Insights into Equity-Centered Data Discourse

Session Resources

Fostering Equity and Inclusivity Within Your School | Leadership Series Session 2
February 13th, 2024

Read Aloud & Shared Text

Standard/Learning Goal or Focus:	Curriculum/Text:

What we want to be true based on research and best practices…	Rubric	Notes

Books and Materials

Books and materials are central to the read aloud. The books must be thought-provoking and useful for starting and sustaining discussions and should send affirming messages, heighten joy, and serve as windows and mirrors.

A.1 Critical Literacy Text is complex, grade-level appropriate, and a good candidate for critical literacy instruction. Text contains content, themes, or main ideas that are significant, thought-provoking, and that support analysis.	☐ Text is not complex or grade-level appropriate. ☐ Text is complex but not grade-level appropriate or a good candidate for critical literacy. ☐ Text is complex, grade-level appropriate, and a good candidate for critical literacy. ☐ Text is complex, grade-level appropriate, a good candidate for critical literacy, and considers the identities of the children in the class.	
A.2 Diversity and Inclusion Text contributes to the inclusion of diverse voices and ideas in the curriculum.	☐ Text presents only a narrow perspective (singular story). ☐ Text does not contribute to the inclusion of diverse voices and ideas. ☐ Text adds to the diversity of ideas, perspectives, and authors. ☐ Text adds to the diversity of ideas, perspectives, authors, and contributes to children's understanding of themselves, others, and our world.	
A.3 Social Justice and Equity Text authentically and accurately reflects the identities (racial, cultural, linguistic), topics, histories, interests, experiences, and motivations of people within it.	☐ Text contains racial, cultural, or linguistic stereotypes or inaccurate information on a topic. ☐ Text paints an incomplete or unauthentic picture of the topics or identities. ☐ Text authentically and accurately represents the topics and/or the identities of the people within it. ☐ Text authentically and accurately reflects the topics and the identities of people within it and is either culturally relevant to the children in the classroom or provides them with a window to learn about others.	
A.4 Lesson Alignment Strong alignment exists between the text and standards.	☐ Text does not align with the standard(s) of the lesson. ☐ Text somewhat aligns with the standard(s) of the lesson. ☐ Text strongly aligns with the standard(s) of the lesson. ☐ Text strongly aligns with learning goals of the lesson and allows for connection with other classroom texts, goals, units, experiences, etc.	

Child Actions

Child actions are the expression of the experience children are having during the read aloud. The experience of joy is a result of stimulating intellectual engagement.

B.1 Language Practices Children use a variety of language practices and play as they make meaning of the text and develop a love of reading and language	☐ Children have little to no opportunities to use all of their language practices. ☐ Children's language practices are accepted and encouraged at some times and in some spaces and not others. ☐ Children engage in language play and exploration using all their language practices. ☐ Children engage in language play and exploration using all their language practices and are excited to explore their own and others' language practices.
B.2 Collaboration Children grow and share ideas by collaborating with peers through discussion, questioning, debate, writing, etc.	☐ Children have no opportunities to share ideas. ☐ Children share answers to low-level or closed questions. ☐ Children grow ideas by asking questions, talking to each other, debating, and writing. ☐ Children's understanding of the text changes and grows as a result of their ongoing collaboration with peers.
B.3 Anchoring Learning in the Text Children cite evidence from the text to support their understanding of the deepest meaning of the text, attending to vocabulary, syntax, language choice, illustrations, author's craft, and other text structures and features.	☐ Children do not cite evidence from the text that moves the discussion towards the deepest meaning of the text. ☐ Children inconsistently cite evidence from the text that moves the discussion towards the deepest meaning of the text. ☐ Children consistently cite evidence from the text that moves the discussion towards the deepest meaning of the text. ☐ Children additionally cite evidence from the text that moves the discussion towards the deepest meaning of the text and to support, clarify, and challenge each other's ideas and viewpoints.
B.4 Social Justice and Equity Children identify and discuss the cultural, linguistic, racial, and social justice ideas/themes within the text.	☐ Children do not identify or discuss issues of social justice and/or equity within the text. ☐ Children identify issues of social justice and/or equity within the text. ☐ Children identify AND discuss issues of social justice and/or equity within the text. ☐ Children independently make connections to external social justice and equity issues (real life, other texts, etc.) using ideas within and beyond the text.
B.5 Connecting Learning Children synthesize and apply key learnings from text across other texts, learning experiences, and life experiences.	☐ Children do not make connections to the text or key learnings. ☐ Children connect to the text in basic or superficial ways. ☐ Children use their connections to the text to develop key learnings, original ideas, and conclusions about the text. ☐ Children use their connections to the text to develop key learnings, original ideas, and conclusions about the text and apply their key learnings from the text to other texts, learning experiences, and life experiences.

Teacher Actions

Teacher actions are intentional and aligned to the experience children should have. The teacher must genuinely value everyone's presence and recognize that everyone contributes to learning.

C.1 Intellectual Prep & Language Practices Teacher facilitates discussions among children that support them in arriving at the deepest meaning of the text by asking questions that are grounded in the text; children's contributions and responses in all language practices are honored.	☐ Teacher does most of the talking with little to no facilitation of discussion among children. ☐ Teacher facilitates some peer discussion that may or may not arrive at the deepest meaning of the text. ☐ Teacher facilitates discussions grounded in the text and supports them in arriving at the deepest meaning of the text. ☐ Teacher facilitates discussions among children that honor diversity of thought; children use their language practices freely as they gain a deeper understanding of the text.	
C.2 Instructional Routines & Pacing Teacher uses instructional routines that support children's understanding of the deepest meaning of the text by including appropriate think time, talk time, wait time, and feedback.	☐ Teacher includes instructional routines and feedback primarily focused on classroom management. ☐ Teacher includes too many or too few opportunities for think time, talk time, wait time, and/or feedback that focuses on right or wrong responses. ☐ Teacher includes instructional routines that consider the differences among children by pacing the lesson to provide think time, talk time, wait time, and feedback that is direct and non-judgmental. ☐ Teacher includes instructional routines that consider the differences among children and provide opportunities for children to utilize feedback to reflect, apply, and contribute to their learning and the learning of others.	
C.3 Anchoring Learning in the Text Teacher scaffolds children's understanding of the deepest meaning of the text by drawing their attention to specific phrases, words, illustrations, and language practices that are significant to understanding.	☐ Teacher provides little to no scaffolding for children to use textual evidence to grow their understanding towards the deepest meaning of the text. ☐ Teacher provides some scaffolding for children to use textual evidence to grow their understanding towards the deepest meaning of the text. ☐ Teacher consistently provides scaffolding for children to use textual evidence to grow their understanding towards the deepest meaning of the text. ☐ Teacher flexibly uses scaffolds that meet the diverse needs of children to enable all children to use textual evidence to grow their understanding towards the deepest meaning of the text.	
C.4 Social Justice and Equity Teacher dedicates time and attention to criticality so that children read, write, think, and speak in ways to understand power and equity.	☐ Teacher does not notice or dedicate time to discuss social justice themes, bias, stereotypes, and inequities in the text with children. ☐ Teacher points out but does not discuss social justice themes, bias, stereotypes, and inequities in the text with children. ☐ Teacher notices and dedicates time to discuss social justice themes, bias, stereotypes, and inequities in the text with children. ☐ Teacher notices and dedicates time to discuss social justice themes, bias, stereotypes, and inequities in text with children and prompts and supports children to take action.	
C.5 Connecting Learning Teacher creates opportunities for children to synthesize, connect, and apply their learning; teacher stamps key learnings throughout the lesson.	☐ Teacher does not create opportunities for children to make connections, synthesize, and apply their learning. ☐ Teacher creates opportunities for their own connections or low-level child connections (e.g., "thumbs up if…"). ☐ Teacher creates opportunities for children's meaningful connections. ☐ Teacher creates opportunities for children to apply their connections and stamps key learnings.	

Classroom Ecology

Classroom ecology is the interdependence of the people and the space. The classroom ecology is inclusive, respectful, and affirming. It promotes a positive self-identity so that children feel comfortable sharing their whole selves: their cultures, languages, gifts, talents, oral traditions, etc. It offers access, choice, voice, and the materials and tools necessary for children to thrive.

D.1 Extend Learning Spaces, time, and materials are designed to extend and support children's learning (e.g., learning centers, library, writing tools, and anchor charts).	☐ There are no or limited spaces and materials to support and extend children's learning. ☐ There are learning centers and spaces but no time or opportunity to extend or apply learning. ☐ The classroom has materials, time, and spaces where children independently extend their learning from the read aloud. ☐ Spaces or materials offer a variety of choices for children to apply, explore, and extend their learning.
D.2 Seating Arrangements Build Ideas Seating arrangements promote conversation and sharing of ideas amongst children.	☐ Seating is arranged to facilitate discussion between teacher and children only. ☐ Seating arrangements promote limited conversations (e.g., only turn and talk). ☐ Seating arrangements support whole group and partner discussions. ☐ Seating arrangement configurations are used flexibly to promote conversation and idea sharing.
D.3 Access to Text Children have access to read aloud text through visual and/or auditory means.	☐ Not all children have access to the text. ☐ Children have access to the text (visual, auditory, tactile) but it is unstructured, inconsistent, not developmentally appropriate, or highly managed by the teacher. ☐ Children have full access to the text (visual, auditory, tactile) to allow them to build comprehension, cite evidence, and learn about the forms and functions of print. ☐ Children have full access and autonomy over the text at any time to cite evidence, review text, and confirm their thinking.
D.4 Culture, Identity, and Language Artifacts and children's work represent their language practices, interests, cultures, and identities.	☐ There are few or no artifacts or children's work in the classroom. ☐ There are artifacts and children's work in the classroom, but they do not reflect all children's cultures, identities, and languages. ☐ The artifacts and children's work in the classroom represent their language practices, interests, cultures, and identities. ☐ Children access and use the artifacts in the classroom to learn about the classroom, themselves, each other, and the world; artifacts are an extension of their learning.

Literacy Assessment Inventory

Part 1: Inventory of K-3 Literacy Assessments

List all the literacy data opportunities (i.e., school, district, state) that teachers utilize.

Data Point	Purpose (and frequency)	Audience	Satellite	Map	Street

990 Spring Garden St.
4th Floor, Suite 400
Philadelphia, PA 19123
T: 215-561-4676
F: 215-561-4677
info@cli.org
www.cli.org

Part 2: Reflection

What (if any) links can be identified between the various data points?

How might data points be better connected to one another?

In which data point might issues of inequity surface? How can you adjust for this?

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Learning Walks Overview: The purpose of Learning Walks is to improve teaching and learning through a collaborative and reflective process. Learning Walks provide a structured approach for educators to observe and learn from each other's instructional practices, with the ultimate goal of enhancing student achievement.

Key Purposes of Learning Walks

Professional Learning: Learning Walks promote ongoing professional learning and development for educators. By observing and analyzing various instructional practices, participants gain new insights, expand their instructional repertoire, and refine their teaching techniques.

***Collaboration and Collegiality*:** Learning Walks foster a culture of collaboration and collegiality among educators. Participants engage in meaningful discussions, share feedback, and learn from one another. It creates opportunities for teachers to connect and build supportive relationships, breaking down isolation and promoting a sense of collective responsibility for student success.

Data-Informed Decision Making: Learning Walks generate valuable data and evidence about teaching and learning. By systematically collecting and analyzing this data, educators can make more informed decisions about instructional strategies, curriculum, and professional development needs. The data helps identify patterns, trends, and areas for improvement, guiding evidence-based decision making.

Instructional Improvement: The primary purpose of Learning Walks is to improve instructional practices. Through observations, feedback, and reflective discussions, educators identify effective practices, share successful strategies, and collectively work towards enhancing teaching and learning outcomes. Learning Walks provide a platform for identifying areas of growth and implementing targeted improvements.

Shared Understanding and Language: Learning Walks create a shared understanding and common language around effective instruction. Participants utilize or develop a common framework for discussing and analyzing instructional practices, which helps align expectations and foster consistency in teaching strategies across classrooms and schools.

***Systemic Change*:** Learning Walks have the potential to drive systemic change within educational institutions. By focusing on instructional improvement, Learning Walks support the development of a culture of continuous improvement and a shared commitment to high-quality instruction. The insights gained from Learning Walks can inform decision making at the school or district level, leading to broader reforms and improved educational outcomes.

Overall, Learning Walks provide a structured and collaborative approach to professional growth, fostering a culture of continuous improvement, and ultimately enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.

Tips for Success

1. Make sure an agenda is in place and complete PRIOR to the day of Learning Walks.
2. Have leaders/coaches confirm teacher availability and that the time of the observation is NOT during a transition or non-instructional time (e.g., beginning or end of class, testing day).
3. Ensure everyone participating in the Learning Walk (including the host teachers) understands the purpose and intent of the observation and feedback.
4. Ensure that you have a copy of the text and lesson plans for all classrooms prior to the day of Learning Walks.

Essential Elements

- When in person, aim to visit six to eight **classrooms** of read aloud/shared reading or foundational skill instruction only (the pages of the Framework that are developed).
- For virtual Learning Walks, aim to observe three to five classrooms.
- The coach and school leader determine the classrooms for the visit. It would be most beneficial to select a random sample of classrooms to get a broad picture of teaching and learning across grade bands.
- **Preview lesson materials.** Collect lesson plans and the title of the text for each classroom that will be observed. The partner should share these lesson plans digitally ahead of time (see sharing tips below).

Roles, Responsibilities, and Process for Preparing the District and Schools for a Baseline Learning Walk

Preparing for Learning Walks

What
Email the district and school leaders to develop a "day of" Learning Walks schedule • If it is the beginning of the year, ask for a teacher focus group so we can build relationships and learn about the teachers' experience and perspective on teaching and learning at their school (even if it's a returning district). Keeping some key considerations in mind as you create the schedule for a Learning Walk can help ensure that time is used most effectively to keep things running smoothly throughout the day. 1. Build in sufficient time between each observation to **debrief and highlight key noticings.** 2. Plan for teacher focus groups prior to the day of the Learning Walk. Teams can help organize the groups by gathering teachers and finding a meeting space.
Work with school leaders to draft the communication that will go out to teachers and leaders about the Learning Walks. Determine how these will be shared and request to be cc'd to stay in the loop on what's happening.

What
A week in advance of the Learning Walks, send an email to the Learning Walks team (if they've done it before) or host a webinar (if they are new to the Learning Walks process) to: • Give an overview of their roles and responsibilities • Hear any context needed on the district/schools • Review schedule and travel logistics • CC and introduce/connect the LILs who will be leading the coaching
Prepare your team for the baseline Learning Walk: Communicate all day-of logistics to your team. This includes the following: • Make sure your team has printed Frameworks ready to distribute to Learning Walk participants. • Communicate when, where, and how they will conduct Teacher Focus Groups. • If you are leading an end-of-day debrief with the district/school leaders, determine when your team will meet to prepare and what each person's responsibility will be. • Prepare the opening PowerPoint that introduces people to the purpose of the day and review any norms. If this is not your first visit, it should be done within the context of the prior strategic plan and goals for the district. • If you are doing a same-day debrief, prepare the debrief PowerPoint so that you are ready to quickly plug in data and slides.   ○ If you are not doing a same-day debrief, be sure to tell district and school leader exactly when they can expect to debrief with you.

Executing a Learning Walk

The actual day of the Learning Walk is an opportunity to build a shared story of instruction and build the capacity of district and school leaders.

What
Start with a full group meeting and review the school's goals as it pertains to the Framework and the flow of the day using the opening PowerPoint. ● Make sure that you have distributed Framework pages and everyone is clear on norms for observations.
Lead the Learning Walks following the pre-created schedule for the day (i.e., student work review and leading a focus group). ● Enter data in the data catcher ● When you leave classrooms, leave our postnote with a "shine" or nice word about instruction in the classroom.
Lead the hallway debrief.
Lead the end-of-day debrief. If you are going to multiple schools in a day, make sure to summarize take-aways (rooted in quantitative and qualitative evidence) with the school leadership team before you leave and provide a concrete date for when you will follow up with the debrief PowerPoint.

Learning Walk Best Practices

While you are leading the Learning Walks, be clear and honest about data. Use the hallway debrief protocol as a guide. We want to use this opportunity to norm on instruction as well as gather evidence about the state of instruction.

- Throughout the day, compare what you are seeing and hearing to what you learned during the intake meeting (both the school-based intake meeting and the district intake meeting). Where is the story the same? Where do we see differences? What are the trends? What might that suggest?
- Start to build a narrative for different teaching practices and schools. Be thinking about what this means for what you share at the end of the day.
- Take pictures of student work throughout the day to illustrate the key messages and trends you want to discuss. Look for examples that show trends in student understanding and alignment of materials.
- Note what teachers say/do and what teachers don't say/do to leverage during EOD discussions and illustrate the findings.
- Keep your eyes open for bright spots and "exemplar" lessons. You can leverage these classrooms as examples to norm on a bar for instruction. Often teacher expertise can be leveraged once you start strategic planning.
- Learning Walks are an opportunity for skill building for all participants. Learning Walk leaders can model analysis of early classrooms and then slowly start to transfer ownership to others so that they are leading the Learning Walk.
- Use your discretion about how you norm and share data. Push for folks to fall "on the right side of the line" of 1-2 or 3-4. You want to be clear about the state of instruction, but it's not always necessary to get extremely precise about the delineation between those two scores.
- If you are not leading one group for the day, you should float between groups to norm with team members and give feedback on how they lead the Learning Walks. This is also a chance to try to get a radar for what's happening across multiple schools and subject areas.
- Many teams find it helpful to connect to debrief about the day. Consider allocating time to meet up or call your team members after the Learning Walks to get their initial impressions and reflections.

Stakeholder Focus Groups allow us an opportunity to attain powerful and important insight and perspectives on the state of teaching and learning and the student experience in schools.

Gathering insights and feedback: Focus groups provide an opportunity to obtain in-depth insights and feedback from stakeholders who have a vested interest or expertise in the success of children. This information can be invaluable for understanding stakeholder perspectives, needs, concerns, and preferences.

Decision-making and problem-solving: Focus groups allow stakeholders to collectively contribute their ideas, opinions, and suggestions. The group dynamics and interactive nature of the session can help generate innovative solutions, identify potential challenges, and inform decision-making processes.

Assessing needs and expectations: Focus groups help in identifying and assessing the needs and expectations of stakeholders. By directly engaging with stakeholders, organizations can gain a deeper understanding of their requirements, which can inform the development or refinement of products, services, policies, or initiatives.

Testing and refining strategies: Stakeholder focus groups can be instrumental in testing new strategies, concepts, or prototypes. Through facilitated discussions, stakeholders can provide feedback on the feasibility, desirability, and potential impact of our work, aiding in refining and improving strategies before, during, and after implementation.

Building relationships and fostering collaboration: Engaging stakeholders in focus groups helps establish rapport, trust, and relationships between stakeholders and us. This collaborative environment fosters a sense of inclusion, demonstrates that stakeholders' opinions are valued, and encourages ongoing dialogue and cooperation.

Overall, stakeholder focus groups facilitate open communication, empower stakeholders to share their perspectives, and provide organizations with valuable insights to inform decision-making, strategy development, and relationship-building efforts.

What
Prior to the Learning Walk, work with the school leadership team to determine stakeholder interviews necessary to learn important context about the state of teaching and learning at the campus or within the district.
Support school leadership with communication to stakeholders. Asked to be cc'd in communication in order to stay in the loop.
Prepare focus group questions for stakeholder group

Teacher Focus Group Sample Questions

Children and Demographics

1. Please tell us about the children that you work with in your classroom. Who are they in terms of their cultures, languages, needs, etc.?

Read Aloud and Shared Reading

2. How are you feeling about this morning's lesson? What went really well? What would you have wanted to change?

3. How did the children do on their independent work?

4. What is your greatest joy in doing your Read Aloud or Shared Reading lessons?

5. What do you do each week to plan your lessons? How do you plan questions you want to ask, your stopping points, or the area of focus for your lessons?

6. How are you able to adapt your lessons to meet the needs of your children? How do you choose and supplement your books?

7. What are the greatest needs that your children have in reading that you have been able to identify? How have you been supporting them?

8. How do you modify your lessons for your children, especially those who are multilingual learners?

9. How are you supporting your children in making deeper connections to the texts they are reading or listening to?

10. Tell us a little about your Response to Intervention. What is the process? When are children referred for further support?

11. Which professional development topics pertaining to Read Alouds, Shared Reading, etc., do you think are most critical at this moment in time?

Support

12. What do you do each week to plan and prepare to teach? How does it work? What does it look like? What are its benefits or successes so far?

13. What support and feedback do you get from your leader or coach about planning lessons?

14. What further support do you wish you had?

15. What has moved your practice?

Implementation

16. What do you think makes a successful Read Aloud/Shared Reading experience?

17. What barriers do you face when trying to teach a successful lesson?

Data and Assessment

18. How do you know if (and what) children are learning during your Read Aloud/Shared Reading lesson? What do you look for?

19. What data do you find most helpful to review?

20. How do you use it?

Curriculum

21. Talk to us about your curriculum and your experience with it at the classroom level. What are some of the challenges you are finding? What are some of the great aspects of the program you have noticed? What do you think it might be missing?

22. To what extent does your curriculum support multilingual learners (children who are ELLs)?

23. What supports have you received for curriculum implementation? Have they been or are they useful?

Coaching and Professional Development

24. What supports do you need to become a better antiracist, culturally sustaining teacher?

25. What have you and your coach worked on that has really moved your practice?

26. As the expert in the classroom, what resources or tools would you want (or wish CLI could create, or your coach could share)? You may say, for example, "I wish I had _____ to support Read Aloud or Shared Reading."

27. What are your goals for your own practice of antiracist literacy instruction?

28. What is your vision for success for your children?

DEI

29. From your perspective as a classroom teacher, what's the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) climate like in your school amongst teachers and leaders (e.g., very tense, folks are scared to talk about DEI, DEI conversations are present regularly, etc.)?

30. What do you think might be your school's biggest challenge/roadblock related to DEI?

31. Where are most teachers and leaders in their willingness to embrace DEI (e.g., most are willing, not at all willing, etc.)?

32. To what extent do you notice an awareness of DEI filtering into your classrooms or even into the conversations among teachers?

33. To what degree do you see DEI filtering down into your classroom?

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

34. What is your understanding of culturally sustaining pedagogy?

35. How does your school bridge or affirm students' multiple language practices?

36. What supports do you or your school need to deliver antiracist literacy instruction?

37. Tell us about any culturally sustaining pedagogy training you've had.

38. How does culturally sustaining pedagogy inform how you plan and implement Read Aloud/Shared Reading lessons?

39. Does your school have a systematic approach to including culturally sustaining practices?

Teacher Focus Group Template

Preamble to teachers:

- Thank you for participating in the teacher focus group! The purpose of the teacher focus group is to gain a deeper understanding of the work that happens daily at a school to support student learning.
- Before we get started, we'd like to talk a little bit about Children's Literacy Initiative and the work that we do, so you can get a better understanding of why we're here and what we're about.
- We are an education non-profit focused on improving teaching and learning in schools for Black and Latinx children.
- This is a non-evaluative visit where we will go into classrooms for 15 minutes, then debrief in the hallway about what we saw.
- Our time in classrooms today is focused on learning—from teachers and children. We also want to learn about what curriculum materials offer and how they are utilized.
- Any information we attain will be confidential (not ascribed to any teacher in particular) and will only be used for our own internal learning.
- During these site visits, we also want to get some insights from teachers about what's working and what could be better when it comes to instruction, coaching, and professional development.
- Thanks for carving out time from what we know are busy schedules. Before we get started with some questions we'd like to ask, do you have any questions about our work and partnership with your school?

Small Group Instruction

Potential questions	Responses/Notes
1. What is your vision for small group instruction, and how do you use small group instruction to support children's learning? A. How do you select learning goals for small-group time? B. How do you assess the learning in small-group time?	

2. How often do you meet with small groups of children? (How often do children engage in small group learning?)	
3. How do you determine which children you are meeting with each day/week?	
4. What is most challenging in implementing small group instruction?	
5. How often do you change groups based on new information?	
6. How are groups formed? (What data is used to form groups?) A. What is the impact of leveled groups (if this is how groups are formed) on children in your classroom?	
7. What is the children's experience in small groups? A. How does it contribute to learning?	

8. How do you decide which texts to use during small group instruction?	
9. What do you like about the books you're currently using? A. What would you change if you could wave a magic wand?	

Phonics/PA/Foundational Skills

Potential Questions	Responses/Notes
1. What is your vision for phonics instruction, and how do you use phonics instruction to support children's learning?	
2. What phonics curriculum does your school use?	
3. How many years have you taught with this curriculum?	
4. What is most challenging in implementing this phonics curriculum?	

5. What has been the biggest success in implementing this phonics curriculum?	
6. How often do you plan and collaborate around phonics instruction?	
7. Are you using decodables? A. If so, which ones? B. What do you like about them? C. What do you dislike about them?	
8. What do you like about the books you're currently using? A. What would you change if you could wave a magic wand?	

Data/Assessments

Potential Questions	Responses/Notes
1. How are assessments used to inform small group instruction?	
2. How are assessments used to inform phonics instruction?	
3. What assessments do you use in your classroom?	
4. What assessments are used school-wide?	

Books

Potential Questions	Responses/Notes
1. Do you get to choose the books you use in your classroom? A. If yes, how do you decide which books to use with students?	
2. Do your books meet your students' needs (including their interests, identities, languages, and instructional needs)?	

A. In what ways do your books not meet your students' needs?	
3. Do you experience any barriers to getting all the books you want/need into your classroom? A. If yes, what are those barriers?	
4. Are there publishers whose books you especially like or find useful?	

Parent/Caregiver Interview Questions

Potential Questions	Responses/Notes
1. What reading goals do you have for your child this year?	
2. What are your child's goals? A. What dreams do you have for your child's future? B. What are your child's dreams? C. What motivates your child to do his/her best work?	
3. When is it easiest for your child to engage in learning? A. When is it hardest for your child to engage in learning?	
4. How does your child feel about school in general?	
5. What makes learning easier for your child? A. What makes learning more difficult? B. What comforts your child when he/she is frustrated, anxious, or upset?	
6. Describe three qualities of a teacher who could help your child succeed in school.	
7. What kinds of books does your child like? A. Why does he/she like these books?	

8. What kinds of books do you want your child to have access to? A. Why do you want him/her to have access to these books?	
9. How or where do you get book recommendations? A. Would you be interested in getting book recommendations from CLI?	
10. Is there anything else you would like us to know?	

Student Focus Group Template

Preamble to students

- Thank you for coming to the student focus group! The purpose of this time is to gain a deeper understanding of your experience as a student at your school.
- Before we get started, I'd like to take a moment to tell you about myself and the organization I work for.
- We really believe that your voices and opinions matter, so we are super excited to connect with you all today.

Questions for Grades 1-5

Potential Questions	Responses/Notes
1. What do you like about school?	
2. What do you like to do best in class?	
3. What is your favorite subject?	
4. What kinds of things do you like to read?	

5. What have you learned recently that you use in reading?	
6. What does it mean to you to be a reader?	
7. What would make learning to read easier or more fun for you?	
8. What types of activities do you do in your class that make you feel like a strong reader?	
9. Can you see yourself in the books in your classroom? Is it easy to find characters like you, or do you have to look hard to find them?	
10. Are you learning about people that are different than you through books in your classroom? Can you give us an example?	

Questions for Pre-K

Potential Questions	Responses/Notes
1. Tell me about the best part of your day.	
2. What was the hardest thing you had to do today?	
3. Can you tell me or show me something you learned today?	
4. Tell me about what you read in class.	
5. What is your favorite book?	
6. What do you know about reading? What are you doing to learn how to read?	

Purposes of Root Cause Analysis in School Improvement Planning

Excerpt From OESE

There are many different ways to conduct a root cause analysis. Typically, a root cause analysis process includes three overarching steps: identifying a problem, identifying the causes of the problem, and identifying strategies to address the problem. More information on these steps and processes is included in the next section of this resource, Approaches to Root Cause Analysis.

Conducting a root cause analysis can help schools and districts strengthen their school improvement planning efforts in a variety of ways. For schools and districts that have already conducted a needs assessment, engaging in a root cause analysis process can help stakeholders (including school staff, students and families, and community members) generate deeper insights about the local needs identified. Using a root cause analysis process, stakeholders can analyze data (i.e., needs assessment data and other local data) to generate insights that reveal the key factors contributing to those needs. Likewise, using a root cause analysis process can help stakeholders prioritize which problems, factors, or root causes to address first (i.e., those that have the greatest impact).

Engaging in a root cause analysis process can also help stakeholders focus on the areas of greatest need identified through their needs assessment. In particular, when considering potential interventions to selected challenges, engaging in a root cause analysis process can help stakeholders make more informed decisions. Using a root cause analysis process can help stakeholders ensure that their selected changes, interventions, or practices are appropriately aligned to identified root causes and supported by evidence, rather than "quick fixes" that may not have a significant impact on the root cause and therefore not lead to meaningful change over time. The ultimate outcome of engaging in a root cause analysis process as part of school improvement planning is to identify, select, and plan for the implementation of specific evidence-based practices or interventions that are likely to remove the root cause or mitigate the chances of root causes (and subsequent challenges) recurring.

Work Cited

"Purposes of Root Cause Analysis in School Improvement Planning." *Office of Elementary and Secondary Education*, 15 Sept. 2020, oese.ed.gov/resources/oese-technical-assistance-centers/state-support-network/resources/purposes-root-cause-analysis-school-improvement-planning.

Phase two of our Core Service Model is the Vision Setting and Strategic Planning Phase.

Why Is Strategic Planning Important?

Strategic planning is the process of using data to set priority areas and goals, deciding on actions to achieve those goals, and mobilizing the resources needed to take those actions. Our shared strategic plan describes how goals will be achieved using available resources and ensures that all stakeholders understand how their work contributes to the common goals and vision. During strategic planning, we use data gathered from Learning Walks, focus groups, teacher observations, student data, etc., to create a theory of change.

- **Clear Vision and Direction:** Strategic planning provides a clear vision for the future of the school or educational system. It acts as a roadmap, guiding leaders toward desired outcomes over the medium to long term.

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Through the strategic planning process, leaders can engage a wide range of stakeholders, from teachers and staff to students, parents, and the community. This inclusive process can foster buy-in and create a shared sense of purpose.

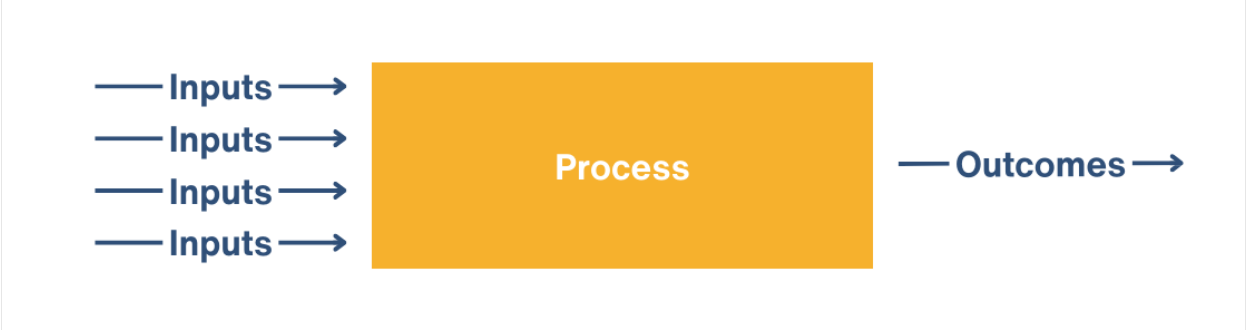
- **Resource Allocation:** Strategic planning helps leaders make informed decisions about how to allocate scarce resources (including money, time, and personnel) to the most important and impactful initiatives.

- **Prioritization:** With a myriad of needs and opportunities, leaders can use strategic planning to determine the most critical goals and objectives, allowing them to focus their efforts effectively.

- **Continuous Improvement:** The strategic planning process involves setting benchmarks and performance metrics. These provide a framework for assessing progress, which can lead to continuous improvement efforts.

In the Vision Setting and Strategic Planning Phase, we work with school leaders and district partners to

- **Align on a Shared Vision**: Together, we will create a shared vision that champions equitable and transformative literacy instruction, aiming to foster an environment where every student thrives.
- **Conduct a Root Cause Analysis**: Our team will delve deep to analyze the underlying causes of the identified instructional challenges. By developing a well-informed theory of action, we aim to effectively address and alleviate these challenges.
- **Identify High-Leverage Next Steps**: We will highlight and prioritize the forthcoming actions that hold the potential for significant impact, facilitating notable progress in both instructional quality and learner experiences.
- **Develop SMART Goals**: We will assist in developing SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) goals that clearly embody the targeted improvements. Together, we will establish clear and tangible metrics to effectively track progress and effectively measure success.
- **Develop a Comprehensive Action Plan**: Our collaborative efforts will culminate in a robust action plan. This strategy is crafted to bolster school teams in meeting their set goals, thereby catalyzing large-scale, systemic change within the school environment.



Inputs	Process	Outcomes
• Priority Areas	1. Big Rocks and Goals 2. Root Cause Analysis 3. Theory of Change 4. Plan of Action	• Understanding why the current state exists • Agreement around intended outcomes/results • People and activities are connected and aligned to goal achievement • Efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources • Shift/identify/create structures to best support children's learning

The Strategic Planning Process

Component	Primary Function
1. Identify Big Rocks	Big rocks are high-leverage focus areas that come from trends from the Learning Walk and student work or school-based data. Big rock example: Children are not getting to the deepest meaning of the text and teachers are not facilitating conversations that support children in getting to the deepest meaning of the text.
2. Conduct Root Cause Analysis	Root causes are statements that describe the underlying cause (or causes) or challenges. The root cause analysis gets to the "why" (provides explanations) behind current trends in the

	data that, if addressed, would eliminate or dramatically alleviate the problem. Root causes usually revolve around the following:
	• **Curriculum** (see example below)
	  ○ *Problem*: Teachers are providing foundational skills practice that is not grade-level appropriate.
	  ○ *Root Cause*: The curriculum is not high quality and does not include a scope and sequence.
	• **Messaging** (see example below)
	  ○ *Problem*: Teachers are not spiraling previous foundational skills practice into lessons.
	  ○ *Root Cause*: Leaders did not communicate that teachers have the autonomy to use data and spiral skills that students need.
	• **Knowledge/Experience** (see example below)
	  ○ *Problem*: Children are not getting to the deepest meaning of the text. Teachers are not facilitating conversations that support children in getting to the deepest meaning of the text.
	  ○ *Root Cause*: Intellectual prep has not been an expectation of teachers.

3. Establish a Theory of Change	A theory of change is a statement that describes how the school can get from its current state to the stakeholders' vision. *If…then…so that…* Example: If leaders are supporting teachers to do intellectual prep with time and coaching, then they will facilitate conversations so that children get to the deepest meaning of the text.
4. Develop a Plan of Action	The plan of action establishes the framework for implementation by outlining the main goals and priorities, as well as the strategies to achieve them. It includes who, what, when, etc. Example action steps: • PD series around intellectual prep • PLC meeting structure for time to collaborate • Coaching around intellectual prep • Feedback loops/observations • Strategic planning team check-in

Discovery Data	
School Intake Summary	Ms. Ward has been the proud principal of South Mountain Elementary School for two years. South Mountain Elementary is a Title 1 neighborhood charter school and serves all students within their catchment area. South Mountain has a high teacher retention rate and many teachers have been at the school for 5+ years. South Mountain Elementary has a beautifully diverse student body with a high immigrant population. In focus groups, students shared that they are often bored during their lessons but that their teachers are mostly nice. Some teachers have tried to start a Culturally Responsive Teaching Committee, but it has not yet gained widespread traction. When Ms. Ward joined the school community, teachers were all using their own curriculum. Last year, the school implemented the research-based Fundations curriculum with some resistance because they were comfortable using their own resources. Support and development of the curriculum primarily focused on using the script to teach with fidelity and administering curricular assessments. Though teachers consistently administered the assessments, teachers and leaders at South Mountain rarely analyzed the data. In focus groups, teachers noted that they rarely have time to analyze the data because a lot of their prep time is used for grade-level logistical meetings and lesson script reviews.
Artifacts/Student Work	Six classrooms were visited during the Learning Walk across K-3 classrooms. • Three out of six classrooms' student work indicated that students mastered the content for their lesson. • Most children worked independently and did not complete their work. • Most independent work consisted of independent worksheets.
End-Of-Day Debrief Trends	Strengths: • Teachers are invested in the school community and are working to use the new curriculum. • There are clear routines present during instruction, which allows most teachers to teach the entire lesson. • The classroom environment is print rich and comfortable. Opportunities: • There were minimal opportunities for engagement and participation across classrooms. Students often worked independently and waited for a teacher to come to them to get support. Six out of twelve students knew their respective lesson objective when asked. • There is a high population of multilingual learners and instruction does not leverage and appreciate their linguistic diversity. • Teachers shared in focus groups (and observations confirmed) that there is minimal differentiation happening when planning lessons. Teachers are often just moving to the next lesson in the curriculum.

Foundational Skills Framework Indicator Report	Indicator, Average Score

Indicator	Initial diagnostic	Total
A.1 Lesson Alignment	2.00	2.00
A.2 Materials Support Multimodal Learning	2.00	2.00
A.3 Diversity of Text	2.00	2.00
A.4 Materials Extend Learning	2.00	2.00
B.1 Opportunities for Authentic Practice	2.00	2.00
B.2 Experiment and Explore Words & Sounds	2.00	2.00
B.3 Active Learning	1.00	1.00
B.4 Linguistic Appreciation	1.00	1.00
B.5 Task & Activity	2.00	2.00
C.1 Content Knowledge	2.00	2.00
C.2 Learning in Community	1.00	1.00
C.3 Leverages Data	1.00	1.00
C.4 Routines & Pacing	3.00	3.00
C.5 Feedback	2.00	2.00
C.6 Language Diversity	2.00	2.00
D.1 Print Rich	3.00	3.00
D.2 Inclusive and Affirming	2.00	2.00
D.3 Space and Materials	2.00	2.00
Averages	**1.89**	**1.89**

Section 1: Identifying the Big Rocks Practice

1. Generate a list of potential rocks. 2. Narrow your list down to two high-leverage big rocks to put into the Strategic Planning Template.

Section 2: Root Cause Analysis Practice

1. Pick one big rock to explore. 2. Brainstorm five questions you might ask stakeholders that will help fill in any gaps about the big rock.

3. Brainstorm a potential root cause for the big rock.

Section 3: Theory of Change Practice

If (defines long-term goals)	If
Then (necessary preconditions)	Then
So that (desired outcome)	So that

Section 4: Creating Action Steps Practice

Strategic Planning Template	
District or School Name	South Mountain Elementary School
Priority Area(s)/Trends	Strengths: • Teachers are invested in the school community and are working to use the new curriculum. • There are clear routines present during instruction, which allows most teachers to teach the entire lesson. • The classroom environment is print rich and comfortable. Opportunities: • There were minimal opportunities for engagement and participation across classrooms. Students often worked independently and waited for a teacher to come to them to get support. Six out of twelve students knew their respective lesson objective when asked. • There is a high population of multilingual learners and instruction does not leverage and appreciate their linguistic diversity. • Teachers shared in focus groups (and observations confirmed) that there is minimal differentiation happening when planning lessons. Teachers are often just moving to the next lesson in the curriculum.
Big Rock 1 Insert your group's identified big rock from section 1.	Root Cause Analysis: Insert your group's identified root cause from section 2.

	Theory of Change: Insert your group's theory of change from section 3.			
	Goal: (Framework indicator growth goal)			
Big Rock 2 Insert your group's identified big rock from section 1.	Root Cause Analysis: Insert your group's identified root cause from section 2.			
	Theory of Change: Insert your group's theory of change from section 3.			
	Goal: (Framework indicator growth goal)			
Big Rock 1	**Action Steps**	**Owner(s)**	**Timeline**	**Resource Allocation**
	Section 4 practice			
	Section 4 practice			

Strategic Planning Template	
District or School Name	
Priority Area(s)/Trends	
Big Rock 1	Root Cause Analysis:
	Theory of Change:
	Goal:
Big Rock 2	Root Cause Analysis:
	Theory of Change:
	Goal:

990 Spring Garden St.
Philadelphia, PA 19123
T: 215-561-4676
F: 215-561-4677
info@cli.org
www.cli.org

Contract Resources:				
Big Rock 1	**Action Steps**	**Owner(s)**	**Timeline**	**Resource Allocation**

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Philadelphia, PA 19123
T: 215-561-4676
F: 215-561-4677
info@cli.org
www.cli.org

Strategic Planning Template

Core Service Model

Big Rock 2	Action Steps	Owner(s)	Timeline	Resource Allocation

Stepback Date: _____

990 Spring Garden St.
Philadelphia, PA 19123
T: 215-561-4676
F: 215-561-4677
info@cli.org
www.cli.org

Article

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Leading Data Conversation Moves: Toward Data-Informed Leadership for Equity and Learning

Vicki Park[1]

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to examine the data conversation moves enacted by leaders and to bridge organizational leadership for equity and data-informed decision making to practice. I argue that data discussion moves with the purpose of improving equity and learning must reflect core tenets of organizational leadership for equity—specifically eliminating deficit thinking and focusing on inquiry for improvement. **Research Method:** I employ case study methods to explore how data use routines and discussion moves unfold in context. The analysis for this article stems from data collected over a 2-year period at an elementary school, consisting of 106.5 hours of observation, 25 semistructured interviews, and document reviews. Analysis was an iterative process, beginning with holistic case studies, open coding, and then a focused coding that lead to a finalized typology of data conversation moves. **Findings:** Leaders engaged in data conversation moves that invited an inquiry stance and a strength-based approach to understanding how student data could inform instructional improvement and support, such as (a) Triangulating, (b) Reframing Deficit Thinking to Building on Student Learning Assets, (c) Pedagogical Linking and Student-Centered Positioning, and (d) Extending. **Implications:** This study contributes to the growing

[1]San José State University, San Jose, CA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Vicki Park, San Diego State University, Department of Educational Leadership, 5500 Campanile Dr., San Diego, CA 92182-1190, USA.
Email: vpark@sdsu.edu

body of research that examines the micro-processes of data use practice by honing in on conversation moves that educators engage in to shift discussion toward student learning and professional inquiry. The findings highlight how data use for inquiry, learning, and equity requires leadership practices that forge capacity building routines with facilitation of data conversation moves.

Keywords
equity, data-informed leadership, organizational leadership for equity, data-driven decision making, data conversation moves, observational methods, case study

Introduction

Data use for school improvement is now a taken-for-granted feature of the education reform landscape; yet the field of education still has much to learn about how data are being used for instructional improvement, how leaders cultivate thoughtful data use practices, and the impact on equity and student learning. In the reform and practitioner literature, data use is sometimes treated as the key strategy for improving schools without a nuanced framework that takes into consideration that data are information mediated by cognitive, sociocultural and political contexts. Data-driven decision making (DDDM) in particular has been associated with a technical, rational model of continuous improvement practice at the policy and local implementation levels. As Dowd (2005) has argued, "Data don't drive": It must be collected, interpreted, and enacted by people. And its uses are ultimately dependent on the specific contexts in which educators operate and their interactions with one another (Coburn & Turner, 2011; Datnow & Park, 2014). Thus, data-informed leadership and decision making is a term more reflective of the actual practice (Knapp, Copland, & Swinnerton, 2007).

Existing research on data use in schools have provided details about the types and consequences of data use, leading to critical insights about the ways in which policy and various models of DDDM are being implemented (Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007; Park & Datnow, 2017; Park, St. John, Datnow, & Choi, 2017). As empirical work in this area has evolved, scholars have recognized that important gaps in understanding how the process of using data unfolds in everyday practice still remain (Little, 2012; Spillane, 2012). Less attention has been paid to how data use is facilitated during data conversations and other professional learning settings, thus limiting the field's understanding of how potential shifts toward learning and equity are supported and enacted.

This article addresses the research gaps in data use by exploring the following questions: (a) What types of organizational routines and frames enable data use for equity and learning? (b) When examining data, what types of conversation moves are used to facilitate shifts toward inquiry and assets-based thinking? and (c) How do these conversations unfold in practice?

In addressing these gaps, the article makes two key contributions to the existing literature on data use and leadership practice for equity. First, it adds to the empirical knowledge about how data discussions for equity and learning unfold within professional learning settings and through conversation. Using observations and in-depth interviews gathered from a case study of an elementary school, findings provide thick descriptions of attempts to shift data discussions away from deficit views of students to more of an inquiry orientation. Second, by bridging scholarship on organizational leadership for equity and data-informed decision making, this article contributes to the field's understanding of how to support leadership development and data use practice for equity and organizational learning.

Literature Review

Over the past decade, there has been increased scrutiny on how data are used to informed decision making for continuous improvement, accountability, and equity. The scholarship on data use, often referred to as DDDM, has also begun to hone in on how educators engage in sensemaking processes to understand and use data, with increased attention paid to how these processes are mediated by existing cognitive frameworks and social–cultural and organizational contexts (Coburn & Turner, 2011). Data use is affected by characteristics and features of data types (Farrell & Marsh, 2016), how leaders frame the motivation and relevancy of data use for equity and learning (Park, Daly, & Guerra, 2013), teachers' sensemaking and attribution of student ability (Bertrand & Marsh, 2015; Datnow & Hubbard, 2016), teacher work teams (Horn, Kane, & Wilson, 2015; Young, 2006), and organizational and policy contexts (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Jennings, 2012; Jimerson & Childs, 2015).

Studies show that when data are coupled with external accountability policies, it leads to both problematic and promising practices for equity and learning. Data use has the power to reify or exacerbate systemic inequities when educators, pressured by the high-stakes accountability context, focus on educational triage or so-called "bubble kids," and an overemphasis on standardized test data (Booher-Jennings, 2005). Schools' responses to high-stakes accountability and data use varied depending on their designations as low- or high-performing schools and the student populations that are served (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004). Diamond et al. (2004) found that

evaluations of students were mediated by student demographic compositions and teachers' beliefs about student abilities, as well as the degree to which educators felt a sense of shared responsibility for student learning. In general, student assets were emphasized in schools with majority percentages of middle-class, White, or Asian American students, while deficit perspectives were emphasized in schools serving predominantly African American and low-income students. One school, serving predominantly African American students, however, did not fit the pattern as school leaders mediated a collective sense of responsibility for all students by creating organizational structures and routines focused on instructional improvement.

To date, much of the literature on DDDM tends to focus on the technical or structures of implementation without an explicit equity orientation. Studies may examine the implications or outcomes for equity but do not necessarily highlight how equity goals or principles drive data use processes. Current research on DDDM also tends to focus on broad implementation, primarily derived from surveys and interviews. How social interactions and conversations within professional development shape data uses remain relatively scarce (see Little, 2012, for review of studies that are exceptions). In sum, both the micro-processes of data use as well as leadership practice around data use for equity as it is enacted in context are still emerging.

Data-Driven Decision Making for Equity

Both emerging research on data use and established scholarship on leadership suggest that practices anchored by equity values must be explicitly articulated for data use to challenge rather than reinforce inequalities. The use of data alone will not likely lead to equitable practices or challenges to systemic inequities given the long history of deficit thinking in education toward marginalized communities (Valencia, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999). Research on equity-focused reforms (e.g., detracking) have shown that conceptions of ability and deficit views related to assumptions about class, race, and gender can either derail reform efforts or lead to superficial implementation (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Lipman, 1997; Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997; Rubin, 2008). Without critical dialogue offering alternative views or challenging negative beliefs about students, the dominant deficit model construction of students' capabilities will likely be reinforced and reproduced (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Valencia, 2010). Because data and data use are socially, culturally, and political co-constructed and, like all practices, educators make sense of data filtered through their preexisting beliefs and experiences, data use must be conceptualized within broader leadership theories and practices that place equity and learning at the center (Knapp et al., 2007; Skrla,

Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004). Leadership theories with an equity orientation also suggest that importance of redefining leadership practice to one that is more inclusive and culturally relevant. In reviewing the literature on culturally responsive school leadership, Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) suggest "data-driven culturally responsive school leadership" as a way to use data to align policy, curriculum, and school reform based on values for equity and culturally relevant practices (e.g., such as equity audits).

A large part of promoting culturally responsive and inclusive school environment requires actively resisting and eliminating deficit thinking about culturally diverse students (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Skrla et al., 2004) and validating the community cultural wealth that children and their families bring with them (Yosso, 2005). The role of data in eliminating deficit thinking and supporting asset-based approaches has not been deeply explored, although previous studies suggest how they play a role. Research suggests that leaders can use data to shed light on systemic inequities such as gaps in opportunities-to-learn and motivate schools toward collective action (Park et al., 2013; Skrla et al., 2004). In some instances when educators were confronted with evidence that challenged their low expectations about students' abilities, educators' examination of data became a catalyst to changing practices and increasing awareness of inequities. Skrla and Scheurich (2001) suggested that the Texas accountability system's emphasis on disaggregating student data by subgroups helped displace, although not eliminate, deficit views of students. With an equity orientation, the use of data can help contest negative tacit beliefs and assumptions about low-income and students of color. Although these studies point to the potential of data use in countering deficit thinking and building awareness of systemic inequities, how these data conversations unfold in practice and how leaders attempt to shift perceptions have yet to be thoroughly investigated.

In building the capacity for using data for instructional improvement and challenging deficit views, the literature further suggests that inquiry-focused conversations are more likely to lead to transformative practices and beliefs (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Nelson, Slavit, & Deuel, 2012; Watanabe, 2006). While the use of data has the potential to illuminate inequities and counter or displace deficit thinking, educators' capacity to engage in thoughtful discussions about data, student learning, and culturally responsive instructional practice still needs further support and development. Teachers and administrators may require specific set of skills and knowledge to use data thoughtfully. Educators in general need opportunities to strengthen data literacy skills and develop the ability to engage in systematic inquiry—skills that are not necessarily built into typical professional development sessions (Mandinach & Gummer, 2013).

Structures and routines can constrain or enable thoughtful data use for inquiry. Routines and sensemaking frames can reinforce deficit views of students or have the potential to create counter narratives that focus on building on their strengths (Park et al, 2017). In particular, Young (2006) suggests that deliberate and strategic activities (i.e., "agenda setting") affected how teachers respond to data use for inquiry. These strategies included establishing rationale and expectations for teachers' use of data in addition to modeling data use and structuring collaboration time. School leaders played a vital role in the agenda-setting process and ensured that district efforts at implementing DDDM occurred at the school level. At one school, Young (2006) discovered that the principal took a hands-off approach rather than pushing faculty to engage in peer collaboration or classroom observations. Assuming that teachers already knew how to apply data for instructional decision making, the principal did not engage in any agenda-setting activities with data use. Consequently, teachers did not participate in team-based inquiry as envisioned by the district.

The presence of professional learning communities (PLCs) founded on a culture of inquiry seems to facilitate thoughtful data use (Horn et al., 2015; Lachat & Smith, 2005; Nelson et al., 2012). Teacher inquiry groups have the potential to help faculty form a professional culture and reassess their assumptions about teaching practices and student learning. When inquiry was the focus, these professional learning opportunities led to a deeper understanding of student thinking and instructional practices, helping participants be less likely to jump to conclusions or solutions, and more likely to engage in reflection by basing their comments on data rather than taken-for-granted assumptions (Nelson et al., 2012). Building on their work studying teacher PLCs, Nelson et al. (2012) found that teams practicing a collaborative inquiry orientation moved away from collaboration as merely joint work, "disconnected talk" or consultation. They suggest that collaborative inquiry has the potential to be transformative when teacher groups, "notice and examine a variety of links between the specifics of their student-learning data and other aspects of practice, including instructional strategies or materials, curricular goals, classroom discourse patterns, and their own content knowledge" (p. 33). Teachers with an inquiry stance did not simply use student-learning data[1] to prove or disprove their beliefs but used it to examine their instructional practices connected to student thinking. In sum, growing body of studies, providing in-depth accounts of teachers discussing student-learning data in PLCs, illuminate how social interactions and content of conversations matter for thoughtful data use (Horn et al., 2015; Nelson et al. 2012).

Conceptual Framework

To investigate the process of how educators facilitate data conversations for equity, I employed a conceptual framework building on organizational leadership for equity and routines as mediators of organizational learning. Taken together, the scholarship on organizational leadership for equity and routines provide the lens for examining data use as a practice enacted in context, within conversations, and driven by equity goals. By equity, I refer to how schools and educators work toward reducing both disparities in opportunities-to-learn and outcomes for *all* students, taking into account the structural, cultural, and historical factors that have led to disparate consequences for marginalized students (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Pollock, 2017; Skrla et al., 2004). Thus, the organizational leadership approach with an equity lens requires "a central focus on leadership practices that facilitate or constrain equitable educational systems" (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014, p. 100).

More specifically, I draw on Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) conceptualization which centers on three key drivers of organizational improvement: the construction and enactment of leadership as inclusive rather than hierarchical practice; the framing of disparities and actions toward equity instead of a deficit frame; and the integration of a culture of inquiry. Consequently, the focus of the analysis is not solely on how data use unfolds but whether and how shifts toward inquiry and equity stances are supported through practice. Within the context of data use, this conceptual emphasis attends to the ways in which data are used to challenge deficit assumptions about students and families. It also points to a focus on the ways in which leadership practices enable or constrain a culture of inquiry.

By invoking the notion of leadership as practice, I also use the concept of leadership as distributed within a system of activity. Research on distributed leadership defines leadership as practice within a system of activity that is "stretched over" people, places, and activities (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Rather than solely highlighting those in formal roles of authority, this perspective focuses on what people across an organization do. The emphasis is on the practice of leadership rather than roles or individuals.

The system of activity for this study is bounded within data conversations and how such discussions are facilitated. Within professional learning routines, conversation moves and how they are facilitated are potential resources for subsequent actions (Horn & Little, 2010). Organizational routines are not only resources but also frame what counts as appropriate and possibilities for

action (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). In other words, the types of conversation routines that educators engage in matter because they can limit or expand opportunities for professional learning. In conceptualizing conversation routines and moves, I refer to Horn and Little (2010) who define it as "patterned and recurrent ways that conversations unfold within a social group. Routines are constituted by moves, turns of talk that shape the interaction's progress by setting up and constraining the response of the subsequent speakers" (p. 184). During these conversations, the types of links made between the specifics of instructional practice and outcomes of student learning to principles of teaching are critical because they guide whether teachers reflect on their practices using data instead of simply confirming or disconfirming preconceived assumptions (Horn et al., 2015; Horn & Little, 2010; Nelson et al., 2012). Rich professional conversations on data can enable educators to normalize, specify, revise, or generalize problems of practice rather than simply going through the motions of reviewing data or emphasizing quick decision making (Horn & Little, 2010; Nelson et al., 2012). This conceptual orientation suggests that facilitation of thoughtful data use requires habits of mind that take in account the purpose and goals of data use, coupled with data literacy skills that promote investigative stances and acknowledge the limitations of data (Earl & Katz, 2006). Attending to how data conversations unfold in practice illuminates what specific skills leaders enact to facilitate or inhibit shifts toward equity and inquiry.

Overall, the conceptual framework highlights the role that routines and leadership practice, through conversation moves, could play in fostering data use for equity. While it is clear that data can be a critical tool to highlight systemic inequities and mobilize action toward improving schools, existing research points to the need for further examination of how leaders facilitate and support the use of data for equitable and culturally relevant practices (Khalifa et al., 2016). Awareness is important but insufficient to create shifts from deficit thinking to assets-based teaching and leading. To date, we know little about how day-to-day leadership practices and facilitation moves enable these shifts (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). The question of how leaders, both formal and informal, can facilitate data conversations for equity and inquiry still remain. What types of data conversation moves and routines support shifts toward inquiry and assets-based thinking?

The Study

The analysis reported here draws on data gathered from a larger case study on fourth- and fifth-grade teacher teams across four schools and the use of data for instructional differentiation. For the larger study, the team purposively

chose public elementary schools in which teachers were expected to use data and to inform ability grouping or differentiate instruction in some way. More specifically, we chose schools in which teachers were using shared student performance data in English language arts (ELA) and math to inform instructional differentiation. We focused on the fourth- and fifth-grade teacher teams in each site, as some research has shown ability grouping in the upper elementary grades in reading and math had grown considerably in the past 20 years (Loveless, 2013). The schools in our sample used a variety of data sources and methods for differentiating instruction and grouping students, allowing us to examine a range of approaches.

This article concentrates on the data conversations moves employed in one site, Billings Elementary School. I selected Billings for this investigation as it served a diverse student population and the leaders were deliberately engaging in efforts to improve data conversations in their PLC meetings. Given the research base and my aim of understanding data use conversations for equity and learning, I employed an in-depth exploratory case study method to examine the conversation routines and data discussion moves as it unfolds in context (Yin, 2014). Employing qualitative methods allowed me to interact with participants, observe behavior, and gain first-hand knowledge about the contexts of educators' work. The aim was to expand the theoretical and empirical base for how data discussions play out in a given setting rather than to make generalizable claims.

For this article, the unit of the analysis was the data conversation moves and the role that they play in enabling inquiry and equity orientation stances and not the PLC teams or individual leaders or teachers. Although previous research shows that teacher work groups hold varied perspectives toward inquiry and collaboration that shape the tone, content, and outcomes of data conversations (Horn et al., 2015; Nelson et al., 2012; Young, 2006), I chose to foreground the types of data conversation moves that are employed to explore how they reflect the drivers of organizational leadership for equity (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). I sought to understand the types of moves that are used during data conversations, detailing their content and characteristics, and how shifts are created away from deficit thinking and toward inquiry.

School Context

Located in a suburban neighborhood on the West Coast, Billings Elementary[2] served a majority of students of color from low-income backgrounds (Table 1).

In the past, the school had a relatively stable teaching staff, although the leadership team was fairly new to their positions. The principal was also previously an instructional coach at another school within the district before being

Table 1. School Demographics.

	Billings
Number of students	400
Student race/ethnicity (%)	
African American	2
Asian American and Pacific Islander	23
Latina/o	66
Native American	<1
Two/more races	2
White	7
Free and reduced-price meal (%)	72
English learner (%)	68

Note. Numbers and percentages are rounded.
Source. Ed-data for school year 2014-2015; retrieved from www.ed-data.org.

hired to lead Billings. She was in her second year when the study began. The full-time instructional coach was an educator with two decades of teaching, the majority of them spent at Billings, and was well respected at the school. The fourth- and fifth-grade teams had two teachers in each team, ranging in experience from 1 to 13 years. At the start of the study, both teams were relatively new to working with one another. The two teachers in the second-grade team were in their first year of working together while the fifth-grade teachers were in the second year of collaboration and joined by a first-year teacher, who taught a self-contained special education class for Grades 3 to 5. In the second year of the study, the configurations of the teams changed again, with a teacher leaving the school and another moving to a lower grade level. This led to a new teacher hire that became a part of the fourth-grade team and a lower grade teacher was placed into fourth-grade team. Thus in the second year, both grade-level teams were new to working with one another.

Data-focused conversations occurred in multiple settings, but most typically happened during structured PLC meeting cycles held during the day and facilitated by the instructional coach and sometimes by the principal (which I will further describe in the findings). All participants considered themselves as growing in the area of using data rather than as experts. While the principal and instructional coach acknowledged the school's growth and progress, they also noted that they were still figuring out how to build capacity for thoughtful data use and to shift deficit mindsets. Thus, Billings represents a case study of a school trying to move toward data inquiry and equity rather than having an established inquiry process or culture with a vision of equity.

Data Sources

The analysis for this article stems from data collected over a 2-year period (2014-2016), primarily consisting of observations and supplemented by semistructured interviews and document reviews. As the primary investigator at this school site, I conducted a total of 106.5 hours of observations. Of these, 55 hours were spent observing PLCs and other data related meetings. Another 51.5 hours were spent on classroom observations of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. For this analysis, I concentrated on meeting observations in which data were discussed and instructional planning or support took place. As an observer during these meetings, I noted the types of data used for discussion, how data were analyzed, and how data were discussed in relation to student achievement and backgrounds based on a semistructured protocol.[3] I also took notes about who spoke, what they said, and when. Additionally, I collected school- and team-level data discussion protocols, data analyses of shared assessments, and teacher-developed formative assessments. The documents helped me understand how data discussion and analysis protocols were used as tools to guide conversations or planning.

Observations were triangulated with multiple rounds of interviews and member checking. I conducted 25 formal semistructured interviews with a total of nine participants, including the principal, instructional coach, and seven teachers. Most teachers were formally interviewed twice each year using a semistructured protocol, with each interview lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. The principal was formally interviewed three times and the instructional coach participated in five formal interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes. These interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. The first interview focused on gaining background knowledge of the participants and school and community contexts, data use culture in the school and teacher teams, and uses of data for differentiating instruction. The subsequent rounds of interviews provided opportunities to follow up with participants to further understand their data use practices and the role of team collaboration, to clarify any discrepancies from prior interviews, and to verify my understanding of their perspectives and interactions from observations.

Analysis

Analysis was an iterative process, starting from whole to part (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I first developed a case report of Billings as to gain a holistic understanding of the setting and then honed in on grade-level team and Language Review Team (LRT) meetings as they provided the

richest context for data discussions. After each observation, I developed field notes elaborating on the setting, routines, and transitions, as well as tone, mood, and interactions. I jotted down my impressions, summarized data, and wrote down reflective notes including speculations about possible themes, relationships, and noteworthy leads for future data collection (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). These memos and annotations then became sources for further analysis.

Once all data were collected, I began open coding of observations, documents, and interviews, noting general flow of conversations and routines (Miles et al., 2014). Informed by the conceptual framework, I paid particular attention to when conversation shifts occurred to expand inquiry and learning or led to changes in instructional planning or deficit thinking. I examined how discussions were extended or altered and participants' perceptions of these conversations. From this open coding, I developed a refined coding list with broad types of conversation moves employed (i.e., *framing, clarifying, confirming, disconfirming*, and *questioning*). These codes were further refined for a round of focused coding. For example, the broad code *framing* evolved to *reframing deficit thinking to student assets* and the code *clarifying* was refined to *extending* move after analyzing the patterns. Using the refined categories, I developed the typology of data discussion moves presented in the findings sections (Table 2) and elaborated by thick description of conversations.

Findings

I first describe the data conversation routines and frames that occurred at Billings Elementary as they structured and normalized broader orientations toward data use for decision making. I then present a typology of data discussion moves employed by the instructional coach, principal, and, in some cases, teachers to facilitate conversations toward inquiry and strength-based approach to examining student learning data. I provide specific examples, describing the characteristics and purpose for their moves. The excerpts and analysis shared here are by no means intended to reflect an exemplary inquiry group or discussion centered on equitable practices but are illustrative of the attempts made to shift conversations.

Data Use Routines and Frames Established Within Billings Elementary

Agenda-setting and broad framing of data use was a strong feature of leadership practice at Billings. This was partly reflected in structured collaboration time for teachers and expectation of data use for instructional decision making. In addition to weekly faculty or team meetings held after school, there

Table 2. Data Discussion Moves for Learning and Equity.

Moves	Characteristics and Purpose	Example(s)
Triangulating	Using or asking for multiple types and sources of data to confirm or disconfirm beliefs; deciding to gather more data/ information before coming up with conclusions or solutions	"Data are never perfect."
	Acknowledging dissonance between types or sources of data	"Sometimes data gives us meaningful information but sometimes it's just a springboard. So it doesn't always tells us about all of their strengths or even their weaknesses."
		"It should be more than numbers. . . . We need to look at other factors such as classroom observation, informal observations [State ELL Test Results], and what we see [students] can do."
Reframing Deficit Thinking to Building on Student Learning Assets	Redirecting deficit assumptions or beliefs about student learning to one that highlights their strengths or skills to build on	" . . . but it is good that the student can observe that . . . that is huge."
	Identifying and knowing student strengths as necessary data	"Based on students—and not just on what they produced but also what they did and how they used language—what went well?"
		"What did students do well?
		"Even if students can't do X, can they do Y?"
		"If I don't see their strengths in the beginning of the year, I'm not even going to know much they've improved at the end of the year."
Pedagogical Linking and Student-Centered Positioning	Examining relationships between student thinking (what they know or do not know and misconceptions) to data and to specifics of instructional practice and curriculum	"What would you want students to say?"
	Perspective is centered on student thinking, experience, and what they need to know	"So they understand the algorithm but not the relationship or place value."

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Moves	Characteristics and Purpose	Example(s)
		"What would you do to help students get there? What specifically?" "Do students understand when they use terms such as borrowing or regrouping, what does regrouping mean?" "Its frustrating for you but its also got to be frustrating for them [students], so what can we look at that would be more valuable use of your time, your student's time and produce different results?"
Extending	Asking for elaboration on how an individual arrived at their conclusion/opinion, asking for more details/concrete evidence, or rephrasing what was said to make sure there was shared understanding. It connotes the sense that ideas and summaries are being built on one another.	"What percentage of the class needs it [specific instructional support on a standard/skill]?" "What would you want students to be able to do within six weeks?" "What do you think that [student improvement] results from?" "Was this an example of the format of a test not showing what they are capable of?"
Confirming/ Disconfirming	Looking for patterns or outliers to prove and/or disprove beliefs	Was there any movement or was there something that was expected or unexpected?

were two specific data conversation routines that occurred consistently and with all teachers: grade-level PLCs and LRT meetings. Both types of meetings were scheduled during the school day, with substitute coverage provided by the school, reflecting substantial investment in school resources and teacher time. These structures and processes had the effect of normalizing teacher collaboration and data use school-wide, although the degree of teacher collaboration and depth of data use for inquiry varied by grade level teams. These meetings also normalized the broad range of data use at the school—not just standardized assessments such as state and district benchmarks but also formative assessments (both written and oral) and teacher observations. This was a conscious framing of what counted as data and data use by the leaders in the school, as I will explain in upcoming sections.

Grade-level teacher collaboration routine. In general, formal PLC routines were conducted in a cycle of three meetings facilitated by the instructional coach. Each meeting lasted for an hour and occurred approximately every 6 weeks. The first meeting of a PLC cycle was used to determine the instructional goal, usually driven by grade-level standards and pre- and postassessments used to capture student learning. These assessments could be district benchmarks, textbook or program tests, or teacher-created formative assessments. Additional time was also devoted to planning possible lessons to scaffold student learning toward the PLC goal. After the first meeting, teachers were expected to administer and grade the preassessment and then input the results on a shared PLC data and notes template. Using this shared tool, teachers noted the results of the preassessment, with the students categorized into three instructional groups. These results were then used to plan instructional lessons and to differentiate support for students in the upcoming meeting.

In the second meeting of a cycle, the teachers analyzed the data using the shared notes template, highlighting the strengths of each group in terms of their progress on the standard and then the areas of weaknesses. Afterward, they discussed instructional strategies targeted for each student group and formulated an action plan. This typically included a date to administer a postassessment after implementing the instructional strategies. Before the third and final meeting of the PLC cycle, teachers were expected to input postassessment data, using the same template. At the meeting, teachers compared the pre- and postassessment results, again discussing the strengths and weaknesses of what students learned, instructional strategies that worked and next steps for a new cycle of PLC. Most of the documents were accessible on a shared online folder to the teams, coach, and principal. Thus, another normalized routine was sharing of student-learning data within teams and monitoring student growth across the school.

LRT meeting routine. In addition to the regular PLC meetings held by grade-level teams, Billings held formal meetings twice a year to review the progress of English Language Learners (ELL). The goal of the meetings was twofold: (a) to decide which students qualified for redesignation out of ELL status and (b) to monitor and support progress of continuing ELL. The school-based instructional coach, a teacher representative from the school, and a district coach facilitated all the conversations. These meetings were held with one teacher at a time and therefore, often took four full days to complete. Teachers came to the meetings with data forms, developed by the district, completed for each ELL student. Meeting lasted anywhere from 45 to 90 minutes, depending on the number of ELL students in each class.

The data form used by the LRT included two years of data on a student, including results on the state's test for ELL with overall scores and domain scores listed for reading, writing, speaking, and listening; and results on quarterly district benchmark assessments in reading, writing, and math for the past two years. In addition to formal assessments, the data form also included a section to note student strengths, areas of improvements, interventions, or accommodations that have been tried, and next steps to further support language development. Although the district provided a set of guidelines which triggered automatic redesignation, the school-based team had the leeway to also redesignate students who did not meet all the criteria using other data including grades and teacher observations. As they discussed student progress during the meetings, facilitators took notes on the LRT data form. All teachers arrived to meetings with their laptops and also accessed different data (e.g., latest district reading benchmark scores, report card scores, attendance history, etc.) as it came up during the conversation. Thus, the teachers at Billings took for granted that data, beyond those noted in the district form, could be used and discussed as potential sources of evidence and information.

In sum, both the PLC and LRT routines at Billings created and reinforced a broader definition of data that included state and district tests as well as formative assessments and teacher observations. Both types of meetings also reflected a stance toward focusing on supporting students by understanding their progress and attempting to develop a holistic view of their needs.

Data Discussion Moves

In these meetings, I found that educators engaged in types of data conversation moves that invited a more inquiry stance and a strength-based approach to understanding how student data could inform instructional improvement and support. While confirming, disconfirming, and generalizing moves were present, during the structured meetings facilitated by leaders, they also employed other moves. These additional moves included the following: (a) Triangulating, (b) Reframing Deficit Thinking to Building on Student Learning Assets, (c) Pedagogical Linking and Student-Centered Positioning, and (d) Extending (Table 2). These moves were not always mutually exclusive but were also relational and built on one another. For the purpose of discussion, I first introduce each of the moves and their characteristics. I then use an extended field note excerpt of a data discussion to highlight how the moves built on each other.

Triangulating: "Data Are Never Perfect"

In inquiry methods and research design, triangulation is considered an important strategy for confirming or disconfirming assumptions, findings, and conclusions,

yet it is rarely highlighted as a critical conversation move during data discussions in K-12 school settings. Triangulation helps answer the following question: How do we know what we know?[4] And is the information we have sufficient to justify conclusions or next steps? During the discussions held in team meetings, there were consistent moments of participants attempting to triangulate data and sources of information. Triangulation moves during data discussions emerged when participants used or asked for multiple types and sources of data to confirm beliefs or justify next steps. It also transpired when there was a request to gather more information before making decisions or designing solutions. The second was more likely to happen when teachers expressed cognitive dissonance between different types of data or uncertainty about providing instructional scaffolds to students.

At Billings, the principal and instructional coach were consistent about recognizing both the strengths and limitations of data. They were clear that multiple sources of data, and not just test scores, should be considered when developing instructional plans and supporting student academic and social–emotional growth. The principal explicitly acknowledged to teams during PLC or faculty meetings that, "data are never perfect" but having multiple types of data can help monitor and support student progress. Similarly when asked about the importance of gathering data on student strengths, the coach acknowledged:

> I think sometimes, when we look at the data it gives us really meaningful information, but sometimes it's just a springboard. So it doesn't always tell us about all of their strengths or even their weaknesses. Sometimes you know it can tell us when we're looking at data, especially if we're looking at longitudinal, we can tell, ok what's going on here? We're seeing this downward spiral. What emotionally is going on with this child?

The leadership stance on data was that when it was a "springboard," more information about students needed to be gathered or investigated in order to gain a fuller portrait of their strengths and needed areas of support. When the data analysis led to further questions or uncertainty about next steps or solutions, both school leadership and teachers felt comfortable seeking further information. This also included talking directly with students to learn about their perceptions and experiences. Students were viewed as key sources of their own learning data and this resulted in educators initiating informal conversations with them about their learning challenges as well as formal conferences where teachers were encouraged to ask students to reflect about their learning strategies and goals.

Teacher observations were not dismissed as anecdotal nor were they considered the primary or sole source of data for decision making. For instance,

during one LRT meeting, when Teacher 1 advocated for students who were not automatically on the redesignation list to be reclassified based on observations and grades, the coach reassured the teacher that this was a well-reasoned decision. She also used the exchange to reflect on the overall redesignation process and how it could be improved. Here is the exchange during the meeting:

> Teacher 1: "Despite the list, I had students that could be good candidates based on my observations and grades. I'm sorry if I stirred up a hornet's nest." The coach reassured him, "This is exactly what you should be doing. It should be more than just numbers." The coach turned to the teacher representative from the school and added that for next year they needed to re-think the process so that teachers were better aware of taking into consideration observations and grades. The coach further added, "Sometimes kids don't test well and we know the kids better because they are more than just numbers." Teacher 1 wondered about the district's benchmarks and its reliability since it was administered multiple times a year and "Some stay the same and some make 100 point swings." The coach responded: "So we need to look at other factors, such as classroom observations, informal observations, [state English language development tests], and what we see they can do."

Teachers at Billings were also willing to ask for more information and help when their observations and test scores did not align. By doing so they were able to acknowledge the dissonance between different types of data such as test scores and teacher observations. For example, Teacher 4 shared the dilemma he had supporting Enrique, a student who was struggling with reading multisyllabic words and comprehension, admitting:

> I'm not sure what I'm doing with Enrique. I talked with [the coach] about Enrique because . . . I don't know if you can listen to him read. He can read and he can decode and he can answer questions, but he's testing out at the 1st grade level on the [district benchmark] test. So I told [the coach], I go, "I don't know what's going on with Enrique. I don't know if he just hates taking tests." I said, "Can you give him a [another leveled reading test]?" She said, "Sure but let me take him to the lab and I'll sit with him while he takes the test." I'm like that's fine because I don't know what's going on with Enrique. Literally I mean he's got . . . and he's an incredible writer. I mean my gosh, I'll say Enrique write me a story about you and your friend, you went to the game. And within 10 minutes he'll have three pages with great voice. I mean I love reading Enrique's stories. I mean there's things he's got to work on but . . . so the data on him is not matching.

In this example, the teacher could have easily dismissed the validity of the district benchmark assessment results and given greater weight to his observations

or vice versa. But this would not have helped the student. Instead the teacher, with the assistance of the coach, decided to gather additional data—by using another type of reading assessment but also observational data during test-taking time to tease out whether test anxiety may be the issue. Triangulating moves enacted by the principal, instructional coach, and teachers provided spaces to question the data and opportunities to acknowledge they may not have the full answer yet. It also promoted a more thoughtful way of thinking about multiple points of data instead of using single data types to draw conclusions about student ability and needs.

Reframing Deficits Narratives to Building on Student Strengths

Another key facilitation move employed by the principal, coach, and some teachers were reframing deficit thinking by shifting attention to student strengths. That is, when a teacher expressed concern or frustration about "low students" or attributed low academic performance to ability or motivation, leaders who employed this move redirected the conversation to highlight the specific learning skills that students did exhibit. The move included not just redirecting to discussion about student learning strengths but changed the conversation away from focusing on generalized learning ability to one of specific skills and domains of the content standards. Reframing deficits to student strengths also involved emphasizing the different types and sources of student learning—not just standardized tests or written work but student language use and indicators of academic engagement.

The reframing of learning deficits to focus instead on strengths and growth was evident in both the grade-level PLC and the LRT meetings. For example, when discussing a student named Juan and his English language progress, the coach started with his strengths and noted that he was making good progress on the district benchmarks, which had jumped by a grade level. Teacher 2 expressed frustration about the student being very low and replied that she needed him to make 7 years of progress instead. When the coach reminded her that it was not just about district benchmark results but also his progress within class, the teacher then began to share her specific observations of his behavior. She elaborated on his struggles with vocabulary and lack of motivation when tasks became too difficult. She then recounted a story about when reading out loud to him, Juan asked, "How do you do that?" referring to the teacher's ability to read the story with expression and tone in a way that caused him to share, "I can see that." In this moment, the implicit invitation to the teacher to share her classroom observations of Juan led to her recalling an interaction with the student in which she believed indicated how "far behind" he was in reading. Instead of

replying with generalized statements about focusing on his overall growth or formulating solutions about reteaching, the coach choose to highlight first what the student could do specifically. The coach pointed out, "But that is good that he can observe [expression and tone]" and suggested building on his ability to notice what expressive readers do by paying attention to tone, pacing, and visualization strategies. This nudged Teacher 2 to share that she had scaffolded Juan's reading comprehension by using various vocabulary building strategies and activities. She then shifted to highlighting what he was able to accomplish: "He is noticing things like that." The coach affirmed this as an important learning strength of the student and responded: "That is huge." At this point of the discussion, the coach then suggested additional activities to help the student with his reading expression.

This exchange highlights the importance of the facilitation moves and how they can disrupt deficit narratives about students. The reviewing of student strengths and weaknesses in data discussions are not revolutionary or new. In many discussion protocols, it is a standard part of a template. Data discussion routines can set the structure for discussions about student strengths to occur but reframing deficit narratives about student ability requires a facilitation move that recenters the conversation to specific skills and knowledge exhibited by the student and connecting it to next steps for student learning growth. This recognition of the student growth is not merely used to celebrate progress but is viewed as vital information to further scaffold student learning. Teachers and administrators who employed this move or shifted to emphasizing learning assets tended to view student strength data as an essential component of improving teaching instead of perceiving it solely as a means to bolster student and/or school morale.

Teacher 1 elaborated the value and emphasis for understanding student learning strengths when he was asked about his perceptions about the conversations occurring in PLC teams. When asked about why his grade-level team spent time unpacking student thinking as a part of their discussions, the teacher responded:

> I think that comes from where you're supposed to analyze the strengths of everyone's responses on those assessments. I think you could look at some of the lower students and act like they accomplished nothing and that's not the case at all. So I think trying to identify the strengths of all of the three groups in the PLC is one way to get into what the students did accomplish and what they were thinking as they were doing that.

For Teacher 2, student strength data helped her keep track of academic growth and she considered it to be critical for monitoring ongoing learning and progress:

> First, there are a lot of kids and I have to know them well, like full on well-rounded. For me, if I don't see their strengths in the beginning of the year I'm not even going know how much they've improved at the end of the year. . . . So if I'm not looking at where were they coming in at in the beginning, like ok maybe they could just read a sentence and stop for that period and read another sentence, but the strength at the end of the year is wow they're decoding multisyllabic words and they're doing expressions.

Similarly when the coach was asked about why student strength data was important, she replied:

> I think sometimes to figure out what students do well or how they do it well leads us into how we can best support them in those areas that they don't do well. And I think it just gives us a better picture of a child and how they learn. Sometimes what they're doing well, like I mean maybe they're a fabulous artist and that might tell us something about their thought process and the lens that they see things through. So I absolutely think it's important.

These teachers, the coach, and the principal consistently reflected on student strengths as essential data to help inform their continuous improvement efforts. These learning strength data then became springboards to analyze student thinking and possible misconceptions during specific lessons.

Pedagogical Linking and Student-Centered Positioning

An important discussion move engaged in by some educators at Billings was the focus on linking student thinking as data for instructional practice and improvement. That is, formative assessments were used as a launching pad to discuss students' thinking processes—their understandings and misunderstandings—around a focal content standard, skill, or domain. Teachers' questions or insights about student thinking were also based on their classroom observations and assignments. In this type of discussion move, the emphasis was not simply on using data to diagnose students' areas of weakness but shifted to what students actually did understand or not. This examining of student thinking was then connected to discussions of pedagogy or what Horn and Little (2010) referred to as generalizing to teaching principles. However, this move also involved a specific student-centered orientation where teachers positioned themselves from students' viewpoints. That is, they also generalized to learning principles.

For example, during one grade team discussion centered on a math standard, the teachers talked about grade-wide weakness based on the results from the common formative assessment and in particular, students struggling with explaining their thinking as they solved problems.

> The coach, summarizing the formative assessment data and the team's comments, stated, "All groups are having difficulty with explaining. Anything else stand out to help particular groups?" Teacher 1 mentioned that many of his students did not understand place value as he had hoped for, although they could get the right answers, and that only a few seem to get it. The coach rephrased his comment to, "So they understand the algorithm but not the relationship or place value." Here the coach continued to paraphrase by drawing attention to both what students understood and not just misunderstood. Teacher 2 noticed that some students simply say, "I can't do it" when it came to subtraction problems where regrouping was required. Teacher 1 provided an example, "Yah, like 4 minus 7." The coach then asked them, "What would you want them to say?" Both teachers talked about wanting students to explain why they could not perform this problem. To scaffold students' language, the coach suggested the use of sentence frames such as "I can't perform this because _____." Teacher 2 recalled that she was using and modeling their uses with her whole class for ELA. She pulled up the document she started and the coach asked her to project it onto the screen so the team could take a look and figure out how they can use it for math.

This move employed by the coach was not just about linking data to improving instructional practice but directed the discussion on the perspective of the students. Connected to linking data on student thinking to pedagogy or instructional practice means centering conversations from students' point of view or student needs. This had the impact of focusing on supporting student thinking instead of keeping the discussion at categorizing students' generalized abilities and levels. By doing so, the PLC team went beyond simply reteaching standards or pulling out interventions groups for support and shifted to scaffolding students' language use so they can better articulate their thinking processes. In this case, while the discussion began with a math standard on understanding and using place value, the instructional scaffolding and planning ended up focusing on helping students clarify their thinking.

Extending Moves

Extending moves involve requests for elaboration on how an individual or team arrived at their conclusions and build on previous ideas or data shared within the conversation. The goal is not to simply clarify and create shared understanding, although that is part of the purpose; the use of this move also leads toward specifying and revising the meaning of student learning data and scope of instructional needs (Horn & Little, 2010). This facilitation move entailed asking for more concrete evidence or specific examples to bolster conclusions or perceptions of a problem. For example during one PLC, when

teachers stated that "some of their students were missing number sense" and thus needed support on it, the coach pushed for specifics by asking for the exact percent of the class that needed help on the standard. The goal was to propel teachers to differentiate instruction based on specific needs of each group rather than practicing a whole class reteaching approach. The coach then followed up with the question: "What would you want students to be able to do within 6 weeks?" As they resumed the conversation, the coach continued to clarify by restating or repeating what was said to create shared understandings.

The extending move also involved other types of data or the push for specific instructional improvement efforts. For example, when a teacher expressed concern that students did not yet master a standard or a skill, the coach would ask specifically what they would want the student to say or do. Extending moves helped pinpoint support needs by identifying specific numbers of students who may need intervention but also served to provide a clearer picture of how mastery of a standard would look like based on student engagement and performance. Extending moves often included clarifying questions and reflected attempts to build on ideas and summaries shared throughout the PLC meeting. Thus, extending moves were often relational to other data conversation moves.

Table 3 displays a field note excerpt of a PLC meeting held by the fifth-grade team as an example of how extending moves were enacted in conversation and built on other data conversation moves. The team just completed their first cycle of pre- and postassessment focused on solving and explaining math problems. As they transitioned to beginning a new PLC cycle, they paused to reflect about what they learned overall from the process.

The moves employed in this discussion segment reflect how conversations shifts are attempted toward inquiry and student-centered instructional improvement. The concluding math conversation on the math PLC cycle prompted the team to reflect about student learning more generally and instructional strategies that were further needed to support writing—that is, the teachers related problem solving and providing explanations in math to learning English and writing. They speculated about the disconnect between writing and speaking skills exhibited by their students, wondering if English language development needed to be supported in other ways. In Horn and Little's (2010) study, the teachers in PLC group normalized problems of practice as a challenge or issue for all teachers. In this conversation, we also see the coach and teachers normalizing learning to write as a general challenge for anybody and not just ELL students. The group then repositioned themselves from students' viewpoint with Teacher 1 relating it to his own experience as a Spanish language learner. This led to further discussions about supporting student writing by incorporating oral retelling, transcribing,

Table 3. Extending Moves.

Field Note Excerpt	Analysis
The coach transitions to a new topic and asks, "Anything else to add in the notes?" Teacher 1 shares, "I really like this PLC. It has really contributed to improvements in the math [district] assessments and benchmarks. Teacher 2 concurs, "They did amazing compared to last year as a class." Teacher 1 replies, "This feels like we are going deeper with Common Core." However, he admits that the kids don't love it and that they would rather just not do these "drawn out explanations" of math problems and just give the answers. Teacher 2 agrees and notes that the writing of the explanations takes so long and students would prefer to do 20 worksheet problems instead of explaining one. "They really don't want to write it out." Teacher 3 adds, "There is so much that goes into writing things out. They are able to talk it out but writing is a whole different story because their writing is not up to par."	
The coach asks: "But they can talk it through?" Teachers reply that they can and that the math blocks and talking it through and recording themselves have helped. The coach asks if they also tried using the sentence frames discussed in earlier meetings.	The coach reframed conversation away from what kids cannot do to what they are able to demonstrate and the use of language scaffolds to support them.
At this point, Teacher 1 notes, "It mirrors what happens in writing time. Students can tell interesting narratives but have trouble with writing." Teacher 1 thinks that it may have to do with language since their students are ELL. He likes the idea of having students record their stories and then use it to help them write it out.	Teacher 1 engaged in extending move, building on the conversation to link writing in math with writing in general and support for ELL.
Teacher 2 responds: "We always have this conversation about how smart our kids are but sometimes what they say isn't showing in writing." She also likes the idea of having students "Get the story out and then transcribing the story." The coach notes that writing in generally for anyone can be hard and how different it is from speaking. She goes on to note, if you are learning a new language, learning how to spell can be harder.	Teacher 2 continued to engage in extending move by responding to Teacher 1's commented but also made a pedagogical link and specified how instructional practice could be scaffolded. They noticed the disconnect between student oral language and writing. The coach then generalized to learning principles.
Teacher 1 (who learned Spanish as a second language) relates it to his own experience: "As a second language learner" he talks about how he uses the same sentence frames and structures over and over and how he sees his students doing the same. Teacher 2 adds that students learn one format and they use it all the way through, citing an example of how they start a narrative essay the same as an informational essay.	Teacher 1 further extended this pedagogical linking by positioning himself as second language learner to highlight student perspectives and experiences. They then normalized the struggles students may have with writing and the strategies they apply as ELL.

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

Field Note Excerpt	Analysis
The coach doesn't believe this strategy is always negative: "One the positive side, they are applying what they learned about format (different types of writing genres) and held on to it." She suggests that joint writing with a partner may be a helpful strategy. The coach notes, "For some, it lowers anxiousness and gets buy-in" about the writing process." Teacher 2 shares her approach where she has students engage in peer and teacher conferencing. She has taught lessons around this and says that she is noticing that students are coaching one another. The coach replies that it is nice that the teacher sees students carrying it over in their interactions with one another.	The coach redirected the focus on students' strengths and then used it to decide instructional supports, including peer writing activities.

and peer conferencing. Rather than the conversations simply staying at "students got it or didn't get it" or generalized comments about ELL students not being able to write, the team speculated and wondered about the disconnect between speaking and writing. By focusing on what students could do, they were able to brainstorm instructional practices that could help link students' strength in speaking to writing.

In sum, while the routines set up the structure and possibilities for action (Feldman & Pentland, 2003), the data discussion moves enacted within PLC and LRT meetings were pivotal in displacing deficit thinking or creating shifts that moved teams toward an inquiry stance and asset-based approach to student learning. Educators at Billings engaged in discussion moves that allowed for tentative stances and questions about data, as well as an openness to gathering more information before arriving at solutions. First, triangulating moves allowed educators to look at multiple sources of information while recognizing that single data points were limited. Second, reframing deficit thinking to build on student learning assets was a facilitation move, often enacted by the coach, that steered teachers' conversation away from focusing on simply generalizing and categorizing student abilities to one that honed in on what students could already accomplish. This conversation move was critical in creating counternarratives about students' abilities and expanding teachers' reflection about the extent to which their instructional strategies scaffolded student learning. Third, pedagogical linking and student-centered positioning moves helped direct conversations on examining the relationship between student learning data to specifics of teaching practices and curriculum. This move required teachers to situate themselves from the student's perspective and as learners more broadly. Fourth, the extending move served

to push the conversation toward concrete details and evidence of claims made. The purpose was to create common understandings about student instructional needs based on data, with team members building on one another's ideas and understandings.

Conclusion and Implications

This study contributes to the limited, but growing body of research, that examines how data conversations unfold in routines and professional learning settings (Horn et al., 2015; Little, 2012). The analysis builds on previous in-depth work on how teachers examine student-learning data and the microprocess of data use but also departs from it by focusing explicitly on how conversation moves shift or expand learning opportunities for equity and learning. It complements the ongoing research base on data use by "zooming in" (Little, 2012) on data conversations by exploring how shifts toward assets-based thinking and inquiry stances were attempted and providing in-depth descriptions of their features.

The findings presented here also extend the field's understanding of the types of discussion moves that have the potential to foster a more equity-focused and inquiry-centered approach to using student learning data. The existing literature on teacher PLCs and discussions about data reveal that several conversation moves are already common: confirming and disconfirming moves where data are used to prove or disprove assumptions and making generalizations about students (Horn et al., 2015; Nelson et al., 2012). These conversation moves, while in of themselves are not always problematic, can limit learning and inquiry when discussions do not allow time and space for questioning, tentative stances, or exploration of problems of practice. Data discussions that only employ these moves might further limit educators' opportunities-to-learn and can reinforce deficit assumptions about student abilities. Conversations about student data matter because they shape how educators' make sense of student learning and whether they lead to instructional improvement or instructional management (Horn et al., 2015). They also matter because they have the potential to disrupt deficit narratives about student abilities and to reorient discussions toward inquiry.

This case study illuminates how additional types of data discussion moves (i.e., triangulating, reframing deficit thinking to building on student learning assets, pedagogical linking and student-centered positioning, and extending) have the potential to support professional learning and instructional reflection. These moves reflect strategies that encourage questioning and reframing of data, wonderings and tentative stances about what is known about students and teaching, and willingness to gather more data before planning action

steps. These conversation moves also underscore the importance of having an explicit orientation toward highlighting student strengths, viewing data as a tool for student learning support and professional self-reflection.

The findings also suggest implications for leadership as practice, especially with regards to understanding how formal and informal leaders facilitate use data to inform teaching and learning for equity. To date, less attention has been paid to how such practices unfold in everyday practice and within professional learning settings (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Little, 2012). The leadership practices enacted in Billings suggest that setting up and then normalizing expectations of data use—one that broadened what counted as relevant data for instructional decision making and student learning—are key resources for meaning making and action during data discussions. The coach and principal in particular were consistent about framing data use as necessary while maintaining a strong agenda-setting approach that also normalized sharing of data within teams as part of thoughtful instructional decision making. In this case, routines and frames for data use set the stage for inquiry around data conversations to occur and to be cultivated. These findings highlight how data use for inquiry, learning, and equity requires leadership practices that forge capacity building routines with facilitation of data conversation moves. That is, conversation moves are an essential part of leadership practice as they can shape how others interpret and act on data. Framing about what counts as data, shifting away from data use for simple solutions, and shifting toward student-centered learning are all meaning-making activities that require investment in structured routines and deliberate leadership moves.

The findings also have implications for leadership development since practices incorporating these moves during professional learning settings can be learned and employed beyond those in positions of formal authority. This requires a mindset that views student thinking as vital student learning data, and willingness to identify and examine student strengths as pathways to student growth. This orientation encourages school leaders to evaluate their approaches to data use, reminding them that the practice is nested in larger frameworks for what counts as good teaching, learning, and leadership. The goal is not to have one model of DDDM but to support conversations and practices so that it directly fuels the goal of educational equity and learning.

Finally, while the typology of moves presented here support a broadening of how we conceptualize leadership practices that support data use for equity and inquiry, by no means are they definite or finite. The exploratory case study presents several limitations as it focused on one school and it narrowly focused on examining data conversation moves as the unit of analysis. Additional studies of data-related meetings situated in various

organizational contexts can illuminate how leadership practice and orientation toward data use constrains or enables the focus on equity and inquiry. Research focusing on informal data discussions can provide further understandings of the types of discussion moves employed and when, as well as the role of teacher work teams and the influence of teacher identities on the outcomes and content of data conversations. While the conversations observed suggest that teacher perceptions of data use were broadened and shifted toward inquiry, it is unclear to what extent it shaped their instructional practice and discussions outside of formal routines. Thus, an explicit analysis of how teaching practices interact with and are influenced by PLCs would be further useful. By attending to social interactions and data discussions within professional learning settings, future research has the potential to capture how conversation moves identified in this study do or do not challenge deficit thinking and how they might support instructional improvement and equity.

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Notes

1. Nelson et al. (2012) define student data broadly as including classwork, oral responses, quizzes, tests, and lab reports.
2. All names are pseudonyms.
3. My role was mainly as an observer rather than a participant-observer in most meetings. I was introduced as a researcher studying data use and PLCs at the onset of the study, and thus my primary role was to observe and take notes.
4. There are two major categories of triangulation: source corroboration and method corroboration (Yin, 2014). Source corroboration deals with interviews

or perspectives from multiple people. Method corroboration consists of using multiple types of data to support a conclusion or finding. While triangulation does not eliminate misrepresentation, it lessens the degree to which findings may be misinterpreted and underscores the necessity of having different pieces of evidence converge to support a conclusion.

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Author Biography

Vicki Park is assistant professor at San Diego State University. Her work broadly focuses on urban school reform, data-informed leadership for equity, and how educators make sense of policy implementation.

Article

Improving Schools

Leading the flock: Examining the characteristics of multicultural school leaders in their quest for equitable schooling

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Brian Vassallo
Mariam Albatool School, Malta, Europe

Abstract

The quest for educational leaders to enact social and equitable schooling requires ongoing critical transformations that cannot be alienated from contemporary educational discourses and practices. Enacting social justice and equitable schooling poses an unparalleled challenge on the shoulders of risk-taking visionaries, who meticulously attempt to transmit their beliefs and values into the daily routine tasks at school, rather than plotting futuristic management scenarios. The study seeks to explore the multifaceted role of primary school leaders in the daily struggle to diffuse the principles of Multicultural Education for more just and equitable schooling. For this purpose, qualitative data measures were employed to determine the extent of which participants in the study mirrored the review of literature and research questions. The Critical Incident Technique was particularly useful as it allowed the collection for a large number of incidents occurring over a number of years, from a small number of people in a relatively short time. Analyses proceeded by identifying culturally responsive leadership practices and the application of critical race theory. Results identified seven core characteristics, present in school leaders who professed strong adherence to the principles of Multicultural Education. This suggests the need for emerging models of educational leadership to effectively respond to the increased diversity in our schools and to further establish the connections between multicultural educational leadership and equity schooling.

Keywords

Equity in education, leadership, multicultural education, social justice

Various studies have contributed to the link between educational equity and students' diversity with outcomes being more concerning than comforting (OECD, 2012; Rochex, 2010, 2011; Sanches & Dias, 2013). As an area of study, models of leadership have surfaced in managerial and educational literature. Bass's (1990) transformational leadership model portrayed the leader as a visionary with a mission, who inspires through self-esteem trust and respect. Other researchers (Blase & Blase, 2004) focused on relationship building with teachers as the key determinant towards positive students' academic outcomes while Sergiovanni (2007) believes that leadership

Corresponding author:
Brian Vassallo, 143, Villambrosa Street, Hamrun, HMR1124, Malta, Europe.
Email: brianvassallo7671@gmail.com

occurs in a context of shared relationships and hence leaders need to see schools as fertile grounds for the strengthening of moral principles, shaped by shared beliefs and strong social relations. Situational leadership (Hersey, 1985) places emphasis on the interaction between the needs of the organisation and the needs of the leader and followers working within the organisation whilst insisting on competency and commitment.

More recently however, researchers (Capper & Young, 2014; Gaetane et al., 2009; Turhan, 2010; McKinney & Lowenhaupt, 2013; Moral et al., 2020) have strongly advocated for leadership for social justice as an innovative approach to addressing diversity challenges both on a national and international educational landscape. These scholars argue in favour of adding multiple perspectives and equity-based leadership approaches to the already established leadership practices do that educational leaders would be in a position to transform leadership into an inclusive process embracing students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012; Tooms & Boske, 2010). Studies linking Educational Leadership and Multicultural Education with and emphasis in equity schooling are rather scare. There is a need for more research to establish the supporting structures necessary to forge links between the different kinds of leadership practices and disparities in educational entitlement in classroom settings.

The study took place in Malta, a small island in the Mediterranean with a population just surpassing the half-a-million mark, and which has been experiencing a surge in its foreign population and, in particular, its student population for at least the past 15 years. The increase in student diversity, mostly the result of migration (regular or irregular), has raised concerns among Maltese educators, notably school leaders. The learning outcomes framework (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2015) recognises this reality and included 'education for diversity' as a central theme 'lor learning and assessment throughout the years of compulsory schooling' (p. 1). It also added that the inclusion of multiple viewpoints in learning environments stimulates cooperative learning in multicultural environments, the understanding of global issues and the need for living together in an increasingly globalised world.

This study aims to provide a much-needed space in leadership discourse among in-service and aspiring leaders, researchers of educational leadership, policy makers, community leaders and stakeholders to consider multiple perspectives which enriches the noble activity of school leadership. The author intends to link educational leadership with multicultural education so that the current and impending needs of multicultural learners, families and communities are met. Finally, this study serves to bridge multiculturalism and educational leadership theory to practice. In this way, it provides scholarship to multiple perspectives in the study of educational leadership as a vehicle for innovative solutions to inequity and multicultural issues in education.

Literature review

Multiculturalism and multicultural education

Proponents of multiculturalism concur that the core elements of multicultural education include prejudice reduction and discrimination against oppressed minority groups whilst working towards equity and social justice for all society members thus ensuring balances in power distribution (Banks, 2008; Sleeter, 1996; Sleeter & Grant, 2003; Vassallo, 2016a, 2016b). Therefore, multicultural education is perceived as a tool to engage marginalised, disadvantaged and segregated groups, moving away from philosophies supporting the comfortableness of mainstream hegemony. Multicultural education has rarely been related to educational leadership in scholarly literature (McGee Banks, 2001, 2007; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012; Vassallo, 2020).

Critical multiculturalism is an extension of multicultural education and stresses the need for empathy and participation in a pluricultural society within a context of harmony and peace. Critical multiculturalism promotes an appreciation of diversity and the provision of tools for leaders, teachers, policy makers and students with a strong knowledge base to mitigate against imbalances in power, access to education, prejudice, discrimination and hate speech (Gorski & Dalton, 2019). The connection between power, critical reflection and transformation are essential ingredients in multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010).

The Maltese National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012) recognises the principle of diversity and stresses that Malta's growing cultural diversity is the result of long-rooted values together with the rich history and traditions of its people. It acknowledges and respects individual differences of age, gender, sexual orientation, beliefs, personal development, socio-cultural background, geographical location and ethnicity. It strongly affirms that all children can learn, grow and experience success if they are in an environment where diversity is respected and where policies and practices safeguard the individual learning needs within that community.

Culturally relevant leadership. Ladson-Billings (2014) suggests that culturally responsive leadership is pivotal towards achieving equity while supporting teaching practices that include culture as a means to scaffold teaching and empowering students. This view echoes the principles of multicultural education as it makes a strong case for innovation, activism and empowerment towards equitable educational reforms, thus forging collaborative partnerships with community organisations (Khalifa, 2012).

Critical race theory. Critical Race Theory (henceforward CRT) is essential to formulate useful and elaborate critiques of a system of oppression that fails to explore the contemporary constructions and manifestations of race in our society and the pervasive effect these invisible mechanisms have on persistent issues pervading spaces in schools.

Banks and Banks (2009) argue that one cannot promote a culturally responsive pedagogy if the curriculum itself overlooks its necessity, that is colour blindness. Yosso (2002) argues in favour of a Critical Race Curriculum that promotes a new approach to understanding curricular structures, processes and discourses, inspired by Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT acknowledges the centrality and intersecting roles of racism, sexism, classism, inequities, power imbalances and other forms of subordination.

It challenges dominant social structures and cultural assumptions regarding traditions, intelligence, linguistic competence and meritocracy. CRT sheds light to policy makers towards articulating goals of social justice whilst developing critical discourses through counter narratives, storytelling, chronicles, newspaper articles, historical landmarks, scenarios, fables, folktales and biographies that emanate from lived experiences of students from diverse cultures. Hence, CRT utilises interdisciplinary methods of historical and modern-day analysis to forge linkages between educational experiences and societal inequality.

CRT delves deeply into teacher subjectivity and explores ways that motivate them to engage in issues related to cultural diversity and new pedagogical approaches. It argues that teacher attitudes are the microcosm of society which mimic larger problematic ideologies such as colour blindness, meritocracy and postracialism. Research conducted by Ladson-Billings (2009), reminds us that teachers are most effective when they teach in ways that are culturally relevant to all students. Teacher subjectivities are crucial to student learning. Teachers adamant at maintaining monolithic subjectivities run the chance of promoting majoritarian narratives that isolate particular students or

student groups (Matias & Liou, 2014). Moreover, a CRT perspective situates school funding inequity as a successful attempt towards normalisation of inequity, subjugation of marginalised groups and oppression of students who do not belong to mainstream Maltese culture.

Ladson-Billings (2005) stresses that Critical Race scholarship should be more engaged with self-dialogue and advocates for deeper dialogical process aimed at developing an understanding of how CRT can be applied to presenting situations. Haney-López (2014) warn us that racism has evolved and that although overt displays of racism are generally not tolerated, racism and racist attitudes still persist and racists still continue to craft their skill. Racism is more than the intentional behaviour. It mutates and multiplies, creating a range of racisms. It camouflages in the form of colour blindness, hides behind fragmented moral principles and laudably envisions a perfect world in which race is no longer a 'buzz word' but irrelevant as to how we perceive and relate to each other- inducing us to adopt strategies that forbid us from recognising and talking about it (Haney-López, 2014).

Methodology. This study is based on written narratives from 10 school leaders, 8 women and 2 men, who have been in a leadership position for at least 4 years. The design and the analysis of the study is inspired by the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954). The technique involves delving into particular events that illustrate specific features of a behaviours, styles or approach. Flanagan (1954) defined the critical incident technique as:

> a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behaviour in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles. . . . By an incident is meant any specifiable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical the incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where the consequences are sufficiently definitive to leave little doubt concerning its effects (p. 327).

The Critical Incident Technique involves the provision of a narrative of an activity with a predetermined set of aims and objectives. The general aim of the activity would be to answer two questions: (1) what is the objective of the activity and (2) what is the person expected to accomplish during the activity? (Butterfield et al., 2005).

A critical incident is a self-generated written narrative that has a social critique (Bruster & Peterson, 2013; Tripp, 2012). This means that school leaders and not the researcher determine the activities, events, actions and behaviours that are considered 'critical' and then uses these events to analyse assumptions. Critical incidents are produced by the lens through which school leaders look at a situation and the interpretation they give to that event. An incident becomes critical when a value judgment is placed and theinferences surrounding that judgement (Tripp, 2012).

The school leaders were asked to write or narrate an incident which had a particular mark or influence in their profession, as they sought to fulfil their role of a multicultural school leader. Through skilful questioning the school leader was asked to explain the significance of the critical incident and identify the core values that made the incident worth mentioning. By critically reflecting on the incident, cognitive and behavioural changes supporting equity and justice are proposed based on what was learned from the critical reflection. The narration of events served as a springboard to spur the participant towards reflection and interpretation, culminating in a number of actions and reactions. The prevalent structure of narration included stating the aim of the activity, contextualising the critical incident and highlighting the relevance and the extent of which the aim of the activity has actually been reached, and was critical to their conceptualisation of multicultural education.

Then data was collected by grouping together identified critical incidents into overarching areas that have practical utility in light of the aim of the study. Data was then interpreted and evaluated, also identifying its biases and limitations. The advantage of the Critical Incidence Technique is that it exposes potholes within existing systems and captures incidents occurring over a very long timeframe. It captured data which made an impact on the participants, which proved intriguing, uncommon, rare in nature and recalled after a period of reflection. Then, the school leaders were asked to reflect on their narrative by answering two research questions which would help the researcher identify school leaders' characteristics as the progress through their quest for more just and equitable schooling.

Research questions

As a school leader, how does your cultural make-up (race, class, socio-economic background, religion, values, gender and language) affects your leadership style as you seek to effectively implement school activities? After undergoing an evaluation process, what modifications/ approaches/considerations do you envisage to ensure the proliferation of justice and equity in your school?

The way data was organised around the research questions provided more information about critical leadership and how critical multiculturalism and educational leadership towards social justice manifested in the initiatives taken by the school leaders. Participants were also able to articulate and communicate effectively the strategies they enacted to effectively fulfil the role of leadership for social justice and equity in the face of diversity.

Data analysis. Data analysis aimed at building patterns and categories by organising the data into increasingly more abstract units of information, with the focus on participants' perspectives, their meanings and their subjective views (Creswell, 2007). It kept focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the issue at stake and not the meaning attached to the research by the researcher.

Participants and data collection

Participants were purposefully sampled on the bases of having at least 4 years of practise as educational leaders in schools composed of representing a range of races, ethnicities, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Besides experience, school leaders were also selected on the bases of their self-professed practices of leadership that promoted social justice and educational equity. All participants have been anonymised in this report, and their descriptions of a critical incident are presented in the Appendix.

Throughout the process of data collection, matrices were created to categorise, sort, store and retrieve multiple sources of evidence for ongoing analysis. Folders were created for each participant and data was analysed in the light of reviewed literature. Data were analysed in two phases. The first was within-case analysis that relied on the theoretical propositions for the study based on literature reviewed.

For each individual case at least one written document by the participant and follow up interview data were studied to identify patterns in the data that suggested evidence for Multicultural Educational Leadership Characteristics namely: *Critical Multicultural Education*, *Transformative Leadership* and *Equity Schooling Perspectives.* Narratives were then organised as they related to the research questions, which led to an examination of comparative data identifying similarities and differences between participants. Follow-up interviews, phone calls or e-mails were conducted if narratives needed further explanations and clarity, hence data was rechecked with participants.

Results

Results from conceptual analysis, grounded in the literature frames, indicate that within-cases, participants in the study individually practiced critical multicultural education but felt unsupported and lacked direction as to what extent they were effective in reaching the aims behind their initiatives. The evidence points towards unique and tailormade models of Critical Educational Leadership focusing on enacting social justice and educational equity.

There were numerous excerpts which highlighted insightful discourses about inequities and access to education issues. The major common characteristics portrayed by school leaders is the use of group consensus when meeting with educational stakeholders. This illustrates the cognizance of school leaders towards mitigating against stereotyping and active engagement in academic discourse (Gorski & Dalton, 2019). Others mentioned *leading by example* as an important characteristic which inspires the development of trust and respect (Versland et al., 2017).

Leadership characteristic 1: Engagement in critical conversations on multicultural education

Elizia's critical narrative reflects the inherent urge of school leaders to liberally *engage in critical conversations* with community leaders about topics which in Maltese culture are still considered as controversial or of heightened emotionality (homosexuality, racism, gender normativity and cultural disparities). Through her written narrative, Elizia showed that critical discourses tapping on the reaching out of families and students coming from different cultures took place in everyday interactions with school staff. As children interact with adults, places and things belonging to the family, the immediate community and beyond, they widen their horizons and develop the new attitudes, skills and knowledge they need to become responsible and effective citizens. Discourses also revolved around the need for increased knowledge and heightened multicultural awareness. Her narrative voiced the barriers she encountered, being 'supported by only half of the teaching staff' and that critical discussions about race are 'difficult and uncomfortable. . .but desperately needed'. This shows an unprecedented need to develop critical thinking skills, perspective taking and meaningful dialogue surrounding own biases, in a quest to engender change within our educators, parents, students, the whole educational system and society.

Leadership characteristic 2: Adopts a transformational leadership style

School leaders that view leadership from a transformative lens position themselves to develop, implement and support a multicultural education school culture, characterised by values of social justice, critical pedagogy and empowerment which goes 'beyond ethnic studies or the social studies' (Banks, 2006). Leaders adopting a transformative approach to leadership are concerned with modifying the educational environment to better reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity within their school and community. This also entices students to learn and embrace new content that traditionally belongs to other cultures and to develop a critical mind towards nurturing school environments.

Ralf adopted a transformational leadership style based on challenging the mainstream discourse in his school. He constantly provided 'food for thought' by challenging his teachers to reflect on how false perceptions and misinformation about individuals or cultural groups might be damaging. This school leader believed in the use dialogue as a leadership strategy which metamorphosises into discourses hovering around Critical Race theory, as can be captured from his interwoven narrative with educational leadership practice.

According to the data analysed, every critical leader who participated in this inquiry *used the CRT lens* to look into daily critical issues from a multiple perspective. This lens involved the notion of considering race as the primary source for building effective and meaningful communication with students, thus advocating for heightened awareness of towards understanding the reality of racism. In this manner, school leaders used CRT theory as a tool to for effective decision making and the enactment of social justice and equity.

Clara, is a school leader who made it a personal mission to embrace all students irrespective of orientation, effectively linking marginalisation with barriers to education access. Clara describes her leadership style as a 'new normal' focusing her efforts towards addressing and eliminating forms of oppression, taking her leadership skills to 'a higher level of morality and motivation' (Burns, 1978, p.20).

Leadership characteristic 3: Practices democratic leadership and equity schooling

Written narratives reveal that participants in this study strove to adopt a transparent leadership style thus adhering to the values of democratic leadership. They worked hard towards consensus building by holding constant meetings both an individual and on a group basis. They were generous in sharing their leadership practices and for other leaders to use in employing this strategy.

Petra, another school leader, stated:

> I strongly believe that the infusion of other cultures is a blessing and not a burden. . .we can all benefit from a heterogenous mix of cultures in schools. What I regularly transmit to teachers is the need to adjust methods of teaching since all students are different, all cultures are different and no scholastic year is identical to another one. The mission I embarked on is to help the school community understand that Multicultural education is not only about race but entails an encompassing examination of the whole cultural baggage of the child, his/her family structure, upbringing, whether they [children] come from war-torn countries or other experiences which shape their cultural dispositions.

Petra also stresses emphatically:

> When I'm taking a heavy decision concerning educational equity. . . I summon the whole school, the parents and the wider community. I take out a piece of paper, jotting down ideas. . . then I divide it in half and list the pros and cons and later explain how the decision was taken. Converging interests, finding consensus and keeping the interests of disadvantaged groups in the forefront is difficult. . . it takes a lot of time and effort but it enables the *whole* (her accentuation) school to move forward. The solution needs to benefit those who would stand to lose, if decision was taken otherwise.

This conforms with literature on the application of a CRT since it places the Head of School in different vantage points, the result being a panoramic effect on decision making. For this Head of School manifests as support of culturally, linguistically and positionally different groups through consensus building to identify shared goals towards social justice and equity for the largest number of students (Gooden, 2012).

Johnny, another school leader, spoke of the ways in which some students from different cultural backgrounds are inadvertently pushed out of mainstream curriculum into specific learning groups. He questioned how is it that we speak about inclusion when our national curriculum is still prescriptive thus, 'silencing them from expressing themselves in their own language'. He relates:

> In one of the in-school training sessions I invited my staff for a discussion on colour blindness. As a Senior Management Team, we believed that the staff were totally 'blind' towards issues of racism and were captivated in a process of creating "unnatural neutral constructs" based on sameness thus negating students' uniqueness. Most of the staff were totally unaware of the dangers of colour-blind pedagogy processes and policies.

Leadership characteristic 4: Mitigates against stereotyping

Participants were particularly conscious of stereotype threat or fulfilling negative stereotypes associated with their perceived racial, ethnic or linguistic group as was indicated in the data analysed. Stereotype threat has negative effects on students' achievement (Appel, 2015; Hartley & Sutton, 2013). The school leaders interviewed worked hard to create an identity-safe classroom. They developed programmes which developed every student's identity, acknowledging and valuing his/her characteristics, becoming aware of their cultural affinities and striving to heighten their self-esteem. The interventions were instrumental in assisting students to interpret their environment, thereby removing negative effects and raising their participation in the classrooms.

Some participants said that they worked hard to dispel negative stereotypes for groups with whom they identified. Rachel, for example, was preoccupied with others' perceptions of her leadership practices. For Rachel this characteristic resulted in her being more conscientious in her leadership practice. She was adamant that her knowledge of this phenomenon kept 'her head in the game'.

Ella in one of her many contributions emphasised that educators in her school need more research-based information on the most underrepresented groups. This practice is also found in the research findings of Hitt and Tucker (2015), Ramirez (2010) and Feuer et al. (2013). In fact, she ensured that her staff is aware of basic research findings informing scholarship about multicultural education and spoke passionately about the importance of capitalising upon the rich baggage brought in school by diverse cultural groups. This aspect formed the fabric upon which the school leader inculcated in her staff the importance of storytelling as a crucial aspect of Culturally responsive pedagogy. She strongly believed in serving as a role model by taking various opportunities and listening attentively to stories from different cultures.

Leadership characteristic 5: Fostering an inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome

During the interviews, participants expressed the need to honour all members within the teaching and learning community (e.g. staff, parents, community members and other stakeholders). The leaders sought out and wanted to include voices and perspectives of traditionally silenced groups and individuals. Maria felt responsible for providing educational opportunities to all her students and their families. She explains:

> I felt that if cultural dominance and language disparities are the cause for parents and students not feeling welcome in my school, then it is my responsibility to work against it and that is why I urged the counselling professionals within my college to examine ways into how can we increase parental involvement. Together with the Senior Management Team of the School we embarked on a set of activities which aimed to reach parents physically, psychologically and emotionally, effectively linking parental expectations with school development planning. It is one thing having parents during Christmas events or book fairs and it's another thing propelling them to take part in important school decisions.

In his narratives she explained how school community members who were perceived as having a nonchalant attitude were the ones who were specifically approached for advice and direction. Inclusionary leadership practices kindled a renewed sense of community ownership and ventured into unexplored adaptive spaces within the learning institution. Furthermore, as can be found in research undertaken by Auerbach (2012), Maria relied heavily on leadership input from members of the community, effectively communicated the ethical inclusion of every member of the community and further proposed strategies for bringing them in. Elizia, Clara and Johnny equated ethical inclusion with their strong catholic beliefs, mirroring Burns' (1978) transformational approach

to leadership whereby 'leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morality and motivation' (p. 411, also coupled with strong elements of situational and contingent leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Kezar, 2008; Nahavandi, 2006).

Leadership characteristic 6: Leading by example

As indicated in the data analysed, individuals included in this study adopted a *leading by example* attitude as a tool to mitigate against ensuing challenges of fairness and equality. In his narrative, Wendy reflects on how she attends professional training which have multicultural education as their main theme and takes the opportunity to 'unearth' critical issues with colleagues and other policy makers. Delving deeply into the written narratives reveals a strong sense of *reaching out* that these leaders profess to support marginalised communities with whom they strongly identify, feeling a growing sense of responsibility while doing so. This mirrors transformative leadership practices (Bass, 1970, 1990; Burns, 2004) as a way of transforming social reforms.

Leadership characteristic 7: Cultivating trust

According to data analysed in this study, participants effectively communicated the need to win trust when working with stakeholders from mainstream culture, but were also effective at reaching out to those who did share an affinity towards issues related to educational equity (Robinson, 2011). In her narrative, Lara expressed her concerns at particular instances during supervision of activities where she experienced 'psychological threat' in the form of lack of trust by some of her colleagues. She then recounts her seemingly unsurmountable difficulties to regain lost trust whilst keeping her unwavering commitment towards the principles of multicultural education and social justice. This echoes research from Santamaría & Santamaría (2012) who stressed the necessity for school leaders to learn to trust their instincts when tapping into the richness of cultural and linguistic identities.

Rachel, a very experienced school leader, depicted the notion of trust as a matter of leading beyond or outside of oneself. She wrote long narratives on how she goes out of her way in her leadership efforts to include different perspectives during her work at school. She envisages trust in terms of loyalty and care and feels responsible for taking care of the tasks she needs to complete. Service is the word she stressed most often, perceiving it as the spiritual force which keeps her going. The importance of building trust and respect were echoed in the voices of school leaders who called them 'the fundamentals before embarking in any project related to social justice'.

Consensus decision making, including community leaders, involving parents in decision making processes are indeed concomitant with the principles of democratic leadership for social justice. By providing leadership through a critical lens perspective and celebrating the positive attributes that differing identities bring about, the leaders in this study demonstrated innovative ways in which they applied the principles of multicultural education. Though we can say that the school leaders participating in the study practiced various forms of leadership, the practice through a critical lens places added value to the study.

Conclusions, implications and recommendations

The study looked into ordinary practices of proactive educational leaders who set about transforming theory into practice and striving to find appropriate solutions for challenges and limitations posed by increasing diversity in Maltese schools. Data collected indicate that some Maltese educational leaders have direct experiences with perceived racism and are capable of utilising it towards

nurturing interest and effectiveness in the field of educational leadership. These experiences are connected with issues on multiculturalism in schooling and how this is practiced to have a positive ripple effect on equity and just processes.

Findings suggest that the Critical Incident Method of inquiry is ideal to elicit experiences which had a profound and lasting impact on school leaders in their quest for a heightened recognition of social justice in their leadership practice. The educational leaders featured in this study demonstrate ways in which positive identity traits associated with race, ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic and gender diversity are linked with leadership for social justice and education equity. Each school leader in the study shared a deep sentiment of responsibility to enact leadership for social justice and educational equity by scaffolding on the multicultural attributes. This study provides emerging evidence that leadership strategies vary as context varies (Vassallo, 2016a) and reflecting critically on educational experiences within each particular school, determines and necessitates unique leadership skill sets which are crucial in contemporary debates in education. The research findings presented in this study connect educational leadership theory with multicultural and social justice education and provides a platform for extending the debate on inequality in education.

It is imperative that the school community remains committed to social justice, build particular relations with individuals and communities in need and invest planning efforts in children who, for different reasons, become disengaged from the schooling process paving the way for increasing learned helplessness and consequently ending up lacking the necessary skills. Promoting the fundamental values of love, respect, dignity, solidarity, inclusion, justice, democracy, commitment and shared responsibility constitute the linchpins for improved community standards.

In a Maltese society that is becoming increasingly multicultural, it is vital for our educational system to provide the optimum environment which enables students to flourish and develop increased cooperation and solidarity among cultures. Barriers which hinder such processes should be clearly addressed in school development planning sessions which focus on making learning accessible to all irrespective of gender, religion, race, linguistic or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Leading multicultural schools implies acting respectfully, sensitively and sensibly towards many differences such as gender, language, religion, race and ethnic origin. By cultivating an attitude of acceptance and making use of such diversity of individuals to fulfil the vision of the school, school leaders would be able 'glue' stakeholders in harmony, thanks to an impartial and fair management mentality. Schools must value diversity more highly and hone its richness to ensure effectiveness and to heighten the learning abilities of students.

In today's globalised world, effective educational systems must address global needs and aim to develop a globally competent citizenry. Our hyperconnected world is placing increasing demands on schools to hone critical and creative thinking abilities to solve complex situations arising from prejudices, xenophobia and racism and racialisation. Equipping our school leaders with resources to cultivate the competences, and develop the characteristics explored above, will equip them to prepare students, across all nations, for a world that is equally accessible to all.

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Appendix

Critical incidents

Elizia. What I would like to recount is a conversation I had with a [stakeholder] about the need strengthen teacher knowledge of gay, lesbian and bisexual and trans students. I remember I spoke about my beliefs about being truly multicultural in all the work I do at school. Believing in multicultural education is an affirmation that you truly exist, that your existence is worthwhile irrespective of from where you come and that is why I insist on the need to heighten our knowledge on these issues. The person in front of me argued that by speaking about LGBTIQ issues, one would be directing children to act against their religion and this will cause an internal crises in one's own personal conscience. I retorted that this argument is used by those who have hidden agendas and sow divisions and this acts against the very principles of multicultural education and is direct opposition to anything which is fair and just.

Ralf. I can safely recall a documentary me and my fellow actors were filming. We were trying to illustrate the effect of popular culture in shaping the perceptions of the general public. We took on various roles, and actually acted [mimed], cultural stereotypes and we could feel the tendency of onlookers to marginalise us and to see us in such limited and distorted light. We tried to bring out the influence that the entertainment industry and the media have in perpetuating negative cultural stereotypes, especially about particular racial groups. The consistency displayed across the many different types of media reinforces existing stereotypes and makes them more vivid in our minds. For example, while there are many media images of black people associated with criminality, few display positive depictions of successful sports men and women. The filming I was speaking about before has had such an effect on me, that I shared with the staff at school so that a critical discussion is developed and hopefully brings to the surface many such issues.

Clara. An incident I recall was when an ex-student from our school voiced out 'I needed you [senior management team] to stand up for me when I needed most. The agony I suffered while being bullied because of my sexual orientation stuck me worse than I could possibly handle. Because of this I suffered educationally and emotionally'. Since then, I made it a personal mission to work against marginalisation of students with different sexual orientation. When you work against all forms of oppression, you are valuing the principles of inclusion. And multicultural education and take your leadership skills to a 'new normal'.

Petra (excerpt 1)

Yes, I can remember a critical incident concerning equality. I remember a parent calling school because her child was in detention room, the previous day. The mother said that her son was not allowed to attend any classes simply because he did not have on his school uniform. The 'imposition' was also extended during break-time. I came to know that the mother did phone the school to explain that she did not have the money to buy it because she was a migrant just arriving to Malta, after a perilous trip on sea, and needed help to get used to schooling in Malta. I felt ashamed that rules were applied across the board without any consideration of the context and state that child and his family were in. I was determined to change the proceedings, ok. . . keeping the rules about wearing the school uniform but without denying him the right for an equitable education. And that is what I did! Within 2 weeks I summoned the whole school together with stakeholders and explained the situation. Then, it was all set, (1) child in class and (2) procedures underway for the procurement of a winter and summer uniform.

When I'm taking a heavy decision concerning educational equity. . .I summon the whole school, the parents and the wider community. I take out a piece of paper, jotting down ideas. . . then I divide it in half and list the pros and cons and later explain how the decision was taken. Converging interests, finding consensus and keeping the interests of disadvantaged groups in the forefront is difficult. . . it takes a lot of time and effort but it enables the *whole* (her accentuation) school to move forward. The solution needs to benefit those who would stand to lose, if decision was taken otherwise.

Petra (excerpt 2)

I strongly believe that the infusion of other cultures is a blessing and not a burden. . .we can all benefit from a heterogenous mix of cultures in schools. What I regularly transmit to teachers is the need to adjust methods of teaching since all students are different, all cultures are different and no scholastic year is identical to another one. The mission I embarked on is to help the school community understand that Multicultural education is not only about race but entails an encompassing examination of the whole cultural baggage of the child, his/her family structure, upbringing, whether they [children] come from war-torn countries or other experiences which shape their cultural dispositions.

Lara. An incident I remember is when I wanted to recruit in my school a teacher of colour in our school to teach English Langauge. Teachers, though not overtly opposed were, in the main, objecting to the idea. They cited cultural discrepancies as the main reason of concern, but I was resolute not to succumb to psychological threat. I was determined to support particular groups of students by helping them identify with particular teachers as I believed this would have enhanced their self-confidence and consequently their academic performance. I must also say, from feedback received that I was right in my presuppositions.

Rachel. I remember the first time that I took over the role of School Leader. As I prepared to address the first meeting with the staff, I noticed my assistant head placing A3 paper in front of my door. As I went out to see what they were time-sheets for teachers. I also realised that teachers were required to sign in and sign out every time sheets for teachers. Later, I got to know that the previous school leader required these timesheets to control teachers coming in and out, even during the day. I consulted with the staff and removed the time sheets. The trust I gained from teachers was incredible and I told the staff. Trust is mutual. Remove trust and we will all crumble. Remember that we are here to give an excellent service to children and their parents, because they trust us. I treat you as professionals and you repay the trust . . . one of them is being punctual! From then on. No teacher or learning support educator reported late for school.

Johnny. I can relate an experience when in one of the in-school training sessions I invited my staff for a discussion on colour blindness. As a Senior Management Team, we believed that the staff were totally 'blind' towards issues of racism and were captivated in a process of creating 'unnatural neutral constructs' based on sameness thus negating students' uniqueness. Most of the staff were totally unaware of the dangers of colour-blind pedagogy processes and policies.

Ella. In yet another particular occasion, I recall somebody saying 'What does culture have to do with learning?' And answer was simple 'Culture is everything'. It is through culture that we encode

information to turn everyday experiences into meaningful events. If we want to develop leaners into independent higher order thinkers, we need to understand how the brain connects with students' prior knowledge and experiences with what we want to teach them next. This is what I constantly stress with the staff, here.

Wendy. An instant I particularly remember was when I confronted my staff with parallels from the bible and multicultural education. Though the staff purports its catholic adherences, I strongly believe that there are discrepancies between what the bible teaches and the practice of educational processes in schools. Jesus teaches us that we are to meet people's needs and to love those that are side-lined and on the brink of society? And then a whole avalanche of arguments starts. Doesn't it mean including those that have been excluded? For me, multicultural education was never new. Teaching and learning has always culturally biased. The issue is in our schools we have typically focused on one culture. Culturally responsive teaching calls us to consider more than one culture since our students come from varied cultural backgrounds.

Maria. I set about investigating why certain parents always fail to turn up for activities that the school organises. I obviously had an inkling that cultural dominance and language disparities are the main reasons. I felt that if cultural dominance and language disparities are the cause for parents and students not feeling welcome in my school, then it is my responsibility to work against it and that is why I urged the counselling professionals within my college to examine ways into how can we increase parental involvement. Together with the Senior Management Team of the School we embarked on a set of activities which aimed to reach parents physically, psychologically and emotionally, effectively linking parental expectations with school development planning. It is one thing having parents during Christmas events or book fairs and it's another thing propelling them to take part in important school decisions.