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Applications Of Social Systems Theory Relative To Inclusivity In The Context Of Kâ€“12 Schools

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APPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS THEORY RELATIVE TO INCLUSIVITY IN THE CONTEXT OF K–12 SCHOOLS

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VITA

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ABSTRACT

This single case study explored K–12 school leaders' perceptions of their district's structure for implementing diversity and creating inclusion as a framework (Getzels & Guba, 1957). Previous research that highlighted the views and perceptions of school leaders with respect to diversity and inclusion in schools as social systems focused on the humane side of the behaviors of individuals (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Nevertheless, traditional educational leadership programs typically focus on accreditation factors specific to lesson planning, classroom management, and curriculum implementation and exclude the human element (Duffett et al., 2003; Johnson, 2016). The lack of focus on change management systems creates a gap for managing diversity and creating systemic inclusiveness in schools as a social system (Crook et al., 2011). The researcher conducted six in-depth interviews with board, executive, assistant principal, and director level leaders. The findings revealed a systemic framework for K–12 schools to create inclusion and implement diversity: the top executive leader influences a culture of inclusion in terms of equity, diversity, and inclusivity, and inclusion must exist in the strategic plan rather than solely being compliant with laws and regulations. In addition, leaders demonstrate commitment and hold staff at all levels accountable for achieving the equity, diversity, and inclusion objectives (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). They understand that creating an equitable district is an important challenge that requires dedicated staff members to lead the implementation process.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation first to God. I then dedicate this dissertation to my family, mom, dad, sister, and husband. They were very patient with me during the years of study required to reach this point in my life—the wings beneath my wings.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Although some advocates seek to improve United States education through school choice and school reform, the data seem to promise better achievement outcomes when the emphasis is on assessment (Spencer, 2014). As Americans enter the new era of professional learning communities, school choice, and demographic shifts, John Taft, chief executive officer of a wealth management company, reminded educators, "If you don't get culture right, nothing else matters" (McMahon, 2012, p. xix). If schools fail to establish the right organizational culture, cliques will constrain stakeholders (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015), schools will be less likely to attract and retain staff or families (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010), and toxic staffers may impede effectiveness (Muhammad, 2009).

Getzels and Guba (1957) provided a framework for understanding how administrators play a significant role in negotiating the demands of the institution and the individual staff members' attitudes, beliefs, skills, and practices that influence the social system. Their framework expanded Parsons' (1961) social systems theory, which indicated that organizations are more functional and apt to reach outcomes when the nomothetic (organization) and ideographic (individual) dimensions are aligned (Getzels & Guba, 1957). Essentially, people feel valued when moving from an individual to an organizational viewpoint (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010; Getzels & Guba, 1957; Muhammad, 2009). When organizational leaders fail to provide

employees with a minimal amount of fulfillment, leaders are unlikely to reach the desired outcomes (Pfeiffer & Jones, 1972). Although social systems theory applies to many contexts, including school administration and business (Getzels & Guba, 1957; Parsons, 1961), researchers have not applied the theory in the contemporary, kindergarten through Grade 12 (K–12) school setting. This study of the contemporary challenges for K–12 schools in the United States relies on two key theories: social systems theory (Getzels & Guba, 1957) and the diversity and inclusion model (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). According to the social systems theory, organizations are more functional and apt to reach outcomes when the leadership and employee dimensions are aligned (Getzels & Guba, 1957). Hoy and Miskel (2005) asserted that the social system differentiates schools from for-profit organizations, as social systems focus on the humane side of the behaviors of individuals. The diversity and inclusion model illustrates how inclusion and exclusion manifest in a social system and cover personality and internal (innate factors, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation), external (life choices, such as religion, education, and career), and organizational (role function, such as classification, authority, and affiliation) dimensions. The interconnection between these two theories drives this investigation into how leaders implement the diversity and inclusion phenomena.

K–12 schools are constantly changing (Finn, 2008). Past challenges have been shaped by people, history, and practices—as part of a systemic approach (Fulmer, 2009). Researchers (Ravitch & Vinovskis, 1995; Wincek, 1995) have indicated that historical challenges have called for school reform efforts to address problems such as bureaucracy, cultural dissonance between schools and families, and the lack of highly effective teachers, early-childhood readiness programs, adequate curricula, and funding (Spencer, 2014). Further research regarding school reform indicates that K–12 leadership aims to redress some social issues, such as inequalities

related to gender and class and the instructional ineffectiveness (Educational Reforms, 2016). Today, the role of school leaders is not only tied to redressing societal ills through school reform efforts and by motivating staff and students through the standards-based accountability system, but leaders must also consider the individual needs of students and staff to engage them in keeping the school viable, competitive, and effective amid neighboring schools (Johnson, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Implementing diversity to create inclusion stands as one of the greatest challenges schools face in the 21st century (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). Administrators in K–12 schools often lack leadership skills for embracing diversity and encouraging inclusivity (Murphy, 2001). In addition, educational preparation programs rarely provide adequate opportunities for leaders to implement diversity and practice inclusion skills (Kochan & Young, 2004). Duffett et al. (2003) found "typical leadership programs in graduate schools of education are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today's school districts" (p. 39). This idea is bolstered by research that shows that almost 67% of K–12 educators feel ill-prepared to handle the challenges of diversity in their settings (Kowalski, 2004). In a social system, administrators face recurring individual and school conflicts involving staff effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction, leadership-followership styles, and morale problems (Beck, 1994; Getzels & Guba, 1957).

School leaders need to have the skills and establish processes within the social system that not only leverage inclusivity but also amalgamate the organizational and individual dimensions to reach the desired outcomes (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010; Getzels & Guba, 1957). This study used interviews and focus groups to explore what school leaders are doing, what they need, and how they can develop a framework to achieve their diversity and inclusion implementation goals within the K–12 school social system.

This qualitative research method applied Getzels and Guba's (1957) seminal work on the social systems theory model and Gardenswartz and Rowe's (2010) four layers of diversity model to the contemporary K–12 context. School culture is defined as the factors that cause employees to practice certain behaviors, and it represents the belief systems of the members of the school; school climate refers to what employees do in a school (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015), including social norms that are often implicit rules of the culture but remain unquestioned behaviors and practices. This single case study explored the depth of challenges, experiences, and perspectives faced by the central office executives and school leaders to determine how they implement diversity and create inclusion in the K–12 social-system environment and a framework to achieve systemic inclusive practices.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative, single-case study was to explore the process used by K–12 school leaders and develop a framework to implement diversity and create inclusion in their district. The study was needed because traditional educational leadership programs focus on accreditation factors specific to lesson planning, classroom management, and curriculum implementation but exclude the human element from the leadership programs (Duffett et al., 2003). The lack of focus on change management systems creates a gap for managing diversity and creating systemic inclusiveness in schools as a social system (Crook et al., 2011). The researcher conducted six face-to-face, in-depth interviews at North Lake Community Schools, a northern Indiana public K–12 district. Interview participants included central office executives, school board trustee members, and the equity and multicultural chief officer. The qualitative data collection process was used to understand the participants' feelings, ideas, beliefs, and opinions (Stake, 2010) about diversity and inclusion and to explore how K–12 school leaders implement

diversity and create inclusion. The goal of the research was to create a useful diversity and inclusion pathway and framework for later use by school employees. The school profile exhibited the four layers of diversity, and the superintendent's desire to implement a systemic diversity and inclusion process and framework (Konoske-Graf et al., 2016). The data collection took place during the 2019–2020 school year.

Research Questions

This exploratory single-case study investigates one overarching research question: "How do K–12 school leaders implement diversity and create a systemic inclusion framework?" This overarching question has three sub-questions:

1. What are school leaders doing to develop a systemic diversity and inclusion vision and strategy?
2. How do staff members see inclusion working (structures, practices, and systems) to promote the implementation of diversity and inclusion among staff, students, and community?
3. What strategies can help school leaders improve or achieve the desired diversity and inclusion vision?

The research questions are designed to explore what schools need to achieve the diversity vision of K–12 schools and what structures, strategies, and frameworks are needed to align the school goals, outcomes, and employees with a vision of inclusivity.

Significance of the Study

In the research, I analyzed the vision, operations, and structure of educational leadership to identify the process and framework for implementing inclusion in the K–12 context. Gaps in the literature exist in all areas of systemic inclusion practices in schools. The findings of this

study contribute to the existing body of knowledge on diversity and inclusion, specifically in the K–12 school and educational leadership contexts. The findings serve as a benchmark for school leaders working to change school culture and implement a culture of inclusion, a change process that involves goal alignment, accountability, and structure to implement diversity and create inclusion (Murphy, 2001).

The information in this study can lead to a systemic diversity and inclusion framework for higher education and K–12 school administrators for integration into their educational leadership programs. The findings can also help shape how K–12 school leaders skillfully motivate a global and diverse workforce for systemic inclusivity, employee innovation, increased productivity, and a positive reputation (Patton, 2018). Thus, school superintendents, principals, P–16 instructors, and human resource professionals can apply the recommendations of this study to integrate diversity and inclusion into leadership on-boarding seminars. The framework can serve as a toolkit for university students to design a diversity and inclusion strategy as a capstone project and give university educational leadership graduates a systemic action plan to address school culture, implement diversity, and create inclusion, which can position them as viable applicants to K–12 schools (Hunt et al., 2018).

Business and human resources personnel can generalize the results of this study for educators in K–12 schools and the workforce and for educational leadership programs in multiple states. Moreover, the findings can provide a framework for school leaders who want to establish a structure and practice of diversity and inclusion in their school goals. Therefore, the single case study sample can represent a perspective toward diversity and inclusion initiatives for leaders in K–12 schools in Indiana or within the United States in general.

Both beginner and advanced leaders can use these findings as a toolkit to address multiple dimensions of diversity to improve school climate, and ultimately, the culture. Furthermore, this study can help leaders advance in their professional mission to create an inclusive structure that would benefit the district, increase the positive market awareness of a brand, recruit talent (especially millennial talent) who want to work for an organization that helps others, or creates higher employee engagement (Konoske-Graf et al., 2016; Hunt et al., 2018). One of the intended outcomes of this study was to help school leaders create a framework to implement a systemic action plan that is inclusive of the internal, external, and organizational dimensions of diversity.

Delimitations and Limitations

In any proposed study, consideration must be shown for its delimitations and limitations. Delimitations are choices consciously made by the researcher that may impact the study. Limitations are factors that are recognized by the researcher but they cannot be changed. The delimitations and limitations of this study are summarized below.

Delimitations

The study population included only North Lake Community School employees. This delimitation has been created because the school represents the four layers of diversity, and diversity and inclusion are district-wide priorities, as evidenced by the funding for a chief office of equity and multicultural services.

The study did not include parent or student perspectives due to its limited scope. This could have an impact on the overall understanding of a systemic diversity and inclusion framework and skew the findings.

Limitations

This single-case study has potential limitations, which should be acknowledged and identified as part of the research. In this study, the researcher cast a wide recruitment net, but ended up going deep rather than broad. The researcher selected a sample that was best suited to answer the research question. The sample participants had experience working in a K–12 social system and understood what the district was doing in regards to inclusion; they could explain how they experienced inclusion in their role and describe measures to improve it from their vantage point.

While the researcher attempted to recruit a broad-base employee group utilizing a purposive random sample methodology, the return rate was low. Of 3,000 employees, the researcher invited every sixth staff member to participate in the study, a total of 500 employees. Although the researcher invited 500 employees, only six agreed to participate in the study.

The limitations of this study included analyzing perspectives, ideas, and experiences through the lens of a relatively small group that identified themselves as administrators in the school district. However, the sample participants provided the researcher with an in-depth, deep understanding of the district's existing practices and clarity of vision for a systemic framework for creating inclusion in the K–12 school social system.

It is worth noting that the district's limited ethnic diversity was least among the certified staff. Most of the certified teachers were White (86%), and the majority of students (64%) were of color. Approximately 65% of the educators had 15–20 years' tenure.

Limitations include that the results cannot be generalized to large-scale applications or other populations from similar K–12 educational institutions because of the limited sample size.

The findings were also subject to preferences that may have influenced the code analysis and framework components, though measures were taken to reduce this risk.

Definition of Terms

This study used the following definitions:

Diversity encompasses all aspects of an individual's identity that makes each individual unique; it refers to a range of similarities and differences among individuals, including, but not limited to, gender, culture, physical capacity and cognitive ability, sexual orientation, parental status, educational background, physical appearance, language and accent, geography, religion, and personality type (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

Engagement is an intellectual and emotional commitment to the organization. Individuals in the workplace need to be committed to being productive, with good attendance and retention of quality staff being key elements (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

Ethnocentrism is a worldview that encompasses seeing one's own culture as the norm to which others are compared (Bennett, 2009).

Ideographic dimension represents the individuals, personalities, and need-dispositions within a social system (Getzels & Guba, 1957).

Inclusion is an operational state in which diversity is used to ensure the fairness, health, and success of organizations or communities. An inclusive environment allows members equal access to resources and opportunities. Inclusive environments lead to feelings of safety, respect, engagement, motivation, and being valued (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010; O'Mara & Richter, 2017).

School climate refers to the psychological part of the organization and what employees do in a school (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).

School culture describes what employees do and represents the belief systems of the school as a collective whole. It influences the members in terms of all aspects of their existence within the school environment: professional demeanor and teaching style, likes and dislikes, interpersonal relationships, time management, and behavior (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).

Social systems are the external and internal (culture, business, and political) factors that connect individuals within the organization to make a complete whole (Getzels & Guba, 1957; Parsons, 1968).

Systemic approach is the intentional effort to create structural processes that implement sustainable diversity and inclusion practices (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

Summary

Chapter 1 focused on the social systems theory and emphasized functionality through the close alignment of the nomothetic and ideographic dimensions. Leadership, for example, can foster a climate that is inclusive and respectful of diversity (Getzels & Guba, 1957; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Multiple current and past researchers provide relevance and guidance to this study. Current authors such as Chinn and Gollnick (2002) and Spradlin (2012) acknowledged the need to extend diversity and inclusion research into the K–12 school system. The historical background and specific characteristics of social systems and inclusion have also been highlighted. This chapter outlined the research questions to provide boundaries for the study of relationships between specific factors and the social system in the K–12 contexts, and it defined the key terms. This qualitative study explores how school leaders can implement a diversity and inclusion framework by interviewing six employees, including central office leaders from one northern Indiana public K–12 school in the 2019–2020 school year. This research is significant to K–12 educators in all contexts and fills a gap in the existing knowledge.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature relevant to social systems, recurring administrative challenges, and school reform, as well as inclusivity in the K–12 context. Chapter 3 presents the methodology for this single-case study of K–12 school leaders and for a systemic inclusion effort within the social system from the perspective of central office leadership and school personnel. Chapter 4 provides the findings of the data collected. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the main findings from the research and, where applicable, links the literature to the research outcomes.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social systems are the external and internal (culture, business, and political) factors that connect individuals within the organization to make a complete whole (Getzels & Guba, 1957; Parsons, 1968). The systems theory is applicable in many contexts, including school administration and business (Getzels & Guba, 1957; Parsons, 1961), and especially in the complex social systems of K–12 education, where school districts are dynamic systems affected by multiple internal and external factors (Llewellyn et al., 2014). To date, however, researchers have not applied systemic diversity and inclusivity to the social system theory in the K–12 context.

Today's K–12 schools face unique and ever-changing challenges (Konoske-Graf et al., 2016). The roles of K–12 leaders have changed in the 21st century (Durkheim, 1973) as they are tasked with managing teaching and learning, and cultural, individual, and political systems that exist amid looming school reform efforts (Manna & McGuinn, 2013). Today, not only is the role of school leaders tied to motivating staff and students through the standards-based accountability system, but leaders must also consider the individual needs of students and staff to engage them with keeping the school viable, competitive, and effective amid neighboring schools (Johnson, 2010). At present, school choice is a central issue for educational leaders who are tasked with marketing the school and being highly competitive (Merrifield, 2001). The changing role of K–

12 school leaders requires they navigate between theoretical and practical solutions to integrate the demands of the organization, the demands of the individual, and the demands of cultural and political systems (Fullan, 2001).

This exploratory study of some of the contemporary challenges for K–12 schools in the United States relied on two key research constructs: social systems theory (Getzels & Guba, 1957) and the diversity and inclusion model (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). The social systems perspective differentiates schools from for-profit organizations, because they focus on the humane side of the behaviors of individuals (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Getzels and Guba's (1957) premise is that external and internal **tensions** are important **motivators** of the human, cultural, and political side of school challenges. These tensions become manifest in the leadership and employee dimensions. The diversity and inclusion model is known as the four layers of diversity. The model expands beyond race and gender to cover personality and internal, external, and organizational dimensions (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2003). The four layers of the diversity model are important for understanding the variations of diversity in the structure of a social system. The interconnection between these two theories drives this investigation of contemporary K–12 challenges for leaders. In this chapter, I review the literature for both constructs.

This literature review begins with a broad overview of educational leadership in America. In particular, the topics of educational leadership, such as changing roles in K–12 education, social systems theory, diversity and inclusion in the United States, and the inclusion imperative will be summarized and reviewed. Chapter 2 outlines premises including reform challenges in contemporary K–12 contexts, recurring administrative issues, motivation school culture, dimensions of social systems, the origins of research on diversity and inclusion, and past practice on implementing such theories.

K–12 Educational Leadership

Although educational leadership is covered by interdisciplinary literature, it also relies on concepts from pedagogics, epistemology, and social development (Wang, 2012). In contemporary practice, educational leadership includes ideas from both political science and business and the tension derived from these two disciplines (Güell & Tintoré, 2016). At the university level, educational leadership departments are responsible for educating future leaders who specialize in diverse fields, such as student affairs, academic affairs, higher education instruction, vocational adult education, and higher education administration (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Although school leadership and educational leadership are terms that have lately replaced educational administration, leadership in K–12 schools only partially captures the work done by educators at all levels (Anderson & Togneri, 2005). Educational leaders, called central office leaders or executives, include K–12 school and program leaders such as principals, teacher-leaders, curriculum leaders, and superintendents, who use the concept of educational leadership (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Over time, the need for school leaders to bridge the gap between educational leadership entities and community stakeholders emerged into the superintendent role as we know it today.

The Role of the School Superintendent

On June 9, 1837, the Buffalo Common Council created the position of superintendent (Carter & Cunningham, 1997); since then, the role has undergone many changes. The major changes involve four developments in the role since the early 19th century. The first iteration of the role was largely clerical and focused on details of day-to-day operations of the school. Over time, and with the rise of common curricula, the role of the superintendent shifted toward

teaching and managing instruction and curricula (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

In the early 20th century, the superintendent's role was affected by the Industrial Revolution; superintendents became managers who focused on efficiency and handled instructional tasks such as budgets, facilities, and transportation (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Waters & Marzano, 2006). In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* scrutinized the accountability of public schools and the role of superintendents (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Waters & Marzano, 2006). In the early 1980s, the superintendent position took on characteristics similar to that of a chief executive officer. They were expected to advise the board, initiate and navigate reform, manage resources, and be the public representative of the district (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

School Leadership Roles Over Time

The school leader role (superintendent, district administrators, and principals) historically emphasized school-building management. The popular perception of school leaders was that they were interested in wielding power. Community stakeholders believed that the school leader's role was to enforce compliance and create policies rather than improve educational systems (Alvoid & Black, 2014). Nevertheless, the roles of K–12 leaders changed in the 21st century (Durkheim & Simpson, 2002) as leaders took on instructional leadership and the cultural, individual, and political systems that existed amid the school reform efforts (Manna & McGuinn, 2013).

Evolution of School Reform

Horace Mann, known as the Father of American public schools in the 1850s (Cremin, n.d.), argued that education would help students learn good citizenship and provide them an

escape from poverty. Although teachers had limited education and low pay, Mann's ideas were widely accepted by many states. Mann led the states' education system and implemented professional development for teachers. Nevertheless, educational opportunities were limited to White males and states did not accept female educators or educate African American students (Cremin, n.d.). From the 1850s to the 1990s, pressure was exerted to include opportunities for all students and equal opportunities for women educators. The lack of educational opportunities for all students and professional opportunities for women educators created a gap between their White counterparts to date Cremin, n.d.).

Today, a historical perspective of reform efforts in schools points to poor-quality teachers, ill-prepared students, inadequate curricula, and issues with family culture, unions, bureaucrats, and university education schools (Finn, 2008; Fulmer, 2009; Spencer, 2014; Ravitch & Vinovskis, 1995; Wincek, 1995). Historical challenges, including long-standing social ills and the 1950s' growth-oriented education scene, have given way to the contemporary challenge of school reform, specifically school choice. School choice empowers parents and helps students achieve their dreams. It means that parents have opportunities to access quality K–12 educational opportunities for their students (Given, 2018).

When the Supreme Court outlawed de jure segregation in public schools in the 1950s (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954), politics and education were deeply connected (Spencer, 2014). As the federal courts reshaped public schooling both racially and institutionally following the 1950s' *Brown v. the Board of Education* case, a federal presence pervaded K–12 education; the influence of funds, attorneys, laws and policies, and troops from the federal government challenged America's tradition of local control (Ravitch & Vinovskis, 1995). As a result, the persistent political and equity-based social ills of the past were used as evidence for the need for

educational reform, which became closely tied to efforts to promote educational equality. Many people regarded such efforts in turn as promoting unequal access to education (Hirsch, 1999).

School leadership roles continued to evolve during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, marking a period of equal education and efforts to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education (Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, n.d.) under the leadership of President Ronald Regan, with the release of *A Nation at Risk.* From the 1960s to the 1980s, the shift towards equality and the elimination of the education department was connected to reform efforts of the 1990s and 2000s. School reform became linked to equality and outcomes-based education (OBE) with an emphasis on assessment (Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, n.d.). OBE is an educational philosophy that emphasizes student goal achievement at the end of an educational experience, and assessments that guide what educators teach and what students should know. As a result, many school leaders believed that teacher unions were opposed to continued reform (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Thus, K–12 leaders found themselves positioned between two political forces, teacher unions and national education reform (Educational Reforms, 2016). Ultimately, under OBE, school leaders adapted their roles to navigate state-created standards and assessments that would determine whether or not students understood the required content and could perform the required tasks (Johnson, 2010). Student outcomes would thus identify effective instruction and accountability according to the U.S. Department of Education (Educational Reforms, 2016). The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001 was the culmination of standards-based reform (Johnson, 2010). This Act was based on the assumption that holding schools to high standards and expecting them to achieve memorable goals would lead to improved student outcomes. This major education reform act remained a nation-wide mandate in the United States through 2016. Under President Obama's administration, concerns

for quality education were addressed with the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), which authorized the Department of Education to pinpoint low-performing state schools and provide condition and progress parameters. Both the NCLB Act and the ESSA led to the contemporary challenges that face educational leaders.

Contemporary Challenges in Educational Leadership

Today, the role of a school leader is tied not only to past reform acts but also to motivating staff and students through the standards-based accountability system. Leaders must also consider the individual needs of students and staff to engage them in keeping the school viable, competitive, and effective amid neighboring schools (Johnson, 2010). School choice, a central issue for educational leaders, stands to be one of the most controversial topics in education today.

School choice provided opportunities to parents in terms of how they educated their children. Public education funds became available to both public and private charter schools for-profit institutions. Charter schools have been an important component in the movement toward school choice and a subject of debate in educational reform (Chen, 2018). Proponents for school choice argue that parents are empowered when making choices for their students' unique needs. In addition, advocates believe that vouchers offer students in low-income areas an opportunity to break the cycle of poverty. Conversely, opponents to school choice believe that it removes funding from the public-school system and undermines the value of public education (Chen, 2018). The potential benefits of school choice are great, but the drawbacks for students from the voucher system still exist. The voucher system does not benefit all students; private schools have the authority to select students, which could lead to discrimination (Chen, 2018). According to the *Washington Post*, parents choose schools on more than just performance. Other factors could

include an inclusive school environment, and as one parent suggested, not all schools were inclusive: “We have several university faculty whose children attend our school. I’m certain that we will find a space for your daughter” (Strauss, 2017, para 8), said the principal to a light-skinned parent. The principal continued, “What we don’t need is more of those Mexican students” (Strauss, 2017, para 8). The conversation came to an embarrassing halt when the parent showed the principal a picture of her dark-skinned Latina daughter. Finding the best schools takes time and research, and today’s school leaders must market their school and be highly competitive in the educational sector (Merrifield, 2001). Researcher John Stimmel (2010) asserted that school leaders who face looming school reform efforts and must assume changing responsibilities in areas of instruction, school culture, human resources, and change management consider the responsibilities impossible to achieve. The changing role of K–12 school leaders is juxtaposed against theoretical and practical solutions to integrate the demands of the organization, the demands of the individual, and the demands of cultural and political systems (Fullan, 2001). In school systems, leaders must develop and align people, create inclusive environments, and compete in the vast school choice market to reach their organizational goals (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010; Muhammad, 2009).

Educational leadership encompasses the changing role of K–12 school leadership that includes teachers, students, parents, and community stakeholders in developing a common purpose to determine what the school is trying to accomplish (Muhammad, 2009). As result, present-day school reform efforts demand that school leaders have the necessary skills in organizational development (OD) (Bassett-Jones, 2005; Cox, 2001; Galagan, 1993; Moore, 1999; Thomas, 1992). OD “is a long-term change effort focused on improving the interpersonal relationships of employees” (Rothwell et al., 2015, p. 9). OD also means involving people in the

change process, which is necessary for employee engagement, ownership, motivation, and other aspects. Experts in OD recommend that leaders connect the interpersonal relationships to the organizational culture (Rothwell et al., 2015). They assert soliciting employee views of how success is to be measured, what they need to do to succeed, and how the organization perceives its stakeholders (students, parents, and community) to be the key for organizational success (The SHRM Body of Competency and Knowledge, 2018). The views of employees represent the diversity of the community and determine how employees experience the social system (Rothwell et al., 2015).

If leaders can leverage and implement diversity, they can create better outcomes (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). OD also involves acknowledging and valuing people and the cultural differences and similarities to create diversity and inclusion (Rothwell et al., 2015). The OD challenge, in this context, is to create a positive climate where employees offer their intellectual and emotional efforts to the workplace and enhance relevant opportunities and services in a global environment (Derven et al., 2014). To help employees bring their best to the workplace, OD researchers uphold that contemporary leaders, such as K–12 administrators, should not only focus on interpersonal matters but also analyze organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) (Morrison, 2016). Understanding the organizational SWOT helps leaders focus on strengths and minimize the threats they face. For example, Morrison (2016) asserted that diversity and inclusion should affect how leaders capitalize on an organization's strengths and prepare for the future. The contemporary OD challenge is to use the unique strengths of Generation Y and Baby Boomers while understanding group nuances (Tyler, 2013).

A systemic approach to OD incorporates most of the current learning concepts, such as employee engagement, strategic planning, and change management (Reitman, 2013). Nevertheless, employee engagement is a crucial element in OD, because leaders can better understand the pulse of the organization. Training professionals challenge leaders to engage the talents of employees and assess their growth, which would affect the broader changes in culture and social learning (Reitman, 2013). Social and cultural changes are important elements of employee and organizational growth and development. Current OD professionals challenge K–12 leaders not only to help their organizations adapt and compete in a business environment that is constantly changing but also to implement changes to stay ahead of tomorrow's competitors (Reitman, 2013).

Social Systems Theory

According to academic theory, a social system is a network of components that come together to make a whole. Social systems enable the identification of relationships that connect people and organizations, and ultimately contribute to a larger institution (Durkheim, 1973). General systems theory, a larger interdisciplinary theory that encompasses social systems, is generic and applicable to many different fields, such as biology, sociology, and even astronomy. In short, general systems theory was an attempt to develop a theory that explained all systems across all fields (Johnson et al., 1964).

The founder of social systems theory, Talcott Parsons (1951), based his theory on relationships of all sizes and complexities. In Parsons's view, systems consist of individuals in a network of interpersonal relationships that occur within a cultural system of symbols with shared meaning. Parsons proposed four system levels with interrelated components: culture, society,

personality, and environment. The four levels represent a structure where the members of a social system agree to abide by and serve as the building blocks of society.

The first level emphasizes culture, which dictates that meanings, not people, are the units of measurement in a social system (Parsons, 1951). Some examples of meaning in context include language, morals, and values. Shared meaning is a form of socialization into society and a part of the process that brings individuals into the culture system (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Parsons, 1951). The cultural aspect of the system is significant, because the process of socialization through meaning builds coherence in a society and is a means for establishing social control (Parsons, 1951).

The second level of social systems, according to Parsons (1951), emphasizes the analysis of role interactions rather than the individual. Role interactions make up society and can include two or more people, including groups. Parsons focused on the roles played by individuals in the social world. Relationships within society depend on expectations inherent to the roles and to the conduct of the role players in a social setting. The role expectation is an archetype that individuals agree to follow, motivating individuals to hold a shared reality and behaviors that members expect in a social system (Getzels & Guba, 1957; Parsons, 1951).

The third level, personality system, takes on the individual as the focus with an emphasis on a person's actions based on personal needs, motivations, attitudes, and beliefs about other people and themselves (Parsons, 1951). Further, this aspect of the personality system is responsible for the needs fulfillment of individuals (Parsons, 1951; Pink, 2009). Needs are the basis for individual action and determine the extent of an individual's efforts. Once an individual acts, they must meet certain conditions (Parsons, 1951).

Parsons' (1951) fourth level, integrated biology, examines the interplay between sociology and biology, or sociobiology. To analyze this system, Parsons asserted that a biological component is necessary, as the actual physical environment and physical body within the environment. The physical elements become the units of measure in the system (Parsons, 1951).

Parsons (1951) categorized the basic components of the social system structure as the culture system, personality system, behavioral system, and integrated biology. Parsons' system levels laid the foundation for contemporary social system theorists, who moved beyond Parsons' functional structure to an operational system structure that is either closed or open. Open and closed systems can be described as privileged and less privileged among people. In the United States' open systems, individuals with limited resources are free to seek opportunities that offer chances to move between social levels and are not required to stay where they were born (Chesbrough, 2003; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). For example, organizations receive information from both within and without, which is essential for the health of the business to make better decisions. The interactions involve inputs from society and the organizational process. In a closed system, people are given different opportunities depending on the characteristics they were born with, including racial and ethnic identity, sex, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

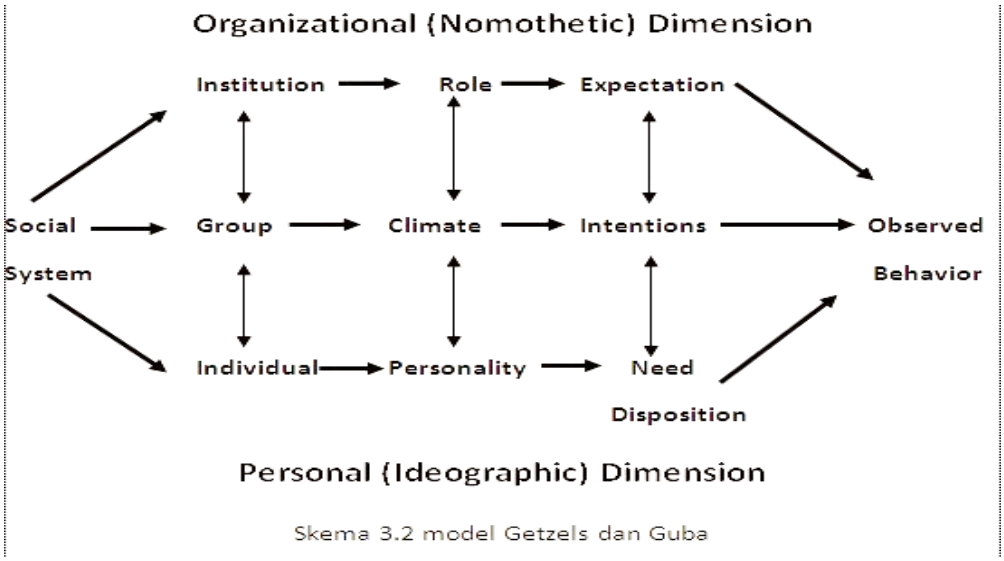
Getzels and Guba (1957)

Getzels and Guba (1957) extended Parsons' (1951) functional systems theory to organizations, particularly schools, helping to frame the contemporary recurring K–12 challenges faced by school leaders (Getzels & Guba, 1957). Getzels and Guba's theoretical premise indicated that organizational outcomes depend on the alignment and tension between educational

leaders and staff dimensions, such as motivations, personalities, and need-dispositions that includes staff member's values, beliefs, and wants. A need-disposition also includes an individual's micro-level preferences for cultural and organizational norms in the social system (Parsons,1961). Given that the human elements can deepen the understanding of comprehensive educational systems, people work in a coordinated manner to attain organizational, individual, and common goals (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993; Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Figure 1 presents Getzels and Guba's model of the organization as a social system.

Figure 1

Nomothetic and Ideographic Dimensions



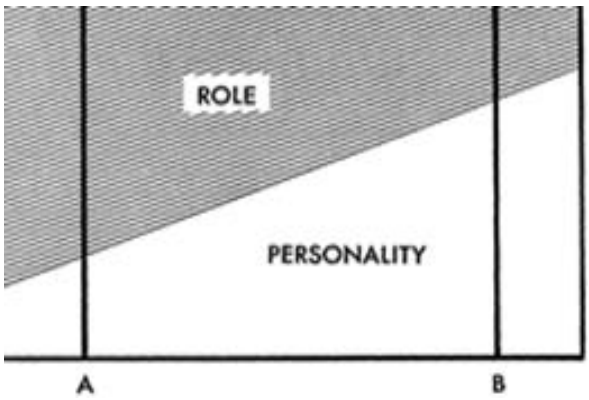
Note. From "Social Behavior and the Administrative Process," by J. W. Getzels and E. G. Guba, 1957, *The School Review, 65*(4), p. 3. Copyright 1957 by the University of Chicago Press. Reprinted for academic use.

In a social system, all actions result from the intermingling of the nomothetic dimensions, the ideographic dimensions, and the external environmental factors including everything outside the social system. The two dimensions combine to result in actions and behaviors individuals can observe and measure as the expected social system outcomes (Getzels & Guba, 1957), such as graduation rates, return on investment, job satisfaction, absenteeism, and dropout rates. From the ideographic perspective, behavior is a matter of role and personality. The relative proportion of interactions in the nomothetic and ideographic dimensions varies with each act, person, and personality (Getzels & Guba, 1957).

Figure 2 illustrates the range of these interactions; for example, in a school, the superintendent's actions would more likely fall close to line A, as their actions would likely be governed strictly by role expectations. An art teacher, on the other hand, would probably be closer to line B, as they would have more freedom to make creative decisions within the expectations of that role.

Figure 2

Role and Personality Model



Note. From "Social Behavior and the Administrative Process," by J. W. Getzels and E. G. Guba, 1957, *The School Review*, *65*(4), p. 3. Copyright 1957 by the University of Chicago Press. Reprinted for academic use.

Getzels and Guba's (1957) theory became the foundation for studying the recurring school and administrative problems that emerge when the nomothetic and ideographic dimensions fail to align with the social system (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010; Getzels & Guba, 1957; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Muhammad, 2009). Getzels and Guba's social system theory also became the framework for examining the contemporary K–12 leadership challenges, such as individual and institutional conflict, lack of effectiveness and efficiency, poor satisfaction, leadership-followership styles, and organizational morale.

Some researchers have viewed Getzels and Guba's (1957) nomothetic and ideographic theoretical model as impractical, fallacious, and unparalleled to individual and social constructs (Czajkowski & Patterson, 1976; Rozycki, 1999). Specifically, Rozycki (1999) argued that Getzels and Guba's role and personality formula for behavior within an organization should not include personality and role because an individual's personality is not a function of the role nor an expectation in an organization. Some theorists, however, corroborated Getzels and Guba's consciously theoretical concepts (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). In addition, Hoy and Miskel (2005)

emphasized the assumption of symbiotic alignment between individual and collective system paradigms and revealed their preference for Getzels and Guba's role and personality model.

Applications of Social Systems Theory

Daniel Pink (2009) outlined motivational factors that influence how leaders can integrate roles and personalities within a complex social system. Pink asserted that the way in which individuals interact with the institution influences their needs and personality. Motivation is also influential when individuals of the social system have the autonomy to demonstrate mastery, thereby engaging individual personalities and skillsets in the context of role and expectations (Pink, 2009). Pink further asserted that autonomy was a motivating factor for individuals and it connects the ideographic dimension to the nomothetic dimension in the social system where motivation increases decision making without micromanagement. Pink's motivation theory strengthens the theoretical links between the recurring challenges in administration that were purported by Getzels and Guba (1957). Motivation can create synergy between the organization and individuals, and, similarly, individuals can transition from the ideographic to the nomothetic mindset (Getzels & Guba, 1957; Pink, 2009). Motivation can also relate directly to the organizational culture in a social system, influencing the school climate (Muhammad, 2009; Pink, 2009).

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) and Muhammad (2009) investigated school culture and explained that within the climate of a school, culture dictates its collective personality. Thus, "It's much easier to change an organization's attitude (climate) than it is to change its personality (culture)" (Gruenert, 2008, p. 58). Scholars of school culture have asserted that the character of an organization's school culture, or personality, and its climate, or attitude, represent the organization's outlook (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). In the social system, school culture is vital

for moving individuals from the ideographic mindset to the nomothetic perspective, as the culture affects both forces (Muhammad, 2009). In the K–12 context, Pink (2009) provided insight into the congruency of the social system's humane structures and goal structures that motivate individuals to enact change and potentially resolve recurring administrative problems. When the goal of culture is to "get members to adopt predictable behaviors and a common mental model" (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 50), school leaders must examine the organization's capacity to shape its culture and influence the actions and attitudes of individuals. Hofstede (2000) corroborated Getzels and Guba's (1957) ideographic theory for organizational culture in remarking, "When people are moved as individuals, they will adapt to the culture of their new environment; when they are moved as groups, they will bring their own culture along" (p. 201). Gardenswartz and Rowe (2010) asserted that leaders must be able to create cultural synergy and convey cultural interpretations within the organization. Leaders must also create a system for inclusion, which would be a catalyst to align the nomothetic and ideographic systems with motivation and cultural theories (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

The role and personality model shows that all behaviors contain some element of both role and personality, and it is impossible to break away from either entirely. The nomothetic dimension that includes institutions, roles, and expectations represents the goal-oriented demands of the organization (Getzels & Guba, 1957). The idea of the ideographic dimension representing individuals, personality, and need-disposition affects both morale and motivational factors (Pink 2009).

Diversity and Inclusion in the United States

Diversity has increased in America over the last half-century (Cohn & Caumont, 2016). In 1965, population demographics were skewed toward native White citizens (84%), with only

11% of the population reporting as Black and 4% reporting as Latino. In that year, less than 5% of the population was non-native (Cohn & Caumont, 2016). Of the 535 members of Congress in 1965, just five were Black, four were Asian, and four were Latino (Prime & Salib, 2014). Thus, Congress was comprised of less than 3% people of color and over 97% White. Since 1965, increased immigration significantly changed the demographics of the population (Karanxha, 2013). From 1965 to 2015, about 50% of immigrants arrived from Latin America and about 25% arrived from Asia. As a result, the U.S. population in 2015 was 62% White, 18% Latino, 12% Black, 6% Asian, and 2% Other, with about 14% of the population being native to another country (Cohn et al., 2013). During this 20–year span, the Latino population grew by 14%. Although the country's leaders are mostly White, native citizens, more Americans are embracing the country's growing diversity. For instance, 53% of Americans say immigrants strengthen the United States; 54% of Americans say they have a high openness to other cultures; and 57% of Americans believe diversity increases the quality of life in the country (Pew Research Center, 2016). In the years ahead, new immigrants and immigrant children will continue to make the United States more diverse. By 2055, the U.S. population will have shifted to the point that no group (racial or ethnic) will make up the majority (Colby & Ortman, 2014). Diversity is steadily increasing in the United States, and progress will depend on diverse views and voices (Karanxha, 2013).

Origins of Research

Diversity and inclusion research originated from a focus on managing diversity as an asset and in response to criticism against affirmative action and employment equity. The history of diversity and inclusion merged with the history of school reform with the shared focus on fairness and common goals (Litvin, 2002). Initially, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity

Commission established Affirmative Action categories to provide guidelines for enforcing civil rights laws and avoiding workplace discrimination. R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., one of the first diversity researchers, provided an important challenge to move beyond these categories (Thomas, 1992). Thomas' (1992) landmark work, *Beyond Race and Gender*, extended this challenge and posited that successful diversity management in organizations would require them to move beyond race and gender to consider a broad set of characteristics related to diversity. Building on Thomas' (1992) work, Gardenswartz and Rowe (2010) developed the four layers of diversity model to include everyone, because people differ from one another in many ways. Figure 3 illustrates the many dimensions of diversity (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

Figure 3

Four Layers of Diversity

Note. From *Managing Diversity: A Complete Desk Reference* (p. 264), by L. Gardenswartz and A. Rowe, 2010, Society for Human Resources Management.

In the four layers of the diversity wheel, Gardenswartz and Rowe (2003) defined and provided an expanded view of diversity. The model illustrates diversity beyond race and gender, and covers personality and internal, external, and organizational dimensions. Amelio (2009) suggested that the four layers of the diversity model are important for understanding variations of diversity in a social system's structure.

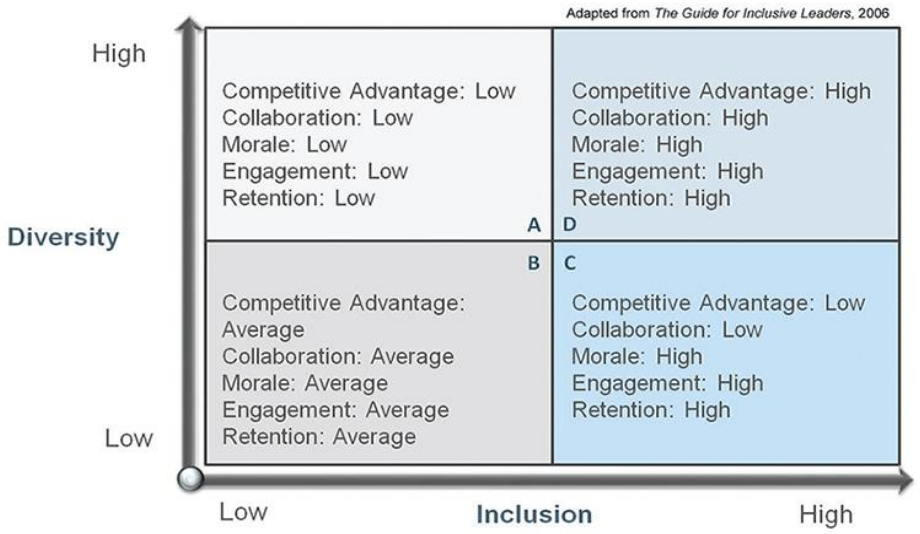
Amid the vast growth in diverse populations in the United States, pluralism is increasingly seen in elementary and secondary schools across dimensions of diversity, such as race, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status (Taylor, 2010). Some dimensions of diversity have been privileged, while others have been marginalized by school leaders (Scanlan & Theoharis, 2014). Privilege is generally afforded to individuals who are "White, of European heritage, of moderate-to-high-income status, Christian, heterosexual, native English speaking, and without disability" (Scanlan & Theoharis, 2014, p. 1). Marginalization is the outcome for those who are: non-Christian; a member of the LGBTQIA+ community; persons of color; of non-European heritage; of low income and social status; persons of limited proficiency in English; or individuals with special needs or disabilities (Scanlan & Theoharis, 2014). School leaders need to be inclined toward creating inclusivity and then seek out the knowledge and skills to do so (Rothstein & Santana, 2011).

Urwin et al. (2013) examined the evidence for increased productivity and organizational cohesiveness in a review of sources promoting equity and diversity in private sector organizations. In their systematic review, Urwin et al. (2013) found evidence that "firms have reaped business benefits from equality and diversity, but not all firms in all contexts at all times" (p. vi). Organizations benefited most significantly from diversity and inclusion when they better represented the global and political environment around them. External business benefits may also arise because increased diversity helps organizations to understand the changing community demographics and address their stakeholders appropriately (Urwin et al., 2013). External benefits include "reduced costs, improved resourcing of talented personnel, better products and services, and enhanced corporate image" (Wright et al., 2014, p. iv). Moreover, as Figure 4 indicates, Janakiraman (2011) suggested, "Organizations that practice inclusion and diversity are able to

experience high levels of collaboration, engagement and retention, which provide a competitive advantage" (p. 3).

Figure 4

The Relationship Between Diversity and Inclusion



Note. From "Berlitz Cultural Insights Series," by M. Janakiraman, 2011, http://www.berlitz.com/SiteData/docs/BerlitzWPI/2b6dd531f5ed23d1/BerlitzWP_InclusiveLeadershipFinal.pdf. Copyright 2011 by Training Management Corporation, A Berlitz Company. Reprinted for academic use.

Internal organizational benefits arise because a diverse workforce that "includes a range of perspectives can improve creativity and problem-solving, resulting in better decisions, innovation, and greater flexibility" (Wright et al., 2014, p. 2).

Organizations in the United States benefit from diversity and inclusion research in other parts of the world. Implementing data from the 1998 U.K. Workplace Employee Relations Survey, researchers found that equal opportunity policies improved productivity, especially when

they resulted in a higher proportion of women and ethnic minorities, and segregated workplaces had temporary negative effects (Urwin et al., 2013). In a study of 66 key individuals in the equity and diversity field in the United Kingdom, interviewees gave anecdotal evidence that diversity led to improved talent recruitment and retention, increased performance, productivity, and efficiency, increased creativity, enhanced trust in relationships, increased worker satisfaction and commitment, improved customer relations and satisfaction, and improved image and reputation for the organization (Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2011).

Wright et al. (2014) also emphasized that interviewees believed recruiting and retaining the best candidates was enabled by encouraging diversity, embracing inclusion, and being respectful toward difference. Employees who felt more included through such things as professional development and advancement opportunities were easier to retain (Wright et al., 2014). Sociology researchers, using data from the 1996 and 1997 National Organizations Survey, found that "diversity was significantly correlated with increased sales revenue, increased customer numbers, increased market share and increased relative profits" (Urwin et al., 2013, p. 25).

Still, acknowledging or encouraging diversity is not enough to accrue benefits, and Dwertmann et al. (2016) found that "over 30 years of research on the group diversity to performance relationship has demonstrated that the value in diversity tends to emerge only under the right conditions" (p. 1140). The same researchers asserted, "It is not enough to get a diverse group together, without clear motivations, norms, and accountability structures to encourage group members to challenge each other's perspectives and persevere in their debate of multiple possible solutions" (Dwertmann et al., 2016, p. 1140). Without such structures, diverse group members may not share different perspectives, or the expression of their perspectives may cause

conflict (Dwertmann et al., 2016). Wright et al. (2014) found that "effective team collaboration not only depends on the diversity of team members but on how well they understand and communicate with one another, and crucially, on how the team is organized and led" (p. 61). Throughout the United States, organizational development professionals have capitalized on the research of Wright et al. (2014) to promote diversity training. Moreover, research has shown multiple approaches can be adopted by businesses to ensure the equity and benefits of an inclusive workplace, but to be productive, such approaches should be thoughtfully introduced to the organization's culture and not treated as an afterthought.

The Inclusive Imperative

Scholars have written about the need for inclusion and diversity in terms of connecting the individual's role and personality (Getzels & Guba, 1957); motivating individuals through autonomy, choice, and purpose (Pink, 2009); and establishing school culture and climate as the "social glue that holds people together" (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 6) for interactions in the social system. A study by O'Leary et al. (2015) for the Diversity Council of Australia determined that inclusion throughout an organization can produce a range of positive team and individual outcomes in areas of profit and performance, innovation and engagement, and opportunity and well-being.

Researchers have indicated an association between inclusion and improved employee welfare (Mor Barak & Levin, 2002; Prime & Salib, 2014). A similar association exists between all employees feeling valued and respected in the workplace. For example, employees feel valued when employers leverage diverse perspectives to inform core work practices (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Conversely, Hewlin (2009) linked exclusion from information to decreased

mood, and the need to conform to organizational norms and suppress unique characteristics was linked to emotional exhaustion and subsequent turnover problems.

In teams with an inclusive culture, employees are more effective at resolving interpersonal conflict and more likely to perceive the results as satisfactory. Inclusion results in better intergroup relations in culturally diverse teams (Nishii, 2013). These teams have open discussions about different points of view, and all members have equal power and status. Such equitable inclusion leads to improved resolutions to conflict and successful integration of diverse viewpoints (Ely & Thomas, 2001).

Inclusive climates decrease the amount of harassment and discrimination reported by members of traditionally marginalized groups (Bruyere & Nishii, 2010). Furthermore, an advanced understanding of social identity is a key attribute of inclusive leaders, and people who exhibit such understanding demonstrate more tolerance and positive attitudes toward outgroup members (Brewer & Pierce, 2005). Similarly, people who acknowledge ethnic differences generate more positive interethnic group relations, leading to less ethnic bias (Correll et al., 2008; Plaut et al., 2009).

According to Nishii and Mayer (2009), inclusion and inclusive leadership may also lead to reduced turnover. From a sample of 348 separate supermarket departments, the authors examined the relationships between participants' demographics (in terms of race, age, and gender) and the group's turnover. The researchers' findings indicate that leaders can positively affect turnover by encouraging inclusion in the organization (Nishii & Mayer, 2009). Similarly, a study of cultural change on an oil rig showed shifting to a gender-inclusive culture from a hard-driving, male-dominated one led to lower accident rates by 84%, while productivity, efficiency, and reliability all increased (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Retention increased for both genders for

organizations that have inclusive diversity climates, because both women and men perceive concrete payoffs from staying in an organization they consider to be fair (Kaplan et al., 2011). Employees who perceive exclusion are more likely to leave an organization, and if the employees stay, they may feel they are not working to their full potential (Mor Barak et al., 1998). Employees feel included, on the other hand, when leaders solicit their opinions and involve them in making decisions; these kinds of workplaces have, on average, 33% less employee turnover (Jiang et al., 2012).

Several studies suggested that improved job and team performance accompany inclusive environments (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008; Ely et al., 2012; Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017; Homan et al., 2008) and higher return on income and productivity (DeNisi & Gonzalez, 2009). Researchers have found that African American and Hispanic employees produce significantly larger sales per hour in stores with an inclusive work climate, leading to annual sales gains of $27,000 per employee. White sales personnel also showed improvements (Avery et al., 2008). Organizational leaders and human resource professionals may use the inclusion research findings from these studies to deploy resources judiciously in creating a diverse workforce (DeNisi & Gonzalez, 2009). The studies contribute to the importance of diversity in the workplace by providing evidence that ethnic identity relates positively to an individual's psychological capacities, which are predictive of positive organizational outcomes such as engagement and performance (Avery et al., 2008).

Gardenswartz and Rowe (2010), corroborating O'Leary et al.'s (2015) study, asserted that diversity, inclusion, and engagement are determining factors for aligning the organization and people to reach desired outcomes. A person's need-disposition influences their ideographic dimension, or how individuals interact within the organization (Getzels & Guba, 1957). An

individual's role, expectations, and personality comprise their skill set. Moreover, the researchers asserted that inclusion occurs when leaders can create organizational structures to motivate and engage individuals, so that everyone can use their skill sets (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010; Pink, 2009). Pink's (2009) motivation theory corroborates Getzels and Guba's (1957) social system paradigm in that autonomy and other need-disposition factors motivate individuals to reach their potential and a greater purpose.

Implementing Diversity and Inclusion

By developing educational leadership standards, leaders from the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) have promoted mastery skills for inclusive school practices and emphasize the interconnectedness of school improvement and cultural relevance (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2018). The ISLLC leaders intended for the standards to encourage discourse among K–12 leaders and work as a set of goals that school leaders can use to drive change in their schools (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2018). The ISLLC leaders wanted to close the gap between organizations and people and guide educational leaders to promote the academic success and well-being of students by creating fair and inclusive schools (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2018). The ISLLC leaders recognized that equity and inclusion affect academic achievement, and, thus, the agency introduced Standard 10, which holds educators accountable for inclusivity in the educational setting. The purpose of Standard 10 is to ensure that educational leaders foster and monitor schools as affirming and inclusive places. In addition, equity of access to networks for personal and institutional support is central to its purpose (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2018). For example, inclusive leaders advocate for students and caregivers and attack student marginalization (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2018). In the standards, the ISLLC also prescribed that inclusive leaders

should advocate for deficit-based education and assumptive notions about gender, sexual orientation, race, class, disability, and special status. Inclusion in schools requires that school leaders create a system of resource accountability across political, cultural, and language realms (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2018).

Diversity awareness and an individual's good intentions alone are insufficient for organizations to gain the full benefits of diversity (Jordan, 2011). A systemic approach increases the likelihood of achieving equity and fairness in a social system setting (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). National and global diversity and inclusion expert Anita Rowe partnered with Lee Gardenswartz, an expert in California, to discuss organizational complexities like school culture, climate, need-dispositions, motivation, and the personality and attitudes of individuals (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). Gardenswartz and Rowe (2010) asserted that the best way to address the organizational complexities is through informal and formal systems and by managing diversity and creating inclusive environments. Gardenswartz and Rowe (2010) developed a comprehensive and inclusive strategic process for implementing diversity and creating inclusion, which applies to national and international organizations (Amelio, 2009). The authors emphasized an expanded view of diversity and explained how to implement the process in practical steps.

The first step is to establish executive level commitment. The single most important factor affecting the success and endurance of diversity and inclusion work is leadership, especially executive leadership. Although leaders must champion the cause, no single person can implement change on their own (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

The second step is assessment and diagnosis. Leaders should learn about the current situation and establish a baseline by conducting a climate survey. Facilitators may use the results

to guide discussions with focus groups and in individual interviews. Assessment and diagnosis are ongoing components to ensure continual improvements. A comprehensive needs assessment can be used to gather data about interpersonal behavior, organizational culture, and the impact of the system on people. The findings can help guide the organization's definition of diversity and mission for inclusion (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

The third step is to establish a diversity task force, which should include members from a range of levels within the organization (board members, administrators, faculty, staff, and community members) and represent the ethnic and racial diversities. Team members should build relationships with one another and throughout the organization and community. Team members should also establish specific objectives that guide the creation and implementation of the climate survey, the vision and mission statement, and the strategic diversity plan (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

The fourth step is to implement system changes. The systemic level is where organizational change takes place. Organizational change is a long-term process, not just a short-term goal. In creating the culture for change, team members need to cover six areas: accountability, reward, reporting relationships, communication, decision making, and norms (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

The fifth step is to implement training, which helps to increase awareness and encourage employees to develop their knowledge and skills. Training can change the behavior of the organization from the employees outward (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

The sixth step is evaluation. By measuring the effects of the culture-change planning process from the point of collecting data, organizational leaders gain credibility and may also

uncover informational feedback for making ongoing improvements (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

The seventh and final step is integration. Managing diversity through the culture-change plan is a process rather than a one-time task. The continuous feedback loop means that the system is constantly evaluating and adapting to ensure effective outcomes and relevance (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

Gardenswartz and Rowe (2010) argued that the seven-step process would position organizations to include all differences. Further, individuals or groups who follow the steps would gain greater support and strategic relevance when they were included in the process. The seven-step model is widely used worldwide in academic, community, and business sectors, by consultant practitioners, task-force leaders, and diversity and inclusion officers to focus on inclusion in a systemic diversity and inclusion effort. For example, the Diversity Council of Australia's evidence-based inclusion model posited by O'Leary et al. (2015) parallels Gardenswartz and Rowe's (2010) seven-step process. Both models emphasize organizational assessment, high-level leadership engagement, and accountability for inclusiveness in the workplace. O'Leary et al. (2015) recommended that leaders should follow the following steps to implement diversity and create inclusion:

Assess the current state of the organization. Leaders draw on available data to assess the inclusiveness of the organization's climate and the level of inclusive leadership capability among managers. For example, leaders could conduct employee opinion surveys, interviews, or manager-employee focus groups on diversity, inclusion, and inclusive leadership. Leaders could use the findings from a workforce analysis of factors such as retention rates and engagement to demonstrate the business's need for building inclusive leadership capability.

Engage the leadership team. Leaders should establish the business-critical nature of inclusive leadership in the organization. Facilitators can use the model to engage the organization's senior leadership team in a business-strategy process to explore and agree on the following:

- What does inclusive leadership mean in our organization?
- Why is inclusive leadership business-critical?
- What are the expected business outcomes of inclusive leadership?
- What will be our organization's key measures of inclusive leadership?
- What are our organizational expectations for all leaders developing inclusive leadership capabilities?

Communicate expectations. Leaders can develop and implement a process to communicate their intentions and expectations about inclusive leadership to the wider organization.

Integrate inclusion into the leadership framework. Leaders can prioritize integrating the inclusive leadership capabilities into the organization's existing leadership framework, at first by engaging with relevant staff who have responsibility for leadership, talent, and measurement in the organization. Together, leaders and staff should review the current leadership framework and the inclusive leadership model and identify any gaps or overlapping aspects. Second, leaders should integrate inclusive leadership capabilities into the organization's general leadership framework.

Identify talent. Leaders can use the model to assist the organization to identify a better next generation of leaders. When selecting leaders and emerging leaders, current leaders should

consider the extent to which potential talented leaders possess inclusive leadership capabilities mentioned in the model.

Learn and develop. Leaders should identify and agree on the learning and development activities and experiences necessary to build the organization's inclusive leadership capability.

Measure success. Leaders need to implement the agreed-upon measurement process in the above-mentioned leadership engagement process.

The key imperatives of Gardenswartz and Rowe's (2010) and O'Leary et al.'s (2015) works on system change are not only thinking about the long-term plan and having patience, but also holding people accountable for the agreed-upon changes. The result is an increase in trust and pride, both individually and within the group (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). Overwhelmingly, diversity and inclusion researchers have shown that the publication of diversity initiatives alone is insufficient for ensuring their implementation. The most important factor that can affect the success and endurance of diversity initiatives is the support of executives and board members (Dover et al., 2014). To make diversity and inclusion organizationally useful, leaders must clarify the purpose of these ideas and identify how diversity and inclusion initiatives will benefit the organization (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). Although the need for more inclusive leadership has received some attention in multiple organizational settings, some organizational leaders and members still fail to acknowledge the importance of inclusive leadership (O'Leary et al., 2015).

Synthesis of the Perspectives

Several researchers (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; O'Leary et al., 2015), highlighted in this literature review, have used a qualitative approach to explore the relationship between employees and their leaders and to determine inclusion best practices, and

to understand the beliefs of individuals and organizational behaviors. Researchers have used surveys, interviews, and focus groups to gather and analyze data. While social systems include many internal factors like culture, need-dispositions, and organizational expectations, people often view them to be nebulous and without value in statistical analyses (Urwin et al., 2013). Research studies have corroborated the qualitative techniques (Urwin et al., 2013), but these methods may sometimes include the integration of respondent groups and investigators.

Aligning an organization and its employees requires leadership commitment, which is a central feature for implementing diversity and creating inclusion in the organizational context (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). Through leadership practices, people can transform culture in social systems and indicate the value of diversity through opportunity, equity, and inclusion of all individuals (Ng & Sears, 2012). Diversity and inclusion management requires school leaders to possess skills for effective organizational development, change management, psychology, and communication, though few leaders receive instruction on how to implement diversity and create inclusivity at a systemic level (Bassett-Jones, 2005; Cox, 2001; Galagan, 1993; Moore, 1999; Thomas, 1992). Research on leadership, social systems theory, and diversity and inclusion has shown that executive leadership, systemic approaches, and demographic factors contribute to diversity implementation frameworks in public settings (Ng & Sears, 2012).

Ng and Sears (2012) claimed that leadership and long-term relationship-building are key factors for chief executive officer leadership styles and diversity implementation efforts. Although leader consensus and support are crucial for implementing diversity and inclusion (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010), Ng and Sears (2012) asserted that leadership styles and the attributes of the chief executive officer during systemic diversity implementation will affect the depth of the transformational implementation of diversity practices.

Researchers who reviewed the implementation of diversity generally focus on best practices that include policies, practices, and procedures that the organization implicitly and explicitly communicates (D. Aronson, 2002). The implementation of diversity and inclusiveness necessitates an openness to a variety of ideas, knowledge, perspectives, approaches, and styles (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). Implementation also requires that all members need to bring their best to the school setting. Explicit executive-level commitment to creating fairness, equity, and inclusion of all individuals can transform the culture in social systems (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

John E. Jones (1981), in his organizational universe model (Figure 5), illustrated the interplay of the nomothetic and idiographic culture, climate, and diversity dimensions. According to the model, the structure dimension is where leaders marshal talent and the energy of the staff to achieve the organizational goal.

Figure 5

Organizational Universe

Note. From "The organizational universe" by J. E. Jones, in J. E. Jones and J. W. Pfeiffer (Eds.). *The 1981 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators.* (p. 6), 1981, Pfeiffer & Co. Copyright by Pfeiffer & Co. Reprinted for academic use.

School culture is the informal system by which leaders manage formal diversity and inclusion structures in a social system (Jones, 1981). The organizational universe model is helpful to leaders when implementing a cultural transformation for inclusion, because it is a systemic model that emphasizes structure, climate, and rewards as elements that create inclusion and opportunity in diverse contexts (Jones, 1981).

Researchers have suggested using Getzels and Guba's (1957) model for a social system with leaders who foster a climate that is inclusive and more respectful of diversity, which would lead to a closer alignment between the institution and individuals (Getzels & Guba, 1957; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Tschirhart and Wise (2002) offered a more comprehensive review of implementing cultural diversity within an organization and suggested effective diversity initiatives should include equity structures that guide the diversity implementation. For example, the intent of diversity awareness should be to help individuals stave off negative, automatic responses when exposed to cultural diversity and to value differences and develop intercultural competence (Bennett, 2009). Prime and Salib (2014) studied inclusive leadership in six countries and found that the more inclusive the culture, the more likely employees were to be innovative and supportive of each other. The researchers called this phenomenon "team citizenship" (Prime & Salib, 2014). In China, for example, 71% of workers go beyond the call of duty to help their coworkers. Of these workers, 78% were more likely to introduce new and fresh ideas, concepts, processes, or products in inclusive environments (Prime & Salib, 2014). Conversely, in the United States, only 29% of workers go beyond the call of duty to help their coworkers, and only 19% offer innovative ideas to achieve company goals. Thus, U.S. workers lag behind their Chinese counterparts by 42% in their inclusive practices at the workplace (Prime & Salib, 2014). Workers in Mexico (60%), India (43%), Austria (41%), and Germany (33%) also outpace Americans in team citizenship and coworker support. An inclusive environment comes with the leaders' commitment to action, alliance-building, and willingness to change behavior (Prime & Salib, 2014). Without diversity competence, the biases and perceptions of employees, particularly about diversity across gender and racial dimensions, can influence the perceptions of equitable and procedural fairness (Soni, 2000).

In the changing demographic context of K–12 education, scholars have asked if current standards for qualifications for principals are effective (Hess, 2008; Murphy, 2001; Tucker, 2003). Scholars on school leadership preparation advocate for reform in administrator licensing standards (Kowalski, 2004). In a study that interviewed practicing principals, Duffett et al. (2003) found that the principals were among the first to agree they needed more effective preparation for their jobs. In the study, all but 4% of the surveyed practicing principals reported that on-the-job experience or guidance from colleagues was more helpful than their graduate school studies for preparing them for their current position. In fact, 67% of the surveyed principals reported that "typical leadership programs in graduate school . . . [were] out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today's school districts" (Duffett et al., 2003, p. 39).

The lack of an agreed-upon implementation framework and common definition of diversity has led some researchers to focus on aspects of race and gender, while others have focused on financial and educational dimensions of diversity (Patrick & Kumar, 2012). Other areas where diversity becomes ambiguous include the problem of classified or non-certified employees, such as accountants, paraprofessionals, and administrative assistants, versus certified status employees, such as teachers, psychologists, and social workers (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). Due to the lack of common definitions and agreed upon application to an organization's strategic plan, many leaders "rely simply on changing the hearts and minds of (their) employees . . . rather than developing a broad range of policies and practices to help ensure that today's workplace works for everyone" (D. Aronson, 2002, p. 303). The existence of divergent perspectives among researchers indicates a significant limitation in the literature.

Overall, the current literature lacks practical applications and comprehensive, change-process approaches for strategically managing diversity, creating inclusion, and connecting to the

organization's strategic plan (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). A consensus is still lacking among researchers, and therefore, no single concise framework exists for implementing diversity and inclusion (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000).

Intentions of This Study

The interdependencies of the social systems theory and the diversity and inclusion models point to a contemporary challenge in K–12 schools (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010; Getzels & Guba, 1957). The challenges include transforming school culture, refraining from laying blame for the lack of student success, and learning to collaborate with one another to create a healthy school culture. The theoretical premise of Getzels and Guba's (1957) framework is collaboration across multiple contexts and closing the gap between the organization and its people (Getzels & Guba, 1957). The effectiveness and efficiency of leadership and job satisfaction significantly affect school culture and morale, and in school systems, leaders must know how to develop and align people with the organizational goals (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010; Getzels & Guba, 1957; Jones, 1981; Muhammad, 2009).

Summary

Educational leadership in the United States has changed over time. The impending school reform demands from entities like the U.S. Department of Education have led to changing roles for K–12 school leaders. School leaders are more than school managers; they serve as chief executive officers who liaise between educational leaders and the community. Furthermore, school leaders, like the superintendent and principals, compete for students amid the pressures of school choice and school privatization. The Getzels and Guba (1957) social systems model illustrates that diversity and inclusion in the K–12 school must be aligned with the inclusion imperative to address recurring administrative issues, employee motivation, and school culture,

which are all dimensions of a social system. The demands of the K–12 school context require school leaders to apply organizational development methodologies that help them adapt to changing demographics and educational advances. This research study seeks to examine the concepts outlined in this chapter from the perspective of school administration leadership. The research questions are derived directly from Getzels and Guba's social systems model and its implications and from Gardenswartz and Rowe's (2010) seven-step process.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The title of this research study is "Applications of Social Systems Theory Relative to Inclusivity in the Context of K–12 Schools." The overall qualitative method was designed to gather insights from the leaders who are responsible for implementing inclusive practices in K–12 schools. The design of the research included data collection from one-on-one interviews with leaders in one urban school district. Through the qualitative data analysis, I sought to identify emergent themes from the participants' responses. The study participants included leaders from North Lake School District in northern Indiana.

Researcher's Background

I am a K–12 district administrator who implements systemic equity and intercultural relations and equity, diversity, and inclusion work at North Lake School District. I hold two master's degrees in Intercultural Relations and Education, and my current role and graduate coursework require me to administer interview sessions and manage multiple qualitative research methods. My educational leadership doctoral coursework in research involved research methods and knowledge that became increasingly specialized throughout the program. I planned my coursework in consultation with my dissertation chair, Dr. Donlan. My research preparation began with a foundation of methodologies that are relevant to research in education and the social sciences and two approaches that are used in my research design.

- I focused my quantitative exploration on quantitative data analysis and SPSS software for use in the research design. In my qualitative coursework, I studied interview and focus group techniques, including survey and case study design. My program research requirements and chair's guidance enabled me to carry out this research design independently, with committee support.
- The strategy used for the case study was based on pooling coursework research methodologies and dissertation committee guidance, which enabled me to design the single case study to explore how K–12 school leaders implement diversity and create inclusion as a systemic framework.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how a K–12 school's employees manage diversity and inclusion to create a pathway for later use by other K–12 schools and their employees. The researcher examined the processes used by North Lake Community School leaders to implement a systemic diversity and inclusion plan. With the changing demographics in U.S. schools, this study would fulfill a need for current information (Duffett et al., 2003). School leaders struggle to meet the demands of staff, students, and the community. The literature review illustrates how educational leadership programs lack diversity and inclusion change management programming that would help school leaders effectively manage schools as a social system with a changing culture and climate, while implementing diversity and inclusion practices, and making use of employee talents (Moore, 1999; Crook et al., 2011), specifically within the United States. In this chapter, I offer the research questions, indicate the case-study framework that is the methodological foundation of the study, and describe the methods for the study. The

selection of participants, components of the systemic inclusion process, sampling procedures, and the process of data analysis are also outlined.

In-depth interviews were conducted at North Lake Community Schools, a northern Indiana, public K–12 school. The qualitative data collection process was used to understand the participants' feelings, ideas, beliefs, and opinions about diversity and inclusion towards achieving the study goal of creating a useful diversity and inclusion pathway and framework for later use in the school district and post-research activities. The North Lake Community Schools exhibited the four layers of diversity and the superintendent agreed to implement a systemic diversity and inclusion process and framework. Research for this study occurred during the 2019–2020 academic year.

The applicability of this case-study research is discussed in this chapter. The research plan, including the methodology, sample, recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and fidelity and accuracy are also described in this chapter. The qualitative case study used standardized, semi-structured and open-ended, face-to-face interviewing methods.

Research Questions

The following research question guided this exploratory, single-case study: How do K–12 school leaders implement diversity and create a systemic inclusion framework? This overarching question had three sub-questions:

1. What are school leaders doing to develop a systemic diversity and inclusion vision and strategy?
2. How do staff members see inclusion working (structures, practices, and systems) to promote greater diversity and inclusion among staff, students, and community?

3. What strategies can help school leaders achieve or improve the desired diversity and inclusion vision?

Research Design

A single case method was used. The qualitative, exploratory single-case study "places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). As outlined by Creswell (2013), a qualitative approach was appropriate for this study as I sought to understand the experiences and perceptions of participants by relying on their values and beliefs (Stake, 2010). The qualitative approach was best suited for this study because diversity and inclusion implementation, as a form of organizational development, lays the foundation for creating a systemic inclusivity framework based on the participants' shared experiences in the school as a social system (Creswell, 2013).

Case Study

In this study, I used a case study methodology for a holistic viewpoint and conducted a deep analysis of the inclusive framework phenomenon, especially in terms of equity, diversity, and inclusion (Gulsecen & Kubat, 2006). The case study method focused on the process of interacting and how the participants experienced the moral, psychological, and professional views in their K–12 social system while acknowledging that cultural differences are subjective (Charmaz, 2006).

To obtain an in-depth understanding of the case, I used multiple sources of data including interviews, documents, and artifacts (Stake, 2010) and reported the interview findings in this study. The interviews provided detailed information about personal feelings, perceptions, and opinions, and a high number of responses to questions asked (Yin, 1994). Observations can also

allow researchers to observe participants in the natural setting and compare what they do with what they say. Documents and artifacts, including agenda items, meeting minutes, and photos, were used in combination with other qualitative research methods. Each data source provides a means of triangulation and can substantiate the data for different sources of meaning (Yin, 1994).

The single-case study allows the researcher to start with an issue or concept and then choose a case to explore that concept in depth (Stake, 2010). This study was conducted using a single-case study methodology, which emphasizes the participants' full experience in developing a diversity and inclusion framework to be used by stakeholders and other outsiders.

The researcher sought to conceptualize the participants' experience; to understand in abstract terms the emergent framework based on the researcher's understanding of the data, consistent with the constructivist approach through coding the data from interviews; and to build a phenomenological framework based on the understanding of the participants' shared experiences. The constructivist paradigm argues that meaning-making is subjective and it emphasizes the socially constructed nature of intercultural differences and cultural memberships (Charmaz, 2006). Together, the single-case study methodology and the constructivist and phenomenological approaches guided the researcher in interpreting the data to build the potential framework (Charmaz, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Participants

After receiving approval from the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Bayh College of Education's Office of the Dean, the interview subjects (including central office and school board of trustees), all of whom work at North Lake Community Schools in Indiana, were invited to participate in the study. The school district included 17,000 students, of which 65% participate in the free and reduced lunch program (Indiana Department of

Education, 2018). The ethnic composition of the student body is 36.4% Black, 30% White, 22% Hispanic, and 9.7% multiracial (Indiana Department of Education, 2018). Fifty-six students identified themselves as American Indian (Indiana Department of Education, 2018). In 2016, the district had 1,031 teachers, with 86% being identified as White, 10% Black, 26% Hispanic, and 0.8% Asian. The number of teachers does not include non-certified employees (Indiana Department of Education, 2018).

North Lake was selected because it has a large and diverse student population and the staff composition represents many of the four layers of diversity (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). In addition, the director, who was focused on equity, suggested that this school district has begun to address diversity with actions that support and create inclusion. By examining an institution that is already inclined to value diversity and inclusion, this research can provide valuable information to schools that are just beginning to implement these practices and to schools that have already begun to do so. The central office and school board of trustees represented the organizational view, the director of equity represented the implementation process, and the school-level interviewees represented perspectives on the need to implement a systemic diversity and inclusion framework.

For this study, I elected to interview a total of six participants. The goal was to engage an adequate but manageable sample size in a deep, case-oriented analysis that is a hallmark of qualitative inquiry. The results would create a new and richly textured understanding (Sandelowski, 1995, p.183). The sample was selected to provide an optimal amount of diversity based on the four layers of diversity demographic dimensions (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).

Recruitment

After receiving approval from the IRB and the Office of the Dean at Bayh College of Education, the participants' school was recruited through the researcher's existing professional network and from suggestions from diversity and inclusion researchers and diversity and inclusion practitioners. The researcher became an employee of North Lake Community Schools, effective July 1, 2019, and used integrated techniques to address the potential role conflict as both researcher and central office employee, which was an unusual circumstance. Given the researcher's dual role as employee-researcher, she used a blind recruitment process, where the subject's choice to decline or participate was kept anonymous from the researcher. The decision was coordinated by the faculty advisor to protect potential participants from feeling coerced to participate in the study.

The researcher used the following recruitment protocol:

1. The school board secretary was sent an email about the intent to contact the school board president of the school district. The communication specifically requested that the board not direct me to contact the superintendent due to my intent to interview executive central office leaders, which included the superintendent as a potential research participant.
2. The researcher requested an agency letter from the board president to conduct research in the school district. The agency letter included permission to recruit all employees, including central office employees and the school board of trustees. The researcher provided the board president with a complete template for approval and requested that the board secretary place it on school board letterhead (Appendixes A and D).

3. The researcher asked the human resource director for a list of district administrators and for the potential participants' email addresses, located in the school district's database, accessed with permission from the school board.
4. Prior to the study and the interviewing, the researcher sent an email to the participants and included an invitation to participate in the study, the letter of recruitment, and the informed consent document. (See appendices.)

An informed consent document was attached to the email, and all participants were advised to open and read the informed consent document (Appendix F). The recruitment packet also contained an explanation that a maximum of three recruitments would be attempted and absolute anonymity could not be guaranteed. An explanation of the steps taken to protect confidential information was provided.

Purposive sampling (Patton, 2002), also known as homogenous sampling, was used for the study. In addition, the school's superintendent identified equity, diversity, and inclusion as his priorities. The selection for this study was based on the following criteria:

- School district with at least 10,000 students and 1,000 employees.
- Employees with diverse job classifications, including religious instructors, custodial workers, administrators, certified employees, classified employees, operations specialists, secretaries, business office staff members, teacher assistants, communications directors, librarians, and legal counselors.
- Participant employees with K–12 school experience. The researcher randomly selected every 6th person from the district's different employee groups to participate in the interviews.
- All potential participants were employees of North Lake Community Schools.

- The researcher, in collaboration with the participants, arranged the timing of interviews to take place without interruptions in a private room on the participant's school campus.
- The one-time interviews were conducted during the 2019–2020 academic year.

Data Collection

The research data was gathered using demographic profiles and interviews. The participants were asked to complete a demographic profile, which identified their age, gender, and their role in the district. Interview dates, locations, and appointment times were set based on the research period and at the interviewees' convenience; the interviews took place during the workday.

Interviews

The participants and researcher met on one occasion to discuss the semi-structured questions about the participants' understanding of what their school was currently doing to implement diversity and create inclusion, in order to invite more ideas about what changes were needed for the staff, students, and community to feel included. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted for approximately 45 to 90 minutes, and they were digitally audio recorded. The researcher reviewed the purpose of the interviews and what would or would not occur (see Appendix B for the interview guide). Before beginning any session, the researcher confirmed that the participant's consent forms were on file and reviewed the participant's rights, time commitment, and confidentiality policies. The researcher also informed participants that the study was to gain a better understanding of the systemic framework for implementing diversity and creating inclusion at student and adult levels and assured the participants that all responses would be kept confidential. As the participant responses were recorded, the researcher used pseudonyms during the interview. Ten interview protocol questions were asked during the

interview session to gain an understanding of their practices about a diversity and inclusion framework in the K–12 school social setting.

General Data Collection Protocol

One-on-one interviews were digitally audio-recorded on a media playback 3 (MP3) device, and then transcribed immediately after each interview. The audio recordings were coded and stored in a locked safe for security. Notes were also taken during the interview as necessary.

A semi-structured interview format was the most suitable method for data collection for this study. Interview questions were derived directly from Getzels and Guba's (1957) social systems model and based on Gardenswartz and Rowe's (2010) seven-step process. To check the validity of the face-to-face interviews, a pre-test was conducted with a few of the researcher's acquaintances that were currently in the education field to determine whether or not the questions were clear and easy to understand (Creswell, 2013).

The goal was to review participant transcripts to understand K–12 leaders' perspective of implementing a diversity and inclusion framework in terms of vision, engagement, and improvements in the K–12 social system. The participants' responses were audio-recorded and the researcher reviewed all recordings immediately after each session and transcribed them using NVivo software (Version 10, 2012).

Data Analysis Protocol

Drawing from the research and model of Charmaz (2006), the researcher incorporated iterative coding processes for the analysis of interviews, recognizing that the purpose of the proposed study was to create the beginning of a new framework (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). In this study, the three phases of data analysis were open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In

addition, the researcher used NVivo software (Version 10, 2012) to assist with the identification and management of patterns and themes. Each type of coding is described below.

Open Coding

Open coding involves "breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195). The researcher read the transcripts and then began conceptualizing and categorizing the responses to emergent themes. Throughout the process, every participant's response was compared and combined with the others to build themes and patterns. To ensure reliability, the researcher enlisted the assistance of another researcher to code one interview and then compared the assessments to measure inter-rater reliability.

Axial Coding

The second stage of data analysis was axial coding. Concepts identified in the open coding phase were related to one another by sorting, integrating, shaping, consolidating, and organizing the large amounts of data and then reconfiguring it in new ways. Brown et al. (2002) described axial coding as a) "continually relating subcategories to a category; b) comparing categories with the collected data; c) expanding the density of the categories by detailing their properties and dimensions, and d) exploring variations in the phenomena" (p. 173).

Selective Coding

In the third stage, the researcher determined the core variable that included all of the data. Categories were filled in and developed until saturation began to occur (Corbin & Strauss, 1998) and a core variable was formed. Data saturation is "the point in data collection when no new or relevant information emerges with respect to the newly constructed theory" (Given & Saumure, 2008, p. 196). The researcher no longer needed to collect new data as no gaps were seen in the

phenomena. When saturation occurred, the researcher began assessing how K–12 school leaders implemented diversity and created a systemic inclusion framework.

Theme Development

The researcher took an inductive approach to develop emerging themes, in four stages: initialization, construction, rectification, and finalization (Jones et al., 2016). The *initialization* stage consisted of reading the interview transcripts and highlighting meaningful bits of information, coding and abstracting participant comments about a particular experience, and writing reflective notes. The *construction* stage consisted of organizing codes and assigning similarities and differences and clustering meanings to create themes based on the research question: How do K–12 schools develop and implement a systemic diversity and inclusion framework? This stage consisted of classifying and grouping similar codes that were generalized into common meaning. After the classifying and grouping process, the researcher sorted the codes into groups of similar meaning and assigned main ideas that were derived from conversation topics, meanings, feelings from readings, and immersion in the data and reading transcripts. Codes were assigned based on the researcher's understanding of concepts and experiences like those already established and available in the literature. In the *rectification* stage, the researcher discussed with a peer reviewer to explore various interpretations of the findings and gave evidence to confirm the themes. Once the themes were developed and the literature was examined, the researcher formulated theme statements, which were linked to theoretical models to develop the research storyline. In the *finalization* stage, the researcher narrated, described, and connected the themes to the research question. This final step involved choosing, chronicling, and ordering the findings to produce an account of the data. In summary, the thematic development method included a cycle of re-reading the data to understand emerging

themes, generating preliminary codes, defining the themes, and then writing the narrative (Jones et al., 2016).

Fidelity and Accuracy

Prior to data collection, written approval was obtained from the Indiana State University IRB and the North Lake Community School Board of Directors to conduct the research. Due to the nature of the data collection, every effort was made to ensure that all participants would remain anonymous and their personal information would be kept strictly confidential (Creswell, 2013). Because confidentiality played an important role, the participants were asked to create their pseudonyms. From the collected data, direct quotations were used in the results and discussion sections of this document. The quotations refer to self-selected pseudonyms. The interviews were recorded and transcribed digitally, before being stored in password-protected electronic folders that were accessible only to the researcher. Although permission was granted by the authority boards, the participants did not have access to the raw data nor were able to view the names of those who participated in the study. Each participant was given and asked to sign a statement of informed consent approved by both the North Lake Community Schools and Indiana State University.

Trustworthiness

In this exploratory study, internal and external validity were important to obtain so that the results of the study could contribute to research. The researcher used several techniques to obtain trustworthy results: (a) peer review, (b) member checking, (c) reflexive journal writing, and (d) reflection based on the researcher's position.

Peer Review

In the first technique, a peer reviewer was chosen to offer perspectives on the data analysis. The peer reviewer was a diversity and inclusion administrator at another institution who oversaw implementation processes and therefore was familiar with the topics and themes of the research. The reviewer's role was to study one thematic area identified by the researcher, and then critique and confirm possible interpretations of the data.

Member Checking

In addition to the peer reviewer, member checking was incorporated with each interview (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Patton, 2002). Participants were invited to review material and provide feedback to the researcher on any errors or perceived misinterpretations. The researcher asked participants to read the final report and provide feedback about the accuracy of the findings. I determined whether or not to collect more data or rewrite sections of the final report. Creswell (2013) asserted that the benefits of member checking include credible reporting and error reduction.

Researcher Reflection and Reflexive Journal Writing

In most research studies, the researcher must reflect on how their experiences, assumptions, principles, beliefs, and biases might affect the study (Creswell, 2013). I was cognizant of my experiences with intercultural relations, diversity, and inclusion and realized that not everyone would have similar educational background experiences. During the study, I consciously reflected on how my own identity may or may not have informed my beliefs and hypotheses on diversity and inclusion efforts and the learning that occurred in relation to a systemic framework. Due to my position (Chief Equity Multicultural, and Inclusion Officer), I was cautious about any biases that I might hold with regards to my role in the educational

leadership field. As a school district leader with responsibility for supporting internal engagement and external awareness of key initiatives and implementing district-wide efforts to expand the value diversity and inclusion in schools, in the community, and among all employees, I recognized that I already had perspectives on what constitutes a systemic diversity and inclusion framework, and that those views should not be imposed on the interviewees.

Personal Statement

My interest in intercultural relations stemmed from my belief that systemic processes, in terms of the practices, policies, and procedure in relation to the human side of organizations, is the answer to overcoming the barriers that prevent inclusive cultures. As a district educator, I have come to understand that K–12 leaders must be intentional about developing positive school cultures. This requires organizational and individual development of cross-cultural skills, equity, diversity, and inclusion, including different cultures, races, and employee classifications. For this study, I chose the K–12 context, because it represents a social system where gaps exist between dimensions of diversity at both student and employee levels. As a Black American professional, I have been affected by both systemic and individual intercultural barriers that exist at both personal (relationships with family members), and professional (relationships with colleagues) levels. The lack of intentionality in terms of creating inclusive spaces has caused me as well as others to experience unnecessary exclusion in areas of education and job opportunities, for example. In addition, the bigotry and racism that I endured as a child can be described as microaggressions: “pin pricks, a psychic assault, and death of a thousand cuts” (Sue, 2005). After experiencing my fair share of racism and prejudice, every instance of institutional exclusion I encountered affected my thinking, and rather than withdrawing from the issues, the experiences fueled my desire to confront the injustices faced by students and professionals and provide

intercultural education among students, educators, and community members. My experiences have been a key impetus for this study. Systemic inclusion can create environments that break silos, build teams, and engage talents to reach organizational outcomes for a sustainable future. My goal is to serve the global community by promoting, creating, and sustaining an inclusive community; the lack of intentional inclusive systems creates exclusion and has dramatic effects on the lives of students and professionals. My goals have motivated my desire to develop a K–12 school consultative framework for implementing diversity and creating inclusion.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology for this proposed research project. First, the research questions and the rationale for the use of a case study, constructivism, and the selected methods for the research were described. The qualitative approach was to gain a greater understanding of how K–12 schools develop and implement a systemic diversity and inclusion framework. Next, the participants, recruitment procedures, and data collection processes were described. A single set of semi-structured interviews was used as the qualitative method of data collection. Next, the site and participants were outlined with regards to their selection to be participants. For analyzing the data, techniques from phenomenological and constructivist approaches were used with the assistance of the NVivo software program. Lastly, the fidelity, accuracy, and articulated trustworthiness strategies were described in terms of the possible impact they might have on the study. In Chapter 4, the results from the analyses are presented, and Chapter 5 provides the conclusions, discussion, implications, and suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This exploratory, single-case study was designed to discover applications of social systems theory for inclusivity in the context of K–12 schools. Six semi-structured, individual interview sessions were conducted to collect the participants' perspectives on implementing diversity and creating systemic inclusion in a school social system. The following overarching research question and three sub-questions informed this study:

1. How do K–12 school leaders develop a systemic diversity and inclusion framework for implementation in their district?
    a. What are school leaders doing to develop a systemic diversity and inclusion vision and strategy?
    b. How do staff see inclusion working (structures, practices, and systems) to promote greater implementation of diversity and inclusion among staff, students, and community?
    c. What strategies can help school leaders improve or achieve the desired diversity and inclusion vision?

This chapter includes a discussion of how the analysis was consistent with iterative data analysis processes of constructivist approaches and how the analysis was tied back to the research interviews and research questions to create a new theoretical framework (Corbin &

Strauss, 1998). In addition, this chapter has tabulated sample demographics to complement the summary. The process for analyzing the interview transcripts to uncover codes and themes is described in detail in this chapter.

The analysis occurred at three levels: open coding to assign categories and variables (Corbin & Strauss, 2008); selective coding to determine the core variable, including the data and filled-in categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1998); and axial coding to assign relationships between the variables (Brown et al., 2002). The researcher used NVivo software (Version 10, 2012) to assist with the identification and management of patterns and themes. At each level of analysis, constant comparisons were made to distill the data until themes emerged. This chapter includes tables and graphics to present the detailed coding and themes, and graphics and vignettes from the individual interviews are used to emphasize key themes.

The Study Sample

One school met the criteria for this study. North Lake Community School District (pseudonym) is a minority-majority district with a part of the student population participating in the free and reduced lunch program (Indiana Department of Education, 2018). The school was selected based on the following criteria:

1. Indiana urban school district with at least 10,000 students and 1,000 employees.
2. A large and diverse student population and a staff composition that represents many of the four layers of diversity (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010).
3. Employees with K–12 school experience.
4. Diversity and inclusion are among the school's priorities.

The study was conducted at North Lake Community School in the fall of 2019. The researcher contacted the school board secretary through email and described the study. The

researcher obtained an agency letter in support of the research with details about the intent of the research and the roles of the participants and the researcher. The board approved the study in the school district letters and indicated that the study aligned with its core values and would be appropriate for the North Lake Community School members. The interview methodology and processes were described to the Institutional Review Board at Indiana State University, and the school board and Institutional Review Board approved the following research activities:

1. Request an agency letter from the board president to conduct research in the school district. The agency letter would include permission to recruit all employees.
2. Work with the district's designee to schedule research activities and to confirm the timeline; informed consent would be sought from employee groups in upper administration for certified and classified roles.
3. Send email recruitment invitations to identified subjects, including the School Board of Trustees.
4. Conduct face-to-face interviews for 45 to 60 minutes with interviewees who had been randomly selected. Interviews would include the superintendent of schools and the equity officer.

Study Participants

A random and blind selection process was used. A total of 500 school district employees received invitations to participate in the study. Because I became an employee of the North Lake School District after receiving approval to conduct the study, some novel methods were used to address the potential for conflict of interest. To address the possible conflict due to the dual roles, I asked the faculty sponsor only to collect the signed consent forms via email and randomly select 90% of the potential participants. I received the consent forms from the faculty sponsor

and prepared to interview participants. The purpose of the blind recruitment approach was to prevent inherent, undue influence in the recruiting, informed consent, and data collection processes.

I sent emails to the selected interviewees, and during each interview session I read the interview protocol script, which provided employees an overview of the study (Appendix B) and indicated the confidentiality and voluntary aspects. Each participant was given time to ask questions about the protocols, and after I answered any questions, I explained the consent forms (Appendix F).

Six types of K–12 educators are represented in the sample, comprising one educational director, one assistant principal, one superintendent, one chief officer, one school board member, and one cultural director. The participants indicated their race information: one self-identified as an African American male; two identified themselves as Latinx females; and three self-identified as White, non-Hispanic males. One White male identified himself as gay. The ages of the participants varied. Participants who were 55 years or older made up 2/6 of the sample; 1/6 were between 45 and 54 years; 2/6 were between 35 and 44 years; and 1/6 of the participants declined to give their age.

Table 1 presents the demographic profiles of the six participants interviewed in this study.

Table 1

Demographics of participating North Lake employees

Participant Pseudonym	Selected Race Identity	Age Range	Selected Gender	Leadership Role
Brenda	Latinx	35–44	Female	Director
Brown	White	45–54	Male	Executive
John	Black	35–44	Male	Executive
Kirby	White	Over 55	Male	Principal
Mark	White	Over 55	Male	Board
Sophia	Latinx	*	Female	Director

Note. * *= Preferred not to say*

Data Collection

The six research interviews with K–12 leaders were conducted in the urban, Midwestern school district and served as the primary source of research data. The demographic questionnaires served as supporting research data. After the six in-depth interviews were completed, the audio recordings were coded using open, axial, and selective coding methods with NVivo software. The transcripts were then reviewed for emerging themes. The researcher ensured that phenomenological methodology was embedded throughout the data collection part of the research process. The original interview protocol is included in Appendix B, and the interview questions are provided in Appendix C.

Individual Interviews

Individual interview sessions were conducted in a private room during a time selected by the participants. The individual interview sessions were conducted to gain insight into the participants' views of what it takes to create a framework for implementing diversity and creating inclusion in K–12 school social systems. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Before beginning each interview, I confirmed that the consent forms were signed and on file. In addition, I reviewed the participants' rights, time commitment, and confidentiality policies.

Participants were reminded of the intention of the study, which was to explore the process used by K–12 school leaders to develop a framework to implement diversity and create inclusion in their district. I also assured leaders that all responses would be kept confidential. Each participant selected a pseudonym for the interview session. I used the pseudonym throughout the interview transcription and research report.

Participants completed the demographic form (Appendix E), which asked for their age, leadership role, and ethnic background. The demographic form was collected and analyzed after the interview sessions. The researcher asked the participants 14 interview questions (Appendix C). Each session was audio-recorded and then transcribed.

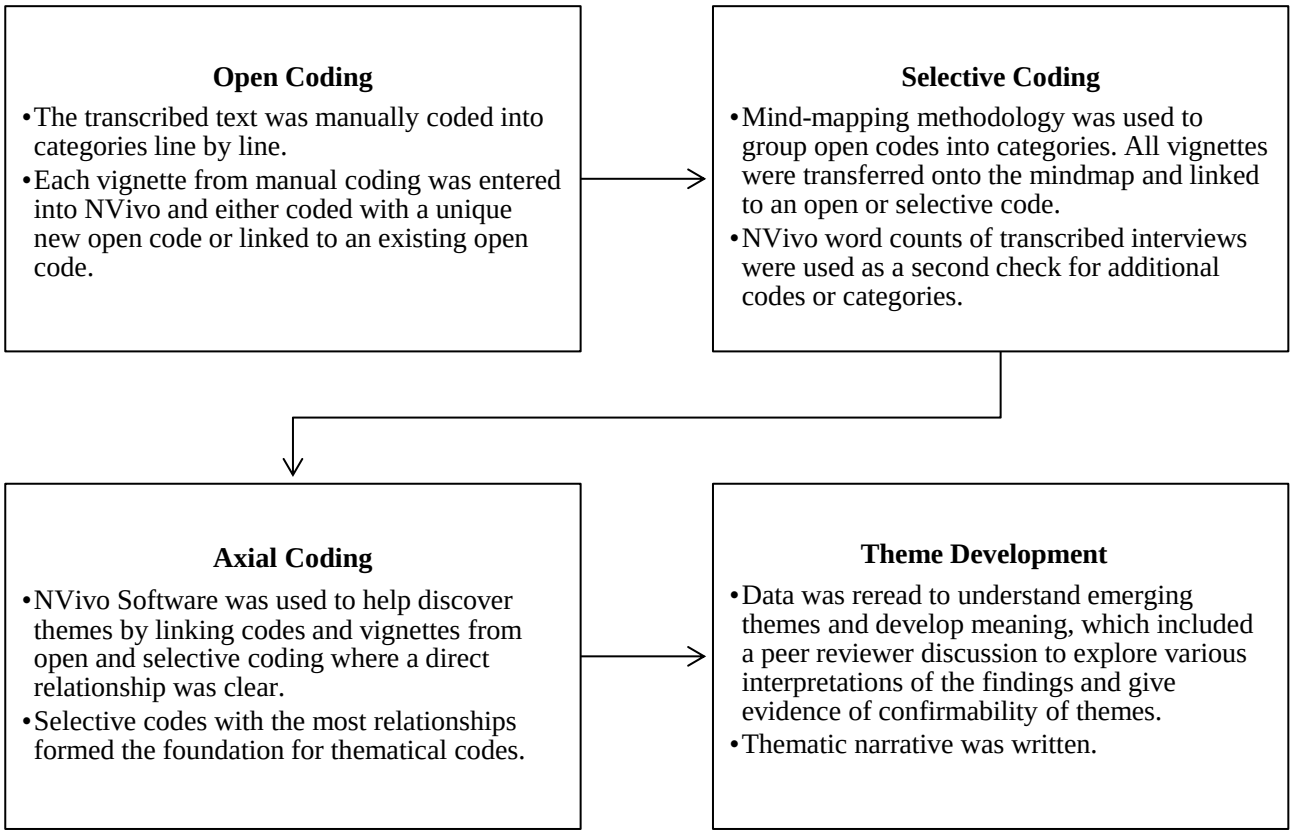
Data and Analysis

All interviews were coded manually during the open coding. I coded each interview and analyzed them for categories or themes. Transcripts were uploaded into computer software (NVivo 10) for further analysis. I listened to the recordings, manually coded the transcriptions, and compared the software's coding to the manual coding. After reviewing the interviews again, and having all six interviews for comparison, I used the constant comparative analysis techniques with the constructivist methodology. This process helped me remain consistent in emphasizing the key points during coding.

In the next phase of the analysis, selective coding, I searched to find categories emerging from the similarities in the open codes. Using theme development methods, I took all of the vignettes and open codes, developed meaning, generated preliminary codes, and defined the themes. Figure 6 summarizes the data and analysis process for the open, selective, and axial coding.

Figure 6

Data and Analysis Process



Using the NVivo 10 software, the researcher used word-count queries and source code data to discover the selective codes from the data. Axial codes emerged from the data during the analysis of the number of vignettes assigned to a group of codes, or the grouping of open codes. For this study, at least 10 in-depth defined vignettes were assigned to a code. Axial coding resulted from the relationships between the open codes and selective codes. The researcher used a mind-mapping methodology to aid this analysis. Relationships between the selective codes were analyzed across the mind map. While building the mind map, whenever a vignette was linked directly to a code, the researcher reviewed that vignette for relationships with other codes.

If other relationships were found, the researcher connected the codes with an arrow. The selective codes with the most relationships formed the start of axial coding.

Adhering to phenomenological methodology, some of the participants were asked additional follow-up questions. Constant comparison was exercised to ensure that additional weight was not added on a per code basis only. For example, each participant was asked questions regarding equity and diversity and inclusion rationale, vision, and the structures that were in place, but not every participant was asked questions about the importance of accountability concerning the school district culture. Two participants were asked this question because accountability systems began to emerge as a code after the first four participant interviews were complete.

The following section header questions indicate two distinct selective codes: vision-centric codes and engagement-centric codes. The three selective codes were assigned seven relationship variable codes, illustrated in Table 2 by the example vignettes from the participants.

Table 2

Example Participant Vignettes Based on Codes

Vision-Centric Codes	Engagement-Centric Codes	Challenges: Inclusion-Centric Codes
Accountability	Decision-making	Opportunities for Inclusion
Structure and Leadership	Inclusion	Changes Needed
	Equity and Equal Opportunities	

Participants were asked to describe their district's diversity and inclusion vision, strategy, and rationale. The question intended to determine how inclusion is embedded in the culture and how it is not seen as an isolated program but rather as a core value. In addition, the question explored how leaders inspire others to take individual responsibility and who holds leaders

accountable for implementing the district's diversity and inclusion vision, setting goals, achieving results, and being role models.

Vision-Centric Codes

In this section, vision is a code used to describe vision and rationale and to understand who holds leaders accountable for implementing a vision for an inclusive culture in the K–12 school context. Over 50 open codes were assigned to the umbrella term of vision, and all participants mentioned at least three vision-centric codes.

The participants noted a lack of vision and clear rationale or investment in standards for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the district. Sophia suggested that a vision for systemic diversity and inclusion does not exist in the district and that a good strategic plan should include internal and external stakeholders:

> I don't believe the district has a rationale or vision at this point. I can recall a time when I served on the writing team for the strategic plan for the district. Writing the vision consisted of three individuals writing that strategic plan and then getting feedback from—I am not even sure. Parts of that plan were developed almost in a bubble without outside perspectives.

She also identified pockets of a vision for inclusion and diversity implementation: "I think that there are departments that are more aware than others in regards to the needs of diverse children. However, we have not put a vision in place as a district." Sophia gave a perspective on how a vision and rationale should be developed in the absence of a plan for diversity and inclusion vision that is inclusive of others: "I think that a vision and rationale should be work that happens both at the district level and the school level. The strategy should even include community

members. We need to engage in those conversations. We have not had those conversations in a long time."

Brown's viewpoint aligned with Sophia's in terms of legal compliance as the motivator to embed a vision for equity, diversity, and inclusion in the district. Brown asserted that pressures from the U.S. government forced the district to act on their vision for diversity but solely in terms of race. Brown noted that multiple changes in executive leadership hindered the intention for inclusive practices:

> I think that vision and rationale existed in the past. However, if you go back many years ago, the government applied a decree that forced the district to acknowledge that they had diversity and inclusion issues. What is more, changes in leadership landed us in how we manage diversity. As a result, the district hired an African American to direct services related to Black students and their families.

Brown believed developing that department was the administration's way of implementing the said vision and rationale for diversity and inclusion.

Brenda, along with three participants, indicated that compliance is the vision and rationale for their inclusion efforts; actions are taken primarily to comply with relevant laws and social pressures. Brenda provided a clear explanation of her understanding of the motivation for an inclusion vision, but it comes from outside the school: "The School Board and the Department of Justice hold us accountable and drives a lot of the rationale for our equity and diversity conversations. Both are outside entities."

John corroborated Brenda's assertion and described the district's rationale highlighting historical benchmarks and the Department of Justice's compliance measures as reasons why the equity, diversity, and inclusion work is underway in the district:

> Ten plus years ago, there was a department that focused on disparities and equity among students and provided prosocial programs for students. However, for the reasons that I believe were budgetary, the department dissolved until 2019. Disparities, particularly for African American students, have continued to widen and worsen.

John further described the rationale for the district's focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion as outside pressures that came from families in the community who have lost trust in the district and whose relationship with the district continued to erode over time due to the leaders' lack of vision regarding students' wellbeing and academic achievement:

> And so as a result of some of these actions that have been happening to students, the district decided to respond to the community's outcry by creating the office that focused solely on African American students and parents—with no vision. Obviously, without vision, there is no funding—just the creation of a job to help resolve some of the ills of the district.

According to Kirby, the district has a clear diversity and inclusion vision and an explicit understanding of the rationale. As a new building leader, he saw evidence that the district wanted to accomplish diversity and inclusion goals, particularly when he attended district-wide meetings. Kirby, along with 90% of the participants, focused their understanding of the district's vision and rationale on minorities. Kirby referenced the changing demographics of ethnically diverse students in his school building as the basis for the district's and his rationale:

> I don't know if I've seen a handbook with our vision for diversity and inclusion, but in my few months with the corporation, diversity and inclusion have been emphasized concerning students of color and the issues that have been brought to our attention.

Kirby emphasized that student demographics have changed as the rationale and vision for his school:

> Our school data show Hispanic and African American students have become the largest segment of the population in our school. And the two of them together make up a majority of the school. We focus our attention on minorities to ensure they are represented in special programming. Being confronted with the reality that we are a minority-majority school, we base our vision and rationale on addressing the exclusion of minority groups in select programs that are not open to all students. We have this good academic program, and we need to make sure we're more diverse and have appropriate representation. I know that the corporation has made a big point of stressing the discipline and behavioral issues, too, in terms of disproportionality because some of the disciplinary matters are in minority populations in our program.

Brenda, in alignment with Kirby, focused on the district's vision for equity, diversity, and inclusion at the school level. She does not see evidence of a clear vision, but she believes the rationale for action is necessary because of inequitable student processes at the building level. She referred to systems of practice that hindered underrepresented students and their parents, such as poor and minority members, from taking advantage of special programs:

> I have some concerns about how we allow students to apply to selective programs, how we then follow up with them, and what we require of certain parents before students can become a part of highly sought after programs that just inherently set it up for the middle class, engaged parents to give their students a leg up. My concern is about students who don't have some of those same support systems and how to get them into those programs.

> I have concerns about the hoops that we make parents or children go through to get into some of our high academic, specialty programs.

She also offered her view of what should be included in a school vision when it comes to equity, diversity, and inclusion: "I really want to make sure as we proceed that we're equitable in terms of our processes. We talk about equitable access to the curriculum and then I think our work with equity, diversity, and inclusion is instrumental in that. So, at this point, I wouldn't say we have a clear vision."

Mark iterated the vision and rationale in terms of a dedicated office to address issues related to equity:

> We never had an office dedicated to addressing equity-related issues before. The fact that we have such an office at all says something about, yes, we believe this is important. On the other hand, I think it does matter that the office's origins stemmed from community pressures; failures to meet the consent decree; and segregation among schools and the fact that we had, even just a few years ago, 8 to 10 schools that were not in compliance.

Study participants were asked to explain how they saw inclusion working in structures, practices, and systems to understand how leaders and board members view the strategies of diversity and inclusion goals. It focuses on understanding the leaders' intentions and responsibilities in terms of supporting diversity-related activities and how they hold themselves and others accountable for implementing the district's diversity and inclusion strategy.

Accountability

Two participants notably captured how the district holds its leaders accountable for the diversity and inclusion vision coming from external entities. These perspectives gave insight into why participants talk about advocating, accountability, and strategic alignment regarding the

strategy. The diversity and inclusion implementation strategy is unknown to others on a broad scale, and there could be a need for diversity and inclusion champions throughout the district.

Brenda provided a clear explanation of her understanding of accountability coming from outside the school: “The School Board and the Department of Justice hold us accountable and drive a lot of the rationale for our equity and diversity conversations. Both are outside entities.” She suggested that while the public holds the district accountable for implementing the government-mandated equity practices, next year could hold promise for internal systems and structures being put in place that would move the district forward with equity and inclusivity practices:

> I see this school year as getting some basic frameworks in place and then next year really starting with a true vision and alignment as it relates to these systems. Currently, our internal system does not hold us accountable for those things. I would argue that we are still focused on what we don’t want someone to ask or are concerned about what if the school board asked this or what if the Department of Justice asked that—almost like a teacher rather than being self-reflective.

Mark focused on leaders and their responsibilities in terms of supporting diversity-related activities from a theoretical perspective. He viewed responsibility for equity, diversity, and inclusion as being shared among everyone in terms of the superintendent, administrators, teachers, and support staff:

> I’m thinking about the difficulty of these equity, diversity, and inclusion responsibilities in isolation. Where does the decision-making reside? And, I would say that the superintendent oversees the executive team, and the executive team oversees the workings of our buildings and our classrooms. Therefore, I don’t think responsibility for

> the equity, diversity, and inclusion strategy should be in one office. The lens of equity has to be one through every office, considering a range of diversity we have in the district. But whether a strategy is implemented or not really depends on the force of an administration that says this is important now.

Mark illustrated a multi-office view of system-wide responsibility for the district's ties to the government consent decree and its equity-related strategies:

> I think responsibility begins with the superintendent working in tandem with a cabinet that has just as much responsibility for defining equity as the one office itself. For example, we have an academic office. Whether it's the academic office, the financial office, or the equity office, or superintendent office—everyone is responsible for equitable outcomes for students, ensuring kids who have the greatest needs are getting perhaps more money than the schools where they have more resources or that a social worker is not splitting her time between two schools, essentially having a thousand students.

Mark further asserted that a strategy first begins with agreement and cohesion with shared understanding at the executive level, but what happens in the classroom is most important: "So, I think structurally it has to be more a more coherent vision where everyone in the cabinet is coming together and saying this is what we want." He continued:

> But I also would say that what actually gets played out in the classroom is probably what matters the most. I think it's one thing to understand classroom-level that the superintendent says that equity is important, but is that what's happening? Unless there is support, training or training and support incentives even, I think those things have to be in play for a strategy to get played out.

Mark also offered a statement regarding self-governance and accountability in the district: “We should hold each other accountable in our different departments as it relates to visions and missions because they need to work together. I think we need to really examine our actions because they show the truth about our vision as an organization.” While all of the participants reflected on accountability and assigned it to vision, Mark offered a glimmer of improvement toward vision and legal compliance accountability.

John spoke of what it is like to be responsible for increasing inclusion among colleagues on his team. He suggested that working in silos prevents enacting a vision for inclusion and explained that leadership is central to the answer:

> There is not a district model that currently brings all officers and expectations into a central focus and so much of it right now is that the central office is very siloed and at the building level I’d say it is also siloed as well. Because each building leader could have his or her vision of what that looks like. I think ultimately that is where everything begins and ends. I think the district superintendent is ultimately responsible for creating clarity around those expectations and setting in motion an atmosphere and a culture that is collaborative and inclusive.

Brown pointed to one office in terms of holding staff accountable: “I do think we have some work to do on accountability right now. I would say the academic office is responsible, because they evaluate building leaders; however, we have to have a broader conversation.”

Sophia, on the other hand, agreed with Mark’s viewpoint of systemic responsibility for the equity, diversity, and inclusion strategy but included commentary about individual and collective accountability:

> I don't think there is an internal structure that holds us accountable. I think many of us who see the need will have to hold ourselves accountable. It's through our efforts and I don't believe that many times people even know we're doing it. We just kind of quietly do our work.

Sophia suggested a systemic perspective: "At the building level I think principals should evaluate their teachers, and then principals themselves should be evaluated by their director." She ended her comment about equity and inclusive strategies focusing the responsibility at every level of the district, asserting that individual accountability is not enough. She argued it should include formal structures, "I think the responsibility for equity and inclusion should be part of my evaluation and principals should hold teachers accountable for creating inclusion in their respective classrooms."

Participants were asked about what strategies they employ to achieve desired diversity and inclusion vision. The purpose of the question was to understand the district's structure for diversity and inclusion to determine whether or not a dedicated person with expertise is in place on the leadership team. In addition, the question is intended to learn about the structure and whether or not the district provides enough resources, human resources, and support to help implement its diversity and inclusion strategy.

The participants' comments showed a correlation between structure and leadership codes. These two codes relate accountability to structure and implementation. Moreover, the participants viewed managing diversity and inclusion as a key part of their leadership responsibilities. They described how actively taking individual responsibility for implementing diversity is a kind of proactive leadership. Thus, the open codes for leadership and structure are merged in the following vignettes.

Structure and Leadership Code

The open code structure had 24 vignettes. Some of the vignettes were evidence of instituting a structure for accountability, whereas some vignettes leaned more toward a lack of evidence. Earlier, Mark endorsed the district's equity department as being part of the organizational structure to address student legal compliance requirements, but Brown pointed to the need for additional expertise at the leadership level to ensure a systemic way for the district to adequately respond to equity and inclusion efforts:

> I would like to see us get beyond diversity and get to this whole notion of inclusion. I think setting a baseline for principals, specifically their training and professional learning, is key to achieving excellence for both staff and students. I don't know that we've unrolled training well over the years.

Brown gave additional insight into the structure of accountability and the lack of training processes to ensure building leaders have a measure of accountability and the necessary skills for creating an inclusive environment where multiple dimensions of diversity exist in the district:

> The district has an office for equity services, but I don't think that we ever got to the place where we ensured the principal training and held them accountable for training and the knowledge they do not have access to. I think there needs to be other people involved in the development piece, but we haven't used a systemic approach to fit everything together. The fact that we have African American students in particular, but also Latino students, who are not achieving proportionately to the White students . . . It's 2019 and we have transgender students and openly gay employees . . . Our approach to inclusion has to be broader.

Brown also described a “stop and start” approach to equity as being ineffective for moving the district forward, particularly when the superintendent changes every two or three years: “When leadership at the top changes, inclusive efforts lurch, and we don’t get a full process worked out.”

John viewed the district as being passive when it comes to its structure and budget for diversity and inclusion. In his view, the district does not have formal proactive practices for addressing diversity and inclusion issues:

> Over time, the lack of structure in the district shone a bright light on the work that needed to be done around cultural competency and implicit bias training. When we focused on our evaluation system to make sure practices were fair and transparent, it didn’t hold up to the highest expectations and rules. It didn’t matter whether it’s central office building leaders or building staff. The next step we need to take in our district would entail creating a structure for resources and an accountability system.

He further asserted that resources can be useful, but if they lack support, people, and accountability, they have no effect. He offered his idea of what a framework for inclusion might look like:

> We have to make sure there are resources, supports, and services available to make it possible for individuals to reach what we’re asking them to do—but all three pieces need to be in place. Even if the district can provide a ton of resources, it won’t matter if individuals are not held accountable and are not expected to push staff to operate at their optimal best or there is no clear understanding of what the expectations are. I don’t think we will ever be able to reach a truly diverse district that embraces diversity and lives it out because fundamental pieces missing.

The participants spoke about having a clear structure to do the work of equity in the district, but John gave insight into what he believed is the right direction for leaders to take for equity work: “I would like for us to have a clear path to do the work with those that directly touch kids, families, and the action in the classroom. I would like to have clear access and a way to provide not only support, but clear feedback within those channels.”

Mark suggested that inclusion has to be part of the organizational structure and should include intentionality in all departments within the corporation, including financial support. He said, “I would say the same is true for the financial officer who is looking at a budget and beginning to ask the question about what’s the available funding that we have for equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts, for example.”

Sophia pointed out the lack of internal structures for accountability in terms of inclusive practices:

> I don’t think there is an internal structure that holds us accountable. I think many of us who see the need will have to hold ourselves accountable. It’s through our efforts and I don’t believe that many times people even know we’re doing it. We just kind of quietly do our work.

The open code leadership had 23 vignettes but directly referenced structure and accountability. Some of the vignettes described the importance of leadership for performance, accountability, structure, and evaluations. Sophia said that inclusion should be everyone’s responsibility: “I actually think it should fall at each level.” She also believed that the organizational structure should craft space to “hear the voices of everyone who does evaluations.” Nevertheless, she explained that evaluations should be tied to formal accountability structures:

> The current structure for the evaluation system we have is focused primarily on instruction and academics, but I also feel that it should include other factors, such as relationships, equity, diversity, and inclusion. I believe that comes with training. I believe, first of all, we have to create the structures. Everybody has to be a part of creating those structures. And, unless there's some accountability from leadership, it's not going to get done.

She particularly noted the importance of school board leadership in terms of creating an inclusive culture:

> Leadership should come from the board, but sometimes the board does not live in schools as we do. Inclusion is something that we create and then present to the board to say how we fill a need and how we believe things should change. I would love to have conversations with board members—not just singularly—but as a team . . . to sit down and have a planning session or communication sessions with the board and of course with the superintendent.

John agreed with the premise that leadership is key to the corporation's success regarding values, beliefs, and actions. He said, "I think everything rises and falls on leadership; everything that we can measure, in terms of growth, cooperation, climate, and success and failure, always starts with the direction that the chief leader instills." He asserted that the right person should be in leadership:

> And it's really easy for those in leadership to use their power to keep others busy doing activities they believe are important, which discounts any type of diverse group or surrounding yourself with different people from yourself. Inclusion is very visual. When you have the "right" leader, there is a clear vision and expectations from the chief leader

for the type of environments that those leaders are asked and held accountable for creating.

While the right leadership was considered to be significant for achieving the vision, equity was considered essential to move the district toward greater accountability and a commitment to inclusive practices. Brown spoke about specificity in terms of equity and diversity and the reasoning behind the district's creation of the equity department. He said, "Prior to the equity office, there was not a level of specificity; the district needed lots of professionals in that department." He went on to explain the level of responsibility he sees the office managing within the district*:* "And for the vision in my mind, the office needs to take the lead and push the entire district to ask difficult questions and interconnect in everyone's business about equity." He suggested corporation leadership should model inclusion and that it was important for an inclusive culture change, as the space for inclusion in the corporation is very important to him.

Engagement-Centric Codes

The open code of engagement refers to how the school community experiences the culture, activities, and practices associated with diversity and inclusion. The selective engagement code included activities underway in the district and its decision-making process. The code emerged as a selective code, with over 75 vignettes assigned to the two combined open codes. Also, over 60 vignettes were assigned to the engagement open code, including how diversity and a diverse workforce had changed over time. For some participants, diversity was a matter of more than race that included aspects of differences related to sexual orientation, and some spoke about the importance of building relationships across differences. These participants said that the evidence for an inclusive culture is an expanding topic for the district, and an intentional effort is needed from both staff and students.

Brown described how he experienced the district's culture in terms of race and sexual orientation diversity. He explained that the lack of cross-cultural relationships and critical dialogues impedes inclusion. Brown gave insight into a practice in a previous role that allowed him to navigate racial diversity with colleagues that he does not experience in the district:

> In my previous role, I was one of the few Caucasians in my building. So that allowed us to have conversations to develop friendships. We talked about my life and theirs. We went to weddings, funerals, and birthday parties. I think that allowed us to talk about how we were the same and how we're different. For whatever reason, we don't do that here. We don't talk about race. We don't talk about gender. We don't talk about sexual orientation. And I think we have to create spaces with intentionality.

Mark gave insight into his perspective on activities associated with diversity and inclusion as it related to student behavior. He viewed the targeted training that occurred as evidence that the district is working to address equity, diversity, and inclusion, but he emphasized that training on behavior alone might not be enough to effect change in terms of inclusion at the systemic level: "I think about the code of conduct training that was provided to staff as a visible activity, but it did not really address the things like implicit bias more broadly in terms of equity, diversity, and inclusion." Mark's view of activities underway not only included a single-focused training, but it also included a review of data, describing activities as a tool to challenge our mindsets:

> We look at our data—a practice that has begun to challenge us to think differently about how we interact with children and engage in relationships with parents. Although the majority of our students are minorities, a disproportionate number of Black students are suspended or expelled; we better do something different.

Brown commented on the type of engagement that is lacking and also what is needed to enhance a culture of inclusion. His viewpoint demonstrated that students might be experiencing exclusion because of their sexual orientation, for example, and require supports that the site-based staff might miss, which could result in unintentional exclusion. He stated, "We have to be very intentional about LGBTQ students because there is an added layer of stress in school; we have to be intentional about what our plans are for kids who needed additional support." As a leader, Brown works with staff to find out what the school can do if a student or staff member is transgender and questions his staff about how they would handle the bathrooms. He would tell his staff, "We need a practice for inclusion that's intentional." He suggested that critical conversations around issues of sexual orientation, race, and other forms of diversity are important for the district equity team: "Focusing on some of the difficult conversations and figuring out ways to engage our students are topics that we certainly hope to discuss, especially through the equity and culture council; we have to make space to do it."

The interviewees were also mindful of intentionality and how they viewed engagement in the district as part of the decision-making process and inclusion as activities to build relationships and engage employees and students. The leaders described engagement in terms of building relationships, ensuring different perspectives in the decision-making process, and managing biases. Brown described how he built relationships with students to engage with them at school:

> You've got to be intentional. When I walk into a cafeteria during lunch, I'm intentional about walking over to the kids sitting by themselves. I'm intentional about walking over to a group of African American or Latino students. I don't know if they all speak English. I just put myself out there and engage students. I was at a high school where all African

> American students were in the hallway. When I build relationships, I can ask them why they were in the hallway and not reading a book. I can tell them I command respect by giving it. I think it's just a matter of engaging—to force yourself—there are groups of students that are harder to go up to. It's scary. Teachers, too, have to build relationships to engage students.

The participants gave examples of activities underway in the district that indicated how they demanded that different perspectives be included in the decision-making process. Sophia gave insight into how she asserted herself to advocate from her sphere of influence. She offered insight into individual actions but left the question about the intentional systemic approach that John described in his earlier commentary. Sophia described the visceral feelings she experienced when voices are not intentionally made a part of the decision-making process, especially given the new organizational structure that came with a new administration:

> I know that voices are being left out—I mean serious voices. Decisions are being made in a bubble and the structure we have in terms of the executive group. The absence of diverse voices has far-reaching implications that weren't thought of because individuals weren't present. It's kind of disheartening.

Sophia added that exclusion caused additional burdens for individuals who intercede to ensure voices are present:

> I'm constantly having to say, "Did we send this message out in Spanish?" We probably should translate communication in other languages, as well, given the high percentages of Spanish speakers. Still, translation sometimes occurs and sometimes it doesn't. Our practice should be consistent, and I shouldn't have to ask these questions.

Brown spoke about the efforts to create an inclusive culture by engaging people in the decision-making process. His account is centered on individual efforts rather than on a culture where a protocol exists to ensure global participation in decisions about schools and programming:

> In my sphere of influence, I make sure everyone has a seat at the table and allow people to know in the words of Martin Luther King to bring their folding chairs and to create a space for everyone. I do that by modeling. I do that by managing my own biases—and my diversity issues.

One of the factors that Kirby acknowledged was that issues of inclusion and diversity must be acknowledged and acted upon. He shared the actions he takes as a leader:

> I announce the equity issue that ought to be acknowledged and recognized. I ensure that staff recognize that differences matter and can be overcome in many cases, but not always. Nevertheless, we have to start addressing them and recognize there is so much disparity out there.

He suggested that the district's actions should align with its stated beliefs in terms of attaining a diverse workforce that represents its community and is inclusive of its members:

> We continue to talk about how we need to try to achieve more diversity. We talk about it . . . We say we're going to get to it. That's a good start, but sometimes putting words into action can be tough. At least we're talking the talk now. What else can we do to make sure we're walking the walk? As a leader, I model and recruit harder, better, and smarter from minority candidates. I assert that we need to get minorities to apply to increase our diversity of staff. We need to be more aggressive in those areas . . . not just talk the talk.

The participants described the decision-making process as a leadership skill that affects how people experience the culture. Engagement activities are distinctly tied to what is underway in the district. When asking the participants how the district included perspectives like theirs in the decision-making process, their responses included power as an inhibitor of shared value and inclusive culture.

Decision-Making

Eighteen vignettes were assigned to the related decision-making codes, elevating them to a category and selective codes. The first vignette below includes a description of changing decision-making to incorporate employees whose voices are unheard and who hold less power in the organization. Mark described the internal challenge for others who want to hold power: "People who are in power want to retain that and if it means we have to change and be more inclusive and hear different voices and be more intentional, maybe that compromises my position." Mark also comments on decision-making with regards to equity, diversity, and inclusion and suggested that it should start with the top leadership and include a shared responsibility model: "The superintendent oversees the cabinet and the cabinet oversees the workings of our buildings and in our classrooms. I don't think it should be one office." He further asserted that prejudice influences the decision-making process in the corporation. He stated, "We [consider] where we're going to put our resources, and it determines who matters and who's going to really flourish."

Sophia also brought up the matter of voice and explained the lack of voice some experience when sitting with executive leaders. She stated, "I am concerned the new organizational structure that we have leaves out voices, I mean serious voices. When we meet with the executive group, do we really meet with them? It's just kind of like just sitting there."

Sophia went on to describe the detrimental impact of voices being excluded from district decision-making: “The lack of diverse voices has had far-reaching implications that weren’t thought of because individuals weren’t present.” She also implied that those without a voice have to force themselves into the decision-making process:

> I think that sometimes you just have to force the issue and you have to speak up. And you have to call that meeting. You have to if you can’t call a meeting with a big group then many times it’s just to walk up to their conversation and you catch them for a few minutes. It’s not through e-mail . . . It’s not through a phone call . . . It’s in person. Because when you’re standing in front of them, they have to listen to you for at least a couple minutes.

The participants also identified specific areas within the district where the decision-making has been an issue. For example, Brenda commented on the magnet school decision-making challenges and the way it gives advantages to some students:

> I have some concerns about how we allow students to apply and how we then follow up with students before they can become a part of a program inherently set it up for middle-class engaged parents to give their kids a leg up. We don’t even have norms for our meetings. We don’t have any way we all make decisions. We don’t even know what we value as a group.

In effort to understand what schools did to achieve a diversity and inclusion vision, the researcher asked questions about the participants’ attitudes, opinions, and cultural perspectives of diversity and inclusion. In addition, the question was designed to explore any bridges to the potential systemic efforts, such as the vision, rationale, and structure, that included professional learning about issues including racism, heterosexism, and unconscious bias, for example. This

question also sought insight into potential diversity and inclusion practices that could lead to a new organizational culture, structures, services, and outcomes that have an impact on performance and retention.

Inclusion

Over 25 vignettes were assigned to the inclusion, engagement, and culture open codes, elevating them to selective codes. The participant responses about the practices associated with diversity and inclusive priorities were largely about what actually happens, rather than what is said or written by executive leadership to matter most for building relationships and an inclusive classroom and workplace culture. Mark said:

> I would also say that what gets played out in the classroom is probably what matters the most. I think it's one thing to understand at the classroom level that the superintendent says equity is important, but is that what's happening? Support, training, and incentives must be in place for inclusive efforts to get played out.

Kirby explained engagement and culture in terms of building-level activities for students:

> Activities like magnet school, such as 8th Grade nights. We are trying to appeal to every student in the district. We organized our first annual retreat a couple of weeks ago. We wanted to reach out to the community, and we want everybody. Our idea was to reach out to promote more community involvement and programs for the community, such as service programs with clubs.

Brown asserted that the leadership team has to build an inclusion structure in terms of funding, staffing, and practicing inclusion within teams:

> I think we have to build the structure. I think we've done that. I think we have to fund it. And, I think with our grants that we did . . . we did that. I just think it has to be

> intentional to make sure that you build the structure, you're funded, and you hire great people to put into it and then you sort work out all the bugs.

He also described engagement and culture in terms of providing school-wide student systems:

> I would say activities for creating a culture of inclusion would grow out of our equity department, such as our efforts to develop Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) that provide social-emotional education; Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS), where adults review school-wide data and teach expected behaviors in both the classroom and general spaces; Responsive Classrooms (RC), where the teacher holds meetings with students and sets a structured, classroom agenda; and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) training where our staff strives toward understanding students and provides appropriate services. I also think we need to make sure we have people in the support rooms, making sure we have systems and supports for students who need behavioral support and redirection. We should have a social worker in every building and systems of support built for students, for teachers, and then have the training necessary to be successful.

When asked about engagement and culture among the staff, he emphatically stated it is not an area of strength in the district:

> I would say we haven't done a great job. I know that we've gone down the road of restorative practices with staff people, but how do we train folks? I don't know. I think it needs to be job-embedded. I think it needs to be part of their workday. I don't know. I don't have a good model for that.

In addition, Mark explained that the concept of inclusion has not been part of the district's efforts and sees it as a new phenomenon for the district to work with:

> So, I think about the shift to inclusion since we're using those three words: inclusion, diversity, and equity . . . you know, I think that inclusion has not been a word that's been used particularly as it applies to this corporation. While it seems that diversity is an add-on and a problem to be solved; on the other hand, inclusion would mean we're making sure that people are at the table who need to be at the table. It is a question of who is helping to make these decisions and whose interests are being served toward that end—where does the decision making reside?

He described a perspective of inclusion of diverse voices through equity in the district:

> A lens of equity has to be one through every office, considering a range of things we have and appreciate—that it's race, ethnicity, physical ability, or gender and sexual orientation. I think there are some clear blind spots when it comes to too many students. Inclusion is not in the area of great concern from the corporation's standpoint in terms of trying to articulate a vision that would filter down.

All of the participants believed that if the school district fostered an inclusive environment, it would lead to feelings of safety and respect. Mark talked about obvious symptoms of educating students of color and including students who are gender fluid: "We're not doing that great of a job talking about race. There are the obvious symptoms of a problem in that we're not educating students of color, nor thinking about the way that we're silencing kids. In addition, some students could be gender fluid because they are still trying to figure out their sexual orientation." He believed that the district needs to be intentional in its efforts in terms of curricular choices and representation:

> In a fairly conservative district, we're talking about sexuality and sexual orientation and gender. The choice of literature is oftentimes again very mainstream and very traditional

> where kids are not seeing themselves in the texts. And that's why I say if we are truly intentional, we're going to be inclusive in terms of who's making decisions about curriculum. We need to lay out an equity vision—that's how specific we need to be.

Sophia believed that the discussions about students of color were plentiful, although some children were still excluded. She mentioned that it can be difficult to speak up because the staff might feel it would compromise their position:

> I think we have to have those difficult conversations, and we haven't had those conversations in a long time. I think our discussions about students should be inclusive; inclusion means being inclusive of everyone. I don't see any conversation about the remainder of our clientele. I don't know what's going on with White children or multiracial children or Indian and Asian children.

She went on to suggest that each department should focus on inclusion. She indicated that one area of need was the hiring of multilingual and Latinx staff at all levels of the organization:

> Some of us recognize the need, and we work in our departments to diversify our staff. We need to hire more Latinx staff members, such as teachers, administrators, and directors and place them in every job classification from the classroom, aides, and front office. Inclusive hiring efforts also include finding staff members who speak other languages as well. We have a few who speak Arabic. At some point in time, we had many Bosnian families in our community, and we were looking for support. We translated some of our registration materials to accommodate families. Today, we translate in seven different languages. We're taking these baby steps essentially.

She further illustrated the need for more inclusive communication with an example: "I'm constantly having to say, didn't we send this message out in Spanish? The manner in which we

send out the information to some families is counter to so many communities because they don't have technology or it's not their preferred choice of communication." While Sophia sees inclusion as central to the diverse staff and student body, she describes disappointment in how superficially people view these concepts:

> This always pains me because people think of cultural diversity and inclusion in terms of ethnic groups and celebrations of food; it involves what is most comfortable for schools, which is basically celebrating very surface-level traditions on the calendar: Let's celebrate Cinco de Mayo or celebrate Black History Month or let's celebrate Hispanic Awareness Month. I hope that some of the instructional pieces that are found in the current adoption will be more inclusive to include literature from other nationalities so that units be developed around those that can be shared within not only the building itself, but outside of the building into communities. We have to go deeper.

Returning to the issue of hiring practices, Kirby emphasized systemic intentionality for instituting inclusion for hiring staff who would mirror the 70% minority student body:

> There is no active recruiting process that focuses on racial minorities. We have to recruit harder, better, and smarter to get minorities to apply and increase our diversity of staff. We need to be more aggressive in those areas, not just talk, to ensure individuals mirror our student population in this district as they exist in our corporation. Some of it is kind of by happenstance; they may get an African American candidate, a Latino candidate, an Asian, or American Indians.

Equity and Equal Opportunities

More than 15 vignettes were assigned to the selective code of equity. This selective code is an umbrella term used in this dissertation to capture participants' views about the evidence for advancement opportunities.

When asked about activities and practices associated with diversity and inclusion in the district that affect students with fewer resources, Brenda referred to school enrollment process inequities. She stated, "For me, equity hasn't really even come into play because I have some concerns about how we allow students to apply and how we follow up with students before they can become a part of a program that is inherently set it up for middle-class, engaged parents to give their kids a leg up." Brenda described student enrollment processes as cumbersome for students with fewer resources, and she talked about the challenges they experience. Nevertheless, she thinks staff members in a leadership program have equal opportunities to succeed and matriculate in the district: "We make parents jump through hoops. We've not set up student success in all ways. For employees, I think programs like the growing leader program, those applicants tend to be very diverse." Further commenting on equitable opportunities for employees, Sophia suggested that if employees performed well, they had equal opportunities to succeed in the district:

> I do believe that if they work hard they will. It's not a question of working hard; it's knowing what the opportunities are to begin with. However, leadership has to find the best staff person for that position and continue to grow them.

While she believed individuals in the district have equal opportunities to succeed, she indicated they have a responsibility to achieve:

> But part of it is accountability on their part. Employees have to be willing to do the work. Moreover, I believe there needs to be more support for those individuals to pursue more education. Many times, it's because they don't have the funds that they don't move forward. Sometimes it's because they're comfortable over where they are; they don't want to move forward.

The participants did not believe that inclusion worked the same at all levels of employment within the district. Mark believed that the corporation did not consider inclusion and equity as synonymous terms in relation to paraprofessionals and cafeteria workers:

> Inclusion has not been a word that's been used particularly as it applies to this corporation. Inclusion would mean we're making sure that people are at the table who need to be at the table, such as our food service workers, bus drivers, and paraprofessionals. In terms of equity and inclusion, I think that's not an area of great concern from the corporation's standpoint in terms of trying to articulate a vision that would filter all the way down.

Other participants noted the lack of equal opportunities to succeed in the district for minority students and staff members. Mark noted long-term gaps in student achievement:

> What concerned me was that students with the most need were not necessarily getting what they needed to flourish; so, for the last three years, I've been developing after school programs, mentoring, or starting my own leadership program. The leadership program was called "No Parent Left Behind" to support families.

The school district recently hired a minority candidate for the highest-ranking administrator position who will have direct influence over the hiring practices. Brown was

obviously excited that the district had hired him, but he said that the district had a long way to go:

> We recently hired an administrator who is the highest-ranking school administrator in the entire state. But in terms of a consistent plan for hiring minorities through the district, we haven't done a great job and there are no systems in place set up to monitor that.

When asked about equal opportunities for all staff, Brown stated:

> You have typically racial and social and economic disparity. As much as I want to say . . . yes, everyone has equal opportunities to succeed . . . my heart tells me to say no. Look at all the White teachers we have. I would be naive to say "yes." It would be all of my White privilege to say "yes" to that question.

John saw the focus on racial equity as tokenism, where hiring minorities is for optical purposes. He stated, "I have not seen evidence of African Americans in leadership positions nor evidence that other than White males and White females are in seats that drive the decision-making process within the corporation." In his experience, he noted that he has seen minorities in positions that are directed by others, which he argued does not equate to equal opportunities. He noted, "If you're still telling minorities what to do and how to do it, you discount the purpose of diversity and inclusion."

The effect of the lack of systems that provide support for students and help staff to monitor processes and equity can be measured according to Brenda:

> Without processes to monitor and manage interactions between students and staff, we have no way to know if supports are actually useful. When looking at our behavior or our discipline data in terms of equity, we are able to make sure we're not over identifying or just not providing resources or putting kids in places that they don't need to be.

Mark believed that the staff was unaware of their behaviors and practices. He stated,

> There are clear blind spots when it comes to hiring staff that matches the district's majority of students of color. One evident blind spot is looking at our workforce; there is a sprinkling physically in terms of appearance because there are very few teachers of color and yet we're also so stratified. We're really not that committed or don't take equity as seriously as it needs to be taken.

Referencing the district's history in terms of multiple leadership changes over the year, Mark explained the current efforts toward equity:

> The district had diversity and inclusion issues, and changes in leadership sort of landed us in how we manage. The district moved to hire an African American director of student and family services. And I think that was the administration's way of saying we're going to focus on this and put a spotlight on this when the school board hired a new superintendent. I think it gets us to diversity maybe but not inclusion.

Brown said that more equity efforts need to materialize to address the systemic inequities. He stated, "And I would also say the director of African American Family Services doesn't go far enough because there's Latinx and there are poor Caucasian kids. I don't think that goes far enough to get us to inclusion." Brown perceived leadership changes affecting the district's ability to move forward in terms of inclusion and professional learning opportunities:

> I would like to see us get beyond diversity and get to this whole notion of inclusion. I think setting a baseline for principals, specifically, and their training and their professional learning. I don't know that leadership has unrolled that well over the years, and superintendents tend to have short careers in this district. As a result, equity and inclusion efforts lurches. And so you don't get a full process embedded in the system. I

> don't think that we ever got to the place where we ensured that we were training principals . . . holding them accountable.

Inclusion-Centric Codes

The participants described barriers to achieving the district's equity, diversity, and inclusion strategy. To drive the strategy, participants described opportunities for implementing inclusion to overcome barriers to improve the culture in terms of a system that would foster inclusion through shared beliefs, values, and behaviors. In addition, the participants described specific changes needed to drive forward the district's equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives or strategy.

Opportunities for Inclusion

Brown highlighted explicit and candid dialogue: "I think being intentional about who's at the table and creating spaces to have difficult conversations is paramount to the diversity and inclusion imperative." He added, "Creating an environment of inclusion has to be easier for leaders or they have to be more aware of doing it." He recognized that inclusion can be difficult because "it's not an easy thing to be intentional and include people who don't like you." John added, "The district needs to ensure a more inclusive culture with the right instructional leaders in place to achieve and value inclusion." John suggested bureaucracy that prevents access to those who touch families and students can also create barriers to inclusion: "Leaders need a clear path to touch directly kids, families, and the action in the classroom." He wanted "a clear access and a way to provide not only support but provide clear feedback within those channels." Brown further asserted the lack of pathways to provide feedback to principals and district office personnel who are responsible to help them grow is a big disappointment.

Norms and cohesion also dominated the case study. Each participant was keenly aware of the lack of effort and goal alignment. It was important that employee actions matched their practices and that the vision, norms, and values be front and center. Brenda said, “I think we need to examine what our actions are showing about our true visions.” In addition, she noted, “We don’t even have norms for our meetings. We don’t have any way we all make decisions. We don’t even know what we value as a group.” Brenda also asserted the importance of finding ways to retain staff in various classifications, “We could extend more opportunities to help staff in non-certified type roles to find ways to grow professionally and to potentially become classroom teachers. Our superintendent has spoken about wanting to have initiatives that help support that type of work.”

Mark expressed similar sentiments regarding alignment, noting an approach that would permeate throughout the district if equity, diversity, and inclusion clarity existed: “None of our efforts have been developed organically from a coherent vision of equity and inclusion . . . It’s very well-articulated, very well. Intentionality grows out of our ability and says here’s what we’re trying to address; here’s what we’re trying to address.”

Changes Needed

For educators to practice inclusion, Brenda mentioned some changes that would be needed to drive forward the district’s equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives or strategy: “If I’m going to be on a team, I’d like to know its purpose and what’s our goal . . . In addition, how are we holding ourselves accountable to an unidentified goal?”

Sophia also suggested the need for making goals clear to achieve equity in the district. Her perspective follows Mark’s viewpoint of how organic and intentional strategy can create not only a systemic focus, but also a team focus intended to work on equity and inclusion:

> We have to make it a priority. We have to put people in place who understand how to be culturally competent and inclusive when they train and teach. We have to establish a shared vision, and then we have to continue to do the work—on a day-to-day basis—working together—not working in silos.

She believed that communication and working across organizational lines are critical factors to move the district's initiatives forward, "Sharing communications is number one and working together on shared training is number two and advocating in a louder voice is number three." Sophia asserted that a failure to communicate priorities and act upon them can cause unintended harm to staff, students, and parents:

> Communicating about equity, diversity, and inclusion are important to the overall impact, because failing to share the priority or if it's not even on staff members' radar screen, we can be doing more damage in the way staff are interacting with students and parents, and the ways administrative staff is interacting with their direct reports.

John said that the district must have a system of accountability, indicating that it would provide transparency and set expectations for what moves the district toward a system of equity. He gave insight into how systems without clarity, intention, and standards for practice could cause mistrust, undue privilege, and reactionary rather than proactive measures:

> The first action, in my opinion, should be based on planning an accountability system. An evaluation system would ensure that practices are fair . . . they are transparent and that it doesn't measure or hold up the highest expectations and all rules, whether again it's central office building leaders on down.

Mark added to the perspective of what was needed to move Lakewood Community School District forward. He suggested that while accountability and expectations are important

actions, a third measure of the diversity and inclusion framework is resources. Nevertheless, accountability, expectations, and resources ranked equal as effective measures for the operation for him:

> After accountability, we have to make sure there are resource supports and services available to make it possible for individuals to reach what we're asking them to do. All three of those pieces being in place, you can provide a ton of resources but if individuals are not being held accountable and pushing staff to operate at their optimal best and/or there is no clear understanding of what those expectations are . . . if those three pieces are not unified and aligned together, I don't think we ever will be able to reach a truly diverse district that embraces diversity and lives it out because fundamental pieces are missing.

The participants described opportunities and changes that could help the district move forward in terms of systems, intentionality, and accountability. John corroborated the other participants' connection between the system of accountability and implementation, "Everyone needs to be intentional about who we hire, who is at the table, and then develop the systems to monitor outcomes."

Likewise, Kirby pointed to embedding inclusion in everyday practices: "If it's not a part of our culture, you have to include the definition, so you include things, PD [professional development] for adults and projects and activities for the kids, too."

John summarized the model that Kirby and other participants outlined of what needed changing in the district:

> We need to establish a district model that brings all officers and expectations into a central focus, as well as de-silo the central office and the school building that is also siloed. We need to honor people and their differences. Lastly, a priority for equity,

diversity, and inclusion is nurtured from the top down to create an environment where staff can continue to grow, be tested, and have opportunities to experience success and failure.

NVivo Analysis Coding Results

From the interview coding, the first step was to transcribe all questions and responses. Seven hours of recordings became more than 35 typed pages. I read through the transcript and highlighted notable excerpts to identify them for further study. Highlighted sections were generally related to concepts presented in the literature review and to ideas mentioned by the interviewees as being a valuable part of their equity, diversity, and inclusion leadership role.

The initial highlights (a couple of hundred excerpts) were pooled into a new document, retaining their affiliation to the interviewees and pseudonyms via similar axial code labels. Here the process of open coding began with a line-by-line coding of each participant's response. The codes grew to cover more than 25 categories, with similar comments being grouped. The coding process with the participants brought the total number of axial codes to more than 300.

With the codes defined, I returned to the original transcript and read for additional comments related to the established codes, which identified an additional 40 highlights to add to the list. Each code and the corresponding quote was examined to see if the code was useful for a deeper understanding. Some single-comment codes were discarded and others were combined with codes that were essentially the same. At the conclusion of the process, 14 codes remained.

I conducted a third review of coding word frequency in the NVivo 10 software for the six interviews to check for any additional themes. Word frequency queries were performed at different ranges to see if any differences existed regarding queries that searched for the same word, similar word groups, and a frequency between these two extremes. Table 3 shows the

results of these word frequency queries. The word “inclusion” was the second most frequently referenced word in the query searching for similar word groups, after the word “accountability.” A total of eight selective codes emerged from the manual, peer review, and NVivo analysis.

Table 3

Summary of Word Frequency Queries

Nodes	Description	Files	References
Accountability	Who holds leaders accountable?	6	59
Activities	What activities are underway?	4	9
Budget	What funding is allocated for diversity efforts?	2	2
Career opportunities	Do people from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to succeed?	5	18
Changes needed	What changes could the district do to encourage diversity?	3	10
Culture	Who holds leaders accountable?	6	28
Decision making	How are you included in decision-making?	5	18
Diverse teams	How does the district build diverse teams?	5	14
Diverse workforce	What are the signs that the district values a diverse workforce?	6	37
Diversity	What are the signs that the district values a diverse workforce?	6	34
Easier	What would make it easier for you to foster inclusion in your sphere of influence?	2	5
Equal opportunities	What are the signs that the district values a diverse workforce?	5	23
Equity	Do people from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to succeed?	5	20
Implicit bias		6	14
Inclusion		6	53

Nodes	Description	Files	References
Leadership	Who holds leaders accountable?	6	23
One thing	What is the one thing the district could do to create a more inclusive culture?	3	4
Rationale	How did the district create a rationale for the diversity and inclusion vision and strategy?	5	15
Role models	What are the signs that the district values a diverse workforce?	3	4
Structure	Does the district structure support diversity?	6	24
Support	Does the district structure support diversity?	1	1
Values	How did the district create a rationale for the diversity and inclusion vision and strategy?	3	8
Vision	How did the district create a rationale for the diversity and inclusion vision and strategy?	5	16
Why you work here	What is the one thing the district could do to create a more inclusive culture?	5	11

Next, an iterative process of grouping and regrouping was performed on the open codes to identify larger clusters of related concepts, or axial codes. The axial codes were in turn grouped into six thematic codes (Table 4).

Table 4

Open, Axial, and Thematic Codes

Open Codes	Axial Codes	*Theme
	Vision-Centric Codes	
Accountability	Holding leaders and staff accountable	Setting systems of accountability
Structure	Driving the strategy	Aligning vision with the strategic plan
Leadership	Providing adequate resources	Building a sustainable infrastructure
Budget		

Engagement-Centric Codes		
Decision-making	Experiencing inclusion in the district	The executive leader influencing culture and inclusion
Implicit bias	Communicating the inclusion imperative	Sharing the leadership of inclusion
Diversity/workforce	Developing and promoting staff	
Equal opportunities/Equity	Advancing cultural competency training	

Challenges to Inclusion-Centric Codes		
Accountability	Opportunities for inclusion	Prioritizing inclusion at systemic and individualistic levels
Structure	Changes needed	
Leadership		
Budget		

Note. The axial codes were distinct with in-depth meaning and stood out on their own; rather than coalescing to one theme, they expanded into more than one dominant theme.

Six themes emerged from NVivo coding, selective coding, and axial coding analysis. The researcher used axial coding and peer review to further understand the relationships between the open codes and across the selective codes which aided theme discovery. The selective codes having the most relationships were used to begin the theme coding. The six themes that emerged from this study summarize the contributing factors that K-12 school leaders use to build an equitable, inclusive social system framework, namely: (1) setting systems of accountability; (2) aligning vision with the strategic plan; (3) building a sustainable infrastructure; (4) executive

leaders influencing culture and inclusion; (5) sharing the leadership of inclusion; and (6) accountability for prioritizing equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The themes were derived from reviewing the relationships in open and selective coding. The first two themes focused on the top executive leadership who make the key difference in the diversity and inclusion vision, strategy, implementation, and business case. The themes are directly tied to the selective codes of vision-centric and engagement-centric codes. The primary difference between the selective codes and the themes was accountability in terms of the organizational dimension (institution, roles, and expectations) and the emphasis on personal disposition (individual, personality, and need-disposition) (Getzels & Guba, 1957). The third theme was also derived from the selective coding and was focused on engagement, with a more direct tie to diversity dimensions and how employees experience and see evidence of inclusion. This theme was also tied to how most employees across the four layers of diversity (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010) rate their leaders concerning treating them fairly and inclusively in the school district. The fourth and fifth themes are related to multiple relationships and concepts within those relationships. For example, for the fourth and fifth themes, bias emerged as an important concept about relationships that affected the district's reputation, credibility, culture, and equitable opportunities for students and staff. The sixth theme was derived from what the participants believed was needed to move from the vision to implementation and to achieve the next step in the diversity and inclusion process based on the district's strategic objectives. During the constant comparison, the challenge of creating an inclusive K–12 social system was seen to be consistent from the board level to the school building level. Each theme is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of the analysis, connected the analysis back to the research questions, and demonstrated consistency in the analysis using the case-study methodology. Six participants were interviewed with semi-structured questions to explore the depth of challenges, experiences, and perspectives that central office executives and school leaders have faced to reveal how they implement diversity and create inclusion in the K–12 social-system environment and create a framework to achieve their goals for systemic inclusion. All of the participants were school leaders and worked in the same urban school district at different levels of leadership, as defined in this project as part of the ideal school profile selection process.

Consistent with iterative processes of a constructivist method, the analysis was conducted at three levels: open coding, selective coding, and thematic coding. A total of 24 codes emerged from the open coding. Constant comparison analysis was used with mind-mapping and NVivo 10 software to discover three selective codes that emerged from the open-code categories. Constant comparison analysis was also used to reveal the relationships between the open and selective codes, which led to six themes.

The themes that were identified by coding describe the leaders in the district to understand their goals, reveal the organizational structure, and provide accountability at both the systemic and individual levels to create an equitable and inclusive environment. In this study, the participants:

- Had a strong sense of accountability and structures needed to establish an equitable environment for staff, students, and families.

- Shared a common message about why the vision and priority of inclusion and accountability needed to be communicated from the head of the organization.
- Identified resources in a robust equity infrastructure that included funding, professional development, and board support.
- Understood that shared ownership of the implementation begins with the leadership team and with individuals themselves.
- Recognized the importance of professional development and increasing cultural competence in the classroom and among families.
- Identified specific steps to be taken next for systemic equity, diversity, and inclusion that needs to be part of the implementation.

Chapter 5 provides a more thorough discussion of each of the themes and their components.

CHAPTER 5

THEMES, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The themes developed in Chapter 5 reveal thoughts, beliefs, and opinions common among participants in this study. These insights are relevant to the beginning of a framework, but they should also be observable and experienced among staff, students, and parents. Limited implementation and integration practices into systems, such as instruction, hiring, promotion, reward systems, and overall strategy references to the leadership and explicit vision as hindrances and that these practices have been unchallenged to a great extent.

The themes in this chapter will expand on the principal investigator's interpretation of the findings of this study as they relate to the research questions presented in Chapter 1. The guiding questions of this study were:

- How do K–12 school leaders implement diversity and create a systemic inclusion framework? This overarching question has three sub-questions:
    - What are school leaders doing to develop a systemic diversity and inclusion vision and strategy?
    - How do staff see inclusion working (structures, practices, systems) to promote greater implementation of diversity and inclusion among staff, students, and community?
    - What strategies can help school leaders improve or achieve the desired diversity and inclusion vision?

Each of the research questions was answered through an analysis of the participants' responses to the questions presented in Appendix C. Findings presented here were common among participants from the school district selected for the case study.

Themes

This section outlines thematic results interpreted in light of the research questions and discussed in conjunction with literature. The six themes were derived from code analysis. Themes are presented to answer the question in this study as the resultant framework for how K–12 schools implement diversity and create an inclusive framework in a social system. This section is outlined in the following order: (1) setting systems of accountability, (2) aligning vision with the district's strategic plan, (3) building a sustainable infrastructure, (4) the executive leader influencing culture and inclusion, (5) sharing the leadership of inclusion, and (6) accountability for prioritizing equity, diversity, and inclusion and holding staff at all levels accountable for achieving diversity and inclusion objectives.

Setting Systems of Accountability

Dwertmann et al. (2016) found that without clear accountability structures, members of an organization may not share different perspectives or engage in an organization's efforts, which may cause conflict among members of that organization. Participants in this study described how they believed accountability should look in the school district. They emphasized both executive leadership and individual accountability. The difference between the research and what the participants suggested was top leadership versus individual accountability. In particular, Mark said, "We should hold each other accountable in our different departments as it relates to visions and missions because they need to work together." Overall, there was a common belief that leaders (school and district) should take responsibility for diversity and inclusion efforts.

However, overwhelmingly, researchers asserted that responsibility begins with the superintendent working in tandem with cabinet and school board members who hold just as much responsibility for defining equity in the district (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). Getzels and Guba (1957) provided a framework for defining the significant role administrators play in negotiating the demands of the institution and the individual staff members' attitudes, beliefs, skills, and practices that influence the social system. Participants believed that their role is not only tied to addressing societal ills through school equity efforts, but also involves considering the diversity of individual needs of students and staff to engage them in keeping the school viable, competitive, and aligned to accountability standards (Johnson, 2010). One specific accountability improvement measure for the district is establishing a district leadership that represents cross-employee levels. The council oversees equity, diversity, and inclusion practices at the building, staff, and student levels.

Aligning Vision With the District's Strategic Plan

According to Gardenswartz and Rowe (2010), an organization's change process for implementing diversity and creating inclusion should be connected to its strategic plan. The study participants commented on the lack of vision and accountability for leaders responsible for the diversity and inclusion strategy, which gave rise to reactive factors in terms of focused diversity-related practices. The words and narratives of the interview participants supported this conclusion. Sophia suggested that a vision for systemic diversity and inclusion does not exist in the district and a good strategic plan should actually include internal and external stakeholders: "I don't believe the district has a rationale or vision at this point." Participants viewed the strategic plan as the best method for achieving the vision in the district. While the vision is the aspirational view of core values, the strategic plan could serve as a practical guide for all

community members. The plan would provide a logical progression of steps for all stakeholders who can support the diversity and inclusion goals to take. O'Leary et al. (2015) and Gardenswartz and Rowe (2010) both emphasized that high-level leadership and accountability drives the district's strategic plan.

Building a Sustainable Infrastructure

According to O'Mara and Richter (2017), building a structure for equity, diversity, and inclusion involves providing dedicated support and structure with authority and funding to effectively execute the diversity and inclusion strategy. A sense of a lack of vision and clear rationale or investment in standards for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the district emerged from the participants' comments. John viewed the district as being passive when it comes to its structure and budget for diversity and inclusion. In his view, the district does not have formal proactive practices for addressing diversity and inclusion issues. John asserted, "resources can be useful, but if they lack support, people, and accountability, they have no effect." This district's structure for diversity and inclusion was partially evaluated by the participants through the question of whether or not a dedicated person with expertise was in place on the leadership team. However, sustainability is not sustained through a person. While 67% of the participants described sustainability in terms of budget and human resource structures, they also recognized that support to implement its diversity and inclusion strategy was paramount to long-term success. Respondents described a sustainable infrastructure in terms of budget and human resources. Failing to focus on change management systems creates a gap for building an infrastructure for creating systemic inclusiveness in schools as a social system (Crook et al., 2011).

The Executive Leader Influencing Culture and Inclusion

Pink (2009) asserted that autonomy was a motivating factor for individuals and connects the ideographic dimension to the nomothetic dimension in the organization's system where motivation increases decision-making without micromanagement. This theoretical concept strengthens the link between the challenges in administration that were purported by Getzels and Guba (1957) and participants of this study. John agreed with the premise that leadership is key to the corporation's success in regard to influencing organizational culture. He said, "I think everything rises and falls on leadership; everything that we can measure, in terms of growth, cooperation, climate, and success and failure, always starts with the direction that the chief leader instills." Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) explained that if schools fail to establish the right organizational culture, cliques will constrain stakeholders, preventing a culture of inclusion. Fifty percent of the participants considered culture and inclusion a question of who is helping to make decisions and whose interests are being served toward that end; of the six participants, five believed the executive leader creates the structure for shared decision-making, a foundation to autonomy and a building inclusive, organizational culture (Getzels & Guba, 1957; Pink, 2009).

Sharing the Leadership of Inclusion

Inclusive environments lead to feelings of safety, respect, engagement, motivation, and being valued for their members (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010; O'Mara & Richter, 2017). According to some of the participants, evidence for advancement opportunities did not apply to all district stakeholders; they noted the lack of equal opportunities to succeed in the district for minority students and staff members. The views of the research participants reflect the diversity of the district and provide insight into how staff experience the social system (Rothwell et al., 2015). Researchers Ely and Thomas (2001) purported a similar association that exists between

staff members feeling valued and respected in the district in terms of leaders upholding principals and inclusion practices. For example, employees believe they are valued when employers leverage diverse perspectives to inform core work practices (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Participants discussed how diversity and a diverse workforce had changed over time. For some participants, diversity was a matter of more than race that included aspects of differences related to sexual orientation, and some spoke about the importance of building relationships across differences. Interviewees described how sharing the leadership of inclusion was directly connected to engagement in terms of building relationships, ensuring different perspectives in the decision-making process, and managing biases. Internal organizational benefits arise because a diverse workforce that "includes a range of perspectives can improve creativity and problem-solving, resulting in better decisions, innovation, and greater flexibility" (Wright et al., 2014, n.p.). According to Nishii and Mayer (2009), inclusion and inclusive leadership may also lead to reduced turnover. Shared leadership can be enacted formally, informally, and individually (Getzels & Guba, 1957). Therefore, leaders should integrate employees' ideas; specifically, employees sharing in setting school goals, disaggregating student data, monitoring and assessing programs, demonstrating inclusion, and linking shared leadership to feelings of safety, respect, motivation, and value in the school setting.

Accountability for Prioritizing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

According to Pfeiffer and Jones (1972), organizational leaders who provide employees with maximum fulfillment, in terms of inclusion and decision-making, are more likely to reach the desired outcomes. They concluded that leaders need to demonstrate commitment and hold staff at all levels accountable for achieving the equity, diversity, and inclusion objectives. They emphasized that creating an equitable district is an important challenge that requires dedicated

staff members to lead the implementation process. The changes the participants believed the district needed included establishing a systemic practice of inclusion to drive the district's equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives or strategy and holding themselves to an identified vision. Each participant affirmed the need for goal alignment to match behaviors and practice to the vision, norms, and values of the district. Brenda noted a disjunction between the stated goals of the district and the actual behaviors and processes in place: "I think we need to really examine what our actions are showing about our true visions."

Interviewees in this study described concrete changes to improve inclusion in the district. John suggested policy and structure changes that remove barriers from leaders that allow them to be in direct contact with families and students to help increase their access to opportunities: "Leaders need a clear path to touch directly kids, families, and the action in the classroom." A need for norms and cohesion also dominated the case study. Brenda noted, "We don't even have norms for our meetings. We don't have any way we all make decisions. We don't even know what we value as a group." The interviewees emphasized prioritizing and holding staff accountable as steps the district can take to reach its equity, diversity, and inclusion goals. They believed establishing a model, unifying the central office, and aligning vision and strategy would all be steps towards accomplishing these goals. Lastly, a priority for equity, diversity, and inclusion needs to be nurtured from the top down to create an environment where staff can continue to grow, be tested, and have opportunities to experience success and failure.

Summary of Findings by Research Question: How do K–12 School Leaders Implement Diversity and Create a Systemic Inclusion Framework?

The participants in this study had various roles throughout the district. As this study confirmed, leaders in the K–12 school district described what was needed to establish a

framework for K–12 schools and their employees. Respondents believed the responsibility of setting systems of accountability was not centralized in one office or with one person, but was shared among everyone. However, they recognized the chief leader sets the structure and empowers employees to achieve equity, diversity, and inclusion goals (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). The participants' viewpoints aligned with Getzels and Guba's (1957) seminal work in terms of administrative culpability. The researchers asserted that an employee's personal disposition (individual, personality, and need-disposition) and the organizational viewpoint should amalgamate, to close the gap between the two (Getzels & Guba, 1957). Getzels and Guba (1957) provided a framework for defining the significant role administrators play in negotiating the demands of the institution and the individual staff members' attitudes, beliefs, skills, and practices that influence the social system. Linking theory to application, Sophia's viewpoint of systemic responsibility for the equity, diversity, and inclusion strategy illustrated individual and collective accountability, ". . . I think many of us who see the need for inclusion need to hold ourselves accountable—it's through our efforts."

Aligning vision with the strategic plan was a key differentiator to all the other questions because all participants alike agreed that funding, human resources, and vision should be designed together. The district's strategic plan, from the interviewees' viewpoint, should be driven by clearly articulated actions and measures that hold leaders and staff accountable and an infrastructure in terms of providing adequate resources. The study participants further affirmed that the executive leader should influence culture and inclusion in a way that leads employees and students to experience inclusion in the district. Although the overall current literature lacks practical applications and comprehensive K–12 approaches for strategically managing diversity, creating inclusion, and connecting to the organization's strategic plan, diversity and inclusion

practitioners Gardenswartz and Rowe (2010) asserted that communicating the inclusion imperative and sharing the leadership of inclusion are integral to developing a systemic commitment for cultural competency training and promoting staff. Prioritizing equity, diversity, and inclusion and holding staff at all levels accountable for achieving objectives at systemic and individual levels are both integral steps to creating a systemic inclusion framework.

Conclusions

The notion of creating inclusion between individuals, personalities, and need-dispositions within a social system (Getzels & Guba, 1957) in the K–12 context environment, exhibits deeply rooted structural barriers. Although leaders can identify opportunities to advance inclusivity in the school context, they suggest that systemic equity, diversity, and inclusion barriers remain in the school as a social system.

During the early to mid-2000s, over 50% of the nation's educational leaders feel ill-prepared to handle the challenges in their settings (Kowalski, 2004; Johnson, 2016). In addition, the research indicated that educational preparation programs rarely provided adequate opportunities for leaders to implement diversity and practice inclusion skills (Kochan & Young, 2004). Duffett et al. (2003) found that "typical leadership programs in graduate schools of education are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today's school districts" (p. 39). A majority of educational leadership programs emphasize theoretical ideas that are misaligned to the demands of present-day school leaders (Duffett et al., 2003).

Implementing diversity to create inclusion stands as one of the greatest challenges schools face in the 21st century (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). Administrators in K–12 schools often lack leadership skills for embracing diversity and encouraging inclusivity (Murphy, 2001). The pressure on districts to reform and compete with charter schools increases every year.

Parental access to education funds, the number of online school options, and demands from business, parents, and community stakeholders, increase how nimbly schools need to adapt to diverse students and leaders in the district. (Manna & McGuinn, 2013).

The results from participants in this study indicated that leaders establishing a diversity and inclusion framework in the K–12 social setting must have a vision, strategic plan, and intention by identifying their goals and resources. Leaders must dedicate their efforts toward creating cohesive environments. Other critical factors of this study highlighted that leaders, in terms of the chief and school board members, ultimately measure the success of diversity implementation in terms of the district's creation of policies that align with the strategic plan, establishment of the district's vision, and provision of professional development related to the importance of diversity and inclusion. School leaders need to have the skills and the abilities to establish processes within the social system that not only leverage inclusivity but also amalgamate the organizational and individual dimensions to reach the desired outcomes (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010; Getzels & Guba, 1957).

Based on the theories of Getzels and Guba (1957) and Gardenswartz and Rowe (2010), this study provided an analysis of how K–12 school leaders construe building a healthy school culture through a systemic diversity and inclusion approach. The two theoretical authors applied different methodologies and found similar results that aligned with the perspectives of the K–12 interviewees. The social systems theory has been described in the literature in numerous sociological studies, although few authors have used examples of K–12 contexts. Because of the paucity of comparative studies, this study provided an opportunity to compare and contrast the results between similar interview methodologies to expand and strengthen the findings. Finally,

expectations should be formalized and integrated as a part of the school-wide evaluation process, ensuring they become an established part of a school culture and accountability system.

The results of this study suggested that there are six themes related to advancing a systemic framework for implementing diversity and creating equity and inclusion in the K–12 social system: setting systems of accountability, aligning vision with the district's strategic plan, building a sustainable infrastructure, the executive leader influencing culture and inclusion, sharing the leadership of inclusion, and prioritizing equity, diversity, and inclusion and holding staff at all levels accountable for achieving diversity and inclusion objectives.

Implications

Negative implications of not institutionalizing inclusive practices abound (O'Mara & Richter, 2017). Students who do not feel valued will not learn as effectively and their academic performance will deteriorate (J. Aronson, 2002). Student attendance will suffer and there may be more cases of suspensions and expulsions (Brandt & Morukian, 2009; Johnson, 2010). Likewise, teachers and staff who do not feel valued may develop negative attitudes, be less willing to collaborate, lose interest in their school, and seek work elsewhere (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Without diversity and inclusion training, problems of resistance to change and disproportionality of student referrals are less likely to be addressed (Muhammad, 2009). Ultimately, North Lake School District could face declining student academic assessments, lower graduation rates, higher teacher and staff turnover, student migration out of the district, reduced ability to build community partnerships, and an overall negative reputation if inclusivity is not addressed (Nishii, 2013).

Legal Issues

Incorporating inclusive practices is also essential for the North Lake School District in terms of minimizing risk and ensuring compliance with legal requirements. *Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964* prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance. Likewise, *Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972*, bars discrimination based on sex in programs or activities receiving Federal funds. In addition, there are numerous Federal laws, enforced by the U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission, that prevent workplace discrimination and harassment. Lawsuits by individuals against school districts have cost millions of dollars and have damaged the reputation of school districts. To avoid the risk of legal action, North Lake School District must cultivate a safe, inclusive environment so that all students, employees, and community members can thrive and prosper without fear of discrimination (Brandt & Morukian, 2009).

Recommendations

School leaders need to have the skills and the ability to establish processes within the social system that not only leverage inclusivity, but also amalgamate the organizational and individual dimensions to reach the desired outcomes (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010; Getzels & Guba, 1957). The researcher has four recommendations based on the study problem and participant interviews:

Developing Structural Foundation

A foundation is the first necessary element to develop a diversity and inclusion strategy. The basic foundation includes vision, leadership, and structure (O'Mara & Richter, 2017). Developing a strategy drives the process forward and helps leaders understand what inclusion looks like in the organizational context. A structural foundation helps employees identify

progress and describe important benchmarks. According to Gardenswartz and Rowe (2010), integrating practices, policies, and vision regarding diversity and inclusion must be the responsibility of all employees. If employees do not have support from the C-level suite that communicates clear expectations and provides human and financial resources with learning and discussion, it will not happen.

Communicating the Vision

According to the Gardenswartz and Rowe (2010), one step to implement system changes is to communicate the importance of the vision to internal and external stakeholders. Diversity and inclusion become integrated into the district's existing communication structures and learning programs to advance the overall goals. Communication is a force to enhance the district's reputation. When utilizing communication to bridge the organization's vision, goals, and strategy, employee best practice is to ensure it is accessible to multiple ability levels in a variety of formats (such as internal and external websites) and languages. Executives should report progress on attaining the vision and goals broadly to the public. The district can leverage communication opportunities in three specific ways:

- Market its equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts internally and externally to enhance the district's reputation with students, staff, and community members,
- Embed equity, diversity, and inclusion topics into weekly newsletters and on the district's internal and external websites, and
- Share employee, student, and parent perspectives using video or in-person interviews.

Empowering Employees

In the K–12 context, Pink (2009) provided insight into methods for motivating employees. Similarly, Getzels and Guba asserted the social system is where human structures

and goal structures empower individuals to resolve recurring administrative problems. Collectively, motivation and empowerment provide school leaders autonomy to enliven the strategy for inclusion. With the increase of diversity in our nation's schools, employees need the freedom to work across organizational lines and with community members to address the complex challenges that arise in the school's social system (Getzels & Guba, 1957). In addition, employees need to be empowered with training. However, structural systems should be in place prior to a training effort to uphold a comprehensive equity, diversity, and inclusion process. The structures include executive buy-in, leadership teaming, data gathering, evaluation, and integration (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). The training program should follow a developmental approach, such as building awareness, enhancing skills, and assisting employees in understanding the benefits of diversity in the workplace and school buildings. Employees are empowered when they know they have the knowledge and skills to understand and respect differences in race, gender, religion, cultural values, and thinking styles. Training can help reduce conflict between administration and teachers, students, and parents and should be offered to employees at all levels.

Evaluating Diversity Progress

Organizational change is a long-term process, not just a short-term goal (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). It is recommended that K–12 schools complete evaluations to measure the effectiveness of their diversity programs. Evaluations should be a part of the strategic plan and should include a comprehensive measure of climate, employee turnover, and the extent of inclusion in the workplace. Accountability is an integral component of the evaluation progress. It allows leaders to use constructive feedback to improve practices, policies, and programs (O'Mara & Richter, 2017). With a foundation in place and an evaluation plan, leaders are poised

to reward employees as individuals and groups that uphold the core values concerning diversity and inclusion.

Suggestions for Further Research

Successful organizational leaders understand that workplace diversity is not simply the responsibility of the human resources department. Executive managers and leaders must communicate the importance of diversity at every level within the organization. There is further research to be completed to explore the relationship to and impact community leaders can have on increasing inclusion in the community at large and in the K–12 system. School, business, and community leaders must cooperate to attract and retain talent, create inclusive communities, and improve economic development opportunities for everyone

Today, leaders must navigate various demographic shifts in our region. Employers demand college- and career-ready performers and community members insist on agile, innovative workplaces. The shifts in demographics mean universities should focus on addressing the skills and knowledge gaps that exist in educational leadership programs to prepare school leaders to implement diversity and create inclusive school environments. In addition, municipal authorities could take an active role in providing schools with funding, mental health support, and equitable job opportunities for school staff and parents.

Education leaders who understand diversity and the power of inclusion in the school, community, and business sectors take a collective effort to address longstanding societal ills that challenge school administrators (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010; Getzels & Guba, 1957). A collective approach to shared leadership can increase accountability and decision-making efforts to support a school's vision based on multiple stakeholders in a given community. Leaders create

inclusion in their organizations. They spark innovation and think strategically about their relationship with the school and community.

Reflection and Framework Hierarchy

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the process that K-12 leaders use to implement diversity and foster inclusion in their social system to reach organizational goals. Participants of the study indicated an inclusive, systemic framework for a K–12 district, a systemic, social system. More specifically, the six indicated themes for an inclusive framework are presented below in no hierarchical order, but by how relevant they were to all the participant interviews:

1. Setting systems of accountability
2. Aligning vision with strategic plan
3. Building a sustainable infrastructure
4. Influencing culture and inclusion by executive leader
5. Sharing leadership of inclusion
6. Accountability for Prioritizing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

In reflecting upon the proposed inclusion framework, I wondered how the six actions could potentially add to the body of knowledge regarding how they could exist in a hierarchy. The hierarchy could guide leaders implementing a culture change process, starting with the action with the most impact on organizational and individual systems; the list to follow would be sequential, corroborating actions.

The proposed hierarchy of actions and its application in the organizational context is the supposition of how I believe K–12 leaders could apply the framework. Also, I included

intersecting data from participants and dialogic voices in hierarchy. The following hierarchical order could be practical for K–12 schools.

Influencing Culture and Inclusion by the Executive Leader

The concept of executive leader is the head of K–12 schools and the school board of trustees. However, the superintendent of schools serves as the chief officer. Together, the chief officer and school board establish practices, policies, and procedures regulated by state codes. The combined executive authority not only set expectations in a school, but also influence school culture and communicate expectations to stakeholders; they provide human and financial resources. Influencing the culture could mean the chief officer sets the direction for the organization that includes a vision for inclusion and then builds the strategy.

Aligning Vision With the Strategic Plan

There are many moving parts in the K–12 school. Therefore, aligning with vision becomes essential to following the district's practices, policies, and procedures. Alignment could include engaging stakeholders in the process. Students and staff could write personal visions for inclusion and define how to achieve it; business owners could incorporate practices that align with the school district's strategic plan as part of their growth strategy by offering student education, internships, funding, and mentorship opportunities. Also, district department heads could compare their goals and objectives to the district vision to identify implementation gaps. The executive leaders design a strategy for the next generation of chief officers to follow.

Building a Sustainable Infrastructure

Building a sustainable infrastructure plays a critical role in closing the gap between the organization and employee dimensions. The chief executive officer would build the infrastructure and set a vision for both the organization and the staff as part of their strategy to

reach expected outcomes. The sustainable foundation could include accountability measures that hold people responsible for parts of the whole process. Also, the foundation could involve a dedicated individual driving the inclusion effort, a data system to inform decision-making practice, a reporting mechanism to communicate to stakeholders, and a budget line, each to demonstrate a system of accountability. Building a sustainable infrastructure model for stakeholders to follow could be a cyclical process, requiring revisions over time.

Setting Systems of Accountability

Accountability can produce positive outcomes and play an influential role in leading a successful inclusion effort. It helps leaders to set standards for performance. However, people need to know what accountability looks like in their space. In terms of application, leaders might consider creating a culture of passion as an effective system of accountability. An accountability system could play out in several ways, such as reward systems, personal growth opportunities, and articulated stakeholder roles. Other accountability systems include embedded state and federal regulations in the social system; furthermore, using both motivational techniques and governmental mandates to drive success in schools could be an achievable and effective strategy for settings systems of accountability and sharing leadership.

Accountability for Prioritizing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Systems of accountability involve established structures and responsibilities. Similarly, prioritizing equity, diversity, and inclusion requires an approach to hold staff accountable in terms of engagement. Promoting staff, ensuring equal opportunities, and creating spaces for dialogue could serve as ways to prioritize equity, for example. Prioritizing equity, diversity, and inclusion could empower employees to meet expectations. Leaders could formalize expectations and integrate them into a school-wide improvement process that supports staff members to be

part of the solution. Prioritizing via systems of accountability is an embedded, official way to invite staff to prioritize equity, diversity, and inclusion and share responsibility.

Sharing Leadership of Inclusion

The board and chief officer set policy, vision, and strategy to reach goals. Next, they build systems of accountability around those goals and motivate and invite stakeholders to engage in the process. Sharing leadership with stakeholders, students, staff, and community members is a feasible approach to increase inclusion and reach goals. The structure dimension could include opportunities for leaders to marshal talent to do the district work. Such opportunities create a culture of belonging for staff, students, families, and community members, but stakeholders have to know their role and work from an established foundation. When stakeholders feel valued, they are likely to collaborate, increase interest in their school, and stay with the school district.

Aspiration and appreciation are not enough for creating a culture of inclusion in an organization. Inclusion in a K–12 social system requires an intentional, systemic approach and a focus on the human element. Inclusion increases intrinsic motivation and the likelihood of reaching expected school outcomes. Therefore, the framework in the proposed hierarchy could offer the greatest impact in the K–12 social system for implementing diversity and creating inclusion.

Summary

This study encompassed a theoretical social systems framework, one-on-one interviews, and qualitative data analysis of the themes gathered from educators in the North Lake Community Schools, an urban district. The aim was to gain a comprehensive understanding of schools as a social system, explore the district's framework for creating inclusivity in the K–12

setting, and obtain an in-depth understanding of the process of implementing diversity to achieve goals from a relatively small number of individuals. The interviews of school-level and central office staff, including school board members, involved a total of six employees. The study provided an understanding of the framework K–12 school leaders employ to implement diversity and create inclusion in the social system. Getzels and Guba's (1957) theoretical premise points to gaps between the organizational leaders and the staff members who can provide a unique glimpse into themes impacting inclusion in the K–12 school social system.

The findings revealed a systemic framework for K–12 schools to create inclusion and implement diversity: the top executive leader influences a culture of inclusion in terms of equity, diversity, and inclusivity, and inclusion must exist in the strategic plan rather than being solely compliant with laws and regulations. In addition, leaders demonstrate commitment and hold employees and student accountable for achieving the equity, diversity, and inclusion objectives (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2010). They understand that creating an inclusive and equitable district is an important challenge that requires dedicated staff members to lead the implementation process.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD RESEARCH PERMISSION

Date:

Dear Institutional Review Board:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that I give Tessa R. Sutton permission to conduct the research titled Applications of Social Systems Theory Relative to Inclusivity in the Context of K–12 Schools at Indiana State University, Terre Haute. We have agreed to the following study procedures:

1. Conduct 12–15 face-to-face interviews for 45–60 minutes with randomly selected employees. Interviews could include School Board of Trustees, central office and staff members.
2. Review mission, vision, school improvement plan or documents related to diversity and inclusion.

Sincerely,

Name of Signatory

Title of Signatory

APPENDIX B: PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEWS

Preamble

The face-to-face, individual interviews will occur on campus at North Lake School District outside of scheduled class time. Interviews will take place in a room selected by the principal investigator (PI) with the goal of ensuring comfort and privacy. The PI will identify herself and explain her role as both employee and researcher. The PI will explain the unusual circumstance of her dual role as both researcher and employee, and she will offer a statement of how she views the study as an opportunity to complete her dissertation, learn with the participants, and explore the school corporation's status in terms of systemic diversity and inclusion and opportunities for improvement and advancement.

To explain fully the purpose of the interviews, the researcher will first provide an overview of the research project. The researcher will also speak to the individual about what the study is and what it is not.

Location

Prior to the interview sessions, participants will be provided a neutral space to review a copy of informed consent sent with the recruitment letter, time to read it, and an opportunity to ask questions. Participants will have the opportunity to sign the informed consent document in the neutral room on the way to the interview meeting room. The PI will collect the informed consent document if it was not signed in advance of the interview.

The researcher and participants will meet in a private room within the institution provided by the director of the Human Resource Office with a table and a few chairs.

Informed Consent Review

Script

Researcher: Thank you very much for your interest in participating. Today's interview will be approximately an hour. I will be recording the interview in order to transcribe it. All your information will be confidential. I just wanted to remind you of a few items:

This research study is not:

- A part of any program review process at North Lake School District
- A part of or connected to evaluations
- In any way connected to status within residence

Your participation in the interviews will not:

- Provide you any benefit to your status within the district
- Be identified in any report specific to the school district
- Be indicated to any staff member within the district

The research study hopes to:

- Understand how K–12 school leaders implement diversity and create a systemic inclusion framework
- Engage and effectively use the feedback from staff about their experiences in the K–12 school
- Hear your collective voice

Do you have any questions? Please be reminded that at any time you can end the interview.

Now I am going to ask you a few questions.

APPENDIX C: FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Obtain Organizational Demographics

The district's vision, implementation, structure (Overall sub-questions)

1. How did your school develop a ***rationale*** for the diversity and inclusion ***vision*** and ***strategy****?*
2. Who holds leaders accountable for implementing the diversity and inclusion vision and for setting goals, achieving results, and being role models?
3. How do leaders ensure that the support and structures are in place with a budget to effectively implement diversity and inclusion?

Activities underway in the district

1. What activities and practices are associated with diversity and inclusion in the district?

How employees feel or see diversity and inclusion working in their district (engagement and culture)

1. What are signs that your district values a diverse workforce?
2. What keeps you here in this district/school?
3. Do people from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to succeed in the district?
4. When there are career opportunities in the district, how do you become aware of them?
5. How does your district include perspectives like yours in the decision-making process?
6. What would you say the top three reasons you work for this district?
7. How does the district build teams that are diverse?

How can the district/school improve an inclusive culture in their district/school?

1. What changes could the school/district make to encourage inclusive culture district/school?
2. What would make it easier for you foster inclusion in your sphere of influence?
3. What is one thing the district could do to create a more inclusive culture?

APPENDIX D: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

Dawn Jones
School Board of Trustees Secretary
North Lake School District
215 South Dr. Martin Luther King, Blvd.
North Lake, IN 46701

Dear Mrs. Jones,

My name is Tessa Sutton, and I am an educational leadership PhD student at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana. The research I wish to conduct for my doctoral dissertation works to answer the research question, "How do K–12 school leaders implement diversity and create a systemic inclusion framework?" This project will be conducted under the supervision of Dr Ryan Dolan, EdD (Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana).

I am seeking your consent to conduct research in your school district:

1. Conduct 12–15 face-to-face interviews for 45–60 minutes with randomly selected employees. Interviews include School Board of Trustees, central office and staff members.
2. Review mission, vision, school improvement plan or documents related to diversity and inclusion.

I have provided you with a copy of my dissertation proposal that includes copies of the consent and assent forms to be used in the research process and a copy of the approval letter that I received from the Indiana State University Research Ethics Committee (Institutional Review Board).

1. Individual results of this study will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented.
2. No costs will be incurred by either the school/center or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated.
Kindly sign the attached letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct the study involving interviews at your school district.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 574-536-8896 and tsutton6@sycamores.indstate.edu or my supervisor, Dr Ryan Donlan, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Leadership at 812-237-8624 and ryan.donlan@indstate.edu

Sincerely,
Tessa R. Sutton

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

Researcher: Tessa R. Sutton

The demographic information will be particularly useful for gathering background information about participants in the research. The data will enable the researcher to learn more about you as an employee group, thus making it easier to be certain the researcher targets the right information.

Participant Information:

Date: _____ Name: _____ Pseudonym: _____

What is your gender?

☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Other
☐ Prefer not to say

What is your ethnicity?

☐ White
☐ Latinx
☐ Black
☐ Native American
☐ Asian
☐ Other _____

What is your age?

☐ 18–24 years old
☐ 25–34 years old
☐ 35–44 years old
☐ 45–54 years old
☐ Over 55
☐ Prefer not to say

What is your employment classification?

☐ Certified ☐ Classified ☐ Other _____

APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT

APPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS THEORY RELATIVE TO INCLUSIVITY IN THE CONTEXT OF K-12 SCHOOLS

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This study aims to find out how K–12 school leaders implement diversity and create a systemic inclusion framework. This document will help you decide if you want to participate in this research by providing information about the study and what your participation would involve.

Time Commitment and Research Focus

You have been asked to participate in this research because the North Lake School District has a large and diverse student population and a staff composition that represents many layers of diversity. The North Lake School District has begun to address equity and diversity with actions that support and create inclusion. This research can provide valuable information both to schools just beginning to implement these practices and to those already engaged in these endeavors. Your participation will provide input about how everyday people work to create a workplace and school culture that includes everyone and help answer the research question "How do K–12 school leaders implement diversity and create a systemic inclusion framework." This study asks you to participate in a one-on-one interview for approximately 45-60 minutes.

Some reasons you might want to participate in this research

You will be giving input into the research and sharing in conversation with an opportunity to evaluate your own district's work on diversity and inclusion efforts**.** You will have the opportunity to think more intentionally about your school district's mission to create an inclusive structure for staff, students, and community. You will also have an opportunity to consider implementing useful ideas at your school.

A few reasons why you might choose not to participate in this research

You might believe participation in this research will not be beneficial to you or the research field. You will have to take time away from daily tasks. You will not be financially compensated for participating in the study.

Recruitment Protection Process

As an employee of North Lake School District, effective July 1, 2019, I will integrate techniques to address the dual role conflict as researcher and central office employee, which is an unusual circumstance.

Given this dual role, I will employ a blind recruitment process. Recruitment will be coordinated by the Institutional Review Board Chair, Dr. Ryan Donlan, to protect potential participants from feeling coerced into participating in the study. If you choose to decline participation, it will remain anonymous from me.

Demographic Data Collection
You will be asked to provide demographic information about yourself, such as gender, ethnicity, age group, and employment classification: classified or certified. The data will enable the researcher to learn more about you and your employee role, thus making it easier to be certain the researcher offers the appropriate recommendations. Identifiers will be destroyed as soon as they are no longer needed.

Recording Interviews
I will record the interviews. If you withdraw from the study, I will remove your identifying information from the transcript, not from the recording.

Confidentiality
Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality by using pseudonym codes for any reference to you. Only the researcher and the faculty advisor will have access to your identifiable information. Your identities, places of work, and school district will not be identifiable in the subsequent documentation. Your information and interview recordings will be secured during and after study activities in a key-locked file box. All electronic data will be secured on the researcher's non-shared computer and be password protected.

Risks
There are some potential risks to this study. These risks include anxiety. Every precaution has been taken to reduce the risk, but there is still a minimal risk that information could be breached during interview discussions. To minimize risk, identifiers will be destroyed as soon as they are no longer needed.

Benefits
This research may benefit you directly by giving input into the research and being asked to consider implementing useful ideas into your school and evaluating your district's work on diversity and inclusion efforts. Society more broadly may also benefit by using information obtained in this study to guide K–12 employees and its leaders in developing a plan for inclusion across multiple diversity dimensions. Outcomes of the study will fill the gap in diversity and inclusion research, particularly in the K–12 sector and may provide a framework for school leaders who want to establish diversity and inclusion structures and practices in their school goals.

Questions and Contact Information
If you have any questions during the recruiting process, please contact Tessa Sutton, tsutton6@sycamores.indstate.edu, or Dr. Ryan Donlan, the faculty sponsor, ryan.donlan@indstate.edu After the recruitment process, the primary researcher will contact you to schedule interviews.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809; by phone at (812) 237-3088; or by email at irb@indstate.edu

I view this research as an opportunity to learn with you, complete my dissertation, and understand North Lake School District and where the corporation is in terms of systemic diversity and inclusion. I hope to learn how I, as both employee and researcher, can work together with you to build a connected culture.

Sincerely,

Tessa R. Sutton,
PhD Candidate
Indiana State University

RETURN SIGNED FORM TO DR. RYAN DONLAN: ryan.donlan@indstate.edu**.**
I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____