Equity Centered Leadership of Principals Who Narrowed the Race-Based Academic Achievement Gap

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Abstract

Critical Race Theory is the theoretical framework used to structure the discussion of data and results. The purpose of this descriptive multi-embedded case study was to investigate the perspective of effective elementary school principals in a large, diverse suburban school district in the Metro area who narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap in reading by increasing their knowledge, skills, and leadership practices. Data gathered included an archival search, focus group observations and transcripts, and individual interview transcripts. Archived data were used to identify a purposeful criterion sampling of elementary school principals who narrowed the race-based achievement gap. These experiences identified are crucial to learning how and why principals need to discuss race and racism in education. Findings revealed in this study a need to provide ongoing learning opportunities that support reflective practices and innovative approaches to combat institutional racist policies and politics are recommended to superintendents in school districts interested in sustaining an inclusive community grounded in equity.

Introduction

A critical issue in public education is the race-based academic achievement gap among Black, White, and Latino students (Bali and Alvarez, 2004). Black and Latino students often receive substantially lower achievement scores than White students on standardized achievement assessments (Boykin and Noguera, 2011). Disrupting the embedded norms of sociohistorical oppression in schooling are vital for the success and de-colonization of education for students of color (Jaime-Diaz and Méndez-Negrete, 2021).

Investigating consciousness, particularly racial consciousness, provides needed insight into understanding how educators perceive schools, curriculum, instruction, and the intersectionality of educators' relationships, behavior, and practices (Gist, 2014). Furthermore, understanding and embracing where one exists within the positionality of society juxtapose to community aspirations and legacy, conocimientos, a deconstruction of self must occur (Jaime-Diaz and Méndez-Negrete, 2021). The educators social construct of race, religion, language, immigration status can either free students and allow them to seize their learning through self-reflexivity or perpetuate the historical oppression that disenfranchises Black, Latino, and Indigenous students in education. While abiding by district policies and legislative mandates, an examination of principals' consciousness regarding relevance, trusting relationships, and rigor for students may reveal deficit-thinking found in schools in the United States (Murakami, Garza, and Merchant, 2012).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) addresses systemic bias, where race is a social construct. Unfortunately, many have misconstrued the meaning of CRT and reversing power and privilege (Mackenzie, 2021). Propagating White innocence

and labeling critical theorists and people of color as perpetrators of hate and divisive dialog reveals the covert work of normalizing Whiteness and supremist ideology (Orozco, 2019). Legitimately, CRT provides a framework and understanding of the systemic structures of White Supremacy that oppresses Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. This theory envelops wide-ranging racial oppression embedded into educational institutions and regular school existence. Often students of color enroll in high-performing suburban schools yet are slotted in lower academic programming and enroll through a system that oppressed and segregates students through attendance boundaries or de facto segregation practices. In this situation, educational leaders may aspire to have an equity-centered leadership study to create and maintain opportunities for every student (Irby et al., (2019). This study identified leadership strategies used by elementary school principals in narrowing the race-based achievement disparity.

The most recent accountability system determined by the federal government to address the race-based achievement gap in schools is the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), enhancing the previous legislation referred to as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). A systematic problem of race-based discrimination in schools gained exposure in 2000 when the researchers used data to expose differences in academic expectations between White and Black and Latino students. Genuine accountability exists for principals when students get the opportunity to receive a free, rigorous, and appropriate education (Singleton, 2013). Critical examination of how elementary school principals attempt to narrow racial achievement disparities in the subject of reading is lacking in the current literature. School district leaders are strategically projecting White innocence by denying blame, dodging

responsibility, disguising racism, glorifying the district, and shielding principals from doing the reflexive conocimientos work (Bertrand and Sampson, 2022).

A focus on educational leadership and its perceived influence on students' academic achievement has become a prominent issue in recent years (Kythreotis, Pashiardis, and Kyriakides, 2010). Educational leadership may address failures of the dominant system providing equity in education and issues of race in American schools (Gooden and Dantley, 2012). Principals' leadership is associated with students' academic success (Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2003), which brings attention to the principal's critical role in narrowing the disparities in race-based achievement (Wright and Harris, 2010). When administrators and teachers see themselves as racially conscious individuals, and learn about their own ancestral history and legacy, honoring the sacrifice of the many generations before them, culturally relevant education is possible (Jaime-Diaz and Méndez-Negrete, 2021; Singleton, 2013).

What is the problem?

The general problem is that elementary school principals must narrow the racial achievement gap, yet few meet this requirement. Boykin and Noguera (2011) found certain racial groups (Black and Latino students) in United States schools do not attain the academic achievement levels of White students when comparing similar standardized assessment data. The specific problem described in this study is that despite the District's Superintendent's requirement of principal leadership training focused on increasing principals' racial consciousness within the first year or employment, the race-based academic achievement gap has only narrowed in only 11 out of 43 elementary schools in a large, diverse suburban school district in the Metro area of Colorado. Educator ideologies constructed during their formative

years as elementary school students through their preservice years formed at the university create the bias and social constructs around race, racism, juxtaposing equity and education (Jaime-Diaz, Ramos, and Méndez-Negrete, 2020).

Beginning in 2003, the superintendent of this large, diverse suburban school district in the metro area of Colorado required all administrators to participate in Beyond Diversity™ training (Board of Education, 2013). Through this training, elementary school principals from schools with academic disparities in racial subgroups can gain the knowledge, skills, and leadership strategies designed to narrow the racial-achievement gaps. The main research question for this study is what do successful elementary school principals do to narrow racial achievement reading disparities? This study's sub-questions are: (a) How have elementary principals applied required racial consciousness training to their leadership strategies? (b) What racially-conscious leadership strategies have the 11 elementary school principals used in elementary schools that have decreased the race-based student academic achievement gap in reading?

Importance of the Study

Closing the race-based achievement gap is the most significant work and perhaps the best contribution to education when addressing the changing demographics of the United States (Boykin and Noguera, 2011). There may be many solutions for closing the race-based student achievement gap; researchers suggest a further need to study the academic experiences of Black and Latino students, families, and educators (Banks and McGee; 2010; Boykin and Noguera, 2011; Jaime-Diaz and Méndez-Negrete, 2021; Singleton, 2013).

Leadership and schools need reform to close the race-based achievement gap (Noguera, 2008a). Leadership is essential to students' academic achievement (Wright and Harris, 2010); thus, it is important to explore effective principals' leadership strategies. Researchers identified a lack of culturally responsive or racially-unconscious leadership as obstructions to narrowing the race-based achievement disparities in schools (Boykin and Noguera, 2011; Noguera, 2008a; Noguera, 2008b; Singleton, 2013).

Theoretical Framework. Literature Review

The theoretical framework presented in this study features Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical Race Theory exposes that a lack of concern for and avoidance of inquiry about racial inequities in education exists as the centrality of experiential knowledge and interest convergence (Singleton, 2013). In CRT, race and racism are central to White innovation. District Leadership recognize that in order to gain support and funding for education, particularly in science, technology, or math, they need to align their programmatic goals with increasing diversity – converging interests (Baber, 2015). Further, CRT normalizes the social, political, and legal system that avoids Black and Latino people and perspectives. Six tenets comprise the foundation for CRT: (a) the permanence of racism, (b) race as a social construction, (c) interest convergence, (d) counter-story, and (e) critique of liberalism.

Legal Realists and Critical Race theorists identify the legal system as a protector of the status quo instead of applying the law to balance competing interests while promoting social justice (Blandford, 2011). Lawmakers throughout the U.S. are writing and passing legislation banning Critical Race Theory and discussion around race and racism in public schools (Liu, 2022). Understanding the origins

and tenets of CRT is key to this study's theoretical framework. Further, the foundational understanding of CRT is essential to identify the leadership strategies used by elementary school principals in the large, diverse suburban school district in the metro area of Colorado who narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap of their students in reading.

The weakness in employing CRT as a framework is that it is not widely used in the academic literature about educational or principal leadership. Critics of CRT claim that the tenets discussing Whiteness in education dichotomize White folk into characteristics of good and bad, thus not advancing antiracist education, and diluting the effects of systemic racist policy and practices (Cabrera, 2017). Several states have implemented or proposed laws banning CRT in schools (Dunn, 2021). Carter (2021) suggested advocates for CRT argue CRT challenges White supremacy and examines the impact of racism in the United States to mitigate racism in the future. Equity can only be achieved if we discuss inequality and provide counter-storytelling to disrupt the White normalized single-story (Liu, 2022).

<u>Racism in Schools</u> Rocque (2010) conducted a qualitative study that highlighted issues associated with racial disparity, including the overrepresentation of Black and Latino students reported as students with discipline concerns. The bias of educators enforcing and providing consequences for students of color while their White peers are not reported and disruptive behaviors by White students are seen as jovial and without malice. In a qualitative single-case study Jaime-Diaz (2019) revealed how the White normed-culture of schools has normalized feelings of being forced out, excluded, punished, and oppressed because they are being authentically and unapologetically a person of Latino who may choose to speak

Spanish in class. The overrepresentation of Black students referred to the office may be because of the staff members' perspective of Black children not fitting into the school's established (i.e., White) norm. Critical Race Theory explains this behavior as the fifth tenet described by Singleton (2013) as a critique of liberalism that has normalized White culture and behavior as normal, a significant underpinning of the theoretical framework in this investigation.

Critically examining the race-based academic achievement gap, Boykin and Noguera (2011) advocated that principal's learn about successful models in education. Noguera (2008b) examined the complexities of race in schools and society and proposed a cultural responsiveness approach for principals to improve outcomes for all students. Leadership that focuses on the racial, ethnic, and cultural needs of students presented by the student, for the student, implements culturally relevant leadership.

Principals and Racial Consciousness In a qualitative case study investigation, Gooden and O'Doherty (2015) identified that a culturally-responsive leader in education needs to address how race, individual, institutional and cultural beliefs impact structures' and, thus, outcomes for Black and Latino students. Through a qualitative study analyzing racial autobiographies of principals, Gooden and O'Doherty (2015) found that early racial identity development occurred with racial isolation and their family and community influence. The questionnaire provided to all participants prompted the interviewee to similarly reflect on race and its effect on their leadership practices. After attending a principal preparation course, an increase of racial awareness, a decrease in colorblindness, and acknowledgment of White privilege demonstrated growth. Gooden and O'Doherty (2015) asserted that leaders need to recognize their assumptions and understand others' perspectives. Leaders must know themselves and their imperfections (Gooden and O'Doherty,

2015). The authors provided a final suggestion involving using racial autobiographies as a tool to reflect and embrace a person's racial identity. Racial autobiographies assist educators in examining their racial identity that builds awareness of race, privilege, racism, and other forms of oppression (Gooden and O'Doherty, 2015; Singleton, 2013).

Findings from a Qualitative Grounded Critical Race Theory approach proposed that understanding the context of woman's life is critical to understanding all forms of oppression in education (Huber 20010). Throughout the data collection there was an obvious theme, the intersectionality of race, gender, and nativism. Contemporary nativism has targeted specific groups according to racialized perceptions of who fits into "normalized" national identity. Huber (2010) revealed how Latina/o students have internalized racist nativist beliefs grounded in White Supremacy resulting in negative perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and opportunities for Latina immigrants. Students and staff within the Latino community are perceiving immigrants as threats beginning in elementary school. Educators and educational leaders need to be reflexive, conscious, and aware of the ways they may contribute to racist nativism in education (Huber, 2010).

Method and Design

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive multi-embedded case study was to describe the leadership strategies used by elementary school principals in a large, diverse suburban school district in the Metro Area of Colorado. They narrowed their students' race-based academic achievement gap in reading during 2006–2016. Using this research method and design, elementary principals described their personal experiences, leadership strategies, and racial consciousness in narrowing their schools' race-based reading achievement gap. The sample includes

elementary school principals in a large, diverse suburban school district in the Metro area of Colorado who has successfully narrowed the race-based reading achievement gap to at least 10 percentage points based on district-archived academic reading achievement measured by the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP). Data analysis included the triangulation of focus group and individual interviews (Appendix F), open-ended surveys (Appendix E), and archival searches.

<u>Population</u> Located in a southern suburb of the greater metro Colorado, the population is a large, diverse school district that geographically covers five different municipalities, educates over 55,000 students, and is one of the highest-achieving school districts in the state. The student population is 50.5% White, 11.4% Black, 20.9% Latino, 8.6%, 0.6% American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.3% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian, 7.7% two or more races, 29% of students receive free or reduced-priced lunches, and 10.33% of students speak a language other than English in their home (CCSD, 2020). The District includes 43 elementary schools. One magnet school that serves kindergarten through grade 8, one magnet school that serves only high school students, two charter schools that serve kindergarten through grade 8, 10 middle schools, one charter school that serve grades 6 through 8, and eight high schools.

The population of this research study varied by race, gender, and years of experience, yet only included elementary principals. A focused sampling of elementary school principals who narrowed the race-based achievement gap by at least 10 percentage points in state-mandated reading assessments was obtained using archival data. The sample size in this study was limited to 11 out of 43 principals who lead elementary schools within the District and represent various

areas. Eleven present-day principals describe the maximum capacity of elementary principals who narrowed the race-based academic achievement in reading.

<u>Sampling</u> The study's sample included current elementary school principals who have successfully narrowed the race-based achievement gap in reading to at least 10 percentage points based on district archived state academic reading achievement data measured by the TCAP during 2006–2016. The research sample was conveniently focused on exploring detailed, in-depth data of closing the race-based academic achievement lived gap in reading, leadership practices, and racial consciousness of said principals. Only principals who have attended the district superintendent's required professional development, Beyond Diversity™, were selected. The sample for the focus group included two tiers of principals. Tier one (TO) included 11 out of 43 elementary school principals in the District, chosen because they narrowed the race-based achievement gap by at least 10 percentage points in state-mandated reading assessments in one out of three grade levels measured by the TCAP. Tier two (TT) participants, a subset of TO, included four TO principals who narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap in two of three grade levels. No further data collection would have occurred if data saturation had been reached with 9 of the 11 participants. However, data saturation did not happen with the focus group; thus, TT participants were individually interviewed, and the data were included. Individual interviews only included TT principals. Once saturation was reached and no further new data emerged, the analysis was valid.

Purposive criterion sampling techniques were employed in this investigation. Criterion sampling techniques require participants to meet criteria, such as experiencing a precisely lived experience (Palys, 2008). Hesse-Biber and Leavy

(2011) claimed that obtaining informed consent, contained in the introductory letter (Appendices A, B, and C) and reviewed during the interview, would help foster a trusting relationship. Building a trusting relationship may foster trust and contribute to an added perception of confidentiality. An electronic audio recording device was used, and when transcribed, a two-letter code was used to ensure anonymity. A field notebook contained a list of questions to ask the interviewee and guided the interviewer to remain focused on previously established learning targets (Kawulich, 2005).

Demographics The large, diverse suburban school district in the Metro area of Colorado employs 43 elementary school principals, and all 43 principals have attended racial consciousness training (Appendix G). The sample for the focus group included two tiers of principals. Tier one (TO) included 11 out of 43 elementary school principals who narrowed the race-based achievement gap by at least 10 percentage points 110 in state-mandated reading assessments in one out of three grade levels measured by TCAP. Tier two (TT) participants, a subset of TO, include four TO principals who narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap in two of three grade levels. Participants in this study did not include principals who have not narrowed race-based disparities. Male, female, White, African-American, and Latino principals were represented in the focus groups ranging from 33–55 years of age and participants in all other data collection processes in this study.

Participant Protocol After the selection process based on the reading achievement archived data, the investigator sent letters seeking support and participation to handpicked individuals requesting their volunteerism via district mail. Then, 24 hours after the paper letters were sent, an electronic reminder and request to answer specific questions for further discussion regarding informed consent was

sent. These personal actions formed the relationship between the investigator and participants to obtain in-depth responses.

An introductory letter (Appendix C) soliciting participation in this study with an informed consent form, as presented by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), was sent to participants. The introductory letter that included informed consent (Appendices A and B) also stated how a participant might withdraw at any time. Once participants were identified for this study, each member was required to sign informed consent acknowledging their understanding of their volunteerism and accepting that all data collected would be kept confidential before proceeding with the investigation. A review of the informed consent form occurred at the onset of the focus group, following the friendly professional greeting. The participants were notified in writing and verbally at the beginning of the meeting that they can discontinue their participation at any time without retribution or penalty. Additionally, participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded to represent their experience accurately.

Data Security The Institutional Review Board (IRB) fully approved this investigation before data collection began. In this study, a focus group interview took place within the school district facilities in a private conference room to ensure the participants' confidentiality. After the focus group discussion, individual interviews were conducted to follow up with the same individuals to gain clarity or further investigate a critical theme. After the interview, each participant was emailed requesting them to share further data in a more anonymous format (i.e., via Survey Monkey©). Individual interviews provided an additional opportunity to share personal experience data in a more anonymous format than a focus group interview.

Field Test Field tests are employed and may support the scholar to refine the data design (Yin, 2014). A convenient local school in the District provided a field test involving the leadership team in addition to a field test including three University of Phoenix School of Advanced Studies faculty members ensuring the focus group interview questions would elicit relevant data. Insight gleaned from the field test included that the research questions and focus group questions posed no risk or injury to human subjects. Additionally, the committee stated that the questions would provide the data needed to answer said questions. Individual interview questions were developed after the data from the focus group questions were analyzed, and open-ended questions were thoroughly analyzed to investigate areas that need further clarity and or data saturation.

Instrumentation The inquiry approach in this study required the gathering of oral and written representation of the lived experience of elementary school principals who have narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap of their students in reading (Michie, 2013). Interview questions written for the focus group interview to gather oral representation of the participants' experiences include student inclusion, race-based achievement, and leadership (Appendix D). The focus group interview was structured into the categories mentioned above, applying an ABC pattern for analysis mitigation. Interviewees responded to questions from the A category, B category, and C category. The three categories are (a) student inclusion, (b) race-based achievement, and (c) leadership. Student inclusion data, race-based achievement, and leadership are three categories to organize data to support the purpose of this study because student inclusion, race-based achievement, and leadership are essential underpinnings to understanding said phenomenon. Consistency in applying the ABC pattern is critical. Mertens (2014)

claimed that trustworthiness is threatened when using the interview questions between interviews when the instrument changes among applications.

Additionally, researcher coding of interview questions assisted data analysis and provided consistency of interview data collection. Coding is an inductive strategy used in qualitative studies that supports exploring a phenomenon in its entirety (Chowdhury, 2015). Four principals within the District were provided a follow-up interview and an emailed questionnaire checking for clarity, understanding, and gathering further information on the influence of race on their lived experience as a principal.

Padilla and Banks (2004) discussed the Universalistic and Relativistic approaches to data collection. They urged researchers to employ the Relativistic approach because the Universalistic approach historically norms the information from a White male middle-class perspective. This field test study resembled an effort to hone questions. The rationale for the response to the questionnaire reflects the scholar's desire to perfect a question absent of the opportunity to clarify or rephrase the questions. Individual interviews with the TT participants served to focus on areas that required further understanding, clarity, and to continue to describe leadership strategies used by elementary school principals in the District who have narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap of their students. Each participant was emailed requesting them to share further data in a more anonymous format, via Survey Monkey©, then an individual interview to add to their racialized narrative within two weeks of the individual interview. The last data collection procedure for TO participants was completing an open-ended questionnaire.

<u>Data Collection</u> Historical artifacts such as the schools' Key Performance Indicators (KPI), all schools' Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), TCAP Status Summary, and School Performance Frameworks (SPF) guided the selection process before any further data collection process began. Field notes, observations, letter writing, autobiographical writing, newsletters, and other documents are all significant data in a case study inquiry when gathered narrative data (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Narrative data, including field notes and acoustic recordings of the conversation and transcriptions of interviews, may comprise the data during the interviews. The focus group discussion required approximately 30–40 minutes of interaction and 15 minutes to complete mapping and reflection in the form of field notes. Participants received a questionnaire to ease and support participation after the interview was over and the interviewer physically left the interview. The questionnaire provided an additional opportunity for participants to share further their perspective or add to their stories within two weeks after the individual interview. The directions of the open-ended questionnaire requested that the participant shares their reflections about the influence that race had on their leadership practices.

The focus group, individual interview data, questionnaires, and archival information were loaded into QSR International's Nvivo 11® to identify themes. Interview data captures the experience of individual participants, including focus group, provide data from a semi-structured group interview, wherein contributors discuss and interact with each other based on questions, questionnaires, and archival data to describe the commonness of a phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Tier two participants narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap in two of three grade levels. Tier two participants participated in the focus group and individual interviews and received an open-ended questionnaire. Obtaining multiple

perspectives enhanced the legitimacy of the data. Triangulation among the three forms of data collected improved the reliability and validity of this study.

Individual interviews were requested to TO participants following the focus group interviews to gain further insight into areas that require further understanding, clarity, and to continue to describe leadership strategies used by elementary school principals in the District who have narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap of their students in reading. Increased authenticity and validity of the data collection occurred with an individual interview. Lastly, a follow-up phone call and a casual face-to-face dialog to check on participants' progress of completing and returning the requested data occurred two weeks after the interviews when the survey information and reflections were not returned.

Analysis A conventional content analysis was used in this study. Data collected from interviews, questionnaires, and the artifacts were thoroughly read. Then, each word was read with precision to identify exact words for key concepts and themes. After the second reading, a third reading noted impressions and identified key concepts. Lastly, the noted thoughts and concepts were scrutinized to identify themes, categories, and codes. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) urged the use of a concept map to organize identified themes and codes. The focus group and individual interviews, questionnaires, and archived artifacts were structured in an ABC pattern for ease and consistency of analysis. After the focus group and individual data were collected, a Word document detailed the transcription of the recordings.

Next, a concept map categorized the data from the transcription by the coded three categories: (a) student inclusion, (b) race-based achievement, and (c) leadership. Concept maps are a visual structure for organizing large amounts of structured

data. The last analysis process for the archived artifacts reflected the same organization procedures by using a concept map following the described ABC pattern applied for the interview and questionnaire data. Text from each concept map was entered into Wordle, an online program that determines the frequency counts of words and displays them graphically using larger text for words used more frequently. Then, patterns of words or phrases stated in the narrative collection of data emerge. Wordle verified the themes discovered while completing the concept maps and initiated understanding the phenomenon through emerging codes. Each concept map was shared with the corresponding interviewee to ensure accurate information was collected from the interviews.

All narrative interview data, questionnaires, and artifacts collected from each participant were gathered and processed through the concept map and Wordle. Castleberry (2014) claimed that researchers could choose word clouds or word trees, similar to the concept map, to display frequently used words within the data and provide context to the data. The last data analysis process included using QSR International's Nvivo 11® to organize and code data from all narrative interview data collected and artifacts to ensure the accuracy of Wordle. The data collection of ABC coding themes of student inclusion, race-based achievement, and leadership provided structure to the use of QSR International's Nvivo 11®. Artifacts, interview, and questionnaire data collected imported into Nvivo 11® were sorted, organized, classified, and analyzed.

When no new data are received, saturation occurs (Francis et al., 2010). Yin (2014) described pattern matching as empirically predicted patterns of descriptive conditions defined before full data collection of the other cases, will occur for reliability and confirmability. This study detailed an initial sample size of 11 elementary school principals identified TO participants and four additional

interviews with participants identified as TT participants. The next phase of data analysis included triangulating the focus group and individual interview data, responses from the open-ended questionnaire, and archived artifacts that described the leadership strategies and application of participants' racially conscious training.

Trustworthiness One of many necessary components in research, trustworthiness, represents the process of checking the investigator's accuracy when presenting results determines the entire study's credibility and trustworthiness (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). Several experts suggested involving the contributors in reviewing the data collections, analysis, and presentations to enhance the findings' internal trustworthiness and increase the study's integrity. This study included a final review from willing members.

Internal Trustworthiness Participant checking, concept maps, and the applied concept-mapping processes in a decision-making procedure for this multi-embedded case complemented this qualitative method. Scholars need to reflect and provide a reflexive mindset within their study. Hewitt (2007) claimed that when investigators reflect, they need to examine their influence, the objectivity of participants, and the conditions. The field test provided an additional approach to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of this investigation. Yin (2014) proposed that a field test may prove to support the inquiry as a quasi-sample for a case study.

Transferability A small number of principals are finding success in narrowing the race-based achievement disparities (Singleton and Linton, 2006). Thus, this qualitative descriptive multi-embedded case study of principals who successfully narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap by at least ten percentage points in the subject of reading as measured by TCAP furthered the results

provided by Singleton and Linton (2006). Given societal inequalities within racial, ethnic, and cultural variances, student achievement becomes obligatory for principals, and principals must focus their work on a conceptual framework that challenges race-based academic achievement and creates strategies to address these discrepancies (Gooden and Dantley, 2012). This investigation's theoretical framework was used to present data, make recommendations to address how an elementary school principal attempts to narrow racial achievement disparities in the subject of reading, and enhance the transferability of this study.

Dependability The logic used for selecting participants for both tiers in this study enhanced the dependability because the purpose of the study focuses on the same population from which the participants were chosen (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Current technology for audio and visual recording during the focus group and interviews, accurate transcriptions, and detailed field notes intended to ensure the dependability of this study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Coding The coding process assisted post-interview analysis and provided consistency of interview data collection. Focus group electronic data were reviewed to identify key concepts related to an individual point of interest (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). To seek more depth and information, the data collected from the TT principals followed the same systematic coding process. A master list of codes (e.g., participant number, race, leadership) was developed wherein repetition, agreement, disagreement emerged throughout the ongoing review of narrative data.

Patterns emerged in each data analysis phase, beginning with the historical artifact review and continuing with the focus group interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and reinforced throughout the individual data analysis (Yin, 2009). Initial steps

included using QSR's International's Nvivo 11® to organize the data. Coded focus group interview data became repetitive concerning the technical leadership strategies to support Black and Latino students accessing the rigorous curriculum, race-based reading achievement, and inclusivity of the school culture, yet, specific themes had not emerged. Conflicting information arose throughout the concept of race-based academic achievement as the principals shared opposing perspectives on their experiences measuring the academic achievement with a single-digit number of Black and Latino students in their school compared to principals with a more significant number of students of color. Statistical knowledge and effect sizes appeared to conflict with each other's perspectives. The need for more information was evident.

Coded Tier one (TO) and Tier two (TT), principals' responses were measured by the frequency of emerging patterns and themes, including Racial Identity, Racial Consciousness, and CRT. The TT principals included more references to racial identity, racial consciousness, and CRT than TO principals.

Open-ended questionnaires (Appendix E) were returned within two weeks of the focus group, and data analysis following the same coding process as the focus group data analysis was completed. Simplistically listed as reading, rereading, applying master codes, and making the text with patterns, concepts, and themes began to develop. Themes of the pervasiveness of race and an equity journey theme emerged. Not having complete data to address the research question and sub-questions, individual interviews with TT elementary school principals commenced. Data analysis of individual interviews occurred the following days of each interview.

Findings and Discussion

Principals in this study experienced challenges and successes in narrowing the race-based academic achievement deficit in the subject of reading. This research was centered on the following main research question; how do elementary school principals narrow racial achievement disparities in the subject of reading? With two sub-questions: (a) How have elementary principals applied required racial consciousness training to their leadership strategies?, and (b) What racially-conscious leadership strategies have the 11 elementary school principals used in elementary schools that have decreased the race-based student academic achievement gap in reading? Two overall themes emerged from collected data included (a) pervasiveness of race on principals' leadership practices, (b) and racial consciousness. The original master code list, including participant number, race, and leadership, was extended with ideas within the theoretical framework emphasized in this study. The list of codes expanded into racial identity and racial consciousness. Each data point was coded, and occurrences of each code were recorded.

Participants in this investigation each integrated all themes during their interviews. Throughout focus group interview conversations and open-ended questionnaires, the TO participants repeatedly integrated race, strategies, and events that inspired racial consciousness. White participants in TO and TT attributed the superintendent's mandated racial consciousness professional development as the unforgettable experience that inspired them to learn more about the influence of race in education and eventually transformed their practices as the principal in their elementary school. However, the Black and Latino principals expressed during the individual interviews that racial consciousness professional development provided a sense of support in the discussion of race in education and their personal

experience as principals of color. Coding references began to racial identity and racial consciousness. These codes revealed patterns of the influence of race and a significant increase of the racial awareness of the participant in their personal and professional experiences. High levels of integration were identified when the participant connected their understanding within their personal and professional life. A low level of integration was identified when the participant only connected their understanding to their professional life.

Theme 1: Pervasiveness of Race on Principals' Leadership Practices Principals in this study fluently integrated racialized experiences and knowledge of how race has influenced their actions in leading an elementary school. During the data analysis, key concepts of CRT were noted as the theme of the pervasiveness of race emerged. The five tenets of CRT are (a) counter-story, (b) the permanence of racism, (c) interest convergence, (d) whiteness as property, and I a critique of liberalism. Elementary principals revealed specific experiences that indicated the integration of CRT into their leadership practices. The first tenet, counter-story, was demonstrated by TT principals in detailing challenges they experienced in narrowing the race-based achievement gap in reading (Table1).

Table 1 *Characteristic Responses Coded as Integration of Counter-Storytelling*

Level of Integration	Characteristic Responses
High	If a parent asks, answer their questions, but the purpose is close your mouth and listen. Learn about their family. Learn about the kid and let this parent tell you whatever they want to tell you about their kid. And I will tell you; I think it's been a challenge for some people.
Low	In some ways, you're kind of saying I lived my life wrong. It really gets kind of challenging you have people saying the way I've been living all my life, not just this one situation, this one circumstance, but my whole life has been jacked up, so that's hard to get that around, that's the hard part.

Tier one principals expressed personal turmoil during the integration of learning multiple perspectives as counter-story telling was described versus TT principals described the level of discomfort of their staff as honoring multiple perspectives was a school-wide expectation.

The second tenet of CRT, the permanence of racism, was explained by principals in both focus groups and more depth during individual interviews (Table 2).

Table 2 *Characteristic Responses Coded as Integration of Permanence of Racism*

Level of Integration	Characteristic Responses
High	The primary reason for the achievement gap is institutional racism, teacher bias, and low expectations. All [of these are] adult things we got to deal with. My experience, White girl experience. Guess who school's made for? White girls. So, I get how to navigate the whole school thing.
Low	So, as unintentional as it may seem, it is still classist, it is racist, it is economic-ist, whatever that word is. So, I will have to assume that those same biases occur for students who are unable immediately able to prove themselves.

The principals who demonstrated a high level of integration described institutional racism as a problem, validating the theory that race is a perpetual part of society. The third tenet of CRT, interest convergence, was exhibited in focus group interviews and more thoroughly in individual interviews (Table 3).

Table 3 *Characteristic Responses Coded as Integration of Interest Convergence*

Level of Integration	Characteristic Responses
High	We have leadership league in fourth and fifth grade ran by two teachers for students of color. And anyone can join, but it was specifically for kids of color. We would invite our Black and Brown students to come to the table. When people push back, and I can tell it's getting personal, you know, it's the district performance plan, you know you see it right here? It ain't just a [participant named self] thing, this ain't my personal thing, it's a district expectation.
Low	Everyone is exposed to the opportunity to learn, and (we) make sure our kids have opportunities to go to GT and go to be in student council and to make sure to have the racial equity lens in determining who is accessing what.

Interest convergence occurs when White people support racial justice when they understand the results will also benefit White folks (Singleton, 2013). Interest convergence emerged during the coding process of identifying leadership strategies. The pattern of principals' assurance that White students would also benefit from a school-wide program exemplifies how their dissonance in thinking influenced their leadership strategy. When a TO principal described the need to mandate two or three students of color as a focus group for targeted instruction, it was evident that it was a sound instructional practice. Black and Latino students may have been omitted from focused instruction without the directive.

Whiteness, as property, the fourth tenet of CRT, was described by both tiers of principals and more in-depth with the TT interviews (Table 4). Whiteness as property is manifested in various forms by all people, wherein White people have a sense of entitlement because of the social construction of race that extends beyond posturing (Singleton, 2013). The leadership and racial consciousness process coding revealed whiteness as property as a pattern in the data. Participants described experiences transforming each school's culture and traditions to provide an inclusive environment for all students with a specific focus on Black and Latino students. A TT principal with a high level of integration described their motivating experience to dismantle whiteness as property in their school to provide access to higher-level courses.

Table 4 *Characteristic Responses Coded as Integration of Whiteness as a Property*

Level of Integration	Characteristic Responses
High	I had a pivotal conversation with one of my Black boys. The White boy made a comment to the Black boy, and the Black boy got upset, understandably so. It was a racially insensitive comment, and the White boy did not realize it. He [the Black boy] really opened up to me and started to cry, and he was like, "there is no one who looks like me in my classroom." That has been something, as a whole, our whole staff embraced and has been like a nonnegotiable for us when we do class lists.
Low	We get very accustomed to those things [Black and Latino students not placed in rigorous classes], and we forget everyone is a human, and we forget to see potential, and we have these conversations. Low If you go somewhere [a majority-minority school] because you have to or, you live in a certain place, it is a different mindset. Families, they specifically choose to be here [predominantly White school] for academic reasons. It's a different mindset.

During their interviews, elementary principals in TO and TT demonstrated the integration of the last tenet of CRT, a critique of liberalism (Table 5). A critique of liberalism is a pragmatic utopian vision shared by Critical Race theorists who examined reasonable incremental attempts to neutralize institutional racism, including concepts of (a) colorblindness, (b) social construction of White as normal, and (c) incremental change (Abrams and Moio 2009). Coding for racial identity and CRT, a larger concept of liberalism emerged as specific experiences were described when the participants attempted to deactivate racist practices. A TT principal described the focused celebration of narrowing the race-based academic achievement gap in reading yet acknowledged that success was an incremental step in the larger picture of eliminating the race-based academic achievement deficit.

Table 5 *Characteristic Responses Coded as Integration of a Critique of Liberalism*

Level of Integration	Characteristic Responses
High	We are not where we, where I'd like us to be, yet, but we have come a long way in being able to have that conversation and not automatically feel like you're calling me a racist.
Low	So it's interesting, again, we have a very small amount (of Black and Latino students), but I do like the statistic that technically, we do not have any (Black or Latino students) under grade level, which is awesome. It's something we kind of celebrate at (name of school)

Analysis from historical documents, focus group data, and individual interview data revealed a linkage from initial coding, in which two consistent patterns emerged that developed into two themes. Historical document analysis initially provided data to inform the sample for this study. Other historical artifacts were then coded into three sections (a) student inclusion, (b) race-based academic

achievement, and (c) leadership. Emerging patterns within student inclusion included tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and racial identity. Within the emerging patterns, continuous data describing the tenets of CRT developed a dominant theme of the pervasiveness of race on principals' leadership. Racial consciousness, an identified pattern in historical documents, revealed a persistent racialized vernacular that formed the reoccurring themes of the pervasiveness of race on principals' leadership practices. The pattern identified as racial consciousness developed into consistent themes of an equity journey and a sense of awakening through training materials and required reading for principals in the District.

Focus group data analysis followed a similar process; however, a persistent racialized vernacular used by Tier one (TO) principals in this study emerged when describing their lived experiences. The focus group data were initially coded into three sections (a) student inclusion, (b) race-based academic achievement, and (c) leadership. Data analysis within student inclusion, race-based academic achievement, and leadership produced patterns that described the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and racial consciousness. Similarly to the analysis of historical artifacts. The persistent descriptions of the lived experiences of elementary school principals in this study further developed a dominant theme of the pervasiveness of race on principals' leadership and racial consciousness. Racial consciousness, an identified pattern revealed a persistent racialized vernacular that formed the reoccurring themes of the pervasiveness of race on principals' leadership practices and racial consciousness.

Individual interview data analysis occurred in a similar process to the historical artifact analysis and focus group interview data analysis. Individual data from the TO principals were initially coded into three sections (a) student inclusion, (b)

race-based academic achievement, and (c) leadership. Emerging patterns within student inclusion, race-based academic achievement, and leadership included tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and racial consciousness. Within the emerging patterns, continuous data describing the tenets of CRT developed a dominant theme of the pervasiveness of race on principals' leadership and racial consciousness. An identified pattern revealed a persistent racialized vernacular that formed the reoccurring themes of the pervasiveness of race on principals' leadership practices and racial consciousness. A stronger pattern that emphasized racial identity and consciousness emerged that developed both themes.

Theme 2: Racial Consciousness

Racial consciousness identifies how cognizant a person is about how race influences their life, often measured as a percentage (e.g., 100% racially conscious) (Singleton and Linton, 2006). Coding of the data gathered from interviews and responses to the open-ended questionnaire demonstrated how the pattern of the racial consciousness professional development increased the levels of racial awareness and decreased colorblindness.

Elementary principals in both tiers integrated their level of racial consciousness during the data collection of this study (Table 6). A TO principal described her life before and after participating in District training in racial consciousness as life-changing that was so profound that her personal and professional relationship has changed. A TT principal described how his perception of the world and its role changed after racial consciousness training. A TO principal described how the school's cafeteria seating arrangements were racially dysconscious. Yet, when her racial consciousness was elevated, she led a new practice wherein Black and

Latino students were no longer isolated and allowed to sit with other students of color.

Table 6 *Characteristic Responses Coded as Integration of Racial Consciousness*

Level of Integration	Characteristic Responses
High	[In] the cafeteria, we used to make you sit by your classes and sit, and now we let [students] sit, anywhere. They may have friends in other classes and, because we have such small number of African American students, and that allows the opportunity to forge out and make other friends, and it is beyond the two or three that they may have in their class and so forth. We had very few girls [in advanced classes], mostly White boys, but even that, we still had more boys or boys of color than we had girls or girls of color. Challenging their belief system, which you know me [a Black man]. Elementary, you know, White women, middle-class White women, you know, that whole thing. They just, you know, they have their view of life and the world, and it's hard to get them to see differently, think differently.
Low	Asking questions around do you know this child as a reader. Do you know this child as a reader, and then if it was a student of color, okay, so tell me about where this plays into for them. And most of the time, they didn't know how to answer.

Note. High levels of integration were identified when the participant connected their understanding of racial consciousness within their personal and professional life. A low level of integration was identified when the participant only connected their understanding of racial consciousness to their professional life.

Recommendations

The specific problem described in this study is that despite the district superintendent's requirement of principal training focused on increasing principals' racial consciousness, elementary Black and Latino student reading achievement has increased in only 11 out of 43 elementary schools in the District. A key recommendation resulting from the findings of this investigation is to require racially conscious and culturally relevant training. Ford (2011) found that principals must commit to equity by providing a learning environment committed to culturally-responsive philosophies and structural changes. Additionally, findings support the need to ensure preservice educators and principals provide reflexive methodologies to disrupt the colonized ideology in current instructional and leadership practices. Jaime-Diaz, Ramos, and Méndez-Negrete (2020) found that gaining knowledge and uncovering a deeper understanding of self and positional situation may eliminate implicit bias, racism, and provide an educational experiences wherein students of color thrive.

To address learners' cultural, racial, and diverse needs, Boykin and Noguera (2011) suggested that superintendents in school districts must recruit antiracists, racially proficient and culturally-proficient administrators, and district-level administration and teachers. Affolter and Hoffman (2011) asserted that administrators must combat persistent inequities in schools, and the principals and instructors must focus on antiracism. Findings revealed in this study a need to provide ongoing learning opportunities that support reflective practices and innovative approaches to combat institutional racist policies and politics are recommended to superintendents in school districts interested in sustaining an inclusive community grounded in equity.

<u>Future Research Implications</u> Chu (2019) explained education reform policies in recent years, and disparities still exist between historically marginalized students and those students who are more privileged. Future research to investigate leadership efforts to eliminate challenges created from whiteness as property may further investigate findings revealed in this investigation and continue to affirm Ford's (2011) research. Ford (2011) found that a national effort to increase the representation of students of color in gifted education failed because of racial disparity and a decline in Black and Latino students having access to advanced or gifted education. Noguera and Boykin (2011) proposed a race-based opportunity gap to place the responsibility for the deficit upon educators. Further research is needed to identify the debtors and collectors of the educational disparities in education for Black and Latino students and influence the vernacular used when discussing who is responsible for the race-based academic achievement gap. The lure of wanting to fix the students or parents for gaps of knowledge or different experience based on the race, culture, or ethnicity compared to the White normalized cultural norm exists (Murakami, Garza, and Merchant, 2012).

Conclusion

<u>Limitations</u> The researcher in this investigation desired to complete an in-depth narrative investigation on the perception and experience of suburban elementary school principals' leadership practices; thus, quantitative methods are not appropriate. Limitations include convenient access to insider information and access to the district equity team, elementary principals, and mentors for administrators. Personal and professional experiences may indicate a limitation in this study. Gender, age, ethnicity, race, and experiences are factors in this study because of acquired skills and capacity to seek and integrate multiple perspectives, think critically and reflexively, and personal involvement may be limitations.

Inclusive excellence in leadership may be a limitation in this study. The focus on obtaining and sharing strategies to assist other principals in becoming racially conscious while closing the academic and opportunity gaps based on race in all schools is a critical belief.

The last theme emerged halfway through the third participant's data: racial consciousness. Subsequent data analysis of the final two participants revealed no new information of interest, and no new themes arose to answer the research questions in this study. Thus, TT interviews and data saturation were determined to have occurred. The organizational support produced by QSR International's Nvivo 11® helped determine meanings and perspectives within the data. The coding also allowed looking for connections between codes—original codes of student inclusion, race-based achievement, and leadership that developed into two main themes.

Limitations of Bias The researcher, as the primary instrument in data collection acknowledges, the role and presence of bias. Omitting words that indicate bias during the interviews (e.g., better, larger, etc.) and choosing racially- and ethnically appropriate terms reduced bias in writing. Asking the same prepared questions in the interviews, allowing for additional follow-up questions for clarity, and administering surveys to all members may also encourage bias-free responses. The participants' genders, races, and approximate ages are documented in the description of the setting within the field notes. Avoiding the appearance of bias in case studies highlights several ethical considerations for researchers. Learning from the harm of members in the Tuskegee Experiment (1932–1972), a requirement of informed consent exists.

<u>Delimitations</u> The delimitations in this investigation include elementary school principals who (a) led elementary schools as the principal and educational leader, (b) worked within the large, diverse suburban District accessed for this study, (c) participated in Beyond Diversity™ professional development, and (d) narrowed the race-based achievement gap in reading by at least 10 percentage points in reading measured by the TCAP. Participation in Beyond Diversity™ training provided the foundational knowledge and skills to engage in interracial dialogue, courageous conversations about race, and the fundamental theoretical understanding of CRT necessary for this study.

When race-based student achievement converges with interests for White principals to be attentive and committed toward Black students achieving racial equality in education, possibilities exist for equity in learning (Parker, 2011). Despite a superintendent's required principal leadership training focused on increasing principals' racial consciousness, elementary Black and Latino student's reading-achievement scores have increased in only 11 out of 43 elementary schools in a large, diverse suburban school district in the metro area of Colorado. The Superintendent's commitment to engage in the awaking of racial consciousness for multiple years through the requirement of racial consciousness training is so controversial, so emotionally charged, that the superintendent's pledge implies a critical leadership strategy in narrowing the race-based academic achievement.

The research findings addressed the question and sub-questions for this investigation as two themes developed. The themes identified how the permanence and pervasiveness of race influenced each principal's leadership practices in this investigation who narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap in a large, diverse suburban school district in the metro area of Colorado. This study

confirmed Ladson Billings' (2009) work that suggested a political connection with education. Equity in education does not exist because of the permanent, pervasive racism that influences legislation and practices to maintain the status quo and power of the dominant system.

Perhaps if the 32 elementary school principals who attended racial consciousness professional development and did not narrow the race-based academic achievement gap in reading evidence a need for an external motivation to eliminate or narrow race-based academic achievement gaps. Singleton (2013) and Noguera (2008a, 2008b) cite educational leaders in school districts in every region of the United States that have attempted to focus on racial consciousness as a leadership strategy. Still, pervasively, it takes a committed superintendent, board of education, and principals to narrow the race-based academic achievement disparities.

Principals in this study experienced challenges and successes in narrowing the race-based academic achievement deficit in reading, answering the research questions in this investigation. Leadership practices that narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap in reading through two themes were identified. The two themes are (a) the pervasiveness of race on principals' leadership practices and (b) racial consciousness. Recommendations resulted from this study and were supported by literature for administrator licensure programs, school district superintendents, and principals.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent: Participants 18 years of age and older

Dear _____,

My name is Nichole Bell and I am a student at the University of Phoenix working on a Doctorate in Educational Leadership degree. I am doing a research study entitled A Multi-embedded Case Study: Leadership Practices of Elementary School Principals Who Narrowed the Race-Based Academic Achievement Gap. The purpose of the research study is to depict the leadership strategies used by elementary school principals in the HBSD who have narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap of their students in reading during the years 2006–2016. Additionally, this proposed investigation may provide an understanding of leadership strategies suburban elementary principals use to reduce the race-based achievement gap, which may support other educators and may increase the lack in academic literature regarding principals' perspectives and perceptions of this phenomenon. This proposed research method and design will elicit data from elementary principals. These principals will describe their personal experiences, leadership strategies, racial consciousness, and structures in narrowing the race-based achievement gap in their schools by at least 10% points in reading measured by the TCAP. A qualitative descriptive multi-embedded case study of HBSD is the focus for this proposed study.

Your participation will involve completing this Informed Consent Form. Then, you will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion not exceeding 45 minutes, a follow up individual interview not exceeding 30 minutes, and complete an open-ended questionnaire via Survey Monkey. The focus group interview will include 11 elementary school principals and I, the follow-up interview will only include the two of us. Know, both interviews will be digitally recorded and all data will be kept confidential, locked in a drawer in my home office, and separate from the signed consent forms. You can decide to be a part of this study or not. Once you start, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits. The results of the research study may be published but your identity will remain confidential and your name will not be made known to any outside party.

In this research, there are no foreseeable risks.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, a possible benefit from your being part of this study are spiritual and intrinsic rewards. Assisting in a research to enhance the field of education and providing information to assist other elementary school principals to narrow the race-based academic achievement gap in reading may be gratifying. Participants may also find that being heard, recognized, and viewed as an 176 exemplar of their personal and professional experiences as an elementary school principal is rewarding.

If you have any questions about the research study, please call me at XXX-XXXXXXX or email me at _____. For questions about your rights as a study participant, or any concerns or

complaints, please contact the University of Phoenix Institutional Review Board via email at IRB@phoenix.edu.

As a participant in this study, you should understand the following:

1. You may decide not to be part of this study or you may want to withdraw from the study at any time. If you want to withdraw, you can do so without any problems. You may contact me via phone, email, or face-to-face to withdraw at any time.

2. Your identity will be kept confidential.

3. Nichole Bell, the researcher, has fully explained the nature of the research study and has answered all of your questions and concerns.

4. If interviews are done, they may be recorded. If they are recorded, you must give permission for the researcher, Nichole Bell, to record the interviews. You understand that the information from the recorded interviews may be transcribed. The data will be coded to assure that your identity is protected.

5. Data will be kept secure. The confidential data including the transcription of the focus group, interviews, archived documents, and questionnaires will be kept in a locked drawer in the researcher's home office as a hard copy and on a password-protected home computer. All data will be secured in this manner for three years then, destroyed. All data will be shredded in the home office using personal office shredding device and securely erased from the hard drive.

6. The results of this study may be published. "By signing this form, you agree that you understand the nature of the study, the possible risks to you as a participant, and how your identity will be kept confidential.

When you sign this form, this means that you are 18 years old or older and that you give your permission to volunteer as a participant in the study that is described here."

( ) I accept the above terms.   ( ) I do not accept the above terms.

(CHECK ONE)

Signature of the research participant _____ Date _____
Signature of the researcher _____ Date _____

Appendix B Informed Consent

Participants 18 years of age and older

Dear _____,

My name is Nichole Bell and I am a student at the University of Phoenix working on a Doctorate in Educational Leadership degree. I am doing a research study entitled A Multi-embedded Case Study: Leadership Practices of Elementary School Principals Who Narrowed the Race-Based Academic Achievement Gap. The purpose of the research study is to depict the leadership strategies used by elementary school principals in the HBSD who have narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap of their students in reading during the years 2006–2016. Additionally, this proposed investigation may provide an understanding of leadership strategies suburban elementary principals use to reduce the race-based achievement gap, which may support other educators and may increase the lack in academic literature regarding principals' perspectives and perceptions of this phenomenon. This proposed research method and design will elicit data from elementary principals. These principals will describe their personal experiences, leadership strategies, racial consciousness, and structures in narrowing the race-based achievement gap in their schools by at least 10% points in reading measured by the TCAP. A qualitative descriptive multi-embedded case study of HBSD is the focus for this proposed study.

Your participation will involve completing this Informed Consent Form. Then, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview not exceeding 30 minutes. Know, this interview will be digitally recorded and all data will be kept confidential, locked in a drawer in my home office, and separate from the signed consent forms. You can decide to be a part of this study or not. Once you start, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits. The results of the research study may be published but your identity will remain confidential and your name will not be made known to any outside party.

In this research, there are no foreseeable risks.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, a possible benefit from your being part of this study are spiritual and intrinsic rewards. Assisting in a research to enhance the field of education and providing information to assist other elementary school principals to narrow the race-based academic achievement gap in reading may be gratifying. Participants may also find that being heard, recognized, and viewed as an exemplar of their personal and professional experiences as an elementary school principal is rewarding.

If you have any questions about the research study, please call me at ###-###- #### or email me at XXX. For questions about your rights as a study participant, or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Phoenix Institutional Review Board via email at IRB@phoenix.edu.

As a participant in this study, you should understand the following:

1. You may decide not to be part of this study or you may want to withdraw from the study at any time. If you want to withdraw, you can do so without any problems. You may contact me via phone, email, or face-to-face to withdraw at any time.

2. Your identity will be kept confidential.

3. Nichole Bell the researcher, has fully explained the nature of the research study and has answered all of your questions and concerns.

4. If interviews are done, they may be recorded. If they are recorded, you must give permission for the researcher, Nichole Bell to record the interviews. You understand that the information from the recorded interviews may be transcribed. The data will be coded to assure that your identity is protected.

5. Data will be kept secure. The confidential data including the transcription of the focus group, interviews, archived documents, and questionnaires will be kept in a locked drawer in the researcher's home office as a hard copy and on a password-protected home computer. All data will be secured in this manner for three years then, destroyed. All data will be shredded in the home office using personal office shredding device and securely erased from the hard drive.

6. The results of this study may be published. "By signing this form, you agree that you understand the nature of the study, the possible risks to you as a participant, and how your identity will be kept confidential.

When you sign this form, this means that you are 18 years old or older and that you give your permission to volunteer as a participant in the study that is described here."

( ) I accept the above terms.   ( ) I do not accept the above terms.

(CHECK ONE)

Signature of the research participant _____ Date_____
Signature of the researcher _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Introductory Letter

Greetings!

      I hope this email finds you well and enjoying your week. This is Nickie Bell, I am a doctoral candidate with the University of Phoenix. My aim is to depict leadership strategies used by elementary school principals in our district who have narrowed the race-based academic achievement gap of their students in reading during the years 2006– 2016. With that said, CONGRATULATIONS, only principals of schools who narrowed the race-based achievement gap are invited to participate! You have been identified as an elementary school principal who narrowed the race-based academic achievement disparity in reading. With that said, this is my attempt in recruiting your participation.

      I would like to invite you in to participate in a small focus group interview on June 24, 2017, beginning at 8:00 a.m. for about 30-45 minutes at ISF. After the interview, I will send everyone an open-ended questionnaire via Survey Monkey to share some private thoughts that only you and I will share. If further data is needed, after the focus group interview, four of you will be selected to have brief individual follow-up interviews to further investigate.

      Please let me know if you are willing to participate, have any questions, concerns, or thoughts by June 9, 2017. You can reach me via email, texting, or calling call me at (###) ###-####.

Best regards,

Nickie Bell

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

(1) Tell me about the race-based academic achievement results in your school in the subject of reading.

(2) How are Black students supported in your school in the subject of reading?

(3) How are Latino Student supported in your school in the subject of reading?

(4) What are your thoughts about inclusive excellence for Black and Latino students in the subject of reading?

(5) Share with me your thoughts about students in your school receiving equitable access to rigorous learning opportunities in reading.

(6) What are the structural supports in achieving inclusive excellence in the subject of reading for your Latino and Black students?

(7) How does the principal influence student learning in the areas of instructional practices, assessment, and curriculum in reading?

Appendix E

Open- Ended Questionnaire

Leadership Practices of Elementary School Principals Who Narrowed the Race-Based Academic Achievement Gap

1. During your term as a principal, did you challenge the norm? If "Yes" please specify.

2. How might other principals learn more about the influence of race on a principals' leadership?

3. What skills and or practices have you acquired that supported your leadership as an elementary principal?

4. As an elementary school principal, what results have you observed/ experienced while "bucking the system"?

5. How has your role as a principal narrowing the race-based academic achievement gap influenced your life?

6. Please share any lessons learned or other information you perceive important for other principals to know when narrowing the race-based achievement gap in reading?

7. Please share about the most memorable time race influenced your leadership.

Appendix F

Individual Interview Questions

1. There are many types of leadership styles. Tell me about your leadership style as it pertains to the school's vision, mission, and decision-making practices.

2. How would you advise an elementary school principal who was attempting to narrow the race-based academic achievement gap?

3. What have you found most challenging while narrowing the race-based academic achievement gap in your school?

4. What do you think has most contributed to the narrowing of the race-based academic achievement gap for Black and Latino students in reading at your school?

Appendix G

District Communications

Nichole, _____ will need to look to see if she can find any old communications that were sent to administrators with a directive to attend BD training. However, we'll do some digging to see what we find.

Regarding, administrators, _____ has made it a mandatory part of the New Administrator Induction program since I've been in the role…that's at least the past 3 years. I don't know if she did this prior to my assuming the position. All new administrators, even those who are from within the district, are made to attend BD each year.

_____

Executive Director of Inclusive Excellence, CCSD

"Gonna go beyond the evidence to create new possibilities based on vision…" Dr. Cornell West

Author Details

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