack specificity—indicating that he is beginning to question the school's choice of content per grade level in a critical manner but is still not able to articulate *why* or *for whom* he is formulating these questions.

Again, Ali was able to utilize her previous experiences grappling with equity to contribute to this conversation. This authentic, emergent exchange within the context of the EC showcased her utilization of prior knowledge to contribute to group dialogue. In this example, Ali demonstrated her EL growth by a) *recognizing* student use of inequitable language, b) *responding* to this language by providing learners with historical context for language use and non-use, and c) *redressing* instances of inequitable language by taking personal steps to increase her own equity knowledge so that she would be better prepared to respond to future inequities in the classroom. She said:

> I usually find in those situations, [the students] give me the opportunity to use those words [e.g., racism] even with first graders because they are looking for language. When we're talking about segregation and they don't have a word to describe people of color so they use words they've heard that we are trying to extinguish in a sense [e.g., colored]. That's when you can use those words then, and say, 'Well, those words come from this tradition and it was racist and this is what racism is, so that's a word we don't use.'

> It's cues from the students, I find, in all of these things. Working with what they bring to me but also having done the work on my own. I feel a huge responsibility to my students, all of my students, to frame this in a way that honors all of the experiences around it.

It was after this exchange that I probed the group about the typical language used to discuss topics like racism, sexism, classism, etc. with their students. All participants expressed a reluctance to use those exact words because they feared backlash from students' families. Their fear of those in power (i.e., students' families in positions of power and privilege) within the school coupled with their hesitance to call historical and current injustices by their names is further evidence that EC members need to further develop their EL skill sets. Ali, although reluctant, remained staunchly committed to using accurate terminology when she questioned:

> What's going to happen from this conversation that I just had with my students? Because we talk about racism, poverty, immigration, slavery, and the Holocaust. I think, when is the phone call going to come that someone has a problem with us talking about these things? But I think not talking about [them] is just as big of a problem as talking about [them].

This statement indicates that Ali was willing to challenge the hidden curriculum of the school by bringing injustices out of the shadows and into the light. Her realization that remaining silent on matters of injustice is just as political as discussing injustice explicitly is evidence of her growing EL abilities.

Throughout this particular conversation, all participants stated that they were leery about naming and discussing inter-connected systems of oppression like racism, poverty, etc. with young learners because they feared parental repercussions. Yet, most teachers explained that they

did so anyway. However, the prior knowledge they possessed about equity seemed to impact the language they chose to use. Megan—who had limited knowledge about equity concepts prior to the study—provided learners with watered down versions of these systems. Kelley—who also had limited pre-study understandings—suggested that there were ways to teach equity concepts at each grade level. Dom—who had basic equity understandings prior to the study—was critical of the arbitrary grade/developmental level that determined learner readiness to discuss these topics but did not provide the specific language he used in his own classroom or acknowledge that students in his class may be currently experiencing effects from marginalization. Ali—who had the most experience engaging in equity work prior to the study—was able to not only name the systems of oppression, but also describe how these systems function in a way that children would be able to understand. In doing so, she also provided a language model for other members of the EC to utilize in their own classrooms. Furthermore, Ali's commitment to challenge the structural nature of educational disparities through both outreach and introspection showcased her growing understandings of key EL principles. She explained that communicating with and learning from teachers, students, and families and taking time for personal reflection are critical pieces of the equity-building puzzle. Ali stressed that this requires constant vigilance to "continually ask the question 'whose needs are we serving'(Meeting 3)?"

At the conclusion of the study, participants were questioned about their understandings regarding equity. Although all participants expressed personal growth in their understandings about equity, most did so in generic or vague terms. For example, Megan said, "I didn't know much about it [equity] and you guys did. So by meeting I learned about it." She also went on to explain that it was through examination of building-wide behavior data that she could see evidence of disproportionality in the school. She said, "If you just said what you thought, you'd

be like, 'Hmmm, really? Here? But when you see the hard data, then you apply it" (Group Debrief). This statement implies that Megan was unaware that disparities in disaggregated behavioral data (e.g., by race/ethnicity, IEP status, F/R lunch status) existed in the school until she viewed school data. In fact, she seemed surprised by this phenomena. In a similar vein, Kelley indicated her growth in understanding in a broad sense when she explained that as a result of her participation in the study, she talks to people *outside of* the EC about issues surrounding equity. She explained how she uses the "children standing on boxes[2]" (Exit Interview) cartoon as a visual for understanding that equity does not mean equality and that equality does not mean fairness or justice. Dom stated generally that through the EC, he "gained the knowledge and the understanding of what [equity] truly means" (Exit Interview). These general responses contrast with Ali's self-critical reflection about her growth. Ali admitted that not much had changed about her view of equity per se, because she had always been comfortable addressing and contemplating issues surrounding equity. She did admit that she experienced growth in learning about ways to engage others in equity work. She explained that throughout the study:

> "[I] learned to tether my own impatience and become a little more mindful of the fact that things are not obvious. Things that are obvious to me are not obvious to everyone, right? If I feel this work is important, I have to also work to find the most effective way to raise questions to colleagues and make sure I'm always listening. Really taking more in than I'm putting out (Exit Interview).

In summary, although participants entered the EC with differing initial understandings and familiarity with equity, it became clear throughout the study that in working collaboratively

[2] This widely-known graphic to depict equality versus equity depicts three children standing behind a fence trying to view a baseball field. Each child is given a box to depict equality. Yet when this happens, all children cannot see the field due to height differences. Therefore, equity is portrayed when each child has the appropriate number of boxes to see over the fence.

with one another, each member grew in his or her own understandings—whether it was learning about equity in general or developing deeper insights into how to challenge colleagues to explore equity within their spheres of influence.

**Understanding and Application Theme 2: Participants reported heightened self-reflection regarding their beliefs and practices related to equity.**

Participants reported that their personal responses (e.g., thought processes, reflective abilities, physical responses) were heightened as a result of participation in this study. While most sessions throughout the study featured face-to-face meetings, three sessions were completed independently online to encourage personal, introspective reflection. Through writing tasks and opportunities for personal reflection during EC activities, participants expressed a change in their a) awareness of their personal ideological development, b) ability to make shifts in their thinking while teaching, c) long-held stereotypes, and d) personal commitments to take action steps to address inequities. After engaging in the Online Activity 2: Individual Ideology Reflection regarding the development of current perspectives (e.g., deficit vs. grit vs. structural), Ali wrote, "These were lightening bolt moments that I haven't thought about in some time in narrative form until engaging in this process." The act of writing and reflecting upon equity jarred memories for Ali—thus aiding her written explanations and awakening personal awareness of belief systems surrounding equity. This is an excerpt from Ali's online response after watching Gorski's video explaining the difference between deficit, grit, and structural ideologies (Meeting 2). In this excerpt, she explained how her dominant structural ideology perspective developed over time. Through the act of writing and reflection, Ali's path to her current ideological perspective came into sharper focus:

It's a rather long litany of personal experiences related to my family structure and

> economic class, the influence of a few very thoughtful, examined feminist adults, my personal educational experiences and my own pursuit of self-directed learning that have brought me to the precipice of unpacking structural inequities in my career, life and politics. It's a journey that began, consciously, in middle school and intensified in urgency, exponentially, as I became an adult, educator, and parent. Growing up on the south side of Allentown, in a lower working class neighborhood with a nurse for a mother and an artist for a father, opened the door to my noticing differences in privilege and power between various groups. My awareness first began as a burgeoning adolescent in middle school. In elementary school I had been identified as gifted and segregated from the rest of the school with a group of 30 boys and girls who were likewise identified. By middle school the competitive academic environment, paired with the stressful environment created by the bonding of a group of boys in the class who mercilessly bullied both students and teachers, without consequence, awoke me to questions of gender, power, and entitlement. It raised my ire while also making me feel powerless. I knew there had to be a different way (Online Activity 2).

Through writing and reflection during this online task, Ali was also able to trace a path back through her history to construct a personal narrative about the development of her belief systems. Ali's awareness of these perspectives and how they came to be resulted in "lightening bolt moments" that brought her beliefs into consciousness. Yet her clearer picture of equity posed some new challenges. For instance, in her Exit Interview, Ali stated, "It's hard—especially when you're looking at concrete application moments like, okay, so I've thought about this, I've learned these theories, I see this everywhere now. What do I do?" This self-critical evaluation of her growth towards equity indicates that although her ability to pinpoint inequities has improved,

she continues to grapple with ways to *address* these inequities. Ali's struggle and acknowledgement of her possible complicity in perpetuating inequity is illustrated in this self-critical reflection:

> It's a continual learning process. The hardest part is not backing away, is continuing to push myself as a teacher and a colleague forward, to continue to examine how I'm looking at my students. What may I be saying to them that I don't realize I'm saying? What I may be teaching them without realizing that I'm teaching to them? You know, like, [I need to] examine the hidden curriculum that I am perpetuating or creating (Exit Interview).

Equity Council members also reported changes in personal reflection processes during as a result of participation in the study. They described moments when they applied knowledge they gained during the EC to events that occurred *outside* the EC (e.g., classroom). Megan recalled her shift from a deficit perspective to more of an equity-focused perspective. She remarked, "Being part of this [EC] has made me think more about my perspectives and I will catch myself during a 'deficit' moment and try to think in a different way" (Exit Interview). She went on to explain that in the past, if she had a student who was not completing homework, she would find herself thinking that the student's family did not care about his schooling enough to reinforce homework completion. After participating in the EC, she realized that her previous thoughts were modeled from the deficit perspective and that to understand the situation, she would need to develop deeper understandings about her student. She said, "In reality, his family was going through some tough times and what I need to do is think about how I can support him." She went on to explain that her involvement in the EC had heightened her general awareness of school-wide inequities as well as her self-reflective abilities. She said, "I also think we all do—to some

extent—judge [others] when we shouldn't. We need to just stop and say, 'Whoa. Hold on. I have no right to judge, but how can I help? How else can I look at this situation?...It's more of a heightened awareness." Megan added that she is much more aware of her verbal and non-verbal responses to students. As a result of the study, she said she is cognizant of "doing things that I shouldn't be doing." She concluded by commenting that due to her increased understandings and self-reflection abilities surrounding equity, she can now make better classroom decisions and reduce the likelihood that she is sending unintended messages to students.

Dom also expressed personal growth in his thought processes as he grappled with generating ideas about school-wide equity throughout the study. He said, "I think initially, you need to get past your own thoughts and boundaries and challenge yourself…This kind of challenges your own beliefs and maybe some of your own stereotypes and makes you re-think some of those" (Exit Interview). Kelley also explained her change in personal stereotypes as a result of participation. She said, "We need to not think about the stereotypes we are familiar with" (Exit Interview). She acknowledged that addressing inequities is her personal responsibility as she questioned, "So, how can I help change the barriers that are keeping a group of parents from coming in to school for meetings?" Kelley implied—through her reflection—that she has a personal responsibility to challenge her pre-conceptions about students and families and work on a personal level to reduce or eliminate obstacles to family-school partnerships.

Like Kelley, as a result of deep introspection, all participants at the conclusion of the study ultimately viewed themselves individually as change agents who could play a vital role in eliminating barriers to equity. Participants were no longer content to simply reflect about inequities. Rather, their personal reflections evolved into commitments to take concrete actions to address them. Each participant made some type of statement—as indicated through examples

in Application Theme 2—to declare his or her personal onus to challenge and reduce inequities. Dom summarized this concept and illustrated the enormity of his responsibility when he said, "You may not be able to change everything, but you can absolutely change one small little piece at a time within your own self" (Exit Interview).

**Understanding and Application Theme 3: Participants demonstrated a collective ability to identify some barriers to achieving equity.**

Participants were able to identify some barriers to achieving equity. Since recognizing barriers to equity is the first critical step to achieving equity literacy, it is important that participants were able to do so. Throughout the study, participants discussed (a) school-wide procedural shortcomings 71 times, (b) scarcity of resources 29 times, (c) curricular and workload pressures 19 times, and (d) lack of trust and relationships 14 times and e) prioritization of equity 12 times as impediments to equity. Participants discussed these barriers at some point during all meeting sessions, online activities, and pre- and post-surveys. Although discussed least frequently, the prioritization of equity may be a key barrier impacting all other barriers. It is notable that EC members identified the absence of this prioritization as a barrier. It is often easier to identify tangible barriers that impede progress toward equity than it is to recognize a phenomena that is *not occurring* as a barrier. If equity is not prioritized or central to decision-making within a school, procedures are impacted, resources are not allocated equitably, time is not provided to include equity into curricula and professional development, and relationships among colleagues and students can suffer. Therefore, I will discuss prioritization of equity before the other barriers that participants *did* identify with the highest frequency. Participants utilized both personal and school-wide examples to illustrate the following barriers.

**Prioritization of equity.** Participants discussed, albeit less frequently than more specific and concrete barriers, the lack of prioritization of equity within the school. This is an important barrier to note because it sets the tone for how the school considers equity as part of its everyday practices. Megan stated that equity matters are not discussed often in school. She said, "I don't think it's ever been talked about. There's just silence" (Meeting 6). Kelley added that conversations between adults are not happening. She said, "We see the data…we may talk about it at a surface level. But we do not dig into what is driving it, how our own bias contributes to it, or how we can address our schools' disparities." Participants also suggested that equity concepts are not fully applied to school-wide practices because they lacked the time, knowledge, and/or comfort level to do so—indicating participants' awareness of the intersection of multiple barriers (Online Activity 1). They also added that discussions of equity have not been frequently addressed in teacher training or professional development due to multiple, school-wide concurrent initiatives, and therefore, themes of equity are not a regular part of the school's collective language. When equity is not central to school-wide dialogue and decision-making, students, families, and teachers who are members of marginalized communities, can suffer the consequences (e.g., limited access to opportunities, voices not heard or valued in conversations, etc.).

In multiple online and face-to-face sessions, participants discussed how lack of attention to equity issues impacted school climate. Due to data-driven decision-making, policies driven by administration, and/or state requirements, Kelley expressed that "so many decisions are based upon adults (e.g., teacher hours, ease of initiative implementation) without thinking about the kids." Ali added that this is "not good for kids and community building." Kelley was referring to school-wide staffing shifts, classroom grouping of students, and school-wide procedures that

may appear to benefit the flow of the system rather than the students. This impacts school-wide equity because in viewing issues from an administrative staffing/scheduling/procedural perspective, the needs of the people that this system was created to serve may not be considered prominently. Instead, the organizational focus may be placed on keeping the system status quo rather than rooting out and addressing flaws in the system that continue to marginalize people. This approach—while aiding the school's everyday functioning in terms of time and personnel—may not address the varied needs of students and their families and can result in inequitable outcomes that negatively affect the most marginalized populations.

In Meeting 5: Action Planning for Equity, Ali went on to highlight this point by explaining that the children within her care are sometimes discussed during school meetings in an impersonal way. She relayed the story of a recent meeting in which some teachers shared concerns with their principals and challenged them to consider "the whole child." Generally speaking, discussing students from a singular academic viewpoint does not challenge teachers to consider the multi-faceted characteristics of the child (e.g., socio-emotional, financial, health, etc.) and how the teachers' own biases play a role in instructional practices—in other words, the approach itself is barrier to equity. In summary, without equity at the conscious forefront of the school organization, participants thought decisions were sometimes made without consideration of children's needs beyond the academic realm and that these decisions were also made for the convenience of adults rather than for the children in their care—another potential roadblock to achieving equity. This further supports the idea that problems within a school have to be framed with equitable viewpoints so that proposed solutions can address root causes and not symptoms.

**Procedural shortcomings.** Participants discussed school-wide procedural shortcomings more frequently than any other barrier to equity. These shortcomings included: lack of clear communication, school safety policy, the transportation system, and other procedural shortcomings.

*Lack of clear communication*. Lack of clear communication in daily school-wide procedures was the most frequently discussed barrier to student access/opportunity. Participants expressed concerns about verbal and written communication regarding school procedures that impacted both students and their families. On a student level, participants highlighted the "wordiness" of elements of the PBS (positive behavior support) program (i.e., posters hanging on walls explaining student expectations) and said that language barriers may impede special education students and DLLs from accessing PBS content and block their opportunities for behavioral success. Participants also explained that the wordy, jargon-filled communication regarding school initiatives and/or events sent home to families was an impediment to parent/guardian access to understanding everyday school happenings. A group discussion in Meeting 5: Action Planning for Equity illustrated this point. Referring to the alphabet soup of current school-wide assessments, curricula, and procedures with acronyms like RtII, MAP, PBS, etc., Megan stated, "The jargon is bad. Parents don't understand. I mean, I don't even know some of it unless I look." Ali replied:

> I can't even imagine [what parents think]. I sit in meetings and I listen to teachers talk about stuff and different programs we use. Please don't ask me for an opinion because I don't know what they're talking about. I can't imagine [what it's like] for someone who isn't in education, you know?...I feel like sometimes the jargon is legitimizing us. I'm

like, 'that doesn't need to be there,' but it's like professionalizing and legitimizing what we do.

Participants added that when teachers themselves do not understand initiatives (RtII, MAP, PBS, etc.) clearly, miscommunication and misunderstandings can occur (Online Activity 3). For example, when a teacher does not completely understand a school-wide initiative, he or she cannot adequately explain it to families—thus impacting access to its potential benefits for children.

*School safety policy*. Participants also identified the school's safety policy as another procedural shortcoming that hindered how students' families could access classrooms and engage in other school-based opportunities. In the past, parents, grandparents, and school guests had been invited to the school to participate in field day events (i.e., assist students with game activities), classroom parties, field trips, and the like without obtaining clearances (i.e., FBI Criminal Background Check, PA Child Abuse Clearance, PA Criminal Record Check). Now, due to statewide requirements for these clearances, policies have been put into place to ensure student safety. Anyone who will have direct contact with children within the school must possess these clearances. Ali stated, "We view all these [special] events as a problem…a safety problem. How are we going to keep them [parents] contained…where are they going to be?" (Meeting 2). Safeguards have been put into place to separate students from anyone else who enters the school campus without these clearances (e.g., physical distance, fences, etc.). However, the policies created in the name of safety may have some unintended consequences that serve as barriers to equity.

Recent changes to Pennsylvania's child abuse background clearance procedures make volunteering in schools less cost-prohibitive. Parent/family volunteers in schools can obtain these

clearances for free by clicking a tab on the school's Website. Participants in this study, however, seemed to be unaware of these changes. They were thinking about the employment (i.e., not volunteer) costs for these clearances and made inaccurate comments about the cost-prohibitive nature of parent/family volunteer clearances. Ali highlighted this point when she said:

> They have to pay to get their clearances…so if you're a family who is struggling... It's like forty-five dollars. That's going to be hard. Like we're saying, 'Oh, well, if you get your clearances you can come in.' But what if you don't have the money for those clearances, then you can't come in (Meeting 3)?

Teachers' unawareness of the availability of these free clearances could impact family inclusion and involvement within the school—further affecting equitable family-school partnerships. This unawareness may also send other unintended messages to families.

Dom explained that the hidden message embedded in our safety policies and practices may be, "We'll deal with your kids here, you deal with them at home." He added that although he does not believe that teachers feel that way about their students, school-wide actions may convey this not so subtly hidden message to students' families (Online Activity 3).

Additional physical safety measures have recently been put into place at the school to protect students and staff. At one time, students' families could get close to children during celebratory school events (e.g., Field Day). In Meeting 2: Exploring Ideologies, participants discussed the potential ramifications and hidden message(s) of these new safety measures. Kelley commented, "It used to be you could come and kind of rotate with your student, with your child." Dom, referring to the upcoming Field Day celebration, said, "That's another one of those prime events that everybody wants to be a part of and wants to come and see their child in." Megan added, "But not so much anymore. Because I feel we shut them out." Dom

continued, “We’ve put up a literal barrier. A fence.” He added, “That’s completely changed things.” Megan sighed and said, “That darn fence.” Dom summed up his feelings about this physical barrier and the message it may convey to students’ families:

> I still truly believe that we have a very hidden curriculum here in terms of what we're providing students—the message we send to families. You want to incorporate parents, you want to be welcoming with them, you want to incorporate what it is you do in this school, and invite those people in to celebrate with us. Whether intentional or not, you take the celebration and you now put [the students] inside of a fence, where all of these parents now have to sit on the outside (Meeting 2).

*Transportation system*. Participants also discussed the school’s transportation system as a barrier to students’ abilities to access school opportunities. They debated whether or not more students would participate in after-school activities if there was an option to ride a late bus home. Currently, students from families with reliable transportation can participate in after-school enrichment activities (Meeting 2; Post-Survey).

*Other procedural shortcomings*. Participants mentioned other procedural shortcomings with less frequency throughout group meetings in the study. From 2016 onward, the school’s kindergarten registration will be held predominantly online. This is a barrier to equity because some families do not have Internet access. Although families can still register a child in person, doing so would require them to drive to the school—another potential hardship for those with unreliable transportation (Meeting 2).

Child screenings for academic placements (e.g., classroom ability groupings for math and reading) may place a stronger focus on academic data over other considerations (e.g., social,

emotional, etc.) (Meetings 2 and 4). This may be a barrier to equity because the child may not be receiving the supports he or she needs to show off strengths and develop weaknesses.

The instrument rental program in the school enables fourth graders to participate in the school band. However, this program caters to those students who can afford the hefty rental fees. While there are some free or reduced-price instruments available and steps are taken to enable all students to play, instrument access is a barrier to equity because not all children can access their first choice instrument or the one they may be skilled at playing due to financial constraints (Pre-Survey).

Finally, school meetings are typically scheduled during the day. There is often no childcare provided for these meetings and families sometimes have to leave their place of employment to attend (Meeting 2). This procedure is a barrier to equity because as a school, the financial hardship of finding childcare and the potential sacrifice of income to attend school meetings may impede some families' abilities to participate fully in their children's school experiences.

**Scarcity of resources**. In addition to procedural barriers, participants identified missing resources as barriers to equity in the school. These resources included time, books/content, and knowledge of the available resources in the community. An example of this occurred in Meeting 4: Assessing Partnerships and Available Resources when the group was discussing Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports for behavior in the building. Ali commented:

> We don't have those extra supports and resources. [We're] serving the kids who come in already knowing how to function [in the school environment]…kids who have already been to preschool…kids who already have been in some sort of structure before coming to school (Meeting 4).

Therefore, participants indicated that they lack the resource of time to teach and re-teach behavioral expectations to those students who may not have had prior school experiences. This is a barrier to equity because children who come into school already knowing what to do (i.e., mainstream expectations for school behavior and social skills) are at an advantage over those who did not have enough time or space to practice school-wide expectations. This may set less-experienced students—many of whom from marginalized communities—up for failure.

Another example of scarcity of resources occurred in Meeting 3: Identifying Opportunities and Barriers to EL when the group was sharing titles of literature (e.g., *Bud, Not Buddy* and *The Jacket*) that typically spark cross-cultural classroom discourse about equity. Megan commented, "Those are two great books for conversation. But then it also comes back to I don't necessarily have the books." Megan relayed that she typically emails out a request to all teachers in the building for extra copies of the titles she needs. "I [may] need seven or eight copies of a certain book and I'm like, 'help'…but nobody's got them."

Finally, in several meetings and online activities, participants discussed their lack of awareness/understanding of the available resources in the community. For example, in Meeting 4: Assessing Partnerships and Available Resources, the group perused a school-based list of available community resources such as mental health supports, food pantries, and free clothing distributors. Megan noted that several of the community resources listed were not truly in the town itself—but rather, on the outskirts of the county. She said:

> I don't really know how much of these are truly local. If you were a family that didn't have transportation and were low on funds…to get to some of these places…I don't know if you're going to be able to do that. I don't know if some of those places come to you.

In other words, if a student's family was experiencing financial hardship and was able to obtain a school-provided list of services, the family may have to drive fairly far to access them. Therefore, food pantries, clothing distributors and the like may be difficult to access without reliable transportation. The group said that perhaps there were other more local resources about which they were unaware.

**Curricular and workload pressures.** Curricula, assessments and school workload were also discussed in many meetings and online activities as barriers to achieving equity. An example related to curricula occurred in Meeting 1: Overview of EL. Dom explained that he felt he could not integrate topics of equity into his math instruction because of curricular pressures. He stated that equity is not typically at the forethought of his mind because with curricular and assessment requirements, he is so focused on "getting through" what he has to complete that he often loses sight of tackling equity issues in his mathematics classes. Kelley commented that this act of plowing through instruction with an, "I can't think about that because I have to meet this deadline" mentality can be a distraction from the underlying causes of disparities. In sum, the deadline can be used an excuse or a diversion to avoid real issues at hand like poverty, racism, etc. Megan admitted that she does not "purposely ignore" topics of equity or show disrespect toward equity topics in general. However, she stated that due to the multiple demands on her time, she does not necessarily prioritize thinking about how to adapt instruction with equity issues at the forefront as she is teaching. She said, "I just think that we fall victim to the pressures that we're under."

Additional pressures from school-wide expectations inhibited participants' willingness to advocate for or act to achieve equity. In Meeting 5: Action Planning for Equity, Kelley explained that teachers are so overwhelmed by the workload generated by various school-wide initiatives

that their lenses for perspective-taking "get all fogged up" and that they "can't see anything but work." The overall message being, if tackling inequities is not a formal item on a school meeting agenda, then the issue may not be discussed at all. Ali added, "There are just so many things pulling on your attention in so many different directions" (Exit Interview).

**Lack of trust and relationships.** An overall concern about lack of trust and relationships was discussed on both community and school-wide levels as a barrier to achieving equity. In terms of the community, Dom questioned, "You have to understand your community's identity. I'm concerned, at least in this community. The community doesn't understand its identity. So how can we figure out what our identity is to be more equitable in what we teach?" (Meeting 1: Overview of EL) He was stressing the point that teachers need to make a more fervent effort to understand the community surrounding the school; however, in the same statement, he said that the community does not understand its own identity because the demographics of the community have shifted vastly over the past ten years in terms of race and socioeconomic status[3]. Dom's underlying sentiment was that although the community may not understand its evolving identity, it is important for teachers and school personnel to make a concerted effort to reach out to the community and learn about people and the issues they face because doing so may have a positive impact on equitable teaching practices within school walls. Dom's statement—while acknowledging the key value of making authentic connections with the community to affect learner achievement—also makes the assumption that the community does not understand itself. This assumption can also be viewed as a barrier to equity because it potentially limits the possibilities of Dom's expectations for a working partnership between the school and the families it serves. Therefore, although Dom's acknowledgement that a partnership is necessary,

[3] In a span of five years, the multi-racial student population increased by 600%, the Latino population by 100%, and the economically disadvantaged population by 100%.

his words indicate that there is much work to do—both personally and collectively as a school community—to achieve it.

Over time, the community surrounding the school may have experienced more than just demographic changes. Participants discussed a shift in how the community perceives teachers that illustrates a perceived lack of teacher-community trust.

Ali and Kelley attributed this decline in trust to teacher union vs. school board contract negotiations—which were lengthy, contentious, and ultimately resulted in a teacher strike—and the requirements for clearances. Dom questioned:

> Do you think some of that is out of our control because we went on strike and we didn't have a contract? And we were then lumped into this big old perception in the community that teachers are the enemy when in reality we're still the same people we were five years ago? We're still the same people that care about their kids…but did the community and those parents kind of lump us into this group (Meeting 3)?

When teachers and schools do not have authentic relationships with the surrounding community, communication can be compromised, resources are not as likely to be shared, and challenging societal problems like racism, classism, etc. are less likely to be addressed because doing so requires strong partnership from both parties. In essence—equity is compromised when schools and their surrounding communities are unable to come together and work collaboratively.

On a school-wide level, lack of trust and relationships is a barrier to equity due to inequities in teacher-administrator and teacher-teacher relationships. This point can be illustrated by a group discussion that occurred in Meeting 6: Action Planning for Equity Continued in which participants discussed how there is a "power and privilege kind of struggle" in which

teachers and administrators seek fairness within the school system, but are keenly aware that some have access to power while others do not. Dom discussed how decisions are often made within the school without gathering pertinent facts from various stakeholders including special education teachers, related arts teachers, and counselors. He attributed this to a lack of perspective. "Administrators are not in the trenches. The decisions do not affect them. I don't think they have to see [things] from the viewpoints that we have to see things through." These internal struggles among staff members serve as distractions that may impede their ability to address and reduce inequities that students and their families face as members of the school community. These distractions—which are points of contention viewed as inequitable from the perspective of teachers—were rarely considered from students' and families' perspectives. Focusing inward on problems does little to eradiate inequities that permeate the underlying structure of the school system. In other words, teachers and administrators were unable to acknowledge that giving time and attention to peer-to-peer squabbles may have impacted their abilities to focus on school-wide inequities for students and families.

**Understanding and Application Theme 4: Participants demonstrated collective problem solving abilities to generate potential solutions to previously identified barriers and considered additional resources to address inequities.**

**Generating potential solutions.** While participants discussed barriers to equity most often throughout the study (146 times), they generated eight suggestions to address and reduce these barriers. They agreed that some inequities in the school may be addressed by focusing their efforts on improving school-wide communication and school-community relationships. It is important to note that communication and relationships are inextricably linked. Open and healthy

communication is critical to developing strong relationships. Participants also generated additional resources that would be needed to address inequities in the school.

*Communication solutions.* Participants agreed that while they may not be able to address all barriers to equity, they may be able to influence school-wide communication to enhance access and opportunity for students and their families. For example, to address the barrier of the wordy, text-heavy behavior expectations in the school for students, participants suggested that the language should be revised to be as "kid friendly" as possible. Additionally, they suggested that the school could work with local daycares to use the same behavioral expectation language in their centers. This way, students and families would come into school already knowing the general language of the expectations. To illustrate this point, Megan stated, "We know that daycares can have PBS. Do they have any programs to start teaching behaviors and coding…like, how to act in one place versus another (Meeting 4)?" It is important to note that neither Megan nor other EC members questioned the equitable nature of the PBS program itself or the reality that not all students have the privilege to attend daycare/pre-school. Her suggestion to have programs teach behaviors for students to "act in one place versus another" intimates that there is a gold standard of behavior which may or may not be equitable or suitable for all learners.

In the Action Planning for Equity Meetings 5 and 6, participants generated several suggestions for how to enhance equity in the school's communication procedures. A few of these suggestions would require a partnership with the school's technology department. First, they agreed that the school as a whole should use jargon-free language as much as possible—as this jargon was identified as a barrier to equitable access to the behavior program. The group acknowledged that complex initiatives like RtII, PBS, and MAP need clear explanations to

maintain transparency. Therefore, they recommended that a glossary of all school initiatives be written and housed on the school's Website—with hard copies of the glossary available in the main office. Ali likened this approach to those of credit card companies when she said:

> A few years ago, they had to revamp the legal jargon on the back of their statements to make it plain English, so people could understand. That's how we need to look at it. I think, yeah, it's almost like having a standing glossary on the Website to go look up what MAP stands for (Meeting 5).

Second, participants suggested that the technology department should utilize different terminology to create a more welcoming, inclusive online space to address the barrier of non-inclusive or vague language. For example, on the Website, instead of using the terms *parent* or *guardian*, they suggested to use the term *family*. They also recommended that the principal make a welcome call using the school's automated system to all incoming Kindergarten students and all students who enroll during the school year.

Third—to address the barrier of limited community resources available to families on the school Website—participants suggested that the site should include more up-to-date links for family services including mental health, food, special education, and the like. While there were links for student services such as counseling, Chapter 15 and 504, special education, and Title I, there were no other family resources provided. Participants recommended that the staff should continue to engage in community-mapping to build a list of family resources that could be included on the school's Website.

Fourth and finally, Megan explained that to address communication problems in general, students, teachers, and families must actually communicate. In reference to miscommunications

between teachers and families, she said, "Sometimes it's just asking. Just asking the question[s]" (Meeting 5).

*Relationship-building solutions.* The overall consensus of participants throughout the study was that the school needs to do a better job facilitating authentic opportunities for meaningful school-community interactions. They felt that doing so would strengthen community ties, build relationships, and enable staff to interact directly with more families. Ali challenged the group to consider the reasons *why* families attend some school events over others (e.g., Halloween parade-higher attendance vs. parent/teacher conferences and parent seminars-lower attendance). She said, "[Families] may have to take a day without pay to come to some of those things. If you have to make tough choices, you're going to choose the thing that's going to make your kid the happiest" (Meeting 2). Here, Ali was stressing the point that children may not be as pleased with their families for attending a school academic conference as they would be if they attended a fun school event (e.g., Halloween parade, picnic, etc.). However, the hidden curriculum of the *school* may be that conferences are valued more by teachers than those other participatory family events.

Understanding that families are short on time to devote to school-related functions, Ali suggested that informational parent seminars could perhaps be held asynchronously. In other words, informational sessions could be held online at the convenience of families. She cautioned that it is important to make personal connections with families prior to inviting them to these types of school-sponsored events. She said:

> Getting this information is personal. It's almost like things need to be invitational, like a personal invitation to a family that you're trying to connect with, to bring them into something, whatever it is…It's like building the plane as you fly it, but you can take your

best guess, take your best shot at trying to get that information but really, it's about those interpersonal relationships (Meeting 2).

Second, participants suggested that to build strong relationships with students and their families, staff need to leave the confines of the school building. Ali summed up staff presence in the community by saying, "Yeah, I keep thinking of feet on the ground out there" (Meeting 5). The group suggested that teachers could get involved in the community more visibly by collaborating with local businesses, sharing the school's behavior program with them, and soliciting donations to use as school-wide incentives. They added that they could host a teacher ice cream scoop night at a local shop to improve community relationships. Megan commented, "If we're out and visible, we might be seen in a different light. Maybe that would bring people [into the school]. If we didn't seem so scary… Sometimes I think [teachers] seem scary." Megan focused mainly on how the community perceived teachers and did not mention what teachers can learn from the community. Kelley added that scooping the ice cream could also benefit the PBS program because the school would receive a small percentage of the sales. She added that a small group could begin this tradition and then over time, invite more staff members to participate—"which in turn, is still making a connection."

They also recommended that staff collaborate with local charitable organizations like Rotary International or the Lion's Club to donate welcome bags for all new students in the school that would include a letter of welcome, a list of school and community resources, and a book from the school. Ali, the school librarian, said, "I would love to deliver the bags" and proceeded to explain how doing so would be a great segue into talking to families about the resources available in the school library and opening a dialogue about the child's favorite types

of books. The group also suggested that students involved in student council could get involved with bag dispersal as a way of getting to know their new classmates.

Third, participants recommended that to increase family involvement in school, adjustments must be made to current school-wide procedures. Changes in these procedures could help bridge gaps in community-school relationships, forge stronger bonds between students, families, and staff, and address weaknesses in current practices. They suggested that the pot of money collected from teachers' weekly dress down days could be utilized to defray the cost of clearances. Although clearances are currently free for school volunteers, the participants were unaware of this fact at the time of the study. Furthermore, they recommended that families be invited into the PBS meetings, share their thoughts about the current program, and serve as parent liaisons.

Fourth, to address the barrier of not being familiar with the whole child due to curricular or work load pressures, the group discussed how the school can change its communication procedures in ways that could increase student and teacher knowledge about learners and their families. They suggested that the staff could designate one bulletin board in the school lobby to feature one family each week. They recommended that this family could bring items or pictures to include on the bulletin board and speak on the morning television announcements to talk about themselves. Also, the group suggested that the child(ren) from this family could be given special in-class tasks to share their unique family stories with the school. These tasks could include emailed interview questions for family members or a special letter sent home acknowledging that a student's family has been selected as family of the week.

Finally, they suggested that school-wide events in general be more inclusive of families. Dom shared a recent example of a grade level picnic he had with third graders and their families

at a local park to illustrate an alternative to status quo school-family engagement (i.e., families invited into the school and expected to adhere to school rules). Dom thought this was a more authentic, relationship-building opportunity compared to other typical school events such as Field Day. He said:

> Too often policy restricts parents from coming *into* schools, and often the ones that do are the homemakers that can afford to not work. Additionally, when there are events in school to recognize students for their achievements, it is for their participation in outside clubs and activities that not all students can take part in. So I suggested getting out into the community and using [community] resources to celebrate kids for who they are and to include parents without the stereotypical barriers that prevent many from stepping foot into schools. Since this was a free event, no one should have felt restricted. There were many games and activities for *all* students to participate in, and the large turnout rate of parents from all backgrounds spoke volumes as compared to the times we have events on campus (Online Activity 2).

Dom spoke more about this experience and how it differed from other current school-wide family engagement opportunities. He said that the park experience differed from typical school events because it did not prevent families from being active participants in their children's activities (Exit Interview).

This comment further conveys the idea that some school-wide procedures—although well intentioned—may have adverse effects on families. Continued collaboration and communication with families will be necessary to strengthen future community-school relationships.

**Additional resources to address inequities.** In addition to previously identified community resources to help reduce school-wide inequities like Rotary International or the

Lion's Club, participants also identified three additional resources--support from administration, time to collaborate with the technology department, and the opportunity to visit families personally—that they thought they would need to enact their plans to improve school-wide communication and enhance school-community relationships.

Participants were adamant that they received administrative support and permission for the utilization of these resources. They also were insistent that equity take more of a central role in school-wide decision-making. Participants stated multiple times throughout the study that equity needs to be more central to the school's decision-making practices. They suggested that embedding equity into all school-wide decision-making would be critical. It is important to note that participants were able to acknowledge, albeit infrequently, that building EL throughout the school would require more than small shifts in individuals' thinking. Rather, their insistence that equity should permeate all aspects of school functioning indicated that they understood the impact of integrating equity concepts into larger patterns of policy and practice.

The group stated that they would need additional time to be able to work with the technology department to change some language on the Website, add glossaries and resources for school-wide programming, and make communication more transparent and accessible for families. With a clear, administratively championed mandate for equity, time may be allotted for this type of professional development.

Participants also proposed using teacher professional development time (e.g., 8:00-8:40 a.m. on Wednesdays or 3:15-5:30 p.m. after-school sessions) to go out into the community, solicit business donations, meet families, and disperse welcome bags to new families. Ali said, "It's going to take us leaving this school and going out. It's going to take somebody saying, 'I will do this. I will visit three places today.'"

**Research Question 2:** Upon completion of the EC, how efficacious did teachers feel about leading equity initiatives in the school?

**Efficacy Theme 1: Participants' efficaciousness for leading equity initiatives was primarily related to perceptions of others' receptivity.**

During Exit Interviews, I asked participants questions about their confidence leading equity work with colleagues outside the EC in the future. They responded that they would feel efficacious—but only under certain conditions. In general, the group reported various circumstances under which they would feel most efficacious. These circumstances included a) working with familiar, trusted colleagues, b) collaborating in small groups with colleagues who possessed differing understandings of EL c) addressing equity with colleagues who would not be comfortable and willing to engage in dialogue and d) administrators supporting EL by prioritizing equity throughout the school and becoming actively involved in the process of embedding EL principles into school-wide policies and practices.

First, all participants reported that their overall general efficacy increased throughout the course of the EC, but that this efficacy was related to pre-established, trusted relationships with colleagues. In other words, participants were more likely to engage in equity-related conversations and confront inequities if they had strong relationships with their fellow teachers. However, in the absence of that trust, participants were less secure in their willingness to engage in dialogue because they were concerned with a) their tone or b) their approach—so as not to offend or provoke a less familiar colleague.

Second, one participant felt more efficacious toward future equity work with colleagues if work would be completed collaboratively in small groups and if colleagues already possessed foundational understandings of EL concepts. Dom expressed that he did not feel ready to lead the

entire faculty in equity discussions. Rather, he explained that the best way to spread the message of equity would be to start in small teacher teams and then branch out into larger, mainstream teacher groups like faculty meetings. He said, "You kind of have to carry that torch with you. It's one thing to do it in my classroom, but it's another to maybe challenge others to think about the decisions that they make and try to influence them too" (Exit Interview). In other words, Dom felt more efficacious working with small groups where trust was already established but less efficacious working to achieve equity with unfamiliar colleagues who lacked a foundation in equity concepts. He illustrated this point by saying, "If I'm with a group of people that already have an understanding of what equity truly means, I can absolutely carry on that conversation, and spread that word."

Third, when Megan was able to recognize deficit thinking in a colleague, she felt more efficacious to intervene. This contrasts with Dom's sense of efficaciousness stated above. While Dom expressed that he would feel efficacious engaging in equity work with colleagues who already possessed foundational understandings of EL concepts, Megan felt more efficacious when she noticed colleagues utilizing a deficit perspective. For example, Megan admitted that she would be more likely to step in if she witnessed a conversation between colleagues that reflected a deficit view of students and/or families. She said, "My brain is thinking way more often than it used to." She also said that she is more likely to engage colleagues in dialogue to encourage them to view a situation from multiple perspectives. She said she may say something like, "Did you think about it this way?"

Third, participants expressed their perceived future efficaciousness when addressing issues of inequity if doing so a) did not cause anyone discomfort and if b) colleagues willingly demonstrated readiness for equity discourse.

**Concern about discomfort.** In her Exit Interview, Megan commented that, "You just want to make them think. Not necessarily say [things] in a mean way—just maybe make them think about a different perspective...so you're not coming off as aggressive because that's not going to do anybody any good." Kelley also subscribed to this concern by questioning, "How far do you go? How much do you say? How uncomfortable do you make people?"

Ali's response to discomfort differs from those of other group members. In contrast, Ali did not explain that she was concerned about others' comfort when advocating for equity. Rather, she acknowledged that although she may personally feel uncomfortable, she must forge on anyway because it is the right thing to do. In her Exit Interview, Ali—while acknowledging her personal discomfort—admitted that she felt more efficacious being "strategic and a little bit subversive" when interacting and sharing equity ideas with colleagues and that her comfort levels doing so had increased as a result of her participation in the EC. She explained that prior to the study, she had felt like an "outlier" within the school because she thought that she was the only person grappling with ways to challenge and address school-wide inequities. She said that her personal involvement in the group was like a "call to arms." Ali reflected that as an adult with power in the organization who at one time felt like an isolated outlier, she can not imagine how some students must feel. Ali then suggested that perhaps the checklist for Engaged Feedback found in the *Daring Greatly* text may be a good resource for discussing equity in small group teacher meetings. Ali said that "talking about resolving the challenges [presented in this checklist] will lead to growth and opportunity" and could potentially play a key role in future conversations with staff (Meeting 6). In other words, problem-solving through small-group collaboration may become a springboard for discussion and action on ways to increase efficacy addressing inequities regarding school policies and practices.

**Concern about readiness and receptivity.** EC participants did not feel strong collective efficacy in regard to *staff* receptivity. In the Group Debrief, participants expressed a concern that "others aren't ready to hear" about student disparities. Dom argued that the EC can talk at great lengths about differing topics related to equity, but he felt that the general staff population could not. In her Exit Interview, Kelley also wondered how to "get to the people who are really not willing yet to see." She added, "you have to be able to see that you are a part of the problem." In other words, the group felt limited collective efficacy about the execution of their school-wide action plan because they had concerns about staff readiness to hear and/or acknowledge that disparities exist. It is notable that Kelley acknowledged the importance of recognizing complicity in perpetuating inequities when related to her colleagues' understandings of EL yet she did not mention in this instance that she personally could be complicit as well.

Similar to their concerns regarding administrative presentation, all members of the CoP also struggled with deciding the best way to present their action plan to a staff that they perceived—for the most part—to be either resistant to or overwhelmed by an impending equity initiative. In his Exit Interview, Dom illustrated this point when he expressed that the EC should take staff beliefs, feelings, anxiety levels, etc. into consideration before bringing them into barrier-reducing equity conversations. "Throwing anything new at them (i.e., staff members)—anyone that already has their guard up just a little bit—is now truly going to put their guard up. I don't think they're going to be fully invested the way they need to be invested."

To help increase their collective efficacy and build readiness for staff members, Kelley mentioned in her Exit Interview that she was concerned about how to engage more people outside the EC in equity work in the next school-year. She said, "We have to get other people at our table, or else we're going to fall as something that was just another initiative that came and

went." In the Group Debrief, Megan, too, expressed a similar concern. She suggested that the antidote would be to embed examinations of equity into every facet of the school environment. That way, the work of the EC could spread organically and not appear to be an add-on initiative. She said that to enable this embedding process, EC members could facilitate discussions with sub-groups of teachers during team meetings. She said, "We need to be comfortable with ourselves. We need to stand up at every faculty meeting and say something" whether it be to share data, articles, or authentic classroom experiences that would further school-wide understandings about equity. Though the group nodded in agreement with Megan, when I asked what *specific* aspects or topics about equity they would feel most comfortable discussing with colleagues outside the EC, there was silence for approximately one minute suggesting that participants were not fluent enough in their EL knowledge to generate ideas with fluency. Kelley suggested that the group could discuss special education issues and Megan said the staff may be able to tackle gender inequities. When I probed, "What is it about gender inequities that makes you feel more confident to address them?" Megan could not answer with specificity, but said that she felt the staff could address gender inequities. These general statements made at the conclusion of the study during the Group Debrief and Exit Interviews—though well-intentioned—highlighted that participants may not have been as ready as they thought they were to facilitate equity dialogue with other staff members as they originally thought. Their responses lacked fluency, detail, and direction and indicated that they were not yet prepared to lead staff in equity work.

Fourth and finally, participants expressed that their efficaciousness addressing inequities in the school would be aided by administrators who played an active role in embedding EL principles into school policy and practice. When asked what would help to improve the

receptivity of *leadership* to support school-wide equity initiatives, Ali said that the administrators should be included in the problem-solving process. She admitted that the EC's impact on the larger staff community would be improved by authentic support from administrators who had been engaged in equity work themselves. Ali added that experience grappling with equity issues on an ongoing basis would help school leaders to be "more intentional and less fearful of examining issues of equity." She acknowledged in her Exit Interview, however, that "the higher up the power structure you go, the harder it is" because "there's more at risk, there's more at stake, there are more stakeholders to answer to."

Ali also issued a word of caution regarding how administrators present equity initiatives to staff. She explained that if equity measures are presented as "a squeezed in, add-on thing," then there would not be adequate support from the staff—thus impacting the perceived collective efficacy of the EC. In other words, if administration provided limited time for professional development training with expectations for full implementation, and without making connections between how equity work could improve and inform other initiatives in the school, it would be off-putting to teachers who may view this approach as disjointed and one more thing to pack into their already busy days. This sentiment was also echoed by other EC members throughout the Group Debrief.

I asked the EC members if they would continue to expand their equity work in the *absence* of supportive administrators who listened to their recommendations and worked with them to reduce school-wide barriers to equity. Interestingly, despite the importance of administrative support, EC members stated that they were still inclined to forge onward despite their perceived lack of support:

Interviewer: Do you still carry on?

Megan: Yes, you do.

Dom: I think we have.

Kelley: Isn't that what we're doing? (group laughter) (Group Debrief)

Overall, the EC's efficaciousness to extend their work and serve as teacher leaders facilitating groups of other colleagues depended on whether or not a) trust among colleagues was established, b) there are opportunities to work in small, collaborative groups with colleagues who have differing EL understandings and intervene when colleagues demonstrate deficit thinking, d) colleagues are not experiencing discomfort and are ready to tackle equity issues, and e) administrators prioritize equity and embed EL principles into everyday policies and practices. Members of the EC were willing to lead small groups, present at faculty meetings, and serve as teacher-leaders surrounding equity concepts but when questioned specifically about what topics the group as a whole felt comfortable enough to facilitate, their answers were vague. While the role that the EC will have in the school after the study ends has yet to be determined, Kelley explained a linear flow of the EC in this manner. "First it's us (i.e., the EC), then them (i.e., the staff), and then this outside community." Kelley was expressing that in order to improve the collective efficaciousness of the EC, members would have to become proficient in EL concepts themselves in order to spread concepts to staff and community members effectively. The lack of specificity in participants' general responses suggests that the "first it's us" step needs more development before the group feels efficacious enough to expand their work school- and community-wide.

**Research Question 3:** What processes of the Equity Council promoted Equity Literacy development?

**Process Theme 1: The small-group, long-term structure of the EC promoted trust and honest sharing of ideas.**

Participants agreed that the small group structure of the EC allowed them to discuss issues related to equity freely. In his Exit Interview, Dom said he liked the fact that in a small group, "everybody participates. There's no hiding in the background." He said that because the EC was small, he felt like he could discuss equity in a "normal, conversational sort of way" while challenging other members of the group and "feeling comfortable enough to do that." He went on to explain that the comfort and honesty established within the group was a critical part of enabling these conversations to occur. In Meeting 6: Action Planning for Equity Continued, Kelley commented that the large groups of teachers who comprise other committees within the school—in contrast to the small-group structure of the EC—are difficult to navigate because so many voices contribute to the conversation that meetings can become unwieldy at times. She said, "Sometimes when there are so many people, you just go round and round and round." Megan agreed and said that everyone has good intentions but, "It's almost too many [people] at times."

Throughout the course of the study, participants expressed that engaging in the EC process with the purpose of reducing inequities within a school is a long-term process and "can't be just a once and done thing." In order for the EC to work efficiently, it takes time for people to learn "a lot about themselves." Participants discussed key features to EC success related to time and space. They were, a) an hour or more of uninterrupted, non-teaching time and b) a quiet room for discussion to take place. In her Exit Interview, Ali and I were discussing the space and

freedom that the EC provided. She said that if you do not have the space to ask questions, you do not know where your allies lie. In other words, Ali understood that the EC was a safe place to discuss inequities and how to address them. She also knew that the members of the EC had personally committed themselves to being threats to injustice within the school. Therefore, she had identified a key group of supportive people who would be willing to stand beside her to create a more equitable learning environment for all. She explained this phenomena when she said, "I feel more empowered knowing there are allies in the school—colleagues I can check in with, tough base with—who have been through the same experience and [who] see things similarly—speak the same language in a sense." Ali spoke of the value of this trusted group of colleagues:

> The things that we have never talked about may continue to never be talked about, but [without an EC] you may never be able to pinpoint those key people that could totally reframe and structure the conversation…. It has to be done strategically, so you have to find those allies and send those ripples out…develop that momentum…You give people the opportunity to *show* that they're an ally. If we don't talk about it, we don't really know who is thinking about these things. We don't know where anybody's at with it. You have to find a way to make these conversations sacred and central to the functioning of a school in particular to best meet the needs of our students and remove barriers" (Exit Interview).

**Process Theme 2: Through participants' sharing of personal stories and experiences, members of the EC enhanced their abilities to view and solve problems from different perspectives.**

Participants discussed the powerful impact of sharing developing perspectives within the EC—often using storytelling to highlight key points related to equity. These stories enabled group members to hear about personal experiences and perspectives and how situations were approached. In a sense, this storytelling helped to make participants' thought processes regarding EL concepts more concrete. For example, in Online Activity 2: Exploring Ideologies, Megan was reflecting about her current ideological perspectives about students and families. She had recently viewed Gorski's ideology video and was applying her learning to an authentic classroom situation. In her reflection, Megan stated that since watching the video, she now "catches" herself during moments of deficit thinking and makes a concerted effort to think differently. She told the story of a student in her classroom who was having trouble completing his homework in a timely fashion. She explained that her initial reaction was to think that the child's parents must not care about his schooling—or else they would reinforce the importance of homework completion. She explained that she was able to recognize that this was a moment of deficit thinking and she made a conscious effort to look at the structural elements affecting the child. Megan explained that the child's family was going through some tough times. She then explained that she was able to re-frame her thinking and instead discover ways that she could offer this student support. Through storytelling, Megan verbalized her reflections and in doing so, brought them into sharper focus. She demonstrated the ability to disrupt her deficit thinking in ways that shaped her perspectives about a particular student and will hopefully enable better problem-solving strategies in the future.

Similarly, during the Group Debrief, Ali told a story to highlight inequitable treatment as she witnessed Colleague A speaking negatively about Colleague B—who happened to be a person of color. Colleague A spoke disparagingly about Colleague B's children's low balances

on their lunch accounts, habit of borrowing money for juice in the cafeteria, and repayment of borrowed funds three days later. Ali told the EC that she herself often forgets to put money in her own child's lunch account because she is waiting for payday or because she has forgotten. Ali then reflected that because she does not feel like an outsider in the school, she had the political capital to challenge Colleague A and say, "I've done that. I've owed the cafeteria money because I get down there and don't have my wallet with me and then I, too, may forget for three days to pay." Ali said, "I don't want my friend [Colleague A] to think I'm calling her a racist or a classist or whatever, but I want to ask the question 'Is there a different standard applied to me?' Nobody talks about *me* like that." This anecdote additionally prompted EC participants to consider that perhaps incidents of bias and inequitable treatment of staff occurred more often than they originally suspected.

By sharing this story, Ali a) identified an inequitable situation, b) applied her individual efficacy to confront and disrupt the inequity, and c) provided other EC members with an example and rationale for how and why she addressed the inequity in the first place. The fact that the EC was surprised that this exchange occurred within school walls is further evidence that they, too, need to continue to develop their skills to see, hear, and act upon the inequities that affect students, families and staff daily.

Ali also commented that the act of sharing contrasting viewpoints may help others in the group understand more about tackling inequities within the school. She said:

> You can read an article or watch a video or even look at data on your own in isolation—but without all of these divergent perspectives coming together to question it and think about it and share experiences and points of view—it doesn't have a life… It kind of expands each of our understanding of different teachers' and

> children's experiences in our school—because we all have our own areas. We have our experiences there, but they're not shared experiences. So being able to come together and share them is powerful (Exit Interview).

In response to Ali, Dom reinforced the message of Process Theme 2's importance of sharing stories to aid in perspective-taking when he said that it was the comfort and honesty established within the group itself that allowed these stories to be shared in the first place. In her Exit Interview Ali agreed with this sentiment and said that having multiple perspectives is always better because it gives her a "richer view of things." She valued hearing Kelley's special education perspective, Dom's hybrid academic coordinator and classroom teacher perspectives, and Megan's multiple perspectives as a community member, parent of a student within the school, and regular classroom teacher. She stated that these viewpoints always make her realize things that she had not been thinking about.

Ali then described that the function of sharing anecdotes within the EC was "about developing the language and analogies and the stories you can use in powerful moments when talking to other people in team meetings and other settings." Thus, stories became a tool for not only developing one's individual awareness and perspective-taking abilities but also for crafting language to challenge others to understand equity concepts. Ali, who is the school librarian, suggested that Brene Brown's book *Daring Greatly* may provide additional guidance for helping others find the words to understand one another's stories. A main question featured in the text asks readers to question, "What is the story I'm telling myself?" regarding a situation that is occurring. In the context of student and/or staff behavior within the school, Kelley—responding to the question that Ali raised—said that many times, people make up stories in their imaginations rather than relying on what is really occurring. She said that in asking that question

to herself, she may pause long enough to say, "I'm telling myself they're doing this [unwanted behavior] to give me a hard time—to get attention." She realized that in taking the time to ask – and answer—the question about the "story" she was conjuring in her head, she was able to move beyond rash judgment, impulsiveness, and assumption. Megan also made a similar comment related to the stories teachers often tell themselves when she said, "Maybe you assume that something is going on. When in reality it's not…and you create this whole thing in your brain. It's really not, if you would just ask. It ends up really not being anything at all" (Meeting 5).

Megan stated that because Ali had deeper understandings about equity at the onset of the study, that through the meetings and activities of the EC, she learned more about equity as well (Group Debrief). In other words, a more knowledgeable member of the group helped less knowledgeable members confront equity concepts. Dom echoed this sentiment in his Exit Interview when he said "I would not have had this experience [exploring equity] if it weren't for working with everybody." Yet the member with the most experience engaging in equity work, Ali, also learned important information as well—mainly, what others in the group *did not* know. Therefore, this increased her awareness that there is still much more work to do. She verbalized that she has committed herself to finding ways to engage her colleagues through both questioning and listening to advance the cause of equity in the school.

**Process Theme 3: Participants preferred the face-to-face method of communication during the EC over written and/or online methods.**

Participants favored the face-to-face meeting format for the EC due to personal preferences, the ability to hear multiple perspectives and have authentic in-the-moment conversations about them, and access to nuanced and nonverbal cues that may be missed in asynchronous interactions. However, when expanding the work of the EC, it may be useful to

offer other modes of communication so that others who may not enjoy face-to-face meetings can feel comfortable voicing their opinions in alternate formats (i.e., email, surveys, anonymous letters, etc.).

Participants shared their ideas regarding equity with one another and with me using verbal (F2F meetings, interviews) and written (online collaborative responses, individual online responses) methods. The EC members reported that they preferred interacting with one another in face-to-face meetings. Dom said, "It's a preference thing, honestly. Personally me, I love the interaction. Live interaction" (Group Debrief).

Ali again shared a story to illustrate the point of nuances that would be missed if authentic equity conversations were held solely in online, asynchronous environments. She relayed an anecdote about an exchange between herself and a parent/cafeteria worker. As Ali re-told this story, she mimicked the parent's body language and tone of voice. These nuances—that ultimately shaped the impact and import of the anecdote—would have likely gone unnoticed if similar communication had occurred over email or another asynchronous online method.

Had all participants not been in the room to witness the exchange, the nuances of what the mother was *not* saying—as indicated by Ali's gesticulations—would not have conveyed the same message. Ali said, "The crux of this is relationship-building too. If you're going to have these difficult conversations and ask hard questions about who we are together and individually, then you have to do a lot of that work face-to-face." Although Ali appeared to favor face-to-face communication, she also acknowledged the "lightening bolt moments" that occurred through online written reflections.

Conversely, when thinking about expanding and continuing the work of the EC to engage more people in discussions surrounding equity, Dom championed the use of multiple formats

when soliciting others' viewpoints. He said that it is important to utilize transparent and varied means of communication. He said some people will feel more comfortable sharing their ideas via email rather than F2F. Others will feel more comfortable verbalizing their ideas aloud in a group.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss how principles of equity literacy, self-efficacy, and professional development can inform the content, design, and future implementation of Equity Councils. For each topic, I will explain implications for practice. Finally, limitations of the study and recommendations for further research will be considered.

### Equity Literacy

In this section, I will tie Gorski and Swalwell's (2015) principles of EL and Gorski's (2016b) four primary abilities necessary to teach EL to my findings. I will discuss how the EC participants understood barriers to equity both individually and collectively. Then, I will explain how participants utilized their emergent EL understandings to problem-solve ways to improve communication within their school and community. Finally, I will comment upon the depth of participants' EL knowledge and discuss the importance of stopping deficit thinking in teaching practice.

In addition to Gorski and Swalwell (2015)'s principles of equity literacy (EL) acting as guideposts for individual educators teaching curricula in schools, they have great utility to inform the direction and effectiveness of ECs. Principle 1 states that EL is important to teach in every curricular area, and Principle 2 states that using a multi-disciplinary, integrative approach is the most effective means of developing EL. Principle 3 expresses that all students regardless of their age are ready to begin learning EL, and Principle 4 states that all students can benefit from possessing EL. Finally, Principle 5 asserts that is just as political to teach EL as it is *not* to teach it.

Additionally, Gorski's (2016b) four key primary abilities essential for ensuring that equity is central to teachers' discussion and decision-making can also be used as a framework for

structuring, understanding, and evaluating ECs. These include: *recognizing* inequities, *responding to* inequities by challenging them in the short-term, *redressing* inequities by uncovering the hidden curriculum within the institution and in the long-term, and *sustaining* equity efforts into the future even when facing resistance. I will now describe how these principles and key facets of the EL framework surfaced (or did not surface) throughout the study and how they informed participants' beliefs and knowledge about equity.

**Emerging understandings of equity.** Statements made by EC members throughout the study alluded to emergent yet incomplete understandings about EL. It is important to note that acquiring and applying EL language is both a product and a process within the group. While some group members may have understood general EL concepts, they may have been unable to utilize specific EL terminology just yet. Therefore, within the context of an EC, it's critical to have a shared language to build a repertoire of knowledge. Equity Council meetings provided a forum to develop, practice, and apply EL language that was relative to members' emergent understandings. For example, when Kelley utilized the "children standing on boxes to see over the fence" graphic to explain her budding understandings of the general concept of equity during her Exit Interview, she explained that it helped clarify her understandings about what equity is—evidence that she was beginning to conceptualize the meaning of the term after admittedly struggling with the terminology after watching Gorksi's ideology video. However, deeper understandings about the structural nature of advocating for equity would have led to her acknowledgement that the children's heights were not the problem (or the number of boxes given to them to allow them to see over the fence), but rather the fence itself (i.e., a literal structural barrier) that was barring everyone from equitable access to the baseball field. This indicates that Kelley was not yet able to *recognize* the barrier—even in a metaphorical sense. Gorski (2016a,

2016b) wrote that educators often focus their work on trying to "fix" perceived obstacles to academic or behavioral student achievement utilizing a deficit perspective (i.e., trying to "fix" parenting, children's work ethic, etc.) when those efforts may be more impactful if they focused on removing barriers that impede student achievement in those academic and behavioral realms like access to healthcare, nutritious food, or reliable transportation. Applying the deficit perspective to this graphic, inadequacies regarding the children's heights were "fixed" by providing them with boxes to see over the physical obstacle. Applying the structural perspective to this phenomena, the inadequacy would have been recognized as the fence—*not* the children's height differences—and measures would have been taken to remove it or re-design it to allow for access for all. This would afford *all* children—regardless of height—a clear view of the playing field. Gorski (2016b) wrote that "how we frame the problem drives what we are capable of imagining as solutions" (p. 225). Kelley's inability—at this time and in this instance—to recognize the barrier from the structural perspective limited her possibilities for generating creative solutions and serving as a true threat to inequity.

Participants were also unable to notice other barriers to equity. There seemed to be a general unawareness amongst most participants that students within the school could be experiencing ramifications of systemic oppressions. For example, Megan watering down the term racism to something 'more relevant' or Dom questioning the developmental appropriateness level of curricula without acknowledging that students may be experiencing racism, sexism, etc. at every grade level during Meeting 3. This serves as further evidence that certain barriers to equity were not yet *recognized* within the school. As Posner (1995) warned, this general unawareness of the lived experiences of students may increase the likelihood that teachers will inadvertently perpetuate inequities that continue to marginalize students. This also

suggests that participants were not following Gorski's suggested principles for fostering EL in the classroom. Principles 1-4 would have helped them address power and privilege and the ways these forces manifest themselves across the curricula with *all* students—regardless of age or background. Furthermore, Principle 5 would have helped teachers acknowledge the very political act of teaching EL principles to learners. While most participants were concerned that using the term "racism" was too political for young learners, Gorski (2016b) would argue that *not* using the term was just as political. In following these five principles, they would bolster their critical awareness and support learners in a shared effort to uproot systemic and pervasive injustices within the school and surrounding community.

**Individual understanding of barriers.** There were, however, some indicators that suggested participants made progress in their EL development that *did* demonstrate an awareness and partial understanding of some barriers to student achievement in school. For example, on an individual level, Megan made the statement that her involvement in the EC brought about a "heightened awareness" regarding the family situation of a student going through tough times and who was not completing his homework. This showcased Megan's willingness to view a barrier to student success and consider it from an equity-based perspective. For example, she made a statement that she is now able to catch herself in moments of deficit thinking. In other words, she was able to recognize her thoughts as emerging from the deficit perspective and now, she tries to "think in a different way." This shows that she is beginning to *recognize* her own bias and past actions that may have made a tough situation even worse for the student. Furthermore, she implied that she will now make a concerted effort to alter her practice by *responding* in the short-term by changing her practice to as not to contribute to the child's hardships; Gorski, 2016b). Megan, therefore, was attuned to Derman-Sparks' (1989) call to "actively intervene, to

challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviors that perpetuate oppression" (p. 3). However, her vague statements indicated that her ability to articulate the depths of her understanding of the situation (at this point in time) were limited. Since EL concepts were rather new to her, it is highly possible that, she was still in the process of integrating newly learned information into her beliefs about teaching and everyday practices and was not yet ready to verbally clarify her emergent understandings.

**Collective understanding of barriers**. Collectively, participants were quite adept at naming barriers to equity with procedural shortcomings like lack of clear communication, school safety policy, transportation, prioritization of equity, and other procedural shortcomings. Scarcity of resources, curricula and workload pressures, and lack of trust and relationships were also identified as barriers to equity. Gorski (2016b) asserted that recognizing and naming barriers to equity with specificity is an important step in the EL process because the ways in which problems are defined impact the trajectory and methodology of the problem-solving steps necessary to remove them. This is a step toward responding to and redressing barriers in sustainable ways. Gorski (2016a) added that even though some identified barriers may be beyond the scope of what teachers can realistically address within the school day, their awareness of these barriers can help them create policies and practices that do not exacerbate their effects or make them even more cumbersome for learners. Participants in this study realized they would not be able to make changes to impact every identified barrier, but that they *could* attempt to make changes within their spheres of influence (Gorski, 2013; 2016a, Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). This is one indicator of EL growth. Yet, when applying the critical question, "Who is this serving?" when considering their solutions to reducing these barriers—a key question when

framing problem-solving related to equity work (see Gorksi, 2016b)—a different picture emerged.

**Building relationships.** While participants may have been able to identify several key barriers to equity in the school, their suggested approaches to *respond* and *redress* these inequities related to building relationships again reflected incomplete EL understandings—often grounded in the deficit mindset. For example, when participants chose to focus on improving school-wide communication and relationships as part of their action plan, the solutions they devised to improve communication were more focused on serving teacher/school needs rather than student needs. In doing so, the focus of the work shifted from progress toward equity like dismantling oppressive systems to preserving the status quo. In other words, they focused on preserving current systems by supporting school initiatives while failing to grapple with how to recognize, respond to, and redress the potential inequities embedded within them. According to Gorski, (2016b), this can serve as a detour from the path to equity. Furthermore, this approach does not support the principles of EL or reflect the characteristics necessary to advocate for equity. This is because the ultimate aim—improving student achievement via practices grounded in EL—was peripherally and not centrally considered. Therefore, participants failed to ask critical questions that could help uncover the hidden curriculum within the school.

For example, their suggestions to improve student behavioral expectations did not include two-way communication with students or families. Rather, they focused on improving the students' abilities to understand behavioral guidelines set by the school by altering language on posters to make them more child-friendly. Another solution they devised for improving school-wide communication was to add a glossary of programs (e.g., RtII, PBS, MAP, etc.) to help families understand the specifics of school-wide initiatives. Both approaches showcased that the

EC's action plan to improve communication focused mainly on serving the needs of the teacher/school. While it is a good, equitable practice to make the language of the behavior program more accessible to learners—the discussion focused mainly on how best to deliver the school's expectations. There was no discussion about the equity of the behavioral program itself. Furthermore, while it may be helpful to explain the multitude of program acronyms on the school's Website, this is still serving the teacher's/school's interests and the conversation about these initiatives was one-sided—featuring only the school's message. The hidden message—or non-explicitly stated norms or values (Vang, 2006)—underlying this practice is that the school was, in essence, defining its practices with little room for dialogue or communication. Were this Website to go live, EC members may be operating under the assumption that they had created an action step that was "good" and "equitable" when, in fact, this practice may contribute to the continued marginalization of certain populations within the school. This illustrates the difference between being talked at versus talked with. Gorski and Swalwell (2015) recognize this as a common pitfall of many well-intentioned teachers and school-based justice efforts. It will take a more developed sense of EL to avoid these types of errors and do the necessary work to unmask inequities in school practices.

In a similar vein, EC participants' suggestions to improve relationships also served teacher/school objectives. Their idea to add community resources to the school Website—while helpful—did not specifically state how the school will help facilitate linking those resources to a) families who need them, b) those who do not have reliable transportation, or c) those who do not have Internet access. These barriers went unrecognized. Furthermore, their idea to ask families to create bulletin boards to feature themselves—while helpful for the school to be inclusive of diverse families—did not discuss the additional workload that this may place on marginalized

families, potential barriers for non-English speakers or undocumented family members, the potential unwillingness for some families to participate due to fear of others' perceptions, or the supply costs and time associated with the construction of the bulletin board.

Whether it related to being featured on a bulletin board or accessing needed community resources, the brunt of the work was projected onto family members. These teacher/school-focused approaches indicated that participants had not mastered central EL concepts of collaboration and engagement with the community. These approaches also masked inequities within extant school practices and therefore, the EC generated some potential solutions that could further marginalize students.

Members of the EC did, however, generate some creative ideas for active, authentic community engagement. An increasing body of school improvement research supports the importance of involving community stakeholders in systemic school improvement efforts (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Fullan, 2011; Tucker, 2011). Ali's suggestion to a) allow families to access information asynchronously (e.g., online and in a family resource center) so that they could review information at their leisure and b) make personal invitations to these learning experiences to bridge important gaps in community-school relationships were equity-focused. This idea may be flawed because not all families have Internet access. Other EC members promoted the ideas that teachers should a) leave the school buildings and be visible helping out in the community, b) utilize dress-down day funds to defray the cost of parent volunteer clearances—allowing for more family involvement in the school, and c) provide opportunities for authentic parent-child interactions during the school day (e.g., park picnic). While these suggestions hold promise for improving authentic family-school engagement, they may be flawed. For example, in regard to the ice cream scoop night, the event may promote

positive family-school relationships and provide opportunities for authentic interactions to occur in a fun, neutral, non-school context. Yet, interestingly, teachers also discussed an aim that this event could raise needed money for the school-wide behavioral program. This calls into question the teachers' motives for engaging in this community event. Was the purpose of the ice-cream scoop night building relationships or fundraising? Perhaps it was both. However, the EC did not grapple with these questions—or the unintended messages that different approaches may send out into the community—when they were action planning around this item.

Overall, as the EC engaged in dialogue and crafted action steps to improve communication and relationships within the school and community, there was little discussion about a) soliciting communication from marginalized families and asking them what would help them feel more included or b) ways that the school could make space for their voices to be heard (Gorksi, 2016b). Although their relationship-building ideas did hold promise for forging authentic bonds, there could be a payoff for teachers too (e.g., ice cream funds).

**Depth of discussions.** Finally, EC discussions were—generally speaking—surface-level and did not dig deeply into systemic oppression within the school in the way I originally intended based upon the resources provided during the EC like the Gorski video, handouts, or prompts. Rather, most participants seemed stuck on a) equity terminology and/or b) teacher-focused concerns like the appropriate developmental age to address topics like racism with learners or the receptivity of teachers to hearing about equity concerns.

This is in contrast to Ali who demonstrated a) fluency naming injustice, b) an ability to model short- term strategies to address it, and c) a willingness to be "political" by naming racism for what it was. For example, despite Ali's concerns that she articulated during personal reflection, she modeled equity language that could be utilized by staff as well as students—

regardless of grade level. During the EC discussion about the Holocaust, Ali highlighted aspects of Principle 1 (i.e., embedding EL into all curricula) and expressed that pointing out historical moments—during book discussions—can help learners process how things came to be the way they are. This also provided a framework for teachers to scaffold conversations about imbalances of power when structured from a historical standpoint that is inclusive of varied perspectives. She indicated that teachers should be responsive to students' inquiries. These examples indicate that Ali possessed EL skills in recognizing and responding to injustice. This supports Principles 1-4 because all children of all ages can benefit from EL during instruction in every subject area—regardless of their backgrounds. Also, Ali encouraged EC members to call racism what it is—without backing away from using accurate terminology—and provided participants with the language they sought to describe phenomena. By engaging in the political act of articulating the word "racism," she supported Principle 5 and also provided guidance for her fellow EC members should similar conversations occur within *their* classrooms.

Group members' power and privilege—which can contribute to school-wide systemic inequity—was addressed very infrequently throughout the study. Power and privilege was discussed once in Ali's online reflection and once when she was recounting a situation with a parent who worked in the cafeteria. Failure to acknowledge power and privilege's role in EC work in an explicit manner may affect the strategies the group devises to improve family-school communication—thus potentially impacting how students and families perceive teachers. Additionally, by not discussing these key topics, members of the EC may not be aware of the ways in which they themselves may be inadvertently perpetuating a cycle of oppression. In other words, participants generally failed to recognize their complicity in the system. Perhaps this was because Principle 1—the importance of embedding EL into every curricular and non-curricular

aspect of the school—was not fully in place. Putting this principle into action would require teachers to uncover and expose injustice—but without EL, they may not even recognize injustice at all (Gorski, 2016b).

**Implications for practice: Disrupting deficit thinking.** Developing EL is a lifelong process and it will take time and patience to hone the ability to challenge deficit thinking in all its forms. To do this, individuals will need to push themselves beyond their comfort zones (and the perceived comfort zones of others) into situations and discussions that can be scary or difficult and—according to Lin, Lake and Rice (2008) challenge themselves to view problems from differing perspectives. Actively challenging deficit viewpoints is difficult because this perspective is so deeply rooted in our American fabric (Gorski, 2016b; Ryan, 1976). When EC members generated the suggestion to clarify the school's programs by articulating them on their Website, they were implying that the problem was with those who did not understand the policies and not potentially with the school policies themselves—classic deficit thinking (Gorski, 2013; 2014b; Milner, 2010; Singleton & Linton, 2006). The deficit model of thinking limits one's ability recognize structural barriers that may contribute to school-wide problems or generate appropriate solutions to respond to and/or redress inequities in the short- or long-term. This perspective limits understanding of the scope of a problem and instead focuses blame on others' inadequacies (e.g., readiness and receptivity to learning EL concepts, unfamiliarity with equity lingo, etc.) for the problems. Hence, the ability to generate workable, equitable solutions is compromised. Orellana and Bowman's (2003) research supports the assertion that Equity Councils can be a forum for working through misconceptions about equity using tools like the checklist for Engaged Feedback and other EC activities. These tools can help develop teachers' abilities to learn how inequity works and how it privileges some while marginalizing others.

Therefore, Gorski (2013) challenged that stronger efforts must be made to curtail deficit thinking and dialogue and re-focus problem-solving efforts in schools on addressing disparities in academic and behavioral outcomes—not by "fixing" students—but by reallocating access and opportunity to marginalized students. Ryan (1976) supported this approach and claimed that "the task to be accomplished is not to revise, amend, and repair deficient children, but to alter and transform the atmosphere and operations of the schools to which we commit these children" (p. 61). Accomplishing this task will require that educational professionals make a shift from deficit to structural ideology when making plans to address school-wide disparities.

**Self-efficacy**

Based on Bandura's social learning theory (1986), it is reasonable to assume that as teachers develop their EL skills, they will feel more efficacious about applying what they have learned into authentic contexts. Although SE and EL knowledge concepts likely are very intertwined, I will now focus specifically on teachers' SE and features of their language that related to self-confidence and beliefs in their abilities regarding EL. First, I will provide a general explanation of participants' SE and then discuss how that SE was developed through specific experiences during the EC. Then, I will describe implications for practice—namely, long-term engagement in ECs to increase SE regarding EL.

**Description of self-efficacy.** Generally speaking, teachers described their willingness to engage in EL work under certain circumstances—indicating a lack of efficacy. They were concerned with their tone and approach and seemed hesitant to challenge colleagues if the act of challenging them did not garner a warm reception. Overall, participants—with the exception of Ali—did not express an urgency to make equitable changes to the school's status quo policies and procedures. Ali, however, mentioned that she felt immediately compelled to engage in the

specific actions of a) listening to colleagues, b) challenging them personally, and c) going door-to-door to welcome new families. This sense of urgency, coupled with her commentary and storytelling, showcased her fluency and confidence in a) using EL terminology and b) responding to situations of injustice. These characteristics were indicative of her of growing SE.

**Self-efficacy development.** Overall, participants did not have strong SE regarding their EL; yet EL growth was indicated through an array of mechanisms that Bandura (1986) suggested effect SE, such as vicarious and mastery experiences and situations that evoked emotional arousal. Through talking with one another, grappling with difficult content, sharing perspectives, and telling stories, participants were building efficacy through different types of experiences (Bandura, 1986). For example, Megan had a *mastery experience* when she was able to successfully apply her newfound EL knowledge and stop her deficit thinking regarding a child who was not completing his homework. This success, coupled with her positive feeling about it, increased the likelihood that she will have the confidence to apply this reflective technique in the future. Participants learned—through *vicarious experience*—from Ali's responses during the Holocaust discussion. While Ali was talking about the ways that she would address the topic with young children, she was concurrently providing her colleagues with strategies, language, and tools that they could utilize in their own classrooms. Through modeling, Ali provided the other participants with clear processes for addressing a similar topic in the future—thus impacting their feelings of preparedness. Finally, when Ali shared a story about the mistreatment of Colleague B by Colleague A, participants experienced strong *emotional arousal*—namely, disbelief that this type of injustice occurs in the school. This emotional arousal was elicited through storytelling and discussion surrounding the outcomes. Therefore, it created

psychological feedback for participants and may have increased their efficacy related to confronting future instances of injustice.

**Implications for practice: Long-term EC engagement.** Other participants were more concerned with establishing trust between colleagues and were concerned that those colleagues were not "ready to hear" about the inequities within the school. This is not to say that these participants did not feel the need for immediate action. Rather, this hesitance to express urgent action may indicate that they did not yet possess sufficient self-efficacy likely due to lack of EL skills to independently and confidently engage others in equity conversations or be the impetus for immediate change. Perhaps their social learning experiences (i.e., vicarious, mastery, emotional arousal; Bandura, 1986) did not yet prepare them to translate their learning (i.e., changes in cognition) confidently to their practice (i.e., behavior). Again, this supports the notion that ECs should be long-term so that EL skills and efficacy can develop over time (see Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

**Effectiveness of the Study's Professional Development Approach**

I will now discuss considerations for ways to design ECs and outcomes of the design of this study including: freedom, self-reflection, storytelling, and self-directed learning. These characteristics shed light on the effectiveness of the EC as an approach to professional development (PD). I will then illustrate ways that group composition and leadership may have impacted the direction of the EC. Next, I will explain how multiple modes of communication were utilized within the EC to grapple with equity concepts. Finally, I will discuss the promising growth demonstrated by EC members, the long-term impact the EC had on participants and implications for participants engaging in distributed leadership of EC principles in the future.

**Design of the equity council.** Professional development opportunities for teachers are essential for building their skillsets and thus impacting student achievement (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). The structure of an EC can provide teacher PD that is coherent, active, authentic, long-term, collaborative, and focused on developing participants' EL content knowledge and their abilities to buck the status quo in ways that are transformative and sustainable. A large body of research suggests that these characteristics—that can be cultivated through ECs—are critical features of quality PD programs and have the greatest positive impact on learner outcomes (see Birman et al., 2007; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). This also supports Hattie's (2009) meta-analyses of key factors impacting student achievement that suggested that the best way to effect change in schools is to organize teachers into teams for the purposes of working collaboratively to identify instructional aims, indicators of learning, evidence that learning has occurred, and analysis of attempted strategies. The EC structure affords teachers an ongoing opportunity to receive support from colleagues in order to apply and implement their learning —a key feature of effective PD (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). I will now discuss the long-term duration to promote sharing, self-reflection, storytelling, and self-direction that the EC enabled.

***Long-term duration to promote sharing.*** Participants expressed that they were pleased to have the freedom to talk about topics that were of concern to them compared to adhering strictly to a set agenda. During sidebar conversations in this current study, several members mentioned that it felt so novel to be able to have the time to engage in unscripted dialogue with a colleague. As acquiring EL takes a lifetime to achieve, it will be important to explore the *processes* through which participants undergo to extend their knowledge. The emergent, free, and long-term

structure of the EC is further supported by Yoon, et al. (2007) who found that sustained PD (e.g., greater than 14 hours) is more advantageous to learners than shorter PD increments. Additionally, EC members disclosed that they learned information through hearing the perspectives of others and felt more confident in their abilities as a result. This supports Bandura's (1971) theory that when people learn about others' perspectives through observation and interaction, they are in fact coding and retaining memories that could shape their future actions upon recalling these events. Perhaps it was the freedom itself that allowed authentic conversations to emerge and helped to promote active participation and perspective-taking during group discussions. In other words, everyone did learn from one another—regardless of initial equity understandings—supporting the general recommendation that ECs should be long-term to enhance the depth and breadth of the learning process. This also supports Gay (2010), Milner (2010), and Pajares' (1992) findings that teachers' attitudes, beliefs and judgments about students, staff and general life experiences are affected by their interactions with colleagues.

***Self-reflection.*** The structure of the EC also promoted self-reflection. Self-reflection is a principle of adult learning (see Knowles, 1984) and, when applied to this context, served as a powerful tool to help teachers uncover the hidden curriculum within the school and examine one's own complicity in perpetuating it (Gorski, 2016b; Tatum, 1997). The member of the group who had the most experience grappling with equity issues, Ali, was most critical of herself and her approaches. Yet, through her verbalization of those struggles, she served as a model for other members of the EC. Yet though she demonstrated the most fluency with EL concepts throughout the study, she indicated that she was still grappling with a) how parents may respond to her inclusive teaching tactics, b) questioning who benefits and who does not from school-wide decision-making, c) best practices in challenging others and raising questions to colleagues to

improve their EL, d) ways to put theory into practice and taking meaningful action steps to eradicate inequities after identifying inequities that exist, and e) her personal responsibility for and complicity in perpetuating inequities and/or reinforcing the hidden curriculum of the school.

***Storytelling.*** It is also important to caution that during ECs, the act of sharing of stories—which was a powerful teaching and learning device in this particular study and—could potentially cause members to shift their focus from the voices of marginalized groups to the voices within the EC—in essence, modeling inequity. Zamudio, Russell, Rios and Bridgeman (2011) questioned, "Who is telling which stories in what way? From what theoretical lens are they being explained and for what purpose are they being told?" (p. 117). Therefore, it will be critical to have a skilled group leader/facilitator who can listen to group dialogue with a critical ear and acknowledge this phenomena if it occurs.

***Self-directed learning***. Self-directed learning is necessary for general growth in any subject area (Knowles, 1980). This is best exemplified by Ali—the participant with the most solid EL understandings. She highlighted the importance of doing equity work on her own—a key aspect of a teacher's developing EL skillset (Gorski, 2016b; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015) and a facet of adult learning (Knowles, 1980). In other words, she recognized the importance of educating herself about ways to dismantle systems of oppression within the school environment. This showcased a willingness to reach beyond school-sanctioned professional development and indicated that she possessed the EL to realize that dismantling these systems required individual work and relentless pursuit. In doing so, she stressed that one must be keenly aware of one's own biases while doing this personal work—as this will affect how new knowledge will be perceived and integrated with existing knowledge. The EC may be a forum for PD that increases

participants' motivation to grow their EL—thus propelling their self-directed learning outside the EC.

**Group Composition.** The EC was comprised of four teachers with varying pre-study knowledge, experiences, and personalities. According to Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002), group composition of small-group PD will naturally be heterogeneous due to participants' individual characteristics, experiences, interests, etc. However, it is the motivation of group members to progress toward a unified goal (e.g., improving EL to impact student success) that is most important when constructing ECs. Furthermore, in accordance with adult learning principles (Ross-Gordon, 2003), all members of the group were highly motivated and focused on achieving that goal.

Group heterogeneity also supports Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of legitimate peripheral participation in which members of varying ability and/or understanding contribute to overall group knowledge. Through this legitimate peripheral participation, core knowledge in EL was formed through the constant ebb and flow of learner engagement and understanding. The participant with the most pre-study knowledge surrounding EL concepts, Ali, was able to share that knowledge with her peers—verbally and in writing—while she, in turn, learned what her peers did *not* know. Ali's peers were receptive to hearing her ideas throughout the study because they were relevant to their own teaching practice and because Ali was similarly receptive to learning about others' perspectives. Although all participants reported growth in equity language and knowledge development via written and oral responses, only Ali utilized concrete examples and used equity terminology with relative ease throughout the study—most likely due to her prior equity knowledge. Yet even the most experienced member of the group learned from the gaps in her colleagues' understandings. Each member of the EC was valued and recognized for

his or her unique contributions—regardless of entry-level understandings. The products (e.g., action plan, dialogue, reflections, etc.) constructed throughout the EC process and guided by the overarching goal of increasing EL resulted in growth within a social context (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Over time and with more group practice in a low-risk setting, learners may experience full participation within the group as each member develops more refined EL skills and knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Heterogeneity in the group members' individual personalities may have affected EC outcomes. While Ali's outspoken nature and EL fluency may have been an asset to the EC by providing others with vicarious experiences to learn from her, her personality and knowledge may have affected others negatively. Kelley and Megan were more quiet throughout the EC sessions and less-versed in equity content. Therefore, they may have been reluctant to contribute because their reserved personalities and lack of initial EL knowledge may have impacted their interactions with Ali and the group as a whole. Therefore, it is important to consider the strengths, weaknesses, needs and comfort levels of EC members from its inception. Additionally, it may be important to embed safeguards into group sessions to ensure that all members have a chance to speak. This could take the form of speaking rotations or written commentary (e.g., email)—as recommended by Dom during the Group Debrief.

***Strong leadership.*** Without at least one strong group member who is knowledgeable in the principles of equity and who possesses a keen, critical lens for rooting out biases, deficit thinking, and potentially harmful practices, the EC's future actions may be dangerously flawed (Gorski, 2016b). Ali—in essence—became the leader of the group because of her strong knowledge base. In my role as researcher, I maintained neutrality by not inserting my opinions during discussions so as not to derail participants' trains of thought. Other than providing

resources and prompting participants to expand upon their responses when there was a lull in the conversation, I assumed the role of active listener. Due to my indigenous-insider status (Banks, 1998), I already knew that Ali had a firm understanding of EL principles. However, I did not anticipate that she would assume the facilitator role within the group—often providing illustrative examples for her colleagues to grasp abstract or challenging concepts.

**Methods of communication.** In this EC, participants interacted with one another predominantly through face-to-face interactions and occasionally through asynchronous responses. The EC intervention was designed using a hybrid design to maximize the strengths of both types of communication (i.e., F2F and online) and collaborative learning. Face-to-face conversations held throughout the EC were sensitive and nuanced—thus providing participants with authentic opportunities to engage in real-time, read others' body language, gain immediate feedback, build relationships, and ask for clarification (Connaughton & Daly, 2004). Participants indicated that they mostly favored the F2F structure of the meetings as an ideal format for engaging in EL-focused, efficacy-building experiences throughout the EC. However, as Dom stated, if there was not trust within the group, some may feel less comfortable sharing their thoughts in person than others. This supports research by Siemens (2008) who argued that F2F settings are ideal for discussing topics that are sensitive in nature because they require the element of trust that in-person collaboration provides. Dom acknowledged that the trust established within the EC enabled these difficult conversations to occur. Research also indicates that it can sometimes be difficult to establish strong community in text-heavy, online-only formats because the nuances of participants' body language and vocal tone/volume/pitch, etc. when participants are not in the same place at the same time can not be translated easily into written form (Poole & Zhang, 2005; Siemens, 2008). However, online synchronous and

asynchronous online environments *do* allow for a) convenient participation that is not limited by distance, b) the development of participants' reflective and metacognitive capabilities through the refinement of and reflection upon their responses, and c) self-directed learning opportunities (Garrison, 2003). The hybrid model was utilized in this EC to enable honest and open communication in multiple formats and to meet the unique needs of participants.

Considering participants' preferred communication styles and comfort levels speaking with one another is important to discern prior to forming ECs. While it may not be possible to cater to the preferences of all EC members for each activity, it may be a good general practice to include a multitude of different communication opportunities when planning and designing EC activities. Therefore, consistent with Castle and McGuire's (2010) findings, it is recommended that ECs utilize a hybrid approach to a) engage all participants by building trust, b) increase their satisfaction regarding participation, and c) solicit participant input through various means like individual yet shared reflections, F2F meetings, and synchronous and asynchronous online collaborative work. Professional development via ECs can utilize these multi-modal approaches to build efficacy in EL through the promotion of differing types of social experiences (Orellana & Bowman, 2003; Siemens, 2008).

Some participants in this EC may have been fearful to take on activist roles within the school because doing so would upset the status quo. This aligns with Principle 5 that states that teaching (or not teaching) for EL is a political act. Teachers may have been concerned that their job security would be at risk if they brought inequities from the shadows into the light. While this may indeed be considered a risk, the risks of inaction and complicity in perpetuating inequities may be more harmful to learners in the long-term. This is why it is encouraging that

even though participants in this study may not have mastered EL concepts, they expressed the willingness to work for change and a dedication to the EC to bring it about.

**Promising growth in equity literacy.** While most teachers in this study—with the exception of Ali—may not yet be ready to fully take on a leadership role disseminating EL principles to their colleagues due to incomplete EL understandings, the EC provided them with a forum to build their skillset, hone their abilities, and increase their efficacy. Furthermore, although EC members predominantly showed emergent understandings of EL and thus have much room for growth, it is encouraging that they showcased an overall intrinsic motivation—regardless of administrative support—to continue this work and engage non-EC members in their efforts. This motivation, a key element of adult learning theory (see Knowles, 1980), implies that participants experienced personal growth in their knowledge and were motivated to engage in future learning experiences to build upon their extant EL understandings (Knowles, 1980). They promoted prioritizing equity and embedding it into every aspect of the organization (i.e., EL Principle 1). Although they verbally expressed that embedding equity into school-wide practices was important, they were not always able to recognize injustice or design appropriate responses to it. The breakthrough is that equity is now on their radar in a way that it may not have been before. Since they are now motivated to explore equity as a result of the EC, they may be more likely to learn EL concepts and be better able to apply them through continued equity work.

Participants believed that if administrators prioritized equity and placed more of a school-wide focus on eliminating barriers, it would increase the likelihood that school leaders would a) work collaboratively with community organizations to provide resources for students and families, b) provide permission and support for equity-related initiatives, c) facilitate

communication between the technology department and teachers, and d) advocate for teachers to utilize professional development time to explore inequities and take steps to eradicate them. However, administrative support and prioritization of equity alone would not necessarily guarantee that staff members would be willing to support and take part in these endeavors. Ali's motivation to do further EL work and take specific actions to forge authentic meaningful school-family partnerships—as evidenced by her statements—is a characteristic that is essential to creating and sustaining equitable learning environments. Motivated people within organizations can impact meaningful change, become threats to inequity, and upset the status quo—and those people, in the context of this school, are not necessarily administrators. Gorski (2016b) acknowledged that there is a benefit to having more teachers engaged in this process in a collaborative sense rather than teachers working in isolation in a haphazard manner. Therefore, the EC needs to continue to develop its own understandings about themselves and their own learning, build upon their momentum, and bring others into the fold.

**Long-term impacts of the equity council.** Discussions regarding equity were not limited to scheduled meeting times. Rather, they began to occur organically and more frequently over time due to the trust established through the EC. For example, members of the EC presented at a state-wide positive behavior conference at the end of the 2016 school year. At a dinner that took place during the conference, equity-related conversations ensued. The topics discussed during this informal dinner were even more in-depth than those held during the study. Perhaps this was because there were no time constraints, no recordings, and no agenda. The EC members—having already established strong relationships with one another—felt comfortable probing for answers to questions that they had not asked during the formal EC meetings. This further supports the notion that establishing trust and comfort with group members is essential to creating and

sustaining ECs over time. Discussions regarding marginalized communities within the school continue amongst EC members to the time of this writing. These conversations occur in the hallways, after faculty meetings, and during general collegial conversations. These ongoing and frequent conversations support the long-term implementation of ECs and—in Ali's words—acknowledge that "there are allies in the school—colleagues I can check in with, tough base with—who have been through the same experience and [who] see things similarly—speak the same language in a sense."

The long-term process of challenging oneself and others to advocate and act for equity in an EC can be done through reading, writing/reflecting, interacting with others in informal or formal settings (see Mitchell & Sackney, 2007; Stoll, Roberston, Butler-Kisber, Slar, & Whittingham, 2007)—whatever format works best within each school's unique context—for participants to be truthful, authentic, critical, listeners and communicators.

**Implications for practice: Distributed leadership.** With more equity literate people engaged in equity work, it increases the likelihood that sustainable change will occur. Through the distributed leadership model, teachers can work collaboratively to effect change that can extend far beyond the limited range of the school administrator (Harris, 2004; Ritchie & Woods, 2007). The demands on school administrators are many and they simply cannot go it alone (Heenan and Bennis, 1999). Therefore, according to Beachum and Dentith (2004), schools must utilize models of leadership that enable others' (i.e., teachers') leadership capacities to develop. Furthermore, teachers in these leadership roles develop a stronger awareness of the tools they craft and utilize within their everyday practice (Spillane, Halverson, Diamond; 2001). Equity Councils—if comprised of efficacious teacher leaders who possess strong EL—can help develop colleagues' EL and provide them with the a) skillset to develop/use equity-focused tools and b)

confidence (i.e., efficacy) to disrupt inequities in schools. Doing so will increase achievement opportunities for marginalized student groups and will provide *all* students with learning environments that are just, accessible, and inclusive.

## Limitations and Future Research Directions

There were several limitations to this case study. First, due to the small group, one-site nature of this research, findings may not be generalizable (see Cresswell, 1998; Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, through rich, thick descriptions of the events that transpired throughout the study, readers will be able to use their judgment to determine applicability of this study to another context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Eisner (1998) added that readers have to build connections between their world and qualitative studies because "through this process, knowledge is accumulated, perception refined, and meaning deepened" (p. 211). Future studies aimed at enhancing teachers' EL skill development may benefit from studying larger teacher groups working at multiple school sites. Furthermore, care should be taken to insure that those sites also reflect diversity in representation of racial, socioeconomic, special education, DLL, etc. student populations.

Another limitation of my study was that I was the facilitator. Although my indigenous-insider status (see Banks, 1998) was helpful in that it aided a) my ability to establish trust and familiarity with the group, and b) ease interpretation of data by situating it within the school's unique context, participants may have self-censored their responses for the purposes of social desirability and preservation of ego while in the presence of a fellow colleague. An outside, independent facilitator (i.e., external-outsider; Banks, 2008) may garner different results in future studies.

A third limitation was that the participants in my study were already part of an established group (i.e., grant team) that had worked together over the course of two years with a pre-established focus and interest regarding eliminating barriers to equity within the school. By the time this study commenced, the group had already established trust within its membership. If the EC was formed with other teachers within the school without these established dynamics, the study may not have yielded the same results.

A final limitation was that because the evaluation of the action plan was beyond the scope of this study, I was unable to determine if participation in the EC impacted teacher and school-wide practices. Therefore, this interesting research direction builds upon the scope of the current project and could shed insight into practical implications for the EC's work. Responses to the enactment of the action plan could be measured via surveys from families, non-EC staff members, and students and classroom and school-wide observations conducted by independent evaluators of all staff during instruction, moments of familial engagement with the school, and teacher-student interactions. Members of the EC could continue their reflections and dialogue throughout this process and also conduct focus groups to a) build relationships with and b) solicit viewpoints from marginalized groups in the school. The feedback from surveys and observations by non-EC members could help them refine their action plan goals and better assess school-wide needs. Additional dialogue, reflection, and focus group data will further assist EC members in the refinement process. In essence, this cycle of learning more about one another to strengthen relationships for the purposes of student achievement is central to Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model of human development. As EC members learn more about themselves through reflection and dialogue and others through surveys, focus groups, and data from independently conducted observations, they will be better able to clarify needs, identify barriers to achieving

those needs, and collectively problem-solve strategies to meet them. In doing so, they will have forged more authentic bonds with their community, staff, and students—all strengthening the communication channels that bolster students' proximal (i.e., microsystem of teachers and peers) and distal (i.e., mesosystem of teachers and families) relationships.

In my pilot study, I discovered that there was a correlation between teachers who recommended high-level teaching practices and their abilities to define multifaceted aspects of culture. Future research could also be conducted to determine if teachers with more EL would recommend (or demonstrate) more equitable teaching practices as well. For example, a study could be conducted to determine how and to what extent teachers recognize, respond to, and redress bias and injustice in their classrooms in a sustainable fashion. This study could include an initial survey to determine teachers' baseline EL understandings, teacher observations—conducted during instruction and also during non-academic interactions with students— and reflective journals to measure teachers' EL and how they apply their understandings of it in practice. It would be interesting to determine if the teachers' baseline understandings were correlated with observable teaching (e.g. academic and non-academic) and reflective practices.

Future research could also be conducted to ascertain optimal group compositions of EC-type approaches to develop teachers' EL. Researchers who aim to replicate the study will run the risk of having no experienced, equity-literate members of their EC. In this current study, Ali entered the study with a solid foundation in EL. Her presence altered the course of the dialogue and enriched the quality of EL conversations. In the absence of a skilled teacher leader with proficient EL, less learning may take place. Therefore, additional research could be completed with ECs comprised of members with differing levels of EL to determine what levels of participants' EL can serve as the threshold for successful ECs.

**Conclusion**

All teachers need EL to expose and challenge the ways that racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other forms of injustice affect a) school-wide policies and practices *and* b) teachers' individual belief systems and practices. While schools across the country have become quite adept at measuring student outcomes (i.e., behavioral and academic outcomes disaggregated by race, socioeconomic status, etc.; see NCES, 2016 Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups), disparities in achievement remain for students of color, those living in poverty, and other historically marginalized groups. Attempts to close these "gaps" in achievement—focusing mainly on knowing about students' cultural backgrounds and characteristics (see Ford & Kea, 2009; Garmon, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Sleeter, 2001)—do little to address the structural forces impeding real, sustainable change. Therefore, ECs focused on building teachers' EL to understand the root causes of the power structures undermining student achievement may help them to recognize, respond to and redress practices that may be inadvertently stunting student growth.

Participation in an EC or similar group can help teachers increase their knowledge and efficacy surrounding EL is a step in the right direction for dismantling structural systems that undermine student achievement in schools. While it is unrealistic to expect that teachers can eliminate the barriers of poverty, hunger, unreliable transportation, lack of healthcare, etc., teachers *can* make an impact within their schools and work to create policies that do not further exacerbate the symptoms of the pervasive structural flaws beyond teachers' spheres of influence. While EL development in a small-group, EC setting is important to build trust and strong relationships, EL can be more effective when it is embedded into the larger school community and not isolated in just a few teachers' classrooms (Fullan, 2011; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015).

Therefore, it is critical that ECs cultivate teacher leaders with the skills and efficacy to spread their EL to their fellow colleagues and utilize their EL abilities when engaged in whole-staff policy-making or curricular decision-making tasks. Notable social justice activist, author and professor bell hooks once famously stated, "There must exist a paradigm, a practical model for social change that includes an understanding of ways to transform consciousness that are linked to efforts to transform structures" (p. 193). Teachers have the power to uproot deep-seated forms of injustice, grapple with solutions to address them within their spheres of influence and cultivate learning environments that are inclusive and just. Equity Councils—centered on the principles of EL—can serve as "practical models" to engage teacher leaders in critical reflection, problem-solving, collaboration, and action-planning to bring about sustained and impactful change—thus impacting student achievement by reducing or eliminating barriers to their success.

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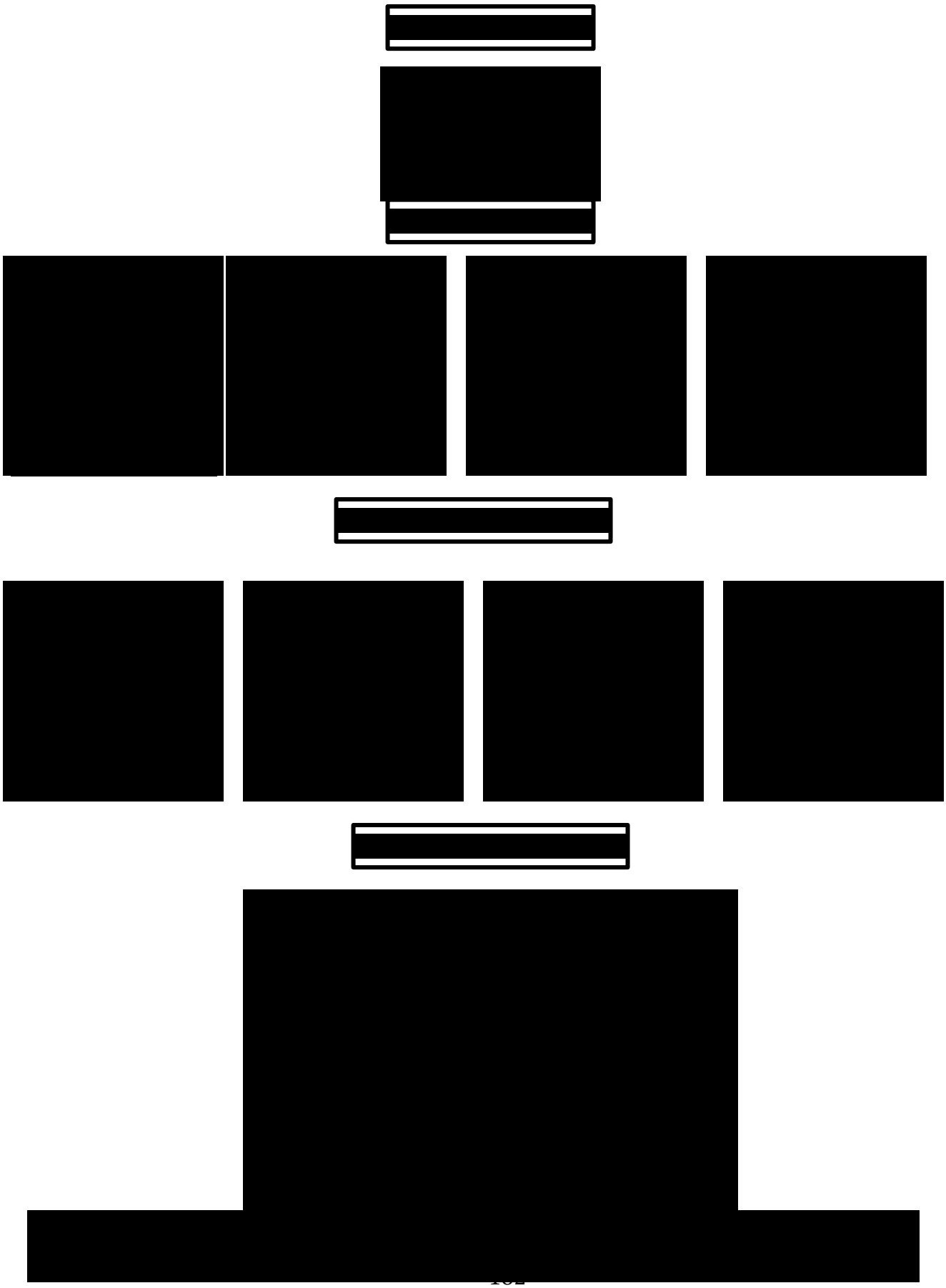


*RQ 1: How did participation in an EC affect teachers' understanding and application of EL address inequities within school?*

Application Theme 1: Overall growth in EL language and knowledge of concepts was demonstrated, but growth appeared to be related to entry-level understandings of EL. (data sources: OL1, OL2, M2, M3, M6, EI)

- EL knowledge development
- EL language
- Ideological indicators (deficit, grit, structural)

Application Theme 2: Participants reported heightened self-reflection regarding their beliefs and practices related to equity. (data sources: OL2, M2, EI)

- Formation of belief systems
- General individual awareness/understandings of equity
- Questioning/vigilance/ reflection (difficult)

Application Theme 3: Participants demonstrated a collective ability to identify barriers to achieving equity. (data sources: OL1, OL3, M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, M6, Pre-S, Post-S)

- Barriers (**access and inclusion; opportunity to learn; school climate; discipline policies and procedures; resource allocation and distribution; achievement and outcomes;** curricular/assessment/ workload; lack of trust/relationships; other resources besides time; physical; procedural; time)

Application Theme 4: Participants demonstrated collective problem-solving abilities to generate potential solutions to previously identified barriers and considered additional resources to address inequities. (data sources: OL2, M2, M5, M6):

- Suggestions for removing barriers (administrative support; clear communication; common vision; discussion with others; embed EL into everyday practices; engage community members and colleagues; trust; monitor/sustain growth; opportunity for reflection; patience; resources; sphere of influence; dedicated time to address)

*RQ 2: Upon completion of the EC, how efficacious did members feel about leading equity initiatives in the school?*

Efficacy Theme 1: Participants' efficaciousness for leading equity initiatives was primarily related to perceptions of others' receptivity. (data sources: M6, GD, EI)

- **Collective efficacy (indicators; non-indicators)**
- **Individual efficacy (indicators; non-indicators)**
- **Distributed leadership**
- Suggestions to enhance SE

*RQ3: What processes of the EC promoted EL development?*

Process Theme 1: The small-group, long-term structure of the EC promoted trust and honest sharing of ideas. (data sources M6, EI-A&D)

- PD to develop EL
- Long-term process
- Openness

Process Theme 2: Through participants' sharing of personal stories and experiences, members of the EC enhanced their abilities to view and solve problems from different perspectives. (data sources: OL2, M5, GD, EI-A)

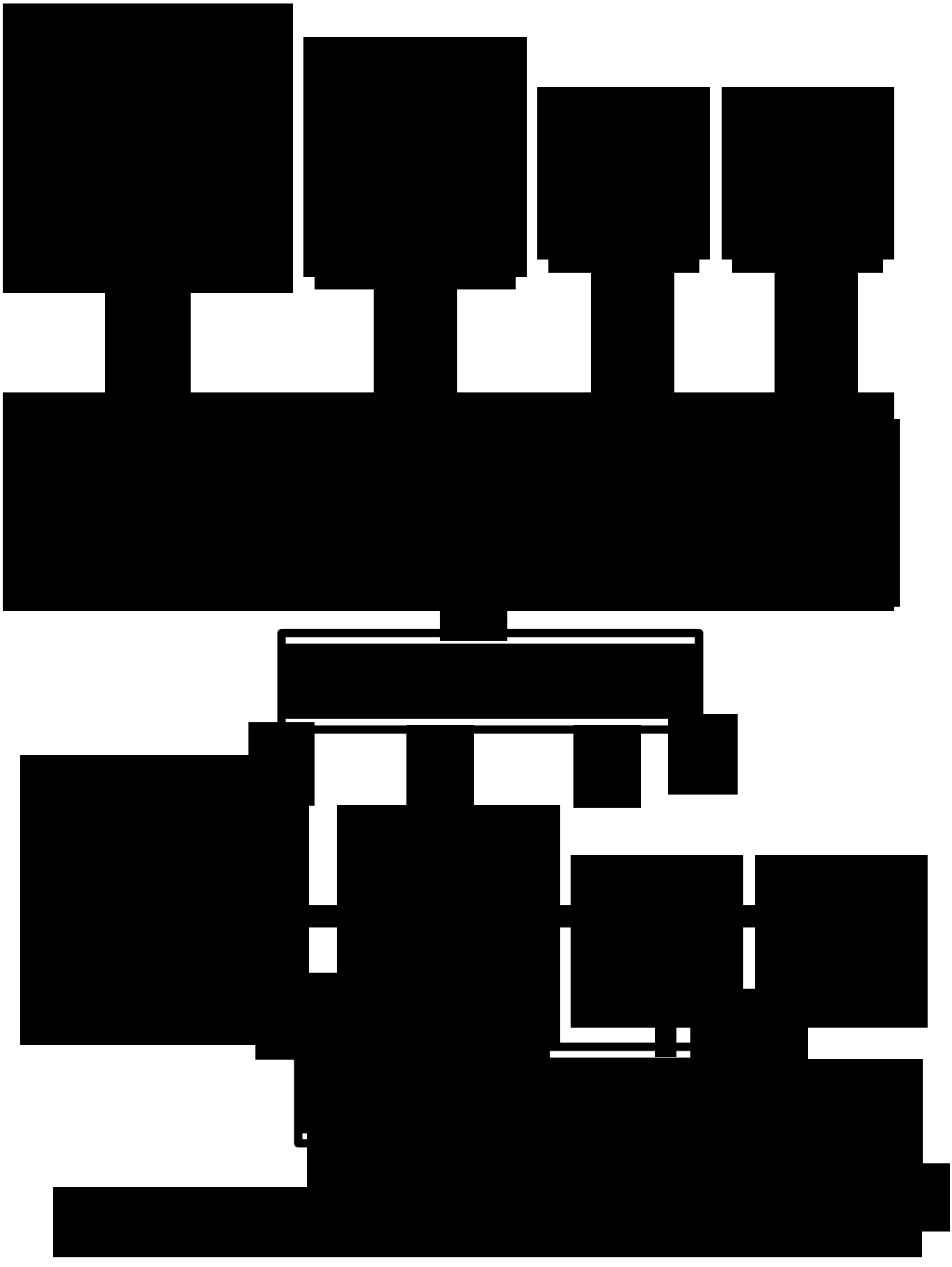
- Not knowing what to do/hesitance/developmental appropriateness concern
- Storytelling

Process Theme 3: Participants preferred the face-to-face method of communication during the EC over written and/or online methods. (data sources: GD)

- F2F interaction
- Opportunities for all to communicate

** emergent codes are bulleted, emergent sub-codes are bracketed, a priori codes are **bolded**

Abbreviation Key
EI= Exit Interview
GD= Group Debrief
M = Meeting Session
OL= Online Activity
Pre-S= Pre-Survey
Post-S= Post-Survey



Appendix A: Collaborative Action Plan Document

**Identify Area(s) in Need of Improvement**: What area(s) in our school are lacking in equity? What leads us to believe this? What decisions could we make as a team that could potentially impact equitable outcomes?

**Assessment of Current Practices:** How do our current practices and decisions in this area inadvertently perpetuate bias, put up barriers, or sustain inequities?

**Alternative Approaches:** What are some proposed strategies to alleviate inequities and generate different outcomes? For each proposed strategy, create a list of resources that would be needed to achieve the desired outcomes.

**Select Action:** After considering the approaches and resources that the team has generated, which option or options will generate the most positive impact towards advancing equity in our school? How will we disseminate this action to the staff?

**Sustaining Action:** Consider what new habits or procedures will need to be embedded into our daily school routines in order to sustain momentum towards equity. What support systems (e.g., parent involvement, community liaisons, incentives, etc.) may be able to support our goals of equity enhancement?

*Adapted from* Keleher, T. (2012). Using choice points to advance equity. *Race Forward*.

Appendix B: Equity Literacy Pre-Survey

**TELL ME ABOUT YOU**

**Select your name from the dropdown menu.**

1

**EQUITY LITERACY PRE-SURVEY**

1. Number of years teaching:

2. Grade Level:

- Kindergarten
- 1st
- 2nd
- 3rd
- 4th
- Other

3. Highest degree of education attained:

- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree

4. Race (Mark one or more)

- White
-

4

[4] Participant names will be immediately deleted.

- [ ] Black (African American, or Negro)
- [ ] American Indian/Alaska Native
- [ ] Asian Indian
- [ ] Chinese
- [ ] Filipino
- [ ] Japanese
- [ ] Korean
- [ ] Native Hawaiian
- [ ] Samoan
- [ ] Vietnamese
- [ ] Other Asian
- [ ] Other Pacific Islander
- [ ] Some other race

5. Ethnicity:

Are you of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin?

- [ ] No, not of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin
- [ ] Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
- [ ] Yes, Puerto Rican
- [ ] Yes, Cuban
- [ ] Yes, another Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin

6. Gender:

- [ ] Female
- [ ] Male

**Equity Strengths and Weaknesses**

7. What are some features of our school that ensure equitable opportunities for all students? Provide specific examples.

8. What are some features of our school that **do not** promote equitable opportunities for all students? Provide specific examples.

9. Provide at least one potential solution to the inequities you described in item 8.

**RESOURCES**

10. Consider the following resources/experiences you would find helpful to improve your understandings about ways to enhance equity within our school. Check all that apply.

- meetings with community members and/or parents
- in-school professional development opportunities
- increased access to disaggregated student data (i.e., academic, behavioral)
- peer group discussions
- peer mentors (i.e., watching experienced colleagues problem solve issues relating to equity)
- personal reflection opportunities (e.g., journal writing)
- video resources
- Website resources
- other

**THANK YOU**

Thank you for participating in the Equity Literacy Pre-Survey. Your responses will contribute to better understandings about ways to enhance equity within our school.

Appendix C: How am I Doing?

# Educator Check-In on Culture
## "How am I doing?"

**Directions:** Review the list below. Place a check by each item to reflect your practice. Then indicate the three items you would like to explore in order to improve your practice.

| Indicators | "I do this a lot" | "I do this a little" | "I haven't done this" | My priorities to explore |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I know the cultural background of each of my students and use this knowledge as a resource for instructional activities. | | | | |
| 2. I know the culture of my classroom environment and behaviors and how it affects all of my students. | | | | |
| 3. I design lessons that require students to identify and describe another point of view, different factors, consequences, objectives, or priorities. | | | | |
| 4. I integrate literature and resources from my students' cultures into my lessons. | | | | |
| 5. I know the English language level of each of my students (e.g. Language assessments such as Bilingual Syntax Measure, LAS, Woodcock-Munoz, IPT, CELDT). | | | | |
| 6. I provide instruction that helps to increase the consciousness and valuing of differences and diversity through the study of historical, current, community, family, personal events, and literature. | | | | |
| 7. I consistently begin my lessons with what students already know from home, community, and school. | | | | |
| 8. I design my instructional activities in ways that are meaningful to students in terms of their local community norms and knowledge. | | | | |
| 9. I incorporate local norms and perspective into my classroom instruction on a daily basis by talking to students, parents, and community members, and reading relevant documents. | | | | |
| 10. I collaborate with students to design activities that build on community resources and knowledge. | | | | |
| 11. I provide opportunities for parents to participate in classroom instructional activities. | | | | |
| 12. I vary activities to address students' learning styles (e.g., multiple intelligences, differentiated instruction). | | | | |
| 13. I understand the differences between school academic language and my students' social language and I use scaffolding techniques to bridge between the two. | | | | |

Appendix D: Equity Rubric

**THE EQUITY RUBRIC**

*Communities and Schools Building Equity Together*

**Measuring Progress Toward Equity**

**1 – Identify Equity Barriers**

The first step toward progress is asking questions about whether disparities and barriers exist for multiple education opportunities. The answers will come from sources that include data, observations, and engagement with students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders.

**2 – Ask Equity Questions**

Once Equity Inquiry Teams have gathered the quantitative and qualitative data that illustrate disparities, they must ask why disparities exist and what institutional barriers contribute to those disparities. Asking why allows Equity Inquiry Teams to begin developing solutions that break down barriers.

**3 – Develop Equity Solutions**

Solutions that address institutional barriers will grow out of multiple sources, including students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders, as well as lessons from other schools and districts.

**4 – Implement Equity Solutions**

As strategies are implemented, schools begin to see a change in multiple areas, including engagement across the community, the shared focus on building equity through policies and practices, and actual decrease in disparities.

**5 – Sustain Equity**

Even once an Equity Goal is achieved, work continues to always monitor whether schools are equitable. The process of building equity in schools is ongoing, and requires continually asking equity questions and adjusting strategies so that all students can learn and succeed.

Education Equity Organizing Collaborative

| EQUITY GOAL 1: ACCESS AND INCLUSION<br>All students have access to and are included in rigorous and relevant courses; extracurricular activities; and college and career preparation. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Progress Toward Equity** | **1 – Identify Equity Barriers** | **2 – Ask Equity Questions** | **3 – Develop Equity Solutions** | **4 – Implement Equity Solutions** | **5 – Sustain Equity** |
| **Measure 1:** Course selection and enrollment is not predictable by race or poverty of students. | Do tracking, disparities in course enrollment, and limited access to academic counseling support exist in the school? | Why is course selection, enrollment, and access to counseling support predictable by race or poverty of students? | Strategies developed to minimize disproportionality course selection, enrollment, and success. | Course selection, enrollment, and success reflect decreased disparities. | Measure 1 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 2:** Participation in extracurricular activities is not predictable by race or poverty of students. | Is there disproportionate access to and participation in extracurricular activities? | What is limiting access and participation in activities by student demographics? Are there barriers to participation and limited opportunities? | Strategies developed to engage underrepresented students and remove barriers to participation. | Increased engagement and participation of underrepresented students, and support to develop activities. | Measure 2 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 3:** Student access to and participation in college and career preparation is not predictable by race or poverty of students. | Are access, participation, and success in college level courses and college and career readiness programs predictable race or poverty of students? | What contributes to disproportionate access, participation, and success in college level courses and college and career readiness programs? | Resources allocated and strategies and partnerships developed to engage and support underrepresented students in college level courses and college and career readiness programs. | Increased engagement, participation, and success of students reflects decreased disparities. | Measure 3 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |

| EQUITY GOAL 2: OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN<br>Schools provide multiple opportunities and strategies for all students to achieve academic success. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Progress Toward Equity** | **1 – Identify Equity Barriers** | **2 – Ask Equity Questions** | **3 – Develop Equity Solutions** | **4 – Implement Equity Solutions** | **5 – Sustain Equity** |
| **Measure 1:** The curriculum is challenging and consistently integrates culturally relevant learning. | Do course curricula, syllabi, lesson plans, and observations indicate cultural relevance? | What is preventing culturally relevant learning? | Strategies developed for coursework and teaching to integrate the cultural histories and experiences of the community. | Resources and practices in place to ensure coursework and teaching is culturally relevant. | Measure 1 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 2:** Teachers and staff demonstrate high expectations for students, so that participation in opportunities is not predictable by race or poverty of students. | Is participation in opportunities disproportionate, due in part to barriers and lack of strong relationships with teachers? | Why are participation in opportunities, strong relationships with teachers, and barriers to participate disproportionate by race or poverty of students? | Strategies developed to engage students, teachers, and resources in building equitable participation in opportunities. | Practices in place to develop better relationships between students and teachers, increase participation in opportunities, and offer resources for full participation. | Measure 2 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 3:** Teachers are trained to modify instructional strategies to meet the needs of different types of learners. | Is there a gap in success for different types of learners and disproportionate placement in special education programs? | Why do disparities exist in academic success and placement in special education? What training and opportunities to develop instructional strategies would help? | Professional development opportunities and instructional strategies created to help all learners succeed. | Training to develop instructional strategies result in increased academic success and decreased disproportionality in special education placement. | Measure 3 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 4:** Teachers and staff connect students and families with the support necessary for academic success. | Are teachers and staff noticing barriers to learning and connecting students and families to resources? | What is preventing teachers and staff from observing and addressing barriers to learning? Do they have resource information to share with families? | Professional development and information sharing developed to help identify multiple barriers to learning and resources to assist families. | Teachers and staff have the knowledge and tools to support students and their families in successful learning. | Measure 4 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |

| EQUITY GOAL 3: SCHOOL CLIMATE<br>The school community is inclusive of multiple experiences and fosters a culture of mutual respect and appreciation among all staff, students, and families. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Progress Toward Equity** | **1 – Identify Equity Barriers** | **2 – Ask Equity Questions** | **3 – Develop Equity Solutions** | **4 – Implement Equity Solutions** | **5 – Sustain Equity** |
| **Measure 1:** Teachers and families know each other and have mutually positive relationships. | Is there a disparity in teacher connection to families? | Why do disparities exist? Do teachers understand their students' cultural experiences? | Strategies developed to help teachers meet and engage with every student's family. | Teachers have met every student's family and have greater awareness of student cultural experiences. | Measure 1 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 2:** The school environment is inclusive, where students from various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic communities and backgrounds, as well as students with disabilities, learn, work, and socialize together in integrated settings. | Are schools, classes, programs, extracurricular, and social settings segregated by race or poverty of students? | What institutional factors contribute to segregation by race or poverty of students? | Policies and practices identified that have resulted in segregation, and strategies developed to bring students together across race or poverty. | The school community is increasingly integrated and inclusive, and strategies in place for building equity contribute to integration. | Measure 2 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 3:** Administration and teaching staff reflect the diversity of the student body, so that students have role models who look like them and share common experiences. | Is the diversity of the administrative and teaching staff proportionate to the diversity of the student body? | What barriers exist to proportionate diversity of the administrative and teaching staff? | Recruitment, hiring, and retention strategies developed to increase the number of staff of color. | The diversity of the administrative and teaching staff is increasingly proportionate to the diversity of the student body. | Measure 3 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 4:** The diversity of the student body is reflected in the school environment, including the inclusion of diverse cultures in educational texts and materials, promotional materials, and the physical environment. | Do course materials, the school environment, and promotional materials reflect the diversity of students? | What is preventing course materials, school environment, and promotional materials from reflecting the diversity of students? | Course materials, physical environment features, and promotional materials designed to reflect diversity of students. | School environment is more welcoming of students, reflected in physical environment, course materials, and promotional materials. | Measure 4 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |

| EQUITY GOAL 4: DISCIPLINARY POLICIES AND PRACTICES<br>Students of color and low-income students are not disproportionately affected by disciplinary policies and implementation. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Progress Toward Equity** | **1 – Identify Equity Barriers** | **2 – Ask Equity Questions** | **3 – Develop Equity Solutions** | **4 – Implement Equity Solutions** | **5 – Sustain Equity** |
| **Measure 1:** Staff members demonstrate increased knowledge in the application of cross-cultural competence and communication. | Do staff members have opportunities to develop cross-cultural competence? Do disparities exist for referrals for disciplinary actions? | What prevents professional development from being available? Why are referrals for disciplinary action disproportionately high by race and poverty of students? | Administration has identified professional development opportunities and policy and practice factors that result in disproportionate discipline referrals. | Increased participation in professional development and proportionate referrals for disciplinary action. | Measure 1 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 2:** Conflict resolution strategies include restorative justice and other practices that do not exclude students from the learning community. | Do conflict resolution strategies support student development and learning? | How could conflict resolution strategies, including restorative justice practices and better support student development and learning? | Conflict resolution strategies developed that support the development and learning of all students. | Conflict resolution strategies, including restorative justice policies and practices, are in place to support students within the community. | Measure 2 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 3:** Data are being collected in a uniform and comprehensive way so that school and district leadership can understand who is being disciplined, how often, and why. | Is disciplinary data being collected uniformly, with information on race, poverty, and special education, and by individual students and incidents? | How could data collection be consistent and uniform across schools and districts? What information would help inform policies and practices? | Consistent data collection strategy developed that tracks key questions to inform policies and practices. | Consistent data collection methodology is in place that allows for more complete assessment of disciplinary policies and practices | Measure 3 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 4:** Rates of suspension and other disciplinary actions are proportionate by race, income, gender, and disability representation in the overall student population. | Are rates of disciplinary action proportionate by race, income, gender, and disability representation in the student population? | What contributes to disproportionate rates of disciplinary action? | Strategies developed for reducing disciplinary actions (e.g. cultural competency, student support, positive interventions). | Multiple strategies are in place and disciplinary rates are more proportionate by race, income, gender, and disability. | Measure 4 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |

| **EQUITY GOAL 5: RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION**<br>**Resources throughout the district and/or across the state are distributed equitably and based on what students require to achieve their full potential.** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Progress Toward Equity** | **1 – Identify Equity Barriers** | **2 – Ask Equity Questions** | **3 – Develop Equity Solutions** | **4 – Implement Equity Solutions** | **5 – Sustain Equity** |
| **Measure 1:** School facilities and classrooms serving low-income students are of comparable quality to those serving higher-income students. | Do observation, maintenance records, and physical plant guidelines indicate school facilities are of equitable quality? | What is contributing to disproportionately poor quality facilities? | Strategies and plans developed to address maintenance issues and disproportionate deficiencies in school facilities. | School facilities are being improved, maintained, and reviewed to improve quality across the district. | Measure 1 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 2:** All students have an equitable distribution of materials, including books, technology, and other supplies that they need to learn and meet rigorous standards. | Do teachers have the materials necessary to meet the needs of every student? | What barriers exist to having the materials necessary for all students to learn? | Plan developed to make sure all students have access to necessary materials. | Plan for making materials available is in place and teachers see increased access and improved student success. | Measure 2 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 3:** Teachers with the most training and experience are assigned to schools and classrooms where they can have the most influence on student learning. | Is assignment of teachers with years of experience, training, or consistent high evaluations equitable? | What is preventing teacher assignment from being equitable for low-income schools and students? | District has developed policies for equitable placement of teachers based on the needs of students. | Policies are in place for equitable placement of teachers based on the needs of students. | Measure 3 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 4:** Budgeting processes are inclusive and transparent, and equity is stated as an affirmative goal. | Are parents and stakeholders who are representative of the school population part of a budgeting process that has equity as a goal? | What is preventing budgeting processes from including multiple community stakeholders? Why is equity not a stated goal of the process? | Plan developed to include multiple community stakeholders who are representative of the school population and to state equity as a goal. | Multiple community stakeholders who are representative of the school population are engaged in the budgeting process and equity is a stated and practiced goal. | Measure 4 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |

| **EQUITY GOAL 6: ACHIEVEMENT AND OUTCOMES**<br>**All students are expected and prepared to perform at high levels. Disparities in achievement and outcomes among student groups and disproportionality in placement in educational programs are eliminated.** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Progress Toward Equity** | **1 – Identify Equity Barriers** | **2 – Ask Equity Questions** | **3 – Develop Equity Solutions** | **4 – Implement Equity Solutions** | **5 – Sustain Equity** |
| **Measure 1:** Test scores and outcome data are comparable, regardless of race or poverty of students. | Do test scores and outcome data indicate a disparity by race and poverty of students? | What factors contribute to disparities in test scores and outcome data? | Strategies developed to close gaps in test scores and other outcomes by implementing Equity Goals. | Test scores and outcome data show decreased disparity by race and poverty of students. | Measure 1 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 2:** Participation and success in advanced coursework is not predictable by race or poverty of students. | Are participation, test-taking, and success in advanced coursework proportionate to the race and poverty of students? | What is preventing proportionate participation, test-taking, and success in advanced coursework? | Strategies developed to increase participation, test-taking and success in advanced courses and tests. | Participation, test-taking, and success of students of color and low-income students in advanced courses increases. | Measure 2 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 3:** Attendance, successful course completion, graduation, and dropout rates are not predictable by race or poverty of students. | Are attendance, successful course completion, graduation, and dropout rates predictable by race or poverty of students? | What institutional factors contribute to attendance, successful course completion, graduation, and dropout rates that are disproportionate by race or poverty of students? | Strategies developed, including meeting Equity Goals, to improve attendance, successful course completion, and graduation rates, and lower dropout rates. | Implementing Equity Goals results in attendance, successful course completion, graduation, and dropout rates that are less predictable by race or poverty of students. | Measure 3 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 4:** All graduating students are college- and career-ready and supported to have a clear plan upon completion of high school. | Is participation in college and career readiness opportunities predictable by race or poverty of students? | What is preventing participation of students of color and low-income students in college and career readiness opportunities? | Strategies developed for improving participation and success in college and career readiness opportunities. | Participation in college and career readiness opportunities is proportionate, regardless of race or poverty of students. | Measure 4 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |

| EQUITY GOAL 7: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT<br>All families and community members are connected and engaged with the school community. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Progress Toward Equity** | **1 – Identify Equity Barriers** | **2 – Ask Equity Questions** | **3 – Develop Equity Solutions** | **4 – Implement Equity Solutions** | **5 – Sustain Equity** |
| **Measure 1:** Communication is meaningful and shared in a language and mode that is accessible to families. | Is communication offered in a way that is accessible to families? | What is preventing communication from being accessible or effective? | Families consulted on preferred forms of communication and a plan is developed to make communication more accessible. | Communication is presented in an effective mode and in accessible language. | Measure 1 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 2:** Schools provide families with multiple ways to engage in the school community and the education of their child. | Do schools provide multiple opportunities and is family engagement proportionate to demographics of the school community? | What barriers are preventing families from engaging in their school community? | Parents asked about how they would like to be involved and opportunities offered for underrepresented families to define and lead. | Multiple means of engagement are available, including parent-led efforts from all communities. | Measure 2 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 3:** Parent leadership and participation in school decision making and events reflects the diversity of the school community. | Are parents who reflect the diversity of the school community engaged in planning and decision making? | Why is the parent role in planning, decision making, and leadership limited and not reflective of the community? | Opportunities offered for parent roles in school planning, decision making, and leadership, with attention to the participation of underrepresented parents. | Multiple opportunities for parent engagement in planning, decision making, and leadership and participation reflects the diversity of families. | Measure 3 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |

| EQUITY GOAL 8: SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY<br>All students, families, school and district staff, and the broader community are transparent and accountable in their efforts to achieve equity in education. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Progress Toward Equity** | **1 – Identify Equity Barriers** | **2 – Ask Equity Questions** | **3 – Develop Equity Solutions** | **4 – Implement Equity Solutions** | **5 – Sustain Equity** |
| **Measure 1:** Equity Inquiry Team members represent the multiple perspectives and experiences that contribute to the diversity of the school community, and feel comfortable engaging in open, honest communication with each other. | Is the Equity Inquiry Team representative of the multiple perspectives and diversity of the community and has it established its working guidelines? | What steps are necessary for development of diverse Equity Inquiry Team membership and working guidelines? | Key stakeholders identified who are representative of the community; Equity Inquiry Team guidelines defined. | Equity Inquiry Team is representative of multiple perspectives and diversity of the community; Equity Inquiry Team guidelines and process support the Team's work. | Measure 1 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 2:** An Equity Impact Assessment is employed in making decisions relating to school policies and practices. | Are school and district policy and practice decisions informed by Equity Impact Assessments? | How can Equity Impact Assessments contribute to decision making? | Equity Inquiry Team has an understanding of an Equity Impact Assessment and how to apply it to Equity Goals decisions. | Equity Inquiry Team builds community understanding of Equity Impact Assessment and decisions are informed and changed through the analyses. | Measure 2 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 3:** The Equity Inquiry Team convenes a broader group of stakeholders in an ongoing inquiry process and continued progress toward equity. | Is there a process for ongoing community engagement and assessment in meeting Equity Goals? | What barriers exist to ongoing engagement and assessment? | Equity Inquiry Team has developed a plan for ongoing community engagement and assessment for progress toward equity. | Equity Inquiry Team continues ongoing community engagement and assessment for progress toward equity. | Measure 3 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |
| **Measure 4:** The Equity Inquiry Team, school, and district document quantitative and qualitative data and report regularly to the larger community on progress toward equity. | Does the Equity Inquiry Team continue to collect data on Equity Goals and report to the community on progress? | What is preventing consistent collection of data and reporting to the school community on progress? | Plan developed for ongoing collection of data and for reporting to the community in a meaningful way on progress toward equity. | Collection of data is ongoing and a plan is in place for meaningful ongoing reports to the community on progress toward equity. | Measure 4 achieved and assessment and adjustment continues for progress toward equity. |

Appendix E: Data Snapshot Example

| Academic Data | Behavioral Data |
| --- | --- |
| • overall academic achievement scores in reading and math<br>• overall demographic statistics of school population | • discipline referral rates<br>• expulsion/suspension rates |

*data for all categories will be disaggregated by race, socioeconomic status, DLL status, and ability status

## Assessing Partnerships

Directions: For each statement, write "yes," or "no," or "unsure."

### The School Climate

____ 1. There are signs and welcoming messages that say parents and community are welcome here.
____ 2. Signs and messages are provided in languages other than English if applicable.
____ 3. Family members and community members are welcomed as observers in the classroom.
____ 4. Family members and community members are welcomed as volunteers in the classroom.
____ 5. Adult-sized chairs, besides the teachers', are located throughout the school.
____ 6. Our school has a parent room or parent corner where information is provided to parents in a variety of ways.
____ 7. The mission and vision of our school are posted throughout the school and distributed to parents and the community.
____ 8. Our school has a parent/community involvement plan or policy.
____ 9. Our school parent involvement policy or plan was developed with the input of parents and community members.
____ 10. All school staff are provided staff development opportunities in family-community involvement.

### Outreach

____ 11. Special efforts are made to involve women and men from different racial and national origin groups in all parent activities.
____ 12. Linkages have been made with community organizations and religious groups which serve the families of children enrolled in our program.
____ 13. Our school buildings are open for use by the community.
____ 14. Liaisons are available to help with parent involvement activities and outreach.
____ 15. A particular effort is made to involve male family members in program activities.
____ 16. Some parent involvement activities take place out in the community.
____ 17. There are efforts to reach families often stereotyped as "hard-to-reach."

### Communicating with Parents and Community Members

____ 18. All staff make an effort to communicate regularly and positively with parents.
____ 19. There is a regular school newsletter with information for parents and the community.
____ 20. Parent communications are written clearly and simply using language the family can understand.
____ 21. Curriculum standards and school procedures are clearly communicated to parents at the beginning of each year or when children are enrolled.
____ 22. Positive communication channels are promoted and encouraged with families early in the school year.
____ 23. Communication with families and communities is expressed in multiple ways.
____ 24. School support staff are provided training in communicating with families and community members.
____ 25. Teachers and administrators are provided training in communicating with families and community members.

## Assessing Partnerships
(continued)

### Policy and Procedures

____ 26. There is an active parent-led organization supported by school staff.
____ 27. Members of the parent organization are representative of the school population by race, gender, and national origin.
____ 28. Parents are trained to be effective team members.
____ 29. Parents and community members are involved in school decision-making teams.
____ 30. Funds and resources are provided to support parent and community involvement.

### Parent and Community Activities

____ 31. There are equal opportunities for working parents and community members to attend meetings and activities.
____ 32. Parents are involved in recommending parent and family activities.
____ 33. There are educational activities and training for parents which enable them to work with their own child at home.
____ 34. There are social activities for families and community members that promote interactions with school staff.
____ 35. There are adult education classes for the parents themselves (ESL, GED, exercise classes, etc.).
____ 36. There are parenting-skills workshops for the parents themselves.
____ 37. Parents and community members are involved in assessing the parent/community partnership initiative.
____ 38. There is an updated file of community services and resources for parents and families (e.g., health, social services, financial aid, emergency assistance, etc.).

### Reporting Children's Progress to Parents

____ 39. Teachers make an effort to say positive things about the child and emphasize the child's strengths in their progress reports to parents.
____ 40. Teacher concerns about a child's progress are communicated clearly to parents.
____ 41. Parents participate in decisions affecting their child's education.
____ 42. All educational programs and services for their child are explained clearly to parents.
____ 43. Meetings are arranged at the parents' request to discuss parent concerns regarding their child.
____ 44. Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled at times convenient to the parents as well as the teachers.
____ 45. Transportation arrangements are made for parents to attend parent-teacher conferences if needed.
____ 46. Child-care arrangements are made for meetings and other parent activities if needed.
____ 47. There are teacher/parent/community recognition programs for service to the school.
____ 48. Some parent-school activities offer refreshments and an opportunity for communicating information between school staff and parents.

(From NEA Membership and Organizing, Family-School-Community Partnerships Training Manual, 2004).

Here is a "tip sheet" that educators can use to make their schools open and inviting for families.

### 100 Ways to Make Your School Family Friendly

1) Create a policy for family involvement in your school.

2) Use the word "family" instead of parent when communicating with families.

3) Make sure family involvement is part of your school mission and vision statements.

4) Celebrate the cultures in your community with specific school programs and practices.

5) Celebrate families-of-the-month or week.

6) Create a family or parent center within your school.

7) Designate special family parking to make access to your school easy.

8) Make sure your school entrances and directions are clear and in languages spoken within your community.

9) Train teachers, administrators, and students about the importance of family involvement in schools.

10) Involve families in staff development programs with staff.

11) Give positive feedback to show appreciation to families through notes, telephone calls, and special events.

12) Approach all families with an open mind and positive attitude.

13) LISTEN!

14) Learn children's strengths, talents, and interests through interactions with families.

15) Explain expectations to families in a manner they can understand and support.

16) Set aside appointment times that are convenient for working families.

17) Make family conferences student-led and mandatory at all grade levels.

18) Understand the best ways families receive information from the school and then deliver it that way.

19) Explain school rules and expectations and ask for home support.

20) Create opportunities for informal dialogue with families.

21) Address concerns honestly, openly, and early on.

22) Show support for PTA and other parent and family organizations by attending as often as you can.

23) Create classroom, grade-level, and school newsletters.

24) Maintain and update your Web page.

25) Publish and post your school and office hours.

26) Create a family handbook similar to your student handbook.

27) Have all information available in languages spoken within your school.

28) Use available technology to promote your family involvement goals.

29) Work with families to understand cultural practices that will promote better communication.

30) Listen to family perceptions of how they feel when they visit your school.

31) Listen to family perceptions of how families feel they are treated at your school.

32) Modify school climate based on family and student input.

33) Know the students in your school and their various peer groups.

34) Provide programs on topics of interest to families.

35) Evaluate all of the family meetings you have and move two from the school into the community.

36) Provide family support programs or groups to help families work with their children.

37) Keep abreast of parenting issues to offer assistance to families.

38) Offer parenting classes in child development, discipline, and similar topics.

39) Create and attend fairs and events especially designed to bring all families together.

40) Create a database of families and their special talents, interests, and ways in which they can support school activities. Use this database when calling families to assist in school.

41) Start a family book club.

42) Be available before and after school, and in the evening at specified times and dates.

43) Help teachers understand the importance of family involvement.

44) Evaluate and spruce up the exterior and entrances to your building.

45) Evaluate and repaint areas that need repainting.

46) Remove all graffiti and vandalism within twenty-four hours.

47) Suggest your school be used as a polling place on Election Day.

48) Provide displays and information when community groups are using your school.

49) Create bookmarks with important school information and pass them out to visitors.

50) Evaluate and create a plan for appropriate lighting for evening activities.

51) Allow all families access to your school computer labs and library.

52) Make sure the "reduced speed" signs in the school zone are visible.

53) Allow family members to be involved in the governance of your school.

54) Train parents to participate in school planning and decisionmaking.

55) Provide biographical information about the principal and administration.

56) Publish important telephone and fax numbers in at least five different places.

57) Publish the names of administrators and their phone numbers in every newsletter and on the school Web site.

58) Publish a monthly newsletter.

59) Place all printed information on the school Web site.

60) Increase the number of events geared to families for whom English is their second language.

61) Promote your school logo or mascot on all publications.

62) Create a "brag about" that promotes your school and its programs. Have copies in every visitor area of your school.

63) Provide all staff with business cards.

64) Provide all teachers with telephones in their classrooms.

65) Evaluate the clubs and cocurricular activities at your school to ensure that all students have opportunities for involvement.

66) Increase the percentage of students in clubs and student activities.

67) Schedule a club fair during the school day.

68) Create a plan to articulate more closely with your feeder schools.

69) Find five ways to celebrate and promote your school's diversity.

70) Identify all of the peer groups in your school. Have lunch with each of them monthly.

71) Create a program to bring diverse students together.

72) Ensure school governance opportunities are open to students.

73) Publish a school calendar with pictures that promotes activities about your school.

74) Evaluate all of your school publications for school "jargon."

75) Create classes that help families understand school curriculum.

76) Promote visitation days for families.

77) Publish your school safety and security plan.

78) Train security personnel in family friendly concepts.

79) Establish a nonthreatening sign-in or entrance policy.

80) Send letters home to all families the same day as a problem or negative occurrence in school.

81) Use telecommunications technology to send messages home about school activities.

82) Create family invitations to school functions.

83) Increase the number of school staff involved in student activities and family programs with incentives and grants for extra pay.

84) Provide opportunities to expose students to school activities within the school day.

85) Celebrate the history of your school by providing information to all students and families.

86) Ask families to share their experiences if they attended your school.

87) Involve grandparents in school functions.

88) Ask families to share their cultures with students during the school day.

89) Create experiential learning opportunities by using families in the process.

90) Fill the walls of your school with motivation to families and students.

91) Always thank families for their involvement in your school.

92) Handwrite five thank-you notes to families per month.

93) Create opportunities to recognize and reward all students, staff, and their families.

94) Allow students to organize and implement new student orientation programs.

95) Ask businesses to help you promote family involvement.

96) Find ten businesspersons to provide mentors for your school.

97) Make sure your school governance council has a business liaison.

98) Create a budget for all school assemblies.

99) Increase by 20 percent the number of opportunities for families and teachers to communicate.

100) Believe that family involvement improves the achievement of every student.

Appendix H: Equity Literacy Post-Survey

**Equity in Our School**

**Select your name from the dropdown menu.**

**Equity Literacy Post-Survey**

1. Consider the personal reflections, collaborative discussions, and group work surrounding equity concepts that you have experienced as a member of our Equity Council. Drawing from these experiences, what does our school do well in terms of ensuring equitable opportunities for students? Provide specific examples.

2. What are our school's weaknesses in terms of promoting equitable opportunities for students? Provide specific examples.

3. Provide at least one potential solution to address area(s) of weakness you described in item 2.

4. Now that you have participated in the Equity Council and have explored a variety of resources to explore equity, consider what additional resources may help you further your understandings about the topic. Check all that apply.

- [ ] meetings with community members and/or parents
- [ ] in-school professional development opportunities
- [ ] increased access to disaggregated student data (i.e., academic, behavioral)
- [ ] peer group discussions
- [ ] peer mentors (i.e., watching experienced colleagues problem-solve issues relating to equity)
- [ ] personal reflection opportunities (e.g., journal writing)
- [ ] video resources
- [ ] Website resources
- [ ] other

**THANK YOU**

Thank you for participating in the Equity Literacy Post-Survey. Your responses will contribute to deeper understandings about ways to enhance equity within our school.

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Appendix I: Informed Consent

LEHIGH UNIVERSITY

**INFORMED CONSENT**
Equity Literacy Study

Dear Colleague,

You are invited participate in a research study about Equity Literacy (EL). The purpose of this study is to determine how involvement in an Equity Council group affects a) your understandings about EL, and b) your individual and collective beliefs about the impact that increased teacher EL may have on students. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an elementary teacher leader who is part of an established group that is seeking to increase equity within the school. Please read this form carefully and ask questions about any concerns before agreeing to participate in the study.

**This study is being conducted by:** Emily Aragona-Young; Teaching, Learning and Technology Ph.D. Program; College of Education, Lehigh University, under the direction of Dr. Brook Sawyer, College of Education, Lehigh University

**Procedures**

**If you agree to be in this study:**

You will be asked to complete two surveys (pre- and post-intervention). The pre-survey will include demographic items about you. Pre- and post-surveys will conclude with open-ended items asking you to identify areas of strength and weakness regarding equity within your school. The 10-item pre-survey should take you approximately 15 minutes to complete. The 4-item post-survey (without demographic information) should take you approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Next, you will be asked to participate in approximately six, hour-long discussion sessions (conducted March, 2016 to May, 2016) focused on developing understandings about EL, identifying areas of inequity within the school, and creating plans for implementing solutions to address inequities. These sessions will be audio-recorded. Periodically, you will be asked to reflect on the group dialogue and provide written responses on your reflections.

After completing the post-survey at the conclusion of the study, you will be interviewed, both individually and as a group, regarding your involvement in the EC. These interview and group debrief sessions will also be audio-recorded.

Anticipated time for study participation is 8.5 hours.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

**The study has minimal risks:**

The risks of participating in this study are minimal. Because the content being discussed may be emotional or sensitive, there is potential that you may feel uncomfortable at some point in the study. You have the right to refuse to engage in any discussions/prompts that cause you discomfort. You may also terminate your participation in the study at any time.

**The benefits to participation:**

You may learn something about yourself as an educator by participating in the study. Specifically, you may gain a better understanding about your beliefs and practices associated with equity. The study's overall findings may contribute to the field by generating deeper understandings about using collaborative forums to help teacher leaders identify gaps in equity, address them, and create sustainable approaches for alleviating them in the future.

**Compensation**

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study. However, at the conclusion of the study, as a "thank you," you will receive a $50 Amazon gift card and a complimentary breakfast.

**Confidentiality**

Completed surveys will be kept confidential and all data will be stored in a secure location. All survey responses will be attached to an identification number to protect your identity. This will enable the researcher to track your development regarding equity concepts throughout the intervention. All data this will be summarized and reported in a synthesized manner in any reports or publications. If you provide permission for audio recording, these recordings will be stored securely on a Lehigh server for a minimum of three years. Then, all recordings will be destroyed. No audio-recordings will be utilized for educational purposes beyond the scope of this study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**

**Participation in this study is voluntary:**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Lehigh University or with your school. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions**

**The researchers conducting this study:**

Emily Aragona-Young (researcher) and Dr. Brook Sawyer (adviser) will be conducting this study. If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact Emily at 570.216.2434 (email: ely207@lehigh.edu) or Dr. Sawyer 610.758.3236 (email: lbs211@lehigh.edu) at Lehigh University's College of Education.

**Questions or Concerns:**

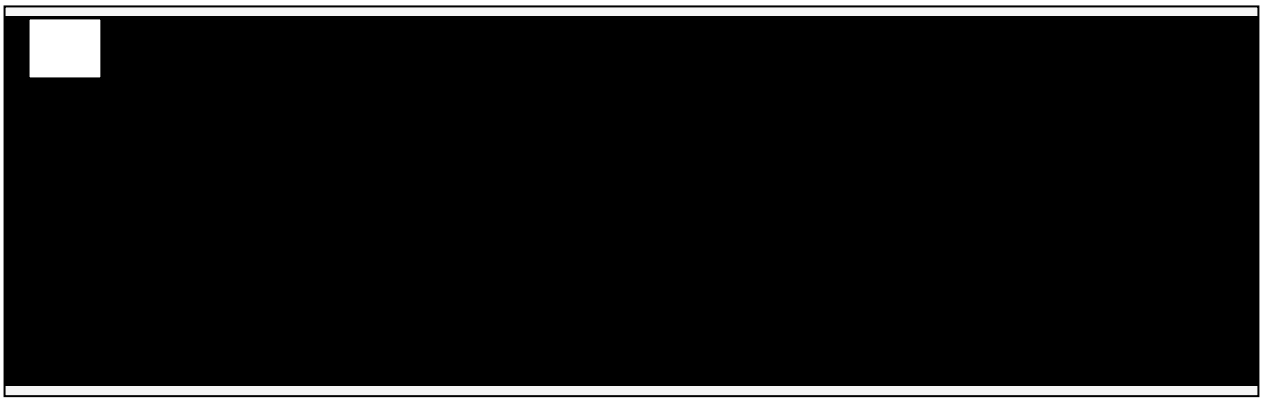
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact Susan Disidore at (610) 758-3020

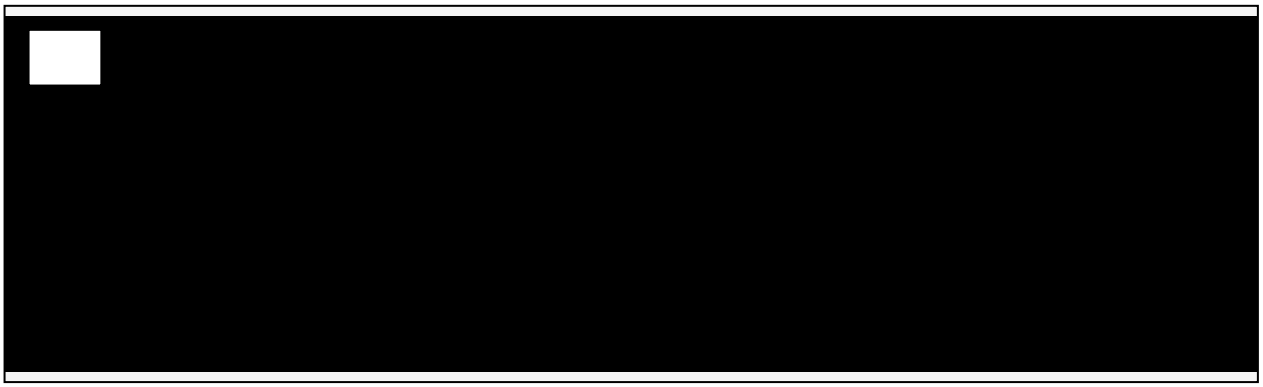
(email: sus5@lehigh.edu) or Naomi Coll at (610) 758-2985 (email: nac314@lehigh.edu) of Lehigh University's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

**Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered.

***Please** check one of the three boxes **below to indicate whether or not you are willing to participate in this research study and whether or not you provide consent to be audiotaped. Please complete all of the requested information.***





**Vita**

**Emily Aragona-Young**
**PO Box 315**
**Blakeslee, PA 18610**
**emilyaragonayoung@gmail.com**

## EDUCATION

**Ph.D., Teaching, Learning and Technology – 2017**
Research interests: Educational equity; social justice
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA

**M. Ed., Curriculum and Instruction – 2006**
Thesis: Differentiated Instruction and Cooperative Learning in Third Grade Recorder Class
Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA

**B. M., Music Education and Trumpet Performance, *summa cum laude* – 2002**
Marywood University, Scranton, PA

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2006 - present ***Adjunct Faculty,*** Elementary Teacher Preparation Program
Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA

2002- present ***General Music Educator (Grades K-5)***

## CERTIFICATION

Pennsylvania State Level II Certification K-12 Music

## AWARDS

**Paradigm Award** *Presented to a graduate student who models leadership, personal integrity, and a commitment to academic excellence*
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA
May, 2010

**Master's Thesis Award** *Presented to the candidate for the Master of Education degree whose thesis meets the highest standards of scholarship, critical reflection, and benefit to the practice, in honor of excellence in teacher action research*
Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA
May 2006

**M. Clare Kelley Award** *Presented to the candidate for Bachelor's of Music degree who possesses the highest GPA and a commitment to musical excellence*
Marywood University, Scranton, PA
May, 2002

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

American Educational Research Association (AERA)
Roundtable Paper Presentation
Elementary Teachers' Multicultural Education Practices (co-authored with Dr. L. Brook Sawyer)
April, 2016
Washington, DC

Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT)
Presentation: Evaluating Multicultural Web Resources
November, 2011
Jacksonville, FL

## CURRENT PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

National Educators Association
Pennsylvania State Education Association