Wayne State University Dissertations

1-1-2017

Justice... Not Just Us: How One District-Level Social Justice-Oriented Transformative Leadership Team Addresses Marginalization And Oppression

Thomas Arnold Zook
Wayne State University,

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/oa_dissertations

Part of the Other Education Commons

JUSTICE… NOT JUST US: HOW ONE DISTRICT-LEVEL SOCIAL JUSTICE-ORIENTED TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM ADDRESSES MARGINALIZATION AND OPPRESSION

by

THOMAS A. ZOOK

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2017

MAJOR: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

Approved By:

_____
Advisor   Date

_____

_____

_____

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful mother Dorothy Marie Zook, whose strength, wisdom, and unconditional love helped me to believe in myself and live life passionately open-minded; and to my loving husband Dr. Hung Duy Nguyen, whose unfailing support and encouragement made this dream possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1 – DEMOCRACY IN PERIL

Within the maelstrom of high-stakes testing, standards, and accountability measures that epitomize the current educational landscape, the unheard voices of marginalized and oppressed children cry out for justice. Today, educational leaders are faced with countless demanding challenges, especially in light of the current myopic focus on various technical reform practices designed to raise the singularly important test scores. Perhaps then it should come as no surprise that many leaders have lost sight of the fact that some groups of students are systematically being marginalized and face institutionalized oppression on a daily basis, denying them the opportunity to acquire an education "worth wanting" (Howe, 1997).

Education is a cornerstone of our democratic way of life; a belief resonated by political theorist Benjamin Barber (1991) when he declared, "the fundamental task of education in a democracy is the apprenticeship of liberty—learning to be free" (p. 12). He defines the importance of education in a democracy saying,

> The autonomy and the dignity no less than the rights and freedoms of
> all Americans depend on the survival of democracy: not just
> democratic government, but a democratic civil society and a
> democratic civic culture There is only one essential task for the
> educator: teaching liberty. (p. 20)

In fact, one of the earliest notions of an educated citizenry being essential to the enterprise of building a sovereign nation is most often attributed to Thomas Jefferson who, in 1816 said, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be" (cited in Jewett, 1997, p. 110).

Albeit, within the context of the time period, the idea of public education applied only to White males, Jefferson nonetheless understood that only when all the people of a

nation were educated could they escape the tyranny of despotism. Regarding the relationship between education and democracy, Jefferson acknowledged four fundamental principles:

> That democracy cannot long exist without enlightenment; That it cannot function without wise and honest officials; That talent and virtue, needed in a free society, should be educated regardless of wealth, birth or other accidental condition; That other children of the poor must thus be educated at common expense. (Thomas Jefferson, 1817, in Jewett, 1997, p. 111)

Taking Jefferson at his word, and if we are to honor the sacrifices of those who fought so hard to advance civil and human rights to all citizens of this country, we must now acknowledge, in the spirit of democracy, that the education of *all children*, regardless of race, class, ethnicity, ability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or any other distinguishing characteristic is a public responsibility to be shared equally by all citizens of this great nation.

Many would argue, however, that the institution of public education, as we know it, has failed in its responsibility to equitably educate all children (Anyon, 1997; Howe, 1997; Kozal, 2005; Lipman, 2011; Lipzitz, 2011; Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Ravitch, 2013; Shields, 2016). In fact, Giroux (2009) goes even further, suggesting that as a nation we have abandoned our faith in public education as the bastion of our democratic ideals, where students are taught in, for, and about democracy, and "honored, critically engaged, and nurtured with a sense of dignity and hope" (p. 9). Moreover, he warns that democracy, as we know it, may be "fatally wounded, as those who are young, poor, immigrants, or people of color are excluded from the operations of power, the realm of politics, and crucial social provisions" (p. 9). Instead of ensuring that all children, regardless of their background or life circumstance, are provided an equitable education

that enables them to participate fully in society and offers the hope of a better and more inclusive future, by history and by present example we demonstrate that values such as equality, justice, and democracy apply only to those who belong to the dominant and privileged group.

Background and Problem Statement

When some students fail to realize similar social inclusion and academic success as their peers simply because of their (self or imposed) identification with a non-dominant identity group, they must be considered casualties of institutionalized marginalization and oppression. I submit that the democratic ideals upon which this country was founded demand socially just and equitable educational opportunities for *all* children regardless of their socio-economic background, race, ethnicity, home language, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or any other characteristic that sets them apart from those who have, merely by privileged identity, historically occupied positions of power in society. Yet the overt and clandestine ways in which our system of public education continues to marginalize and oppress some groups of children are so numerous and wide-ranging it is beyond the scope of this research to address but a few.

As Oakes and Rogers (2006) suggest, the Supreme Court made it clear in *Brown v. Board of Education* that states must provide equal educational opportunities to all children if they afford it to any; nonetheless, public education in the United States continues to unjustly deliver to able-bodied White and wealthier Americans an education worth coveting, and to low-income students of color one hardly worth having. In fact, many researchers submit that the disparity between the quality of educational

opportunities offered to wealthy White students and those afforded to low-income children of color are often so glaring they are painfully difficult to ignore (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Oakes & Rogers, 2006).

For example, the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement has been studied extensively and reveals that children from impoverished households score significantly lower than average on measures of academic achievement and rates of school completion (Kena, et al., 2015). Since nearly 65 percent of the more than 16 million U.S. children living in poverty in 2011 were either Black or Hispanic (Lopez & Velasco, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), it is evident that, in addition to income, race and ethnicity play an important role in determining educational outcomes.

Additionally, Latino youth are more than twice as likely to drop out of school as their White counterparts (Kena, et al., 2015); English language learners (ELL) and children whose home language is other than English fall significantly behind their non-ELL peers in measures of reading ability (Kena, et al., 2015); and, decades of research has consistently shown that Black students are subject to out-of-class discipline, suspensions, and expulsions at a much higher rate than any other group (Gregory, Skiba, & Nogera, 2010). Moreover, children with disabilities, those who are English language learners, and other children from non-dominant backgrounds are far too often relegated to inherently unequal special education programs, remedial classes, and vocational trajectories, leading to inequitable and unjust educational opportunities and outcomes. According to Starratt (2005),

> The subtle bias in the classifications of special education children, the tracking of students into dead-end, low expectation programs, and the scheduling of the "best" teachers in honors classes and the least experienced teachers in the lowest performing classes are examples

of organizational arrangements that disadvantage (some) students in schools. (p. 129)

Further, the overarching culture in most public schools in the U.S. tends to be inherently hostile towards sexual and gender minority youth (Kosciw, Greytak, & Bartkiewiez, 2014) and those from non-Christian religious backgrounds (Bonet, 2011) consigning these children to the margins.

Regardless of intention, when the policies, practices, customs, and cultural rules of an institution (such as a school or district) systematically produce inequities traceable to one's membership in a targeted social identity group, the institution is oppressive (Cheney, La France, & Quinteros, 2006). Instead of imagining a society where all children have the same opportunity to obtain a quality education that reflects and accounts for their lived realities and making that ideal a reality, the United States has carved formal public education into more and less desirable portions, the better of which are coveted and consistently seized by those who have garnered the most power. Oakes and Rogers (2006) contend that these disparities in educational opportunities are the result of deeper cultural values and political ideologies that cannot be remedied simply by instituting technical reforms that merely adjust rules, structures, and practices. Rather, equitable and just reform also requires the "deconstruction of prevailing beliefs and politics that sustain racial and class privilege" (p. 15). Without addressing the underlying causes of marginalization and oppression, no amount of reform efforts will level the playing field for the millions of children who are unjustly disenfranchised (Shields, 2013).

Call to Action

Leaders, especially those in administrative positions with the power and authority to shape educational policy and practice, have both a moral and ethical obligation to create milieus where all children are afforded equitable and socially just opportunities to learn (Giroux, 2009; Ryan, 2006; Shields, 2016). Educational leaders committed to this goal must identify and adopt values, beliefs, and practices that promote more democratic and socially just educational environments for all children. Astin and Astin (2000) articulately describe these ideals saying,

> We believe that the value ends of leadership should be to enhance equity, social justice, and the quality of life; to expand access and opportunity; to encourage respect for difference and diversity; to strengthen democracy, civic life, and civic responsibility; and to promote cultural enrichment, creative expression, intellectual honesty, the advancement of knowledge, and personal freedom coupled with responsibility. (p. 11)

Progress toward the goal of democratic reform requires a revolutionary reconstitution of the foundational issues undergirding the injustice within public education and the society in which it is situated (Shields, 2013). I submit that educational leaders must heed the clarion call of the unheard voices and take action to address the origins of marginalization and oppression in our schools. This means that our public school leaders must strive to eliminate the forces of oppression from school communities and create educational opportunities that respect and represent the diversity of values and viewpoints of those who have been traditionally excluded from the metanarrative of U.S. culture.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

As public servants dedicated to the democratic pursuit of an educated society, school leaders are charged with providing direction and a shared vision that shapes the overall school climate for *all* youth. By extension then, they are faced with the challenge of ensuring that no group is marginalized or oppressed because of their social identity. Historian, scholar, and Pulitzer prizewinner James MacGregor Burns (1978) speaks to a vision of social transformation emerging from the efforts of leaders who engender "*real change*—that is, a transformation to a marked degree in the attitudes, norms, institutions, and behaviors that structure our daily lives" (p. 414, italics in original). To that end, it is important that we begin to better understand the ways in which some educational leaders can and do work to create socially just educational environments that provide all students with meaningful opportunities to obtain an excellent education that reflects and respects the differences each child brings to the classroom.

The purpose of this transformative case study was to explore whether transformative leadership theory could best explain how one self-identified social justice-oriented leadership team at the district level endeavors to create an inclusive and excellent learning environment for all students, including those from traditionally marginalized and oppressed groups. In order to determine if transformative leadership theory does, indeed, best explain this team's approach to socially just leadership; the following questions guided my research:

1. How does the leadership team (superintendent and two assistants) interact and relate to one another?

2. How do they interact with the community, School Board members, principals, parents, and students?

3. How do they address the needs of traditionally marginalized and oppressed students?

Rationale of the Study

To honor the democratic purpose of education we must also honor the ideals of equity and justice for all children. Considering the depth and breadth to which our schools are plagued by the injustice of marginalization and oppression, we must heed the advice of Burns (1978) who suggests that transformation requires a revolution of ideology and "a movement bent on transforming society on the basis of that ideology" (p. 202). Shields (2009) reminds us that "in education, social justice requires equity of both access and outcomes" (p. 12) and educational leaders have both a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that all aspects of schooling are inclusive and welcoming for all students. Therefore, understanding the ways in which committed leaders work to create more inclusive and socially just schools has the potential to offer the promise of a brighter and more democratic future to all students in our systems of public education.

Although numerous scholars have written about leadership for social justice (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Marshall, 2004, Marshall & Olivia, 2006, Marshall & Ward, 2004; Scheurich, 1998; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, Theoharis, 2007), few researchers have studied leadership at the district level to understand exactly what systemic leadership for social justice looks like in practice. This study adds to the academic literature on educational leadership at the district level by exploring the ways in which one self-identified social

justice leadership team endeavors to create excellent and inclusive educational experiences for all students, including those from traditionally marginalized and oppressed groups. More importantly, however, as an exploration of social justice leadership in practice, this research offers current and future educational leaders useful insight into the fundamental goal of providing excellent and inclusive education for all children.

Overview of the Literature and Theoretical Frame

Oppression and marginalization can take many forms including physical, economic, social, mental, or emotional domination and can annex the deepest shadows of society or hide in plain sight, but always involve issues of power and privilege. In fact, Freire (1970) defines oppression as a form of violence carried out when one individual or group exploits another. In chapter two I provide a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature relevant to this study, and outline the theoretical framework that undergirds this research. The major themes that are discussed in more detail include a depiction of the violence that is marginalization and oppression (Adams, Robelen & Shaw, 2012; DeBlaere & Brewster, 2013; Freire, 1970; Graff & Stufft, 2011; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Harry & Klingner, 2014; Shields, 2016; Smith & Harper, 2015; Welner & Carter, 2013), the social milieu in which this violence is carried out (Bourdieu, 1984; Carlson, 2014; Delpit, 2006; Kumashiro, 2000; Meyer, 2010; Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005; Shields, 2004, 2013, 2016), and its relation to one's social identity (Garnets, 2003; Mayo, 2014).

I then situate and discuss common mechanisms by which marginalization and oppression are manifested (Applebaum, 2006; Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2008; Diem &

Carpenter, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Milner, 2010; Shields, 2004; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Sumara & Davis, 1999; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012; Valencia, 1997). Next I draw attention to the mission of transforming schools by reviewing prominent leadership theories (Burns, 1978; 2003; Green, 1999; Leithwood, 2010; Leithwood & Duke, 1998; McKenzie & Locke, 2014; Møller, 2010; Nasaw, 1979; Park & Datnow, 2009; Ryan, 2006; Shields, 2010, 2016, Wells, 2010) and explain how these models do not adequately address the causes of marginalization and oppression.

Finally, turning to the theoretical frame of this study, I reference Burns' (2003) call for revolutionary change that seeks to transform the very nature of our educational system. The goal of transformative leadership theory (Foster, 1986; Quantz, Rogers, & Dantley, 2001; Shields, 2009; 2010; 2013; 2016; Weiner, 2003) is to inspire the kind of individual, organizational, and societal transformation to which Burns refers. Transformative leadership theory differs from other leadership models in that it begins with a transformative goal in mind, the promise of deep and equitable social change—specifically a more just and democratic society—and seeks a path forward to accomplish that goal. Firmly grounded in values of liberty, emancipation, deep democracy, equity, and justice, transformative leadership theory seems to offer the greatest potential for eliminating the anti-democratic violence of marginalization and oppression. This study was informed and guided by the lens of transformative leadership theory as I sought to understand the ways in which a district-level leadership team committed to social justice works to create inclusive and excellent schools for all students.

Overview of Methodology

Using purposeful sampling (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010; Schensul & LeCompte, 2013), one economically, racially, and ethnically diverse Midwestern school district of nearly 6,000 students was chosen as the site for this study because the superintendent, and her administrative team identify social justice as a guiding principle with a primary goal of improving inclusion and academic excellence for all students.

In order to generate a deep appreciation of the various ways in which this leadership team works to combat marginalization and oppression within their district, I employed a transformative case study design (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2009). The collection and analysis of multiple sources of data helped to ensure that the interpretations resulting from this transformative case study accurately reflect the phenomena under investigation (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002; Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). Through repeated and extended contact and multiple, in-depth and open-ended interviews with the leadership team, I endeavored to better understand how they address the needs of traditionally marginalized and oppressed students to create a more socially just educational environment district-wide. Additional interviews with board members, building administrators, and community leaders, as well as other district personnel helped to triangulate the perceptions of the leadership team with those of other stakeholders to more accurately reflect the efforts and results of the team's social justice mission.

Additionally, through careful observation of the relations within the team as well as their exchanges with others, I attempted to better understand how they interact and relate to one another, how they work with schools, principals, parents, and students to combat oppression while promoting inclusion, and how they relate to the community and

other stakeholders to encourage democratic participation and respect for differences throughout the district.

Finally, through the use of abductive reasoning (Evers & Wu, 2006; Shields, 2010) I seek to determine if transformative leadership theory best explains the values, beliefs, and practices of this self-described social justice-oriented leadership team.

Summary

In the preceding section, I have identified marginalization and oppression as a grave social offense, situated this injustice within the context of our democratic responsibility to equitably educate all children regardless of their background or life situation, suggested the need for a revolutionary transformation of the values, beliefs, institutions, and practices of public education, highlighted the moral and ethical obligation of educational leaders to interrupt this violence, and recognized the need to explore and identify ways in which committed leaders successfully address this profoundly troubling social concern. In the next two chapters, I review and consider prevailing scholarship relating to this menace to our democratic society, and delineate the methodology that was employed in this study to identify and understand the ways in which one self-designated social justice-oriented district leadership team endeavors to create inclusive and excellent schools for all students.

CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

We the people of the United States of America, a democratic nation founded upon and anchored to the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice for all—as established by such honored documents as the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution—must strive to embody the essence of those principles in our moral and ethical actions towards one another. Sadly, for millions of our citizens, this is not the case.

In schools across the country, students who have physical or mental impairments, those who are non-White, or come from impoverished homes, students who are English language learners, or those of a non-Christian faith, children who are, merely perceived to be queer, or have queer loved ones, and all youth who are in some way different from the historically dominant social group are far less likely to realize the same level of academic and social success in school as their able-bodied, heterosexual, gender compliant, White, middle and upper-class, Christian, peers who come from homes where English is the spoken language.

In this chapter, I describe how our institution of public education has failed to educate all children fairly and equitably, regardless of their social class, race, ethnicity, nation of origin, religion, ability, sexual orientation or gender identity, or any other distinguishing characteristic. I begin by providing selected evidence recounting the ways in which our system of education unjustly fails to equally serve some groups of students based upon certain characteristics of their identity. After defining the ways in which I use the terms marginalization and oppression to describe this failure, I explain how marginalization and oppression operate within the concepts of identity and the habitus of schools. In the next section of this review, I characterize the mechanisms by which

marginalization and oppression are often manifested within the educational setting, and briefly describe several of the more common mental constructs emerging from the literature that result in marginalizing and oppressive outcomes for some students.

Understanding the role of educational leaders in reversing the harmful effects of marginalization and oppression is a paramount goal of this study. As such, in the next section I turn to the mission of school leadership to transform our schools into more inclusive, equitable, and socially just spaces for all students to learn by first addressing the need to identify an effective theory of leadership. In that section, I briefly describe six widely recognized leadership theories and indicate why I believe they fail to adequately address the prevalence of marginalization and oppression within the institution of public education.

Lastly, I suggest, with Burns (1978), that we need to imagine a revolutionary change in the way we educate our children. With this notion, I turn to one leadership theory that I believe is capable of the revolutionary transformative change to which Burns refers. In the final sections of this review I examine and consider transformative leadership theory, and illustrate how this theory offers educational leaders considerable promise for creating inclusive, excellent, and socially just schools.

Understanding Marginalization and Oppression

Paulo Freire (1970) explains that "any situation in which "A" objectively exploits "B" or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression" (p. 55). This situation, he maintains, "constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with the individual's ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human" (p. 55). Marginalization, a form of

oppression, can be described as the multitude of ways in which individuals from non-dominant identity groups are isolated, excluded, or pushed to the margins of the social realm, and denied the support and resources they need to succeed (DeBlaere & Brewster, 2013). Far too often, public educators and the curricula they deliver represent the voice of the dominant social group without offering space for other voices to be heard and respected (Shields, 2016). Moreover, flawed values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions prevent educators from recognizing the disingenuous message being sent to students from diverse backgrounds that, although attendance is forced upon them, "school is not really designed to include them and… they really do not belong" (Shields, 2013, p 48).

Marginalization and Oppression Revealed

There are countless examples of the serious consequences caused by marginalization and oppression within the educational setting based on identity categories of difference, far more than I could possibly adequately address in this dissertation. To illustrate my point, however, I will highlight just a few. For instance, although the national four-year graduation rate for U.S. public high schools was at an all-time high of 80 percent in 2012, the disparity between graduation rates for White, Black, and Hispanic students reveals a glaring injustice. While 86 percent of White students graduated within four years, only 73 percent of Hispanics and 69 percent of Black students were accomplishing the same (Layton, 2014).

In spite of mounting evidence that shows the practice of grade retention, or requiring a "struggling" student to repeat a grade, is ineffective in improving overall academic success and significantly increases the likelihood that a child will eventually drop out of school (Andrew, 2014; Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002; Jimerson, et

al., 2006), students of color are much more likely to be retained than their White peers. In fact, in 2009-10 Hispanic students were more than twice as likely and Black students were nearly three times as likely to be retained as their White counterparts (Adams, Robelen, & Shaw, 2012).

Additionally, the disproportionate representation of Black students in disciplinary actions such as suspensions and expulsions is widely recognized. In a recent study of school discipline trends across the South, a shocking level of injustice was revealed. Although on average Black students represented only 24 percent of the students enrolled in public schools across the South, they accounted for nearly half of all suspensions and expulsions in 13 Southern states (Smith & Harper, 2015); a trend that can also be seen in public schools across the nation (Shields, 2016). When students are removed from the classroom, they are disallowed even the opportunity to learn. Furthermore, Black and Hispanic students are consistently disciplined more severely for the same infractions as their White counterparts (Ryan, 2006; Smith & Harper, 2015). This sad statistic hints at the even greater problem of the school to prison pipeline that continues to plague Black and Hispanic (especially male) students. For instance, although Black males represent only 14 percent of the overall youth population, they account for 45 percent of juvenile incarcerations, (Welner & Carter, 2013).

Similarly, Black, Hispanic, and Native American children are significantly more likely than their White peers to be designated as having an emotional behavior disability (EBD), intellectual disability (ID), or specific learning disability (SLD) and placed accordingly within their schools into special education programs (Harry & Klingner, 2014). Further, the test-score gaps between White middle-class students and those of

diverse backgrounds continue unabated. For instance, it is well known that poverty is strongly correlated with poor educational outcomes (Shields, 2016; Welner & Carter, 2013).

A child born into poverty faces innumerable mental, physical, and emotional obstacles that predispose him or her to developmental challenges, compounded by the daily struggles inflicted by a life absent the many benefits afforded to children of affluent parents. Ravitch (2013) explains that poverty begins to inflict its harm even before a child is born due to lower rates of prenatal nutrition and healthcare, predisposing infants to premature birth, low birth-weight, and a myriad of associated health problems and developmental impairments. The physical and intellectual development of a child born into poverty diverges rapidly from a child born into affluence due to inadequate medical, dental, and vision care, poorer nutrition, less academically enriching environments, and exposure to environmental contaminations, among many other burdens of insufficiency (Kozol, 2005).

By the time a child born into poverty enters the classroom for the first time, he or she is already academically, physically, and emotionally far behind his or her peers from affluent families (Ravitch, 2013). Furthermore, it is often the case that schools serving children from impoverished backgrounds are unprepared to help them catch up. There is significant evidence that children from low-income neighborhoods are more likely to attend failing schools with fewer certified or experienced teachers, where overall expectations for achievement are lower, and opportunities for enriched learning are limited (Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Kozol, 2005; Shields, 2013, 2016, Viadero, 2006).

In addition, schools often portray a welcoming and inclusive public image; yet, allow hidden messages to exist that some groups are less welcome than others. Students who come from diverse religious backgrounds, those whose home language is other than English, and children with disabilities, among others, are often consigned to the margins of the social environment by means of what is promoted within the social habitus of the school as well as what is disregarded completely.

As one example, schools are often unwelcoming and even dangerous social milieus for students who identify as queer[1], are merely perceived to be gay, lesbian, or transgender, or have loved ones who are queer. In their actions or absence of engagement, educators regularly convey the message to queer kids and parents that school is not for the likes of them.

For instance, queer youth are made to feel invisible and insignificant when they find no favorable depictions of their own lived realities portrayed within the sanctioned curriculum. Legitimate references to queer topics and role models are prominently missing from most schools' curricula, thus, in that deep silence, sending queer kids a thunderous message that they are unwelcome (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Graff & Stufft, 2011; Greytak & Kosciw, 2013; Herr, 1997; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010; Walton, 2005). As Curwood, Schliesman, and Horning (2009) maintain, "One of the key ways that schools condone homophobia is by failing to include LGBTQ literature in the curriculum" (p. 38). In such hostile climates, queer students must contend with verbal and

---

[111] I have chosen to use the term "queer" in addition to the more common acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) to embody the totality of complex identities represented by sexual and gender minorities for two reasons. First, as Mayo (2014) explains, "Queer is a concept and identity that works against problematic forms of normalization, troubling the exclusions that any category of identity may enact" (p. 21). Second, as Tooms (2007) asserts, the word "queer" has been used for so much of the last century as an insult; by recontextualizing it in a positive light, we can diminish its power to inflict harm.

physical harassment and even physical assault far more frequently than their heterosexual and gender compliant peers (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Moreover, many schools maintain discriminatory policies and practices that single out queer youth, such as preventing same-sex couples from attending a school-sanctioned function, prohibiting students from using their preferred name or gender pronoun, or forcing transgender students to use restroom and locker room facilities according to their birth gender (Kosciw, et al., 2014).

Marginalization, Oppression, and The Habitus of Schools

To understand the ways in which marginalization and oppression are enacted in schools, it is useful to first envision the organizing social structure within which education in the United States frequently takes place. While the entirety of physical, pedagogic, and social aspects of a school might be thought of as its culture (Meyer, 2010), a more nuanced understanding of the social aspects of culture provides insight into the evolution and manifestation of the mechanisms through which marginalization and oppression operate.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) used the term *habitus* to refer to the lived experiences and relations with others that occur within a cultural site, which are habitual, unquestioned, and reproduce "without any deliberate pursuit of coherence… without any conscious concentration" (p. 170) the arbitrary cultural referent from which it emerges. In other words, schools replicate and reinforce in a microcosm the culture of the community and society in which they are situated regardless of the inequities that may be present in the larger macrocosm. More specifically, educators tend to reproduce without question, the

power structures related to social identity present within the larger social structure simply because that is the way things are (Carlson, 2014).

Bourdieu's notion of habitus indicates that our values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about others, which motivate our actions towards them, "are so deeply ingrained that they constitute structures that organize and perpetuate societal norms often at a subconscious level" (Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005, p. xvii). More importantly, because these mental models are rarely acknowledged and seldom questioned, the actions they inspire—ones that may be marginalizing and oppressive—represent particularly robust and persistent behavioral patterns that "are extremely resistant to change" (Shields, 2004, p. 112). From this perspective, it becomes clear that meaningful and lasting change must simultaneously challenge the knowledge frameworks that undergird unjust actions both within the perimeter of the school, and throughout the wider society.

Identity and the Experience of Marginalization and Oppression

For most children, school—where relations with others outside of the family and immediate neighborhood generally first take place—is an important site of cultural and social exchange. Often school is where children of non-dominant social groups learn the unwritten rules of engaging socially within the dominant culture of power (Delpit, 2006). School is where children begin to understand the marginalizing effects of power and privilege as some identity groups are relegated to unfavorable positions outside the dominant group. It is exactly this power and privilege, which accompanies membership within the dominant group, that creates the dichotomy between "us and them" and the mental construct of what Kumashiro (2000) defines as "the Other". Those individuals and groups whose self-selected or imposed identities are in some way different from the

dominant group are banished to the category of the Other and denied the right to share power equitably and the privilege to participate fairly in the decision-making processes of the society. It is within this social milieu that all educators animate their values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about Others in ways that will either be inclusive and equitable or marginalizing and oppressive.

Although the processes by which students from diverse backgrounds and various social identity groups are marginalized and oppressed might be organized into broad categories, it is important to recognize that the manner in which this violence is experienced by the victim may be unique. In reality, at the personal level the experience of marginalization and oppression within the school setting may vary significantly relative to the multiple, complex, and often shifting ways in which individuals identify themselves or are identified by others. Even the intersection of one identity with various others, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion, socioeconomic class, and so on, creates unique and often muddled experiences of marginalization and oppression. Moreover, the socially constructed concepts of identity themselves are often challenged, reformatted, and stretched to define diverse relationships, describe fluid identities, or explain complex social positions (Mayo, 2014). Thus, as Garnets (2003) cautions, "no single element of identity, be it class, race, gender, disability, or sexual orientation can truly be understood except in relation to the others" (p. 123), the relationship between oppression and its expression on subordinate identity groups can sometimes be unpredictable. Nonetheless, while the outcomes may play out differently across and within various social identity groups, some educators

unintentionally, or perhaps deliberately, marginalize and oppress certain groups of students within the school setting in a number of similar and somewhat predictable ways.

Mechanisms of Marginalization and Oppression

Keeping in mind the idea that consequences can play out in a myriad of ways across the unlimited and shifting signifiers of social identity, the literature suggests that many of the modes in which marginalization and oppression become expressed within the educational setting originate from a relatively few common mental constructs or thought patterns that, when taken to their logical conclusions result in the violence that interferes with an individual's calling to become more fully human (Freire, 1970).

Values, Beliefs, Attitudes, and Assumptions

While the private thoughts of an individual towards the Other may be positive and welcoming or prejudicial and stigmatizing, they are neither immediately inclusive nor oppressive. On the other hand, because one's actions are fundamentally ordered by the myriad of private values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions one holds about the world and those in it, the manifestation of those mental models are either inclusive or oppressive (Shields, 2013; 2016 Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005). In this way, mental constructs or thought patterns arising from one's private beliefs such as negative stereotypes and preconceptions, lowered expectations, and stigmatizations to name a few, become expressed in the decisions, behaviors, and actions one takes when interacting from a position of greater power and privilege with the Other, and result in the violence of marginalization and oppression. Therefore, because humans behave in ways that are congruent with their deepest, possibly even unconscious values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about the world and others who occupy it, altering the decisions and

behaviors of educators that manifest in the marginalization and oppression of certain individuals and groups requires a restructuring of the private thoughts upon which those actions are based.

I do not mean to imply that I, or anyone else, can know for certain the nature of any other person's private thoughts about individuals from Othered groups. Nor do I mean to suggest that the majority, or even a significant number of educators intentionally act in ways that are discriminatory and oppressive. What does become evident, however, considering the millions of students from diverse backgrounds who fail to realize the same level of academic and social success in school as their peers who belong to the dominant social group, is that educators' values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions have the power, manifested through their decisions, methods, and actions, to obstruct the progress of some students who seek only to achieve their full academic and social potential.

Mental Constructs or Thought Patterns

Emerging from the literature, and upon consideration of the demographics of the study district, I selected some of the more common mental constructs and thought patterns that manifest in oppressive and marginalizing ways. The initial list of potential suspects include deficit thinking (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Milner, 2010; Shields, 2013; 2016; Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Valencia 1997), pathologies of silence (Applebaum, 2006; Shields, 2004), the myth of meritocracy (Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Milner, 2010; Shields, 2013), and disregarding difference (Applebaum, 2006; Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Milner, 2010; Shields, 2013; 2016). I also consider other 'isms and obias' such as racism and White privilege (Anti-Defamation

League, 2001; Cowan, 2010; Delpit, 2006; Harris, 1995; Jorde & Wooding, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Lipsitz, 2011; Palmer, 2007; Schniedewind, 2005; Shields, 2009, 2016; Wellman, 1977), and heteronormativity and homophobia (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2008; Chiasson & Sanlo, 2013; Espelage & Rao, 2013; Graff & Stufft, 2011; Greytak & Kosciw, 2013; Kosciw, Greytak, & Bartkiewiez, 2014; Mayo, 2014; Meyer, 2010; Sumara & Davis, 1999; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012).

This list is not presented as an all-inclusive inventory of the types of mental constructs and thought patterns associated with marginalizing and oppressive educational outcomes; rather, merely a starting point from which to begin to uncover and examine possible mechanisms that may be in operation within the district that was the site of this research. As additional marginalizing and oppressive thought patterns and mental constructs emerged during the research process, I returned to the literature to include extant scholarship in this report. In the next section, I briefly review each of the preceding concepts.

Deficit thinking. Deficit thinking paradigms are thought patterns that, when manifested, allow educators to deflect responsibility away from themselves for diverse students' failure to achieve similar academic and social success as their dominant group peers and onto the failing students. Shields (2004) clarifies further saying, "[b]ased on socially constructed and stereotypical images, educators may unknowingly, and with the best intentions, allocate blame for poor school performance to children from minoritized[2] groups based on generalizations, labels, or misguided assumptions" (p. 111).

---

[2] Together with Shields (2009; 2016), I use the term minoritized to refer to a group of people who have been ascribed the characteristics of a minority regardless of whether or not they are in the numerical minority.

Richard Valencia (1997) claims that deficit thinking is such a pervasive problem, especially in low-income schools and those with high percentages of students of color that it could explain much of the educational failure of these children. He describes this thought pattern in the following way:

> The deficit thinking paradigm, as a whole, posits that students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster—such as familial deficits and dysfunctions. Given the endogenous nature of deficit thinking, systemic factors (for example, school segregation; inequalities in school financing; curriculum differentiation) are held blameless in explaining why some students fail in school… The popular "at-risk" construct, now entrenched in educational circles, views poor and working class children and their families (typically of color) as predominantly responsible for school failure, while frequently holding structural inequality blameless. (p. xi)

Locating the responsibility for a child's poor academic achievement within the child or in the child's home environment releases educators for failing to effectively educate "those" children. Further, through the use of the deficit thinking paradigm, the educational system is released from the need to search for and dismantle the systemic barriers that prevent equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for all students. Finally, the failure of "those children" to progress in step with children from the dominant group becomes 'evidence' that simply reinforces the deficit paradigm (Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001).

The results can be devastating for students from economically disadvantaged homes, children of color, and those whose families speak a language other than English. Skrla and Scheurich (2001) explain that these children…

> routinely and overwhelmingly are tracked into low-level classes, identified for special education, segregated based on their home languages, subjected to more and harsher disciplinary actions, pushed

out of the system and labeled "dropouts," underidentified as "gifted and talented" immersed in negative and "subtractive" school climates, and sorted into a plethora of "remedial," "compensatory," or "special" programs. (p. 236)

Educators who fail to recognize the systemic barriers and hurdles that some children from diverse backgrounds must overcome in order to achieve the same level of academic and social success as their peers from the dominant social group may simply assume that "those parents" just don't care, don't value education, or that "those children" simply aren't ready for school (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Regardless of the rational, the deficit thinking mental model always manifests in marginalizing and oppressive outcomes for children from diverse backgrounds.

Myth of meritocracy. A similar mental construct, the myth of meritocracy holds that educational and social achievement is based solely upon an individual's personal merit, that success or failure is determined entirely by the choices one makes, and the effort one puts forth (Diem & Carpenter, 2012). As with the deficit thinking paradigm, this model also fails to consider the fact that not all students are afforded the same economic, educational, and social opportunities (Milner, 2010), or that poverty, racism, classism, and other socially constructed institutionalized barriers encumber the progress of some students (Ryan, 2006, Shields, 2010, 2016). Educators who succumb to this pattern of thinking fail to acknowledge the uneven playing field, the retracted starting point, and the uphill climb that often face children from diverse backgrounds, and fail to recognize the inherent unfairness in assuming that these students fall behind simply because they are not working hard enough.

The logic of meritocracy evolved as a byproduct of American capitalism and the need for a highly differentiated workforce (Bennett-deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). In

opposition to the more democratic purposes of schooling, functionalists presume that schools also have an economic purpose—to sort, select, and differentially train a competent and compliant workforce. Relying on the false belief that every child has an equal chance to realize the unique excellence that his or her talent merits, the outcomes of this sorting process seem fair because, "students are not sorted capriciously; rather they are placed in programs that suit them best according to supposedly objective measures of ability" (Oakes & Rogers, 2006).

The duplicitous message we are sending to children here is that if they just work harder and "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps" they too can succeed. The myth of meritocracy is merely a thinly veiled attempt to suggest that the systemic cultural, structural, and institutional barriers that perpetuate an uneven playing field for minoritized groups are merely obstacles that must be overcome; and, that it is acceptable to expect that they should have to work harder than their dominant group counterparts to enjoy the same level of success (Shields, 2013).

Disregarding difference. In some ways related to the myth of meritocracy, disregarding difference is a mental construction that allows educators to neglect important dissimilarities such as race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and so forth, when accounting for individual achievement. Most commonly expressed as colorblind racism when referring to the omission of one's race, this form of oppression is often endorsed as a virtue by uncritical educators who most assuredly belong to the dominant social identity group. The ideology behind this mental construct is that difference (race in the case of colorblindness) is and should be irrelevant (Applebaum, 2006; Shields, 2016).

This thought pattern, significantly reinforced with the election of President Barack Obama, is rooted in the notion that racism no longer affects a person of color's life chances (Diem & Carpenter, 2012), and that individuals should be understood and evaluated without regard to their racial background. Yet the conflict sparked by racial turmoil in places like Ferguson, Missouri in August of 2014 or Baltimore, Maryland in April of 2015 clearly contradicts such arguments.

The same logic may apply to sexual orientation and the Supreme Court Decision (*Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015*) that legalized same sex marriage in all 50 states. The notion that we are a nation past discrimination against the LGBTQ community may be offered; although reactionary measures, such as North Carolina's passage of the Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act of 2016, which requires everyone (but specifically transgender people) to use the public restroom assigned to the biological sex on their birth certificate, or Mississippi's Protecting Freedom of Conscience from Government Discrimination Act of 2016, which allows public entities to deny service to LGBT people, single mothers, and any others who somehow offend an individual's sincerely held religious belief, most assuredly suggest otherwise.

The obvious flaw in these arguments is that, in the U.S., difference does matter. From housing, to employment, to healthcare, and education, structural and systemic discrimination continues to present hurdles to the progress of people from non-dominant groups in all aspects of life. Presuming to disregard a person's racial heritage (in the case of colorblindness) leaves important aspects of race and racial histories unchallenged, and erases the significant disparities in relation to power and privilege (Applebaum, 2006). This type of mental construct is particularly dangerous because it offers the perpetrator a

veil of integrity, while simultaneously preventing the interrogation of deeply held stereotypes and assumptions about the other and leaving intact the presumption that the dominant social identity group is a normative standard by which all other groups should be judged (Shields, 2016).

Pathologies of silence. Another associated mental concept involves what Shields (2004) terms pathologies of silence. Recognizing that educators, particularly those who identify with the dominant social group, are often uncomfortable addressing differences such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and so forth, Shields suggests that many important distinctions are omitted from conversations, preventing marginalized students from bringing their own lived realities into the learning environment. Whether resulting from insensitivity, ignorance, or merely discomfort with difference, when educators choose not to address or even acknowledge the important identity characteristics of children from diverse backgrounds, they are pathologizing those lived realities and excluding those children from full and fair participation in the educational process. Shields (2004) submits that remaining silent about issues such as race, economic status, sexual orientation or gender identity, even in the well-intentioned effort not to single children out, sends the "clear and strong message: Your experience is not normal; it is something to be ashamed of. You not only need to struggle with your life circumstances, you need to hide them so no one will know your reality" (p. 121). Students who are made to feel ashamed of their background and unwelcome in the social environment of the school are unlikely to engage in their education. All students should feel welcomed and see themselves portrayed in the usual and customary representations of individuals and lived realities throughout the school.

Isms, obias, and normative structures. As stated previously, the list of ways in which mental constructs manifest in marginalizing and oppressive outcomes for students is considerable. Many thought patterns have developed over generations to justify and rationalize heterosexual White males' privileged position and dominant power over essentially all other people. Racism, sexism, classism, xenophobia, homophobia, and Islamophobia are just a few examples of this type of discriminatory thinking and acting that result in the violence to which Freire (1970) refers. Although unique in their historical development, targeted identity group, and resulting manifestations, these thought patterns all result in the marginalization and oppression of those who do not belong to the dominant social group. In the following paragraphs, I will briefly address racism and White privilege, as well as hetero/cisnormativity and homophobia, as examples of this type of mental construct because the literature and site demographics suggest they may be the most likely to be encountered.

Racism. Perhaps the most vehement and malevolent of all discriminatory constructs, racism emerges from the deeply held belief that a person's social and moral characteristics are determined by his or her inherited biological traits, and that one race is superior to all others (Anti-Defamation League, 2001). Racism is often misunderstood as a bidirectional phenomenon applied equally to instances of White on non-White oppression as well as non-White on White oppression. In fact however, because racism is inextricably linked to the power and privilege afforded to White society in the United States, the dialectic between perpetrator and victim explicates why bigoted, biased, or prejudicial behaviors on the part of non-Whites cannot be considered racism (Ladson-Billings, 1996). The decisions and actions that arise from White racist mental constructs

therefore result in the marginalization and oppression of individuals who are considered non-White.

For more than four centuries, racism has morphed from its deliberate and barbaric roots in the institution of slavery, through segregation and Jim Crow laws, to its more covert, yet still powerful social and political manifestations experienced by people of color to this day. The perpetuation of slavery in America relied upon the mental justification that Africans and their descendants were somehow less than human. No moral agent could possibly accede the unjust and inhuman treatment slavery wielded upon its victims—the effects of which remain today as institutionalized shackles upon the wrists and ankles of every person of African decent—unless one could mentally separate and maintain Blacks as a sub-human species (Harris, 1995). Over the ensuing generations, White society has incorporated these mental constructs, which are now indistinguishable from their origins in slavery, into the thought patterns, institutions, and practices of White dominant culture (Lipsitz, 2011). It is rather ironic, as Ladson-Billings (1996) notes, that "America's understanding of itself as a nation based upon freedom, justice, and equality was predicated on its establishment of the antithetical conditions of enslavement, injustice, and inequality" (p. 250).

Like many deeply ingrained thought patterns that result in the discriminatory treatment of certain groups of people, racism is based upon a socially constructed belief that there are inherent differences in the human character, which can be attributed to distinct races (Harris, 1995; Lipsitz, 2011; Palmer, 2007; Shields, 2009). In spite of substantial evidence to the contrary, this notion of an inherent racial difference has remained steadfast. In recent decades, considerable advances in genetic research have all

but eliminated the notion of a genetic basis of racial distinction. Simple genetic variations

resulting from millennia of geographic separation, as humans spread North out of Africa

and across the Eurasian continent, account for the phenotypic differences we commonly

associate with "race". Geneticists Jorde and Wooding (2004), explain,

> Data from many sources have shown that humans are genetically homogeneous and that genetic variation tends to be shared widely among populations. Genetic variation is geographically structured, as expected from the partial isolation of human populations during much of their history. Because traditional concepts of race are in turn correlated with geography, it is inaccurate to state that race is "biologically meaningless." On the other hand, because they have been only partially isolated, human populations are seldom demarcated by precise genetic boundaries. Substantial overlap can therefore occur between populations, invalidating the concept that populations (or races) are discrete types. (p. 532)

Nonetheless, in America, race continues to be a divisive concept that significantly

influences the lives of those who are considered Others by the dominant and privileged

group. Working with and through other mental constructs such as intolerance, biases, and

stereotypes, racism can manifest in limitless forms of oppression resulting from the

power that originates in the privilege of Whiteness. Far from being immune to these

marginalizing and oppressive thought patterns, education, as Bourdieu (1984) suggests, is

a field that perpetuates more than eliminates the status quo of lower academic

achievement, higher drop out rates, disproportionately frequent and severe discipline, and

so forth for most students who are non-White (Shields, 2016).

White privilege. Racism involves much more than the hateful and even violent

acts perpetrated by Whites against people who are considered to be "non-White". Taking

the more subtle forms into consideration, Wellman (1977) defines racism as "culturally

sanctioned beliefs which, regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages

whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities" (p. xviii). In reality, there is a great degree of power and resulting privilege that accrues automatically to all White people. At the cultural level, Whites unconsciously sanction a particular version of reality based entirely on the White experience, or what Schniedewind (2005) describes as "the institutionalized white perspective" (p. 286), and this reality becomes the basis of what is considered normal and expected. Practically all institutional and social structures are configured from this perspective and operate according to specific rules determined by those who belong to what Delpit (2006) calls the "culture of power" (p. 24). For instance, Whites have the power to shape the norms and values of society; White society decides upon the version of history and knowledge that is taught in our schools; White society chooses what is considered acceptable linguistic style; and, Whites have access to many other concrete benefits and social rewards merely due to their inclusion in the dominant social group (Schniedewind, 2005).

Moreover, White people are, by their mere inclusion in the dominant social group, immune to and most often unaware of many subtle, but insidious forms of racism. White people, for instance, are not subject to hyper-vigilant supervision when they enter a store, don't find it impossible to hail a cab at night, and don't routinely worry that police may fatally shoot their male children during a routine traffic stop. Furthermore, White children are never told that they are a "credit to their race" for doing something honorable, nor are they held as an illustration of all White children when they misbehave. As Ladson-Billings (1996) explains, White people are complicit in the violence of racism merely by "their non-action and tacit acceptance of the privilege and advantages they receive" (p. 253), and this is perhaps the most insidious form of racism. This is particularly important,

considering the percentage of White teachers leading increasingly diverse classrooms in American schools. According to the most recent demographic information available from the National Center for Education Statistics, 83 percent of public school teachers in the U.S. were White non-Hispanic, while more than 38 percent of students were either Black (17 percent) or Hispanic (21 percent) in the 2007-2008 school year (Cowan, 2010). The predominance of White educators teaching students from diverse backgrounds merely escalates the potential for the marginalization and oppression of non-White students.

Hetero/cisnormativity. Another thought pattern commonly ascribed to by educators is that of hetero/cisnormativity. In schools, as with other social institutions, normativity is the process by which the standards of what are considered normal or expected are instilled into the habitus of the institution (Mayo, 2014). The overarching habitus in most schools tends to be inherently heteronormative and cisnormative, in that pedagogies, policies, procedures, language, attitudes, values, and social norms, as well as salient examples of endorsed social relationships and gender appropriate behaviors, assume that all students are heterosexual and cisgender[3] at the expense of any alternative forms of sexuality or gender identity (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2008; Sumara & Davis, 1999; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012).

Schools that reproduce and perpetuate the existence of hetero/cisnormative habitus can trap queer students in a double-bind situation where they must choose to either conform to expected modes of behavior—in direct opposition to their authentic identities—to gain acceptance, or violate these normative conventions leading to the very

---

[3] Scholars in queer studies often use the term *cisgender* (from the Latin prefix - cis meaning "on this side of", as opposed to the Latin prefix – trans meaning "on the other side of") to both describe a person whose "gender identity and expression aligns with social expectations for the sex assigned [to them] at birth" (Meyer, 2010, p. 141), and to reify the concept as a social construction that becomes meaningful only when juxtaposed to its opposite—*transgender*.

real possibility of isolation, harassment, and even physical assault (Kosciw, Greytak, & Bartkiewiez, 2014). In other words, regardless of intent, schools that maintain hetero/cisnormative habitus systematically marginalize and oppress children who fall outside the norms of heterosexuality and gender compliance.

   Homo/transphobia. One final mental construct on this abbreviated list of isms and obias is homophobia. Popularized in the 1960's to label an overwhelming distress brought on by merely considering the notion of homosexuality, the term homophobia describes an irrational fear and loathing of anything queer, and includes a range of negative attitudes and feelings that often result in verbal or physical attacks against anyone or anything merely suspected of being queer (Chiasson & Sanlo, 2013; Meyer, 2010). Similarly, transphobia applies to an irrational fear and loathing of transgender and transsexual individuals. Homo/transphobia can manifest in subtle, almost imperceptible ways—such as an educator's inability to generate caring relationships with queer students, the intentional exclusion from the curriculum of all forms of sexual orientation and gender identity other than heterosexuality and gender compliance, or limiting queer literature and materials from the library—to blatant examples of disrespect—such as failing to intervene when students use homophobic language, refusing to allow transsexual students to use their preferred gender pronouns or dress according to their gender identity, or refusing to include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected categories in anti-bullying policies and legislation (Espelage & Rao, 2013; Graff & Stufft, 2011; Greytak & Kosciw, 2013; Mayo, 2014).

Rejecting Marginalizing and Oppressive Thought Patterns

The ways in which some students are systematically discriminated against and pushed to the margins of the educational realm are nearly endless; yet, the result of such unjust modes of thinking and acting is violence perpetrated against some individuals and groups merely because of their chosen or forced social identity. What can be understood from this brief review is that marginalization and oppression emerge from an imbalance and misuse of power by those who are privileged to be included in the dominant social group. Such privilege includes the authority to shape the norms, values, rules, and expectations by which all others are ultimately judged. In order to eliminate the behaviors that lead to marginalizing and oppressive outcomes for minoritized youth, the thought patterns and mental constructs that structure and guide educators' decisions and actions must be challenged, deconstructed, and reformed in more equitable and socially just ways. Only in this manner can we begin to eliminate the academic and social disparity between students who can claim a privileged position within the dominant social identity group and all others. As democratic institutions, it is reasonable to expect that our public schools provide *all* children not just the equal opportunity to participate fairly, but also the expectation that all students, regardless of their life circumstances or background, are afforded an equitable educational experience that reflects and respects their diverse lived experiences. Educational leaders have an obligation to eliminate marginalization and oppression, and to generate a shared vision of inclusion and excellence for the entire student body. In the next section, I examine theories of educational leadership with this responsibility in mind.

Not Just Us… Transforming Schools

> We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America. –U.S. Constitution, pmbl.

Shortly after the birth of this untested nation, our founding leaders set forth to create a living document that would guide future generations toward the vision of a democratic union of people steered by the principles of liberty and justice for all its citizens. In spite of the soaring promises invoked by this document, it is important to recognize the historical context in which the Constitution of the United States was written. Few would argue that the scope of the original document failed to sanctify *all* people of this land. Women would not win the right to participate in the political process for more than a century, Blacks were considered only three fifths of a person, and Indigenous inhabitants of this land would not be regarded at all until 1924 (Nasaw, 1979). Nonetheless, over time, the idea of inalienable human rights would persevere and evolve to include more and more formerly disenfranchised groups. The notion of genuine human equality, however, has remained steadfastly illusive to this day. Injustice and inequity are enshrined in the many institutions upon which this country is built. Not the least of which is our institution of public education.

Transforming the habitus of schools into more inclusive, equitable, and socially just spaces for *all* students requires committed leaders who have the courage to actively trouble and interrupt the mental constructs and thought patterns of educators that manifest in marginalizing and oppressive decisions, behaviors, and actions throughout the educational realm. If we aspire to realize the democratic ideals upon which this country

was founded, we must work towards deconstructing these mental frameworks and reconstructing them in ways that are more inclusive, equitable, and socially just for all. To accomplish this task, we must invoke a particular kind of leadership theory, one devoted to the goal of eliminating marginalization and oppression throughout the school and, ultimately society as a whole.

The Search For an Effective Theory of Leadership

Shields (2016) reminds us that leadership theories for the most part are not intended to provide prescriptive answers to every question, concern, problem, and situation that might arise within an educational setting; rather, they serve as a "lens through which to view one's daily work" (p. 21) and to guide and ground one's pedagogy. Further, she points out, the quest for an effective theory of leadership spans millennia from the times of Sun Tzu (500 B.C.) and Alexander the Great (300 B.C.) to the present, and includes countless books, chapters, and articles written on the subject. Even recent scholarly international encyclopedias and handbooks dedicate dozens of chapters specifically to educational leadership theories; yet still, every day millions of children suffer the violence of oppression at the hands of inequitable and unjust educational institutions. Clearly a better approach to educational leadership is called for. So what theory of leadership is capable of serving as an anchor, a guide, and a touchstone for such a momentous transformation? I will begin by briefly reviewing some of the more prominent leadership theories.

Transactional Leadership Models

In his seminal work on leadership, prominent scholar, theorist, and Pulitzer prizewinner James MacGregor Burns (1978) differentiated between two main branches of

leadership theories based on their primary focus. The first, transactional leadership involves pragmatic relationships between leaders and followers where transactions take place through bargaining and negotiation—exchanging one thing for another such as pay for work, praise for favors, and so forth. This type of leadership theory involves making rational and technical decisions based upon concrete needs, tends to be formulaic and prescriptive, and largely maintains the status quo. Transactional leadership theories focus more on the means of leadership than the outcomes. Educational leaders who ascribe to a transactional theoretical frame are primarily focused on the daily managerial and technical aspects of school administration, including human resource decisions, financial, legal, and perhaps most saliently, academic accountability as measured by standardized test scores. Largely absent in their purest forms today, transactional leadership styles are most prominent in scientific models of leadership (see Mayo, 1949; Taylor, 1912) and highly bureaucratic and hierarchical organizations, where rational and technical decision making is utilized, efficiency and stability are highly valued characteristics, and compliance is favored over inspiration (Shields, 2010b)

Transforming Leadership Theories

Burns (1978) referred to the second type of leadership as transforming leadership in which "one or more persons engage with the others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). Unlike transactional leadership, Burns contends that transforming leadership involves a moral and conscious purpose, action towards social change, and engagement that "raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both" (p. 20). The idea of a higher purpose to leadership is an

important departure from transactional leadership models and drives at the need for change that results in more just and democratic educational opportunities for all. As with transactional leadership theories, there are many variations of what Burns would describe as transformational leadership theories. Not all leadership theories classified as *transforming* have clearly defined moral and conscious purposes, nor do they all advocate for action towards social change beyond the walls of the organization. Next, I briefly describe several of the more popular transforming models, some of which clearly focus more on organizational change and others that look toward more social transformations.

Distributed leadership theory. One type of transforming leadership theory is distributed leadership, where the focus is on increasing leadership capacity, improving teacher practice, and creating a more democratic workplace (McKenzie & Locke, 2014). This theory distributes leadership responsibilities across multiple individuals to more accurately reflect the division of labor experienced within the organization, reduce the likelihood of errors based on decisions made by a single leader with limited information, and allow organizations to build on the strengths and skills of a variety of individuals (Park & Datnow, 2009). While flattening hierarchical structures and democratizing management responsibilities, distributed leadership theory does not address issues of morality or call for a higher social purpose, therefore does not offer much potential in solving the problem of marginalization and oppression.

Instructional leadership theory. Most interpretations of instructional leadership theory "assume that the critical focus for attention by leaders is the behaviors of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students" (Leithwood & Duke, 1998, p. 34). This model of leadership assumes that the role of an effective

educational leader is to attend to three major tasks including defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and creating a positive school climate (Shields, 2016). The main focus of instructional leadership, then, is supporting the efforts of teachers and improving school and classroom conditions. While these are indeed important and worthwhile goals, they do not directly address the deeply held and unjust values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions teachers may hold that manifest in the marginalization and oppression of some groups of students relative to those who belong to the dominant social group. Moreover, this theory of leadership fails to address wider issues of power and privilege or the normative conditions within the habitus of a school that work to marginalize and exclude some students from full and fair participation in the entirety of the educational experience (Shields, 2016).

Transformational leadership theory. Perhaps one of the most well known educational leadership models, transformational leadership theory (Leithwood, 2010; Leithwood & Duke, 1998) borrows its moniker from Burns (1978) grand concept of transformation, yet lacks a clear reference to concerns for end-values such as liberty, justice or equality. Instead, transformational school leadership holds as its main goal the improvement of organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Transformational school leadership theory (Liethwood, 2010) guides educational leaders towards four major dimensions, each with three to four subsets of practices. According to Liethwood (2010), the first major dimension, setting directions, "is about the establishment of a moral purpose as a basic stimulant for one's work" (p. 159). The argument Leithwood makes here is that leaders are more likely to accomplish goals that are personally important; however, the nature of what a 'moral purpose' entails is unclear. He breaks this main

dimension into three practices, building a shared vision, fostering group goals, and expecting high performance.

His second main dimension is developing people, specifically building individual capacity and sense of mastery. Within this dimension, Leithwood (2010) lists the following subsets of practices; providing individualized support; intellectual stimulation; and providing an appropriate model. His third main dimension involves redesigning the organization, with which he means increasing motivation and capacity by improving the working conditions inside the organization. Within this dimension, Leithwood lists the following subsets of practices, building collaborative cultures, restructuring, building productive relationships with families and communities, and connecting the school to its wider environment.

Finally, his fourth main dimension involves managing the instructional program. Here Leithwood, (2010) describes four "managerial practices" that he claims have been proven to be "consequential in creating stability and strengthening the organization's infrastructure" (p. 161), including staffing the program, providing instructional support, monitoring school activity, and buffering staff from distractions to their work. Although similar in name to Burns' (1978) notion of transforming leadership, Leithwood's (2010) theoretical framework is more concerned with the smooth and efficient operation of the organization than the liberation, emancipation, and democratization of the institution or society.

The previously discussed leadership theories seem to fall short of emphasizing a moral and conscious purpose, at least with regard to socially just and democratic educational outcomes. Transformational styles of leadership theories, Burns (1978)

insists, are "concerned with *end-values*, such as liberty, justice, equality" (p. 426, italics in original), all of which are ideals that are incongruent with the deeply held values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions that manifest in marginalizing and oppressive behaviors and actions. Next I consider two leadership theories that foreground more democratic and socially just values.

Moral leadership theory. Some other contemporary models of leadership come closer to deliberately addressing the moral and conscious purpose and action towards social change called for by Burns (1978) that educational leaders might employ as a guiding lens to tackle the pervasive problem of marginalization and oppression. Moral leadership, according to Leithwood and Duke (1998) "assumes that the critical focus of leadership ought to be on the values and ethics of leaders themselves" (p. 36) implying that leadership decisions and the direction in which one leads should be grounded in the values and ideals of what is moral and ethical. This approach to leadership may come closer to achieving a goal of social change; the obvious problem, however, stems from the lack of a dispassionate notion of what is good and right. Because this theory relies on the ethical and moral perspective of those in formal administrative positions, it is potentially subject to the same flawed, and deeply held values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions that currently manifest in marginalizing and oppressive consequences for some groups of students.

Democratic leadership theory. Democratic leadership, according to Møller (2010), is a moral activity based on democratic values dedicated to developing democratic citizens, is grounded in the belief that "a more democratic and egalitarian organization of society is both possible and desirable" (p. 12), and that education is

instrumental in bringing about this social transformation. The concept of democracy implied here goes beyond the formal 'one voice, one vote' notion of fairness, which serves only to maintain the status quo. Democracy in this context embraces what Judith Green (1999) describes as

> [a] deeper conception of democracy that expresses the experience-based possibility of more equal, respectful, and mutually beneficial ways of community life and "habits of the heart"—those characteristic, feeling-based, culturally shaped and located frameworks of value within which we perceive the world and formulate our active responses to it. (p. vi, italics in the original)

Using Green's concept of deep democracy as a core ideal upon which all leadership activities are grounded, democratic leadership implies the need to address the underlying mental constructs and thought patterns that manifest in marginalizing and oppressive ways. Further, the theory's focus on developing democratic citizens through education as a means of social transformation satisfies Burns (1978) call for moral purpose and action towards social change. Nonetheless; as a theory, democratic leadership is not well defined and offers little in the way of guidance for educational leaders endeavoring to address specific issues such as marginalization and oppression within their organization (Shields, 2016). Burns (1978) makes clear that "the leadership process must be defined, in short, as carrying through from the decision-making stages to the point of concrete changes in people's lives, attitudes, behaviors, institutions" (p. 414). To effectively combat the unjust and inequitable educational conditions that result in the marginalization and oppression of millions of children, a better theory of leadership is needed.

Transformative Leadership: Leadership for Revolutionary Change

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.—U.S. Declaration of Independence, Paragraph 2 (1776).

Perhaps more than any others, these powerful words and the ideals they represent have shaped the course of our nation and inspired the hopes and dreams of countless citizens… woefully, more significantly for some than for others. In spite of the soaring rhetoric of self-evident truths, equality, unalienable rights, and life, liberty, and happiness, we as a nation have failed to realize the promise of this declaration. Nearly 250 years hence, women, people of color, Muslims, queers, and those who are impoverished to name but a few, have yet to experience the true essence of equality, liberty, or an unfettered pursuit of the good life.

In a follow-up to his seminal work on leadership, Burns (2003) returns to the subject in a book entitled *Transforming Leadership,* where he addresses the need for leaders who seek to inspire genuine societal change. He affirms that the words of such documents as our Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution and values upon which they are founded "are the inspiration and guide to people who pursue and seek to shape change, and they are the standard by which the realization of the highest intentions is [sic] measured" (p. 29). These transforming values, he insists, are the core values of transforming leaders and determine whether "leadership indeed can be transforming" (p. 29).

Burns (1978) speaks of a need for revolutionary change which, "in its broadest meaning… is a complete and pervasive transformation of an entire social system" (p. 202). Rather than working around the edges of marginalization and oppression in incremental steps, which may take generations to accomplish the kind of change needed to bring genuine equity and justice to our schools, Burns (2003) calls for the kind of transforming leadership that seeks to change, in profound ways, the very condition or nature of our educational system and the society in which it is situated. He insists that "leaders take the initiative in mobilizing people for participation in the process of change, encouraging a sense of collective identity, and collective efficacy, which in turn brings stronger feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy" (p. 25), thereby transforming the system and all those involved in the pursuit of its goals. Burns further describes transforming leaders as those who "define public values that embrace the supreme and enduring principles of a people" (p. 29). The values to which Burns refers represent the essence and foundation of such documents as our Constitution and The Declaration of Independence, the ideals of liberty, equality, democracy, and justice for all of the magnificent diversity that is this United States of America.

Transformative Leadership Theory

Transforming schools into socially just exemplars of democratic communities requires an authentic commitment to reconstruct the totality of pedagogical structures based on genuine principles of inclusiveness and respect for all individuals. Shields (2009, 2013, 2016) advocates for transformative leadership theory, the goal of which is to inspire individual, organizational, and social reformation towards more democratic and socially just ends.

Social reformation is no small task, and the role of a transformative leader is far from routine. Transformative leadership requires a profound understanding of the politics of power and privilege that dominate the social habitus of educational institutions (Quantz, et al., 2001, p. 103). Schools must be understood to be "active sites of cultural politics where different groups with varying access to power seek to interject their cultural understanding into school discourse and practice" (p. 98). Lastly, transformative leaders must understand that whenever the dominant structures of and access to power and privilege are challenged, "those in the dominant position will resist and retaliate to the extent they are able" (Quantz, et al., 2001, p. 103).

Unlike the previously discussed theoretical frameworks, transformative leadership theory begins with the well-defined objective of individual, organizational, and societal transformation in mind. Transformative leadership theory is firmly anchored in the values of liberation, emancipation, deep democracy, equity, and justice, and offers educators the concept of critique and promise as a touchstone to evaluate their work. Furthermore, the conceptual model of transformative leadership theory guides educators' practices as they work towards creating more democratic, equitable, and socially just schools.

The principles of transformative leadership theory (Shields, 2016) are encapsulated in the following eight tenets:

1. A mandate to effect deep and equitable change

2. The need to deconstruct knowledge frameworks that perpetuate inequity and injustice and to reconstruct them in more equitable ways

3. The need to address the inequitable distribution of power

4. An emphasis on both private (individual) and public (collective) good

5. A focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice

6. An emphasis on interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness

7. The necessity of balancing critique with promise

8. The call to exhibit moral courage

Although well defined, transformative leadership theory is neither a prescriptive model of leadership, nor a process oriented theory. According to Shields (2016) "Transformative leadership is as much a way of life and a way of (re)thinking as it is a leadership theory (p. 22). All of the above tenets are fundamental elements of transformative leadership theory; however, they do not organize neatly into a temporal or hierarchical order. Rather they operate in concert to form an authentic way of being that informs and guides transformative leaders' decisions and actions towards the goal of individual, organizational, and societal change.

Like the symbol of infinity it resembles, this conceptual model of the theory (Figure 1) illustrates the complex, dynamic, and unending nature of transformative leadership. Beginning with a recognition of inequities within the organization and society (the square in the center), the transformative leader moves downward through the left side of the model challenging and reconstructing the deeply held values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions that manifest in the marginalization and oppression of the Other. While holding both the private and public goals of education in balance, the transformative leader moves upward through the left side of the model by addressing the inequitable distribution of power. Moving into the right side of the model, (transforming the organization) the transformative leader shifts from an emphasis on critique to the promise of emancipation, equity, and inclusion that transformative action engenders. Helping

students to understand how we are all interconnected and interdependent helps them to work in and for Green's (1999) vision of deep democracy.

Model of Transformative Leadership Theory
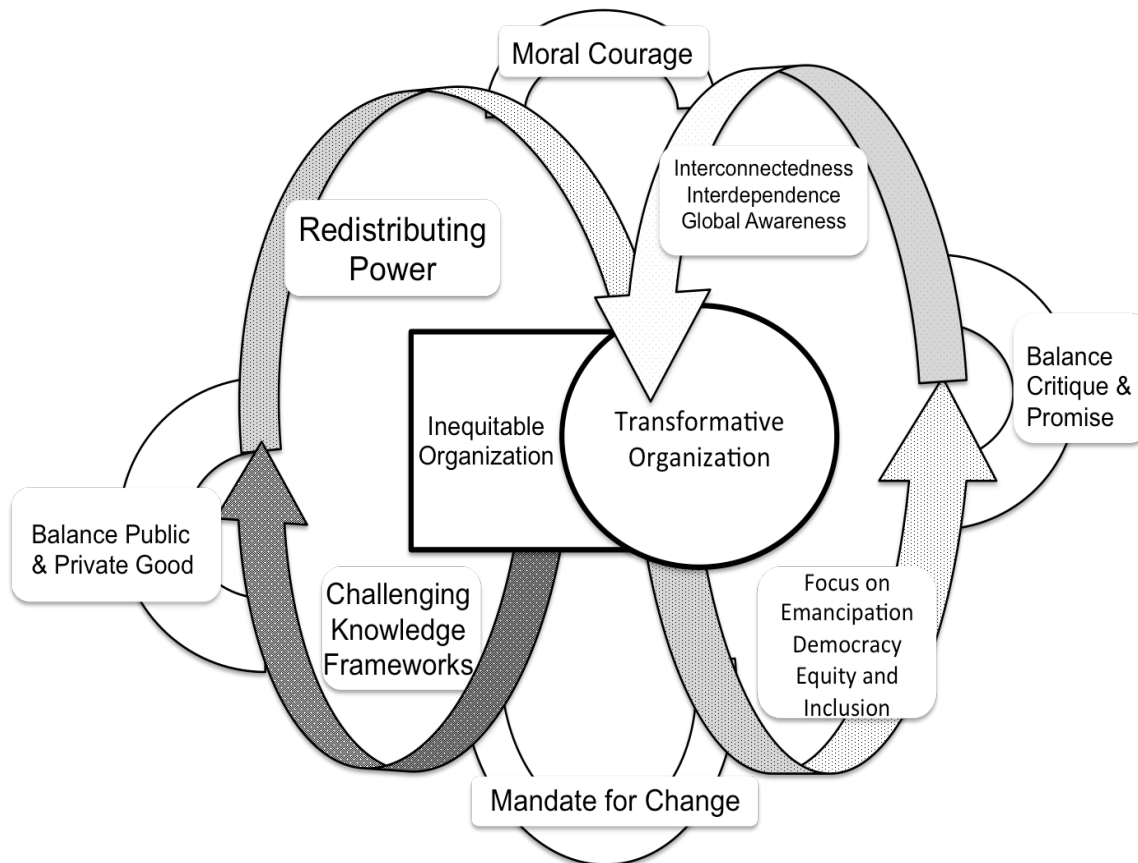
Figure 1. Transformative Leadership Model. Adapted from "Transformative Leadership Primer," by C. M. Shields, 2016, p. 25. Copyright 2016 by Peter Lang. Reprinted with permission.

The theory, like the model, is compelled by a mandate for deep and equitable change and bound by the moral courage required to face the resistance brought on by such transformation. Like the model, transformative leadership theory acknowledges no end-point where the job of transformation is complete. Injustice is an insidious and malevolent force that must be continually rooted out and destroyed.

Epistemological considerations. Transformative leadership theory is grounded in a constructionist epistemology that understands all knowledge, and therefore all

meaningful reality as being *"constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context"* (Crotty, 1998, p. 42, italics in original). An important awareness that emanates from constructionism is that the meanings we create to explain and describe our reality shapes the ways in which we see, interpret, and interact with the world and those who inhabit it. From this perspective, educators' values, beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes about the Other that manifest in marginalizing and oppressive pedagogies are not immutable; rather, they are subject to reinterpretation and reinvention.

Understanding power. Emerging from the modernist tradition of critical theory and sharing some common positions, transformative leadership theory recognizes that marginalization and oppression result from the inequitable distribution and misuse of power. In schools, normative structures give rise to what is considered acceptable and expected. Those who conform to the normative structures have access to power and privilege, while those who contravene expectations are "Othered" and treated differently, thus amounting to oppression (Kumashiro, 2000).

Similar to other critical theories, transformative leadership theory views power as the operating force behind oppression; however, unlike some critical theories that view power as an all-or-nothing phenomenon (Capper, 1998), transformative leadership theory considers power as positional and relational. Shields (2013) explains that "[p]ower inappropriately understood and used is the underlying force that continues to marginalize students in our schools and to perpetuate structures, practices, curriculum frameworks, and even beliefs that comprise barriers to equitable reform" (p.49).

At the same time, "transformative leadership is an exercise of power and authority that begins with the questions of justice, democracy, and the dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility" (Weiner, 2003, p. 89). Further, Quantz, et al., (2001) add to the discussion saying,

> Transformative leadership does not imply the diminishing of power, but the diminishing of undemocratic power relationships. It does not work for the reduction of power, but for its heightened use legitimated through democracy. Transformative leaders must learn how to use power rather than fear it" (p 102).

In summation, power, as seen through the lens of transformative leadership theory, is often utilized oppressively as a means of maintaining privilege, but is also utilized democratically by moral leaders to mitigate marginalization and oppression, and even by Othered youth in their conscious efforts to resist and breach normative structures.

Theoretical background. Like the critical traditions from which it emerged, transformative leadership theory is committed to the goals of emancipation from oppression, equity, and social justice (Capper & Jamison, 1993; Shields, 2013, 2016). Additionally, like critical theorists, transformative leaders problematize educational practices and the social structures of schools to determine who benefits and who is disenfranchised by leadership decisions (Capper, 1998; Shields, 2009).

However, unlike modernist critical perspectives that are mostly concerned with oppression that results from economic and social class disparities (Crotty, 1998), transformative leadership theory unambiguously addresses inequities that originate from all forms of oppression, including but not limited to racial, ethnic, social class, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, language, and disability (Shields, 2013, 2016).

Furthermore, modernist critical theories assume the existence of one right solution to the problem of marginalization and oppression that can be discovered through rational dialogue—which can simply create a new form of hegemony (Capper, 1998). In contrast, transformative leadership theory recognizes the socially constructed nature of hegemonic structures and calls for the constant reevaluation and critique of reform measures to ensure that they do not unintentionally create new structures of oppression (Shields, 2016).

Critical perspective. Emerging from social constructionism, transformative leadership theory shares the idea that knowledge and the meaningful reality we place on our social constructs is derived from the interactions and relationships between people (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, in common with other critical perspectives, transformative leadership theory requires the critical examination of the beliefs, attitudes, and social structures that serve to privilege some while simultaneously marginalizing and limiting others (Shields, 2014). In transformative leadership theory, however, this critical analysis is both reflexive—introspective of one's own deeply held beliefs and attitudes, and reflective—contemplative of the structures that perpetuate inequity and injustice within the organization and, more broadly, throughout society. In this regard, Transformative leadership theory recognizes that reform must look beyond the perimeter of the organization to address the inequities that exist within the wider social realm.

Transformative Leadership Theory in Practice

Transformative leadership theory begins with honest reflection on and recognition of the material realities and disparities within and outside the organization that impinge on the success of individuals, groups, and the organization as a whole, and an

acknowledgment of the personal responsibility of educators to eliminate these disparities (Shields, 2010a). Once attuned to the manifestation of marginalizing and oppressive mental constructs and thought patterns, the transformative leader will begin to notice once hidden inequities such as the disproportionate percentage of Black and Hispanic students involved in disciplinary procedures, or their under representation in advanced placement (AP) and gifted courses.

The acutely aware leader will recognize the injustice committed by asking students living in poverty to contribute money to participate in extracurricular activities, or the insensitivity of expecting a homeless child to provide his or her own supplies for an out-of-class project. Indeed, transformative leaders will recognize the marginalizing effects of non-inclusive curricula and homophobic school climates on queer students, those who are merely perceived to be queer, and those who have queer loved ones. Once the transformative leader becomes sensitive to the marginalizing and oppressive power of the dominant identity group, inequity and injustice can no longer remain invisible.

Armed with what Shields (2009) describes as critical awareness, transformative leaders embrace "a mandate to effect deep and equitable change" (p. 19). This mandate represents promise, both in the sense of a contract to enact democratic and equitable reform, and in terms of the hope for a more equitable and just future that such transformation may create. Transformative educational leaders who are committed to the goal of democratic and equitable reform are prepared to take the courageous steps necessary to deconstruct faulty mental constructs and thought patterns throughout the school community and to reconstruct them in more equitable ways. Transformative leaders are also prepared to commit to the equitable redistribution of power, and to

promote inclusion, respect, and absolute regard (Starratt, 2005) for all. Concentrating on the ideals of emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice, the transformative leader helps to foster a deeper understanding of our interconnectedness and interdependence, and to nurture a global awareness within all members of the school community.

Deep and equitable change – a profound burden. Transformative leadership theory invokes Burns' (1978) ambitious goal of revolutionary transformation (Shields, 2009, 2016) at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. As such, transformative leaders are not merely concerned with the individual consequences of inequity, but are profoundly burdened by the comprehension that the agony of oppression ripples outward from its casualties to cast a dark shadow on all of humanity. It is this burden that compels the transformative leader towards courageous action in spite of personal exposure because it is morally right to do so.

Transformative leadership theory is not only concerned with imagining what should be, but is also committed to critical action. Shields (2009) explains that "[a]wareness, reflection, and analysis do not effect change; without action, they are not transformative. Yet action requires the courage to take a stand and to act in ways that may run counter to current realities" (p. 179). This demand for critical action is echoed by Weiner (2003) when he asserts that "transformative leadership, to be transformative, must confront more than just what is, and work toward creating an alternative political and social imagination that does not rest solely on the rule of capital or the hollow moralism of neoconservatives, but is rooted in radical democratic struggle" (p. 97).

Deconstruction and reconstruction. Transformative change begins with the identification and dismantling of the values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions that result

in marginalization and oppression. There are countless ways in which the flawed mental constructs and thought patterns of educators can manifest in marginalizing and oppressive ways. Tacitly accepting, for instance, that low-income students of color are less capable of learning than their White peers from privileged backgrounds sets into motion a tautology that begins with lowered expectations and ends with a confirmation of the original belief when only those expectations are met. Or assuming, for example, that the parents of students who are eligible for free and reduced price lunches seldom attend parent-teacher conferences because they don't care about their child's education is a prejudiced and marginalizing attitude instead of recognizing that these same parents are less likely to have reliable transportation, or are paid hourly wages and can not afford to take unpaid leave or hire a babysitter.

Howe (1997) reminds us, it is important to understand that social justice and democratic ideals demand meaningful opportunities to obtain an education "worth wanting" (p. 18). By this he means an education that not only reflects and respects the differences that each child brings to the classroom in the form of their lived experiences, but also one that expects the same high standards of achievement from all students. In other words, it is not enough for some youth to merely have the opportunity to silently accept an educational experience that fails to recognize, worse yet diminishes their lived realities, for that amounts to oppression. He insists that a democratic education requires both "recognition"—the appreciation of differences that are central to individuals' identities, and "nonoppression"—the stance that positions espousing oppressive ideals must not be tolerated (Howe, 1997, p. 67-70). Therefore, transformative leaders must expect all educators to challenge and disrupt deficit thinking, eschew notions of

meritocracy, engage in the difficult conversations about important matters of difference, trouble normative social structures, and interrupt homo and transphobic school climates (Shields, 2010a, 2013, 2016).

Redistributing power and the moral courage to take a moral stand. As seen through the lens of transformative leadership theory, power is the vehicle through which oppressive values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions are manifested. Power is an omnipresent condition of all social relationships. Those with access to power regulate the rules of social engagement and even decide who is and who is not permitted to participate fully in the educational experience (Shields, 2016). Still, power is not automatically yielded to those with a numerical majority. Shields (2016) uses the term minoritized to refer "to those who may or may not be in a numerical minority but who are in a subordinate position because of power imbalance" (p. 84). For instance, even though more than 90 percent of Detroit, Michigan public school children are Black, they only celebrate their own cultural history during the shortest month of the year. The inappropriate use of power can also serve to oppress those who are differentially connected to the culture of power.

Often, the unsubstantiated fear of Otherness, coupled with access to power creates oppressive situations, even for those who might otherwise belong to the culture of power. For instance, even though LGBTQ students are three to four times more likely to be the victims of homo/transphobic violence in schools, the state of Michigan postponed the passage of anti-bullying legislation for more than 10 years because conservative legislators refused to allow the bill to specifically call for the protection of sexual orientation and gender minorities.

Power is also closely aligned with privilege and "holding social, economic, cultural, and legislative power in our country provides clear opportunities for the exercise of privilege" (Shields, 2013, p. 55). Those with access to power are even afforded the privilege of determining what counts as knowledge by deciding what gets taught and what is left unexplored, what knowledge is valued and what is considered unworthy, whose perspectives are shared and whose are ignored, and even what is considered academic achievement and what is considered failure.

Troubling the equitable distribution of power and privilege is perhaps the most challenging aspect of transformative leadership. Quantz, et al., (2001) notes that "if schools are understood to be arenas of cultural politics characterized by asymmetrical power relations, then any attempt to use power to transform social relations will be met with hostility" (p. 103). For instance, to welcome some marginalized groups such as queer students into the school community requires a redistribution of power and, often, the questioning of deeply held religious beliefs that may be met with considerable ire and may even place the transformative leader in a great deal of political danger. Interrupting and reversing the heteronormative and hostile environments commonly encountered by queer students for instance, requires transformative leaders to demonstrate true moral courage in the face of potentially vehement opposition from within the school and the greater community (Shields, 2013). Nonetheless, transformative change cannot be accomplished without moral courage. As Shields (2016) explains, "[i]f we do not have moral courage, we will be reluctant to act. We will retreat into our fears and insecurities, our discomfort with conflict, and our need to be liked and remain secure" (p. 154).

Emancipation and social justice. Focusing on *end-values* such as emancipation, equity, and justice, transformative leadership theory accepts that educators must hold as "non-negotiable" (Shields, 2009, p. 149) ideals such as recognition and nonoppression, and seek to foster an atmosphere where both are commonplace. Because recognition and respect are crucial to emancipation, and a democratic education demands fair and equitable participation, transformative leadership theory strives to create supportive, inclusive, and excellent learning environments for *all* students (Shields, 2016). When respect, recognition, acceptance of difference, and high expectations for all students become the norm of a school, oppressive structures and discriminatory practices find no fertile ground.

Balancing private with public goals and interdependence. Within and beyond the walls of the school, transformative leaders are committed to fostering the evolution of a better, more democratic and socially just world. An equitable and just education free from oppression not only improves the confidence and competence of every individual, but also benefits society by preparing all students to participate fully in the social, political and economic welfare of our global community. Conversely, the transformative leader comprehends the ultimate loss to society when the potential of even one individual is diminished. In this way, education represents both a private and a public good, and the goals of each must be kept in equilibrium.

In recent years, this balance has shifted away from valuing education for its public good—focused on preparing educated citizens capable of participating in and for the good of our democracy—towards recognizing only its private value as a means of acquiring credentials that can be used to attain a better social position. Instilling in

students a love of learning and a critical consciousness has largely given way to test preparation and the memorization of disarticulated and decontextualized facts and figures. High-stakes testing and standards-based accountability measures essentially ignore the public value of educating democratic citizens (Giroux, 2009; Labaree, 1997).

The commodification of private educational goals has entrenched the struggle for limited educational resources with the best and most valued being seized by those with the greatest power and privilege. Labaree (1997) explains that parents from the dominant social group understand that benefits, such as admission to the best school or landing a good job, accrue to children who take advanced placement (AP) classes, for instance.

> As a result, they actively lobby to gain the right placement for their children, and they vigorously resist when educators (pursuing a more egalitarian vision) propose elimination of some form of within-school distinction or another, such as by promoting multi-ability reading groups, ending curriculum tracking, or dropping the gifted and talented program (p. 53).

At the same time, these parents see educational benefits as a zero-sum competition. The flawed logic is that if low-income students of color, for example, are offered more spaces in AP classes, then there are fewer spaces available for my child, thus setting the stage for vehement clashes over educational resources with the most and best generally going to those in positions of power and privilege.

Transformative leadership theory stresses the need to match the private good of education with its counterbalancing public good. Indeed, a strong civil society is forged through democratic public education (Shields, 2016). Therefore, transformative leaders must strive to create opportunities for both a socially just education (serving the private goals of social mobility), and a social justice education (serving the public goals of democracy). Shields (2014) makes the important distinction between a "socially just

education" and a "social justice education", where the former is concerned only with safeguarding the rights of every student to equitable educational opportunities and outcomes; and, these are indeed worthwhile goals.

Transformative leadership theory, however, imagines a more complex and nuanced form of social justice education that also addresses the underlying causes of injustice throughout the world and focuses on building a better future by helping all students to develop a critical understanding of their location within society and their agency and responsibility to correct injustice wherever and whenever it is discovered. To this end, the transformative leader fosters a sense of empowerment that permits every individual to empathize with those less fortunate, to know how to act for the mutual benefit of all, and to accept personal responsibility for building a more democratic and just society. Understanding how we are connected to each other and to the world in which we live is the basis of a social justice education.

Summary - Towards Justice

The systematic manner in which some groups of students are marginalized and oppressed as a result of discriminatory mental constructs and thought patterns is anti-democratic and unjust. Armed with this understanding of marginalization and oppression and a democratic obligation to create equitable educational opportunities for all children, I have attempted, through this study, to understand, and document the ways in which one self-declared social justice-oriented district-level leadership team endeavors to create excellent and inclusive schools for their entire student body. Specifically, I have sought discover the ways in which this leadership team works to expose, dismantle, and reassemble unjust thought patterns and mental constructs held by their educational staff

that result in the marginalization and oppression of some groups of students. I endeavored to determine ways in which this leadership team works to build a shared vision of inclusion and excellence throughout their district, and to support a more equitable and just community. Finally, I sought to determine if transformative leadership theory best explains this team's approach to socially just leadership.

I approached this study using transformative leadership theory as the lens through which I analyze the complexities involved in district leadership for social justice. Further, I endeavored to determine the extent to which this leadership team's theoretical foundations reflect those of the study's theoretical lens. In this way, I hope to provide a better understanding of leadership practices that result in the generation of excellent and inclusive educational experiences for the wonderfully diverse populace that is this United States of America.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

In the waning quarter of the last century, a new research paradigm, which seeks to address issues of power and privilege, began to coalesce around the plight of marginalized and oppressed people who had for so long been essentially overlooked. A group of scholars and researchers began to advance a transformative approach to social research, not only to reveal the nature of injustices wrought against groups of people from non-dominant traditions, but also, in alliance with those most affected, to advocate for social and political action directed towards counteracting such disparity (Creswell, 2013). Emerging from its roots in critical theories such as feminist theory, critical race theory, and queer theory, the transformative approach maintains that social research should foreground the goal of challenging marginalization and oppression while furthering social justice and human rights (Mertens, 2009). As such, transformative research addresses important issues such as power and privilege, inequity, oppression, domination, and alienation becoming "a united voice for reform and change" (Creswell, 2013, p. 10).

Towards that objective, the purpose of this transformative case study was to explore whether transformative leadership theory could best explain how one self-identified social justice-oriented leadership team at the district level endeavors to create an inclusive and excellent learning environment for all students, including those from traditionally marginalized and oppressed groups. Further, this study attempts to detail the ways in which this leadership team addresses marginalization and oppression throughout their district with the expectation that such knowledge can be applied to promote inclusive and excellent schools in other districts as well. This chapter includes an

overview of the methodology, describes my personal standpoint, presents some ethical considerations, identifies the rationale for site and participant selection, data collection, data analysis, standards of validation, limitations and delimitations, and the significance of this study. In order to determine if transformative leadership theory best explains this administrative team's approach to socially just leadership, the following questions provided guidance for my research:

1. How does the leadership team (superintendent and two assistants) interact and relate to one another?

2. How do they interact with the community, School Board members, principals, parents, and students?

3. How do they address the needs of traditionally marginalized and oppressed students?

Overview of Methodology

The selection of a research approach is an important first step in conducting research that not only effectively addresses the phenomenon under investigation but also is considered academically sound and obtains outcomes that merit the respect of the chosen audience (Crotty, 1998). Most research begins with a real-life issue, problem, or question that leads the researcher to reflect on the purpose or objective of the inquiry and to consider the most appropriate strategy for obtaining the information sought. With these practical dimensions in mind, the researcher conceptualizes the study—centered within his or her philosophical worldview—and decides upon the best approach that will guide decisions regarding research design, data collection and analysis, and finally reporting the responses to the research questions (Creswell, 2013).

Mertens (2009) explains that a transformative research paradigm is grounded in transformative theory, focuses on the lives and experiences of groups that are marginalized and oppressed, is concerned with asymmetrical power relationships, and connects the results of social inquiry to action for change. Because the goal of this inquiry was to explore and understand an inherently social phenomenon and to give voice through narration to the beliefs and actions of a leadership team as they serve to address issues of marginalization and oppression within their district, a transformative approach for this investigation was appropriate (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2009). Further, as Mertens (2009) stresses, transformative research paradigms require, at a minimum, a qualitative methodological dimension to capture, through description, narrative, and dialogue, the critical contextual and historical factors associated with the lives and experiences of communities that have been pushed to the margins of society; therefore, I chose to follow a transformative and predominantly qualitative research methodology.

With the researcher acting as the primary instrument of data collection, qualitative research methodologies seek to explore or understand the meaning people assign to their experiences and endeavor to give voice to the feelings, interpretations, and perceptions of the participants under study (Creswell, 2013; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). As with most qualitative research methodologies, the transformative paradigm employs an emergent design, in that questions and procedures may evolve as data are collected and analyzed in order to better represent the realities of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2009). In addition, data for qualitative research, including transformative studies, are generally collected from a variety of sources in naturalistic settings and analyzed inductively, building from particular details into broad themes with

the results rendered in aesthetically crafted narrative to richly describe and analyze social phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Eisner, 1993).

Personal Standpoint

In qualitative research, the investigator acts as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; all data are gathered through the researcher's eyes and ears and filtered through the researcher's views and perceptions of social reality. As such, it is important to address the position of the researcher with reference to the phenomenon under study (McDonald, 2013). Because this study revolves around issues of power and privilege that result in the marginalization and oppression of non-dominant groups, it is essential that I address my own position along the power and privilege continuum. In light of my relative privilege as a middle-class White male born and raised in a small rural mid-western, culturally and ethnically homogenous community, it is reasonable to question my ability to comprehend and empathize with the experience of marginalization and oppression. For that reason, it is necessary that I divulge the manner in which I am able to relate to a marginalized and oppressed worldview.

When conducting qualitative research, many researcher-embodied categories of identity are immediately recognizable, such as gender, race, and ethnicity. Others, such as socio-economic status, language, or gender identity may not be as obvious upon first reflection, but would likely become apparent during a qualitative study. However, some researcher-embodied categories of identity such as sexual orientation are not readily discernible. This brings up the important notion of disclosure, especially as it relates to my ability to speak to issues of marginalization and oppression.

As a child, I struggled to fit in. I often felt different, alone, and afraid. Throughout my life, I have been painfully aware of the marginalizing pressures exerted against people like me. Unlike many oppressed individuals, however, I have always had the option to conceal my differences from those who would surely persecute and torment me. Generally over the years, I learned to evade the "lynch mob" mentality that would reject or torment me by concealing a significant part of my identity. For this, however, I paid a terrible emotional price. I lived most of my youth alone, in fear of exposure, unable to speak out, and afraid to pursue my dreams. This is the reality of the gay closet, a silent prison with which I am intimately familiar. As an undergraduate I studied race and racism, perhaps as a proxy to understanding the marginalization and oppression that, as a gay man, I felt but was too afraid to acknowledge. As an adult, my graduate training has focused exclusively on all forms of equity, diversity, and social justice issues in education. Nonetheless, even in the fifth decade of my life I continue to struggle with the remnants of homophobia that linger throughout a predominantly heterosexual society. Through a lifetime of personal experiences coupled with my academic discipline, I am able to recognize and empathize with other forms of marginalization and oppression in spite of my apparent position of power and privilege.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers must always carefully weigh the benefits of new knowledge against the potential of causing harm to anyone involved in the study. From the earliest planning stages, the researcher must remain cognizant of potential ethical concerns that may arise during the research process and protect the interests of all parties involved (Creswell, 2013). This involves developing trusting relationships, guarding against misconduct or

impropriety, and promoting the overall integrity of the research process (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). The overall design of this study presents no more than minimal risk of harm to the educated, professional adults who comprise the participant group. An informed consent document was developed and signed by each participant involved in the study. Additionally, to avoid any ethical concerns regarding access to the proposed site of the study, I drafted a letter to the superintendent of the district requesting permission to conduct the research, detailing the purpose of the study, the time requirements involved, assuring the least possible disruption, and describing the potential impact of the research and the possible outcomes (Creswell, 2013) as well as potential benefits to the district that could result from the research. To address other ethical concerns regarding data collection, analysis, and storage, I used only pseudonyms and disguised site and situational narratives to protect the privacy of all participants. Further, in order to identify and address any other potential ethical concerns, the institutional review board (IRB) from the university reviewed and approved the research plan prior to my initiating any activity.

Research Design

Once an appropriate approach has been selected, the researcher choses a research design that will offer the best chance of providing suitable data relative to the goals of the study (Lodico, et al., 2010). I selected a case study design to explore the actions and interactions of a three-person district leadership team with a professed shared social justice mission to determine if transformative leadership theory could best explain their values, beliefs, and actions as they serve to create inclusive and excellent learning environments for all students. Case study research is a multifaceted strategy used to

explore, explain, or describe a bounded and complex contemporary phenomenon within a natural setting, especially when contextual conditions might be significant (Yin, 2003). Case study research is not a monolithic investigative method; rather, the strategy can vary greatly in terms of length, complexity, focus, and purpose.

An intrinsic single case study with a holistic design, for instance, seeks to understand a specific singular unit of study that is considered to be important in its own right (Evers & Wu, 2006; Lodico, et al., 2010; Yin, 2003). Intrinsic case studies tend to be descriptive in nature, focusing on the context, processes, and characteristics of the group under investigation (Lodico, et al., 2010). Thus, through the collection of various forms of data over an extended period, the case study researcher endeavors to investigate, discover meaning, and gain insight into a bounded system (Mertens, 2009). When the phenomenon under investigation can be circumscribed with relation to the number of people who could be interviewed or the timeframe within which observations could be made, then the study can be considered a bounded case (Yin, 2003). With the preceding conditions in mind, the case study was an appropriate design for this research.

Site and Participant Selection

A research strategy or design is the logical framework that links the initial study questions with the data to be collected and conclusions to be drawn (Yin, 2003). The first step in designing a case study research project involves identifying the boundaries or the place and people who will make up the case (Mertens, 2009). In the instance of my research, the site and participants were selected based on purposeful sampling, or the deliberate selection of a site and participants because they have the key knowledge and information related to the purpose of the study (Lodico, et al., 2010).

While working in the capacity as a research assistant on a previous study investigating how educational leaders address the needs of all students, I encountered the three-person district leadership team and school district that was the focus of this study. New Hope Unified School District[4] is a large district serving approximately 6,000 students. The district serves all of New Hope, the county seat and largest city in an otherwise rural county in the Midwest. New Hope, a city of roughly 30,000, boasts its small town charm coupled with big city amenities. The district is the most diverse in the county and includes 44 percent White, 40 percent Black, eight percent Hispanic, one percent Asian, and seven percent multiracial students. Approximately 78 percent of the students are eligible for the free and reduced lunch program, two percent of the students are homeless, three percent are English Language Learners (ELL), and roughly 14 percent of students have some type of disability. At the onset of this study, there were 13 separate buildings within the district, including eight elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, one alternative school, and one administrative building. The district employs roughly 375 full-time teachers, approximately half of whom have Master's Degrees. Interestingly, but relatively common, is the fact that although more than half of the students in the district are non-White, nearly all (95 percent) of the teachers are White.

The district administration team is comprised of a superintendent and two assistant superintendents. Dr. Alice Grey, an African American woman, was hired as the superintendent of New Hope Unified School District in the spring of 2015. At the beginning of the 2015-16 school year, Dr. Grey asked Dr. Pam Jacobs, a White woman,

---

[4] All proper names and places used throughout this report are pseudonyms chosen to protect the confidentiality of all participants in this study.

to become the assistant superintendent for secondary education. It should be noted that Dr. Grey and Dr. Jacobs were in the same doctoral cohort and had known each other for some years prior to accepting their roles on this leadership team. Mr. Jerry Parker, assistant superintendent of elementary education and the third member of this team, is a White man who has worked in the district since 2001. In his capacity as an elementary teacher, principal, and director of special education, Mr. Parker is the only member of the leadership team with a history and experience of working in the district.

During the interview process and debriefing sessions of the prior study, I learned that each member of this three-person leadership team held social justice as a guiding principle, and together shared a goal of fostering inclusive and equitable educational environments for all students. Mertens (2009) explains that a researcher may employ a purposeful sampling technique because particular individuals or cases may "exemplify certain theoretically important characteristics or… reflect critical cultural or historical positioning in regard to the phenomena under study. With this advice in mind, I believed that this leadership team was ideally suited to provide essential information for this study.

Data Collection

The type of data that best helped to answer my research questions came primarily from repeated and extended observations and multiple, in-depth, open-ended interviews and observations of the leadership team in their natural setting. In-depth interviews explore any and all of the issues related to the topic under investigation in considerable detail to deepen the researcher's knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon. Interviews that are open-ended refer to the notion that the participant is not asked to select from a series of predetermined or limited range of answers and that the researcher

is free to ask additional probing questions to obtain a deeper understanding of the participant's perspective.

Good qualitative research depends on obtaining rich details from the interview process. The best method of maintaining the details that arise from an interview is to record the entire process (Lodico, et al., 2010). I used a high-quality digital recorder to capture all interviews. The data are stored digitally on a secured computer, and backed up on a secured server to prevent catastrophic data loss. According to academic research standards, the data will be securely stored for at least seven years and then securely destroyed. Recording the process does not, however, eliminate the need for skillful and strategic note taking during the interview to record particulars such as a description of the physical setting and participants, situational context, body language, and other important details. Jotting down quick notes in a field notebook allowed me to formulate follow-up questions, indicate nonverbal communications, and reminded me of important details after the interview was completed. In addition, extensive field notes were taken during all observation sessions and frequent journaling was conducted to maintain a congruent narrative of the research as it progressed (Patton, 2002). In addition, where appropriate, I reviewed publically available documents such as board meeting minutes, and state or district level report cards for relevant data.

Open-ended (or semi-structured) interview guides were used during the interview phase of the study. The advantages of utilizing an interview guide include optimizing the limited time available in an interview situation, the ability to cover the most important topics systematically and comprehensively with multiple participants, and a reasonable assurance that important questions are not missed. One potential disadvantage of using an

interview guide is that it reduces the extent to which unusual situations and circumstances can be investigated. However, probing questions and follow-up interviews using a semi-structured interview protocol (Spradley, 1980) allowed for deeper investigation into these types of circumstances. Some examples of the types of questions that were asked of the superintendent and her team included:

- Describe your district (how big, demographics, how many schools, etc.)

- Tell me about your leadership team (Strengths, weaknesses, etc.)

- How do you define social justice?

- Have you identified any particular groups that are systematically marginalized or oppressed?

- Have you made any district-wide changes to address marginalization and oppression?

- How do you work with principals and teachers to address marginalization and oppression?

To gain a deeper and more complete understanding of the values, beliefs, and actions of this leadership team, additional data were collected from key school board personnel including the president and two other members recommended by the superintendent, and seven building principals through open-interviews (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2013; Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). Some examples of the types of questions that were asked of school board members included:

- What characteristics of the superintendent brought her to your attention?

- How did you decide she was a "good fit?"

- What are her strengths and weaknesses?

- What seem to be her primary preoccupations?

- What changes has she made?

Some examples of the types of questions that were asked of the school principals included:

- What would you say are your superintendent's primary goals and how are they communicated?

- How does she work to achieve these goals?

- Do you think your superintendent is concerned with issues of equity and social justice? Why or why not? What evidence do you have?

- Describe how your superintendent works with:

  - Principals

  - Teachers

  - Parents

  - The wider community?

In an effort to improve the credibility of the study, I collected data from a wide variety of knowledgeable sources, including New Hope USD staff, religious leaders, and community leaders with unique and informative perspectives on the efforts of this leadership team in creating inclusive and excellent schools. I conducted four 30 to 45 minute interviews with community members recommended and introduced by the superintendent. The types of open-ended questions I asked these community members included:

- How often do you interact with the superintendent?

- What do you consider her strengths/weaknesses?

- What are her priorities?

- Tell me some of the ways the district leaders deal with issues of inclusion.

- In what ways do the district leaders show their support for the community?

Data collection began in June of 2016 after I received authorization from my dissertation committee and IRB approval (see appendix A for list of site visits and participant interactions). A tentative plan was to make four to five visits of approximately one week each to the district between June and November 2016. I conducted the initial visit to the district during the first week of June 2016, at which time I conducted the first of several in-depth interviews with the leadership team. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. I also observed the team as they interacted with each other and, to the extent possible, with their principals, teachers, and other district personnel, as well as community organizations during various meetings. I also asked the superintendent to introduce me to the board president and board members, and attended a district board meeting. Generating rapport, describing the purpose of the study, and offering to share the data and recommendations helped to build trust and authenticity as well as facilitate follow-up interactions with the board (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Mertens, 2009).

On three subsequent site visits, I conducted follow-up interviews and shared emergent ideas and themes with the leadership team. I also met with and interviewed the board president and two board members recommended by Dr. Grey to obtain their unique perspective about the team. Additionally, I conducted several 30 to 45 minute interviews with community members including a district police officer, a religious leader, an entrepreneur, and a community leader to gain a wider perspective of the efforts this leadership team has made to create inclusive and excellent schools. I also conducted in-

depth interviews lasting between 45 and 90 minutes with the board's secretary, the superintendent's secretary, two assistant superintendent's secretaries, the director of curriculum, the business director, the business manager, and seven of the 12 building administrators.

I made a final visit to the district in October to conduct final interviews and observations with the leadership team, share preliminary findings and feedback, and answer any questions the team had.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research methodologies tend to amass large amounts of data from the various sources over extended periods, including transcriptions of interviews, detailed field notes, survey results, and documents and artifacts that must all be incorporated in some coherent manner into a final research report (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2003). Additionally, the emergent nature of qualitative research necessitates that researchers review their data continuously, looking for common themes, novel questions, and unusual findings, among other things (Lodico, et al., 2010). For these and other reasons, the process of analysis began shortly after the first data were collected and continued throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013).

The analysis of qualitative data is an inductive process involving the steady amalgamation of numerous data sources into increasingly more broad and descriptive conclusions (Lodico, et al., 2010). The first step in this process included the transcription of recorded interviews as quickly as possible, and consolidating and typing field notes. The data were also organized by categories such as location, person, and type of event (Lodico, et al., 2010). Soon after the first pieces of data were collected, I began multiple

and ongoing readings through the transcriptions and field notes looking for the emergence of meaning, hypotheses, and personal reactions that eventually became common themes (Creswell, 2013). Reviewing evidence as it was collected allowed me to gain a sense of its scope and possibilities as well as the overall flow and structure of the data (Lodico, et al. 2010) in addition to hinting at potential codes that were used in the next phase of data analysis.

Once the bulk of data were transcribed, I began the process of coding the data into segments that described related themes and broad categories. Creswell (2013) describes coding as "taking text, data, or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant" (p. 198). Not unlike most qualitative studies, the data collection phase of this study amassed voluminous amounts of data. To aide in the organization and coding of the data, I employed NVivo[©] software in this phase of data analysis. Coding the data allowed me to reduce the enormous volume of data into more manageable sections, but more importantly, to begin to see common themes and relationships within the data (Mertens, 2009). In addition to codes found in the review of relevant literature, such as marginalization and oppression, myth of meritocracy, and heteronormativity, I included codes such as deficit thinking, power and privilege, dialogue, and equity, which are supported by the framework of transformative leadership theory (Shields, 2013; 2016). I also included codes that readers might expect to find such as exclusion, bullying, and so forth. Lastly, I allowed codes to emerge from the data such as banter, humility, and synergy (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2009).

Data coding continued through multiple readings of the data until no new codes emerged. I then gradually combined similar and overlapping codes to produce a more coherent view of the patterns in the data (Lodico, et al., 2010). A concurrent process in the analysis of qualitative data is the creation of thick descriptions, or detailed narratives of the people, places, and events covered in the study from the field notes taken during the data collection phase. These thick descriptions, situated strategically within the final report hopefully allow the reader to "feel like they are living the experiences described… [which] is the real power of qualitative research" (Lodico, et al., 2010, p. 185). The final step in the analysis phase was to interpret the findings through my own perspectives as a researcher as well as drawing meaning through the guiding theoretical lens of transformative leadership (Shields, 2016), which was described in detail in chapter two.

Standards of Validation

Good research, that is research having any useful value to anyone for any reason, must conform to some standards of quality. Until the latter half of the twentieth century, this generally meant research that was conducted in the empiricist traditions of positivist thought under strict measures of control separating the researcher from the subject of research. The positivist tradition imagines a reality that has meaning distinct from any human interaction with it, that this meaning can be discovered through objective scientific processes, and that the quality of scientific research and thus its value can be determined by evaluating the rigor under which it was produced (Crotty, 1998). The standards of value for scientific research in the empirical sense include its internal validity—how closely it approaches the "true" nature of the phenomenon under investigation, its external validity—how applicable or generalizable the results are, its

consistency—how reliable or reproducible the results are, and its objectivity—the degree to which the subject was isolated from the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Within the positivist paradigm, when these four criteria are met, the research is considered to be rigorous.

For research conducted under the naturalist paradigm, however, where the nature of reality is assumed to be constructed and varies depending upon the perspective of the observer, these criteria fail to make sense. So how then does one go about evaluating the "quality" of qualitative research? Lincoln and Guba (1986) offer parallel criteria of Trustworthiness as one approach to this question. Using the empirical criteria of scientific rigor as "analogs or metaphoric counterparts" they suggest using *credibility* as an analog for internal validity, *transferability* for external validity, *dependability* for reliability, and *confirmability* for objectivity.

Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggest several methods for establishing the credibility of qualitative research, including prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checks. This research study involved multiple, in-depth, and intensive contacts with the participants in the field with follow-up interviews conducted to pursue more deeply elements and themes that began to emerge through the process of analysis. In addition, I triangulated data and emerging themes by interviewing board members and building administrators to obtain their thoughts and perceptions of the leadership team. In addition to the extended and multiple engagements with the leadership team, which provided opportunities for frequent feedback, I worked closely with my dissertation advisor and committee members, all experienced and highly capable researchers and scholars as a form of peer

debriefing. Through multiple readings of my data, I actively searched for negative instances where the data did not fit within the established theory, and continually sought feedback from the study participants to ensure that my renditions accurately described their experiences.

Lincoln and Guba (1986) explain that the transferability of qualitative research can be strengthened through the production of thick descriptive narratives based on the data that can be used by the readers of the research to make judgments about the degree to which my interpretations fit or can be applied to their particular situations. To this Ruddin (2006) adds, "the researcher's liability is to afford sufficient contextual information to facilitate the reader's judgment as to whether a particular case can be generalized to a specific field of practice" (p. 804). Furthermore, Evers and Wu (2006) remind us that the primary goal of intrinsic case studies is not to create all-encompassing generalizations but to more fully understand the qualities of a particular and perhaps distinctive case. Additionally, they argue that generalizations from case study research can indeed be supported by the use of abductive inference, also known as inference to the best explanation. In other words when a theory describes the observed empirical data and no other scheme is better able to explain phenomenon, then a generalization is warranted (Evers & Wu, 2006).

Finally, a competent and disinterested external auditor "can support dependability and confirmability" (Lincoln and Guba, 1986, p. 19). My dissertation chair and the members of my committee carefully scrutinized my research to ensure that both the process by which I conducted my research (yielding a dependability judgment) and the final product (yielding a confirmability judgement) are methodologically sound.

Considering the disparate ontological and epistemological positions held by those with a naturalist worldview, such as a transformative researcher, Lincoln and Guba (1986) recognize the weakness inherent in identifying parallel criteria for judging the rigor of qualitative research interpretations based solely on issues that emerge as important from a positivist perspective. Moreover, in the hypothetical absence of a positivist tradition, they rationalize that criteria to judge the value of naturalistic inquiry would likely have developed independently. For this reason, Lincoln and Guba (1986) proposed a unique set of standards they label as authenticity criteria including fairness, ontological authentication, educative authentication, catalytic authentication, and tactical authenticity.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1986), qualitative inquiry is by definition interpretive, and as such, subject to differing value structures from various stakeholders involved in the investigation process. The notion of fairness implies that these various and potentially conflicting perspectives are, as much as possible, explicated and presented in a balanced manner. Further, fairness implies that "all stakeholders should be empowered in some fashion at the conclusion of an evaluation, and all ideologies should have an equal chance of expression in the process of negotiating recommendations" (p. 20). Additionally, the goal of qualitative research should be to raise the consciousness of the individuals and groups involved in a study. Lincoln and Guba (1986) refer to this as ontological authentication saying,

> In some instances, this aim will entail the realization (the "making real") of contextual shaping that has had the effect of political, cultural, or social impoverishment; in others, it will simply mean the increased appreciation of some set of complexities previously not appreciated at all, or appreciated only poorly (p. 22).

Closely related to this goal is the notion of educative authenticity, which implies that all parties involved in qualitative research should have the opportunity to become educated about the various values and constructions uncovered by the investigation. Meaning that, at a minimum, qualitative researchers should aim to educate the gatekeepers through which he or she originally gained entrance, and ensure that they "are offered the chance to enhance their own understandings of the groups they represent" (p. 23).

Transcending the discovery of new knowledge, catalytic authentication implies that the goals of qualitative research must reach beyond the generation of a fair, uplifting, and educative document to facilitate and stimulate real action called for by the research findings. Lincoln and Guba (1986) assert,

> The naturalistic posture that involves all stakeholders from the start, that honors their inputs, that provides them with decision-making power in guiding the evaluation, that attempts to empower the powerless and give voice to the speechless, and that results in a collaborative effort holds more promise for eliminating such hoary distinctions as basic versus applied and theory versus practice (p. 24).

Lastly, qualitative research that has tactical authenticity is empowering in that it ensures that "all individuals at risk or with something at stake in the evaluation have the opportunity to control it as well" (p. 24).

The transformative approach that I chose to follow holds that research needs to be intertwined with politics and a political change agenda to confront social oppression, and recognizes the potential role of the researcher as an instrument of social change (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2009). Furthermore, the guiding framework of transformative leadership theory looks beyond the observation of what is to imagine what should be and

insists on critical action towards bringing that reality to fruition (Shields, 2009, 2013, 2016; Weiner, 2003).

In addition to striving to adhere to the trustworthiness criteria and in the spirit of transformative research, this study sought to represent all viewpoints and ideologies fairly, share the study's findings with all stakeholders, and pursue an enlightened consciousness through dialogue with the study's main participants. Finally, this study endeavors to enlighten and move the field of educational leadership towards more equitable and just practices through the troubling of common ideas related to the deliberate or unintentional marginalization and oppression of individuals and groups merely because of their inclusion in one or more social identity groups.

Limitations and Delimitations

Competent researchers recognize that, in spite of careful planning, there is no perfectly designed study. Qualitative research, by nature, does not seek to control all aspects of the phenomenon under investigation, and thus, represents the potential for limitations to the study. In addition, the researcher may deliberately choose to confine the parameters of the study for a number of practical reasons. Therefore, a capable researcher remains mindful of the limitations and delimitations represented by the methods proposed for a study as well as the potential criticisms that might be raised by other researchers (Lodico, et al., 2010).

Due to time constraints and practical considerations, I was not able to solicit the perspective of all stakeholders throughout the district, and as a result may have missed some conflicting viewpoints; however, the purpose of this study was to determine if

transformative leadership theory best described this leadership team's commitment to just leadership, not to document all possible perceptions of their work.

I have chosen to delimit this study by not seeking the participation or perspective of teachers or students within the district. Given that this study focuses on the beliefs, attitudes, values, and actions of the district leadership team, teachers' and students' perspectives, while important, would not likely contribute significantly to more complete answers of the research questions.

Significance of The Study

In an era of increasing diversity and mounting pressures for accountability, understanding how to combat the marginalization and oppression of historically disenfranchised students through a commitment to inclusion serves both the goals of political responsibility and social justice. This study sought to illuminate the distinctive ways in which one district leadership team with a shared social justice mission contests the institutionalized marginalization and oppression of certain groups of students to create inclusive and excellent schools and to determine if transformative leadership theory best explains that work. In particular, the study sought to determine how the leadership team interacts and relates to one another, whether those relationships foster or hinder their stated goals of promoting inclusion, and whether their chosen leadership style can best be described as transformative leadership.

In this way, this study has the potential to add important depth and detail to the academic literature on educational leadership practices at the district level aimed at the political goal of improved accountability and the social goal of enhanced justice. Additionally, the data suggests important recommendations for action at the district

leadership level to combat marginalization and oppression. Finally, the results of this study provide current and future district leaders with important insights into the potential of transformative leadership theory to foster inclusive and excellent educational opportunities for all students.

Summary

In the preceding sections I have endeavored to elucidate the very real problem of marginalization and oppression in education as it affects students who are, by their chosen or imposed identity, Othered by those who are privileged to belong to the dominant social group. I have reviewed several contemporary theories of leadership and discussed why I believe they do not adequately address the root causes of marginalization and oppression. I have presented transformative leadership theory as a promising alternative approach to school leadership that not only challenges the origins of marginalization and oppression within the walls of the school, but also pursues greater societal transformation. Finally, I have indicated the purpose of this study and described the methodology by which I reveal how one district-level social justice-oriented transformative leadership team endeavors to create inclusive and excellent schools.

In the next three chapters I present the findings of this research and begin to analyze and interpret the data to better understand the ways in which this leadership team approaches excellence and inclusion within their district. Through careful and deliberate consideration of the data, I hope to reveal the ways in which this team works to eliminate the mental constructs and thought patterns that result in marginalization and oppression. In the final chapter I employ abductive reasoning (Evers & Wu, 2006) to demonstrate how transformative leadership theory is best able to adequately describe the leadership

style of the administrative team at the center of this study. Additionally, I consider the implications of these findings for creating inclusive and excellent schools and look towards ways in which committed district-level leaders can draw from this research to address issues of marginalization and oppression in their own communities.

CHAPTER 4 – A NEW DIRECTION FOR NEW HOPE USD

Today, perhaps like no other time in recent memory, the notion of a high-quality public education for all is in peril; furthermore, those children who are habitually marginalized and oppressed are among the most likely to be swept aside in a political climate that touts the private value of choice over the public responsibility to educate all children equitably. If the institution of free public education is to survive and continue to offer all children equitable and socially just opportunities to learn, then those charged with the responsibility to guide these institutions must cleave to the democratic ideals of liberty and justice, while working to insure that all students, and most certainly those whose voices are so often unheard, are presented with equitable educational opportunities and assured equal scholastic outcomes (Austin & Austin, 2000; Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Shields, 2013, 2016).

As such, it is important to examine and understand how leadership at the district level can and does operate to provide excellent educational environments and meaningful learning opportunities for each and every child. The purpose of this transformative case study was to explore whether transformative leadership theory could best explain how one self-identified social justice-oriented leadership team at the district level endeavors to create an inclusive and excellent learning environment for all students, including those from traditionally marginalized and oppressed groups. To accomplish this objective, the following questions helped to guide this investigation:

1. How does the leadership team (superintendent and two assistants) interact and relate to one another?

2. How do they interact with the community, School Board members, principals, parents, and students?

3. How do they address the needs of traditionally marginalized and oppressed students?

At the onset of this investigation, the subjects of this transformative case study were just completing their first year as a new leadership team within the district. The team consisted of superintendent Dr. Alice Grey, assistant superintendent of secondary education Dr. Pam Jacobs, and assistant superintendent of elementary education Mr. Jerry Parker. None of the members of the leadership team under investigation had previously worked together. It is important to note, however, that Dr. Grey and Dr. Jacobs had known each other for several years as part of the same doctoral cohort. They both received a doctorate in Educational Leadership, and without revealing details about their program; it would be safe to say that they were both exposed to social justice issues closely related to transformative leadership theory during their doctoral coursework. Mr. Parker, unfamiliar with transformative leadership theory and unknown to Dr. Grey at the time of her hire, is the only member of the leadership team with a history and experience working within the district.

Having met this team several months prior to the beginning of this study while serving as a research assistant with my doctoral advisor, I discovered that each member of this team held a deep commitment to social justice, and together shared a common goal of fostering excellent, inclusive, and equitable educational experiences for all children. Moreover, I believed that this team shared a unique bond and working relationship that warranted further investigation. Because this group has the key

knowledge and information necessary to answer my research questions, they were the appropriate subjects for this study.

To answer the research questions, I collected data in two different ways: direct in-situ observations of the leadership team, and in-depth interviews with the leadership team, numerous stakeholders within the district and other community leaders. This chapter presents a synthesis of the data and initial analysis of the team's relationship from the perspective of the researcher, from the perspective of the leadership team, from the perspective of their secretaries and closest assistants, from the perspective of board members and community leaders, and from the perspective of their principals.

In this chapter, I identify and describe the major themes that emerged concerning the team and their relationships during this study as I endeavor to answer the research questions regarding Dr. Grey as a leader and the ways in which the leadership team relates to one another. I examine the ways in which they interact with each other in private and in public forums. In chapter five, I examine the ways in which this leadership team interacts with their building administrators, parents, students, and other community stakeholders. In chapter six, I define and explore the ways that this leadership team has addressed the needs of traditionally marginalized and oppressed students within the district. In the final chapter, I provide an analysis of the data utilizing abductive reasoning (Evers & Wu, 2006; Shields, 2010) to determine if transformative leadership theory best describes this team's approach to social justice leadership.

One of the most remarkable and possibly one of the most important qualities of this leadership triad that emerges from the data is their unique relationship as a team. Over the course of more than six months, I was able to observe this team as they engaged

in the day-to-day operations of leading the district, as well as spend considerable time in active conversation with the team and others in their administrative orbit. In this chapter, I will endeavor to richly describe the relationship that this team has developed using study participants' own words in an aesthetically crafted narrative format (Eisner, 1993). This team's rather unique bond is also perhaps the most challenging characteristic to adequately describe in written format. Therefore, when portraying certain interactions among the team I will endeavor to describe my personal feelings and impressions in a sidebar narrative on the right side of the page. I will also utilize a distinct font style to differentiate narrative gathered during whole-team interviews in an attempt to convey the uniquely dynamic, yet nuanced humor that emerges during their repartee that might otherwise be lost.

Creating Perspective

Before introducing this rather unique leadership team, I will begin by offering additional details about the community and the district that became apparent to me only after considerable exploration. I believe this information will provide important contextual distinctions that will help the reader to more fully appreciate certain aspects of this study. New Hope Unified School District (pseudonym) is, in many ways, typical of many medium to large school districts serving small to mid-sized, centrally located cities in otherwise rural counties found throughout the Midwestern United States. New Hope City's roughly thirty thousand residents have a long and proud history reaching back to the city's founding in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, when two White settlers donated nearly 100 acres of mostly flat prairie land to establish a community on the banks of a long, lazy river. Agriculture, especially corn, soybeans, and other large-field

crops, was an important part of New Hope's economy for more than one hundred years; however, increasing automation and farming efficiency significantly reduced the number of jobs associated with this type of activity.

With the discovery of a rich coal vein in the area in about 1850, mining became an important and prosperous industry in New Hope. Serving much of the energy needs of the Midwest, New Hope grew into a major industrial center during the latter part of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. Although New Hope lies several hours from major cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, or St. Louis, historic steam rail lines traversed the city, making transportation of goods and people to those larger ports practical and economical. Its central location and stable population also made New Hope an ideal destination for major manufacturing businesses such as the auto and heavy equipment industries. Other large manufacturing businesses also established plants in and around New Hope during the first half of the twentieth century, offering stable, high-paying jobs and attracting a whole host of support and service industries. As a result, New Hope and her residents enjoyed nearly 150 years of continuous growth and prosperity.

As the nation began to shift its manufacturing base abroad in the waning years of the twentieth century, some of the largest manufacturing employers in New Hope closed their doors. This shrinking job market forced many residents to seek work in other far-flung communities and larger cities. Throughout the last decades of the twentieth century, New Hope's population began a steady decline that would see the loss of nearly one quarter of its residents and a contemporaneous surplus of vacant homes. One community leader described it this way.

We had a significant reduction of population in the eighties. A lot of the homes became vacant, or those people were aged out, the elderly started passing away, there was no marketing anywhere, and these were great, established neighborhoods at one time. They were bought by rental [investors] people more interested by profit than they were in neighborhood redevelopment, so that affected the neighborhood value, property values. And then we also had an overabundance of public housing based on the population we were currently serving.

Contemporaneously, an epic gentrification battle was being waged in one Chicago neighborhood. Built shortly after WWII and initially envisioned as low-cost housing for the city's largely Italian immigrant working-poor, the high-rise development known as Cabrini Green had earned the label of one of the worst urban development disasters in the United States by the end of the twentieth century (Ajaka, 2017). By the mid-1980's Cabrini Green had become home to more than three thousand low-income, mostly African American families. Meanwhile, the Chicago Housing Authority had been neglecting the cheaply constructed buildings at Cabrini Green for decades. As segregation and institutionalized racism plagued the nation's second largest city, crime and violence in and around Cabrini Green continued to increase. School board member and local pastor Chris Farrows, an African American man and native of New Hope described life in Cabrini Green this way,

> The Cabrini Green life was a war zone. It was absolute survival. [They were] shell-shocked; I mean I can't imagine… people dying around me every day, lying on the floor at night to be safe, multiple attacks on my life every day…

In spite of the social turmoil stirring in and around the housing project, the nearly 70-acre complex of high-rise buildings known as Cabrini Green sat on some of the most valuable land in the city of Chicago. Situated within a short walk to all of the public transportation hubs and in the shadow of downtown, just blocks from the Gold Coast and

Lincoln Park neighborhoods, developers coveted the land upon which the housing projects stood. It should be of no surprise that in 1995, the Chicago Housing Authority announced plans to demolish the more than a dozen high-rise buildings known as Cabrini Green and in their place to build a low-rise, mixed-income residential and commercial neighborhood. Amidst protest from many of the long-time residents stemming from the justifiable fear that they would be shut out of the redevelopment project, the Chicago Housing Authority pushed forward with their intention to relocate anyone who wished to move out of the city, promising vouchers for section-eight housing elsewhere. With a glut of available housing and a community of kind and generous folks, the city of New Hope became a popular destination for people who wanted to start over away from the mayhem of life in Cabrini Green. Pastor Farrows explained the mass migration saying,

> Some millionaires decided 'this lake shore [property] could make us crazy money so we're going to pass out section-eight vouchers and say, you're out of here', and then allow people to move anywhere in this country. So New Hope received some of the people from those projects who absolutely were like coming out of Vietnam.

Today, New Hope United School District is home to more than six thousand students, 74 percent of whom are from families receiving public aid, living in substitute care, or are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches. While this is a slight reduction over the past five years, New Hope USD continues to have one and a half times the state average for percentage of low-income students. The student body is quite diverse with roughly 41 percent White, 40 percent Black, nine percent Hispanic, and nearly eight percent reporting two or more races. Only three percent of New Hope USD students are English Language Learners, compared to 11 percent of the state. The percentage of students in New Hope USD with some type of disability is roughly the

same as state averages, as is the percentage of students categorized as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act, who do not have permanent or adequate homes.

New Hope USD employs roughly 375 full-time teachers, 95 percent of whom are White, and three in four are female. All full-time teachers in New Hope USD have at least a bachelor's degree and nearly half have a master's degree. Many of the employees of New Hope USD also grew up and attended school in this district, and many have parents and relatives who also attended the district.

New Hope USD began the 2015-16 school year with 13 buildings, including one administration building, one high school, two regional 6th through 8th grade middle schools, seven neighborhood k-5th elementary schools, one k-6 magnet school, and one alternative school with a pre-k program housed at the largest elementary building. As will be explained in detail in chapter six, the district underwent a complete reorganization in December of 2015 after severe flooding required the closure of one elementary school. As of the writing of this dissertation, the district is now comprised of 11 school buildings and one administration building. The reorganization included the elimination of the regional middle schools and, in their place, the creation of a district-wide 5th and 6th grade upper elementary center and a 7th and 8th grade middle school. As will be detailed in chapter six, this was a significant decision in terms of equity and social justice within the district due to what was, at a minimum, the perception of disparate and inequitable educational opportunities offered at the two supposedly equal middle schools.

The End of an Era

After serving New Hope USD for more than four decades in nearly every possible capacity, Mr. Jacob Davis announced that he would be stepping down as the

superintendent of New Hope USD at the end of the 2014-15 school year. Finding just the

right candidate to follow in the footsteps of Mr. Davis, a long-time resident, respected

member of the community, and district icon would not be an easy task for the board of

education. Mr. Davis began his career in education as a teacher in the district right after

college and moved steadily through the ranks. A board member described Mr. Davis this

way:

> He [had been] principal of elementary schools, principal of middle
> schools, principal of the high school and an assistant superintendent.
> He'd done everything. He knew everyone in the district. I mean [he]
> knew all the families, all the students; he could name everyone by
> name. I mean… he had all the history and all the background, and all
> the power, all the power. In the district, nobody had any power
> compared to him; I mean there was hardly a number two.

Many in New Hope would say that Mr. Davis was 'married to the district',

dedicating all of his time and energy to his duties as superintendent. He was single, had

no children of his own, and was known to work as many as 80 hours or more week in and

week out. Mr. Davis had one associate superintendent during his tenure at the helm of the

district, an arrangement that was adequate only because of the inordinate number of hours

he was able to commit to the district. Commenting on Mr. Davis and his leadership style,

long-time secretary to the board of education Dorothy Boynton noted:

> He worked day and night and… we always said he was married to the
> district. He expected folks to work just as hard as he did. He would
> come in on a weekend to finish something up [expecting us to be here
> too]. He would just smile and say, "Thank you so much for doing that,
> see you Monday." Mr. Davis worked night and day, so he had no
> trouble getting all his work done. We all had a hard time keeping up
> with him, especially his directors.

Mr. Davis was well known throughout the district for his attention to details and

his hands-on style of leadership. Mr. Beau Jeffries, executive director of an independent,

not-for-profit organization that provides funding for numerous New Hope USD educational programs and long-time associate of Mr. Davis recalls:

> Because of his knowledge base you couldn't buffalo the man. I was sitting in a meeting one day and we're talking about the violin program at one of the schools. We were talking about where they could store the violins, and he said, 'well there's a room here...' he knew the floor plan of that school so well that he said they could store it right there because that room was available. He was a very hands-on leader.

With all due respect, most district employees would describe Mr. Davis' leadership style as 'very hands-on'. Director of Finance, and long-time district employee Ms. Rivers explained, "He wanted to be involved in everything, so he would be at my desk every morning at 8:00 am wanting to know what we were working on that day." Building administrators also described Mr. Davis' leadership style in much the same way. Highland Park Magnet School Principal Brewer revealed:

> He managed everything down to the things you said to parents. I had him in my office every week during my first year [as building administrator] and then it was like every other week and at the end, at least once a month. He would come around your building and say 'you need to do this and this and this'; He was very, very directive.

A New Era Begins

Near the end of 2014, Dr. Alice Grey recalls that a friend told her about the soon-to-be leadership vacancy in New Hope USD and urged her to apply. Holding a bachelor's degree in finance, a master's degree in administration, and a doctorate in Educational Policy and Leadership, Dr. Grey had been climbing the ranks through various administrative positions within the same suburban Chicago district for 18 years, including assistant superintendent then deputy superintendent & CFO. Dr. Grey simply says that after nearly two decades in her former district, "It was time to go."

Meanwhile, back in New Hope City, the Board of Education set about to recruit the next leader of the district. Taking the changing demographics of the community into consideration, the Board recognized a need to address the diversity and poverty that was increasingly reflective of the district. "Part of what we were looking for was somebody with experience in diverse schools, and someone who could really help raise up a school in poverty," recounted board President Mr. Vega. With nearly two decades of experience in administrative positions in a district comprised of 95 percent African American students and represented by 99 percent low-income families, Dr. Grey certainly met that requirement. On other measures contemplated by the board, such as "big seat" leadership experience, some might not have considered her an "ideal match" for their perfect candidate. Mr. Vega recalls,

> I personally, and I would say others on the board, saw Dr. Grey as a perfect candidate for that [experience in diverse and low-income schools], a perfect candidate in that sense. Not the perfect candidate in other ways though. Remember her background was an assistant superintendent of finance. And really no teaching experience, really no principal experience, definitely that wouldn't be your ideal candidate.

On the other hand, Dr. Grey did possess certain qualities that impressed the board enough to make her one of their three top finalists. In hindsight, Mr. Vega recollected that Dr. Grey had impressed the hiring committees as someone who had tremendous insight into her own strengths and weaknesses, the humility to surround herself with individuals who complimented her skills, and the intelligence to choose her team wisely.

> She was bright, energetic, and charismatic. So, you know, you have a leader… it's kind of like a head football coach. If you are charismatic, you can recruit, you can hire someone that does the defense and the offense. You know you could, if you are a superintendent and your background is in finance… you could hire someone like Dr. Jacobs that balances that out. You could hire Jerry Parker who has special

education, was a special education director and has that kind of background. So you could balance it out that way. And that is how we made our choice.

Perhaps one of the qualities that set Dr. Grey apart from the other finalists became apparent during her interview process. When asked how she felt about educating the whole child, something that seemed to Dr. Grey to be so obvious, so essential to education, she was unable to formulate an answer. Another board member, Jason Logan, remembers, "On one of the questions she took a Mulligan. And where one board member just thought that was horrible, I thought it spoke well of her… you know, this is a real person…" In this instance, Dr. Grey's authenticity was obvious, as was her honesty. One member of the interview committee suggested that instead of getting caught in the arrogance of her title and giving an answer that was disingenuous, she "kept it real" and said that she just couldn't retrieve the answer at that moment. Recalling the occasion, Mr. Logan stated:

> I don't know. Her mind just went blank on it and I was ok with that, because I could see me doing that. So, I suppose that was, to me that was a positive and not a negative. Where somebody else may have seen it as a negative, well she didn't answer the question, yeah but she was real about it. Then later in the interview she came back and said "I know what… ok." Because the question was about, basically what we were looking for was how do you develop relationships with kids to educate the whole child… but she couldn't quite get there because that was so very natural for her, it didn't make sense to her that one wouldn't be doing that already. We were asking her to come up with something that was different than what she did, and that's basically how she explained it. It was like 'I don't know how I can answer that,' because that's what she was already doing.

Thus, evidence of Dr. Grey's educational philosophy became obvious to many in her willingness to 'take a Mulligan' on a question that seemed far too obvious for her to even formulate an answer. In her failure to recognize the simplicity of the question, the

board saw that Dr. Grey was passionately committed to the wellbeing of every child.

Board president Vega recalled the instance this way:

> I think it [the question] was about educating the whole child. That was probably the one thing that stood out. I think in the interview process there was [a question] about educating the whole child, how would that fit in your... and Dr. Grey, at first had a difficult time answering that question because what she said was that it was so obvious. I mean how could you... basically how could you even ask that question? Because if a kid is hungry or a kid has all these problems [outside of school], you have to start there. You can't possibly expect a kid to learn if you're not [addressing all of his or her needs], you have to deal with the whole child. So that's the kind of thing that stood out.

Hence, after some deliberation, the Board of Education agreed they had found the next leader of New Hope USD.

Alice Grey, an Authentic Leader

As a researcher, I had a similar first impression of Dr. Grey, an almost larger-than-life character, charismatic, passionate, vibrant, and most of all, deeply committed to "her babies", which I came to realize was the way she referred to all of the children in her district. In fact, there was unanimity of opinion about Dr. Grey's attitude from everyone I encountered during this study. Her authenticity and sincerity, along with her infectious positivity is what most people remembered about their first encounter with Dr. Grey. One board member recalled, "I thought there was a great sincerity to what she was saying to us. It was from the heart and it wasn't educational-ease to make us all see how smart she was. We knew that we were talking to a real person." Another administrative staff exclaimed, "I love Dr. Grey! She's such a peach; I love her attitude, and her demeanor. I think she makes people feel comfortable whenever, whatever…when I first met her last year with Mr. Davis, I really liked her."

More often than not, people would tell me stories of their first encounter with Dr. Grey that were obviously endearing memories. One principal could hardly keep from breaking into hysterical laughter as she recalled her first encounter with Dr. Grey.

> She's going to kill me for telling you this story, but there was a bee flying around in her office because she had her window open without a screen. And I kept thinking, why don't you have your screen in here? But whatever… so a bee comes in, and she's terrified of bees! So we were talking and all of a sudden, she takes off her shoe. She scoots her chair back. She was literally running around her office. I kept thinking oh my God you [and your staff] must have a fun time together. She has her shoe off; she's whipping it around trying to kill this bee… she is all on top of the chair… on top of the table… it was hilarious! And my impression was… things are going to be fine because she's real and she's all about the kids and that's all I'm here for. I felt comfortable she made me feel very comfortable, definitely no nervousness from her at all.

Another principal recounted the trepidation she felt when she realized that she would have to inform her new boss that she would need to take maternity leave and didn't know how the news would be received.

> I remember when I was scared to death to tell her I was pregnant and I was due right after Christmas. I thought oh my gosh what am I going to do? This is a new boss and how will I make this happen? She was hilarious! She was just jumping up and down… giving me a hug… telling me how awesome it was. And I was like, "Shush! Nobody knows this yet! Be quiet! Nobody knows, my husband… my parents… that's it." So that was like one of our first encounters and I thought this is going to be good! She is just happy. She's a happy person. But if she needs something, you know the look in her eye… you know that.

In addition to her charisma and positive attitude, many of the individuals I encountered during this study were equally impressed by her authenticity and humility. Although she might be described as somewhat of a private person, in some respects, Dr. Grey wears her emotions on her sleeve and that warmth and genuine concern for others is what many recall about her. One administrator who had applied to become the principal

of the high school recalled the night that the board approved Dr. Grey's recommendation for her hire.

> I remember the night she came directly to my house, to let me know that I had the job. She didn't want to invade on my home and just come inside, but she told me outside and she was as over enjoyed as I was. But the fact that she made that personal connection it wasn't just that she picked up the phone and called me and said hey come to my office, she took the time to come to my home and share that news with me late at night after the board meeting. It was probably after 9:00 at night but the fact that she did that I will probably always remember that she knew how important it was to me and the fact that she had faith and trust in me with this position, I take it very serious and that meant a lot.

Dr. Grey is equally dedicated to her new community. Over the past few decades, New Hope City has developed somewhat of a negative reputation outside of the region. Business manager Cheyanne Rayne, who came to the district with Dr. Grey, recalled her family's reaction when she revealed that she would be moving to New Hope City with her long-time mentor and friend:

> It's so funny; my dad forwarded me this article The Top Ten Worst Cites in Which to Live, and New Hope was on the list. But when you look at who made the list, its Edutainment. What is that? What is Edutainment? I know like [a neighboring city] talks down on us. When the football team went to [a nearby district], they were selling T-shirts and towels and the towels said "It's just New Hope." And I was like, what does that mean? But it's kind of like when you come down the aisle and beat the crap out of a child. "It's just New Hope." Like that's what people say about us and I think that's part of it.

To some degree, even long-time residents of New Hope City had begun to internalize the bad reputation. One interviewee who grew up in New Hope City noted:

> [New Hope City] has changed. Once we had factories here, we had automotive plants and we had big machinery plants, and it was just a totally different dynamic. Once the big companies closed down, a lot of people moved out and there were a lot of abandoned houses. So I think New Hope started to change once a lot of the companies closed down.

According to several of the people with whom I spoke, many of the changes in the character of New Hope can be attributed to the migration of people from Chicago after the closing of Cabrini Green. One African American principal and long-time resident noted the following:

> There is always quite a bit of drama with the teenagers during the summer time, but now it's at its highest. Years ago we didn't have to worry about those things, very few shootings or killings but now it's just on the rise. I think a lot, a lot of it is the decision that the city made when the housing authority accepted a lot of those families from Chicago, Cabrini Greens. So Cabrini Green closed about what, maybe a decade ago, maybe ten years ago, and it's been like, it's been a steady increase of families that have relocated here. I'm not of the mindset... because a lot of people in New Hope are of the mindset that everything that is going on here [is because of the] people from Chicago. People from Chicago, that's all you hear. And it's not all them, it is some of the people from here too, but the people from here would not normally pull out a gun and shoot you. So it's that different mindset that we have to deal with. I've seen a tremendous change in that, in those kinds of behaviors.

Dr. Grey sees New Hope City in a different light. Coming from a much larger urban area, she recognizes all of the wonderful things about New Hope to which some of the long-time residents have grown accustomed. Even before she was offered the position, Dr. Grey admired the many good qualities about the community. A school board member recalls:

> At her interview, she talked about when she was at the mall with her mother and was giving stories of some of her observations within the community. It wasn't the story itself; it was the fact that she took the time to spend in our community prior to the interview. That she went to different locations in town and instead of doing a buzz through and seeing some of the highlights, she went to the mall, and she walked the mall. She had visited in the schools, but she [also] went to the different locations in our community where our schools are, and she made observations regarding those areas. I think she had a very good perspective of our community.

Dr. Grey is genuinely committed to the community and to helping the residents of New Hope shed the negative image they have acquired over the past decades. She believes that the community needs to (re)learn "how to really appreciate themselves… because as a community, I think they have low self-esteem." Perhaps even before accepting the position as superintendent, Dr. Grey had already intuitively recognized that the community had lost confidence in itself, and began using an analogy to help people to rediscover the good qualities New Hope has to offer.

> I've given them the analogy of a pretty girl who doesn't know she is pretty and she allows this because other people are jealous of her that they diminished her self-esteem and she begins to believe it and then she starts to think and talk that way… I call them the pretty girl… to get them to appreciate and value themselves.

During the course of this study, it became clear that Dr. Grey did indeed use her analogy of the "pretty girl syndrome" frequently and widely throughout the community. I heard numerous references to her analogy, especially in conjunction to the many positive qualities and opportunities offered to the residents of the city. One principal summed it up nicely by saying:

> Dr. Grey's main thing is that New Hope is not the bottom of the barrel, that we have so much potential, and I mean you hear her say it all the time, "You guys don't understand." she'll say, "You don't understand how much you have. There's so much focus on the bad that you don't understand how much good there is in the community." So it's kind of nice to hear that from someone who has never been here before. So building us up absolutely, she doesn't look at us as just a district, I do feel she looks at the community as a whole and she thinks of building it up.

When Dr. Grey decided to accept the position as superintendent of the district, she also clearly made a commitment to become an integral part of the community. In such a tight-knit community where so many employees of the district are also long-time

residents and products of the school system, it is not hard to imagine why some people in the community, and perhaps some board members as well, wanted to hire from within the district. It seems, however, that Dr. Grey has become a part of New Hope City just as if she had grown up there. One board member notes:

> The one thing that I can say that I've seen is that she has a true love for this community. We wanted as a board someone that would be involved with the community and not just be in the community. Not just a figurehead of the school that goes to this meeting and that meeting, but somebody that becomes engaged. And she has become engaged. She has a sincere love for the community and she is acclimated.

Dr. Grey's commitment to the community is overshadowed only by her dedication to the district and to "her babies". In spite of the current myopic focus on standardized tests and high stakes assessments in this nation, Dr. Grey is unwavering in her dedication to each and every child within the district. In many hours of interviews, Dr. Grey never focused on test scores. When asked directly about the district's scores, she replied, "You know what? Like everyone else… we are struggling, but considering the challenges that these babies are facing… the fact that they have done as well [as they have] I think we need them to celebrate that."

Dr. Grey's commitment to the children and doing what is right for each and every one was apparent to everyone to whom I spoke. Moreover, her dedication to equity and inclusion for those who have been traditionally marginalized is overwhelming. As will be detailed in later sections of this report, Dr. Grey has championed several innovative projects targeted towards equitable and inclusive goals, such as the Phoenix Program, the GED program, increasing space for middle school alternative programs, and increasing equitable participation in the gifted and talented program. Her passion for social justice is

evident to others in her orbit as well. One administrative staffer close to Dr. Grey put it this way, "She's saving them all Tom. She's saving all the kids one at a time. She's saving them all the time." Dr. G, as many call her, is clearly burdened by the inequities around her and is dedicated to leveling the playing field wherever she can. Another administrative staffer agreed, saying:

> Yeah, she's out to save every kid. That's her big deal, doesn't matter what color, what kind, she's out to save every one of them. And she wants a program for everything so that she can save them all. This one will fit into that program; this one will fit into that program. We need this, we need that, of course we don't have the money for all of it, and she knows that, but she has great ideas... what's nice about her coming from the outside is that she has all these different ideas.

At the same time, Dr. Grey understands how to navigate within the rules of privilege and, as Weiner (2003) cautions, realizes that, as a transformative leader she must also always "have one foot in the dominant structures of power and authority, and as such become [a]'willing subject' of dominant ideological and historical conditions" (p. 91). Dr. Grey seems to enjoy broad support from her board for the numerous social justice-oriented projects that she has thus far championed, but the following statement from one board member seems to suggest that her awareness of Weiner's (2003) advice is warranted.

> Here's a danger for her, and it has been pointed out to her. 'Be careful that you don't just appear to be someone who's helping out lower students who are struggling, students who are in poverty, don't forget that you have diversity in the district. Diversity doesn't mean just, you know, students struggling.

Dr. Grey is a leader who has a clear vision for the future of her district and the moral courage to make difficult decisions for the welfare of the children. When asked directly about her view of the road ahead she replied candidly, "Initially, I wanted to take

this [first] year to assess, because you don't make changes your first year… That's [advice from] leadership 101… Oh my God that has not happened. Situations evolved and I had to make decisions." During the three-month period between the time Dr. Grey arrived in New Hope City and her first day as superintendent, she had the opportunity to get to know the community, the district and her staff in some detail. All the while, her plan for the district began to coalesce.

The Team Begins to take shape

Dr. Grey formally assumed the helm of New Hope United School District on July 1, 2015. Her vision included creating a leadership team to assist her in managing the vast responsibilities of a large urban district. Unlike past administrations, she imagined a bifurcated and flattened hierarchy with an assistant responsible for the day to day operations of elementary education and another essentially equal partner who would be responsible for everything secondary. Dr. Grey, devoted mother of two adolescent boys, recognized that being new to the seat, the district, and the community, she would need to build a strong team around her to effectively manage New Hope USD. Referring to his long history and the inordinate amount of time that Mr. Davis was able to allocate to the district, Board Secretary Dorothy Boynton recalled,

> [Dr. Grey], being the new person, knew she wasn't going to accomplish all that by herself, she had to learn. She knew that she would need [more than just one associate superintendent]. She has a family and she has children. She knew that she would need more help.

With this reality in mind, Dr. Grey asked the board to split the associate superintendent's position into an assistant superintendent for elementary education and an associate superintendent to cover everything related to secondary education within the

district. Commenting on the evolution of the leadership team, board member Jason Logan recalled,

> It was very important to the board that we provide her with the tools for her to be successful. Some of us, because we've had experience with Mr. Davis, and knowing that every position that [he] left in this district, there were always additional people hired when he left. There was not a surprise in my mind we would have to do something different, that we would have to look at [splitting the associate superintendent position into two] as another option. It was like yeah, [no one else] is going to put in 65, 70, 80 hours a week. That's not going to happen. The question was how would she want to see her team look?

Easing into her new position alongside the outgoing superintendent gradually over the course of three months gave Dr. Grey the opportunity to patiently observe her new staff and get to know them as she considered who would fill the newly created assistant superintendent of elementary education position. One of the first individuals with whom Dr. Grey connected was Mr. Jerry Parker. Tall and lean with an impeccable sense of comedic timing, Mr. Parker grew up just down the road from New Hope City and went to high school in a neighboring district. He received a bachelor's degree in special education, a master's degree in General Administration, and was completing his Education Specialist degree as this research commenced. Mr. Parker had served the district for 15 years in various capacities. "I began as a teacher in elementary special education. I was a special education coordinator, then a building principal, the director of special education, and now assistant superintendent," he recounted. Referring to her first impression of Mr. Parker, Dr. Grey remembers:

> I got to watch him in action from March to June. That's usually my thing. I usually watch people and see how they interact. I saw his passion and attention to detail and how much he knew and I said he was an overlooked gem; but, I wouldn't overlook him. So after

watching him for three months I knew he needed to be an assistant superintendent.

Dr. Grey would quickly make good on her intuition and, as her first hire, selected Mr. Parker to become assistant superintendent of elementary education.

Perhaps not surprisingly, just as Dr. Grey and her new administrative team were set to begin their tenure, the incumbent associate superintendent accepted a position as superintendent in another district, leaving a vacancy for an assistant superintendent of secondary education. Faced with what should have been a serious transition complication, Dr. Grey didn't hesitate. When asked what was going through her mind the moment she realized that she now had to fill a vital position on her team, Dr. Grey replied that she knew immediately whom she wanted by her side. Long-time friend and former doctoral cohort mate, Dr. Pam Jacobs had just left her position as assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction in pursuit of a better opportunity down south. Dr. Grey recalls her conversation with Dr. Jacobs, telling her to "Turn the truck around! **Turn the truck around**!" Not wanting to miss this opportunity to build her dream leadership team, Dr. Grey was persistent. "She was very persuasive," Dr. Jacobs recalls, "She just kept saying 'stop your plans and what you're doing. I'm going to offer you a better opportunity!' and it was true.'"

Asked what made her immediately think of [Dr. Jacobs] for her team, Dr. Grey responded,

> Because I had seven years of watching her and her work ethic during our doctoral program. Also, I never thought I would ever meet anyone that is as out there [concerned about social justice] as much as myself, but I had the opportunity to watch [Pam Jacobs] for seven years. It was just her passion and work ethic... And I really thought she was probably one of the smartest ones in that cohort. She was really smart.

Dr. Pam Jacobs received a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature, a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and, after several years as a secondary teacher, educational consultant, and district director, she returned to academia to obtain a second master's degree in Educational Leadership and Administration, and finally a doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy. Her leadership experience includes secondary administration and more than a decade as an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in racially and ethnically diverse, majority-minority suburban Chicago districts where she was highly regarded for her depth and breath of knowledge about a wide range of k-12 education topics.

Dr. Grey may have intuitively recognized that a working relationship with Mr. Parker would offer significant synergetic benefits as she contemplated the makeup of her administrative team. On the other hand, when faced with the sudden, but ironically providential departure of the incumbent associate superintendent on the first day of her new contract, Dr. Grey knew instantly who would complete her serendipitously symbiotic team. The passion and emotion in her voice was evident as she recalled the moment her "dream team" came together in her mind.

> So I had the two them in my head and I was like, 'JP!' His name was Jerry Parker but I had to rename him. I said, 'JP oh my God! I have a female you! The two of you together! Oh My! And I kept going like this (making the yin/yang sign with her hands) because she has just as much energy as you.' They are just like this! He had the special education and she had the curriculum, which I don't have because I'm finance. So I have operations and money and buses and I can do all that, but I needed curriculum, and special education, the IEP... DEP... FMLA... whatever...[said jokingly], they complemented my shortcomings and I always believed... that you surround yourself with people that complement you and can fill in the gaps for you. They could fill in my shortcomings. I can work as hard as I could but I'd only be mediocre at curriculum. So why waste that energy.

Thus, with one phone call to tell her friend and colleague to turn the moving truck around, she had completed her leadership team.

A Multi-faceted Relationship

"There is something very special about this team, and I would really like to find out what it is," I stated as we drove out of New Hope. After spending only a few hours observing this district leadership team as a research assistant on a study about how educational leaders address the needs of all students, I told my doctoral advisor that I wanted to focus my dissertation research around this rather unique trio. It became evident to me almost immediately that they shared a common passion for social justice and were committed to bringing about equity and inclusion for all students. Moreover, I believed that these three individuals genuinely liked each other and operated synergistically as a team. At the risk of sounding like a cliché, they seemed to possess a magical quality that will be challenging to convey adequately in two dimensions through this thesis. Nonetheless, leaders yearning to build leadership teams in any field who wish to accomplish transformative change might find valuable insights through a careful inspection of the qualities this district leadership team exhibits.

The unique bonds of this triadic leadership team began to become apparent almost immediately upon my first encounter with the entire team. In a brief 15-minute meeting with the team just a few months after they began their tenure, I was struck with the complex, yet nuanced ways in which they related to one another. This team seems to have a multi-dimensional relationship with each facet more or less apparent depending upon the context of the situation in which they are engaged. After several observations of the team in different settings, distinct modes of relating to one another began to emerge.

Level 1 – Professional Working Relationship

On a professional level, there is a clearly defined employer/employee relationship with Dr. Grey assuming the responsibility of the ultimate decision-maker, while Dr. Jacobs and Mr. Parker respectfully support her and provide their unique perspectives. This aspect of their relationship is founded upon a deep respect for the office of superintendent as well as the person in that position. Likewise, Dr. Grey demonstrates her regard for the responsibility of her office and the direction that she must ultimately provide to the district. At the same time, she has great respect for her team and the professionalism that they bring to their respective positions. Dr. Grey openly recognizes the strengths that her assistants bring to the office and to the team. When asked about her assistants, Dr. Grey answered,

> Oh they are great. Pam and JP really are phenomenal! Sometimes I just sit there and look at them and go 'Wow! You guys are good! I think I could only mess it up!' Instructional strategies, leadership, getting the SLO's down, and… they are good. They really are good!

Her highly animated answer is indicative of not only her respect and admiration for her team, but also her own sense of humility. Regarding the professional nature of their relationship, Dr. Jacobs reflects,

> I can come in here and say [to Dr. Grey], 'Here's what I'm thinking…' and she considers it… like, 'Where am I off or what am I not thinking about?' And that's big! That is why I'm here, because I will work my butt off for someone who treats me like a professional, that I'm valued as a person.

New Hope USD board president, Mr. Vega, explained the leadership team's hybrid hierarchy in the following way:

> Dr. Grey, is clearly the superintendent and clearly her decision is the final decision, but she has much more shared responsibility, power, however you want to say it… She and Dr. Jacobs are both brand new

to the district, and so they have no history in the district, or in the community. Jerry Parker has the history for them.

Level 2 - Colleagues

Simultaneously, and at a different level, this triad performs more like colleagues who share a strong sense of vision, voice, and responsibility for the future of the district. I use the term colleague here to describe a quality of their relationship that reflects a sense of professional respect as well as a nuanced appreciation of equal status in their pursuit of a shared goal. On this level, each individual of the team relies on the strengths of the others to synergistically produce an end product that is greater than the sum of the individual contributions. One board member describes the complexity of this team saying,

> They're hyperactive, all three of them. And you know, in one sense… so they are a great team. They really work together well. They really like each other. There is a great deal of loyalty there. They all… I mean they listen [to each other]… again, you have three people that are almost equal. Really not in the chain of command equal, because she [Dr. Grey] is of course [the boss], but equal in another sense.

In one candid conversation, the team, in an impromptu yet perfectly harmonious routine, explained the strength of their collegial relationship.

> **JP:** I think collectively…
> **Dr. G:** We know some stuff. Together we know some stuff!
> **JP:** That's what I think… collectively…
> **Dr. Jacobs:** Collective wisdom of the group. I think we definitely know
> what we want to accomplish.

Even others in the administrative orbit recognize the professional, yet fluid nature of this leadership team's relationship. Dorothy Boynton, administrative secretary to the board of education, explains:

> Mr. Parker and Dr. Jacobs especially… in their positions may have one idea, where Dr. G, leading the entire district, has sometimes a different

idea and she just says, "No, we can't do that. You'll have to come up with something else." But then, I think they all three respect each other's intelligence, knowledge, and energy and they come back with a different idea.

Level 3 - Teammates

At an even deeper level, this triad exhibits the quintessential quality of a team—a genuine effort to accomplish a goal marked by a devotion to teamwork and shared acclaim rather than individual accolades. The following conversation occurred in response to a question posed to the group about what qualities made them an effective team:

> **Dr. G:** Were not trying to do the Ego thing. Like... 'I know I don't know that.'
>
> **JP:** That's what I think! Nobody's trying to do the Ego thing. Nobody's trying to stand out.
>
> **Dr. G:** 'I don't know that. What you want me to do? What am I supposed to say?' and, then I'm like I'm easy to defer [to them], and I'll sit there and shut up.
>
> **Dr. Jacobs:** She's like... 'Jacobs, answer the question!' and I'm like... 'Alright...'
>
> **Dr. G:** 'Answer the question!'
>
> **JP:** And I think you said that several times comfortably [in the past]. [Speaking in mock Dr. G voice] 'I don't know, ask Jacobs, she knows the answer.' and, I think that takes a strong superintendent to be able to say that. There are not many of them.

This exchange seemed to flow naturally with a degree of intimacy that suggests they have had lengthy conversations about this subject in the past. They spoke in each other's voice frequently, showing a deep sense of trust. I believe this also indicates a deep level of shared experiences on which they base this conversation.

Putting ego aside, this team works together with near seamless perfection in public contexts to the point that others are seldom aware of their teamwork. Dr. Grey will admit in private that she is a "big picture" kind of person who sometimes has difficulty recalling details in a pinch; nonetheless, in public her team supports her so effectively that she appears to have near perfect recall. After carefully observing the team in numerous public settings, I recognized the usefulness of this technique in-situ. For

instance, being new to the community and to the district, Dr. Grey might not always recall the name of someone she had met briefly in the past. In that context, Mr. Parker, a long-time resident and the historian of the group, would seem to sense the impending encounter and imperceptibly lean in to Dr. G, imparting the critical pieces of information so quickly that no one would recognize the maneuver. Dr. Grey illustrates this tactic, saying,

> Case in point: When we are out talking to people, he [JP] will stand in my ear and say, "Her name is Jane, ask about the kids, don't forget the dog." He'll give me three words and let me go. And so it always looks like [I remember everyone and everything], and she [Pam] does the same thing for me with curriculum. Ok this is… say this… She knows everything… they cover me so well. And there is no ego in it. You know what I mean? There's no ego with them.

Sometimes the ease with which the group operates seamlessly as a team even takes Mr. Parker by surprise. Recalling how effortlessly he is able to pass historical and contextual information to his colleagues, JP stated, "I'm serious; I am always in their ears and they pull it off. I can give her two words and she'll just run with it. I'm like, seriously? But it just works for us."

In public situations, I would often observe the team selflessly covering for each other. When one seemed to sense that the other might not have a critical piece of information, he or she would, with seamless precision, insert the missing material, almost as if unable to resist speaking up. In fact, because this team is so in-sync with each other, it was nearly impossible to tell when they were using this technique as opposed to merely finishing each other's thoughts, perhaps a distinction without a difference. This skill might seem clumsy at best were it not so finely tuned within this group, a quality dependent upon the profound level of intimacy this team shares with each other.

In this case study, I have chosen to use the term *intimacy* to portray a particular quality of this triad's relationship that describes a profound familiarity, closeness, an awareness of each other's mental and emotional state, which no other single synonym could completely convey. This form of intimacy seems to be foundational and omnipresent with this team; therefore, I will invoke its purely platonic, and in some sense even spiritual nature, throughout the remainder of this study.

Level 4 – Best Friends

Although it took some time to identify, I was almost immediately aware of an even deeper quality to this relationship that may be rather unexpected among leadership teams, yet in some sense is quite familiar to most people. After several long conversations involving all three members of this team, it became unmistakably obvious that their relationship mirrors the qualities found among best friends. Rooted in a genuine positive regard for one another, it is obvious that they enjoy being in each other's company. Humor seems to be an integral characteristic to the quality of their relationship, especially when they are in more private settings. They seemed to be able to switch from deeply serious conversations to silly banter almost at will, a quality that, for me, made every encounter with the team, every interview, every observation as entertaining as it was informative. In fact, during the coding phase of this research, I would often listen to the recordings of taped encounters with the leadership team over and over again, simply because they were enjoyable. In spite of the fact that I knew the content of each recording verbatim, I would find myself laughing uncontrollably at the perfectly timed comedic banter among the trio. This team is surrounded by a contagious

aura of enthusiasm and excitement that seems to translate into what Bakhtin (1895-1975) describes as *carnival.*

Writing extensively on the works of Russian philosopher Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, Shields (2007) explains his concept of carnival as "a way of breaking down barriers, of overcoming power inequities and hierarchies, of reforming and renewing relationships both personal and institutional" (p. 97). Meant to be a temporary suspension of the socially constructed structures that, by edict and convention, prevent open and honest dialogue—communication that is free of professional correctness yet maintains personal respect, the idea of a carnivalesque moment in time "permits us to express ourselves differently than we might in normal everyday conversations" (Shields, 2007, p. 105). In some ways, akin to the military custom of a subordinate asking "permission to speak freely", carnivalesque affairs are unstructured, spontaneous incidents where "the ever-changing opportunities presented when one is freed from fear and constraint are able to live life joyfully" (Shields, 2007, p. 125). Although never meant to permanently replace professional decorum, Dr. Grey senses the importance of creating relationships that engender this concept, allowing for the lasting effects that offer "the possibility of new norms, new approaches to the normal routines of non-carnival daily life" (Shields, 2007, p. 101). The following exchange offers a glimpse into this team's ability to suspend professional protocol in return for the possibility of creating a deeper and more trusting relationship.

> **JP:** When we went to Springfield to the conference that… I
> don't think it was as much about paying attention
> and really gathering information… it is, hell we all
> appeared so sometimes it is. I mean remember we
> cut up!

Dr. G: We ate so much food!

Dr. Jacobs: I fell! [Uproarious laughter ensued from the group]

JP: I wanted to dance with the old lady remember?

Dr. G & Dr. Jacobs in unison: Yea!

JP: It was nice because everybody's on that crazy… you know… the year was just starting… and we were like 'what the hell did we get ourselves into?' and 'this is a big district!' So everybody was on some crazy… No one had ever really been to a conference as a superintendent, I hadn't been at all… Pam hates everyone there. [This statement results in uproarious laughter] So that was easy, and G wanted to look good… [resulting in more uproarious laughter from the group]. Anyways, so really I think that we were all on that crazy level together… because it wouldn't do any good for Pam to go to the winery and drink four bottles of wine, [more uproarious laughter] so she's down and she's in her mellow mood and G and I are still up here [using his hand to indicate a high energy level] doing our thing.

> *As I listened to the group recall their first trip as a team to an educational conference, I felt as though they were genuinely reliving a truly enjoyable experience shared as friends. Their animation and laughter belied greater details about the trip that only close friends would know and understand. Mr. Parker's willingness to poke fun at his colleagues suggested an authentic level of trust and intimacy often experienced by best buddies.*

In many respects, the enjoyment this team experiences as they interact and work with one another seems to propagate throughout the district. Director of Curriculum, Ms. Bobby Jean Riche, who works one floor above the superintendent's office, described a seismic shift in her outlook on her tenure within the district after this leadership team took over at the helm. After nearly three years in a coaching and curriculum coordinator position, she was feeling somewhat frustrated and noticed a dampening of morale within her department. When asked about this leadership team, however, Ms. Riche's tone brightened perceptibly as she explained, "They work so well together. We have fun and we work hard. There are days where it's really stressful and we're frustrated, but now I truly love coming to work every day." She went on to say,

I just really am excited about what we are doing now and where we are going. It's fun to come to work. I told Mr. Parker after I met Dr. Jacobs that I felt like I had died and gone to curriculum heaven. It's just like I have somebody to geek out with now.

The playful nature of this team's interactions is indicative of the genuine positive regard with which each holds of the others. In spite of the pressures associated with running such a large district, this team seems to find authentic joy reveling in their complex relationship. One conversation about the synergy within the team unfolded this way:

Dr. Grey: I just keep saying… I am truly blessed [to have these two].

Dr. Jacobs: It is different; I never, ever had a team like this.

JP: We have a curriculum coordinator upstairs, and on Friday when Obi-Wan Kenobi was out playing, Ms. Riche came in and said, 'Oh my gosh, I can't believe how loud this place is. It was never like this before…' She just kept saying how much fun we have and 'we have never gotten this much done… You know we have never gotten this much done.' So they can take the loudness as long as [we're getting things done].

Mr. Parker's reference to Dr. Jacobs as Obi-Wan Kenobi is derived from the similarity of her real name to the fictional Star Wars character.

Only used in private settings, the nicknames the team has adopted for each other are also characteristic of the friendship quality of their relationship.

While there seems to be an aura of carnival hovering over this team and unanimity of opinion throughout the community that they appear to have fun, few outside of their administrative orbit recognize its origin. This team has a sophisticated sense of context and are adroit at maintaining a professional demeanor in public. Mr. Parker described it this way:

When we go to a school [together], people will say, 'You know, I saw Mr. Parker, Dr. G, and Dr. Jacobs at Hilltop middle, what's up?' So it's different… it's seriousness. I think that people know we are thinkers;

we are reflective; that we have high expectations; but we can come back here and we can cut up.

Their ability to easily switch from a formal, more professional working relationship in public into a relaxed, friendship mode in private was evident from my first encounter with the team when Dr. Grey explained, "It's a different dynamic, when we are not here [in the superintendent's office]… the three of us are a different dynamic! But if you get us together in a social setting… we are so freaking goofy." Over the course of nearly six months, I observed this team under many diverse public situations, including school board meetings, cabinet meetings, HR and staffing meetings, and many others, and noted how easily they were able to shift into a professional mode in public while maintaining the strong friendship bonds that would reemerge the moment they were behind closed doors. Perhaps Mr. Parker summed it up best saying,

> I think that we see it, like within ourselves, within this office, within this building, within this room… But I still think when we walk out we are a different group. And I think that's hard to pull off. I don't think many people could pull it off.

Level 5 – Chosen Family - Siblings

In addition to the professional, collegial, team, and friendship aspect to this triad's relationship, there seems to be an even more profound level upon which they relate. Grounded in an implicit, unconditional, and absolute trust in one another, this team seems to have a familial bond as though they were life-long siblings. The trust this team shares has a professional aspect as when Dr. Grey states with absolute certainty:

> I've watched them enough that I trust their judgment. I know even if we make a mistake and we screw it up, I know his heart was in the right place, he did the best he could, and we're going to roll that out, and later on say… 'Okay that didn't quite work.' So, I can always trust his heart was in the right place… same with her.

The trust among the members of this team goes much deeper, however, as demonstrated by this story recounted by Mr. Parker about an incident that occurred very early in their professional relationship.

> **JP:** One week into the job, do you remember what we said?
> **Dr. G:** "Do you got my back?"
> **JP:** She said 'I got your back all the way through this; but, you have to promise you have my back.' And I said, 'Nobody will have your back like I'll have your back!' She wasn't here a week yet. I don't know her, and I'm thinking to myself 'Okay, you said it so now you got her back!' And if there was a time it's going to be put to test… not that she was unavailable, but…
> **Dr. G:** I don't know what phone number he was calling, [it wasn't mine] but he's calling and calling and calling… but I didn't get it, [the phone call] and the school [Franklin elementary] was flooding.
> **JP:** I thought to myself… 'I'm going to have to decide to either close this school or keep it open. I went over there and they said they just got the water shut off; and, I was like, 'Okay, it's fine…we're not going to have to shut [the school] down. Then I was walking to the front door and there she was standing at the front door.
> **Dr. G:** I'm like "what's going on?" [Said casually]
> **JP:** And the conversation we had was two sentences. 'Dr. G, if I would have had to shut down this building, all I have to know is that you would've supported me publicly.' And she said, 'Publicly I would have supported you.' I said, 'Now you know you can kick my ass once we shut the doors, I'm good with that; but, we said we'd have each other's back.' and she said, 'we do!' And I **one hundred percent** believed it [Said emphatically]!

This conversation played out like a comedy sketch; nonetheless, the honesty and sincerity with which the sentiment was shared made it obvious that there was a profound level of trust almost instantly between Dr. Grey and Mr. Parker that seemed to transcend normal levels of confidence among colleagues, or even between friends.

Asked how he knew so quickly that he could trust the new superintendent, Mr. Parker gave the following answer:

> It's not easy to come here and you don't know a soul. That's why, on day seven, honestly, she was looking for someone to trust and I had to trust the new superintendent. So I mean it was weird because she didn't know anyone and I knew that I was *stuck* with her [Dr. G bursts into laughter]. So I had to trust her and she didn't know me either, but she had to trust me. So I think that part worked. I don't know… I could

> just feel an energy that… I'm a people person. I stink at hiring people by the way, for the most part, people always say, "Don't allow Parker to sit in on an interview because he always picks the wrong person; but, [in this case] I didn't… I don't know… [She] was just a good fit for here… it was easy… it was an easy fit for here. It was nothing I could put my finger on.

Mr. Parker's reference to the 'energy' that he felt when first encountering Dr. Grey was a common theme recited by many individuals when reflecting upon their first impression of Dr. Grey, and seems to be associated with a tacit sense of confidence in her as a leader. This quality is shared equally between all three leaders.

Even though Dr. Jacobs had known Dr. Grey for several years as doctoral students, they had never shared a working relationship. Nonetheless, Dr. Jacobs trusted her instincts and her faith in Dr. Grey when she decided to cancel her plans to take a high-paying consulting job down south to join the New Hope USD team.

> I would say trust is probably what makes it work the best between the three of us, because I trust them completely. I came here I didn't know anybody. I left my family behind. I didn't know quite what to expect. While I knew Alice, I'd never worked with her before. I didn't know how it was going to go, but I definitely knew we both felt the same way about what we needed to do as administrators, and the fact that she was very persuasive and just kept saying, 'Stop your plans and what you're doing. I'm going to offer you a better opportunity!' and it was true. JP was just a bonus that came along with it.

This familial aspect of their relationship manifests most obviously in the ease with which they devolve into what can only be described as sibling banter. With a regularity approaching certainty, every time I observed this trio in a private setting where no one except their closest administrative associates could overhear, their relationship seemed to transform into one forged from a profound trust in one another, one best exemplified by close siblings. The following exchange occurred during a conversation about their down

time away from work. While I found this exchange particularly humorous, it is also indicative of the manner in which this team would frequently interact.

> **Dr. Jacobs:** It's our reflection time.
> **JP**: I feel like we talked about those things today.
> **Dr. Jacobs:** We did.
> **JP:** Don't look at me like that.
> **Dr. Jacobs:** We did. It's called reflection time.
> **JP:** Well then don't look at me like that.
> **Dr. Jacobs:** Can't the cat look at the King? Really? It's called reflection time and it's about having the time to create rather than…
> **JP:** That was the dumbest thing you've ever said! You've said some dumb things in your life… It's reflective time… really?
> **Dr. Jacobs:** Yeah!
> **JP:** What the hell? Who's watching?
> **Dr. Jacobs:** Nobody! it's true.
> **JP:** Turn the camera off. You know I hate that… what did they say? 'We're going to go sit down, we're to have grub, we're going to reflect we're going to hug we're going to kiss.' [Said in a very animated and overly dramatic manner – reflecting on a past-shared event].

As this exchange progressed, JP and Dr. Jacobs devolved into what could best be described as good-natured sibling banter. Throughout the mock squabble, Dr. Grey laughed uproariously, adding fuel to the fire.

As will become even more evident in later sections of this study, the ease with which this team can become irreverent with each other substantiates the trust and loyalty they share. Finding it difficult even to put into words, Mr. Parker suggested, "I think it's safe. I think we're kind of safe with each other… and I don't even really know what that means exactly, but… it's weird, I mean it's trust, it's safety, it's comfort."

Talk About Synergy

In some respects, it doesn't completely make sense to speak about the *individuals* who comprise this team, because they have effectively developed a synergistic relationship that is not only greater than the sum of its individual parts, but is also incomplete without each member of the triad. I do not mean to imply that Dr. Grey, or for

that matter, either Dr. Jacobs or Mr. Parker could not perform the duties of the position to which they have been assigned were this team, for instance, never assembled, because I am certain that they could. At the same time, I am also convinced that, together as a team they have been able to accomplish their goals in a manner and to a degree that would be difficult if not impossible to achieve were the dynamic of this team altered.

Her Purse Didn't Match Her Outfit!

Listening to them describe it, the multi-faceted relationship between Dr. G and Mr. Parker seemed to evolve out of thin air almost immediately. During an interview with the triad early in the study, I asked them to describe how they became a team. Mr. Parker was quick to take responsibility for its evolution.

> **JP:** Me!
> **Dr. G:** Whatever!
> **JP:** I interviewed both of you!
> **Dr. G:** That's true, you did.
> **JP:** Yes I did.
> **Dr. G:** So my third interview was in three groups. My third interview here, it was staff, community, and board. And he [JP] was the facilitator of the staff group. And he just stared at me the whole time, **JUST LIKE THAT!** He was assessing my every move. [Laughter erupts from the group]

As Dr. G explained the interview process, Mr. Parker starred intently at her. This whole episode was both comedic and simultaneously quite serious.

When asked to describe his first impression of Dr. Grey during that interview, without skipping a beat, Mr. Parker announced, "Her purse didn't match her outfit, so that was very telling for me!" This statement, spoken in a most serious tone, was met with uproarious laughter from his teammates, and led into the following exchange:

> **Dr. G:** That is not true! I didn't bring my purse with me! It stayed upstairs.

JP: Yes you did! It was brown and you had on black. So that, I don't know, I think that was telling. She had a different perspective of schools than I do.

Dr. Grey and Mr. Parker quickly realized that they thought alike. Even as the final hiring decision was being made by the board of education, they began to hone their ability to communicate non-verbally. When asked about the first time they knew that they were on the same page, they simultaneously began recounting the following story as if it had happened just yesterday, showing clearly how they both had perceived the incident in much the same way.

Dr. G: But we could do that from my interview. It was something…[something was said during the interview] and we looked at each other and…
JP: I knew what you were thinking!
Dr. G: You knew what I was thinking!
Dr. G: And we knew that we knew what the other person was thinking!

During board meetings, cabinet meetings, and other public meetings, I noticed that the team always tried to position themselves within a line-of-sight of each other if possible, to facilitate their non-verbal form of communication. Their barely perceptible looks, facial expressions, and other gestures, combined with a profound familiarity with each other and a deep sense of trust, allowed them to communicate vast amounts of information silently and unnoticed by just about everyone in the room. The team, who acknowledged their ability to communicate this way "has just always come easy to us", confirmed the observation during this dialogue.

JP: I know it wasn't even a week into [their relationship] after Dr. Grey got here, and it was just the weirdest thing and I thought, 'Okay… whatever.' But it just made sense. She said to me, 'I need you to watch me at the board meetings and if I roll my eyes, make facial expressions, if I'm slouching, if I say 'um', you have to be comfortable enough to let me know.' And I'm thinking, 'Okay lady,

> I don't even know you like that!' But it was the oddest thing... it was just that easy.
>
> **Dr. G:** But, we could do that from the board meeting... no we did that way before...
>
> **JP:** I bet you it wasn't a week into it.
>
> **Dr. Jacobs:** We all do it [communicate with each other silently] without even thinking.
>
> **JP:** Right, and we will look at each other and be like...
>
> **Dr. G:** The first time was the [first] board meeting! And you were still sitting in the audience.

Others in the administrative building were also soon aware of the special working relationship developing between the new superintendent and the then Director of Special Education, Mr. Parker. "It was like they had known each other for years." One assistant recalled when asked how the team came together. "It was immediate. It happened right off the bat." Referring to the ease with which Dr. Grey and Mr. Parker developed their special working relationship, school board secretary Dorothy Boynton explained:

> As soon as she [Dr. Grey] got here... she came early in March... So she just latched onto him and found out what a great asset he was to her. And their personalities meshed. Then when the associate superintendent left, she described Dr. Jacobs to us as a female version of Jerry. We are getting a female version of Mr. Parker.

Fortuitous Symbiotic Relationships

Less than a week into her tenure, Dr. Grey needed to fill a newly vacated assistant superintendent of secondary education position and had just the person in mind for the job. Having complete confidence in Dr. Jacobs' abilities and qualifications for the position, Dr. Grey arranged for a telephone interview with the hiring committee, including, of course Mr. Parker, who was quick to suggest that he was (in some respects) responsible for bringing Dr. Jacobs on board as well. The team recalled that phone conversation in great detail:

> **JP:** I will say... with Obi-Wan it was a phone interview and she didn't have a question sheet.

Dr. G: She was so good in her interview we put her on…

Dr. Jacobs: THEY PUT ME ON MUTE! And I'm talking and I think they're listening to me but I was on mute! [Said emphatically as if emotionally wounded]

Dr. G: Like in the first couple of minutes I kept saying, 'You'll see how smart she is!'

JP: Do you remember when we hung up the phone? The first thing out of my mouth was 'I've never met anybody so BROAD! K to 12.' She had so much knowledge!

Dr. G: Yep, she had all the pieces, and she knew this stuff like… She just wasn't giving us the surface answer… she knew it!

JP: It wasn't just that she knew keywords, she knew trends in education, she knew… I was like, 'Dang! This girl knows her stuff!'

Dr. G: So we just put her on mute and let her talk.

Dr. Jacobs: They just let me talk on and on and on and on finally they were like, 'We're done here. Do you have any questions?' I was like, 'Did I do okay?' [Said in a pleading and unsure tone] I had no clue.

JP: We got off the phone and G said, 'I told you!' I was like okay, um hum… that's her. She's the one.

As fate would have it, an inevitable resignation created the providential occasion for Dr. Grey to merge a male and female version of the same personality [Dr. Grey's words, not mine] with her own, to create an exceptional leadership team. With that muted phone call behind her, Dr. Jacobs would soon experience the synergy and cohesion that Dr. Grey and Mr. Parker had already begun to appreciate. Joining her new colleagues and teammates less than a month later, Dr. Jacobs would quickly begin to feel the uniquely compelling synergistic energy that seems to unite them.

Dr. Jacobs: I didn't realize, actually, how powerful it [the synergy] was until I started watching them [Dr. G and JP]... Actually, until all three of us got started in a room, and I call it NUCLEAR FUSION because it is true! It is how the three of us play off of each other and feed off each other… and sometimes it can get downright… messy… scary… whatever! Sometimes it's where I have to [leave the room] because I can't take it.

Dr. G: The energy is just SO MUCH!

JP: Yea, it can be SO INTENSE!

Dr. Jacobs: Sometimes it's almost too much.

Rather quickly, it seems, others within the administrative orbit also began to notice the unique relationship beginning to evolve within the leadership team. When asked about the relationship among the team members, Brenda Baker, the newest administrative secretary noted "Oh they get along very well. I mean… with them, it's just a different feeling all throughout the district. I think it's great! I love how they work together." Even leaders within the community have begun to recognize the special relationship this triad has developed. As the owner of a considerable number of restaurant franchises in town and someone who is deeply involved in the district, Natalie Mathews knows a thing or two about generating teamwork. "They're an incredible team." She enthusiastically offered. "The synergy that they have in working together is like none I've ever seen before, honestly. They're fun, I mean they have fun… the work hard-play hard mentality is absolutely there. Absolutely!"

Local Pastor and newly elected school board member Chris Farrows explained that leading a district is, in some ways like leading a congregation. He believes that this leadership team has something special, saying:

> It takes a dedicated leader and some dedicated people around that leader and I think we have some dedicated people [on this team]. I think Dr. Grey works well with [her team]. I think they really like her from what I can discern, from when I'm around them, they are all a team, all three of them putting their heads together and trying to do what's best for these students and our community.

Perhaps Dr. Grey sums it up best extolling, "I say it all the time I've been truly blessed [by this team] because I've always wanted synergistic relationships and *this* is synergy."

Serendipitous Complementarity

This team is able to achieve a high level of synergy, in part due to the modes in which their individual strengths compliment their different weaknesses. In many

important ways, the members of this team share similar personalities. In addition to a

shared commitment to social justice and passion for service to the children of the district,

which will be described in detail later in this report, each member of this team can be

described as highly energetic. In fact, one of the most common words used to describe

this group was hyperactive. Board president Mr. Vega reminded, "You've talked to Dr.

Jacobs, you know her, you can see how enthusiastic she is. Same way with Mr. Parker,

they are hyperactive, all three of them are hyperactive." Opal Wooster, administrative

secretary to Dr. Jacobs described her first impression of her new boss saying:

> Oh lord, how can I keep up with her? That was my first thought,
> because when I think of her, I think of the energizer bunny. She just
> doesn't walk, she runs. She runs everywhere. She even talks fast. She
> does everything fast. She and JP, they are a lot alike in a lot of ways,
> especially like that.

Dr. Jacobs recognizes that her energy level may be misunderstood at times, but

makes no excuses for her enthusiasm, because it serves her and her team well.

> I know…people mistake my energy for ADD. It's not. Being exuberant
> as I like to call it, being exuberant has nothing to do with the way my
> mind works. I'm always saying where do we want to be at the end of
> the day. And then I back into it. Call it UBD, call it whatever you want
> to call it. It's…that is how I think.

Mr. Parker's assistant describes her boss in much the same way, "Oh he is high

energy all of the time. He is definitely a 'get things done' kind of guy. It is hard to keep

up with him sometimes." Although no one to whom I spoke would describe the team's

energy level as a shortcoming, even the team recognizes the high intensity can be

difficult to adjust to at first.

> **Dr. G:** Everything is high energy. We've been called the Energizer
> Bunnies…

Dr. Jacobs: Actually people are known to say we suck the life out of a room. 'I'm exhausted just being in the same room with you guys' they will say… And I'm like I don't know how to take that.

JP: Is that a compliment or an insult? Hum, let's see…

Dr. Jacobs: Pretty much everybody says that… board members, principals, teachers…

Dr. G: The three of us together, that's a lot to handle. But oh my goodness the things we get done.

Dr. Jacobs: Yes, the things we get done are amazing.

In much the same way, each member of this leadership team is highly organized and has a strong desire to control their environment. When asked how three people, each with a need to be in control, manage to get along and still like each other, their response was revealing.

Dr. G: We all control our own thing. I don't try to control hers because I don't know it. I don't try to control his because I don't know it. And they don't try to control mine.

JP: I can't even balance a checkbook, so… like anything financial I'm not even going to try to control it. Just tell me how much money I have and I'll spend it.

Dr. Jacobs: We are all in control over our own expertise.

JP: I agree.

The three members of this leadership triad seem to have matured quickly into their complimentary roles, developed a strong sense of confidence in one another, and have committed to the success of their team above a need for individual accolades.

Integrated Accountabilities

This team's willingness to yield to each other's strengths seems to be grounded in a keen sense of self-awareness, humility, and a profound level of trust. First of all, each member of this team seems to recognize and is willing to accept and admit his or her own limitations. While it may seem rather easy for most people to identify the areas in which they excel, accepting and divulging one's weaknesses may be more difficult for some

leaders. This was an aspect of the team's relationship that was apparent to Mr. Parker very early on. "When we first started," JP recalled during one interview, "I wrote that [we are] three people in the same room who are comfortable with our weaknesses." This team has managed to turn their self-awareness and humility into a strength that they employ to maximize their potential by concentrating on what they do well and deferring to their colleagues those areas where they are less effective. Relinquishing control over certain aspects of a job for which one is personally responsible can be fraught with apprehension; nonetheless, this team seems to have a fundamental level of trust in one another allowing for a near seamless handoff of shared responsibility. Each member of the team recognizes where he or she can focus attention and what aspect to 'hand off' in order to effectively cover all aspects of a task. When asked about their working relationship, Dr. Jacobs explained how JP and Dr. Grey compliment her strengths:

> He gives me the historical context and she gives me the board and political perspective so it works with all of us, but I would say that's about the only way that we differ. Other than that we are totally on the same page.

At a more fundamental level, these leaders compliment each other's approach to the task of leading New Hope USD as well. Notwithstanding the obvious hierarchy built into the office of the superintendent, there is a well-defined sense of shared responsibility within this team. Although Dr. Grey is ultimately responsible for the direction of the district and, in the end, makes the final decisions, she relies on her team to support her and provide her with a critical perspective. Dr. Grey willingly acknowledges that sometimes, as she focuses on the 'big picture' and her overall vision for the district, she may overlook the finer details of a situation; hence, this is why she surrounds herself with trusted colleagues who compliment her. Dr. Grey explains the relationship this way:

They [Dr. Jacobs and JP] have the attention to detail that I don't. I am the big picture. I will plan the vacation… we are going to Paris, I got it, we are going to do this and this and this and then [I will] forget to put gas in the car, or forget to go to the bank and get the money. They pay attention to all of the details for me… and we don't blame each other for our shortcomings.

Recognizing her occasional lack of focus, Dr. Grey admits, "I need to work on slowing down to pay attention to the details. Sometimes I'll fire right past [the details] and I'm on to the next [big thing]. Then they [Pam and JP] have to bring me back." As Dr. G continued, the trio began laughing hysterically, suggesting that they were all intimately familiar with this scenario:

> **Dr. G:** Yes, I need to work on slowing down… and remembering names, which bring us back to the details.
> **Dr. Jacobs and JP:** [Laughing hysterically – **Dr. G** begins to giggle]
> **Dr. Jacobs**: You are the worst!
> **Dr**. **G:** That's why he's [JP] in my ear, 'Jane. Remember the dog. Ask about the cat.'
> **JP:** I'll say [to the person who is approaching], "Kelly! How's Hilltop these days?" and then she [Dr. G] will know it's Kelly who works at Hilltop [Middle School].

Perhaps Dr. Grey is able to focus most of her attention on the overall vision for the district precisely because she can implicitly trust her colleagues to attend to the finer details, knowing that they will 'have her back' and inform her of any problems or concerns of which she needs to be aware. The team did not leave this important detail to chance; instead, they made this arrangement explicit. Dr. Grey explained:

We have a commitment to give each other brutal honesty… 'Don't tell me what I want to hear! Tell me what I need to know. What am I missing?' JP will say [to me] 'G… Okay… I think you should consider such and such' and I'm like 'Okay. I'm not doing that, but, okay.' But then he's like, 'Okay, but… I told you so!'

Although they had been operating in this fashion for nearly a year, the team had not considered their relationship in these broad terms until they were asked to explain themselves as an equilateral triangle with each individual being one side. The following insight was fascinating:

> **Dr. G:** I am the big picture. Here is what we are going to do. She [Pam] comes up with the things [details] that need to be done, and he [JP] gets them off the task list. You've [JP] got to check it off. Like, once you've [Pam] outlined what the details are, he [JP] absolutely will make sure that they all get off the list.
>
> **JP:** I do think that G is right, because she is like the big picture and Obi-Wan, a lot of times, is the detail. She'll say, 'We need to do blah, blah, blah,' and, a lot of the time, I'm the follow-up. Like… 'Okay, did you do this detail? Did you do this detail?
>
> **Dr. Jacobs:** You [JP] are execution. You're execution dude.
>
> **JP:** I do think that sometimes… Sometimes I do make the first move.
>
> **Dr. Jacobs:** You [JP] are definitely the executioner. [Laughing at the pun]
>
> **Dr. G:** Oh, that was well said. Let me write that down.
>
> **Dr. Jacobs:** I got it! [Anticipating that Dr. G would want to record this insight, Pam had already made a note.]

This exchange was punctuated with excitement and new insight. It was clear to me that the team recognized this pattern in the way they operate. I also observed this pattern play out numerous times during this study.

After observing each leader individually and as a group for several months, inexorably this synergistic pattern would emerge.

Collective Cognizance

At a fundamental level, this team clearly operates from a common frame of values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about the world and those in it. Dr. Grey is quite often described as someone who is passionate about social justice. Referring to Dr. Grey, one board member said:

> I hear what people say [about Dr. Grey], and what people say is that she is willing to express her desire for social justice, that she

demonstrates a passion to serve under served children, and certainly
she has brought to the board a variety of different ideas in that regard.

Others within the district have also begun to recognize Dr. Grey's passion for social justice and equity. Berlin Homer, principal of Hilltop Middle School described Dr. Grey as "the champion for those kids that everybody else has given up on, saying they're not worth a second chance, but they are worth it and she sees that."

It is quite likely that the seven years Dr. Grey and Dr. Jacobs spent learning about leadership and social justice during their doctoral studies influenced their common outlook on issues relating to marginalization and oppression. Dr. Grey recalls the passion she saw in Pam and the rest of their cohort:

> I said this to [the cohort] directly one day, 'You guys are the freedom fighting… rush out to save the people… social justice warriors.' I was the only Black person in the cohort, and joking with them I said, 'you guys would be the first ones out there talking about we're going to save the people! We're going to save the Black people!' and I'd be in the back going… 'Wait… wait… wait… what? Where are we going?' So, in one sense, I would be the one reeling that group in.

Mr. Parker seems to have arrived at nearly the same mental frame through his years working in special education. When asked why he chose special education, Mr. Parker replied, "I am just the king of the underdog!" to which, Dr. Grey replied, "He is! He is the king of the underdog! He's going to save every underdog! He's going to fix it! That's what I love about him." Referring to her sentiments about Pam and the rest of their doctoral cohort, Dr. Grey said of JP:

> I also thought the same about him. I have a nickname for him. I call him Captain Underdog. But they [Dr. Jacobs and JP] have the same 'rush out there and save the people' mentality, you know, 'free everyone' and I know that about myself as well. I often have to reel them [Dr. Jacobs and JP] in because they are very passionate about [emancipation]. For both of them [Pam and JP], the thing that I admire the most is their 'Captain-save-the-world' mentality… They are just…

they are going to save the people! They are the first ones to the firing line. Both of them! First ones to the firing line!

When asked individually to reflect on the one principal passion or overarching life goal that inspires their leadership, the similarities of their deepest motivations becomes clear:

Dr. G: Service.
Dr. Jacobs: Taking care of people.
JP: I want to help people grow and really reach their potential. I
   see potential in everyone.

From the preceding examples and many similar instances, it is evident that the members of this leadership team share a common ontology and epistemology, and operate from a mutual set of values and beliefs about social justice leadership.

Intuitive Intimacy

This team shares a strong bond with one another that is predicated upon an implicit sense of trust. Similarly, they share a level of camaraderie that seems to transcend a simple collegial relationship. The expanse of personal familiarity and closeness displayed by this team is generally found only among close siblings or perhaps a group of best friends. They seem to possess an intrinsic awareness of each other's mental and emotional state, and when they are together in the relative privacy of the administrative building, they seem to have the ability to resonate with a harmonic energy that is almost palpable. Over the course of several months, I observed this team speaking in unison, finishing each other's sentences, and using what amounts to a private language more times than I could possibly record. I observed the team frequently not even needing to finish a sentence, and yet they all understood the deeper reference. These qualities are not by any means unique, and most readers will be able to identify someone with whom

they share these communicative abilities; nonetheless, it is most likely that person will be a close friend or relative rather than a workplace colleague.

An example of this intimacy occurred during a team interview that took place in a conference room early in the study. After approximately 30 minutes of conversation, Dr. Grey excused herself from the table and went to a refrigerator in the room, took out three bottles of water, and handed one to me, one to Dr. Jacobs, and kept one for her, but did not offer one to JP. The following dialogue ensued.

JP: You see how she treats me? [*Protested loudly, as if wounded*]

Dr. G He doesn't drink water! [*Stated for my benefit*]

JP: He noticed! You did notice though didn't you? [*Feigning an affront*]

Dr. Jacobs: He doesn't drink water! [*Said in a mockingly defensive way… like a brother and sister arguing playfully*]

Dr. G: And he just finished his diet coke so I can't give him another one for a couple of hours. Otherwise his eye twitches. [*Clearly they are quite familiar with each other's habits, likes, dislikes, etc.]*

Dr. Jacobs: He has Monster Drink upstairs, just letting you know. [*Spoken as if she were tattling on him*]

Researcher: How long did it take you guys to get to the point where you're finishing each other's sentences?

Dr. G: Week one.

Dr. Jacobs: Yea, it was pretty quick.

Mr. Parker's hyperbolic and comedic reaction to draw my attention to the feigned insult, as well as the mock defense and banter that followed, was emblematic of many such private interactions observed during the course of this study.

The team almost always seemed to be acutely aware of each other's mental and emotional state and would compensate for each other to maintain a generally positive mood within the group. If one individual were having a particularly bad day, for instance, the others would seem to anticipate potential annoyances and work to mitigate them on behalf of their teammate. In following illustration, Mr. Parker was explaining how he was approaching the end of his last semester in his Education Specialist program when Dr.

Grey declared, "and once we take a break from him being in school—***because that takes a lot out of all of us***—he has to go back to do a doctorate."

> **JP:** Do you see that they [Dr. G and Dr. Jacobs] have a weakness? They can't handle me while I'm in school! It's not that I'm unbearable... I just want you to know that.
>
> **Dr. G:** But we have to put the whole building on notice when you are on your school week.
>
> **JP:** Because of people like you!
>
> **Dr. G:** I'm just saying...
>
> **JP:** You put them on notice. You send e-mails out like 'delete JP from the group.'
>
> **Dr. Jacobs:** It's called group therapy.
>
> **JP:** You delete me from the group.
>
> **Dr. G:** It's group therapy on the week that you... [*She breaks up in laughter*]
>
> **JP:** [*Speaking as if he is reading the e-mail*] "Parker has school tonight! Leave him alone!"
>
> **Dr. G:** This week! Parker has school this week! No, that e-mail notice goes out on Monday. 'Reminder to everyone...'
>
> **JP:** They take me out of the group email. [*Said as though he is hurt*]

This exchange is emblematic of how the team is in-tune with each other's mental state and how they work to compensate for each other when needed. In spite of his feigned offended tone, it was clear by the uproarious laughter that no feelings were actually hurt. Moreover, it is evident that Dr. G has a genuine desire to support JP with his studies.

After spending a considerable amount of time observing this group, it became obvious to me that they share a profound level of familiarity with and a genuine positive regard for each other. Like a group of best friends or close siblings, the members of this leadership team would often provide familiar details about each other ranging from childhood antics to familial relationships, characterize each other's likes and dislikes, and recite each other's habits and reservations. Although Dr. Grey and Dr. Jacobs did spend quite a bit of time together as members of the same doctoral cohort, and that certainly might account for a degree of personal knowledge among the two of them, Mr. Parker seems to have developed nearly the same level of familiarity with his teammates that cannot simply be explained by many years of acquaintance. Regardless, this level of

intimacy seems to bond the group even tighter and permits the development of a shared mental state that benefits the leadership team in many ways.

Strength in Divergence

This team does not always agree, however. As would be expected from any group of individuals, be they colleagues, teammates, best friends, or siblings, there are going to be instances where opinions diverge. Uncommonly however, this team actively employs dissent to their advantage. As stated previously, this team is adroit at demonstrating unanimity of opinion in public and always emerges from closed-door meetings as a united front on major policy decisions. Upon first look, it might appear that these three never disagree; however, upon closer examination, I observed that this team utilizes their combined individual expertise and disparate life-experiences as a force multiplier, offering numerous perspectives when deliberating challenging situations.

It became quite clear during the course of this study that this team was composed of three independently knowledgeable, strong-willed, competent leaders who trusted each other enough to disagree and bring opposing views to bear when deliberating a point while in private; nevertheless, the moment they stepped out in public, they were unanimous in their final decision. While intractable disagreements can sometimes lead to personal turmoil and intolerable working relationships, this team is able to capitalize on their disagreements because of the deep level of respect they have for each other. Perhaps even more like siblings than best friends, when dissention does exist within the team, a profound level of trust and deep respect for one another seems to prevent differing opinions or the occasional bad mood from becoming festering wounds. One particular conversation with the team shed light on this important feature of their relationship.

Dr. Jacobs: We do have disagreements… like we can get on each other's nerves! But it's always with respect. It might be as simple as, 'I don't like you right now, I'm going on my way.' or 'I don't even know what she's saying right now.' I don't know, it's just easy…

JP: Or it's the wrong time!

Dr. G: Or he's too moody [referring to JP on his school days]. And we just give each other space. It's no problem… we don't need to talk about it… we don't need to analyze it. It's just over.

JP: It's not done in anger.

Dr. G and JP in unison: And we move on.

The team is able to disagree without taking personal slight or finding malicious intent in each other. They know when to give each other space and they do not hold on to bad feelings about each other. The following illustration shows how their sibling-like banter prevents their disagreements from becoming personal attacks.

Dr. Jacobs: What I love about our relationship is the trust and respect we have… I will tell Mr. Parker, 'Respectfully, I disagree with you and here's why… here's what I'm thinking' and he will say, 'I don't care, this is what I'm doing!' I'm like, 'All right. I'm just telling you.'

JP: But it is good because I don't hurt her feelings if I say something and she doesn't hurt my feelings if she says something. I think we just roll on and it's okay. We don't have to agree in here [the administration office], but we walk outside and agree in public.

The team is careful to present a united front in public in spite of how divergent their opinions might be behind closed doors. Dr. Grey often asks for and respects Dr. Jacobs' and Mr. Parker's viewpoints, and sometimes they might disagree behind closed doors, but once Dr. Grey makes a final decision, the team closes ranks and shows no dissention.

JP: I don't think anyone outside of this office recognizes that we disagree.

Dr. G: Because they think that we never disagree.

Dr. G and Dr. Jacobs in Unison We disagree a lot OMG! [Uproarious laughter]

JP: I think that if you ask any of the principals what our dynamic is, I don't think they would have a clue that there are times when we are just over each other and just… we just move on.

JP: I use to say that a good board can disagree behind closed doors and then they have to walk out and be on the same team. It's no different for us, because I think sometimes we beat the hell out of each other in here [the administration office].

Dr. G and Dr. Jacobs: [Agree audibly]

JP: You know, Dr. G will say, 'Where do you think we're going to get that kind of money?' And I'll be like, 'Do we have a choice?' Then we'll decide we don't have that kind of money, and we'll walk out and all agree that [expense] is just not a priority right now. And then we'll beat each other up again over the next thing and walk out in unison. That's just how it works with us.

Dr. G: And we move on.

JP: I don't think anybody really sees that many disagreements [between the three of us].

Dr. G: And we don't go back and pick that thing up.

Dr. Jacobs and JP in unison: It's over!

Consistent with the team's assessment, I did not find anyone outside the administrative team's closest orbit who could remember ever witnessing the team disagreeing openly in public. Even the administrative assistants recognize the team's ability to disagree respectfully in private and present a united public face. The following conversation between Savannah Shepard, administrative assistant to Dr. Grey, and Opal Wooster, administrative assistant to Dr. Jacobs illustrates the nature of this team's ability to disagree in private and display a unified public front:

Opal: They treat each other with respect just like they would treat anyone else. I mean Dr. G, JP, and Dr. Jacobs can disagree [with each other] and they feel confident… ultimately knowing that she [Dr. Grey] is the boss, they are never disrespectful in any way.

Savannah: They have that open dialogue. Like when Dr. Jacobs says [to Dr. G], 'that's your opinion, but I feel this way… and they talk it out and then they go on. They [Dr. Jacobs and JP] are not yes-men by any means. If they don't agree they don't hesitate to say what they think.

Opal: That's what I've always said, if people are my friends, they're not going to tell me what I want to hear, they're going to tell me the truth.

Savannah: And they do disagree a lot!

The administration of a large public school district such as New Hope USD can be a demanding endeavor even by an experienced team in relatively stable times, but by most accounts, this team's first year was complicated by more than a normal number of difficult challenges. Nevertheless, due in large part to the exceptional strengths of this leadership team, they conquered that steepest mountain—the first year of an administration—and can now focus on the road ahead.

CHAPTER 5 – THE TEAM INTERACTS WITH AND RELATES TO OTHERS

Recognizing early on that leading a large urban district like New Hope USD would involve far more responsibilities than one person could undertake in a normal work schedule while supporting a family, Dr. Grey decided that she would focus her attention on certain aspects and trust Dr. Jacobs and Mr. Parker with the responsibility for others. Working as a team they are able to more effectively manage the major district-level stakeholders, specifically the community, the Board of Education, building administrators and staff, and parents and students.

Although there are countless ways she could have divided these responsibilities among the team, Dr. Grey envisioned herself taking the lead with matters concerning the community, the board of education, and parents and students, while Dr. Jacobs would be directly responsible for essentially everything involving secondary education and Mr. Parker would handle all things related to elementary education. Regarding issues involving district-wide departments such as Human Resources and transportation, the team divides responsibilities logically on a case-by-case basis. To be clear, Dr. Grey remains informed and involved in all aspects of the district; however, she trusts and relies on her team to operate as an extension of herself by maintaining a close and open line of communication and sharing her vision and goals openly with her team.

Community Relations

With a strong background in finance and her leadership experience as Deputy Superintendent and Chief Financial Officer, Dr. Grey appreciates the business aspects of district governance; therefore, she is well suited to focus her attention on matters related to the community at large and the board of education. Serving nearly two decades in the

central office of a large, diverse, and economically challenged Chicago suburb, Dr. Grey understands that a school district is inescapably a political entity, yet she feels quite at home working within the power relations of New Hope USD.

There is a strong family politic in New Hope where influence is often determined by matters of who is related to whom. According to Dr. Grey, "Everyone is related in New Hope… Here [The political landscape] is so different from Chicago; here it's just about navigating. To me, it is not so much about avoiding political landmines; it's just navigating the waters." For Dr. Grey, successfully negotiating the political relationships in New Hope and within the district was made easier during her inaugural year thanks to her close connection with Mr. Parker. As JP explains, "I'm serious; I am always in their ears saying 'this person is related to so and so… this person is the…'" a sentence finished by Dr. Jacobs, "Brother-in-law of so and so." This teamwork has allowed Dr. Grey and Dr. Jacobs to gradually build mental hierarchies of the political and familial relationships while avoiding many potentially turbulent first-year negotiations throughout the district.

In New Hope City, as with many communities, the public school district is a major pillar of the society, which at some level affects nearly every resident. There are few aspects of public life that is not touched by decisions made within the school district; therefore, the important relationships built between the district and the wider community stakeholders are an integral part of district leadership. From the moment Dr. Grey arrived in New Hope, she began the important work of preserving existing relationships and building new community/district partnerships.

This facet of district leadership is sometimes as simple as serving in one capacity or another on various community boards and cultural committees, thereby becoming a

liaison for the school system, and bringing a fresh perspective to important social structures. Dr. Grey, however, does not simply pay homage to the community expectations placed upon the leader of the local public school district; rather, she has become an integral and active member of these important community leadership bodies. Jason Logan, retired educator and current school board member, notes:

> There's kind of an expectation that the superintendent will serve on certain committees and be a part of those committees. But, serving and being involved… being on a committee and being involved in the committee are two different things. Dr. Grey is involved. I'm not on the Symphony Board myself, so I'm not sure what her engagement is there, but I do know that I hear what people say, and what people say is that she is willing to express herself, that she demonstrates that she wants to serve, that she is committed, that she is truly involved.

Dr. Grey is an integral member of several community boards such as the New Hope Symphony orchestra, and she regularly works with the Big Brothers and Big Sisters agencies. She is an active member of the community Court Appointed Student Advocacy board and speaks at several community events throughout the year. Dr. Grey also sits on the board of directors of the New Hope Development Project (NHDP), a considerable countywide organization that works to enhance all aspects of community living and quality of life for the county's residents and businesses. The New Hope Development Project plays a vital role in the welfare of all county residents by providing strategic leadership on essential commercial development matters, leading economic and workforce development, and advocating for and pursuing opportunities to strengthen the local communities. Through this important interface, Dr. Grey is able to network with civic leaders throughout New Hope and the surrounding county generating valuable community partnerships. Dr. Grey has already begun to find creative ways to partner with NHDP, as High School Principal Carolyn Isaacs affirms:

> We just started a partnership this year with New Hope Development Project. When we interview possible candidates for teacher positions, NHDP people are giving those individuals tours of New Hope. We want to be welcoming. That level of welcoming service doesn't just happen with our parents, but also with any new employee that we are considering.

Dr. Grey seems to be very active in community events outside of her official district duties. Fellow NHDP board member and community leader Natalie Mathews notes:

> I've hardly been to a community event where I haven't seen Dr. Grey, Dr. Jacobs, or Mr. Parker, but especially Alice. She has really put herself out there, she is right there supporting [the community] with her time and money and her presence. I think that's really a good thing for the community too.

Sometimes, it seems, Dr. Grey is pulled in too many directions at once. Managing a busy schedule of district obligations, community expectations, and being a full-time single parent can be challenging, but Dr. Grey seems to know how to position her priorities and politely declines social invitations when necessary. Community leader and board member Pastor Chris Farrows explained:

> She is trying to get around to as many places as she can. She knows that is a part of her being accepted into this community. So I'm on the board for another charitable organization and we tried to recruit her as our keynote speaker but she turned us down because it was on her son's birthday. She said, 'I've been trying to pay my dues. I'm sorry but I can't come to [your event] that night, I have to be with my son.' But, I see her just going, and going, and going.

In addition to the many public events and community boards in which Dr. Grey is involved, she also creatively seeks out collaborative partnerships with local organizations to the benefit of both.

Facing what seems to be an ever-increasing teacher shortage that extends throughout the region, Dr. Grey and her team find themselves constantly shifting

personnel and students to cover the current educational obligations. While observing the leadership team during a pre school-year staffing meeting with Human Resources personnel and various other departmental leaders, I was privileged to witness the team's deft ability to utilize creative, out-of-the-box thought processes to identify appropriately certified teachers who were willing to take the helm of the most demanding classrooms. Working from an enormous whiteboard covered in a kaleidoscope of colored names and certifications, the team was able to bend reality just enough to meet their current obligation to provide caring certified professionals in every classroom; nonetheless, the team recognized that the first flu outbreak might unravel their tenuous web of instructive capability. Appreciating the fact that the district had several dedicated teachers' aides who held bachelor's degrees but lacked the requisite teaching certificate to become full-time classroom teachers, Dr. Grey reached out to the College of Education at a nearby university and arranged to inaugurate a satellite teacher certification program as one mid-range response to the growing teacher shortage. Board member Reverend Chris Farrows describes the creativity of the program, saying:

> We have a lot of TA's with four-year college degrees, but they don't have the teaching certificate. Dr. Grey reached out to the university and arranged it so that we could put the TA's in the schools… in the classrooms, and have them working towards their teaching certificate while they are helping with instruction. That was really innovative thinking.

In addition to the prospect of assuaging the paucity of certified teachers, Dr. Grey understood that, because many of the present teacher aides were African American, her satellite certification program would also encourage the development of diversity within a teaching staff that was currently, and perhaps more importantly intractably, 95 percent Caucasian. As Reverend Farrows explained, "It's been one of my passions to try and

[increase] the diversity within the school district teaching staff… and we've talked about recruiting, we've talked about incentives, but this program is really going to help us with that."

Dr. Grey and her team seem to thrive on the energy that flows from their creative process, and their energy is seldom higher than when they are endeavoring to solve a particularly confounding problem. One of the most vexing challenges that awaited Dr. Grey and her team upon taking the reigns of New Hope USD was the number of students they discovered who had been retained too many times and were now in jeopardy of not being able to complete their high school experience and graduate before they turned 21 years-of-age, the maximum age allowed by the state before a student is no longer allowed to receive a publically funded education.

Dr. Grey recalls her dismay, "We had a number of 17, 18, 19-year-old eighth graders and ninth graders and state law says at 21 we have to put them out, but I just couldn't do that." Steadfastly unwilling to give up on these 'babies' and just set them adrift, Dr. Grey and her team resolved to find a solution. Thanks in part to her work on the board of the New Hope Development Project, Dr. Grey was privy to employment statistics and information throughout the surrounding county, and once again thinking outside the box, Dr. Grey and her team imagined bringing two disparate needs together to forge a new alliance called the Phoenix Program.

I will be describing this program in greater detail in the next chapter; nevertheless, according to Dr. Grey, the basic concept involves matching the needs of several companies in and around New Hope who were looking for qualified employees with the needs of these wayward youth who just wanted an opportunity to shine. Dr. Grey and her

team came up with the idea to pull these kids out of traditional school and train them to do these jobs. By partnering with the local community college, the Phoenix Program provides these youth with the requisite vocational training to fulfill meaningful jobs as they work towards obtaining their GED. As a result, they are now on the path to successful careers. High School Principal Carolyn Isaacs sums the Phoenix Program up nicely saying, "It is a GED program but then there is also a career track to local logistics and manufacturing industries as well, so instead of simply dropping out, these youngsters can move right into a high paying job."

As the 'big picture' arm of the team's triad, Dr. Grey could easily imagine merging these two seemingly incongruent concepts; but, as Dr. Jacobs recalls, the funding for such a program was initially lost among the details. "The entire Phoenix Program... we had no funding for it, but we put our heads together and came up with a solution." Through her strong ties with the local community college and countywide scholarship granting entities, Dr. Grey was able to devise and forge a mutually beneficial partnership that offered these forgotten youth the opportunity to become active participants in their own future.

Dr. Alice Grey and her team are particularly insightful and understand how important it is for the public school district to establish and nurture meaningful relationships with community partners. In nearly all public school districts today, educational resources are seldom sufficient and invariably contested, and New Hope USD is not the exception. Nonetheless, with her accomplished proficiency in educational finance and the capacity and courage to imagine what could be, Dr. Grey has found innovative ways to subsidize several creative and socially just projects designed to level

the playing field for disadvantaged youth throughout the district. Several of these projects will be described in more detailed in the next chapter.

Needless to say, building strong and mutually beneficial partnerships with local businesses and community organizations has been a hallmark of this administration, and Dr. Grey seems particularly adroit in this area. Local entrepreneur and magnanimous sponsor of New Hope USD, Natalie Mathews recollects Dr. Grey's eagerness to express her heart-felt appreciation in the following story:

> From time to time, we have some of our national-level corporate people come to town for meetings, and when they do, I always like to take them and show them our community. So this past year, we took them to several noteworthy places around town, and to the high school. When I asked Dr. G if she would be willing to host our group she said, 'I don't want to let you down, but I don't have the history with you that Mr. Vega had. I don't have all the stories, I don't have the background of all the things you guys have done together over the years to share with these corporate people.' So I gave her a packet of all the things we've done in the past to bring her up to speed. She didn't just jot down a few notes; she studied it. By the end of it, she knew it better than I did.

Alice's willingness to go the extra mile demonstrates the importance she placed on the relationship she was forging with this benefactor, but Dr. G wasn't nearly finished. "The coolest thing was," Mrs. Mathews continued, "the whole team, including the building principal, met us at the entrance to the high school and greeted our corporate guests."

Furthermore, Dr. Grey understood how important it was to involve the students in this testament of genuine appreciation for the treasured support from which they benefit. Dr. Grey had personally selected eight students to escort the guests on a tour of the high school, during which the students pointed out the scoreboards that the Mathews had purchased for the sports teams, the many programs their generosity had helped to fund,

and the numerous awards won by the show choir and other groups that were supported, in part, by the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Mathews and their organization.

Although this red-carpet treatment of her guests was completely unexpected, Dr. Grey and her team had one more surprise in store. Mrs. Mathews seemed genuinely touched as she remembered her reaction upon the completion of the school tour.

> So this was right before Christmas and when we finished our tour, Dr. Grey had us stop just outside of the auditorium doors. In this wonderfully dramatic way, she opened the doors and the orchestra began playing beautiful Christmas music. I'm tearing up just thinking of that moment. I had no idea what she was going to do. It just blew me away.

Dr. Grey concluded the event by gathering the group into the library where each of the eight students stood in front of the honored guests and spoke about how the corporate philanthropy had personally affected his or her life and school experience. "It was just one of those goose bump kind of events," Natalie remembered, "it was really, really cool."

On the other hand, when important community partnerships fail to live up to their beneficial expectation, Dr. Grey is quite willing to draw a hard yet fair line. In one instance, Dr. Grey determined that the lead partner in a lucrative School Improvement Grant was not meeting the terms of their obligations according to the contract.

> We have a school improvement grant at the high school to the tune of 6 million dollars and with that, you must have a lead partner. Now remember, I have a business mindset; I examine contracts. Let's just say for 355 thousand dollars, I have a certain level of expectation. I read the contract and I enforce the contract... all of it. I found out they weren't holding up their end of the bargain, and then they wanted additional money. That hasn't gone well for them. So we've been back to the state a few times, and now I want a new lead partner. You know I fully documented everything and if the state says [the lead partner] is supposed to be on site every day for 180 days but they are off at

another district for 2 days and then 2 days at a conference... I'm not
happy.

Dr. Grey's leadership experience and business sensibilities also serve her well as she

interacts with other important leaders within the district.

Dealing with the Board of Education

Never having been in the position directly responsible to the board of education,

Dr. Grey experienced a predictable learning curve related to her interactions with her

employers. Nonetheless, she was fortunate to have a supportive board of committed

leaders who were willing to afford her the opportunity to master her new responsibilities

and to evaluate the best approach to delivering the leadership that the district required.

Dr. Grey believes that much of the support she receives from her board can be attributed

to the fact that many members are former educators. Elucidating this point, she says:

> This community is very involved in the district. The school district is
> the center of the community. Everyone is invested in this school
> district in one way or the other, so everyone is paying attention;
> therefore, there is a different level of accountability from the board
> members and there is a different level of experience. My board
> president was the former teacher's union president. Another board
> member was the former Director of Special Education. Another was a
> counselor at the high school, another was the district attorney, and
> one taught at the college level. So they are more knowledgeable about
> education and they have insider knowledge having been
> administrators and teachers. That has played a beneficial roll. I feel
> supported, very supported.

It is reasonable to imagine that Dr. Grey's transition from second-in-command to

the individual directly accountable to the governing body of a school district, not to

mention her supervisory unit, would foreseeably be fraught with trepidation in any

instance; not the least of which, when most of your board members are seasoned and

experienced educators. Striking the right tone and meter as she interacted with her new

superiors was apparently, for Dr. Grey, somewhat of a process of trial and error. Evidently, early on she approached her board somewhat gingerly as she attempted to determine the most amenable tack for future productive interactions. One board member recalls Dr. Grey's first foray into the realm of superintendent/board interactions this way:

> At first, the one area where we certainly needed to work with Dr. Grey was when we would ask for her recommendation [about something related to district leadership] we wanted to hear her recommendation. 'Tell us what you want to do and then we'll make a decision.' Sometimes she was too busy feeling us all out rather than just being a superintendent. But you know, that is just the confidence piece and that's getting to know the board and getting to know the players, you know we are all a little anxious [in a new position with new bosses]. It was the first year, you know, so she kind of wanted to know what we thought before she would give us her opinion. But the board always wants to know what her professional opinion is.

Like most experienced professionals, however, Dr. Grey soon began to gain confidence in her understanding of the personalities making up her board. Speaking to me near the end of Dr. Grey's first school year, Dorothy Boynton, secretary to the Board of Education described how that initially tentative relationship had evolved:

> I've noticed in the last few months, she's kind of getting into the rhythm of the board. Because at first the board was kind of overbearing and I think she finally saw that. So she's starting to push back and, maybe disagree or show a little more leadership with them. I think that is a learned thing, very predictable. She's been an assistant but she had never been directly accountable to the board as the main person. She's learning though and I've noticed the last few months it is getting a lot easier because she's back-talking a little more and getting things her way instead of changing to suit their whim. That makes them sound irresponsible, and they are not. They are just trying to nurture her.

Indeed, Dr. Grey's relationship with her board is anything but contentious. The board members seemed to have a great deal of respect for Dr. Grey and her team. In every interaction to which I was a witness, I had no reason to believe that there were any

feelings other than positive regard on both sides. In fact, on several occasions I had the opportunity to observe Dr. Grey as she interacted with board president Mr. Vega. In addition to their respectful professional relationship, they seem to have a genuine connection that might best be described as a familial bond between a wise older uncle and his favorite strong-willed niece.

On one occasion near the start of this study as I waited outside Dr. Grey's conference room for her to conclude an early morning meeting with her staff, Mr. Vega sheepishly entered the superintendent's office carrying two bags of Godiva chocolates. Dr. Grey's assistant and the board secretary both began to snicker, as I overheard them say, "Ha, I guess she won again!" A similar scenario played out several more times throughout the course of this study, with Mr. Vega sometimes carrying a box of Champagne Truffles and sometimes holding a bag of dark chocolate covered cherries. Fellow board member Pastor Farrows explained the mysterious behavior in the following exchange:

> My opinion, Dr. Grey is a person who is very thorough, so when she comes to you, she's not coming uninformed. She's going to give you every opportunity to have input, suggestions, and so forth; but she's not just going to roll over because she doesn't know the subject you're talking about. She's going to do the work to make sure she's well informed of what's being presented. If she doesn't know it she'll say, 'I'll get back to you', and then she does. She doesn't just say I know everything. So, let me tell you an inside joke with her and the president of the school board. He is always challenging her over one thing or another. The bet is her favorite treat and he keeps losing bags of chocolate candy. She says 'I'm telling you Mr. Vega; I know what I'm talking about. Ok, here's the wager, a bag of chocolates.' So she's got four or five bags at least. I don't know, maybe more.

It seems clear, after observing numerous interactions between board members and the leadership team that a spirited healthy respect has developed among the group. The

board does seem to support Dr. Grey and her team and the vision they have outlined for the district. Referring to the team's vision and approach to district leadership, Pastor Farrows notes,

> I don't think that there is much of a difference between [the team's] philosophy and the board's. There's always some healthy debate, but most of our votes are seven, seven, seven [out of seven], we'll get six once in a while. Unity, pretty much we are all on the same page.

Perhaps some of the support that Dr. Grey enjoys from her board can be attributed to her sense of fairness and her strong business acumen. In light of the unremitting threat of budget cuts and resource constraints, the passion with which Dr. Grey and her team approach social justice issues within the district might be met with significant pushback were it not for the team's innovative out-of-the-box style of thinking. Instead of pointing to a problem and proposing the commitment of escalating portions of dwindling resources as an answer, Dr. Grey modestly channels inspired creativity to offer both a solution and the means with which to fund it. Speaking about the many inventive social justice programs the team has promoted during their first year, one board member explained:

> Again, this budget crisis is not helping us one bit. The fear that we are going to lose even more resources and the state is going to shift more of the burden over to local districts is a great concern to us. So, we're not at liberty to say 'yeah that sounds like a great program. How much is it going to cost? Oh, sorry we don't get to do that.' We are blessed to have [Dr. Grey] and her financial expertise. She has done a great job helping us find money for those valuable projects even with all the financial troubles that we presently have. When she has asked us for things, she's found ways to pay for them so they don't add more to our debt.

Parental Interactions

In addition to her focus on cultivating inter-organizational relationships and forming strong district/community partnerships, Dr. Grey and her team are committed to building dynamic and constructive relationships with parents as a means of connecting more profoundly with their students. As Mr. Parker explains, "We have really [made an attempt] to get parents more involved district-wide and really try to bring some of the community resources to the parents as well." Dr. Grey has made her pledge to strengthen personal relations with parents and families widely known throughout the district. As one principal noted,

> I think that they have been very clear on that matter; parent involvement is definitely a priority... Dr. Grey in particular, when she came on board, made it clear that [one of her primary goals] was to go back to the strong family component... that we are providing the best service to families, that we are welcoming, and I believe that we are. That starts at the front door. They have stressed that quite a bit.

Principal Herman at the Horace Mann Alternative School also posited, "I think parent involvement is a primary goal [of this leadership team], and meeting our kids' needs. They are very committed to that; to helping the kids and their parents." Dr. Grey and her team recognize that parent involvement encompasses far more than bake sales and PTA meetings; they understand that parents also need to feel welcome and appreciated, as well as being an integral part of the learning process, and the only way to accomplish that goal is to cultivate genuine and caring relationships. Ms. Herman explained:

> I think the way Dr. Grey and Dr. Jacobs approach [parents] is more from a relationship mindset. They really want to get to know students and their families, and they really want to affect the academics by improving those relationships. That's my philosophy too, because I don't believe you can just think about it from an academic standpoint.

Our kids deal with so much more; you have to make that family connection and build those relationships because when those kids know you care, they'll do whatever you need them to do. I believe that is how they approach things and I think that makes a huge difference. They're not afraid to think outside of that box.

To be sure, relationships are a main pillar of this team's approach to district leadership. Dr. Grey and her team endeavor to cultivate authentic caring relationships with parents and students alike by consistently offering all concerned parties the opportunity to be heard and understood. "I do know that Dr. Grey has a very open door [policy]," explained School Resource Officer Daniels.

> Dr. Jacobs has a very open door policy too, and so does Mr. Parker. Kids will come to speak with them and parents come in to speak with them. They get different things done that way. They are invested in these kids and the parents, and it's nice. I will see [the team] outside of school at all sorts of events. I feel like they're definitely more involved with the community [than previous administrations] period. And I think that's making a difference, building the relationships and developing the trust; not everyone is going to be happy, but I think they're certainly on the right path to keeping everyone safe.

Unlike some administrations that are not as accessible, Dr. Grey and her team work very hard to be available and responsive to parents' concerns. Dr. Grey's administrative assistant Savannah Shepard explains:

> The team does respond to parents, and they expect their principals to be responsive as well. There is no acceptable excuse from an administrator who fails to respond to a parent's concerns. If [the parents] have called and called and they didn't get any answers, that is addressed directly back to the principal. The team will insist 'this matter needs to be taken care of by such and such deadline.' Most of the time the parent is encouraged to call us [the administrative secretaries] back and let us know if the situation was resolved. There isn't any shoving issues under the rug by this team.

Nonetheless, Dr. Grey upholds a principled sensibility and has become known for her polite, yet firm posture when interacting with parents who may not necessarily agree

with her. Long-time friend and assistant Cheyanne Rayne describes Dr. Grey's diplomatic approach saying, "She can speak with a parent who might be angry and manage to calm them, but in a way where she has not backed down by letting them know we are all in this together." Natalie Mathews confirms this important characteristic of leadership saying, "She is no pushover; she speaks her mind. I've seen her at board meetings; I've seen her interact with kids and parents alike. She will do what's right and she's not swayed." Her team is equally committed to a high standard of ethical receptivity, as school board secretary Dorothy Boynton affirms:

> If there's an issue they are going to deal with it. They don't always agree with the parent, but they certainly investigate every situation. They acknowledge the parents and [the parents] are not ignored. Every principal understands that the parents are not to be ignored.

In addition to her astute business acumen, Dr. Grey is also well known for her interpersonal skills and ability to quickly develop open and honest relationships with people. Along with her somewhat 'larger-than-life' personality, Dr. Grey seems to be able to draw new acquaintances in close and disarm them with ease. People seem to quickly become comfortable in her presence and are willing to open up and share personal stories with her. Many district staff recognize this particular quality about Dr. Grey, but fall short of being able to provide a characterization when asked directly about it. Dr. Grey and Cheyanne Rayne have been close for more than a decade. Having been hired as a payroll clerk by Alice during her tenure as assistant superintendent in Chicago and brought onboard at New Hope USD as business manager, Cheyanne looks up to Dr. Grey as a mentor and personal friend. When asked to describe Dr. Grey's ability to quickly read and consider people, Cheyanne explained,

I don't know how she does it, I don't even know what it's called, but I see it… it's like she does the 'Jedi Mind Trick' thing. She reads people really well and I don't know if that has to do with her spirituality or what, but it is very interesting to me.

Even her teammates find it difficult to explain Dr. Grey's ability to connect with perfect strangers in such a welcoming manner. At one point during a leadership team interview, Mr. Parker asked that the recording device be turned off. After which a short conversation ensued in which the team attempted to circumscribe what amounts to Dr. Grey's somewhat uncanny ability to quickly and accurately appraise a new acquaintance's personal backstory. During this unrecorded conversation, Dr. Jacobs and Mr. Parker struggled to define Dr. Grey's peculiar ability or skill; nonetheless, they both confirmed its presence. The following conversation occurred after I was given permission to turn the recorder on again.

Dr. Jacobs: And I know that… [Referring to Dr. Grey] she is… Intuitive.

JP: That IS your strength, but I HATE IT about you [*said mockingly as though he was uncomfortable with her skill/talent*]

Dr. Jacobs: That is a freakish gift…talent you have! But you can read I mean anybody off the street!

JP: No. It's a sin.

Dr. Jacobs: It is not a sin.

JP: That is not a gift.

Dr. Jacobs: It's a gift.

Dr. G: He hates when I do it though.

JP: I don't like it.

Dr. Jacobs: Oh my Lord! It's like she can look through… I mean she will have their story… their entire life experience summed up in one meeting and it is extraordinary I've never seen anybody…

JP: I think it's a curse.

[*Dr. G. and Dr. Jacobs begin laughing hysterically]*

Dr. G: He doesn't like when I do it.

JP: I don't!

Dr. Jacobs: I think it's a gift.

JP: And I will say that if people thought about it… If people thought about it they would all recognize that about you. I mean Donna Picard and I have talked about it before and we were like 'Dang!' I knew

> when you first got here just how perceptive or intuitive… it's more intuition. That you are about people, what a good read on people you are, and so, I think it's hard to be able to describe that characteristic of yours, I don't know but I think… people see it and I do think it's a curse and I'm not changing my mind.

Dr. Jacobs: It's [her] ability to connect and to listen to a response.

Researcher: I think you must've seen something in JP at one point too.

Dr. G: I told him something he didn't like… because he asked me something about it. He asked me to explain something about him [*referring to a private conversation between Dr. G and JP*] and he didn't like the explanation, so he has been mad about it [*her ability*] ever since. But I was right.

JP: Yea… I don't know.

Dr. G: See?

This debate over its merits not withstanding, people seem to feel comfortable enough in Dr. Grey's presence to quickly shed their defenses and form genuine relationships with her. Moreover, Dr. Grey is committed to being accessible as much as possible to both parents and students. Opal Wooster, secretary to Dr. Jacobs explains:

> From the beginning, Dr. G always let everyone in the district know 'I'm here if you want to talk. If you have anything to say I'm here.' You know, maybe they won't [get to] talk to her directly, but someone will get ahold of her and let her know what is going on. That was never the case [with previous administrations], so I think people took her up on it and they started voicing their concerns.

Dr. Grey recognizes that approachability and openness are qualities that help her to build trusting relationships with parents, and therefore tries to be available to parents as much as possible.

> They [the district] wanted someone who would be there; they wanted someone who was accessible. And because I am out and about in the community [parents] see me everywhere, they love that. And the things they will tell me… it's just amazing… everything from their personal history to professional aspirations, and they will tell me these things standing in line at the grocery store, in the post office, wherever. It takes about 15 minutes and they will go through their whole history.

Dr. Grey demonstrates her commitment to this philosophy even outside of her normal work schedule and outside the boundaries of the district. Friend and fellow community leader Natalie Mathews recalled an incident when Dr. Grey was quickly able to form a bond with a prospective district resident.

> So, I was at the mall one day getting my nails done on a Saturday and I was talking to the owner of the salon. He was telling me about his sister who had just moved to New Hope. He said that she was thinking about moving to [a nearby community] because she was concerned for her daughter who was going to be in middle school. She was worried about bullying, was troubled by some negative things that she heard about the New Hope community.

> Then Alice walks in. She's [wearing] her sweats and a t-shirt and she flipped when she saw me… but when I told her what was going on she didn't care [what she was wearing]... And so I introduced the two of them and, long story short, not only did Alice turn this mom into a fan of New Hope USD, but later met with her personally at the middle school. She met with the daughter and introduced her to her son, who was also going to the same middle school, and just turned the whole thing around. Alice just turned the negative perception about New Hope and the district into making this child and this mom feel so important that they wouldn't think of going to any other school, they wouldn't think of moving to [another city] because of the experience she had with Dr. Grey and with her son and with the whole care and concern she demonstrated.

I personally observed this phenomenon one evening while having dinner at a restaurant with Dr. G and Dr. Jacobs during an observation visit to the district. While waiting to be seated, a parent approached Dr. G and asked if she could have a few moments. Alice didn't even hesitate, and spent several minutes in conversation with the parent. When asked later about the pressing issue that made this parent approach her while at dinner with friends, Dr. Grey responded:

> Her son is in the Phoenix program. She just wanted to thank me and say hi… They [parents of kids in the Phoenix Program] feel comfortable [approaching me] because I sat down and had dinner with all of them. You know… I pulled everyone [parents and students

in the Phoenix Program] in for dinner. We had a family dinner. We had conversations… I did the 'Alice thing' [referring to her ability to read people] that I do and I got in their faces and I told them. 'You better not embarrass me [while in the program]… You know… just that thing [about me] that the kids relate to. So the parent actually wanted me to go back and threaten her child a little more because [he was starting to slack off]… really! Yea, you know. The kids they are like 'Oh Dr. G is crazy!' They think I'm a little crazy, but they love that about me.

Dr. Grey is frequently willing to sacrifice her personal space and time to build relationships with parents because she understands how vital families are to a child's academic success. Moreover, Dr. G appreciates the importance of building relationships with 'her babies', and perhaps nothing is more evident than the passion with which Dr. Grey and her leadership team address the needs of their students.

Relationships with Students

Dr. G, as many of 'her babies' affectionately call her, is devoted to the welfare of all children in her district. While many superintendents of large urban districts might easily get caught up in the bureaucratic activities of running the organization, Dr. Grey finds time to stay connected to her students as much as possible. In fact, she might even say that the operational duties of the district are, to her, secondary to building relationships. Asked how she manages to find time to build relationships with students among all of the other responsibilities associated with the operation of a large school district, Dr. Grey replied:

> You have to get out of the office and stay in touch with the children. And whenever I can, I find the ones I need to see and get back to them. Of course I have meetings in the schools, and because I have those meetings I'm in the hallway… I'm talking to the kids… we have conversations… you know me. I'm going to get in there and we are going to have conversations… I'm sitting in the cafeteria with them… because I need to hear from them… I'm going to Horace Mann, which is my alternative school… and I'm going to have conversations with those kids. I'm not going to pass a kid in the hallway; I'm going to sit

right down and I'm going to have those conversations. That enables me to stay focused, to keep doing the important work. The other stuff… the actual running of the district, the management… that stuff… those are the things I have to do in order to be able to do the things I want to do, which is working with the babies.

Dr. Grey has cultivated numerous relationships with students in the short time she has been at the helm of New Hope USD. She has even endeavored to build relationships with groups of students who seem to treasure their relationships with Dr. Grey. For instance, she has invited groups of kids to her house for cookouts. "I adopted the entire football team right away," Dr. Grey reported. "They are supposed to come to my house and have hotdogs. They ask me, 'When are we coming to the house? Can we go fishing in your lake?' That is why they all know they can come to me."

While Dr. Grey might wish to cultivate relationships with all of 'her babies', there is not enough time in the world for her to form a personal bond with each and every student in the district. Often, the students who need her support the most are those who have, as she says, "come onto my radar." These are the 'babies' who, perhaps, just need to know that someone cares and is looking out for them. When Dr. Grey takes note of a student, she monitors them carefully, which, according to Dr. Grey, may not always be the most welcome attention. She explains, "When you are on my radar, you are probably more scared of me, yeah you probably hate to see me coming." Dr. Grey takes these relationships very seriously, and doesn't let the boundaries of the district define her interactions with these students.

During one site visit, the leadership team and I were heading out to lunch in Dr. Grey's suburban, which was driven by Mr. Parker because, as Dr. Jacobs says, "that's just the way we roll." As we pulled up to a stop light, Dr. Grey noticed one of 'her

babies' walking down the sidewalk with his pants sagging, so she rolled down her window, and shouted "Denauti, pull your pants up!" The young man complied immediately and shot Dr. G a wide-toothed grin and a wave. Denauti, I later learned, had been struggling in the high school setting and was in danger of dropping out of school when Dr. Grey took the time to have a conversation with this young man. She discovered that the normal high school environment provided far too many distractions for this otherwise bright student, and arranged for him to be homeschooled. Dr. Grey's administrative assistant Savannah Shepard clarified:

> Little Denauti earned more credits than anyone while he was homeschooled. Bringing him in one-on-one, Dr. G just realized that high school wasn't the right setting for him. It's like she takes the time to figure each one out. They [the leadership team] won't just put kids here or there. They figure out what's going to work best for each kid. Do you see what I mean? She is going to save all of our kids. It may be one at a time, but she is going to do it.

Asked how she planned to keep up with the personal lives of more than 6000 students in the district, Dr. Grey replied, "I say the ones that come across my path, those are my divine appointments… those are the ones I am supposed to know… the ones that open up and give me the information, that's where I'll go with it." Nonetheless, Dr. Grey and her leadership team make every effort to connect with as many students as possible, especially those who may just need to know that someone cares enough to reach out and connect. For instance, before any student who has been expelled from New Hope High School may return to class, they must meet with the leadership team. As Dr. Jacobs explains:

> We meet with every high school student returning from an expulsion to understand his or her side of the story. Dr. G and I have met with all of them, and I cannot get over some of the students' stories that we

glean. Alice is very good at it; she has a talent that is… man… students just open their hearts to her. It is a gift. It's a true gift.

Dr. Grey and the leadership team are equally committed to ensuring the success of every student who finds him or herself in need of special assistance. As Dr. Grey's assistant Ms. Shepard offered, "there's a spot for everybody and they are going to find a place for every kid." The team's personal commitment to include each and every student in the district is well known according to Dr. Jacobs' assistant Opal Wooster:

> I appreciate their commitment to include every student, because you know what, you could do all these big picture whatever things, but if ultimately you're not concerned about this one kid that comes in and doesn't fit in, and you say… 'Oh we don't have an answer for that child so we just won't [deal with him or her].' That's not how this team handles it now. I mean there aren't any 'No' answers. That's not an option [for this team].

Where students are concerned, this team will go above and beyond to ensure that every student has the opportunity to participate fully in the educational experience as Ms. Wooster's story exemplifies:

> I mean they find a way to include students wherever they can. There was this girl who came in [to our office] and she wanted so badly to graduate… and long story short, she'd been through all the channels and everyone had told her there was no way she could graduate because she came in so late. Whatever… So, Dr. Jacobs talked to her and dealt with the situation until finally the girl was allowed to take her finals. Dr. Jacobs told her, 'if you take the finals and you pass them, you can graduate.' You know, and the girl was smart; I mean, just so eager. Without Dr. Jacobs' stepping in, she wouldn't have gotten that opportunity; she would not have gotten the opportunity to show what she could do. And I've seen so many cases like that with this team that it just makes my job worthwhile.

When this team identifies a student who might benefit from one of the innovative programs that they have created, such as the Phoenix Program or the GED program, Dr.

G and Dr. Jacobs take the time to ensure a proper fit. High school principal Isaacs clarifies:

> We have put a lot of things into place to better support our students, and Dr. G and Dr. Jacobs even personally interview each student to make sure they are a right fit for these programs. They took the time to do that and I think that has made a dramatic difference.

The team continues this level of commitment even after a student is accepted into one of these programs. Dr. Grey has high expectations for her divine appointments and insists that her students respect and appreciate the chance she has offered them. As Cheyanne Rayne explains:

> If a kid in one of her programs steps out of line, or if the people at the community college calls her, she will be like, 'I'm on my way!' and she will get up and immediately go over there and straighten you out. Oh she will straighten you out all right, and if you don't get straightened out she will kick you out of her program.

Dr. Grey is also well known for her no-nonsense approach to student discipline. She is understanding to a point, but does not back away from conflict. As Natalie Mathews points out,

> She doesn't shove things under the rug, and I appreciate that about her. If there is a problem with a student, she deals with it, but her first answer is not to just kick the student out... get rid of the problem. Instead, her first response is 'what can we do to help this child? What can we do to fix this? How can we prevent this from happening in the future? That is the thing that I really respect about her.

Apparently, it is not at all unusual for Dr. Grey to take a special interest in one student or another. In interview after interview, I heard heartwarming stories of the personal relationships Dr. Grey and her team have cultivated in the short time they have been leading the district. For instance, Natalie Mathews recalls the time she received a

call from Dr. Grey about a student who was about to be expelled for his erratic and

dangerous behavior:

> I was actually at a [corporate] convention in Florida when Dr. Grey called me and said, 'I need your help.' She had a student that was going to get kicked out of high school; he was misbehaving and he had just missed so many days, and she was trying to save him. But beyond that, in talking to the student, she uncovered the cause of his behavior problems. He wasn't taking his psychotropic medication because he wasn't eating and taking [his medication] on an empty stomach made him feel funny; therefore, he didn't take his medicine. So she needed to feed him and she asked me if I would provide him with some free meals at our restaurant. I said absolutely that's an easy thing for us to do. So, it was something as simple as that. The child was on the verge of being kicked out of school. And just by her getting involved and just doing something about it, she totally changed that child's life. Just the magnitude of that I think is just really cool.

Dr. Grey takes every one of her divine appointments very personally and cares

deeply for each. In spite of her noble efforts, however, occasionally Dr. Grey comes

across a student whom she is unable to save. In one heart-wrenching instance, a student

had become involved in some major gang-affiliated activity and, in addition to his own

imminent danger, was becoming a risk to the safety of innocent people near him who

might become caught in the crossfire. Try as she might, Dr. Grey was unable to extricate

this student from the difficult and dangerous situation in which he had found himself.

Cheyanne Rayne recalls:

> She does feel very deeply for these kids. One time, she was so upset; there was a baby she just couldn't help. He said to her, 'So you're telling me you can't help me?' She was so heart broken. I could see it was really personal to her that she just couldn't save him… She had tried to get him a job, but because of his gang affiliations it was too dangerous for the other employees, you know because of drive by shootings and such. I don't even think she had met him more than once; they couldn't have had that much interaction with each other. But after that she was so down in the dumps because she couldn't help him. He was the one individual soul that got away.

When it comes to the safety and welfare of any of 'her babies' Dr. Grey will not assent to compromise from her staff either. Early in the first term of her tenure, Dr. Grey discovered that one seven-year-old child was walking through a dangerous neighborhood to get to school. She wasted no time contacting the transportation department to tell them in no uncertain terms what she expected.

> So we had one woman living way back up in the woods. It was really back up in a trailer park, and yea, it felt a little unsafe getting up in there… But you know me, I'm going to get out there and knock on the doors… because there were no addresses, we didn't know which home she lived in… so I'm knocking on the doors asking, 'Is this the house where so and so lives?' We are out there trying to find the baby. But no, I told the bus garage, 'you're going to figure out a way to get this bus up here because she's not walking past these abandoned houses. Figure it out. Yeah, just figure it out, because you will pick her up.' And they did.

Furthermore, Dr. Grey is decisive and wastes no time correcting systemic problems in her district. Shortly after the start of school during her first year, Dr. Grey discovered that school nurses were turning some children away on the first days of school because of a policy that allowed students to be excluded from classes until they submitted a physical exam form, so she put an end to the policy straightaway. Dr. G contacted the nursing staff and clarified her expectations:

> So, I told them 'the one's that you turned away, call them back and get them down here [to the school]. I made the principals get on the phone with the parents, apologize and call them back in. And I told the principal of the one mother that had taken three buses to get here in the first place, 'you're going to send a cab for her.'

Dr. Grey and her team insist that all students be treated equitably, and this is especially true for the poorest kids in the district. When asked how the teachers in the district relate to those economically disadvantaged students, Dr. Grey responded, "I think they are out of touch and need to rethink some things." With nearly eight in 10 students

qualifying for the free and reduced lunch program, it is important for the educational staff to understand the underlying issues associated with poverty as it relates to their students. Nonetheless, Dr. Grey and her team continue to uncover evidence that this awareness is not ubiquitous throughout the district. Dr. Grey provided the following example of a faulty thought process she discovered.

> We have a backpack program where we send backpacks home full of food on Fridays to get the kids through the weekend. But I found out that on that same day, [our PE department was charging students a dollar in PE if they didn't want to participate… you know, if they didn't want to dress for class they could pay a dollar. They were calling it 'jean day' or 'dollar day' or whatever. And so… when I found out I said, 'It's done! Stop!' So the PE department, oh my God they were livid, 'How could you?' And I said, 'So let me get this straight, on the same day that we are sending food home so the kids have something to eat over the weekend, you charge them a dollar to not dress for PE and the ones who can't afford it you give a zero for not dressing for PE. Do you see anything wrong with that? Are you freaking kidding me?'

When Dr. Grey and her team realized that their principals had not even considered the contradictory logic in this policy, the team understood that they would need to begin to deconstruct these faulty thought processes and reconstruct them in more equitable and socially just ways. This is a matter of paramount importance to the team, and is an ongoing process. "We are constantly taking those thought processes apart and rebuilding them so that everyone can participate fairly," Dr. Grey stated.

Clearly, Alice Grey's dedication to children runs deep. She has devoted most of her adult life to the service of youngsters and to doing everything in her power to ensure that every child, regardless of distinguishing characteristic, is afforded the opportunity to participate fully and fairly in the pursuit of the good life. Dr. Grey's passion for social justice is readily apparent to anyone who gets to know her. When asked to speculate

about the origin of that commitment, her administrative assistant Savannah Shepard offered:

> I think it is a combination of her background and her education. I mean it's like her family… the way she was raised. I think she sees how [some] people get treated differently, and she was one of those kids. I think she is just now in the position where she can do something about it and she doesn't want any of those kids to ever feel like they're any less than anyone else.

Dr. Grey consistently elevates the welfare of 'her babies' above all other concerns. One story recounted by Dr. Grey exemplifies this level of commitment. On her way to an urgent meeting, Dr. G encountered a forlorn girl wandering the hallways of the high school and, from the message printed on that child's tee shirt, perceived a soundless, yet thunderous plea for help:

> There she was, this baby… and her shirt said, 'Beat me! Hit me! Kick me! Fuck me!' And you know I couldn't let that go… I was supposed to be in an important conference, but I missed that meeting all together because I needed to have a session with her. Two hours later we had gone through all these levels of [her] abuse. She had gone all the way back to her being a baby… being raped as a baby… and thrown at a wall. So… that's why she felt worthless… And I said to my staff, 'doesn't anybody see this baby screaming? How does she walk through these halls all day and nobody stopped to help her? How did you not see this?

In fact, during a conversation with board secretary Dorothy Boynton, I came to appreciate the profound depth of Dr. Alice Grey's devotion to her own two sons. "Did you know that she was in a beauty pageant?" Ms. Boynton asked.

> I don't know when it was or how old she was, but she had to write an essay for the pageant and her essay was on foster kids. Through that process, she discovered that foster children who have aged out of the system make up a large percentage of the homeless population. And, she said that was the moment she decided that as soon as she was able, she was going to adopt a foster child so that she could save at least one child. So, in time, she adopted her boys.

Thus, it comes as no surprise to me that Alice's devotion to her own boys and to her family is of paramount importance; therefore, with all due respect, but unlike her predecessor, she decided she would not 'be married to the district'. When asked about Dr. Grey's commitments outside of the district, Beau Jeffries, president of the New Hope Public School Pecuniary Association, a non-profit group dedicated to funding extra-curricular programs throughout the district, observed:

> Dr. Grey is a single mom doing a really tough job, but her kids are also a high priority in her life. So, she's got to make time for those kids, and she does. I am proud of the fact that she is willing to say no when necessary. Having a career is fine, but your family is more important. I think she really focuses on family, so I really don't know how much more involved she can be in other things. After the district and her family there's not a whole lot of time left. There are days where she's here till 10:00 at night, and she has to get her kids to bed and get them ready for school the next day, so that has to be tough.

Considering her numerous responsibilities to the community, the board of education, and parents and students, Dr. Grey's daily agenda is undeniably filled; nonetheless, thanks to the total and competent support of her team, she also dexterously coordinates the activity at all of the district's buildings.

Interacting with Principals

One of the most important aspects of district leadership, of course, is providing day-to-day direction and guidance to the various building administrators. Dr. Grey entrusted this very important responsibility to her team, explaining:

> Between giving what time I can to the students, managing my board, managing the politics, serving on the many different [community] boards... I can't [meet regularly with the building administrators]. I meet with them quarterly, or when I want to call a meeting, or if we have an issue, and I try to sit in on their principal meetings.

Although Dr. Grey is allegedly not as involved in the day-to-day responsibilities of managing building administration, Mr. Parker is quick to point out that "she pretends sometimes that she doesn't [work with the principals] but if there is any need, she will bring them in and meet with them, whether good, bad, or indifferent. She is more involved than she likes to admit." Dr. Jacobs also adds some clarification saying:

> I would say it is different; we do more of the day-to-day hands-on things with the principals than Alice does, but the mission and vision and messages of where we are going... the 'this is how you need to be on board' stuff... that is Alice.

Dr. Grey takes an entirely different approach to leadership than her predecessor, who was widely recognized as a hands-on administrator. In contrast, Dr. Grey and her team endeavor to develop people, inspire autonomy, and share responsibility by cultivating relationships based on trust and respect. Adapting to such a distinct paradigm shift, however, can be difficult for some individuals as evidenced by the reaction of certain district personnel the first time Dr. Grey met with the entire New Hope educational staff. Dr. Jacobs recounts the reaction of some teachers and administrators:

> You could just see the surprise on their faces the first time [Dr. G] addressed the entire staff on an Institute Day. Now keep in mind we had all of the educators in the auditorium, which is not a very intimate setting. They were all spread out, many sitting way in the back. So what did she do? 'You... up in the balcony... way back there... I need to see your face. You need to come down here. I need to have a conversation with you.' Oh those teachers didn't like it, but they came down. She went to the back of the auditorium and herded them forward and said, 'I need to wrap my arms around my new family. You need to come closer.'

Apparently, New Hope educators were not accustomed to administrators being so open and approachable. According to Dr. Jacobs, the New Hope staff took some time to adjust to the new style of leadership.

I think that people's verbal and nonverbal cues were indicating that they were uncomfortable. When they were working with us, they were hesitant to talk at first. I think perhaps there was a punitive element in the past system, where you just did as you were told or you got punished. On the other hand, Dr. Grey welcomes dialogue. 'Come on let's talk. Let's be real. Let's talk about this and go through this.'

Possibly, Mr. Parker might have had more difficulty adjusting to this aspect of his new team's approach because of his years of service with the previous administration. Dr. Jacobs advanced her theory saying:

It is funny... Jerry is a product of that system; he tends to revert back more so than I do because, to me, that's just how I roll. He said to me, 'I have to learn from you a little more.' It's hard for him because sometimes he just wants to tell people what to do. I said, 'No, you have let them come to it. It's different. We help each other now.

Dr. Grey and her team are aware of the challenges associated with such a dramatic paradigm shift in leadership styles and recognize that it will take time for everyone to become accustom to this dissimilar approach. "[The principals] want us to problem solve for their buildings a lot of the times because they are used to that" Dr. Jacobs explained. "They are very used to being micro-managed," added Dr. Grey. "And now they have only me to micro-manage them," Mr. Parker said, only half jokingly. Nonetheless, Dr. Grey and her team have instituted a new approach to district leadership that honors trust, autonomy, shared responsibility, and professionalism, and this begins at the top with Dr. Grey and the faith she places in her team.

Shared Responsibilities.

From an operational standpoint, Dr. Grey is able to maintain a greater degree of consistency and depth of involvement with her building administrators by allowing Dr. Jacobs and Mr. Parker to focus all of their time and mental energy on the specific but very different tasks of overseeing secondary and elementary education respectively.

When asked if this particular division of responsibility was deliberate or more organic,

Dr. Grey offered the following explanation:

> Probably… it just happened that way. Because JP had been the Director of Special Education and has been here forever, he has a relationship with many of the kids and their parents. Of course, Dr. Jacobs has the curriculum knowledge and experience and just knows everything secondary. But I communicated my expectations up front [to all of the building administrators]. I had three months with them [prior to taking over as superintendent], so we were able to have those "What's your vision? What's your plan? Who are you?" conversations… I was able to have meetings with them and understand who they were.

Dr. Jacobs explains exactly what this management style looks like in practice,

saying:

> I'm in charge of everything secondary and Jerry is in charge of all things elementary. We run everything. That's where this position is so different. For instance, I was never in charge of instances when discipline went awry and someone had to call in the School Resource Officer. Now I'm in charge of that. Any incident at the middle, alternative, or high school where there is law enforcement involved, I am responsible. Transportation… I've ridden buses already, because if there's a problem with buses or something's going on, I am responsible. Anything [related to] facilities in my buildings, I am responsible. It's just different. The air conditioners weren't on at Hilltop Middle and you would have thought that the world was coming to an end. Parent phone calls, I get a lot of parents calling me. I work more closely with parents than I do with the [teaching] staff. So this position is different in that way as well.

Dr. Jacobs' responsibilities are mirrored for Mr. Parker and the eight elementary

buildings. Because neither is constrained to a particular aspect of leadership, Dr. Jacobs

and Mr. Parker have a much broader operational understanding of the district. In many

respects, Dr. Grey treats her assistants as co-superintendents who need to know every

aspect of district leadership and can step in and govern at a moment's notice, should Dr.

Grey be unavailable for any reason. Furthermore, whenever Dr. Grey wants to

collaborate on particularly vexing problems or challenging decisions, she has two knowledgeable and experienced colleagues at the ready precisely because they are involved in all aspects of district leadership.

I had the opportunity to observe several cabinet level and other meetings over the course of several months during this study, and found this team to operate synchronously as a leadership unit. In many instances, either Dr. Jacobs or Mr. Parker might be seen to lead a meeting while Dr. Grey would officiate in the sense of offering decisive information, proposing a solution when opinions among the attendees would diverge, or making final decisions. It was not, however, unusual for Dr. Grey to preside over a meeting as well. The team would even frequently divide responsibilities and simultaneously cover more than one meeting, thereby increasing their capacity to conduct the business of the district. On these occasions, Dr. Grey and her team would collaborate and decide who would best lead which meeting.

Personnel Strategy

Since the beginning of her tenure, Dr. Grey and her team have carefully considered personnel decisions with the goal of ensuring that each and every student is afforded the best possible opportunity to achieve academic and social success. In part due to the closure of one elementary building mid-year during the first full school year due to severe flooding—which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter—this team had the occasion to implement several carefully scrutinized administrative personnel moves. In fact, with considerable deliberation, Dr. Grey and her team repositioned half of the incumbent principals into different buildings in just the first full year of her tenure. The team did not make these moves whimsically, rather with forethought and strategy to

accomplish the greatest good for the district. Near the end of my time in the district and after having interviewed more than half of the administrative staff including all of those who had been reassigned, I believed that a pattern was beginning to emerge. It seemed to me that this team had deliberately moved particular building administrators into certain positions with a particular stratagem in mind. The following exchange among the leadership team illuminates the deliberate nature of these personnel moves.

> **JP:** That's exactly what we said; those are the words we used. Put the right people in the right places.
>
> **Dr. G:** Putting the right people on the right bus and in the right seats and the wrong people off the bus.
>
> **JP:** You don't have to like it... Wasn't necessarily a promotion, wasn't demotion...
>
> **Dr. Jacobs:** It was about matching the needs of the district to the strengths of the leaders.
>
> **Dr. G:** That's what we said. It's about putting the right people on the right the right bus, in the right seats, and the wrong people off the bus.
>
> **JP:** And we did say that although it's about getting the right people, it's not a promotion to have a bigger building, it's not a demotion to have a smaller building; it's about getting the right people in the right buildings.
>
> **Dr. Jacobs:** It's about matching up your strengths... to the district and building needs.
>
> **JP:** Absolutely.
>
> **Dr. G:** People's strengths with the building needs.
>
> **JP:** And we did it.

Nonetheless, it is hardly a surprise that reorganization on this scale could be accomplished without some trepidation from the principals involved.

As will be discussed in more detail in the next section, the team was faced with the unwelcome, yet inescapable closure of one of their elementary schools due to severe flooding during the winter break of the team's first year in office. Paradoxically, this unfortunate event provided the team with an opportunity to restructure the district and eliminate a long-standing division between the two 6th through 8th grade middle schools

that had contributed to the perception at least of an inequitable distribution of opportunities among middle school youth within the district.

Bridging the divide. New Hope city is divided, economically speaking, between the North and South ends of town. For decades, the residents in the North end of town have predominantly been white-collar professionals—doctors, lawyers, business owners, and so forth, whereas the majority of inhabitants on the South end of town tend to be, as one principal stated, "blue-collar and no-collar workers". As a result of this economic disparity, there has been at least the widespread perception that middle school students who were fortunate enough live in the catchment area for Hilltop Middle School on the North end of town were afforded enhanced opportunities, better teachers, and perhaps even a superior education than the children who attended Valley View Middle School on the South end of town.

In spite of previous efforts to provide equitable educational opportunities at both schools, many of the families who lived in the North-end of the city could afford to have one parent stay at home to raise the children; whereas, South-end students were more likely to come from lower income families. As a result, Hilltop could expect more parent participation at school functions, parent-teacher conferences, and extracurricular programs. In addition, the higher income residents of the North end of town could support enriched fund-raising drives, and better-subsidized extramural programs to name a few of the conceivable inequities.

Therefore, faced with the already daunting task of having to find space for all of the children displaced by the flood, the team decided to address the inequities head on and restructure the entire district by eliminating the dual middle schools and creating an

upper elementary fifth and sixth building at Valley View and a single seventh and eighth

grade middle school at the Hilltop building.

The right people on the right bus. After decades of division between the two

middle schools and the rivalry and resentment that had developed, the team faced

considerable community resistance to the idea of bringing the opposite sides of town

together. Consequently, the most critical building administrative positions that the team

would need to fill would be in these two new controversial grade centers, and they would

need just the right people in those seats. The team knew just who they wanted in these

important positions; on the other hand, the chosen individuals were not so sure they were

ready for such a move or even why they had been selected for the position.

The team believed that Ms. Jacque Macallan was just the right person to lead the

newly created Valley View Upper Elementary School under the guidance of Mr. Parker.

After more than a decade teaching elementary children and eight years serving as the

principal of a New Hope elementary school, Ms. Macallan wasn't sure she was ready to

take on a school filled with young adolescents. When asked how she became the

principal of the newly created Valley View Upper Elementary School, Ms. Macallan

replied bluntly, "I was asked. How's that. We'll use that. I was asked." After calling one

elementary building home for nearly a decade, the idea of leading a whole new building

of fifth and sixth graders blended together from diverse economic backgrounds wasn't

exactly appealing at first. Principal Macallan describes her initial reaction to the request

as "extremely stressful."

> Brandon Park Elementary was my home. At Brandon Park we had
> done a restructuring and we were, I'll be honest with you, we were
> where I thought we needed to be socially and emotionally and I was
> super happy. So yeah, this [move] is a huge stretch for me. I have one

year of sixth grade [teaching] experience and I'm not going to kid you, it was not my favorite grade level, it wasn't. There are a lot of hormones... a lot of drama. So yes, [the move] was very nerve wracking.

When asked if she knew why the leadership team had asked her to take the reigns at this new upper elementary school, Jacque wasn't certain. She recalled mentioning that it might be exciting to lead such a school when the notion of an upper elementary grade center had been floated as a future possibility by this leadership team early during their first year, and attributed her selection to what might have been that passing comment.

Now at that time, I was thinking maybe five to six years down the road [I might be ready]; I'm not thinking it was going to happen in three months. So, I'm sure that I was a natural choice for them, 'Let's take Macallan, because she had at one time said that [position] would be exciting.' Had they opened the position and posted it, would I have applied? I don't know. I'm not going to kid you. I don't know.

Similarly, long-time resident of New Hope Ms. Berlin Homer was also finally feeling at home in her position as principal at Jacob Davis Elementary School. The largest elementary building in the district housing roughly 800 kindergarten through fifth grade students and home to the district's 150-student preschool program, Jacob Davis Elementary was, for Ms. Homer, her second posting as principal. Becoming one of only a handful of African American administrators in New Hope USD's history, Ms. Homer had successfully lead G. Miller Elementary School on the North end of town for five years before she was tapped to take over the reigns at Jacob Davis in the South end of town. Known at the time as one of the worst elementary schools in the district, Jacob Davis Elementary had the lowest test scores, poorest attendance, and worst discipline record; nonetheless, Principal Homer lead a successful turnaround in just under three years,

bringing test scores to within a fraction of the highest school in the district and dramatically improving both attendance and discipline.

Furthermore, Ms. Homer had been instrumental in helping to orchestrate the initial emergency shuffling of kids from the flooded building. By suggesting that the team move the preschool program to another building, Ms. Homer was able to accommodate all of the students from the flooded building in one wing of Jacob Davis Elementary. Nevertheless when Dr. Grey knocked on her office door with a proposal, Berlin was quite taken aback. She recalls the encounter this way:

> So Dr. Grey shows up at my building, and as I've already told you I seldom see her in my building. Now when she shows up here I was like, 'oh my God what does she want? She doesn't come to my building, she must want something.' And she said to me, 'Okay Homer, I've got a proposal for you. I need you to go to Hilltop.'

It is safe to say that principal Homer was not initially enthusiastic about the prospect of leaving the building she had worked so hard to turn around for what might be an even bigger challenge. "I just got here!" Berlin remembered thinking. She recalled the following conversation with Dr. Grey:

> I just got this building to a point where we are making big strides. I was working to be a blue ribbon school... and now you're telling me you're moving me. She said to me, 'No, I'm asking.' I said, 'Well let me ask you this, how are you asking? If I say no will you move me anyway?' And she said to me... 'I hope you will think of this as a career move.'

Being a woman of faith, principal Homer asked Dr. Grey for a week to reflect and pray about her decision, and in time, her answer came.

> God spoke to me and said, 'I send you where I need you. Just because you are comfortable doesn't mean that you are needed here. You planted the seeds and now they know what to do, so now I need you to do something else; I need you [at Hilltop]. So I got my answer and I

called Dr. Grey and said 'God spoke; I listened. I don't want to [take over Hilltop], but I'm going to go with a lot of apprehensions.

I asked Ms. Homer if she understood why Dr. Grey requested she take this particular assignment. Principal Homer's response was illuminating:

> I'm still figuring that out. Everybody's telling me they knew I'd be great, but I'm telling you that confidence was not there for me even though I knew God put me here. I was not so convinced; I'm going to be honest with you, not so convinced.

Dr. Grey and her team understand the apprehension some of their newly reassigned principals feel. They also recognize that the inauguration of a new leadership paradigm is sometimes a slow and deliberate process. When I asked Dr. Grey if her principals realized why they were chosen for particular posts, she replied, "No, because they don't see the potential in themselves. I often have to help them see what I see in them, and that doesn't happen overnight. It is going to take time, coaching, and reinforcement." Just as she does with her team, Dr. Grey has a great deal of confidence in her staff and their ability to grow and develop as professionals.

Developing People

Introducing autonomy and professional responsibility to a group who has, for years, been allowed to rely on detailed instructions and centralized control understandably may produce a certain level of apprehension and uncertainty. Recognizing this propensity, Dr. Grey and her team try to provide their staff with support, but nevertheless encourage independence. Some of the newly reassigned building administrators initially experienced difficulty adjusting to their new autonomy as Dr. G explained:

> Right now some of them are still 'deer in the headlights', they are like, 'Oh my God! This is so overwhelming! I can't do this!' I just tell them,

'Yes you can!' And they believe that they can. It's what Cheyanne calls my Jedi Mind Trick.

Developing leaders who demonstrate the confidence to make decisions independently based on a common vision and shared goals is a priority for this leadership team. Instilling in others the confidence to take that first step towards self-development is a quality that Dr. Grey seems to have mastered. Board secretary Dorothy Boynton explains, "I think Dr. Grey makes people better employees. She makes people grow beyond [where they currently are], and she does it in a way you don't even know it's happening." When Dr. G believes in someone, she simply speaks his or her future into reality. Cheyanne Rayne, who has known Dr. G for more than a decade and perhaps knows this quality about Dr. Grey better than anyone in New Hope, calls it her "Jedi mind trick". Referring to Star Wars master Obi-Wan Kenobi's ability to influence the mind of others, Cheyanne explains Dr. G's benevolent gift this way:

> She will just say, 'This is what you're going to do… you are going to get out there and you are going to do A, B, and C, and you are going to make this happen. Then, before you have time to say, 'I'm going to do what? Wait… I don't… I've never…' She's like… 'Yes, you're good! You've got it! I have faith in you. You can do this! And then she's saying, 'Now get out there and do it!' and she will push you right out of the nest. The next thing you know, you have succeeded.

Dr. Grey sees great potential in the people in whom she entrusts her confidence. She encourages those around her to advance themselves to the best of their abilities, and this is equally evident in the regard with which she holds 'her babies' and her employees. In many respects, Ms. Rayne attributes much of her current success to Dr. Grey's support and encouragement over the years.

> I wouldn't have a master's degree if she hadn't pushed me. So sometimes I feel like that's her role, kind of like a big sister, you know… she was really pushy and would say, 'I told you to do this, this

and this and you haven't done it yet?' And I would say, 'I don't know why I have to do that.' Finally she said, 'One day when I'm gone nobody's going to be able to take that master's degree from you, and I'm trying to make sure that when we are no longer working together you will still be successful.' So I went back to school and finished. In the end it was really good.

Balancing Autonomy with Support

Just as Dr. G embraces a strong sense of faith in her team, Dr. Jacobs and Mr. Parker have also endeavored to instill trust and autonomy as main pillars of their approach to leadership. This leadership team exhibits confidence in the people they have chosen to lead the individual buildings and attempts to convey that faith by allowing administrators the independence to lead their buildings as they see fit. While the leadership team endeavors to cultivate a sense of self-confidence and competence within the individuals to whom they entrust the operation of the school buildings, Mr. Parker understands that some of his principals are still adjusting to the new leadership approach, explaining:

> We have assistant principals who are good! They just need to step up and let people know that they are good. And then we have principals who have been restrained to a certain degree in the past. Now we are putting them out there as leaders and they still want to hide behind Dr. Jacobs and me or Dr. Grey for the final decision… I mean it's ok to ask for our opinions, but not necessarily for decisions. Decisions [at the building level] can't come from us. We want principals to make decisions for their buildings.

This effort to cultivate independence has not always been met with the appreciation one might expect, as Mr. Parker explains: "Some people found comfort in having somebody else who is going to make the decision for you. There is something that is unsettling, or uncomfortable about making a decision on one's own for some people." Some building administrators may find that their newfound autonomy seems more like a

lack of support from the central office. When asked if she felt supported, one building

administrator admitted,

> I guess they want us to solve problems on our own. It seems like they
> are saying, 'If you really need me, call... but just try to take care of it
> yourself. Sometimes it can be frustrating, but it's okay. I think this
> year has been an exceptional year with the reorganization and
> everything, they have been extremely busy, so I have tried not to
> bother them.

Another elementary principal stated, "Usually, I just talk with Mr. Parker and he tells me,

'you know what you're doing!'" Asked how that made her feel, this principal replied:

> Well, at first it was flattering; but now it's like, 'No, seriously, I need
> your help!' I mean if it were [something] horrible, of course he would
> come and help. Usually he says, 'Okay you've vented, are you fine
> now?' And I'll say, 'Yea, I'm fine... whatever... I'll go with it and just do
> my thing.' And that's truly the way I operate with him. I mean he
> knows that I'll figure out a way to fix it. Does it get aggravating? At
> times, yes.

In all fairness, this same principal's overall appraisal of her relationship with Mr.

Parker was very favorable. Like the previous principal, she also attributes some of her

perceived lack of support to the tremendous amount of time and energy the team has had

to commit to the district reorganization process. Ms. Brewer, principal of the district's

only magnet school, seems to echo these thoughts:

> Mr. Parker has never led me the wrong way. If I ask for his advice, he
> has always given me the right answer, and I trust him. I just think he
> has been a little bit preoccupied this year with the reorganization, so I
> try to handle a lot of things on my own. But, I know that if I had an
> emergency, he would be there.

A few administrators with whom I spoke seemed to indicate that because Dr.

Grey visited their buildings less frequently than the previous superintendent, support

from the central office had diminished; yet, those same administrators would lavish

praise on their direct supervisor, either Dr. Jacobs or Mr. Parker, for the tremendous

amount of support he or she provided. One principal noticed that during the first year of the new administrative team's tenure, she felt as though she was not as 'connected' to the central office as in previous years.

> As far as the previous administration goes, I could pick up the phone at any time and [Mr. Davis] was answering and I was getting [my answer] from the horse's mouth. Even though he had assistants, I could still call him. I didn't feel that way the first year with [Dr. Grey]. I didn't feel like I could call her and ask her a question. When I did call she was busy, so instead of her calling me back, Jerry would call me with the answer. So she had evidently talked to Jerry, but she never called me. So to me that meant, 'I heard what you said and it's important to me, but I'm letting him take care of it.' So that personal connection was not there.

Though at the same time, this principal greatly appreciated the trust and autonomy she felt when she was given back responsibilities that had been taken away by the previous administration.

> For example, during the previous administration if [we] needed [to hire] teachers and it was summertime, all that hiring was done without [our] input. We would get teachers, and I'm like 'Oh man, who hired this teacher? Where did she come from? Oh my God!'. So that was one thing that we as principals were asking for, 'Can we have some say over who is [hired] in our building? And Dr. Grey did give us that autonomy back.

Again and again, principals would report feeling as though they possessed the trust and confidence of their direct supervisor. In spite of the trepidation she felt moving to the new middle school, principal Homer reported feeling a deep sense of satisfaction and support from Dr. Jacobs.

> Dr. Jacobs and I, oh my God, our conversations are rich. And her guidance is so spot-on… She allows me to [make decisions]… she will say, 'You take it and go Homer, you take it and go. If it's an idea and you think you can do it, take it and go.' I like that because I do the same thing for [my teachers] so there is quite a little bit of freedom and autonomy in that.

When asked if she felt supported by the administrative team, one elementary building

principal responded:

> Oh yes definitely. I work with Mr. Parker. He is always available, like if
> I have questions, or if I just need to pull some ideas from him, or if I
> come across a situation where I don't know what to do. So having him
> to bounce ideas off of is wonderful.

Principal Sterling, also an elementary building administrator, observed:

> Mr. Parker is my go to… just always making sure that if I have a
> question about discipline or just really a question about [anything],
> he's the one I go to. He is more of the legal side of things too. And,
> during our principle meetings last year he would have a different idea
> or strategy for us to try, or an article to read and reflect on, to see if
> we could incorporate it here into our building.

> New Hope high school principal Carolyn Isaacs greatly appreciates the respect

and autonomy she receives from the new leadership team. In her first year under the new

administration, she has been able to dramatically reduce the number of meetings and

commitments that would require her presence away from the school, and she believes this

helps her to be a more effective leader.

> I think the current leadership team is very supportive. I think they are
> respectful of our time. As far as meetings, there's not as many as I've
> had in the past, at this district. The last few years I was out of the
> building a lot. But, this year I'm very seldom out of the building and
> that is very helpful. Sometimes it may be that we have meetings after
> school hours, when students aren't here. It may be at 4:00 to 6:00.
> That way it's not taking us out of here.

Ms. Isaacs feels that her direct report, Dr. Jacobs, is available, honest, and trusts her

judgment.

> Well, I honestly have never felt more supported. I don't feel like they
> have any hidden agendas. If we are going to have a meeting I feel like I
> know what it's going to be about. Dr. Jacobs is quick to respond if I
> have a question, and I reciprocate that as well. We always let each
> other know what's going on. We are in close contact and I feel like I'm
> part of the problem-solving process. When there is something going

on here that she doesn't understand, she doesn't try to impose or belittle me. Instead, she will say, 'Can you help me understand this?' I've never felt more supported and that's why I love what I do so very much. I have that support and somebody who actively listens.

Perhaps the following insight from senior building administrator and principal of Horace Mann Alternative School, Ms. Herman, might help to illuminate the mixed feelings some of the newer principals were reporting.

> I think you've probably heard this from a lot of people. I think that we had all become comfortable with being kind of micromanaged. That is what we've been accustomed to for over a decade... like a long, long time. And that was just the philosophy of the former superintendent. He was very hands-on, very involved with the schools. He pretty much had his hand in everything and his leadership style was pretty much that of a micro-manager. He probably wouldn't describe himself that way, and we all had a pretty good relationship with him. I have tremendous amount of respect for him, but that was his leadership style, and that's what we were accustomed to.
>
> Now with Dr. Grey and her team we have the freedom, the autonomy to do what we want to do in our building without having to always run everything by her. So in the beginning you kind of got a sense of this is not right. Was it difficult to get used to that change and style at first? Yes, yes it was. It was like 'what the heck is going on?' But I had to keep telling myself, 'you have to realize that this is a whole new philosophy than what you've been used to for the last umpteen years. It's just a change and after 19 years of pretty much the same leadership, it's definitely a shift, it's definitely a change.

Although this team's leadership style may take a far less hands-on approach when it comes to day-to-day operations, New Hope principals do seem to appreciate the freedom they now feel to innovate and envision new ways to lead their buildings. Ms. Herman offered the following example:

> I love some of the things that we've done [since Dr. Grey arrived]. I've been fighting for eight years to have a GED program, and finally I have a GED program. Dr. Grey supported me immediately; she agreed with me and we wrote the proposal pretty much right away. Then, just like that, we were up and running. It has been the most gratifying thing, because these are kids who are former students [who didn't

graduate], or, in one case we had a young man that turned 21 before he could finish in high school so he came right into our GED program and he was our first graduate.

In spite of, or perhaps due to the leadership team's ability to connect almost empathically with each other, the one weakness most often reported by building administrators was a lack of communication.

Communication

It seems as though much of the perceived lack of communication felt by some building administrators may be directly related to the diametrically opposed leadership styles between the previous administrator and the current leadership team. Whereas the previous administrator seemed to have maintained almost constant contact with his building principals and to have been involved with nearly every decision made in every building throughout the district, the current leadership team tries not to interfere in ordinary school house issues, chiefly communicating their concerns regarding matters involving district-wide policy, direction, and goals. While this leadership team may wish to cultivate autonomy in their staff, some building administrators interpret this diminished level of contact from central office vis-à-vis the previous administration as a lack of support. As Mr. Parker observed:

> When they ask us what they should do specifically regarding building matters, we tell them, 'you make that decision. I will support you. That is your call. I don't know the kid, I don't know the parent, or the teacher; I don't even know the context of the situation. Thanks for sharing with me… now make a decision. I will have your back.' That is a totally different conversation than they are used to having.

In spite of the team's good intentions, it seems as though some principals have not completely adjusted to the decreased level of direct communication from the

superintendent. One principal suggested that she would not be sure she understood Dr.

Grey's vision until she heard it come directly from her.

> Being her first year last year, I didn't get to see a lot of Dr. Grey; I
> didn't talk to her a lot. There were less of those conversations. I didn't
> have those conversations with her. So my superintendent was Jerry,
> who I already had a relationship with because he was a principal at
> the same time I was. And so, [he and I] had those open
> communications. I felt like it was kind of difficult to know [Dr. Grey's]
> true vision, because I never heard it come from her. It came from Mr.
> Parker, but I never heard it from her.

Another principal perceived a lack of responsiveness in the way the team

communicates. "Sometimes when we call or e-mail, I don't hear back. I mean if it's an

emergency I do, but to even know that somebody received [the e-mail] would be nice."

Once again, Principal Herman may have summed it up best saying, "the one thing they

could do better, and I have told them this already so I have no problem sharing it with

you, I would like to see better communication from them to us." Being the senior-most

principal in the district, Ms. Herman understands how important it is for the district

leadership, including central office and building administrators, to be on the same page.

> We [administrators] used to meet a lot, but this year not so much.
> That was different and took some getting used to. I personally would
> like for us to meet more, because I think as administrators we need
> that time to network too. I don't think we need to meet as often as we
> used to, but more than we do now. We [secondary administrators]
> met twice this year with Dr. Grey and then once a month with Dr.
> Jacobs. But, the only thing I don't like about that is I never see the
> elementary administrators. I think if we could do quarterly meetings
> all together that would be beneficial because there's still a lot of
> collaboration that we could do. Just seeing them sometimes, it's just a
> reminder that everything is ok… that we are all in this together. I think
> that would be something I would suggest that we do differently.

One elementary principal agreed that the leadership team could stand to communicate with principals more, but wanted to point out some of the ways in which she felt more informed now than in the past.

> I think it depends on the situation. Sometimes I think [their communications are] last minute and are done through e-mail when they should be more face to face. So I think that's one thing they could get stronger at. But then there are also times when they communicate better [than the last administration]. For instance, they always have an agenda for their meetings so we know what to expect. We always start out the school year with an administrative kick off, and they make very clear the goals that we're working on throughout the district. And as we go through our principals' meeting and our agenda, everything leads back to those goals. So, the communication of the district mission and the goals of the district are very clear.

One principal described how the team generally communicated their goals to the rest of the district staff, noting how impressed she was with their willingness to listen.

> I think they definitely communicate [their goals] more to the principals, and then the principals share them with the staff. [The team has] done a really good job. I know probably about November or December Dr. G and Dr. Jacobs did take their time to just be available for any concerns where they just listened to staff at all of the schools. Out of all the superintendents that I've ever worked for, I have never seen that from a central office leadership team; that's never happened. They took the time to come to each building and just be there to listen to concerns.

> Interestingly, other than principals, most staff with whom I spoke offered the opposite assessment of this team's ability and efforts to communicate. School Resource Officer Daniels opined:

> I will say I do like the level of communication that we have with the leadership team right now. We didn't have that before; Mr. Davis was not as communicative with us as this team is, so I don't know what he did behind the scenes, but I like that she includes [the SROs] into certain decisions. It's very important that they understand us and our limitations and we understand their limitations. It is really good that we've gotten to the point where we are having some really good

communications and involvement. That's probably the thing [that I like best about this team]; it just boils down to that.

Unlike previous administrations, Dr. Grey and her team have tried to involve the School Resource Officers as much as possible in their effort to build relationships with the students as a means of keeping incidents from escalating. Officer Daniels explained:

> I'm [in the administration building] at some point every day and will run into Dr. G and we'll talk mainly about the kids that she's had involvement, or I should say investment in. We'll talk about the kids that are on her radar to see if there's any change we need to make with them and what not. So that part's really nice. The communication and the trust that we have now, that's the best part of it honestly.

According to Officer Daniels, Dr. Jacobs and Mr. Parker are also more willing and available to discuss mutual issues and concerns.

> I would say I probably talk with Dr. Jacobs and Mr. Parker at least once a week about different topics; we talk about the peer tribunal, getting that started, getting their input. We talk about students that may be possible problems, and how we can come up with solutions. We try to stay on top of things as much as possible so they don't get out of hand.

Curriculum Director Bobby Jean Riche also works closely with the leadership team and concurs with Officer Daniels.

> I could just feel the level of communication improving as Dr. G started coming in a little early [before her tenure began] and… just the conversations I could have with her, and her demeanor and how she handled things, it was wonderful. Also, after Mr. Parker interviewed Dr. Jacobs he came in and told me, 'you are just going to love her!' and that was after only a short phone interview. Now, I trust his opinion a lot because he is really a hard sell, and that was not like him to say something like that. Well, the minute I met Dr. Jacobs, I finally felt like I had somebody that I could geek out with about curriculum. You know, someone who knew more than me, but was on the same page and could really teach me something.

> To be sure, this team's first year in office was anything but tranquil. By all accounts, this new administration faced more than their share of major district-level

crises that occupied a great deal of their time. Dr. Jacobs expressed her regret at not having more time to communicate with her principals during this first tumultuous year saying, "one thing I wish I had is more conversations with staff. I'm talking about being able to have really respectful but open conversations… you know taking the time to ask a few questions and get a better understanding."

Although they communicate with each other almost clairvoyantly, this team recognizes that some of their building administrators may still be longing for the level and frequency of communication they experienced during the previous administration. Dr. Grey is perhaps the first to admit that she had not reached out to her building administrators as much as she would have liked during her first year in office; and at times, this may have evoked some unnecessary disquiet among her staff. When Dr. Grey made the decision mid-way through the team's first year to reassign one long-time principal back to a teaching position due to persistent shortfalls in leadership expectations, some of the other building administrators were unsure what to think. Dr. Grey explains:

> A few of [my principals] were nervous because I hadn't communicated with them as much [as I should have] and they saw one of their own team be reassigned back to a teaching position. They didn't know what that meant for them. They didn't really know what had happened… they kind of knew [how she typically performed her duties], but they didn't know if there was something else. Did she do something, or what? And, so it left my other [principals] unsettled. So what I'm trying to get [my principals and staff] to understand is, if I have a problem with them—you see, I'm very black and white, it's either this or that—'if I have a problem with you, you'll absolutely know it. You will [always] know where you stand with me.' But they don't trust in the fact that if they don't hear from me that says 'you are doing okay'. Yeah, so I have to work on communicating that better.

Nonetheless, Dr. Grey understands how important communicating to her staff is, and has committed to build closer relationships with her principals in the coming year.

> I'm trying to do better this year. That's why I'm out visiting buildings more. I try to visit principals and to have more conversations with them, because I've gotten that message, 'Oh she doesn't communicate with us enough.' I have pulled [the central office staff] in, and they are on the team; I haven't done it with my principals. So, this year I've done more [outreach to the principals], and I actually go out without [Dr. Jacobs and Mr. Parker].

In spite of the fact that Mr. Parker seemed to me to be the most outspoken member of the leadership team, he believes that public communication is probably his main weakness. "I think that I talk a lot—I mean I have a lot to say at times, but I'm not a good communicator," Mr. Parker conceded. During a team interview, the following exchange helped to clarify Mr. Parker's argument.

> **JP:** I know what I'm talking about and I can talk to people but I don't like e-mail. I have to make myself put 'Good morning,' and then ask a question – **HELL NO!** I am about write a statement! Mine is usually a directive or a demand and I'm done. I'm not warm. I'm not fuzzy. I don't like to text.
>
> **Dr. G:** That's just your Asperger's syndrome Sheldon.
>
> **JP:** Sometimes people get offended or they think, 'Dang, he means do it now!' All I did was… I just wrote it fast. Sometimes my communication is…
>
> **Dr. G:** And he knows about it, we joke about it all the time.
>
> **JP:** I'm misunderstood because of efficiency. I don't even think it is about directness; it's just more efficient for me to write one sentence… People will invite me to something and I write back, 'I'll be there', and they wonder why I am mad… Yeah that's never… that's usually not my intent. I'm not very good at communication, written or oral. G, do you remember the time I made… what's her name in HR cry?
>
> **A:** [*In unison*] Cry.

> *Dr. Grey's tongue-in-cheek reference to television's fictional Big Bang Theory character, Sheldon Cooper, who portrays a genius theoretical physicist on the autism spectrum, was meant as a jest that the team has obviously referenced in the past to describe Mr. Parker's rather unique personality, not to insinuate that he actually has Asperger's syndrome.*

JP: Yeah I made her cry. I'm like, 'No. I'm not mad at you'. I just don't play into that. I don't…

Dr. G: Sheldon… [*In a whispered voice, Dr. Grey calls out to JP in a long, hushed, and almost spooky tone.*]

JP: It didn't make sense to me. It just didn't make sense. Well she didn't think she could talk to me about this? [*referring to the HR person whom he made cry*] What the hell would I have said? [*Dr. G and Dr. Jacobs erupt in laughter over this shared memory.*] I really don't know! I needed someone to help with the words. I'm like okay…

Dr. Jacobs: He says to me, 'Jacobs! You gotta help me write this email! Get over here!'

Dr. G: Thank God [Pam] writes so well. She writes really all of our stuff, because I can't stand to write.

JP: [*Agreeing audibly with Dr. G.]* And I'm pissing people off. 'Jacobs, Help me make nice!'

Dr. Jacobs: Yep, That's what he says to me, 'Help me make nice. Put something good on there and send it out.'

Apparently, Mr. Parker's penchant for expediency in his official communications has been misunderstood more than once. As Dr. Grey pointed out, "Once he moves out of his box… [Dr. Jacobs and I] end up having to do damage control because he executes immediately and fails to think about the other people who play a role at that table." At this, the team launched into another of their legendary dialogues to illuminate:

JP: I don't do damage control.

Dr. G: I know you don't do that honey.

JP: Somebody else gotta pick that up.

Dr. Jacobs: That's me! 'Please excuse him, Mr. Parker's just having a bad day.' I have to talk secretaries out of the tree.

JP: Oh yes, G just had to do that too.

Dr. G: Yes, I had to talk your secretary back off the ledge.

JP: G said to me, 'Do you think you can be nice to your secretary just this one day?' I'm like, 'What the hell does that mean?' And G said, 'well I think she had her feelings hurt.' I'm like, 'From what?' And G says, 'well, you're not talking to her. All you are doing is giving her things to do.' I was like, 'that's what she supposed to do!' So G said, 'Okay, but can you just play nice?' That was just two weeks or three weeks ago. So I said, 'all right, I'll play nice for a day. So, remember, I had lunch with her?

To be clear, in spite of the team's perhaps overly dramatic version of events, there was unanimity of opinion from everyone with whom I spoke that, regardless of his no-nonsense approach to his e-mail communications, Mr. Parker is a kindhearted and fun person to be around and he is well liked and respected.

Carnival

Actually it seems, although this team maintains a laser like focus on their obligations and takes their responsibilities very seriously, they do enjoy some frivolity from time to time. While the team generally attempts to subdue their witty side in public, Dr. Grey took Bakhtin's notion of carnival to the next level one Friday afternoon late in May. Near the end of a seemingly long and challenging first year, Dr. Grey called all of her principals and her team in for a late afternoon meeting. Her clandestine plan, concealed even from her teammates, was to regale the whole group at a nearby resort. Dr. G recalls her subterfuge:

> I was planning to take everyone to the country club for drinks and appetizers after work, and I didn't even tell [Dr. Jacobs and Mr. Parker]. I told them, 'Oh we are going to have a meeting at 3:30. Call all the administrators; we're going to talk about our feelings.'

To my surprise, based on the following team dialogue, even Dr. Jacobs and Mr. Parker were ensnared in the ruse.

> **JP:** You know I hate that… what did she say? 'We're going to go sit down, we're to share, we're going to reflect, we're going to hug, we're going to kiss.' [*Said in a pseudo sarcastic tone – reflecting on the past-shared event*].
> **Dr. G:** Yea, that was last Thursday.
> **Dr. Jacobs:** She said something like, 'we're going to have our emotions on the table, feelings… Feelings! [*The group is now animating this past event in very dynamic voices*]

Dr. G: So last Thursday, [*she recounts her side of this story laughing throughout*] I put posters up around the conference room, and I had post-it's all around and pens and markers…

Dr. Jacobs: She was totally playing JP and me because that's the way we roll with our principal meetings.

Dr. G: I had everyone in the conference room and I'm like okay… 'Everyone count off by three.'

JP: That was a big poke at us too.

Dr. Jacobs: That's what I mean; she was totally rocking the way we do our principal meetings... having ownership and everybody be a part of it.

Dr. G: I told them, 'we are going to talk about our feelings…' Which would have driven [JP] nuts. 'We are going to sit and talk about our feelings, we're going to meditate and hold hands.'

JP: I don't even like to hear you talk.

Dr. G: See! [*Dr. G and Dr. Jacobs erupt in uproarious laughter*]

JP: That is so not like me! I'm telling you I am the taskmaster.

Dr. G: 'We are going to have a drum circle… Talk about our feelings, and what was good for you.' I wrote 'high' and 'low' and 'next year' on the poster.

JP: I didn't know what was going on… I was rolling my eyes the whole time. I couldn't even read the damn poster.

Dr. G: And the only reason I had them count off by three was because I needed to buy some time until the bartender who was going to serve us, came in to work, so I was like… 'We have to count up to three…' and then I told them all to get in their cars and follow me.

Dr. Jacobs: Yes… she freaked us out. Where are we going? What is she doing? And then she said, 'nobody is carpooling. Everybody get in your own car.'

Dr. G: I told everyone, 'Get in your own car. I want you to see what I see the way that I see it.'

Dr. Jacobs: Oh yea, and Danny ran out of gas on the way and Betty Parks wouldn't even let him in her car. She was like, 'No way! I'm following Dr. G's orders! She said we couldn't carpool!'

Dr. G: And then I took them all to the country club to drink and have appetizers.

Researcher: Did you ever read Bakhtin?

Dr. G and Dr. Jacobs [*in unison*] **Carnival!**

Perhaps one of my favorite stories, this dialogue and the events recalled here illustrate Dr. Grey's passion and devotion to her district leadership team. In her characteristically humble manner, Dr. Grey wanted to recognize and honor her staff for the tremendous jobs they had done throughout the unusually turbulent year.

As a rookie administrative unit, Dr. Grey and her team certainly had an eventful year. In spite of Dr. G's assertion that "even grad students know that [new

superintendents] change nothing the first year", this dedicated team did indeed make several noteworthy changes to the status quo, many of which significantly enhanced equity and social justice throughout the district.

CHAPTER 6 – JUST LEADERSHIP

Whereas leadership is a value-neutral term conveying the act of guiding others toward a common pursuit, *just leadership* is burdened by the weight of inequity, aspires to rectify injustice, strives to embrace the marginalized, and endeavors to emancipate the oppressed. Dr. Grey and her team embody the value-laden qualities of *just leadership,* as substantiated by the numerous courageous transformations undertaken by this team during their inaugural year. Leading off with the development of the innovative Phoenix Program conceived to endow defeated learners with the strength to rise from the ashes of an abandoned education, the team also paved the way for the realization of a long-desired GED program on behalf of former dropouts, allocated space and resources to accommodate 40 additional struggling middle school students in alternative education classes, extended free meals to all students district-wide through the Community Eligibility Provision, commissioned an equity audit of the district's Gifted and Talented Student Program, and developed and instituted a comprehensive anti-bullying agenda. In these and many other ways, Dr. Grey and her team audaciously disregarded the 'change nothing' cardinal rule for new administrations. Asked why she and her team chose to enact such sweeping transformations during that critical first year, Dr. Grey replied, "You just have to know this team… When there is a need… when a necessity manifests itself, this team is going to address it."

Dr. Grey and her team do not let negativity obstruct their overwhelming desire to find creative solutions to intractable problems. When it comes to ingenuity, Dr. Grey and her team shed the bonds of impossibility and soar above conventional limitations. Board secretary Dorothy Boynton explains that when Dr. G recognizes a need within the

district, she simply won't accept the status quo. "For her, just the whole idea that 'this is the way it's always been; perhaps we might tweak it, but we're not going to go too far outside that box…' Well, for her there is no box anymore." Nevertheless, Dr. Grey selflessly credits her team for the actualization of these remarkable accomplishments saying, "I'm very fortunate that I serve with a group that when something has to be done we are going to figure out what to do and we are going to do it, because it's the right thing to do."

Up From the Ashes – The Phoenix Program

As the last fading days of summer waned and the start of their first school year approached, the leadership team instituted their plan to interview each student returning from a suspension or expulsion prior to reenrolling in classes so they could better understand the student's lived experience. Dr. Jacobs recalled those interviews:

> I remember reaching out to them and bringing them in to basically get to know them… interviewing them about what do they really want to do in their future. A lot of them weren't opposed to going to school; they were just struggling with the traditional setting.

As one student after another recounted their story, the team quickly recognized a conundrum that required an immediate solution. Dr. Jacobs explained:

> We definitely began to see a theme of kids for whom, for whatever reason—and some were valid and some were merely behaviors or whatever, but traditional high school wasn't working out, traditional schooling period wasn't working out for them.

Feeling the burden of injustice for these youngsters who were drifting aimlessly through a system that did not appreciate their unique needs, this team resolved to find an answer. Dr. Grey explained:

> As we got to know them, we realized that these kids were age inappropriate for the grade they were in, and we understood that the

chances that they would graduate through the traditional route were rapidly diminishing. So we asked ourselves, 'what could we do to give them something to reach for?' We needed to find an alternative route for them to be successful.

In most instances, these students would have ultimately become casualties of an inflexible educational system that failed to meet the needs of all students. Not in this instance, however, because this leadership team refused to abandon these young souls. Recalling the conversation that prompted the evolution of Phoenix Program, Mr. Parker stated, "we were talking about how we were either going to find a way to support them now or the community is going to have to support them later. So, I think that's kind of where it all started."

They needed a plan, and Dr. Grey thought she might just have the perfect solution. As a member of the New Hope Development Project, Dr. Grey was aware that many of the logistics and manufacturing companies throughout the county were having difficulty finding qualified applicants for vacant positions, and thought she knew just how to fill those high-paying jobs.

> There are so many jobs within this county right now that go unfilled because of a lack of qualified workers… we have a number of sectors—right now there are about 89 jobs that pay $18.50/hour in just one company that they can not fill. So… you know… me and my divine inspiration… I said, 'what if we could take some of these kids who are 18-19 years old and train them… pull them out of school, put them in a GED program and train them for these core sectors?

By partnering with the local community college for the necessary vocational training and providing evening GED classes generously supported by the New Hope USD board of education, the Phoenix Program indisputably offers new hope to these previously discounted souls.

Curious to know how the idea came into existence, I asked the team to describe the conversation that lead to the Phoenix Program. In her usual humble manner, Dr. Grey revealed, "It just evolved… It just… you know how things happen with us, it was spontaneous combustion." Dr. Jacobs provided a few more details, saying:

> We sat down here in the conference room, and we were looking at the whiteboard filled with the names of all of our students returning from potential expulsions and suspensions. It was all three of us sitting around that table with those little yellow tabbies. We were going through that roster and we were really looking at our kids asking what can we do…

Mr. Parker offered a timeframe for when the idea emerged saying, "I remember it was early. It was in September, because it started with the students coming back from expulsions and they started to make appointments in August. It was early." Describing the first group of students, Dr. Grey added:

> I think that we got [the Phoenix Program] up and running in about two weeks. We started with 12 students, but the goal was to get to 20. They ran the gamut, Black, White, Male, Female… I have a beautiful picture of them and you can see [that they are a diverse group].

The team either could not recall more details or, more likely, were simply too humble to individually take credit for any particular characteristic of the program.

Regardless, the Phoenix Program has already made a tremendous difference for more than a dozen young lives. Hilltop Middle School principal Berlin Homer passionately summarized the impact of the Phoenix Program this way:

> Implementing the Phoenix Program… that was huge! That was **HUGE!** I can't tell you how huge that was. I think that Dr. Grey has a passion for those kids that the previous [administration] didn't have. In the past it was, 'yeah okay, we need to do something with those kids… put them in [alternative education]', but Dr. Grey actually converses with those kids and asks them, 'what do you need? How can I make your life better? What can we do to move you forward in life?' That is where the Phoenix program comes in. Because if a young person says,

'I'm 16; I'm never going to graduate on time; it's not going to happen so what can I do? I'm just going to quit because I know I am not going to graduate on time. I know messed up my 6th grade year because I was immature. So now I don't see a hope for the future because I'm in 6th grade and I'm 15.' To give those kids that way out… it's huge. That's the biggest change; to me, that's the most important change [the team has made], not all the movement of the schools. To me, [reorganizing the district] is just something that had to happen. But to take those kids that felt hopeless, and provide them with some hope or to give them the support they needed… that was huge.

When the first group of Phoenix kids completed their program, they had a graduation ceremony. Mr. Parker's assistant Opal Wooster recalled that experience saying, "I'm going to tell you, the kids that completed that program were so proud, and I am so proud of them because they made it and they wouldn't have without that program." Perhaps no one is more proud of 'her babies' than Dr. Grey, who emotionally recollected:

We pulled them out [of traditional school]… we got them out of that environment that wasn't working for them… Some of them were still in middle school, and now they've graduated from the community college… to have that number [of kids], and the amount of scholarships they received… I sat [at their graduation] and cried that whole time.

The Alternative GED Program

Always humble, Dr. Grey realizes that she is surrounded by capable and creative people and always looks to her staff for novel ideas inspired by a shared aspiration to serve children. Hence, when alternative school principal Herman mentioned a concept she had been advancing with no success for nearly a decade, Dr. Grey listened carefully. Remembering each student who had passed through her hallways and ultimately dropped out before graduation, principal Herman appreciated the need for a GED program based out of Horace Mann Alternative School. In the past, according to Ms. Herman, New

Hope USD declined to offer former students an opportunity to earn their high school equivalency credential due to budgetary constraints. Board president Vega explained:

> Since the GED kids have dropped out of school, they can't be counted in our graduation statistics. We've been trying all along to get a program where if they got a GED they would count towards our graduation rate, but we were never able to work that out.

Nevertheless, the memory of those youngsters who didn't make it troubled Ms. Herman. "Each and every day I see students who struggle to fit in, even here in the Alternative Education Program and it breaks my heart," Ms. Herman said. "The traditional model of education just doesn't work for some kids, and they simply need an alternate route to that very important credential."

It was this devotion that compelled Ms. Herman to pursue her dream once more with the new administration. "We started having those discussions in May, and [Dr. Grey] was in favor of [a GED program] right away," stated Ms. Herman. Despite the fact that budget considerations had not become more favorable, "Dr. Grey immediately said we'll just take it on ourselves [find the resources in our budget], and it has been going well ever since," Ms. Herman declared. She continued saying:

> We were up and running by November. I've been collaborating with [the team] all year. Now we know we're going to do a session from September to January then one from January to July and continue to run [the program] like that. That works best for the kids; it gives them ample time to complete the work.

Ms. Herman's dedication to the program goes beyond merely championing the cause; she even teaches some of the GED classes. "Right now we have between 12 and 15 students, and I have two teachers, two teaching assistants, and myself teaching the classes," Ms. Herman reported.

Furthermore, in addition to the Phoenix Program, Dr. Grey managed to convince

the Board of Education to support the Alternative GED Program out of the district

budget. "We pay for [the Alternative GED Program] even though they don't count on

our graduation rate. The state won't allow us to count them; we are just helping them out

because it is the right thing to do," Board President Mr. Vega confirmed. While Ms.

Herman certainly has become a champion for the Alternative GED program, Dr. Grey

and Dr. Jacobs remain actively involved as well. High school principal Carolyn Isaacs

notes:

> We started a GED Program at the alternative school this year that is
> held after school. Dr. Grey and Dr. Jacobs even personally interview
> the students to make sure they are a good fit for the program. They
> take their time to do that, and I think it has made a dramatic
> difference.

Should anyone doubt the success of the new Alternative GED Program, they

simply need to ask the graduates who now have that all-important high school

equivalency credential. Ms. Herman proudly boasts:

> [The Alternative GED Program] has been the most gratifying thing
> because these are kids who have been former students, or in one case,
> we had a young man who turned 21 before he could finish high school.
> He came right to our GED program and was our first graduate. Now
> our kids are graduating from the program and we are so proud…
> Sometimes I think we are more excited than the kids. We just go crazy,
> and when they pass those tests, when they are done, we get them a
> cake… we make a big to do about it because I believe some people
> think that a GED in their mindset is just a GED, but it is hard work.

The Peer Tribunal Program

Dr. Grey and her team encourage creativity throughout the district and urge

anyone with an innovative idea to share it with the team for consideration. School

Resource Officer Daniels presented an idea to the team that she had been pondering for

some time. She imagined a new approach to discipline that would allow students to become involved in a more active manner. "I'm starting a program called the Peer Tribunal, which is a student based school court situation… basically restorative justice," Officer Daniels stated.

> We are going to have the students lead referrals for different behaviors and give them consequences that will be handled during the school day. So let's say [a student is] disrespectful to the teacher. The teacher is going to ask for a referral to the Peer Tribunal. The students will hear the situation; the student [who was disrespectful] will have to explain his or her side of it, and the tribunal will come up with an appropriate consequence. So they may have the student work with the janitor for a couple of 30-minute programs, or they might have [him or her] write an essay about why you should not be disrespectful, or an apology, or whatnot. So, we are trying to basically teach the kids to take accountability for their actions instead of putting them out of school.

Officer Daniels worked closely with the leadership team and school principals to ensure her program met district and state discipline guidelines and fit within the team's social justice ideology. "Dr. Jacobs met with us multiple times and she was very instrumental in the whole process. We also went before the board to explain exactly what the program would entail and they approved it so off we go," Officer Daniels eagerly explained.

More Space for the High Flyers

In many cases, students who have trouble fitting into the general education classroom simply need a more structured setting in which to learn, at least for a time. Middle school principal Berlin Homer understands these students, whom she calls 'high flyers', and says that they are just trying to survive, trying to maintain their dignity. "These are the kids who don't want anybody to know they can't read very well, or that

they aren't a very good student. Really, that's what it is all about," Principal Homer

explained. Ms. Homer clarified by channeling a 'high flyer':

> I don't want anybody to know that I really can't read very well. I don't want anybody to know that I don't understand algebra, but I'm sitting in the classroom with all these kids and they're all at a different level than I am. Because, you know, out on the street I have street cred… but in here, I can't give up that cred. I don't want them to know that I can't read, so I'm going to cut up in your class so you will throw me out and then I don't have to give up my status.

Managing a classroom full of adolescents is difficult enough when there are no

'high flyers' creating disorder to deflect attention away from their own insecurities, but

bring two or more together and pandemonium may ensue. Principal Homer deftly

explains the value of an alternative setting by again channeling a 'high flyer':

> If you put me in an environment where everybody's got street cred… where everybody can't read the same as me… then I have no risks. Because really I'm afraid to take risks, really, in all actuality… in the real world of things… I'm afraid to take risks, to show you I don't understand. I need everything to stay the same, the way it was, how it was, and how it always worked. So if you put me in that alternative classroom with other kids just like me, I don't feel the need to cut up. I can learn without taking risks.

Dr. Grey and her team are well aware that the traditional educational setting

doesn't work for every child, and explore any opportunity to develop learning

environments better suited to each child. Unfortunately, however, Horace Mann

Alternative School was already at capacity with the high school aged alternative students

and therefore couldn't accommodate more middle school 'high flyers'. Faced with the

challenge of finding appropriate educational environments for some of the younger 'high

flyers', Dr. Grey and her team went to work to invent a resolution. Thinking way outside

the box, the team came up with a solution that no one before had considered. Having

been built many decades ago as a school, the central administrative office building had

several classrooms in the basement that were being used for storage, so Dr. Grey repurposed them to house two additional alternative classrooms for 40 middle school youth.

Principal Homer noticed a striking difference in her school almost immediately, and expressed her appreciation saying:

> So her adding 40 more spaces this year to accommodate some of the high flyers that were in this middle school has made a huge difference in the culture of this building. That was huge! I mean Huge! It changed that whole culture in my building, because now I have some high flyers, but they're sprinkled. So now I can maintain them, now the other kids can have some influence over them and believe me that'll happen. Sooner better than later, but it'll happen.

Indeed, this team contemplates New Hope USD through a justice perspective, allowing them to identify opportunities with which to enrich students' lives. As Dr. Grey articulated previously, when this team recognizes a need they take action.

Feeding the Babies

When a child arrives at the schoolhouse doors hungry, has no money for lunch, or is concerned about going to bed on an empty stomach, getting a good education may not seem all that important. Due to the high poverty rate in New Hope, nearly three in four students regularly face food insecurities, and therefore are eligible for free and reduced price meals. Unfortunately, however, along with a free meal comes the social stigma of being 'one of the poor kids' and the unenviable choice between maintaining a sense of dignity and going hungry. Children can sometimes be insensitive to their peers who may be struggling, as Pastor Farrows explained:

> There's an attitude in the general sense that somehow it's the children's fault if they can't afford their supplies, or lunch… and there's that stigma… If you have to get a reduced lunch or a free lunch, you are 'one of those kids' and nobody wants to be that kid.

As Dr. Jacobs expounded, "especially at the middle school, not so much at the high school, but at the middle school level there is a stigma if you get free lunches."

To eliminate this quandary, this team arranged to extend the opportunity to eat free breakfast and lunch to all students in the district. "We are feeding everyone now," Mr. Parker said, "including the pre-K kids." The team extended free meals to all students through a Federal program called The Community Eligibility Provision offered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The program allows schools and districts located in low-income areas where greater than 40 percent of the population would otherwise be eligible for free or reduced priced lunches to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students, thereby eliminating the need to collect household eligibility applications or stigmatize eligible students as 'low-income'. Authorized by Congress as part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, the Community Eligibility Provision became available to all schools nationwide beginning in 2014. "Initially there was some push-back from the board," explained Dr. Jacobs:

> Because [the program] has to do with federal dollars and people were afraid it would impact our regular funding, so we had to be really clear that [the program] is based on the census only and does not effect Title 1 dollars.

In spite of logistical difficulties related to federal guidelines, the team even decided to extend the program to their pre-kindergarten students. "We decided that even though [pre-K] is only a half-day program and we have to work within the confines of the grant—single session meals served from a central location—we were going to take on pre-K as well." This team recognizes the importance of all students having access to nutritious meals because, as Dr. Jacobs attested, "they can't learn if they are hungry." Now, every student in the district, regardless of income or ability to pay can eat breakfast

and lunch free of charge and free of stigma. Dr. Jacobs summarized the program nicely, saying:

> At one time if you went in to eat, you were 'the poor kid', but now because everybody can eat… And I'm sorry, but when they see a kid walking by with a sausage biscuit or whatever, they're like, 'I can get that and I don't need money? Nope, go ahead and help yourself.' So now, it has really helped pull those barriers down as kids aren't being identified as poor just because they are eating free breakfast or lunch.

Dr. Grey and her team are committed to breaking down as many barriers to equitable student participation as possible and have the support of a dedicated Board of Education behind them.

Tugging the Tiger by the Tail – The Gifted and Talented Audit

One area of inequitable participation the team identified was the district's Gifted and Talented Student Program. In New Hope, educators and parents alike have always held the Gifted and Talented Program and its students in high regard. Beginning in the third grade, students identified as gifted and talented would remain in the advanced program through middle school and into high school, where Advanced Placement and Dual Credit courses were closed to all but those students in the Gifted and Talented Program.

For several years prior to the arrival of Dr. Grey and her leadership team however, New Hope USD's gifted program had, in some instances, become a program of privilege rather than an opportunity for truly talented students to excel academically according to their abilities. "Our Gifted and Talented Program had become an exclusive club," Dr. Grey explained:

> Most of the students in the program were White kids from middle to upper class families, and some of them didn't even really qualify as

gifted, but their parents were doctors, lawyers… you know. So they were just moved into the program and then they stayed there.

Concurring with Dr. Grey's assessment, Dr. Jacobs expanded on the team's thought processes.

> When we began observing and looking into the [gifted and talented] classrooms it became clear that the students in the program were predominately White, socially and economically affluent, and had probably been afforded the opportunities and experiences that obviously had a great bearing on their academic success in what I call the 'system of schooling'. It reminded me of [my previous district]… walking in that White privilege… that was our Gifted and Talented Program. So we were really concerned that our district was creating this hierarchy and caste system of only those who had the benefits of a great home life were a Gifted and Talented student, and those students definitely, definitely are viewed in a different light.

Dr. Grey and her team knew that inequitable participation in this important program was an indefensible position and must be corrected. "I'm trying to deconstruct that logic," Dr. Grey stated, "just take it apart and rebuild it so that everyone has the opportunity to participate in gifted education." The team knew, however, that privilege often comes with a sense of entitlement that can be very intransigent. Aware that some in the community would believe competition for space in the Gifted and Talented Program was a zero-sum game and perceive the team's efforts as an attempt to remove their children from the program, the team knew that they would need to proceed cautiously. Having experienced this scenario in her previous district, Dr. Jacobs questioned whether the team would even be able to bring equity to the Gifted and Talented Program at New Hope USD.

> The first thing I did when I came here was to suggest an audit of our program, and they actually said yes. I was shocked, because when I made the suggestion to [my previous board] I was voted down unanimously; 'Don't tug the tiger's tale' they said. But the New Hope USD Board of Education said yes.

The team suggested that the district hire experts from one of the country's top university programs in gifted and talented education to conduct an audit of the program. This bit of strategy gave the team enough political cover to insulate them from the potential reaction of some affluent parents. Curriculum Director Bobby Jean Riche supported the decision, saying:

> When Dr. Jacobs suggested we have [the experts] come in I was really excited, because having that third party make suggestions based on sound research, it's not us saying what we want to do differently. It's the experts saying, 'Here is what you are doing well and here is what you should change,' and that's just exactly what they did. They were really good to work with too, because we were able to have some candid conversations with them and say 'look this is where we are, this is what we want to do, this is why we want to do it, this is the data that we are seeing.' And they validated what we were seeing and put it in their report.

As a result of the audit, Dr. Grey and her team were able to take the feedback and begin to implement some of the suggestions with the full support of the board. Mr. Parker explained:

> I think [the audit] will help us to expand offerings that we have for our more affluent students to students from all demographics. And really, I don't know if we could have tackled that on our own without the audit, that audit is kind of permission in the form of 'ok, move forward'.

The audit not only reinforced the team's position on alleviating some of the disproportions with regard to equitable participation in the program, but also revealed other ways in which the team could assist previously underserved youth to benefit from the program. Mr. Parker noted:

> We learned that identifying kids [as gifted and talented] earlier, especially kids from poverty, kids of color, you know… that early identification is key, getting the kids into the program… Don't delay.

Furthermore, the audit helped the team convince the board to similarly open and expand

programing for Advanced Placement, Honors and Dual Credit classes to more students,

and to create a pre-AP program in the middle school for students who are differentially

advanced, as Dr. Jacobs explained:

> We are expanding; offering more students the opportunity at advanced programming. In other words, [Gifted and Talented] is not one size fits all. It's no longer either you qualify for gifted or you don't; we understand there are students who are higher achieving perhaps in mathematics, or higher achieving in humanities, or whatever, but what are we going to offer those students? So we are working on implementing things like Pre-AP classes and so on.

Perhaps more importantly, the audit offered suggestions geared towards

encouraging more students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to aspire towards

higher academic and life goals. In the past, some students from lower SES backgrounds

might not have qualified for the gifted and talented program due to a culturally biased

interpretation of assessment results. By teaching the district evaluation team how to

interpret gifted and talented assessment scores differently, students from lower SES

backgrounds are now more likely qualify for the program. "A student's background

should not be a determining factor in qualifying for the Gifted and Talented Program,"

Dr. Jacobs declared. "We must have high expectations for all kids and believe that every

child can succeed."

An Emphatic Approach to Marginalization and Oppression

Dr. Grey and her team have demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring that

every student, regardless of any distinguishing characteristic that may set him or her apart

from the dominant group, is welcomed, supported, and included in the totality of the

educational community of New Hope. Through their actions, it is evident that this team is

prepared to take any steps necessary to ensure that all students have the unfettered opportunity to obtain an education "worth wanting" (Howe, 1997), that is, one that not only expects the same high standards of achievement from all students, but also reflects and represents the lived experiences and realities of all students, especially those so often pushed to the margins of society.

Harassment and bullying prevention. All students deserve a safe and supportive environment in which to learn; yet, bullying, intimidation, and harassment by some students against others make learning for the victims difficult at best, and too often, nearly impossible. For some children, attending school can be a painful and humiliating experience due to the constant victimization they suffer at the hands of more powerful individuals. Although bullying and peer victimization has likely always been a part of the educational landscape, during the past few decades the consequences of peer on peer violence have become a serious threat to the physical, mental, and emotional health and wellbeing of our youth. While it is quite likely that no school district is completely free of bullying, intimidation, and harassment, New Hope USD seems to have less of a problem than other similar school districts.

Recognizing first and foremost every child's right to feel secure and supported in school, Dr. Grey and her team have taken a proactive approach to mitigate the negative consequences of bullying and peer intimidation throughout the district. Beginning with a strong and comprehensive anti-bullying policy that clearly defines the prohibited behaviors, specifically delineates the protection of most traditionally marginalized and oppressed victims and groups, and specifies consequences for noncompliance; New Hope USD has clearly indicated the will to create safe and inclusive educational milieu.

Importantly, the policy also covers any individual or group that might be perceived to belong to a named category and extends protection for any individual who might be singled out by reason of any distinguishing characteristic. The following is an excerpt of the New Hope USD Anti-Bullying Policy:

> Bullying Defined: The use of written or verbal communication or physical conduct intended to psychologically injure, harass, humiliate, coerce or intimidate another person.
>
> No person, including a District employee or agent, or student, shall harass, intimidate, or bully a student on the basis of actual or perceived: race; color; national origin; military status; unfavorable discharge status from military service; sex; sexual orientation; gender identity; gender-related identity or expression; ancestry; age; religion; physical or mental disability; order of protection status; status of being homeless; actual or potential marital or parental status, including pregnancy; association with a person or group with one or more of the aforementioned actual or perceived characteristics; or any other distinguishing characteristic. The District will not tolerate harassing, intimidating conduct, or bullying whether verbal, physical, sexual, or visual, that affects the tangible benefits of education, that unreasonably interferes with a student's educational performance, or that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational environment. Examples of prohibited conduct include name-calling, using derogatory slurs, stalking, sexual violence, causing psychological harm, threatening or causing physical harm, threatened or actual destruction of property, or wearing or possessing items depicting or implying hatred or prejudice of one of the characteristics stated above.

The importance of specifying traditionally vulnerable individuals and groups cannot be understated, as it eliminates the possibility of inadvertently or deliberately disregarding the most likely victims of bullying or harassment found in schools as well as the workplace. Although important, anti-bullying policies alone will never generate safe and welcoming schools for all youth. Bullying and harassment, regardless of motivating animus, is tantamount to social assault. Eliminating this ritual of victimization necessitates leaders who have an authentic commitment to recreate the entire school culture based on genuine values of inclusiveness and respect for all.

For this leadership team, a strong anti-bullying policy was merely the beginning of an effort to ensure a safe, supportive, and inclusive learning culture throughout the district. Dr. Grey and her team understood that to be effective, anti-bullying measures must be universally understood and uniformly applied; furthermore, educational leaders must work to create welcoming and inclusive environments throughout their buildings. To that end, Dr. Grey sought the assistance of nationally renowned authority on school bullying Dorothy Espelage to conduct a series of professional development trainings. Principal Sterling recalled:

> [The leadership team] did have a huge bullying forum; [bullying] was a huge issue at the middle school especially. The training helped us to make sure that… we were following through on every single bullying incident that was reported, making sure that we are in compliance with the policy, and making sure we are filling out those paper forms. But more importantly, [the training] taught us how to promote safe and inclusive schools, different ways for us to be a bully-free zone, to help kids develop social skills, and to do assessment surveys to see what issues we can eliminate.

It seems as though principals throughout the district are employing strategies to effectively combat bullying. At the high school, principal Isaacs has implemented additional suggestions from the anti-bullying training:

> We have focus groups with students, parents, and teachers, and we are even creating an application for kids' phones where students can self-report incidents of bullying, harassment, anything. I've been really pleased with that. We also have support structures in place to deal with bullying. If any staff member sees a student coming down the hall visibly frustrated we will take that student directly to our behavior interventionist so that she can intervene see what's going on. I think that's made a big difference.

Middle School principal Berlin Homer is also taking steps to reduce the opportunities for kids to bully and intimidate others by modifying student congregation and movement.

Before I took over here at Hilltop Middle School, when the students arrived in the morning they had to stand outside to wait for the bell to ring. A lot of interactions happened during that time that eventually led to fights and bullying, so I eliminated that time. Now they don't stand outside. They get off the bus; they come straight into the school. So I eliminated the time that they have to gather as groups to plan and to organize. I also made a rule with the staff, 'three or more, let's explore'. That means that if you see three or more students congregating you are to have a friendly encounter with them. If there's three or more kids gathered, most of the time something is going to happen, so you go "hey how was your weekend, how have you guys been doing?" and guess what all of a sudden…nobody has anything to talk about anymore.

When it comes to student movement and preventing the opportunities for mischief, Principal Jacque Macallan agrees with Ms. Homer. When I arrived at Valley View Upper Elementary School for my interview with Ms. Macallan, I observed several classes of fifth and sixth grade students as they moved through the hallways from one class to another with their hands in their pockets or behind their backs. "We are learning safe-hands in the hallways. Students move through the building in groups, escorted by staff, and they must have their hands either in their pockets or behind their backs," Principal Macallan explained. "That way we can avoid the incidental tap or punch that eventually leads to a fight." According to Principal Macallan, Building and maintaining relationships with the students is the key to an inclusive and safe school climate:

The first goal in my school is building relationships because you can't learn from somebody unless you respect them. And you won't learn from somebody if you don't feel included. So that always comes first. We are learning to just live together and how to be safe, respectable, and responsible and then if you learn something, by golly good for you.

Creating a school culture where students are supported and feel a sense of inclusion is a critically important element in combating bullying. High School Principal Carolyn Isaacs described the culture of inclusion at her school saying:

> We have a club for just about every group imaginable and that helps kids to fit in. For instance, we have a Gay Straight Alliance club and we even observe A Day of Silence [representing the silence many LGBTQ kids feel when they are forced to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity] for all students who want to participate and they even had a little pin that they wear. I think that we don't have too many problems with bullying here at the high school because there are so many opportunities for kids to be involved and included. That's not to say that a child is never bullied, but our students are really accepting of one another.

While it is true that the motivating animus behind the act of bullying and intimidation can emanate from nearly anything or even nothing at all, sexual orientation and gender identity are three to four times more likely to be the impetus for bullying than for instance race or disability (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). Therefore, it was reasonable during the course of this investigation to inquire about district climate vis-à-vis LGBTQ youth.

Homo/Transphobia. Prepared to uncover a wide range of homo/transphobia and hostility towards LGBTQ individuals, I routinely asked questions related to LGBTQ individuals and school climate. Instead of a typically cold and unfriendly climate towards LGBTQ individuals, I found New Hope USD to be unexpectedly warm and welcoming based on the reports obtained from study participants. Indeed, it seemed to me that most of the adults interviewed for this study reported a school climate that was relatively accepting and inclusive of LGBTQ youth and staff. When asked about issues related to LGBTQ individuals in the district, Dr. Grey replied:

> You know what? New Hope is different. Again, we have such a big art community… My babies are openly gay… and I mean OPENLY… When I first arrived, I watched the show choir and… yea… you know I was like… okay… at first all my fears came back for their safety. I'm like oh okay, you are obviously out… and you are too… and you are too… and… okay… wait… what? And he was the homecoming king… I'm like

okay really? (Laughter) When I saw him on the homecoming court I was like okay… cool. Yea, they are able to be very open here.

Dr. Jacobs concurs with this assessment saying,

> I think that it's a very open atmosphere at the high school for LGBTQ students… it's very accepted. We have openly gay staff and that helps students have someone to relate to. It's just a general atmosphere of acceptance at the high school especially.

To this discussion, one educator added:

> We have LGBTQ kids, but you don't hear anything [negative] about it. I mean my daughter is gay and she says she feels accepted. I don't think of kids as being transgender, or gay or whatever, they are just kids. I think straight kids are aware of the kids who are gay because it's brought to their attention, but I don't think anybody really cares… it is what it is.

On the subject of school climate and LGBTQ individuals, one building administrator

opined:

> I think that people in New Hope are pretty open-minded about LGBTQ issues. I really do. Last year I had two teachers who were open about their sexuality. To me people are people and love who they love, that's their business. I see people as people… whether they are men or women, boys or girls… or whether they're trying to figure out who they are—and a lot of these kids are trying to figure out who they are—I'll help you through that, but who am I to judge if it's right or wrong anyway? I'm not.

Principal Porter at Jacob Davis Elementary School explained how she handled one

child's coming out experience:

> Towards the end of the year a little girl came to me and said, 'Mrs. Porter I just don't know if I like girls or not.' I told her, 'that's okay, you're fine sweetie. How can I help you? What can we do?' Then in fifth grade, she let it slip to her friends and it spread like wildfire. So we did have to put out some fires. We just did a lot of talking to her, talking to her classmates, and a lot of social work help. Eventually, everybody was like 'okay well Tina's been with us since kindergarten, so Tina is Tina whatever.'

Even School Resource Officer Daniels agrees that when it comes to LGBTQ individuals, the climate in New Hope USD is relatively welcoming.

> Most of the kids are very accepting I think, because we are so diverse here and [the high school] is such a big school that there are kids who are lesbian, gay, whatever, and the kids just don't care. I have kids from my middle school last year that were absolutely certain they were lesbian or gay, or they have all sorts of things, polyamorous relationships, everything, and the kids are cool, they have no qualms about it, they are very confident I think because we've come so far in being accepting of it.

Insofar as school climate vis-à-vis LGBTQ individuals can be a bellwether of an inclusive and welcoming educational culture, New Hope USD seems to be at least no worse than most, and quite likely considerably better. It is important to note that no data were collected from students; therefore, an accurate picture of school climate and inclusiveness can only be inferred based on staff reports and observations.

Racism and Classism. Taking into consideration such factors as its relatively rural Midwestern location and diverse socio-economic population, I was also prepared to identify potentially serious issues related to race and class within New Hope USD. Although an in-depth examination of racism and classism, as with homo/transphobia, was beyond the scope of this dissertation, I asked all study participants a wide range of probative questions about race and class to gain a sense of these dynamics within New Hope USD and the surrounding community. Interestingly, it seems, socio-economic status and, of course, the dialectic between race and class may be somewhat more of a determining influence on marginalization and oppression in New Hope than simply an individual's race.

As should be expected, one's opinion concerning the state of relations in New Hope vis-à-vis race varied somewhat depending on the racial background of the

informant. Perhaps somewhat more surprising, however, there was considerably more

agreement among the study participants regarding the influence of one's socio-economic

status on a child's educational opportunity. For instance, when asked about racial tension

within the school, one White principal replied:

> No I don't see that. I really don't. Sometimes we will have some
> tension but it's not racial, it's not White versus Black. We may have
> some groups that are on a web posting site that may be living in one of
> our housing authorities or something like that where there may be
> some conflict there. When I talk to students and we talk about it and I
> ask 'why is this happening? Are you part of this or that organization?'
> they'll say 'I'm not part of that... but my family is.' So it's something
> that their family has been involved in. But it's not White versus Black.

Another White principal had this to say about race relations in the schools:

> Really, the only thing we've ever had that I've experienced with
> racism is every now and then you get a parent that will call you and
> say they there upset because their child has been suspended and it's
> obviously because they are black and I'm white. That happened to me
> my first year quite a few times but once the parents got to know me
> they realized okay and there's been many times where I've said really,
> come on guys, really? And they knew that it wasn't true, but I think
> they were trying me. And now I think that if I left their kids they
> would be completely devastated because they know that's not the
> issue at all.

At the same time, one African American principal also felt that racism was not a serious

problem saying, "I've listened to what you've asked me and I just don't see a lot of that

in our district… I don't see a lot of racism. Those are not issues that I deal with on a daily

basis."

On the other hand, one White principal pointed to the disparity in the racial make

up of the disciplinary statistics as a sign of systemic racism.

> Well, our data always shows that our black males score lower [on
> tests of academic achievement]. Our black males lead the numbers in
> our discipline too. So we're definitely aware of that. That's one of the
> reasons why I wanted to start my dad's group. Really, it was to

support our black males here. I think that it's so important in this day and age of just what's going out there, even in the world of how we can really support our black youth.

Determined to change that reality, this principal devised a strategy to provide additional support for her African American male students through community outreach.

I noticed last year that we had huge support from our dads and our adult male population. I would see them in our building all the time and I wanted to take an advantage of that support. So I started a dads group this year. It's called Dedicated and Determined Dads to Serve Students. We had our first informational meeting last week. I had 25 dads attend, which is huge. We talked about the goals of this group. What do we want to accomplish? How can we serve our male student population here at school? We're still in the brainstorming process but that's one of the things I'm really proud of this year... helping our dads to be positive figures and provide support to our students.

Recognizing that a lack of cultural awareness on behalf of some of her staff regarding issues of race contributes to such disparities, Dr. Grey explained her position saying:

I wouldn't say that racial tension among the kids is the issue. I believe the students would say 'these teachers don't understand me.' If there is racial tension, it would be between the students and teachers. Those are issues that we are looking at right now. I am trying to deconstruct many of the cultural misunderstandings that, for instance, lead to [African American males] being disciplined more often and more severely. We are working on building cultural sensitivities and having those difficult conversations about race.

Not surprisingly, some other African American study participants were not so quick to dismiss racism as a problem within the community. After hearing comments from some residents regarding the reorganization of the district, a former resident of a Chicago suburb who is an African American administrative staff person in New Hope gave a more somber reflection, stating:

I think that... and I know this happens everywhere, I feel like especially at the time [planning for the reorganization was happening] I could hear it and I could see it, even with the people that work here [in the district], like the mingling of the schools was a big deal. Like 'I

don't want my kids going to school with those kids.' Well who are **those** kids?

This same staff member explained, "I don't know if racial stuff is better here [in New Hope]. I think it is about the same; but, in the district… you know I have two little black kids [who attend New Hope USD] and I haven't experienced anything [racial] first hand."

Another African American administrator was unequivocal when asked specifically about racism within the community, stating:

> Yes. And I can tell you, just from personal experience as an African American female. I took a friend home to [a neighboring community], which is just outside of New Hope… right here, not even a ten-minute drive. She needed a ride home from work. She asked me to come in for a minute to see her new baby and, by the time I stepped out of her house somebody had spray painted 'nigger lover' on her house. So yes, it does exist. There are parents here that refuse to talk to me, but they will talk to my [White] assistant principal, and not for the fact they don't think they can agree with me, but that they won't allow me to dictate what happens with their child's life.

Providing even more detail, she explained, "A lot of it is very subtle, it's subtle racism. There's systemic racism. I can tell you that." This principal described how she had been passed over for an administrative position several years in a row in spite of being highly qualified for the position:

> I was the summer school coordinator for three years, I was a unit leader in my building, I served on district committees, so I served the leadership world throughout the district for a long time, for three or four years, five years. When a principal job came open, it was not offered to me. I applied and someone who had no district experience, who had no leadership experience, got that job and they put them in that building and I didn't get it. I'm like, I don't understand… I'm doing in-services and I'm already in leadership roles… I had worked side by side with that person. I mean side by side, so I knew their organizational skills, I knew… and I'm like man, no that's…you know something is not right about that. There were some African American leaders in the district and some community members that went to the

former superintendent and asked, 'what do we have to do? What does she have to do to become a principal? What other skill sets does she need so that we as a community can help her get those skill sets? After that conversation, all of a sudden I'm an intern.

One of the most obvious indicators of this type of systemic racism can be found in the district's lack of diversity within the teaching force. Although nearly six in ten students who attend school in New Hope are non-White, 95 percent of the full-time teachers are White. An African American administrator shed light on the problems this lack of diversity represents for non-White students saying:

> If you are not White in this school, we have two teachers that look like you. Everybody else that looks like you is a Teacher's Aide, a hall monitor, or a janitor… let me take that back, we don't even have a janitor in this building… the kitchen help. But then you want to sit in my classroom and tell me I can be anything I want to be, why should I believe you?

As much as they want to support building administrators' autonomy in hiring decisions, this leadership team is finding creative ways to address diversity within the district's teaching force. For instance, the reader may recall Dr. Grey's inspired satellite teacher certification partnership with the local university to assist current Teacher's Aides, many of whom are African American, to become full-time teachers.

The leadership team, however, recognizes that the complex and nuanced nature of diversity within New Hope revolves around more than just race. Dr. Jacobs quickly acknowledges that racism still exists in New Hope but qualifies her answer saying,

> Is there racism? Absolutely… absolutely, but my perception is that New Hope is highly integrated. Much more so than either of my previous districts, for instance I believe there are more bi-racial families and bi-racial kids here than I have ever seen elsewhere… But I think poverty is the very real beast and I think that for a long time the district did not program with that in mind. I think poverty is a very real piece that challenges us in the learning aspect.

With the help of her team, Dr. Grey has even modified her own understanding of the

complex relationship between race and poverty in New Hope.

> Racism exists, and I'm afraid to admit this, but I think this community is different. It's different and I think Jacobs helped me to see that. What I thought I saw as strictly a race issue, Pam made a comment and it helped me to see that it is not just race. It is an issue of poverty, because the problems are the same for both poor Blacks and poor Whites. I would always think it's a race issue, but when I was faced with them, they weren't issues of race, they were issues of poverty.

As a native of the area, Mr. Parker offered another layer of depth and perspective

to the relationship between race and poverty explaining:

> A lot of the kids [who live on the South end of town] don't see themselves as New Hope kids they see themselves as Tipton Village kids, which… it's difficult, it's a different poverty. In that small geographical area there's White poverty of Tipton then there's Black poverty of New Hope, …and they're two very, very different things. In Tipton, for instance, you would have people… broke, no money, but still did not want to apply for free and reduced lunch. Then you would go to the housing projects [predominantly Black], they're all about assistance. If you can provide assistance no matter what it was, then they wanted it. In Tipton, it was almost a secret to fill out the form or to ask for help… it's crazy but there is a difference. It's like… 'I may be broke, but I have more money than you'. I don't even know what it means but it's real. I'm telling you it's real.

Also a native of New Hope, Officer Daniels offered this take:

> I have seen New Hope change dramatically over the last 25 years, and I will say that our economy has gone downhill, which does not help. I think we have 13,000 residences in New Hope and I believe the last count I heard was 5,500 of those were rentals or section 8 housing; which does not help our economy, it does not help any of the situations. When they closed Cabrini Green it brought in a lot of different people. They moved here because they had vouchers for housing and we had an abundance of cheap housing, which is fine, but it has changed the demographics of the community. When I first started working as a police officer I could have given you probably 60 names of the people in town that were doing this crime or that crime, now we just don't know anymore. We don't have the multi-generational families here anymore. They're very transient and it has just changed.

Perhaps the most common theme emerging from a wide cross-section of study participants was the notion that, with the migration of former Cabrini Green residents came an increase in drug abuse, crime, and poverty. Pastor Farrows offered the following explanation:

> As an African American community leader, I can tell you that there is definitely some resentment from the whole community towards some of the folks that migrated here from Cabrini Green, absolutely. All you hear is 'it's them Chicago people. If it weren't for them Chicago people...'
>
> But they are a product of their environment, that's all they know. Poverty is survival. I was saying to someone from Cabrini... Can you really handle having enough money to not want the basics? Because we see people [from Cabrini Green] who can now meet their basic needs and now that those are met, they destroy their lives. They don't know what to do with the money left over from meeting the basics so they turn to drugs, to gambling, to this and that... so they are lacking the discipline to be able to handle being out of destitute poverty, but poverty itself is the reason why these children are suffering.

To be sure, there is a complex relationship between race and poverty in New Hope, perhaps not altogether unlike other areas; nevertheless, the migration of former Cabrini Green residents over the last couple of decades has added a particularly challenging dimension. Importantly however, when Dr. Grey and her team become aware of marginalizing and oppressive situations, they waste no time taking restorative action regardless of the underlying cause.

The Reorganization – A Bold Plan

So much for Dr. Grey's 'well-known advice' to avoid making alterations to the status quo during the first year of a new administration, because each time this team realized a need or uncovered an unjust circumstance they took action to rectify it, which often resulted in significant renovation of process or program. Sometimes, however, the

impetus for transformation arrives quite suddenly and demands immediate attention. Just half way through the team's first year, New Hope encountered the wrath of Mother Nature in the form of copious unseasonal rains that fell during the winter break and resulted in severe flooding of Washington Elementary School. One of the oldest buildings in the district and the last remaining 'neighborhood school', Washington Elementary was beloved by students and parents alike, thus the news of its peril was particularly unwelcome. Revisiting the events, Dr. Grey recalled:

> We had significant flooding during the Christmas break, and our area was significantly impacted. So, during that time, Washington Elementary received a substantial amount of water that remained with us for a period of time. Our custodians did a phenomenal job in getting the water out and getting the school cleaned up and ready to open; but being the OCD kind of group that we are, we went and did a deeper inspection, and it just wasn't enough for us.

Unwilling to expose their students to potentially hazardous conditions and with time running out on the winter break calendar, the team needed to act quickly. "We had another level of inspectors come in, and [the team and I] even actually climbed up in the rafters and down to the boiler. We discovered some things that were quite unsettling," Dr. Grey remembered. The team, in collaboration with the Regional Office of Education, decided that they could not reopen Washington Elementary for the beginning of the new semester until additional restoration measures could be completed. Without a moment's delay, the team sprung into action, obtaining cost and time estimates and considering contingency plans for students in need of classrooms. Dr. Grey recounted:

> When we secured cost assessments to determine what it would take to decontaminate and restore the building, it was just fiscally irresponsible to ask the taxpayers to pay nine million dollars, and with that we would actually lose four of the 11 classrooms in the building. So, for that sum of money, we would only have 7 classrooms. We just couldn't ask the taxpayers to do that, so we were forced to

[permanently] close the school and redistribute the students into other buildings.

Facing what would be a tremendous challenge even for a weathered, incumbent administration, the new team scrambled to find short-term space for roughly 300 elementary students displaced by the flooding while they grappled with a more long-term solution. "We secured a temporary facility for the start of the term while we worked on plans to rearrange the district to absorb the students into other buildings," recounted Dr. Grey. With no room for arrogance, this team sought input from their entire staff to solve this conundrum. Eager to help, Principal Homer, who was at the time administrator of Jacob Davis Elementary School, recalled sharing an idea with Dr. Grey:

> I said to her 'Well Dr. G, you know one square of my building will house that whole school,' and she replied 'You know what Homer, that might just work.' so they took the preschool out of my building and moved them to another building. It was a tight squeeze, but doable. That gave us the opportunity to move Washington into one wing of my building and that way they could stay together as a school. Those kids from Washington needed some consistency because they had just lost so much.

Engineering the move was a minor miracle in and of itself. In order to accomplish this feat, eight preschool classrooms had to be packed up and moved across town then those same classrooms were repurposed for Washington students, all while trying not to disrupt the students' normal school schedule. "We couldn't cancel classes because of a grant we have that says the students have to attend so many days," recalled Principal Homer. So, essentially, the team brought in four substitute teachers who conducted classes for half of the preschool in spare rooms while those teachers packed up and moved, then repeated the process for the remaining four classrooms. Nonetheless,

moving the preschool students out was merely the tip of a giant iceberg. Principal Homer

recounts the next phase:

> Next, we had to bring some 300 kids in from Washington Elementary and all of their support staff. We had to find space to feed them, arrange schedules so they could have their music, art, and gym classes with their own teachers, and figure out how we were going to get them back and forth to school safely. Remember, Washington was a neighborhood school so all of the kids walked to school. Now they have to figure out how to ride a bus for the first time, and I had a system in place to get some 500 students in and out, now I have almost double that many kids to worry about. To top it all off, the principal at Washington was on maternity leave so we had to accomplish this whole thing without her.

Making arrangements to shuffle that many students from one building to another

without major disruptions in the educational process could take months of planning to

pull off, but this team did not have the luxury of time to plan. Incredibly, the team

accomplished the moves in just a few weeks without significant classroom interruptions

or cancelling any classes. Unfortunately however, that reshuffle would not be the end of

the dilemma, as Dr. Grey explained:

> That was only a temporary plan. The Regional Office would only allow us do that until the end of the school year. We needed a plan to open school [in the fall], send out teaching notices, and send out parent letters… I think we had just eight weeks to figure it all out.

Stepping back momentarily to assess their options, the team returned to an idea

that they had previously tabled as a long-term goal. For many years prior to Dr. Grey's

arrival, New Hope USD had grappled with the intractable perception that some middle

school students received a better educational experience than others depending on from

which side of town one came. In spite of attempts to equalize racial and ethnic diversity

and educational offerings, the two regional middle schools remained rival schools.

Hometown girl and former Valley View student, Principal Homer clarified:

I know just coming from the South end of town, going to Valley View middle as a student, and also just knowing my town, we have the South end of town folks who are mostly made of blue collar White Caucasians, and not a lot of diversity in that area. So several years ago, in order to diversify the school, our district took some students from the East end of our town and all of them also went to Valley View. The East end of town is mostly African American, middle to low range income; some of the housing projects are in that demographic also. So in that one building you have a lot of your lower and lower middle class families. A lot of trailer parks and housing projects were in that area and most of the students who lived in public housing were also part of that building.

In their efforts to diversify Valley View along racial and ethnic lines, the district

failed to consider economic factors. Principal Homer continued:

The North end of town is still considered to be where doctors, lawyers, people of wealth, as you would call it, the upper middle class and even high society folks live. So all of the kids from those wealthier families attended Hilltop Middle School. Because the families on that end of town could afford to support the school, Hilltop was always highly funded. Whether it be private donations from parents… or because you have the fathers that work and mothers at home there was a lot of parental interaction, so there was a lot more things that happened at Hilltop than what happened at Valley View. Hilltop was always considered the upper echelon of the two middle schools. Hilltop was also where the gifted and talented program was housed, so there was always a lot of community support for the gifted program as well.

The opportunity gap between the two ends of town and the two middle schools was well

known to all participants in this study. One administrative staff member recalled her

perception as a kid growing up on the Southeastern side of town:

When I was at Valley View there were always rivalries between the two schools. It was the South end kids and North end kids, so even growing up the North end kids seemed to get more than us in the East and South, it seemed like the town is split up that way. Growing up it was… it still is, 'oh you're living in the North end so you think you're better than the people that live in the South…'

Another elementary administrator recalled:

It's been that way in our community for as long as I can remember… that Hilltop was the prestige school, where all the good kids and all the rich kids went, and then there was Valley View. Hilltop had the gifted program but Valley View didn't. Hilltop had a huge support system… just a lot more opportunities at Hilltop versus what was at Valley View.

Asked if the differences between the two middle schools were merely perception or reality, Curriculum Director Bobby Jean Riche replied, "having taught [at Valley View], some of it was perception and some of it was reality. Hilltop kids definitely had more opportunities than Valley View kids." Ms. Riche explicated the differences succinctly saying,

When I was [a teacher] at Valley View, most of the parents were blue collar and would often have to work two jobs. They would have to work second and third shift in a factory and they couldn't come to the school when we needed them to. They wanted to be there but they simply couldn't. There were simply more stay-at-home moms from Hilltop that could go in to the school and volunteer, or were part of the music arts program, or whatever. We had people that were willing to [volunteer at Valley View] but just couldn't. The most important thing though was that the kids were the same. When they got to the high school, they were all considered good kids, so why were they considered 'bad' when they were at Valley View?

Board President Vega concurred with this assessment saying, "We've always had a split. The North end has always been the rich end and the South end has been poor. There was a perception that it was a racial distinction for sure, but there was a real economic… opportunity difference." Board secretary Dorothy Boynton added:

Valley View didn't have the music program that Hilltop did because the music director at Hilltop is simply amazing. They win every competition they go to. They beat high school choirs, and Valley View didn't have that strong of a music director or the support from the community so those kids kind of felt like they were second-class citizens.

Recognizing early on that even the perception of disparate opportunities between hypothetically equal middle schools was problematic at best, the team considered eliminating the separate middle schools and replacing them with a 5th and 6th grade upper elementary and a 7th and 8th grade junior high school. Considering the fact that all New Hope USD students come together again at the high school, maintaining two separate but supposedly equal middle schools didn't make much sense. Nevertheless, returning to the 'don't rock the boat your first year' advice, such a drastic change involving the children of rich and powerful citizens would almost certainly be political suicide for a new administrative team, so they tabled the discussion for a later time. Dr. Jacobs recalled early discussions regarding the subject, "we really though that restructuring would help the district to eliminate inequities between North and South… rich and poor, but we thought we would need at least a year to plan and a year to prepare everyone."

As fate would have it, however, the district faced a dilemma and the team needed a solution quickly. As Dr. Grey likes to say, "being the team that we are, when faced with a challenge we do what we need to do. We knew that it wouldn't be easy, but it was the right thing at the right time." Completely reorganizing the district was indeed a bold move, and would almost certainly be met with opposition from some Hilltop parents who might feel as though they were losing a privileged status, but it was the only solution that would solve the immediate need to find space for the displaced Washington students and simultaneously eliminate the inequitable dual middle schools. During one conversation, Dr. Grey revealed the though process that led them to make the decision to restructure.

> We knew what was best for the district, but we had to allow everyone else to get there too, so we just let [people] talk. We gave them an idea and let them discuss it… pro/con, yes/no, and ultimately end up with 'yes, that is the right way to go'.

Already well into the second term, the team had no time to waste. They would need to come up with a plan that included facilities, student and staff assignments, impact bargaining with the union, curricular conversions, extra-curricular activities, and a myriad of other considerations that must work in near perfect unison on the first day of classes in August, or the blowback from the community might just bring down this team. Most importantly, they would need buy-in from the community, the Board of Education, principals, and parents if their plan were to have a shot at succeeding. In order to accomplish this, the team would need to communicate their vision and allow all stakeholders to share their feedback and concerns. Mr. Parker recalled how important this was saying:

> I still think one of the best things we had going for us was that we knew how important communication would be. We kept saying that we have to communicate, we have to communicate, and we can't let this get out of hand…

Although the team had a very clear idea of how they wanted the reorganized district to look when all was said and done, they understood how important it would be that the stakeholders could also see the value in creating grade centers in place of the separate and unequal middle schools. The best method of accomplishing that outcome would be to invite the participation of all concerned groups into the process. Very quickly, the team solicited representatives from all invested parties to participate in action committees, each one tasked to consider a different aspect of the overall goal. Board secretary Dorothy Boynton recalled:

> Dr. Grey told the public numerous times during board meetings, we really need a year to figure out how to do this, but we have three months. Here are our options. We got parent committees together; we got tons of committees together in a short amount of time. Made all

these decisions, and presented them to the board and the board voted yes or no on them.

Cautious expediency being of the essence, secretary to Mr. Parker, Brenda Baker remembered how quickly things took off.

> It was like the team was just all of a sudden like, 'ok, let's go!' Each one just took this committee, took that committee, everybody had their committees and it was down to business. I'm not going to say there were no bumps, but they all worked them out. Everybody worked together and got it done. I think that it was very smooth considering; everybody just seemed to get on board with it.

In times of crisis, leaders must have a clear vision and know where they want to go. This team knew that replacing the dual middle schools with grade centers would not only interrupt the inequity but also address the high mobility rate within the district by removing the need for a student to change from one school to another when families move within the district. "We knew that once the district was reorganized, from the fifth grade on, no matter where you move in the district you're still at that same school, so that would really give some stability to our students," Dr. Jacobs explained. Nevertheless, opening important decisions up to committee deliberations is not without potential risk. The team would need to balance the benefits of having wide-support for their plan with the risk of being derailed by a multitude of opinions. Mr. Parker understood the importance of maintaining this balance saying:

> I said when you have a committee you're going to hear all kinds of different voices, and it's not that we didn't listen to opinions, or take them into consideration, but we had a pretty good idea that... with the students that we had, and knowing the school district that we had, we really needed end up with an upper elementary [and a middle school] and I think that helped us stay on track.

Facilitating the committee meetings allowed the team to lead the stakeholders in one direction while still allowing for a thorough debate of the issues. As Dr. Jacobs

recalls, "we would throw out considerations that they may not have thought about. I mean, a couple of those committees were like 'oh my gosh, that's right! I didn't think about that.' In so doing, it helped facilitate the conversations." Dr. Grey explained, "we gave [each committee] a framework, they could dispute it, and they could say no."

The team maintained laser-like focus and kept everyone on track, clearly communicating their progress with the Board of Education along the way to avoid surprises when it came time for a vote on the reorganization plan. Commenting on why he believed the team managed to lead the district to the difficult decision to reorganize, Mr. Parker recounted:

> As those committees came together, we helped them see where we needed to go. Honestly, when we ended, we stopped on a dime exactly where we knew… where we thought we needed to be. I still think that's why we are so successful today, because we knew where we wanted to go from the get-go and I really think we drove it there…

After nearly two months of deliberations, public debate, and preparation, the team compiled their recommendations for the district reorganization and submitted them to the Board of Education. Board member Jason Logan recalled how risky such a proposal was, especially coming from a new administration in their first year.

> That's a crazy risk, and certainly it didn't go without a number of calls to different board members about 'don't you think she ought to at least wait to kind of to get to know this community a little bit before she starts making these radical changes?' Well, she didn't make the radical change, the board did, and we do know this community. My response was, 'I don't know why we didn't think of this before; this is a great idea.' You know, don't put it all on [Dr. Grey] when the board was the one… we didn't have to approve it. We could have just said 'no, we're not going to do that.' But the board understands that the superintendent is our leader. We hired her to make decisions and give us recommendations… It was the right decision.

Once the Board of Education approved the plan, the real work of dismantling and reconstructing the district could begin. One of the biggest hurdles, the team agreed, would be redesigning the entire school bus system to incorporate a substantial number of new riders and new routes without significantly increasing the transportation budget. The team recalls just how complicated that aspect of the reorganization was:

> **Dr. G:** It was huge. It was a whole communications campaign by itself… It was huge.
>
> **JP:** That was, I think probably one of the biggest… it was one of the biggest obstacles, and probably had some of the most difficult conversations. I don't want to say we had to convince people, but it was convincing them and honestly they had to convince us. You know, people didn't want their kids on the bus, and we kept saying, 'Oh we won't have kids on the bus more than 60 minutes' and I'm looking at Dr. G going, 'Don't say that! You know it's going to be 65 [minutes] and people will lose their minds. But honestly… we pulled it off.
>
> **Dr. Jacobs:** No more busses, no more trips! Oh My God! It was the most emotional! I would say that transportation was the most emotional aspect of the entire reorganization. You know, 'My kid is going to be on a bus, with all these other kids'.
>
> **JP:** And cost too. They swore that we couldn't add routes… because the high school busses go all over town and drop at one building, so essentially we ended up with three high school routes. So [people] said, 'there's no way… same amount of buses, same amount of drivers, no way you can keep the same bus times…' but we did it.
>
> **Dr. G:** We added routes, same busses, same start times, and same costs…
>
> **JP**: And [the transportation concern] lasted the longest. It didn't go away until the first week of school… and then… everybody just forgot about it.
>
> **Dr. Jacobs:** And then when the transportation ran, and ran well they were all like 'oh never mind.'

Listening to the team recount their experience, one certainly gets the sense that it was a frantic and stressful period. Mr. Parker remembered, "I think we all did a little bit of all the pieces… really it was more, I want to say yelling at each other," a response that had the whole team laughing. Although said in jest, it was clear that the reorganization

process was a crucible from which the team emerged stronger, closer, and more confident. "We spent a lot of time together," Dr. Grey recalled. "I've thought about that, it was a lot of time together. When you revisit it, you realize how stressful that really was."

The team attributes their success in this major undertaking to the profound sense of responsibility they all shared. The following conversation indicates just how important being fully committed to this course of action was:

> **JP:** I think if we didn't each have skin in the game… I mean because you know how many times I said…
>
> **Dr. G:** "This can't go bad!"
>
> **JP:** This can't go bad G. If this fails, we fail. It's not like somebody is going to rise to the top. We're all going to break through or we are all going down. And we told the principals the same thing. You know they said, 'I need this or that to make this work, give us this much support,' and we would always say, 'You can have all the support that you need, because if this goes bad…'
>
> **Dr. Jacobs:** Yea, it goes bad for everybody.
>
> **JP:** I mean [the leadership team] is in this too, we're not saying, 'Here's your 750 kids, go get them…' you know, it couldn't go bad. The busses couldn't go bad, extra curricular activities can't go bad, I mean…
>
> **Dr. G:** It was more than skin in the game; it was whole body in the game!
>
> **JP:** It was our first year… that's crazy!

In hindsight, even board president Mr. Vega recognized the magnitude of a first-year administration undertaking such radical action as reorganizing the entire district structure.

> I would say, and I've said this to Dr. Grey—I don't know if she believes me, but I've said it—that I don't think the reorganization could have taken place under former superintendent Mr. Davis. That was a pretty radical, radical change. Not that there hasn't been things done like that before, but normally you have a stable administration that has been in the district for a while and knows the district. Now we have a new group… and Dr. Grey was never in favor of doing the reorganization in the first year. It was too quick… very risky. She got a lot of pressure

from Mr. Parker, because he pushed for the reorganization. But let me be perfectly clear, Mr. Parker could have his own ideas and he could argue with the superintendent but when she makes the decision... That's it. He goes with it. That's what I mean about the team working together, arguing things out, and then going on with change.

Although it might be too soon to know for sure, by the end of the data collection phase of this study in November after the reorganization, all signs pointed to a smooth transition and a return to stability throughout the district. Jacque Macallan, principal of newly created Valley View Upper Elementary, gave the reorganization high marks saying:

> I think that it made a huge difference. I do think... I think [the reorganization] had to happen. It was probably one of the best things that could have happened. Would it have happened so soon? Probably not, but I think as far as social equity goes, I think we're much better now. I mean I think we are really strong. I think that by putting all of the 5th and 6th graders in one building and all of the 7th and 8th graders in the other made all the difference in the world. Do I wish the buildings were a little bigger? Yeah, I do a little bit. Maybe one more wing would have been kind of nice, but I think that socially we are pretty good now.

Principal Homer at Hilltop Middle School agreed with this early evaluation of the reorganization saying:

> The reorganization is going well by and large. Parents have been making positive comments, and that's a huge thing because you know you always have negative ninnies. At first some people were a little upset because I kind of told him they couldn't drive down [to the entrance of the building] during dismissal to pick up their kid. They wanted to pick him up at the front door... I have seventh and eighth graders they can walk up here to the parking lot. I have 18 buses that come through here, and eight special education buses. If you get down here in a little car you're going to mess up my whole operation. I don't allow them to come down so [some of them] get a little perturbed but they will get over it, you know they will get over it.

Even elementary building administrators are benefiting from the team's decision to restructure the district. Truman Elementary School principal Ms. Sterling was very

happy to report that she had seen a dramatic difference in her building since the reorganization.

> Oh my gosh… I'm telling you what, I don't know if it's because we've got about 60 less students, or if we're starting to see the different mindset of having those positive relationships with our students, but… I've only had to suspend two times this year, and only because it was a personal safety issue… only 2 times. Last year, I had to suspend 43 times and that was about the old average… so, yes its much better.

Board secretary Dorothy Boynton may have captured the overall sentiments of New Hope best saying, "I'm not glad that Washington Elementary flooded, but I think the whole overall plan is going to be so much better for everyone."

As demonstrated by the preceding examples, when Dr. Grey and her leadership team recognize an inequitable or unjust situation, they do not hesitate to take corrective action regardless of the potential difficulty involved. Time and again, this team has confirmed their commitment to all the children of New Hope, and through their actions, proven that they believe no child regardless of circumstance deserves less than any other. Rather than taking the path of least resistance and gracefully navigating through their first year in office, this team chose to pursue justice, equity, and inclusion at every turn because it was the right thing to do.

CHAPTER 7 – A RELENTLESS JOURNEY TOWARDS JUSTICE

A democratic society cannot survive unless and until its citizens learn how to be free and to protect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all. I remind the reader of Benjamin Barber's (1991) wise council, "there is only one essential task for the educator: teaching liberty" (p. 20). Charged with ensuring such a fundamental undertaking, educational leaders convene at the apogee of this imperative and must shepherd our institutions of public education along the path towards liberty and justice for all. As such, we must strive to more fully appreciate the ways in which effective educational leaders engender socially just, inclusive, and excellent educational environments.

To that end, the purpose of this transformative case study was to explore whether transformative leadership theory could best explain how one self-identified social justice-oriented leadership team at the district level endeavors to create an inclusive and excellent learning environment for all students, including those from traditionally marginalized groups. The following questions helped govern this study:

1. How does the leadership team (superintendent and two assistants) interact and relate to one another?

2. How do they interact with the community, School Board members, principals, parents, and students?

3. How do they address the needs of traditionally marginalized and oppressed students?

In order to answer the main question of this transformative case study, I collected observational and interview data from the leadership team and various people within their administrative orbit. Over the course of a six-month period, I conducted four separate site

visits, each one lasting several days (see appendix A for a list of observations and interviews). During each visit, I observed the leadership team in situ as they conducted the business of district administration in various forms, taking careful field notes, which were then transcribed and coded. I also conducted numerous informal and six formal tape-recorded in-depth interviews with members of the leadership team, each one lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. In addition to the leadership team, I conducted 19 formal in-depth interviews with various district employees, School Board members, and community leaders, each one lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. All formal interviews were transcribed and coded for common ideas and relationships that emerged from the data as supported by scholarly literature, the framework of Transformative Leadership Theory, and the participants themselves. These concepts were then analyzed with the aid of NVivo$^{©}$ qualitative software to begin to produce a more coherent view of the data and allow key concepts to surface. The data were then organized into major themes and, using the participants' own words, meticulous narratives were constructed to respond to the study's three sub-questions, each one becoming a separate section.

In chapter four, I portrayed the context within which this case study evolved, detailing the historical, socio-political, and economic background of New Hope. I carefully described the school district and its demographics, and then provided important contextual information regarding the previous administration to give the reader a sense of the mindset within the district as the subject leadership team began their tenure. Thereafter, I described from several different perspectives, the development of the current leadership team beginning with the hiring of Dr. Grey to become the next superintendent. As articulated by numerous district employees, community leaders, and

School Board members, I embarked on a detailed narrative of Dr. Grey as a leader, and then described in detail the evolution of this leadership team.

Turning next to the complex and rather unique ways in which this team relates to one another, I described five distinct yet interrelated levels of association that emerge from the data. As expected, this team maintains a professional working relationship; yet, at the same time they often interact in a non-hierarchical manner more suggestive of a group of colleagues. Perhaps not surprisingly, this group has also coalesced into a tightly bound team out of a shared sense of purpose and responsibility. Notably, however, behind closed doors this leadership team displays a rapport that is far more common among best friends than professional colleagues. At an even more profound and extraordinary level, this team seems to have become a family of sorts, siblings by choice bonded by an implicit, unconditional, and absolute trust in one another.

Finally in chapter four, I detailed the intricate and multi-faceted ways in which this team interacts with one another. Describing their synergy, complementarity, and like-mindedness, I documented the ways in which this team approaches the administration of New Hope USD with a sense of platonic intimacy peppered by a judicious amount of divergence.

In Chapter five, I endeavored to reveal and describe the team's interactions with various parties invested in the success of New Hope USD. In many ways, a community revolves around its public school system. Those who apprentice within the walls of public schools and become inculcated in the habitus of its people either enhance or undermine the character of many a small towns and neighborhoods. As such, there are a

host of disparate parties in and around New Hope who are invested in the district's administration.

This leadership team relies on the multiplicity of their individual strengths and shared responsibility to effectively negotiate successful partnerships with the community, the Board of Education, their building administrators, and parents and students. In chapter five, I described this team's relationships and interactions with each major stakeholder and delineated their strategy for building cohesive, yet autonomous governance throughout the district.

In spite of, or perhaps even owing to, an unusually eventful inaugural year, this leadership team has undertaken and accomplished several significant milestones in an effort to engender a socially just and equitable learning environment for all students within their district. In chapter six, I chronicled the courageous activities of this team as they lead New Hope USD towards a more inclusive and excellent educational venue. Reflecting on the accomplishments of this administrative team vis-à-vis *just leadership,* educational leaders who are committed to redressing the injustices of marginalization and oppression may discover new insights into their own leadership and cultivate more inclusive and excellent learning environments for all students.

In this final chapter, as I contemplate the findings that emerged from the data collection phase of this investigation, I shall endeavor to ascertain whether transformative leadership theory best explains the actions of the social justice-oriented leadership team at the center of this study as they strive to create an inclusive and excellent learning environment for all students. I will then turn my attention to particular recommendations

that emerge from the data; my reflections concerning the research process; and end with concluding remarks.

Inference to the Best Explanation

I opened this dissertation with the assertion that the survival of our democratic society is dependent, in large part, on teaching our children to be free and to defend the virtues of equality and justice for all. If we are to believe in the soaring ideals upon which this country was established, and if we are to trust that a more democratic and inclusive society is both possible and necessary, then we must assume that educating all children in and for a more democratic society is an essential part of that ambition (Møller, 2010). As public servants accountable to all citizens, I contend, with Ryan (2006) that those who lead our institutions of public education have, at a minimum, an ethical obligation to ensure that all children regardless of their social identity are welcomed and included in the entirety of the educational experience. Further I affirm, as does Shields (2012), that for the institution of public education to be socially just it must represent equity for all students in terms of both access to and outcomes of the entirety of the educational experience. Therefore, the leaders of public educational institutions have both an ethical and a moral obligation to ensure that all aspects of schooling are inclusive and welcoming for all students.

The challenges associated with extracting generalizable conclusions from a single case study notwithstanding, Evers and Wu (2006) describe a pattern of extrapolation known as abductive reasoning, or inference to the best explanation. This logical frame implies that, after demonstrating why other plausible theories fail to adequately describe the phenomenon under investigation, it is reasonable to infer a theory that best explains

the evidence presented is probably accurate. I will now review several of the most likely

theories of leadership to determine which, if any, are able to adequately describe this

team's social justice leadership praxis.

Transactional leadership. While there are countless theories about leadership

spanning millennia, they are for the most part intended only to serve as an anchor, a

guide, and a touchstone for the parties tapped with the mantle of leadership. In chapter

two, I explained that Burns (1978) divides the body of scholarship into two main

partitions, transactional and transforming leadership. Transactional leadership, according

to Burns, involves making rational and technical decisions through negotiations based on

practical concerns and largely maintains a status quo within the organization. The fact

that transactional leadership theories are essentially anchored by self-serving objectives

and have no moral compass to guide the overall direction set by the leader; they would be

broadly eliminated as possible candidates to best explain the socially just actions of the

leadership team at the center of this study.

Transforming leadership on the other hand, according to Burns, involves a clear

moral purpose that compels the leader to action and engagement "with others in such a

way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and

morality" (p. 20), and ultimately has a transforming effect on both. I believe most

educational leaders would agree with Burns' notion of a moral purpose to education;

however, not all educational leadership theories advance a clearly defined moral and

conscious purpose or advocate for action towards tangible social change.

Distributed leadership theory. With its major focus on increasing leadership

capacity, refining pedagogy, and creating a more democratic organization (McKenzie &

Locke, 2014), I considered distributive leadership theory as a possible candidate to best explain how this team endeavors to create an inclusive and excellent learning environment for all students. As a contending theory, distributed leadership effectively describes some of the philosophical underpinnings of this triad. Dr. Grey is quick to admit that she depends on her team to complement her strengths and counter her weaknesses. She recognizes that, although her strength is in her overall concept and direction for the district, she relies on the synergy of her team to bring her vision to fruition. "I can't get caught up on the fact… I can't get haughty that I came up with this or that idea because it would never get done without these two. I am totally dependent on them and I recognize it." Likewise, Dr. Jacobs and Mr. Parker are equally humble in their recognition of the strength represented by their relationship. Dr. Jacobs explained,

> I recognize Jerry's part in the fact that I can come up with all the details, but I lack the ability to execute some of them because I don't… I just don't know, meaning I want to get there someday… so I want to be like Parker.

To this discussion, Mr. Parker added,

> I do think [Dr. G] is right… she is the big picture and Obi Wan is a lot of times the detail. [Dr. Jacobs] will say, 'we need to do blah, blah, blah… but a lot of the time I'm the follow-up. Like I'll say, 'Okay, did you do this detail? Did you do this detail?'

This team has clearly divided the major responsibilities of district administration among themselves, with Dr. Grey taking ownership of the relationships with the community, the Board of Education, parents and students, and Dr. Jacobs and Mr. Parker assuming ownership of the province related to building administrators. Furthermore, they have returned a great degree of autonomy and leadership responsibilities to their

building administrators, redistributing governance from its former highly centralized position.

On many levels, this team demonstrates characteristics of distributed leadership theory, which has some noteworthy benefits. For instance, dividing the domains of an organization fairly equally and distributing the leadership responsibilities across multiple individuals reduces the likelihood of compounding errors made by a single individual and allows an organization to take advantage of the talents and strengths of other individuals in a synergistic manner (Park & Datnow, 2009).

Although a more distributed style of leadership has its advantages—encouraging downstream leadership development, improving the flow of information, creating a more democratic work environment—the leader of such an organization must have absolute confidence in his or her team, the self-assurance and humility to relinquish control over certain decisions, and the ability to instill trust and loyalty in those appointed responsibility over significant portions of the organization. Dr. Grey has certainly demonstrated that she trusts her team and the people with whom she charges with the management of the district.

> I don't micromanage, but here are my non-negotiables… Service the children and keep us out of the newspaper. And I trust them to make it happen. They do. I'm lucky… I have a great group. They are so good… I have a great group.

Moreover, from her willingness to 'take a Mulligan' on an interview question, to the ease with which she admits her shortcomings and her inclination to surround herself with individuals who possess complimentary talents, hubris does not seem to exasperate Dr. Grey.

Distributive leadership, in theory, may seem like a logical reaction to heroic and authoritarian styles of organizational leadership. In practice, however, it usually manifests in a more hybrid model that retains hierarchical as well as heterarchical characteristics (Gronn, 2008). Spillane (2006) describes a style of distributed leadership that is purposefully composed of synergistic relationships among certain individuals within an organization. Among this group of individuals working as a team, there is a high level of interdependence and shared responsibilities that result in synergistically additive outcomes. This certainly describes the symbiotic relationship between Dr. Grey, Dr. Jacobs, and Mr. Parker. There is a consensus of opinion within the district that this group demonstrates an almost enchanted quality with which they interact, more often than not producing results that far surpass expectations.

Gronn (2002) adds another dimension of evolution to this type of relationship that he refers to as *intuitive working relations* and *institutionalized practice*. In the first iteration, two or more individuals spontaneously develop close working relationships that become interdependent and synergistic over time. The spontaneous bond that developed almost immediately between Dr. Grey and Mr. Parker certainly demonstrates an intuitive working relationship that has evolved and strengthened into a profoundly trusting and compatible bond. In Gronn's second iteration, a more intentional approach fosters a formally structured team or working group that becomes symbiotic as well. Dr. Grey's insightful choice to convince her trusted friend and colleague Dr. Jacobs to join the team most definitely could be seen as an example of this practice. Additionally, the manner in which this triad has come together and bonded is further evidence of Gronn's intuitive working relations.

While distributed leadership theory may effectively describe many aspects of this team's leadership style, including the flattening of hierarchical structures, sharing of organizational responsibilities, and encouraging down-stream leadership development, this theory does not address ethical concerns or issues of morality and justice. Furthermore, as a theory, distributed leadership does not attend to a higher social purpose or offer guidance to leaders who are committed to enacting just and equitable transformations. From an ethical standpoint, distributive leadership theory simply lacks the moral grounding necessary to adequately explain this leadership team's strong commitment to social justice or to warrant the degree of risk and exposure they assumed when enacting the numerous courageous and socially just resolutions during their inaugural year and subsequent tenure.

Instructional leadership. While gaining considerable attention in the past few decades as somewhat of a catchall concept that could include anything leaders might do to improve pedagogy and academic achievement (Costello, 2015), most interpretations of this theory place the central focus of educational leaders on the behavior of classroom teachers "as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students" (Leithwood & Duke, 1998, p. 34). This theoretical model is frequently broadened to include other organizational variables such as school culture and consists of three categories of leadership practice related to this wider definition including, defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting the school climate (Shields, 2016; Southworth, 2002). Nevertheless, instructional leadership theory remains focused mainly on improving scholastic performance and supporting teachers in achieving this goal. Scholars generally acknowledge that instructional leaders "do not

appear to affect the academic achievement of students directly," rather, their influence emanates from activities that support the efficient operation of the school and promote a "positive and orderly environment for learning" (Heck, Larson, & Marcoulides, 1990, p. 95).

Instructional leadership theory remains somewhat imprecisely defined, making it a challenge to evaluate the extent to which scholars studying the theory are even referring to the same facet (Costello, 2015; Heck, Larson, & Marcoulides, 1990; Leithwood & Duke, 1998; Southworth, 2002). Further complicating the application of this abductive review to instructional leadership theory, Hallinger and McCary (1990) report "studies support a view of instructional leadership as a complex role that is dependent on personal, contextual, and organizational factors" (p. 91), implying that different school contexts necessitated distinct types of instructional leadership. Moreover, much of the scholarship generated on instructional leadership theory focuses on building administrators rather than district leadership.

Although the data collected from this study suggest that this leadership team supports the primary goals of instructional leadership, the theory itself fails to specifically address issues of power and privilege or unjust values, beliefs, and assumptions teachers may embrace that result in the marginalization and oppression of some students. While there is some mention of instructional leaders promoting positive educational cultures conducive to learning (Leithwood & Duke, 1998; Southworth, 2002) the theory fails define such positive cultures as being inclusive or unambiguously condemning marginalization and oppression. For these reasons, instructional leadership theory fails to adequately explain Dr. Grey and her team's approach to social justice leadership.

Transformational leadership. With origins in James McGregor Burns' (1978) seminal work, transformational leadership theory's principal goal is to harness the energy and commitment of educational leaders' vision of organizational modification through the development of collaborative capacity to conquer deficiencies and attain challenging objectives (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Among the most extensively studied educational leadership models, transformational leadership theory is generally divided into four major dimensions—*setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization*, and *managing the instructional program* with each major facet further segmented into three or four specific practices (Leithwood, 2010).

According to Leithwood, setting *directions* involves "the establishment of a moral purpose as a basic stimulant for one's work" (p.159), yet no clear definition of a moral purpose is given. In fact, Leithwood merely suggests that "personally important goals" are what motivate people. Given the lack of specificity here, it is imprudent to assume that all school leaders find social justice and emancipation to be personally important goals, as do Dr. Grey and her team.

Subsumed under this first dimension, transformational leaders seek to build a shared vision, establish group goals, and maintain high performance expectations. Transformational leaders, according to Leithwood (2010), rely on their charismatic personalities and inspirational motivation to generate a commonly identified purpose within the organization that drives the combined efforts of the institution toward the stated goals. The data collected during this study clearly reveal a leadership team that demonstrates compelling personalities. With unanimous agreement, Dr. Grey and her team were described as charismatic, motivating, energetic, and passionate. The evidence

clearly suggests that the team has a well-defined vision for the district that involves creating a welcoming and inclusive educational experience for all students, particularly those who have habitually been marginalized and left behind in terms of academic success.

Nevertheless, the data indicate that the team's vision of socially just schools has not always been clearly communicated downstream to their principals. One building administrator admitted that she was not certain she knew what the leadership's goals were.

> I felt it kind of difficult to know the true vision, because I never heard it come from Dr. Grey. It came from [Dr. Jacobs and Mr. Parker], but I never heard [Dr. Grey] speak.

Another principal stated, "I don't know much about Dr. Grey because I haven't really met with her." When confronted with a hypothetical dilemma concerning transgender children and single-sex restrooms, one administrator was unable to predict what advice the leadership team might provide.

> I don't know. I'd probably call Mr. Parker first and he would tell me, 'I don't know what do you want to do?' So I would call Dr. Grey, and I don't know what she would say… To speculate… I don't know what she would say. It kind of makes me giggle, because I truly don't know what she would say. I can't even speculate, I think she would say, "We just have to figure this out. What have other schools done… maybe? What do the parents say? I don't know.

Another specific practice included in *setting directions* involves fostering the acceptance of group goals in such a way that others adopt the overarching organizational goals as their own. The data indicate that principals and staff in New Hope USD have begun to foster inclusive attitudes and develop their own welcoming customs. Principal Herman's advocacy for a school-based GED program, for instance, demonstrates her

shared commitment to social justice, as does School Resource Officer Daniels' proposal to create a peer tribunal to provide students a voice in their own governance regarding minor disciplinary matters.

The second major dimension of transformational leaders as described by Leithwood (2010) is *developing people*, which not only can be thought of as taking action to improve individual and group capacity in terms of the knowledge and skill required to accomplish the organizational goals, but also in terms of "commitment and resilience, the dispositions needed to persist in applying that knowledge and skill" (pp. 159-160). Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) list three specific behaviors involved in this dimension of transformational leadership including, individualized consideration/support, intellectual stimulation, and modeling key values and practices. Transformational leaders realize the capacity of those under their direction and foster growth and development, often through the delegation of responsibilities to facilitate self-actualization (Leithwood, 2010). Dr. Grey and her team take seriously their commitment to develop the potential of individuals within their organization. Dr. Grey's persistent encouragement that, in spite of his inability to envision himself returning to school at this time, Mr. Parker should finish his doctorate is one clear example of this dimension. Ms. Cheyanne Rayne also attributes her advancement in terms of her education and her career to Dr. Grey's insistent yet caring guidance. Furthermore, the data clearly indicate that this team consistently endeavors to foster self-confidence and develop individual capacity through the return of autonomy and delegation of responsibilities back to their principals and other staff, thus modeling important leadership behaviors.

Leithwood (2010) explains that the third dimension, *redesigning the organization*, involves building collaborative cultures, restructuring, building productive relationships with parents and communities, and connecting the school to its wider environment. Transformational leadership theory assumes that motivating people to grow and develop individually and strive to accomplish ambitious organizational goals requires conditions within the organization to be conducive to those objectives. To that end, according to Leithwood, building collaborative cultures where individuals have the opportunity to authentically collaborate and contribute to the success of the organization is an essential practice for transformational leaders.

This often requires reorganizing structural components and building collaborative opportunities into the organizational operation as well as establishing a sense of trust that collaborative efforts will not be made in vane. This leadership team has taken a proactive approach to collaboration, encouraging their staff to become active partners in the realization of the district's goals. In particular, the team utilized collaborative strategies to facilitate the redesign of the district upon the fortuitous closing of Washington Elementary School.

Dr. Grey's efforts to build effective relationships with parents and the wider community are clearly evident among the data. From her partnerships with the local community college and countywide business and industry that were essential in creating the Phoenix Program, to her many personal contacts with parents and community leaders, Dr. Grey has demonstrated a willingness to incorporate the wider community into the successful management of the district.

The fourth dimension of transformative leadership described by Leithwood (2010) involves the management of the instructional program, by which he means the more practical and prescriptive tasks associated with the day-to-day operation of any organization. Included under this dimension are staffing, instructional support, monitoring school activity, and buffering staff from distractions. Dr. Grey and her team have demonstrated efficient forethought in developing their administrative capacity by moving key individuals into positions where their talents and dedication to the children, as well as their tacit understanding of socially just leadership empower them to achieve the goals of the district. Nevertheless, the data clearly indicate that this leadership team implicitly trusts their staff and believes it is more important to build autonomy and self-confidence among their principals, allowing them to manage the instructional programs within their own buildings.

Although transformational leadership may describe many of the observed leadership traits of this team, the theoretical model fails to provide a moral grounding or a touchstone from which this team's pursuit of social justice can be charted. With its emphasis on efficiency and staff development, transformational leadership fails to address the needs of those on the margin of society who suffer from oppression and injustice. In spite of the similar moniker, transformational leadership theory does not embrace the quality of leadership inspired by Burns' (2003) when he wrote:

> Transforming leaders define public values that embrace the supreme and enduring principles of a people. These values are the shaping ideas behind constitutions and laws and their interpretation. They are the essence of declarations of independence, revolutionary proclamations, momentous statements by leaders that go to the core meaning of events, that define what is at stake, such as the Gettysburg Address... They are the inspiration and guide to people who pursue and seek to shape change, and they are the standards by which the

realization of the highest intentions is measured. Transforming values lie at the heart of transforming leadership, determining whether leadership indeed can be transforming (p. 29).

A theory of leadership that best describes the ways in which this leadership team endeavors to engender a socially just and equitable learning environment that is welcoming and inclusive, must forefront those beliefs, attitudes, and actions that address issues "concerned with *end-values,* such as liberty, justice, and equality" (Burns, 1978, p. 426, italics in original). While Dr. Grey and her team do exhibit some of qualities described by the previously discussed leadership theories, the aforementioned models cannot adequately account for this team's deeply grounded commitment to the moral and conscious purpose of providing socially just and democratic educational outcomes for all students. I now turn to two theories of leadership that foreground such values.

Moral leadership theory. The notion of moral leadership is, by definition, focused on the values and ethics of leaders themselves (Leithwood & Duke, 1998). A complicated subject indeed, Frick (2008) makes the important distinction that "values are motivated preferences, conceptions of what is desirable, in personal or collective terms," which influence decisions and actions within a social setting. Morals and morality, he continues, are a "special class of values where differentiations between good and evil, right and wrong, praiseworthiness and blameworthiness are made" (p. 51).

Why should moral leadership find relevance in the administration of public institutions of education? As Greenfield (2004) asserts, "the education of the public's children is by its very nature a moral activity…" (p. 174), and the relationships critical to the work of school administrators are formed around this moral activity. Starratt (1991)

agrees, declaring "educational administrators have a moral responsibility to be proactive about creating an ethical environment for the conduct of education" (p 187).

Nevertheless, for a theory of leadership to have practical value, it must provide its followers a touchstone that grounds and guides the management of ethical dilemmas encountered in practice. Much of the literature concerning moral leadership, however, fails to adequately anchor philosophical debate about the nature of morality to the ethics of value-laden educational administration. Starratt (1991) manages to portray a framework of moral leadership that may provide sufficient grounding points to be a potentially effective guide for educational leaders committed to the establishment of socially just and inclusive schools. His model is divided into three interrelated ethics— critique, justice, and caring—which, considered simultaneously, can be applied comprehensively to the myriad of moral dilemmas encountered by educational administrators.

Beginning with what he terms an ethic of critique, Starratt explains, "no social arrangement is neutral" (p. 189) rather, one side always benefits at the expense of the other. The premise of critique, Starratt expounds, "forces administrators to confront the moral issues involved when schools disproportionately benefit some groups in society and fail others" (p. 190). Being grounded in an ethic of critique compels a moral leader to expose injustice by asking questions such as: Who benefits and who is disenfranchised by this arrangement? Which group defines what is valued and what is worthless? Who decides which groups may participate fully and which ones are subjugated to the margins? The answers to these and similar critical questions invite moral leaders to take action to engender equity. Considering the inherently democratic purpose of public

education, Starratt asserts the educational administrator has a moral obligation to ensure schools prepare all students equally to "take their responsible place in and for the community" (p. 191).

While an ethic of critique offers leaders a standard by which unjust arrangements can be exposed, it fails on its own to provide guidance as to how to reconstruct such inequities. Starratt (1991) offers an ethic of justice to provide clarity at this point saying, "we govern ourselves by observing justice. That is to say, we treat each other according to some standard of justice that is uniformly applied to all our relationships" (p. 191). Without clearly identifying what 'some standard of justice' looks like, Starratt invokes the principles of balance and impartiality when he refers to the uniform application of such a standard, meaning that ethical decisions and actions should not benefit or burden any individual or group unfairly and the effects should apply equally to all actors, including the decision maker.

Nevertheless, one needs only to invoke the biblical image of King Solomon calling for a sword to resolve two women's claims of maternity to the same infant to recognize the limitations of an impartial ethic of justice devoid of compassion. To his ethic of critique and ethic of justice, therefore, Starratt (1991) adds the ethic of caring, which focuses on a quality of human relationships that demand *absolute regard* for one another. He explains that absolute regard involves each person in a relationship "occupying a position for each other of absolute value; neither one can be used as a means to an end; each enjoys an intrinsic dignity and worth, and given the chance, will reveal genuinely loveable qualities" (p. 195). He further attests that such an ethic "honors

the dignity of each person and desires to see that person enjoy a fully human life" (p. 195).

With these three equal ethics then, Starratt (1991) is able to respond to the moral concerns of identifying injustice, operationalizing ethical governance, and respecting the dignity and humanity of all. The data collected during this study clearly illustrate this team's critical approach to administration. Dr. Grey and her team have demonstrated the resolve to question the fairness of their institution with respect to equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for all students. Soon after taking the reigns at New Hope USD, this team identified a number of students who had been disenfranchised by the traditional pathway to graduation and, thinking outside the box, conceived and launched the Phoenix Program.

Designed as a means to match the needs of one group of students with those of the community, the Phoenix Program demonstrates both an ethic of justice—in that all students, including those who have not benefited from the traditional educational experience, are afforded an equitable opportunity to earn that important credential, and an ethic of caring showing absolute regard and a willingness to acknowledge those students' right to be who they are. Dr. Grey and her team demonstrated the three ethics of moral leadership numerous times throughout the often tumultuous first year of their administration, as established by the data.

Although moral leadership theory certainly speaks to the value-laden issues of liberty and justice, and emphasizes the need for a critically alert consciousness, it fails to address the core issues of power and privilege that sustain injustice, and falls short of

offering the hope and promise of genuine social transformation, the ultimate goal of genuinely transforming leadership.

Democratic leadership theory. In some respects, democratic leadership theory shares common ground with the concept of distributed leadership discussed previously. Both highlight interaction among individuals over hierarchical, top-down decision-making, both emphasize an emergent property where governance develops from the mutual interactions and relationships between people within the organization, and both share helpful descriptive or analytical ideas (Woods, 2004). Distributed leadership should not be conflated with democratic leadership theory, however, where the former is predominantly a prescriptive concept and the later is unapologetically normative. Møller (2010) describes democratic leadership as a moral activity that is meaningless without recognizing education as being entrenched in democratic values. She explains that democratic leadership theory:

> implies that the primary responsibility of education is to create democratic citizens, a conviction that a more democratic and egalitarian organization of society is both possible and desirable, and that education can have an important role to play in attaining this kind of society (p. 1).

Beyond the political definition of democracy—rule by the people, which stems from the Greek words *demos* meaning people, and *kratos* implying rule—democratic leadership theory reaches toward a more profound meaning. Democracy in this context refers to what Starratt (2001) describes as "the social forms of living together as equals under the law, citizens with moral bonds to one another, yet each free to pursue their own interests" (p. 334), and embraces Green's (1999) more reflective interpretation that

"expresses the experienced-based possibility of more equal, respectful, and mutually beneficial ways of community life and 'habits of the heart'" (p. vi).

Møller (2010) contends that one of the main responsibilities of democratic leadership is "to build educational institutions around central democratic values such as promoting equity and social justice in the school as well as in the wider community" (p. 2). These institutions, according to Møller, should be conceptualized as democratic communities "based on the acceptance and celebration of difference rather than the nostalgic striving for homogeneity, and include key concepts like interdependence and the common good" (p. 2).

The leadership team at the center of this study certainly demonstrates a commitment to promote the democratic values described by this theory. As Dr. Jacobs explained, "social justice is about teaching that difference is okay. There's nothing wrong with people who don't agree with you or people that are different from you, or people who approach life or have different perspective than you, it's not wrong." This team recognizes the importance of interdependence and promoting the public good of a democratic education. Reflecting on the benefits of the Phoenix Program, for instance, Mr. Parker noted,

> We were talking about how we're either going to find a way to support them now or the community is going to have to support them later, so we looked for a way to do what was right for the students and the community.

Although democratic leadership theory emphasizes the ideals of socially just leadership and calls for the type of individual, organizational, and social transformation encouraged by Burns (1978), the model lacks specificity in terms of guidance for educational leaders dealing with issues such as marginalization and oppression (Shields,

2016), and fails to address the need for a moral imperative and the courage to act in the face of public opposition. While the data collected during this study demonstrate that this social-justice oriented leadership team displays some characteristics described by each of the preceding theories of leadership, no single model adequately encapsulates the totality of their leadership style. I now turn to a theory of leadership that I believe more accurately reflects the essence of what makes Dr. Grey and her team especially effective in creating a welcoming, inclusive, and excellent learning environment for all students.

Transformative leadership theory. Building on the shortcomings of the previously discussed models of transforming leadership, yet making significant progress, transformative leadership theory begins with a well-defined tripartite goal of radical transformation at an individual, organizational and societal level in mind, and is firmly anchored in the values of liberty, deep democracy, and justice. At the very core of transformative leadership theory is a recognition that all forms of injustice exist as a vile stain of disgrace defiling the honor of humanity, an admission that endures as a profound burden—a mandate that compels just leaders to transformative action. Existing alongside this acknowledgement of injustice is the promise of more equitable social arrangements; and, shepherding the relentless crusade from the former state to the latter is the essence of transformative leadership.

Transformative leadership theory, unlike the previously considered models, offers those who seek its council a well-defined moral anchor, imparts a clear lens through which the ethical decisions of leadership come into focus, and provides a touchstone from which to evaluate progress towards transformative change. Furthermore, transformative leadership theory responds to the basal cause of inequity, which is the inequitable

distribution and immoral misuse of power. Instead of viewing power as an all-or-nothing phenomenon, however, transformative leadership advocates for the moral and democratic use of power to interrupt inequitable and unjust social relationships (Quantz, et al., 2001; Shields, 2016; Weiner, 2003).

Akin to Starratt's (1991) notion of an ethic of critique, transformative leadership theory demands the critical evaluation of all social relationships and organizational structures to expose inequitable and oppressive conditions (Shields, 2009, 2010a, 2013, 2016). Transformative leaders begin with a profoundly introspective evaluation of their own deeply held beliefs and attitudes, which sometimes takes the form of an epiphany. Dr. Jacobs, for instance, as a person who has passively benefited from White privilege, recalled when her viewpoint dramatically changed.

> Until I started the doctoral program, I was so clueless. I was so unaware, and absolutely a completely different person when I looked at situations and things. I was very regimented with respect to 'this is the way it is supposed to be, and this is what we do in schools.' Now social justice is at the heart of my worldview and affects every decision that I make.

For others, transformative leadership theory offers the framework and language to organize and describe a tacit, lived understanding of injustice, and to define their experience of entrenched inequity in the social structures and relationships around them. Coming to more of an enlightened understanding of her own life experiences, Dr. Grey described her introspective journey this way,

> I think... remember I said that the doctoral program and the studies in social justice gave me the language for my experiences. And that is still true and it actually kind of validated what I knew my leadership style to be, because I am still the same person I was then... I'm going to say it just gave me the language to name my reality.

In addition to a reflexive, inward-looking critical lens, transformative leadership theory demands a deeply reflective contemplation of the attitudes, beliefs, values, and actions that undergird and perpetuate injustice not only within one's organization but also throughout society. As a matter of course, transformative leaders ask the critical questions, "Who benefits and who is disenfranchised by this arrangement? Who holds the power and who is held powerless? Which group decides what knowledge is important and what gets ignored?" (Shields, 2013). Critical reflection is, for Dr. Grey and her team, so deeply ingrained in their leadership praxis they barely notice its application.

> It's just the team we have. There was a need, it manifested itself and this team is going to address it. We are not going to wait... as soon as we realize what's going on and we realize that's not going to work, we take action. So when these things happen, when we discover a need, you just have to know this team, we're going to tackle it. And it's not like we decided, 'oh these are the changes we want to make'... That's not at all how it happened. These things evolved, Washington flooded, we had these kids who were age-inappropriate for the grade they were in, something had to be done and we did it.

Transformative leadership theory is also unique in that as much as it provides a framework for just leadership, it more profoundly describes a way of being, an ontological and existential awakening that grounds and guides one's interactions within the social realm. According to Carolyn Shields (2016), the theory's most notable scholar,

> Transformative leadership is as much a way of life and a way of (re)thinking as it is a leadership theory. It does not address the specifics of budgeting or personnel management or facility construction or many other tasks a school leader may encounter; however, it does offer a set of underlying tenets that can guide these and all other decisions leaders will be called upon to make. In other words, it is a lens through which to carefully examine all aspects of schooling. (p. 22)

Having spend years investigating educational leadership and reviewing all available scholarship relating to social justice and transforming leadership devoted

towards more democratic and socially just individual, organizational, and social reform, Shields (2016) identified what she calls the eight tenets of transformative leadership theory:

1. A mandate to effect deep and equitable change

2. The need to deconstruct knowledge frameworks that perpetuate inequity and injustice and to reconstruct them in more equitable ways

3. The need to address the inequitable distribution of power

4. An emphasis on both the private (individual) and public (collective) good

5. A focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice

6. An emphasis on interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness

7. The necessity to balance critique with promise

8. The call to exhibit moral courage.

Reflecting on these eight tenets that encapsulate transformative leadership theory, it becomes clear that this theory comprehensively responds to the inward and outward expression of moral leadership, addresses the core beliefs, attitudes, and actions that undergird injustice and oppression, speaks truth to power, balances the need to call out inequity with the hope that springs from the promise of a more just future, and recognizes the dignity and inclusion of all humanity.

Imagined as a conceptual model (figure 1), transformative leadership theory resembles the symbol of infinity both literally and figuratively. Beginning with the identification of inequity and compelled by the burden of injustice, the transformative leader employs critical scrutiny balanced by hope and promise to challenge and dismantle marginalizing and oppressive mental frameworks and reconstruct them in ways that

promote inclusion and deep democracy. Holding the public good of the social order in balance with the private needs and desires of the individual, transformative leaders courageously undertake an equitable redistribution of power and privilege strategically intended to transform the organization. Importantly, transformative leadership theory holds as immutable deeply democratic values such as emancipation, equity, and inclusion, and consistently acknowledges the interconnected interdependence of our global society. Finally, as the infinite shape of the model suggests, the work of a transformative leader is never complete, rather it is a relentless journey towards justice.

Dr. Alice Grey, Dr. Pam Jacobs, and Mr. Jerry Parker have assumed the mantle of leadership at New Hope USD as a synergistic team, each galvanized by a deeply personal commitment to social justice. In their first year at the helm of a large mid-Western urban public school district this team faced significant challenges, uncovered certain troubling circumstances, confronted entrenched inequities, cultivated mutually beneficial partnerships, introduced innovative programs, and forged genuinely heartfelt relationships. By all accounts, the data indicate a successful inaugural year; nevertheless, does transformative leadership theory best describe this team's approach to district administration? Taking each tenet individually, I will examine some of this team's major accomplishments through the lens of transformative leadership theory.

A mandate for deep and equitable change. Shields (2013) took judicious care in her choice of words to portray the eight tenets of transformative leadership theory so that each one would carry the sobering weight of its intended meaning. The first tenet of transformative leadership theory speaks to an upwelling of purpose from within the leader driven by an agony that emanates from the combined and countless silent voices of

those who suffer the despair of oppression. From the moment one meets Dr. Grey, her passion and conviction to defend and encourage the abandoned and forgotten souls is evident. Recall the words of her administrative assistant Savannah Shepard when she declared, "she's saving them all Tom. She's saving all the kids one at a time. She's saving them all the time." To which, Opal Wooster added,

> Yeah, she's out to save every kid. That's her big deal, doesn't matter what color, what kind, she's out to save every one of them. And she wants a program for everything so that she can... This one will fit into that program; this one will fit into that program. We need this; we need that...

Dr. Grey has demonstrated her mandate for deep and equitable change through her championing of such things as the Phoenix Program, the GED Program, and working to ensure that all children in the district can learn without having to choose between a full belly and a battered dignity. Time and time again, Dr. Grey exhibited the critical awareness that compels her mandate to enact deep and equitable reform. From the compassion and understanding she shows 'her divine appointments' to the care and concern she demonstrates by finding additional space in the alternative education program for those students who struggle in the traditional setting, Dr. Grey confirms her commitment to engender deep and equitable change.

She has also shown her resolve towards social justice in assembling a team of like-minded and equally passionate individuals who resonate and amplify her desire to engender deep and equitable change throughout the district and, ultimately the community. Recalling her initial thoughts about Mr. Parker, Dr. Grey described his passion and attention to detail as the qualities that first captured her attention. It wasn't

long after that, however, that she began calling him 'captain underdog' because of his overwhelming desire to protect the vulnerable and promote the meek.

A serendipitous departure of the then incumbent associate superintendent gave Dr. Grey the opportunity to reunite with her friend and former doctoral studies colleague Pam Jacobs. In her 2012 doctoral dissertation, Dr. Jacobs revealed her leadership philosophy writing,

> I consider myself to be a transformative leader and have developed a critical consciousness regarding the role that education must play for the future of this country. Leaders must engage in transformative leadership practices that support the larger picture of education—to develop individuals who are connected to a larger sense of purpose and life. (p. 141)

Recalling that only Dr. Jacobs' commitment to social justice matched her own, Dr. Grey realized that this addition to her administration would complete "her dream team". Perhaps Dr. Grey's assessment, first introduced in an earlier section of this dissertation, best epitomizes the team's mandate to effect deep and equitable change.

> [Dr. Jacobs and JP] have the same 'rush out there and save the people' mentality, you know, 'free everyone' and I know that about myself as well. I often have to reel them [Dr. Jacobs and JP] in because they are very passionate about [emancipation]. For both of them [Pam and JP], the thing that I admire the most is their 'Captain-save-the-world' mentality... They are just... they are going to save the people! They are the first ones to the firing line. Both of them! First ones to the firing line!

Deconstructing and reconstructing inequitable knowledge frameworks. To be relevant and useful, a theory of leadership must consider the practical application of its foundational doctrines. For transformative leaders, tenets two and three represent this call to action. Qualified by the charge to act courageously, transformative leaders enact radical and equitable change by engaging the root causes of inequality, which are the

unjust and inequitable values, beliefs, attitudes, and actions that promote marginalization and oppression. Often surreptitiously concealed within established customs, conventions, and opinions, unjust mental constructs and the practices that result often represent intractable challenges that must be deconstructed to lay bare the faulty logic upon which they were created. Once dismantled and decoded, the inequitable mental constructs that form the foundation of unjust practices can be evaluated in the light of a democratic and inclusive ethic, and transformed into exemplars of socially just and excellent educational praxis.

New Hope, by most accounts, is a generous and welcoming community of well-intentioned individuals who desire the best for their children and their town. Nevertheless, Dr. Grey and her team have been actively working to identify and dismantle the invalid and misguided values, beliefs, and assumptions that have resulted in inequitable practices and unjust outcomes for some unfortunate students. Beginning with her efforts to help the community regain its sense of self-worth after years of not so nice press coverage stemming from the influx of migrants from Cabrini Green through her analogy of the 'pretty girl syndrome', Dr. Grey has endeavored to dismantle and reconstruct negative self-images of New Hope.

Realizing the existence of a generalized cultural naïveté among some of her mostly White staff towards African American students, Dr. Grey has actively troubled her staff to envision a different perspective when dealing with some students' behaviors. After an incident with an African American youth wearing a hoodie turned ugly, Dr. Grey opened dialogues with her School Resource Officers and other staff.

> I'm trying to get my staff and principals to understand culturally the behaviors that [they] have unintentionally provoked… so my big thing

now is teaching them that they've made the first act of aggression to an African American person when they stepped up into [an African American's] personal space. And they didn't know it… and I'm like… "Um, don't walk up on me!" When you walk up in my personal space and touch me, we have a whole different conversation. It's about teaching cultural sensitivities and having those conversations. It started with my conversations with the police officers and the chief of police. I need you guys to get some training because what you think is ok is not ok.

For Dr. Grey and her team, it is about laying bare the inequitable values, beliefs, and assumptions so that the faulty logic can be identified, disassembled, and reconstructed in more inclusive and equitable ways. When the team became aware of the Physical Education department's practice of charging students a dollar to avoid dressing on Fridays, coincidentally the same day the district was providing backpacks filled with food for students who might otherwise go hungry over the weekend, they took immediate action. "I said, 'So on the same day that you send food home you charge your kids a dollar to not dress for PE and the ones who can't afford it you give a zero for not dressing for PE… Do you see anything wrong with that?'" Similarly, the team helped their staff recognize the inequity in organizing a 6th grade field trip that would cost every student $20.00 plus additional money to pay for fast-food lunches when not all families could afford such an expense; or, that it was placing an unfair burden on some families to require private transportation when the field trip buses were scheduled to leave before the regular school buses arrived at the school.

Dr. Jacobs helped New Hope's Board of Education understand that their Gifted Program was unfairly excluding some students by deconstructing the selection process through a scholarly third-party audit. "We had them deconstruct it. Just take it apart and rebuild it so that everyone has the opportunity to participate in gifted education," Dr.

Jacobs recalled. Furthermore, the team is actively moving to reconstruct the process by which New Hope USD offers Advanced Placement and honors classes, which previously had been closed to students not participating in the Gifted Program. "This was one of the items on my 'big list' when I got hired, Dr. Jacobs disclosed.

> I said here is my big list of things I see need to happen, including the audit, restructuring special education to make it more inclusive, reviewing the graduation requirements so that students were not prevented from graduating because of missing PE credits... things like that.

Similarly, the team sought the counsel of a leading authority on bullying prevention to conduct district-wide in-service trainings designed to deconstruct established beliefs and patterns of behavior regarding this endemic problem and teach all staff how to identify and prevent the harmful effects of bullying and intimidation. Speaking candidly about being a transformative leader and the need to take critical action, Dr. Jacobs insisted,

> Transformative leadership is necessary because we have reached, I believe, the point in education that if we don't deconstruct and reconstruct these inequitable frameworks we will implode. It cannot continue. After 28 years in education, I can tell you it is absolutely the worst I've ever seen about the glaring have's and have not's... we have to ask what is our purpose, what is our role? If our role is supposed to be to educate the citizen, to create a better society, to be informed, to ask questions, we are way off track. Way off track... I mean the train lost the tracks.

Evoking but a few examples of the ways in which this leadership team has actively contested inequitable mental frameworks, the data clearly show transformative leadership in action.

Courageously and morally reconstituting the balance of power. Transformative leadership theory, as previously specified, views power as the vehicle through which

marginalization and oppression operates. An inevitable quality of all social relationships, power conveys the ability to influence the outcome of social encounters, and can, among other things, be wielded by those with access, to regulate who may and may not participate in a wide range of activities, including the educational experience (Shields, 2013; 2016).

At the same time, power as seen through a transformative lens, is both hegemonic and positional in that, while power is employed through relationships to establish and maintain a particular social perspective, the nature of that influence can be moral or immoral—democratic or undemocratic (Shields, 2009, 2010a). Viewed through this lens, leaders must make conscientious decisions about how best to exert the power their position entails. As Weiner (2003) reminds, "Transformative leadership is an exercise of influence and authority that begins with questions of justice, democracy, and the dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility (p. 89). In other words, the transformative leader must be willing to utilize the power entrusted to them in moral and democratic ways to bring about equitable and socially just change (Quantz, et al., 1991, Shields, 2010a, 2013, 2016).

Within society, power and its accompanying privilege is often misunderstood to be a highly valued commodity with a zero-sum relationship, in that those who have access to power may experience genuine fear and distress when confronted with an alteration in the balance of that power. Those threatened with a perceived loss of privilege may react vehemently in response. For this reason, disrupting conventionally asymmetrical power relationships is, perhaps the most perilous and incendiary aspect of transformative leadership. Thus, no discussion of transformative leadership theory would

be complete without contemplating the call to exhibit what Shields (2013) calls moral courage. Faced with potentially hostile reactions to decisions that may be mistakenly seen to threaten hegemonic power and privilege, transformative leaders must reach deeply into a wellspring of courage that emanates from the moral use of power to speak on behalf of those who have been silenced and act in support of the disenfranchised.

Time and again, Dr. Grey and her team courageously confront the inequitable balance of power and privilege throughout the district. For instance, challenging the board to appropriate a portion of a budget that was ostensibly an insufficient and limited resource to begin with into an unproven Phoenix Program designed to benefit only a few students—whom some may have considered inconsequential casualties—required conviction and moral courage. Requesting even more resources from the operating budget to fund the Alternative GED Program must have seemed like throwing gasoline onto an inferno, but the team was undeterred. Calling for an audit of the Gifted and Talented Program could have in itself been the spark that ignited a firestorm of contention from those in the community who enjoyed the inequitably shared privilege and extremely important rewards of such a distinction. Additionally, taking steps to address bullying and intimidation is, by definition, an act designed to redistribute asymmetrical power.

Nevertheless if there were any doubt, the team's authentic commitment to address the inequitable distribution of power and the genuine moral courage to act became most undeniably apparent as they confronted the flooding of the beloved neighborhood elementary school and the community-wide ramifications of their decision to reorganize the entire district. The unfortunate flooding created a serendipitous opportunity for the

team to tackle one of the most conspicuous yet intransigent examples of a perceived, if not real imbalance of power and privilege in the district, Hilltop Middle School verses Valley View Middle School.

Unwilling to be overly dramatic, Dr. Grey recognized the inherent danger in suggesting such a radical move, especially so early in her administration. "We knew there would be some opposition to [reorganizing the district] because of the North—South issue. But it was the best thing and the right thing to do. Outside of that, it just had to be done," she stated. However, others were more forthcoming in praising the team for finding the courage needed to make such a potentially contentious decision. Board President, Mr. Vega called the decision a "very risky move" that probably could not have even been accomplished by the previous administration. Community leader Natalie Mathews believed "the way the team handled the Washington school disaster was with grace. They took a lot of flack from a lot of people but they didn't back down." When asked if the decision required moral courage, Dr. Jacobs replied,

> absolutely, and resilience in the face of adversity. [Making the decision to] close Washington Elementary and reorganize the district definitely took courage, and that experience… though I would never want to repeat it, I wouldn't change it because it did teach me; anybody can throw anything at me now and there's no way I would fold. No way.

Balancing the private and public goals of education. All socially arranged organizations attempt to serve, at some level, two contending, yet interrelated goals of individual achievement and public advancement. The institution of public education has, since its inception, struggled to find balance between its primarily private goal of developing the self-confidence and competence of the individual and its public ambition of perfecting the welfare of a democratic society (Shields, 2013). Labaree (1997) asserts

that the tension between the private and public goals of education is primarily one of a political nature saying,

> the central problems with American education are not pedagogical or organizational or social or cultural in nature but are fundamentally political. That is, the problem is not that we do not know how to make schools better but that we are fighting among ourselves about what goals schools should pursue. Goal setting is a political, and not a technical, problem. It is resolved through a process of making choices and not through a process of scientific investigation. The answer lies in values (what kind of schools we want) and interests (who supports which educational values) rather than apolitical logic (p. 40).

In other words, finding the right equilibrium between the counterbalancing private and public goals of education is a pursuit in serving the demands of the educational consumer looking to capitalize on a highly stratified and inequitably distributed commodity, and the needs of a democracy that depends on preparing all citizens to competently participate in society.

Shields (2013) stresses "one of the first tasks of a transformative leader must be to help his or her community clarify the kind of school it wants and the values on which it should be built (p. 64). The transformative leader recognizes this ubiquitous tension and appreciates the need to maximize the private good of individual advancement while holding true to the values of equity and social justice, which serve the public goals of an advanced and more democratic community. The data collected during this study suggest that Dr. Grey and her team face this challenge thoughtfully and conscientiously in a manner that reflects transformative leadership.

Dr. Grey's many valiant efforts to intercede in the plight of individual students' lives are an indication that she values the private goals of education. Her commitment to "stay in touch with the children" and "find the ones I need to see and get back to them"

illustrates an awareness of the private good that remains in balance with a recognition that the potential of even one lost soul sends a shockwave of repercussion throughout society. Taking the time, for instance, to understand that the traditional high school environment was not meeting young Denauti's needs and making the necessary arrangements for him to be successful in a homeschooling environment demonstrates Dr. Grey's commitment to advancing the individual's goal while maintaining a focus on emancipation.

This leadership team consistently maneuvers within the tension between these competing goals, working to strike a balance that satisfies both. Their 'outside-the-box' creativity permitted the team to engineer the Phoenix Program, a mutually beneficial arrangement between the community's need for skilled employees and struggling students' desires for self-confidence, competence, and credentials. Mr. Parker's recognition, as he reflected on the impetus that led to the development of the Phoenix Program, that the team would either "find a way to support them now or the community is going to have to support them later" epitomizes this tension between the private and public goals of education.

The majority opinion concerning the essential goals of education in the U.S. has begun to shift away from its public ambitions to prepare all citizens to participate in and for the benefit of our democracy and to inspire students to embrace the unfamiliar and question the unknown, towards what can only be recognized as its private value as a means of acquiring the credentials needed to attain an enhanced social position. As a result of mandated high-stakes testing and standards-based accountability, education in

the U.S. has largely become an exercise in the memorization of disarticulated figures and decontextualized facts.

While understanding the need to remain cognizant of these mandated benchmarks, Dr. Grey and her team have promoted a more balanced perspective. Asked specifically about the districts' performance on standardized tests, Dr. Grey responded,

> You know what? Like everyone else… we are struggling, but I needed New Hope to see… if the challenges that these babies are facing, and the fact that they have done as well… I think we need I need them to celebrate that.

This response, especially in light of the fact that the team's conversations seldom focused on standardized tests, again displays an effort to maintain a sensible equilibrium between these two important educational goals. The team has managed to cultivate this appreciation for balance throughout the district as well. Getting adjusted to her position as the administrator of the newly created upper elementary building, principal Macallan recognized the importance of maintaining this equilibrium saying:

> Our first goal is building relationships with the students, because you can't learn from somebody unless you respect them. And you won't learn from somebody if you don't feel what they are telling you is valid to you. So that always comes first. I know that all the data is important, but that's not where I'm at yet. It's the first quarter and we're still building relationships and you know when you have 800 kids coming together and you have PTSD and you have all the other things these kiddos are dealing with… So, we're learning to just live together, and how to be safe, respectable, and responsible. After that, if you learn something, by golly good for you.

Further evidence of the team's effort to maintain this fragile balance can be seen in the way they conducted the Gifted and Talented audit, which previously had mainly served the private good of well-connected students. "We wanted to make sure that we were serving all of our high achieving students with programs that are going to expand

their talents and abilities equitably for all students regardless of background," Dr. Jacobs explained. As a result of their determination, the district will be working to identify students in previously underrepresented populations and offer expanded opportunities for honors and advanced placement courses to allow more students to participate. This effort also demonstrates the team's commitment to equity and justice.

Focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice. Transformative leadership is exceptional among theories related to leadership in that it is deeply anchored to the bedrock principles of emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice. Chosen carefully for their meaning as well as their historical, political, and social significance, Shields (2016) identifies these principles as integral beacons that guide and ground transformative leadership practice. Emancipation, a term most often associated with Lincoln's 1863 proclamation and the 1865 Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which prohibited the legal institution of slavery within the United States and its territories, is deeply laden with profound historical, political, and social significance even to this day. Emancipation, as it relates to transformative leadership theory, signifies an enduring struggle to shed the manacles of injustice that continue to restrain some from the "pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person" (Freire, 1970, p. 55), and implies the necessity of contravening action to thwart the consequences of all forms of marginalization and oppression (Shields, 2016).

Transformative leadership theory takes seriously the notion of democracy, not merely the superficial ideal represented by the opportunity to participate in the process of governance, but more specifically a belief in what Barber (2001) referred to as *democratic faith*, by which he means a conviction that all humans possess the capacity

and competence—given the equitable opportunity to become educated for excellence—to govern in common their own lives (pp. 12-13). Shields (2009, 2016) invokes Green's (1999) notion of "*a deeper conception of democracy* that expresses the experience-based possibility of more equal, respectful, and mutually beneficial ways of community life and 'habits of the heart'" (p. vi. italics in the original) to signify a normative guide for transformative leaders committed to the advancement of authentically democratic educational institutions.

Equity, chosen precisely because it diverges in essence and implication with what is perhaps the more familiar term—equality, demands "unequal and dissimilar inputs and supports for some individuals and groups to ensure more similar outcomes and outputs" (Shields, 2016, p. 119), and must guide and ground transformative praxis. Equality and equal treatment as a practice may resonate with fairness; however, in reality, merely sustain the disparate and unequal starting point inherent in any unequal social relationship. Equity, on the other hand, refers to the process by which "individuals are treated in ways that are intended to create the conditions for both a level playing field and for fair inputs and outcomes" (Shields, 2016, p. 121). In practice, transformative leaders eschew equal treatment in favor of equitable action in order to bring about more equal outcomes for all individuals, and this is the target of justice.

A fundamental attribute of transformative leadership theory, justice "implies rightness and right outcomes according to the law" (Shields, 2016, p. 121), yet in this context, extends far beyond its legal inferences. Often understood tacitly, many individuals find it difficult to adequately define justice more broadly conceptualized. Within the framework of transformative leadership theory, justice mourns ancient, extant,

and unforeseen transgressions, rebukes abuse and exploitation in all forms, interrogates hegemony, and imagines global peace and prosperity.

Dr. Grey and her team are moored to and inspired by these values as demonstrated by the data. While others seemed not to notice the girl inaudibly crying out in pain through the words written on her tee shirt, Dr. Grey saw a baby confined by the fetters of a lifetime of abuse. Rather than ignoring the call for help, Dr. Grey took immediate action to liberate the girl from her prison, and began the conversations with her staff to help them see and hear the silent alarms that signal a child in distress. When a student was in danger of being expelled for inappropriate behavior, Dr. Grey asked the important questions, discovering that the medication needed to curb his behavior when taken on an empty stomach was unbearable; and, accordingly she found a way to feed him, rescuing yet another of her babies. Although Dr. Grey yearns to "save them all", as Savannah Shepherd fondly denotes, even her best of intentions occasionally fall short. Cheyanne Rayne recalls Dr. Grey's anguish and despair at her failure to free one boy from the figurative and literal prison associated with his gang affiliation.

Through their persistence and accomplishments, Dr. Grey and her team consistently demonstrate a commitment to emancipation. Troubled by the image of students lost in a system that failed to recognize their unique needs, this team immediately began crafting a plan to liberate more than a dozen souls destined for failure and return them to a path towards self-actualization and fulfillment. Like the mythical phoenix for which the program is named, these students can now rise from the ashes of oppression and soar. Similarly, the team's relentless efforts to find appropriate space for the 'high fliers' in Ms. Homer's building who needed an alternative learning environment

extricated 40 struggling students from the burden of an unsuitable milieu, while simultaneously restoring a sense of stability to Hilltop Middle School.

Further evidence of this team's focus on equitable and democratic praxis can be found in the team's call for an audit of the Gifted and Talented Program by an outside expert panel. Dr. Jacobs explained how it became obvious to the team that there was an inequitable distribution of students in the Gifted and Talented Program,

> The way I understand gifted education is that gifted students are those who have exceptional talents, not just those who come from wealthy homes and are good students. And so we were really concerned that our district was creating this hierarchy and caste system. If you had the benefits of a great home life, you were a Gifted and Talented student, and those students definitely, definitely are viewed in a different light.

For the transformative leader, equity in practice may mean bending the rules for moral purposes as when Dr. Jacobs assisted a student who desperately wanted to graduate but had exhausted all of the traditional remedies by accepting passing grades on the final exams as worthy evidence that she deserved the right to graduate.

In these, and many other ways this team has demonstrated a dedication to these guiding and grounding principles of transformative leadership. When the team sees a need, they take action, as when floodwaters forced the closing of Washington Elementary School. Instead of irresponsibly spending millions of dollars to mitigate the damages, the team made the democratic decision to reorganize the district and, at the same time, eliminate the inequities evident in the disparate middle schools. Recognizing the potential in Officer Daniels' concept of a Peer Tribunal Program to allow students to practice democracy, Dr. Jacobs took steps to ensure the program's success.

This team relentlessly seeks justice for all their students and for the people of New Hope. From their first resolutions to generate school community partnerships that would pair industry demands with student needs, to their pledge to feed all students in the district understanding that no child should be forced to choose between food and dignity, this team displays genuine compassion and a sincere devotion to justice through transformative leadership.

Fostering interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness. The transformative leader recognizes the intimately connected nature of our world and is sensitive to the common threads that bridge and bind us all in a web of human interdependence. Injustice, like ripples on a pond, radiates outward from its source to ultimately dishonor humanity. It cannot be contained, rather it must be eliminated, and the transformative leader is keen to eradicate injustice through democratic education.

While a socially just education seeks to create equitable opportunities for every student, a social justice education pursues the higher goal of helping all students to develop a deeper understanding of their connection to one another and to this marvelous and unique biosphere we call earth (Shields, 2014). Transformative leaders focus on both goals simultaneously, applying their influence judiciously to rectify injustice, while asking everyone to accept personal responsibility for the advancement of a democratic and just society.

Dr. Grey and her team continuously strive to honor the dignity and worth of every individual, understanding that the elimination of marginalization and oppression benefits the downtrodden and the tormenter equally. Addressing the ubiquitous problem of bullying and harassment that appears to some degree in nearly every educational

institution, Dr. Grey and her team sought to eliminate one of the most common forms of marginalization and oppression found in schools. Taking a proactive stance, Dr. Grey and her team ensured that the district maintained a comprehensive anti-bullying policy specifically enumerating historically vulnerable groups to send a clear message of inclusion to all members of the New Hope community. The team then called on the expertise of a nationally recognized scholar to conduct professional development seminars in the prevention of bullying and harassment and the deconstruction of the stereotypes and biases that often perpetuate behaviors of domination, followed by the development of the vital social skills needed to supplant such violence. Moreover, supporting the establishment of a diverse array of social clubs and extracurricular activities offers youngsters plenty of opportunities to belong and teaches respect and acceptance.

Just as the Phoenix Program is founded on principles of interdependence and interconnected relationships, this leadership team models these ideals through their partnerships with the community college and teacher aides to alleviate the intractable shortage of certified teachers. The team's focus on building relationships with parents and students is also a standard for staff throughout the district and stresses the appreciation that the education of our youth is a community endeavor.

Critique and promise – pursuing equilibrium. Arising from a critical perspective, transformative leadership theory calls upon its followers to question the nature of all social relationships and requires the critical examination of the beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors that undergird the inequitable distribution of privilege within social structures and public institutions such as schools. In the context of transformative

leadership theory, critique implies thoughtful consideration and informed analysis rather than negative and unproductive criticism (Shields, 2016). For transformative leaders, critique leads inevitably to a condition that Shields (2009) calls a critical awareness of the unjust and inequitable conditions around and within an organization. When PE teachers are charging students money for the privilege of wearing street clothes on the same day the school is handing out backpacks filled with food so that those same children have something to eat over the weekend, for instance, Dr. Grey and her team experienced a critical awareness that instigated a mandate for change.

Critique and the critical awareness of injustice, however, is merely one half of the equation for transformative leaders. Resonating with and through the tenets of transformative leadership theory, critical awareness anchored to the principles of emancipation, equity, and justice, leads to critical action that is steeped in the promise of a more democratic future. Promise in the context of transformative leadership theory, as conceptualized by Shields (2016) conveys an important dual meaning. On one hand, promise "implies hope, possibility, and future action…" while at the same time must be understood as "a contract in which educational leaders undertake to serve their constituency—all members of their school community" (p. 146). Without the counterbalancing effects of promise, this theory would become mired in the impotent enumeration of inequity.

The data from this study reveal that Dr. Grey and her team characteristically, at an almost instinctive level, employ a critical lens to the administration of New Hope USD counterbalanced by promise in both the sense of forward looking optimism and a commitment to act for the evolution of a more just future. From the Phoenix Program,

which in its design—even its very name, embodies critique and promise, to the creative repurposing of storage space to make room for more alternative education students, this team demonstrates a spontaneous propensity to critically evaluate the social structures within their institution and imagine a brighter and more just future arrangement. Whether it is critique on an individual level, as when Dr. Grey responded to the unnoticed lament of an abused girl, or the informed analysis of a district-wide Gifted and Talented Program that ostensibly functioned as "an exclusive club", this team inhabits a mental framework of critique in equilibrium with "the promise that sees the potential in each and every child and offers the possibility of a better future" (Shields, 2016, p. 147).

A call to exhibit moral courage. As stated earlier in this chapter, leaders who take seriously the responsibility of transformative leadership will almost certainly at some point face contentious disapproval from those in possession of entrenched power and privilege when those entitlements are challenged. Nevertheless, leadership that does not speak to the equitable rights and dignity of each and every student is not transformative.

Speaking truth to power requires a great deal of courage in the face of what could represent considerable personal jeopardy; thus, transformative leaders must exhibit what Shields (2009) calls moral courage. The distinction here is important, because mere fearless audacity simply implies hegemonic might employed to maintain the status quo, whereas *moral courage* signifies bravery buttressed by a moral purpose that seeks to interrupt and rebalance the inequitable distribution of power and privilege.

Without question, Dr. Grey and her team demonstrate moral courage annealed by a profound commitment to just leadership. Time and again, when confronted with a challenge this team did not hesitate. Firmly anchored to the principles of emancipation

and justice, Dr. Grey and her team needed little time to debate the direction in which they would go when they identified the need for the Phoenix Program or the Alternative GED Program; they immediately understood their moral responsibility to eliminate the stigma associated with the free breakfast and lunch program; and when the floods came, this team drew strength from each other and demonstrated the unwavering moral courage to proceed with the reorganization in spite of the potential for career-ending consequences because "it was the right thing to do."

The Best Explanation

After careful consideration of various potentially relevant models, transformative leadership theory appears to best describe this team's approach to just leadership. Engaged simultaneously, the eight tenets of transformative leadership theory address the need for critical evaluation and awareness of inequity and injustice counterbalanced by the hope and promise of a just future, call for a mandate to redress transgressions, describe the process of deconstructing and reconstructing mental frameworks that lead to oppression, demand the equitable redistribution of power and privilege, provide a moral compass pointing towards emancipation, equity, and justice, address the need to balance the private and public goals of education, and highlight the connected web of humanity, all of which is undergirded by the need to exhibit a special kind of moral courage.

Although other leadership models reasonably illuminate certain aspects of this team's approach to district administration, only transformative leadership theory adequately describes both their profound commitment to social justice and their ethical application of leadership practice intended to dismantle marginalizing and oppressive mental frames and structures that result in injustice.

Applying the logical framework of abductive reasoning, or inference to the best explanation (Evers & Wu, 2006; Shields, 2010), I have demonstrated why other likely approaches to leadership fail to describe the phenomenon under investigation; therefore, it is reasonable to infer that transformative leadership theory best explains how Dr. Grey and her team endeavor to create an inclusive and excellent learning environment for all students, including those from traditionally marginalized groups.

Recommendations

The responsibility to reform our institutions of public education into ones that resist the tyranny of hegemony and provide equitable opportunities for all children to succeed in school and in life falls to a new caliber of leaders who understand and embody the meaning of deep democracy and social justice. Reform begins when one individual who has the courage to speak out and the wisdom to listen enters into a relationship of dialogue with another about these important matters. I believe, with Shields (2013), that real social transformation begins with the democratic and just education of our youth, and creating deeply democratic and socially just learning environments is the moral obligation of just leaders.

The following recommendations are provided for all individuals and teams who are responsible for the leadership of educational institutions, but particularly those who take seriously the clarion call for just leadership.

1. Engage in deep personal reflection to discover the moorings that ground and guide your practice. Just leaders will come to rest upon the values of emancipation, equity, democracy and justice. These bedrock principles will provide a beacon that shines through the most ambiguous context.
2. Strive to consistently employ critique, and become critically aware and conscientious leaders. Ask of every social situation: Who benefits and who is disenfranchised? Who is included and who is marginalized? Which group is powerful and which is impotent? Whose truth is told and whose is

suppressed? At the same time, cling to the hope and promise for a more democratic future that just leadership offers.

3. Heed the burden of injustice that mandates equitable action. When it becomes apparent through critical analysis that an individual or group suffers the violence of marginalization or oppression, summon the moral courage to act because it is the right thing to do.

4. Endeavor to dismantle inequitable mental frameworks and unjust structures and rebuild them to reflect deeply democratic values. Likewise, help others to become critically aware and to locate their own moral courage.

5. Recognize the connections that unite all of humanity and fathom our interdependent destiny. Accordingly, maintain the fragile balance between private and public good, between individual enrichment and social prosperity.

Shepherding the institution of public education is a moral and ethical undertaking that demands just leadership. If we are ever to attain the ideals espoused by our founding declaration and constitution, then we must teach our children in the ways of deep democracy to cherish liberty, and to fight for justice. Transformative leadership theory offers genuine potential for achieving these goals.

Reflections on the Research

This investigation sought to determine whether transformative leadership theory best described the actions of a self-described social justice-oriented district leadership team as they endeavor to provide an inclusive and excellent learning environment for all students, and particularly those who have traditionally been marginalized and oppressed. The leadership triad at the center of this study exhibits what I imagine to be some rather unique characteristics for a district administration team. In particular, and one of the qualities that initially drew my attention, are the ways in which this team relate to and interact with one another.

The data demonstrate a multifaceted relationship including qualities that reveal professionalism, collegiality, teamwork, friendship, and most strikingly, a profound trust

most resembling a family of choice. It became evident immediately that humor and frivolity behind closed doors strengthen and unite this team allowing them to weather the gravity of a demanding profession. Dr. Grey and her team rely on each other to augment individual weaknesses and support one another unconditionally. Additionally, the members of this team demonstrate a particularly disarming humility that allows them to benefit from each other's strengths in a synergistic manner. As they are fond of saying, "there is no ego here", and as unusual as that may be, it certainly rings true.

Beyond the qualities that seem to allow this team to perform in near perfect harmony, they share a profound commitment to equity and democratic schooling. Somewhat of an uncommon covenant in an era of technical reforms focused almost entirely on high-stakes test scores and accountability measures, it may be especially significant to discover three leaders equally devoted to social justice who consistently demonstrates a critical awareness and absolute mandate to include the marginalized and emancipate the oppressed.

Although the purpose of this case study was to determine if transformative leadership theory best described and explained the actions of this social justice-oriented leadership team, further research for instance might focus on correlations between transformative leadership and improved academic performance for marginalized and minoritized youth. Mixed method and longitudinal research examining transformative leaders and academic growth would contribute additional important insight into the need for just leadership practices.

Concluding Remarks

Intimately familiar with the profound and potentially life-altering reverberations of marginalization and oppression, I approached this study with the hope of offering current and future educational leaders a fresh perspective on just leadership. In solidarity with the millions of children pushed to the margins of society and burdened by the fetters of oppression, I chose to study a leadership team that seemed to offer real promise toward answering that clarion call of justice.

This odyssey, from discovery to enlightenment and finally to dissemination, was a defining moment in my own search for answers to life-long questions about equality and the intrinsic dignity of all people. As I reflect on the past five decades of my life, I often wonder where I might be today had I been welcomed and included and had my reality been respectfully reflected in the totality of my early educational experience.

The leadership team at the center of this study demonstrates an unwavering commitment to honoring the dignity and potential of each and every child in their custody; and, in so doing, reflect the constitutional tripartite goal of individual, organizational, and societal reform that characterizes transformative leadership theory.

They do not evade controversy when democracy is threatened, nor do they shrink from confrontation when equity is at stake; rather, they draw from the progenitor of moral courage that is justice, and anneal their resolve to emancipate every child from the injustice that is marginalization and oppression. Their decisions are grounded by an enduring belief that all individuals are endowed with the unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

I steadfastly believe that the future of humanity depends upon the decisions we make today, and one of the most important and momentous resolutions we as a society can make is how we choose to educate the children who will one day inherit this earth. If some insight gleaned from this transformative case study of a social justice-oriented leadership team at the district level offers even one child emancipation from an otherwise diminished life, then my efforts have not been in vane.

APPENDIX A

List of Site Visits and Participant Contacts

	Date	Type of Interaction	Person(s)	Position
1	5/31-6/3/16	In Situ Observations	Leadership Team	Leadership Team
2	05/31/2016	Recorded Interview	Dr. Grey, Dr. Jacobs	Leadership Team
3	06/01/2016	Recorded Interview	Leadership Team	Leadership Team
4	06/01/2016	Recorded Interview	Dr. Grey	Superintendent
5	06/01/2016	Recorded Interview	Dr. Jacobs	Assistant Sup. Secondary Ed.
6	06/02/2016	Recorded Interview	Principal Brewer	Highland Park Magnet School
7	06/02/2016	Recorded Interview	Principal Isaacs	New Hope High School
8	06/02/2016	Recorded Interview	Pastor Farrows	Board Member/Community Leader
9	06/03/2016	Recorded Interview	Natalie Mathews	Entrepreneur/Community Leader
10	06/03/2016	Recorded Interview	Principal Herman	Horace Mann Alternative School
11	06/03/2016	Recorded Interview	Principal Porter	Jacob Davis Elementary School
12	06/03/2016	Cabinet Meeting	Various	Leadership Team, Cabinet
13	7/18-7/22/16	In Situ Observations	Leadership Team	Leadership Team
14	07/19/2016	Policy Meeting	Various Admin.	Cabinet, Board President
15	07/20/2016	Staffing Meeting	Various Admin	Leadership Team, HR & Curriculum
16	07/20/2016	School Board Meeting	Various	New Hope USD School Board, others
17	07/21/2016	Recorded Interview	Admin. Secretaries	Admin. Secretaries
18	07/22/2016	Recorded Interview	Brenda Baker	Admin. Asst. to Mr. Parker
19	07/22/2016	Recorded Interview	Bobby Jean Riche	Curriculum Director
20	8/29-9/2/16	In Situ Observations	Leadership Team	Leadership Team
21	09/01/2016	Contract Negotiations	Various	Leadership Team/Union Reps
22	09/01/2016	Working Lunch	Admin. Staff	Leadership Team/Admin Staff
23	09/01/2016	Staffing Interview	Bobby Jean Riche	Curriculum Director, Candidate
24	09/01/2016	SIG Negotiations	Leadership Team	Leadership Team, Admin. Staff
25	09/02/2016	Recorded Interview	Dr. Jacobs	Asst. Sup. Secondary – Gifted Audit
26	09/02/2016	Recorded Interview	Principal Homer	Hilltop Middle School
27	10/17-10/21/16	In Situ Observations	Leadership Team	Leadership Team
28	10/17/2016	Recorded Interview	Mr. Vega	Board President
29	10/17/2016	Beau Jeffries	President -	Community Leader
30	10/18/2016	Recorded Interview	Cheyanne Rayne	Business Manager
31	10/18/2016	Recorded Interview	Leadership Team	Leadership Team
32	10/19/2016	Recorded Interview	Office Daniels	School Resource Office
33	10/20/2016	Recorded Interview	Ms. Rivers	Business Director
34	10/20/2016	Recorded Interview	Principal Macallan	Valley View Upper Elementary
35	10/21/2016	Recorded Interview	Jason Logan	Board Member
36	10/21/2016	Recorded Interview	Principal Sterling	Truman Elementary School

APPENDIX B

Superintendent Information Sheet and Informed Consent

Research Information Sheet (Superintendent)

Title of Study: Justice… Not Just Us: How One District-Level Social Justice-Oriented
Transformative Leadership Team Addresses Marginalization and Oppression

Principal Investigator (PI):   Thomas Arnold Zook
                                         AOS, Education
                                         954-336-0987

Purpose
You are being asked to be in a research study of district-level leadership teams and how
they ensure inclusive, excellent, equitable, and socially just education to all students
because you are part of the district leadership team and as district superintendent, you
have agreed to allow district participation in this case study. This study is being
conducted in your home school district.

Study Procedures
If you take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in several interviews over
the next six months about your approach to ensuring inclusive and equitable education
for all students and about your leadership team's approach to the same issue. During the
interview, you will be asked about your school, your challenges, how you prioritize your
activities, what your goals are, and what strategies you are using to achieve them and
about how your assistant superintendents approach the same issues. The amount of
information you provide (or even if you decline to answer a specific question) is up to
you. I anticipate each interview will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hrs.

Benefits

The possible benefits to you for taking part in this research study are that you will have a
clearer idea of your goals and strategies for including all students.
Additionally, information from this study may benefit other people (society) now or in
the future because, hopefully the understanding we gain from the whole study will
provide superintendents and other educational leaders with an expanded repertoire of
knowledge and strategies to ensure an excellent and socially just education for all
students.'

Risks

By taking part in this study, you may experience the following risks:
   o   Emotional risks (e.g., feelings of lack of accomplishment, or anxiety)

Costs
There will be no costs to you for participation in this research study.

Compensation
You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:
You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. There will be no list that links your identity with this code.

Voluntary Participation /Withdrawal:
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with Wayne State University or its affiliates.

Questions
If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Thomas Zook at the following phone number (954) 336-0987 or his doctoral advisor, Dr. Carolyn M. Shields at the following phone number (248) 285-2166. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call the Wayne State Research Subject Advocate at (313) 577-1628 to discuss problems, obtain information, or offer input.

Participation
By completing the interview you are agreeing to participate in this study.

APPENDIX C

Assistant Superintendent Information Sheet and Informed Consent

Research Information Sheet (Assistant Superintendents)

Title of Study: Justice… Not Just Us: How One District-Level Social Justice-Oriented Transformative Leadership Team Addresses Marginalization and Oppression

Principal Investigator (PI):   Thomas Arnold Zook
                                        AOS, Education
                                        954-336-0987

Purpose
You are being asked to be in a research study of district-level leadership teams and how they ensure inclusive, excellent, equitable, and socially just education to all students because you are part of the district leadership team whose superintendent has agreed to have the district participate in this case study. This study is being conducted in your home school district.

Study Procedures
If you take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in several interviews about your superintendent's approach to ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all students and about your approach to the same issue. During the interviews, you will be asked about your school, your challenges, how you prioritize your activities, what your goals are, and what strategies you are using to achieve them and about how the superintendent approaches the same issues. The amount of information you provide (or even if you decline to answer a specific question) is up to you. I anticipate the interviews will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hrs.

Benefits

The possible benefits to you for taking part in this research study are that you will have a clearer idea of your goals and strategies for including all students.
Additionally, information from this study may benefit other people (society) now or in the future because, hopefully the understanding we gain from the whole study will provide superintendents and other educational leaders with an expanded repertoire of knowledge and strategies to ensure an excellent and socially just education for all students.'

Risks

By taking part in this study, you may experience the following risks:
   o Emotional risks (e.g., feelings of lack of accomplishment, or anxiety)

Costs

There will be no costs to you for participation in this research study.

Compensation

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:

You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. There will be no list that links your identity with this code.

Voluntary Participation /Withdrawal:

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with Wayne State University or its affiliates.

Questions

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Thomas Zook at the following phone number (954) 336-0987 or his doctoral advisor, Dr. Carolyn M. Shields at the following phone number (248) 285-2166. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call the Wayne State Research Subject Advocate at (313) 577-1628 to discuss problems, obtain information, or offer input.

Participation

By completing the interview you are agreeing to participate in this study.

APPENDIX D

Principal Information Sheet and Informed Consent

Research Information Sheet (Principals)

Title of Study: Justice… Not Just Us: How One District-Level Social Justice-Oriented
Transformative Leadership Team Addresses Marginalization and Oppression

Principal Investigator (PI):   Thomas Arnold Zook
                                         AOS, Education
                                         954-336-0987

Purpose
You are being asked to be in a research study of district-level leadership teams and how
they ensure inclusive, excellent, equitable, and socially just education to all students
because you are a school principal whose superintendent has agreed to have the district
participate in this case study. This study is being conducted in your home school district.

Study Procedures
If you take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in one interview about your
superintendent's approach to ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all students
and about your approach to the same issue. You may also be asked to participate in a
shorter follow-up interview at a later date. During the interview, you will be asked about
your school, your challenges, how you prioritize your activities, what your goals are, and
what strategies you are using to achieve them and about how the superintendent
approaches the same issues. The amount of information you provide (or even if you
decline to answer a specific question) is up to you. I anticipate the interview will take
approximately 1 to 1.5 hrs.

Benefits

The possible benefits to you for taking part in this research study are that you will have a
clearer idea of your goals and strategies for including all students.
Additionally, information from this study may benefit other people (society) now or in
the future because, hopefully the understanding we gain from the whole study will
provide superintendents and other educational leaders with an expanded repertoire of
knowledge and strategies to ensure an excellent and socially just education for all
students.'

Risks

By taking part in this study, you may experience the following risks:
   o   Emotional risks (e.g., feelings of lack of accomplishment, or anxiety)

Costs
There will be no costs to you for participation in this research study.

Compensation
You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:
You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. There will be no list that links your identity with this code.

Voluntary Participation /Withdrawal:
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with Wayne State University or its affiliates.

Questions
If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Thomas Zook at the following phone number (954) 336-0987 or his doctoral advisor, Dr. Carolyn M. Shields at the following phone number (248) 285-2166. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call the Wayne State Research Subject Advocate at (313) 577-1628 to discuss problems, obtain information, or offer input.

Participation
By completing the interview you are agreeing to participate in this study.

APPENDIX E

School Board Member Information Sheet and Informed Consent

Research Information Sheet (School Board President/Member)

Title of Study: Justice… Not Just Us: How One District-Level Social Justice-Oriented
Transformative Leadership Team Addresses Marginalization and Oppression

Principal Investigator (PI):   Thomas Arnold Zook
                                         AOS, Education
                                         954-336-0987

Purpose
You are being asked to be in a research study of district-level leadership teams and how
they ensure inclusive, excellent, equitable, and socially just education to all students
because you are a school board president/member whose superintendent has agreed to
have the district participate in this case study. This study is being conducted in your
home school district.

Study Procedures
If you take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in one interview about your
leadership team's (superintendent and two assistants) approach to ensuring inclusive and
equitable education for all students and about your thoughts concerning your
superintendent. During the interview, you will be asked about your school district, its
strengths and challenges, and about how the superintendent approaches issues of
inclusion and social justice. The amount of information you provide (or even if you
decline to answer a specific question) is up to you. I anticipate the interview will take
approximately 0.5 to 1 hour.

Benefits

The possible benefits to you for taking part in this research study are that you will have a
clearer idea of your leadership team and their approach to leadership for social justice.
Additionally, information from this study may benefit other people (society) now or in
the future because, hopefully the understanding we gain from the whole study will
provide superintendents and other educational leaders with an expanded repertoire of
knowledge and strategies to ensure an excellent and socially just education for all
students.'

Risks

By taking part in this study, you may experience the following risks:
   o   Emotional risks (e.g., feelings of lack of accomplishment, or anxiety)

Costs
There will be no costs to you for participation in this research study.

Compensation
You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:
You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. There will be no list that links your identity with this code.

Voluntary Participation /Withdrawal:
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with Wayne State University or its affiliates.

Questions
If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Thomas Zook at the following phone number (954) 336-0987 or his doctoral advisor, Dr. Carolyn M. Shields at the following phone number (248) 285-2166. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call the Wayne State Research Subject Advocate at (313) 577-1628 to discuss problems, obtain information, or offer input.

Participation
By completing the interview you are agreeing to participate in this study.

APPENDIX F

Community Leader Information Sheet and Informed Consent

Research Information Sheet (Community Leader)

Title of Study: Justice… Not Just Us: How One District-Level Social Justice-Oriented
Transformative Leadership Team Addresses Marginalization and Oppression

Principal Investigator (PI):   Thomas Arnold Zook
                                        AOS, Education
                                        954-336-0987

Purpose
You are being asked to be in a research study of district-level leadership teams and how
they ensure inclusive, excellent, equitable, and socially just education to all students
because you are a leader in the community whose school district superintendent has
agreed to have the district participate in this case study and you may be able to provide
important information for the study. This study is being conducted in your home school
district.

Study Procedures
If you take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in one interview about your
district superintendent's approach to ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all
students. During the interview, you will be asked about your community, the school
district and its challenges, your perception of the superintendent and her assistant
superintendents and their effectiveness as a leadership team. The amount of information
you provide (or even if you decline to answer a specific question) is up to you. I
anticipate the interview will take approximately 0.5 to 1 hr.

Benefits

The possible benefits to you for taking part in this research study are that you will have a
better understanding of the district leadership team.
Additionally, information from this study may benefit other people (society) now or in
the future because, hopefully the understanding we gain from the whole study will
provide superintendents and other educational leaders with an expanded repertoire of
knowledge and strategies to ensure an excellent and socially just education for all
students.

Risks

By taking part in this study, you may experience the following risks:
   o   Emotional risks (e.g., feelings of lack of accomplishment, or anxiety)

Costs
There will be no costs to you for participation in this research study.

Compensation
You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:
You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. There will be no list that links your identity with this code.

Voluntary Participation /Withdrawal:
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with Wayne State University or its affiliates.

Questions
If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Thomas Zook at the following phone number (954) 336-0987 or his doctoral advisor, Dr. Carolyn M. Shields at the following phone number (248) 285-2166. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call the Wayne State Research Subject Advocate at (313) 577-1628 to discuss problems, obtain information, or offer input.

Participation
By completing the interview you are agreeing to participate in this study.

APPENDIX G

Superintendent Interview Guide

Superintendent Interview Guide for Study

Justice… Not Just Us: How One District-Level Social Justice-Oriented Leadership Team Addresses Marginalization and Oppression

1. Tell me about your district (how big, demographics, how many schools, test scores).
2. How long have you been here? What is your previous experience?
3. What challenges did you find when you first got here?
4. What have you tried to do to address them and how successful have you been? (pushback etc.)
5. What are the issues that preoccupy your time?
6. Tell me about your leadership team (Strengths, weaknesses, relationships, etc.)
7. How did you assemble your leadership team?
8. How is your thinking aligned with (or different from) your (assistant) superintendent and how well do you work together?
9. How do you define social justice?
10. Have you identified any particular groups that are systematically marginalized or oppressed?
11. Have you made any district-wide changes to address marginalization and oppression?
12. How do you work with principals and teachers to address marginalization and oppression?
13. Have you identified equity concerns from your perspective as a superintendent? What?
14. Describe your current involvement with students? With parents? With teachers?
15. How do you work with your principals and about which issues?
    a. Are you aware of what is going on in each school related to LGBTQ issues, race, etc.?
    b. Other minoritized groups?
16. How do you work with community groups? The police? Etc.
17. Do kids in this community experience any particular challenges and to whom do you turn to address them (trauma)
18. Tell me about discipline, inequitable representation, etc.,
19. Does a particular theoretical leadership perspective guide your work and if so, which one and why?
20. Some of the tenets of transformative leadership ask for specific strategies. Let's discuss them for a moment.
    a. Are there patterns that need to be deconstructed and if so, which are dominant?
    b. How do you engage in dialogue with principals? How do you encourage it in the schools?
    c. Have you had specific conversations about equity issues with the principals?
    d. Who determines the professional development and do you direct them to have any related to marginalization and oppression/equity and diversity?
    e. Have you talked about transformative leadership? In what contexts?
21. How important is moral courage in your job? Can you give some examples of when it has been needed? And when you have needed to use transformative practices?

APPENDIX H

Assistant Superintendent Interview Guide

Assistant Superintendent Interview Guide for Study

Justice… Not Just Us: How One District-Level Social Justice-Oriented Leadership Team Addresses Marginalization and Oppression

1. Tell me about your district (how big, demographics, how many schools, test scores).
2. How long have you been here? What is your previous experience?
3. What challenges did you find when you first got here?
4. What have you tried to do to address them and how successful have you been? (pushback etc.)
5. What are the issues that preoccupy your time?
6. Tell me about your leadership team (Strengths, weaknesses, relationships, etc.)
7. How is your thinking aligned with (or different from) your superintendent/other assistant superintendent and how well do you work together?
8. How do you define social justice?
9. Have you identified any particular groups that are systematically marginalized or oppressed?
10. Have you recommended any district-wide changes to address marginalization and oppression?
11. How do you work with principals and teachers to address marginalization and oppression?
12. Have you identified equity concerns from your perspective as an assistant superintendent? What?
13. Describe your current involvement with students? With parents? With teachers?
14. How do you work with your principals and about which issues?
    a. Are you aware of what is going on in each school related to LGBTQ issues, race, etc.?
    b. Other minoritized groups?
15. How do you work with community groups? The police? Etc.
16. Do kids in this community experience any particular challenges and to whom do you turn to address them (trauma)
17. Tell me about discipline, inequitable representation, etc.,
18. Does a particular theoretical leadership perspective guide your work and if so, which one and why?
19. Some of the tenets of transformative leadership ask for specific strategies. Let's discuss them for a moment.
    a. Are there patterns that need to be deconstructed and if so, which are dominant?
    b. How do you engage in dialogue with principals? How do you encourage it in the schools?
    c. Have you had specific conversations about equity issues with the principals?
    d. Who determines the professional development and do you direct them to have any related to marginalization and oppression/equity and diversity?
    e. Have you talked about transformative leadership? In what contexts?
20. How important is moral courage in your job? Can you give some examples of when it has been needed? And when you have needed to use transformative practices?

APPENDIX I

Principal Interview Guide

Principal Interview Guide for Study

Justice… Not Just Us: How One District-Level Social Justice-Oriented Leadership Team Addresses Marginalization and Oppression

1. Tell me about your school (how big, demographics, how many schools, test scores).
2. How long have you worked at this school? In the district?
3. What challenges did you find when you first got here?
4. What have you tried to do to address them and how successful have you been? (pushback etc.)
5. What are the issues that preoccupy your time?
6. How many superintendents have you worked for?

(For this discussion, please think about your current superintendent).

7. How does your superintendent help you to address the issues you identified above?
8. What would you say are your superintendents' primary goals and how are they communicated?
9. How does she work to achieve these goals?
10. Do you think your superintendent is concerned with issues of equity and social justice? Why or why not? What evidence do you have?
11. Describe how your superintendent works with:
     a.   Principals
     b.   Teachers
     c.   Parents
     d.   The wider community?
12. To what extent is the superintendent aware of what is going on in schools with respect to LGBTQ issues? To racism? To discipline? To curriculum?
13. Do kids in this community experience any particular challenges and how does the superintendent help to address them?
14. Does a particular theoretical leadership perspective guide your work and if so, which one and why? Do you believe a similar theory guides your superintendent?
15. Does your superintendent ever discuss issues like equity, inclusion, social justice, or deficit thinking? Under what circumstances?
16. How is your thinking aligned with (or different from) your superintendent and how well do you work together?
17. (if applicable) How does this superintendent's style and focus differ from that of the previous superintendent and what difference does that make to the overall climate and focus of the district?

APPENDIX J

School Board President/Member Interview Guide

School Board President/member Interview Guide for Study

Justice… Not Just Us: How One District-Level Social Justice-Oriented Leadership Team Addresses Marginalization and Oppression

1. Tell me about your district (how big, demographics, how many schools, test scores).
2. How long have you served as Board President/Member?
3. What challenges did you find within the district when you took office?
4. What have you tried to do to address them and how successful have you been?
5. What are the issues within the district that you find most pressing?
6. How many superintendents have you worked with in the past?

(For this discussion, please think about your current superintendent).

7. What characteristics of the superintendent brought her to your attention?
8. How did you decide she was a "good fit?"
9. What are her strengths and weaknesses?
10. What seem to be her primary preoccupations?
11. What changes has she made?
12. What would you say are your superintendent's primary goals and how are they communicated?
13. How does she work to achieve these goals?
14. Do you think your superintendent is concerned with issues of equity and social justice? Why or why not? What evidence do you have?
15. Describe how your superintendent works with:
    a. Her Team
    b. Principals
    c. Teachers
    d. Parents
    e. The wider community?
16. To what extent is the superintendent aware of what is going on in schools with respect to LGBTQ issues? To racism? To discipline? To curriculum?
17. Do kids in this community experience any particular challenges and how does the superintendent help to address them?
18. Does your superintendent ever discuss issues like equity, inclusion, social justice, or deficit thinking? Under what circumstances?
19. How is your thinking aligned with (or different from) your superintendent and how well do you work together?
20. (if applicable) How does this superintendent's style and focus differ from that of the previous superintendent and what difference does that make to the overall climate and focus of the district?

APPENDIX K

Community Leader Interview Guide

Community Leader Interview Guide for Study

Justice… Not Just Us: How One District-Level Social Justice-Oriented Leadership Team Addresses Marginalization and Oppression

1. Tell me about your community (how big, demographics, how many schools, test scores).
2. How long have you served in your current position?
3. How many superintendents have you worked with in the past?
4. What do you see as strengths of the school district?
5. What challenges do you see affecting the school district?

(For this discussion, please think about your current superintendent).

6. How often do you interact with the superintendent?
7. What are her strengths and weaknesses?
8. What seem to be her priorities?
9. What would you say are your superintendent's primary goals and how are they communicated?
10. How does she work to achieve these goals?
11. Do you think your superintendent is concerned with issues of equity and social justice? Why or why not? What evidence do you have?
12. Describe how your superintendent works with you/the wider community?
13. Do kids in this community experience any particular challenges and how does the superintendent help to address them?
14. Does your superintendent ever discuss issues like equity, inclusion, social justice, or deficit thinking? Under what circumstances?
15. How is your thinking aligned with (or different from) your superintendent and how well do you work together?
16. (if applicable) How does this superintendent's style and focus differ from that of the previous superintendent and what difference does that make to the overall climate and focus of the district?

REFERENCES

Adams, C. J., Robelen, E. W., & Shah, N. (2012, March 6). Civil rights data show

    retention disparities. *Education Week*. Retrieved from:

    http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/03/07/23data_ep.h31.html#top

Ajaka, N. (2017, February). Cabrini Green and Chicago's Public Housing Disaster. *The*

    Atlantic, Retrieved from:

    https://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/516999/cabrini-green-and-chicagos-

    public-housing-disaster/

Andrew, M. (2014). The scarring effects of primary-grade retention?: A study of

    cumulative advantage in the educational career. *Social Forces, 93*(2), 653-685.

Anti-Defamation League. (2001). *Racism.* Retrieved from http://archive.adl.org/hate-

    patrol/racism.html#.Vx0CL5MrKV4

Anyon, J. (1997). *Ghetto schooling: A Political economy of urban educational reform.*

    New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Applebaum, B. (2006) Race ignor-ance, colortalk, and white complicity: White is…white

    isn't. *Educational Theory, 56*(3), 345-362.

Astin, A. W., & Astin, H. S. (2000). *Leadership reconsidered: Engaging higher*

    education in social change. Battle Creek, MI: Kellogg Foundation. Retrieved

    April, 2016 from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED444437

Barber, B. R. (2001). An aristocracy of everyone. In S. J. Goodlad (Ed.) *The last best*

    hope: A democracy reader (pp. 11-22). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bennett deMarrais, K., & LeCompte, M. D. (1999). The way schools work: A

    sociological analysis of education. New York, NY: Longman.

Bonet, S. W. (2011). Educating Muslim American youth in a post-9/11 era: A critical review of policy and practice. *The High School Journal, 95*(1), 46-55. doi*: 10.1353/hsj.2011.0013*

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste.* London, UK: Routledge.

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership.* New York: Harper & Row.

Burns, J. M. (2003). *Transforming leadership.* New York: Grove.

Cambron-McCabe, N., & McCarthy, M. (2005). Educating school leaders for social justice. *Educational Policy, 19*, 201-222.

Capper, C. A. (1998). Critically oriented and postmodern perspectives: Sorting out the differences and applications for practice. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 34*, 354-379.

Capper, C. A. & Jamison, M. T. (1993). Outcomes-based education reexamined: From structural functionalism to poststructuralism. *Educational Policy, 7*, 427-446.

Carlson, D. (2014). The bully curriculum: Gender, sexualities, and the new authoritarian populism in education. In E. J. Meyer & D. Carlson (Eds.), *Gender and sexualities in education: A reader* (pp.175-187). New York: Peter Lang.

Cheney, J., LaFrance, J., & Quinteros, T. (2006). Institutionalized oppression definitions. Tri-County Domestic & Sexual Violence Intervention Network. Retrieved from: https://www.pcc.edu/resources/illumination/documents/institutionalized-oppression-definitions.pdf

Chesir-Teran, D. (2003). Conceptualizing and assessing heterosexism in high schools: A setting-level approach. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 31,* 267-280. doi: 10.1023/A:1023910820994

Chester-Teran, D., & Hughes, D. (2008). Heterosexism in high school and victimization among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning students. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*, 963-975. doi: 10.1007/s10964-0089364-x

Chiasson, J., & Sanlo, R. (2013). Putting sexual orientation and gender identity in context: Historical influences and social trends. In E. S. Fisher, & K. Komosa-Hawkins (Eds.), *Creating safe and supportive learning environments: A guide for working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth and families* (pp. 10-28). New York: Routledge.

Costello, D. (2015) Challenges and supports of instructional leadership in schools. *Antistasis, 5*(1), 3-6.

Cowan, K. (2010, September/October). New teachers and the culture gap: Induction programs focus on reaching students from diverse backgrounds. *Harvard Education Letter, 26*(5). Retrieved from http://hepg.org/hel-ome/issues/26_5/helarticle/new-teachers-and-the-culture-gap_478

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Curwood, J., Schliesman, M., & Horning, K. T. (2009). Fight for your right: Censorship, selection and LGBTQ literature. *English Journal*, *98*(4), 37-43.

DeBlaere, C., & Brewster, M. (2013). Diversity across the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning community. In E. S. Fisher, & K. Komosa-Hawkins (Eds.), *Creating safe and supportive learning environments: A guide for working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth and families* (pp. 73-87). New York: Routledge.

Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom.* New York: The New Press.

Diem, S., & Carpenter, B. W. (2012). Social justice & leadership preparation: Developing a transformative curriculum. *Planning and Changing, 43*(1-2), 96-112.

Eisner, E. W., (1993). The emergence of new paradigms for educational research. *Art Education, 46*(6), 50-55.

Elmore, R. F. (1979-1980). Backward mapping: Implementation research and policy decisions. *Political Science Quarterly, 94*(4), 601-618.

Espelage, D. L., & Rao, M. A. (2013). Safe schools: Prevention and intervention for bullying and harassment. In E. S. Fisher, & K. Komosa-Hawkins (Eds.), *Creating safe and supportive learning environments: A guide for working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth and families* (pp. 140-155). New York, NY: Routledge.

Evers, C. W., & Wu, E. H. (2006). On generalizing from single case studies: Epistemological reflections. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 40*(4). 511-526.

Foster, W. (1986). *Paradigms and promises.* Buffalo, NY: Prometheus.

Frick, W. C. (2008). Principals' value-informed decision making, interpersonal moral

    discord, and pathways to resolution: The complexities of moral leadership praxis.

    Journal of Educational Administration, 47(1), 50-74. doi:

    10.1105/09578230910928089.

Frattura, E., & Capper, C. A. (2007). *Leading for social justice: Transforming schools for

    all learners.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York, NY: Continuum.

Garnets, L. D. (2002). Sexual orientations in perspective. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic

    Minority Psychology, 8*(2), 115-129. doi: 10.1037/1099-9809.8.2.115

Giroux, H. A. (2009). Education and the crisis of youth: Schooling and the promise of

    democracy. *The Educational Forum, 73*(1), 8-18. doi:

    10.1080/00131720802539523

Graff, C. & Stufft, D. (2011). Increasing visibility for LGBTQ students: What schools

    can do to create inclusive classroom communities. *Current Issues in Education,

    14*(1). Retrieved from http://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/636

Green, J. M. (1999). *Deep democracy: Community, diversity, and transformation*.

    Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Greenfield, W. D. (2004). Moral leadership in schools. *Journal of Educational

    Administration, 42(2), 174-196. doi: 10.1108/095782304110525595*

Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Noguera, P. A. (2010) The achievement gap and the

    discipline gap: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational Researcher. 39*(1), 59-

    68. doi: 10.3102/0013189X09357621

Greytak, E. A., & Kosciw, J. G. (2013). Responsive classroom curriculum for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning students. In E. S. Fisher, & K. Komosa-Hawkins (Eds.), *Creating safe and supportive learning environments: A guide for working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth and families* (pp. 156-174). New York: Routledge.

Gronn, P. (2008). The future of distributed leadership. *Journal of Educational Administration, 46*(2), 141-158. doi: 10.1108/09578230810863235

Hallinger, P. & McCary, C. E. (1990). Developing the strategic thinking of instructional leaders. *The Elementary School Journal, 91*(2), 89-108.

Harris, C. L. (1995). Whiteness as property. In K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller, & K. Thomas (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that framed the movement* (pp. 276-291). NY: New Press.

Harry, B., & Klingner, J. (2006). *Why are so many special education students in special education? Understanding race and disability in schools 2nd edition.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Heck, R. H., Larson, T. J., & Marcoulides, G. A. (1990). Instructional leadership and school achievement: Validation of a causal model. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 26*(2), 94-125.

Herr, K. (1997). School experiences of gay and lesbian youth: The invisible minority. In M. B. Harris (Ed.), *School experiences of gay and lesbian youth: The invisible minority.* New York, NY: The Hawthorn Press.

Howe, K. R. (1997). *Understanding equal educational opportunity: Social justice, democracy and schooling.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Jewett, T. O. (1997). Thomas Jefferson and the purpose of education, *The Educational Forum, 61*(2), 110-113. doi: 10.1080/00131729709335239

Jimerson, S. R., Anderson, G. E., & Whipple, A. D. (2002). Winning the battle and losing the war: Examining the relation between grade retention and dropping out of high school. *Psychology in the Schools, 39*(4), 441-457. doi:10.1002/pits.10046

Jimerson, S. R., Pletcher, S. M. W., Graydon, K., Schnurr, B. L., Nickerson, A. B., & Kundert, D. K. (2006). Beyond grade retention and social promotion: Promoting the social and academic competence of students. *Psychology in the Schools, 43*(1), 85-97.

Jorde, L. B., & Wooding, S. P. (2004). Genetic variation, classification, and 'race'. *Nature Genetics Supplement, 36*(11), S28-S33.

Kena, G., Musu-Gillette, L., Robinson, J., Wang, X., Rathbun, A., Zhang, J., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Barmer, A., & Dunlop Velez, E. (2015). *The Condition of Education 2015* (NCES 2015-144). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch.

Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., & Bartkiewicz, M. J. (2014). Failing progress: Changes in school climate for LGBT youth over time. In E. J. Meyer & D. Carlson (Eds.), *Gender and sexualities in education: A reader* (pp.188-201). New York: Peter Lang.

Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). *The 2013 national school climate survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in our nation's schools.* New York: GLSEN.

Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation: The restoring of apartheid schooling in America.* New York, NY: Crown.

Kumashiro, K. K. (2000). Toward a theory of anti-oppressive education. *Review of Educational Research, 70*(1), 25-53.

Labaree, D. F. (1997). Public goods, private goods: The American Struggle over educational goals. *American Educational Research Association, 34*(1), 39-81.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1996). "Your blues ain't like mine": Keeping issues of race and racism on the multicultural agenda. *Theory Into Practice, 35*(4), 248-255.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2007). Pushing past the achievement gap: An essay on the language of deficit. *The Journal of Negro Education, 76*(3), 316-323.

Larson, C., & Murtadaha, K. (2002). Leadership for social justice. In J. Murphy (Ed.), *The educational leadership challenge: Redefining leadership for the 21st centrury* (pp. 134-161). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Layton, L. (2014). National high school graduation rates at historic high, but disparities still exist. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/high-school-graduation-rates-at-historic-high/2014/04/28/84eb0122-cee0-11e3-937f-d3026234b51c_story.html

Liethwood, K. (2010). Transformational school leadership. In E. Baker, B. McGaw, & P. Peterson (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education (3rd ed.).* Oxford: Elsevier.

Liethwood, K., & Duke, D. (1998). Mapping the conceptual terrain of leadership: A critical point of departure for cross-cultural studies. *Peabody Journal of Education,* 73(2), 31-50.

Leithwood, K. & Jantzi, D. (2005). A review of transformational school leadership research 1996-2005. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 4*(3), 177-199. doi: 10.1080/157007760500244769.

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. In D. D. Williams (Ed.). *Naturalistic evaluation.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lipman, P. (2011). *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race and the right to the city.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Lipsitz, G. (2011). *How racism takes place.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Lodico, M. G., Spaulding, D. T., & Voegtle, K. H. (2010). *Methods in educational research: From theory to practice.* San Francisco: Josssey-Bass.

Lopez, M. H., & Velasco, G. (2011). *Childhood poverty among Hispanics sets record, leads nation.* Retrieved from Pew Research Center, Hispanic Trends website: http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/09/28/childhood-poverty-among-hispanics-sets-record-leads-nation/

Marshall, C. (Ed.). (2004) Social justice challenges to educational administration [Special issue]. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*(1).

Marshall, C., & Olivia, M. (2006). *Leaders for social justice: Making revolutions in education.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Marshall, C., & Ward, M. (2004). "Yes but…" Education leaders discuss social justice. *Journal of School Leadership, 14*, 530-563.

Mayo, C. (2014). *LGBTQ Youth & Education: Policies and Practices.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Mayo, E. (1949/1990). Hawthorne and the Western Electric Company, In D. S. Pugh

    (Ed.), *Organization theory, 3rd Edition*. New York, NY: Penguin.

McDonald, J. (2013). Coming out in the field: A queer reflexive account of shifting

    researcher identity. *Management Learning, 44*(2), 127-143. doi:

    10.117/1350507612473711

McGuire, J. K., Anderson, C. R., Toomey, R. B., & Russell, S. T. (2010). School climate

    for transgender youth: A mixed method investigation of student experiences and

    school responses. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39, 1175-1188. doi:

    10.1007/s10964-010-9540-7

McKenzie, K. B., & Locke, L. A. (2014). Distributed leadership: A good theory but what

    if leaders won't, don't know how, or can't lead? *Journal of School Leadership,*

    24, 164-188.

Meyer, E. J. (2010). *Gender and sexual diversity in schools.* New York: Springer.

Mertens, D. M. (2009). *Transformative research and evaluation.* New York, NY: The

    Gilford Press.

Milner, H. R. (2010). What does teacher education have to do with teaching?

    Implications for diversity studies. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(1-2), 118+.

    doi:10.1177/0022487109347670

Møller, J. (2010). Leadership: Democratic. In E. Baker, P. Peterson, & B. McGaw (Eds.),

    International encyclopedia of education (3rd ed., pp. 12-17). Oxford: Elsvier.

Nasaw, D. (1979). *Schooled to order: A social history of public schooling in the United*

    States. New York: Oxford University Press.

Oakes, J., & Rogers, J. (2006). *Learning power: Organizing for education and justice.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Obergefell v. Hodges, 135 S. Ct. 1732 (2015).

Palmer, P. (2007). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Park, V., & Datnow, A. (2009). Co-constructing distributed leadership: District and school connections in data-driven decision making. *School Leadership and Management, 29*(5), 477-494.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act, North Carolina Statute, Session Law 2016 -3 House Bill 2.

Protecting Freedom of Conscience from Government Discrimination Act, Mississippi Statute, Session law 2016 - House Bill 1523.

Quantz, R. A., Rogers, J., & Dantley, M. (1991). Rethinking transformative leadership: Toward democratic reform of schools. *Journal of Education, 173*(3), 96-118.

Robinson, V. M. J., Lloyd, C. A. & Rowe, K. J. (2008) The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 44*(5), 635-674. doi: 10.1177/0013161X08321509.

Ravitch, D. (2013). *Reign of error: The hoax of the privatization movement and the danger to America's public schools.* New York, NY: Knopf.

Ruddin, L. P. (2006). You can generalize stupid! Social scientists, Bent Flyvbjerg, and case study methodology. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12(4), 797-812.

Ryan, J. (2006). Inclusive leadership. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schensul, J. J., & LeCompte, M. D. (2013). *Essential ethnographic methods: A mixed methods approach.* Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

Scheurich, J. J. (1998). Highly successful and loving, public elementary schools populated mainly by low-SES children of color: Core beliefs and cultural characteristics. *Urban Education, 33,* 451-491.

Scheurich, J., & Skrla, L. (2003). *Leadership for equity and excellence: Creating high achievement classrooms, schools, and districts.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Schmidt, S. J. (2010). Queering social studies: The role of Social Studies in normalizing citizens and sexuality in the common good. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, *38*(3), 314-335. doi: 10.1080/00933104.2010.10473429

Schniedewind, N. (2005). "There ain't no White people here!": The transforming impact of teachers' racial consciousness on students and schools. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 38*, 280-289. doi: 10.1080/10665680500299668

Shields, C. M. (2004). Dialogic leadership for social justice: Overcoming pathologies of silence. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40,* 109-132.

Shields, C. M. (2007). *Bakhtin: Primer.* New York: Peter Lang.

Shields, C. M. (2009). *Courageous leadership for transforming schools: Democratizing practice.* Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

Shields, C. M. (2010a). Transformative leadership: Working for equity in diverse contexts. Educational Administration Quarterly, 46, 558-589. doi: 10.1177/0013161X10375609

Shields, C. M. (2010b). Leadership: Transformative. In E. Baker, B. McGaw, & Peterson (Eds.), International Encyclopedia of Education (3rd Edition). Oxford: Elsevier.

Shields, C. M. (2013). *Transformative leadership in education: Equitable change in an uncertain and complex world.* New York: Routledge.

Shields, C. M. (2014). Leadership for social justice education: A critical transformative approach. In I. Bogotch and C.M. Shields (Eds.), *International handbook of educational leadership and social (in)justice.* Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer.

Shields, C. M. (2016). *Transformative leadership: Primer.* New York: Peter Lang.

Shields, C. M., Bishop, R., & Mazawi, A. E. (2005). *Pathologizing practices: The impact of deficit thinking on education.* New York: Peter Lang.

Skria, L., & Scheurich, J. J. (2001). Displacing deficit thinking in school district leadership. *Education and Urban Society, 33*, 235-259. doi: 10.1177/0013124501333002

Smith, E. J., & Harper, S. R. (2015). *Disproportionate impact of K-12 school suspension and expulsion on Black students in southern states.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education.

Southworth, G. (2002). Instructional leadership in schools: Reflections and empirical evidence, *School Leadership & Management, 22*(1) 73-91. doi: 10.1080/1362430220143042

Spillane, J. P. (2006). *Distributed Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Starratt, R. J. (1991). Building an ethical school: A theory for practice in educational leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 27*(2), 185-202.

Starratt, R. J. (2001). Democratic leadership theory in late modernity: An oxymoron or ironic possibility? *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 4*(4), 333-352. doi: 10.1080/1360312011080978.

Starratt, R. J. (2005). Responsible leadership. *The Educational Forum, 69*, 124-133.

Sumara, D. & Davis, B. (1999). Interrupting heteronormativity: Toward a queer curriculum theory. *Curriculum Inquiry 29*(2), 191-208.

Taylor, F. W., (1912/1990), Scientific management, In D. S. Pugh (Ed.), *Organization theory 3rd Edition*, New York, NY: Penguin.

Theoharis, G. (2007). Social Justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 43,* 228-251.

Toomey, R. B., McGuire, J. K., & Russell, S. T. (2012). Heteronormativity, school climates, and perceived safety for gender nonconforming peers. *Journal of Adolescence*, *35*, 187-196. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.03.001

U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates. (2012). Retrieved from

http://census.gov/topics/population.html

U. S. Const. pmbl.

Valencia, R. R. (Ed.). (1997). The evolution of deficit thinking. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Viadero, D. (2006). Rags to Riches in US Largely a Myth, Scholars Write.*Education Week*, *26*(8).

Walton, G. (2005). The hidden curriculum in schools: Implications for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth. *Alternate Routes,* 21, 18-39.

Wellman, D. (1977). *Portraits of White racism.* Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

Wells, C. M. (2010). Preparing superintendents for building teacher leadership: Implications for university programs. *The International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 5*(2), 1-9.

Weiner, E. J. (2003). Secretary Paulo Freire and the democratization of power: Toward a theory of transformative leadership. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 35*(1), 89-106.

Welner, K. G., & Carter, P. L. (2013). Achievement gaps arise from opportunity gaps. In P. L. Carter & K. G. Welner, Eds. *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child a chance.* (pp. 1-10). New York, NY: Oxford.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research design and methods, 3rd edition.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

ABSTRACT

JUSTICE… NOT JUST US: HOW ONE DISTRICT-LEVEL SOCIAL JUSTICE-ORIENTED TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM ADDRESSES MARGINALIZATION AND OPPRESSION

by

THOMAS A. ZOOK

December 2017

Advisor: Dr. Carolyn M. Shields

Major: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Our democracy depends upon an educated populace; thus, educators have an ethical and a moral obligation to provide equitable opportunities for all children to obtain an education "worth wanting" (Howe, 1997). Yet, too often the pleas of countless children yearning to be accepted go unnoticed. In the U.S., millions of students fail to realize similar academic success and social inclusion simply because of their (self or imposed) identification with a non-dominant identity group, and this can only be understood as institutionalized injustice. Often hiding in plain sight, marginalization and oppression take many forms, yet for their victims the results are the same—a diminished existence.

This transformative case study examined a social justice-oriented district leadership team as they endeavored to promote inclusion and equity and provide exceptional educational experiences for all children in their care. Utilizing multiple in-depth interviews and in-situ observations over several months, the perspectives of the leadership team, various district personnel, and community leaders were obtained and

analyzed using transformative leadership theory as a framework. Applying abductive reasoning (Evers & Wu, 2006) to the data I demonstrate why it is reasonable to infer that transformative leadership theory (Shields, 2016) best explains this team's approach to just leadership.

The data describe a leadership team that demonstrates a multifaceted relationship including qualities revealing professionalism, collegiality, teamwork, friendship, and a profound level of trust most resembling a family of choice. Humor and frivolity unite this team, annealing them to the magnitude of a challenging profession. Furthermore, humility and a willingness to share in the responsibilities of administration magnify this team's effectiveness and sphere of influence.

Most significantly, the leadership team at the center of this study demonstrates an unwavering commitment to the dignity and potential of every child and a mandate to effect equitable reform. This study richly chronicles the decisions and actions of a morally courageous leadership team as they challenge injustice district-wide. Working to dismantle inequitable mental constructs, the team confronts poverty, racism, classism, meritocracy, and other forms of institutionalized oppression. Transformative leadership theory offers individuals committed to just governance a powerful lens through which to guide praxis.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Prior Education

- University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois — 2012
    - Ed. M.   - Diversity and Equity Issues in Education
- The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio — 1998
    - B.A. - Psychology - Emphasis in Black Studies

Awards and Honors

- Thomas C. Rumble Graduate Fellowship – Wayne State University — 2013, 14, 15
- Nominee - Student of the Year, University of Illinois Champaign Urbana — 2012
- Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society — 2012
- Golden Key Honor Society — 2012
- Phi Theta Kappa - Outstanding Student in Foreign Languages — 1998

Publications

- **Zook, Thomas A. (2017)** Promising pedagogy: Advancing the educational experience of queer students through transformative leadership theory. *Journal of Homosexuality*. 64(13), 1755-1777.

• Presentations

- **Zook, Thomas A.** (2016, January). *Climate Change: Creating Safer and More Welcoming Schools for Queer Youth Through Transformative Leadership Theory*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of Michigan SOGI, Plymouth, Michigan.
- **Zook, Thomas A.** (2015, November). Promising Pedagogy: Advancing the Educational Experience of Queer Students Through Transformative Leadership. In C. M. Shields (Chair), *Educating Marginalized Children in Inclusive Transcultural Spaces*. Symposium to be conducted at the conference of the University Council for Educational Administration, San Diego, CA.
- **Zook, Thomas A.** (2015, June). The Promise of Transformative Leadership in Creating Safe and Supportive Schools for Queer Youth. In C. M. Shields (Chair), *Addressing the Educational Needs of Minoritized Populations through Transformative Leadership.* Symposium to be conducted at the conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Educational Administration, Ottawa, Canada.
- **Zook, Thomas A.** (2015, April). *Out On the Street Is No Place To Be: Recognizing and Responding to the Educational Needs of Sexual and Gender Minority Homeless Youth.* In C. M. Shields (Chair), *Homelessness Should be no Child's Heritage: Addressing the Impact of Homelessness in Education.* Symposium conducted at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Chicago, Illinois.
- **Zook, Thomas A.** (2015, January). *Just Not Those Kids… Michigan's Failed Anti-Bullying Legislation and the Potential of Transformative Leadership to Complete the Job*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of Michigan SOGI, Plymouth, Michigan.
- **Zook, Thomas A.** (2014, June). *No Child Left Out: The Implications of Non-Inclusive, Heteronormative Curriculum for Queer Youth*. Paper presented at the symposium, *Educational Leadership in Impoverished, Highly Contested, and/or Challenging Contexts.* C. M. Shields (Chair) conducted at the conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Educational Administration in partnership with the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management, Fredericton, Canada.