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What Do You Believe? School Leaders and an Ideology of Achievement

by

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B.A. May 2010, Old Dominion University
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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN EDUCATION WITH A CONCENTRATION IN
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND FOUNDATIONS

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE? SCHOOL LEADERS AND AN IDEOLOGY OF ACHIEVEMENT

Andrew T. Lloyd
Old Dominion University, 2017
Director: Dr. Steve Myran

Beliefs about achievement impact the educational experiences of students. The mainstream ideology of achievement espouses that anyone can be successful as long as they put forth effort and work hard. This belief fails to account for systemic barriers that have limited historically marginalized groups of people from achieving. Research has focused on the beliefs of teachers with scant research done on the beliefs of school leaders. This study focused on what school leaders believe about achievement and how it impacts their daily practice. In addition, the ideologies of the school leaders were compared and contrasted with an ideology rooted in social justice. The goal of this study was to gain insight into what school leaders believe about achievement and add to the literature about achievement ideologies and school leaders. This study utilized a qualitative method rooted in grounded theory. The triangulated protocol used interviews and questionnaires to guide the data collection process. Participants' beliefs about achievement, challenges to achievement, their impact on achievement, and how these beliefs impact their daily practice were revealed. The shared experiences of secondary urban school leaders provided insight into what school leaders believe about achievement, how they do and do not operate with an ideology rooted in social justice, and how these beliefs guide their praxis.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of grandfather, Jim Lloyd. Thanks for all the laughs and support, Old Man. I also want to dedicate this to Little Dog, you went through almost this whole process with me, and I am eternally thankful for your companionship.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“If you tremble with indignation at every injustice then you are a comrade of mine.” –

Che Guevarra

The “grammar of schooling”, or the structures under which schools operate, has remained remarkably stable over the decades (Tyack & Tobin, 1993, p. 454). Stable structures have created a system in the United States that does not look different from decades past. Many schools still follow the factory-like model of kids in a classroom being talked at by a teacher and rotating through different classrooms (Morgan, 2007). While the style and format of teaching has not changed, the students sitting in classrooms have. Not only have times changed due to technology and other advances, but the make-up of students is also different. While this diversity is represented at the racial level, the cognitive ability of students is not determined by their racial identity. A once heterogeneous mix of students that were predominately White, today’s schools are very diverse (Cooper, 2009; Furman, 2012). Additionally, “educators, policymakers, and indeed, the general public are increasingly aware that despite numerous well-intentioned restructuring, reform, and curricular efforts, many children who are in some way different from the previously dominant and traditionally most successful White, middle-class children are not achieving school success” (Shields, 2004, p. 111). This study explored the beliefs of achievement of school leaders that serve in a minority dominant school district.

This study is divided into five chapters, beginning with the introduction of the topic, statement of the problem, and the purpose of this study. In the second chapter, literature relating to the topic is reviewed. The ideas of critical race theory, critical consciousness, and the mainstream ideology of achievement are connected to set up the need for this study. Chapter

three outlines the design of the study, the interview protocol, and how the data were collected and analyzed. Chapter four is a presentation of the findings and key themes, and chapter five is a discussion of the findings and outlines future research.

In discussions about student achievement, the gap among different student groups must first be addressed and understood. The achievement gap is defined as the difference in academic outcomes among demographic subgroups (Wenglinsky, 2004). The achievement gap between White students and students of color is very large (Adams, Robelen, & Shah, 2012; McKown & Weinstein, 2008). White students, on average, outscore their Latino counterparts by more than 20 points and their Black counterparts by 26 points or more on standardized mathematics and reading examinations at the secondary level (Davis et al., 2015). These trends are also seen on SAT scores where White students outscore Latino students by 200 points and Black students by 300 points (Davis et al., 2015). Along with the achievement gap, there is a disproportionality of discipline of students of color, in particular Black males. Whether it is not understanding the cultural differences of their students (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011) or having low expectations of their students (Davis et al., 2015; McKown & Weinstein, 2008), the results have damaging effects on students of color that keep the gap from closing.

Researchers have begun asking why this is the case, and more specifically what are the perceptions of schooling that are limiting the success of all students? School leaders were educated under traditional systems that emphasized the values and norms of the popular culture. Some of these values and norms have created the highly held ideology of achievement that argues that anyone can achieve through hard work. This ideology of achievement that is accepted by the majority within the United States, has been studied with teachers and their beliefs about students, but has not been studied within school leaders. Looking at the beliefs of

achievement ties in closely to social justice in how diverse student populations are receiving education.

In response to the achievement gap and needs of students in public schools, the fight for equity has risen to the forefront of many scholars and activists. Social justice has been a popular concept in the education world over the last few years (Furman, 2012; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Stovall, 2004). Scholars have taken on the task of identifying issues that are limiting the access and achievement for students of color in schools (Santamaría, 2014). Social justice leadership is defined as “the leadership needed to close the access, opportunity, and achievement gaps” (Theoharis, 2009, p. 1). Committing to social justice leadership requires leaders to not only identify systemic issues, but seek to move beyond the discussion and bring about change (Capper, 2015; Miller & Martin, 2015). As schools have worked to assimilate students that are culturally and linguistically diverse, social justice leadership looks to create an equitable environment that gives all students access to educational opportunities (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006).

Moving beyond the idea of access, scholars are dedicated to research to help students of color understand that their racial identity and academic achievement are not separate, but occur at the same time (Carter, 2009). Accepted values and norms guide how people see and understand the world. These beliefs also guide how people view achievement and what it takes to be successful. The mainstream ideology of achievement espouses hard work and motivation as the keys to success. While these components are valid, the mainstream ideology fails to account for systemic barriers that limit students’ access to education and achievement and instead works to assimilate students of color in the dominant culture (Carter, 2009).

While people are aware of the disparities in education for students of color, there have

not been theories for researchers to use to study these issues specifically. Developing a theory and lens to identify and analyze issues related to race in education was necessary. Critical race theory, developed from critical legal studies, serves as both a theoretical and analytic lens in studying education (Carter, 2009; Davis et al., 2015; DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011).

Utilizing six key tenets, critical race theory identifies and addresses systemic issues that limit the access and achievement of students of color in schools. These key tenets which are explained in further detail in chapter two are counter storytelling, permanence of racism, intersectionality, critique of liberalism, Whiteness as property, and interest convergence (Carter, 2009; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Stovall, 2004). This theory works with an activist mindset to move beyond identification and toward action that will improve the educational experiences of students of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). While critical race theory addresses these issues, school leaders operating with a social justice mindset begin to understand and develop a critical consciousness.

A developed critical consciousness moves beyond the tendency to personalize perceptions which situates the ideas closer to one's experiences and ideologies (Dantley, Beachum, & McCray, 2008). Ultimately, it is the "spirit of recognition and affirmation of group differences, along with the interrogation of structure and the primacy of embracing a rigorous curiosity through notions of unfinishedness, that inform our framework for leadership practice" (Dantley et al., 2008, p. 128). The development of a critical consciousness impacts not only a leader's perceptions of the world, but also guides his praxis as a school leader, and his development of his achievement ideology.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the achievement ideologies of school leaders

and how they compare and contrast with an achievement ideology rooted in social justice. Furthermore, this study sought to understand how leaders conceptualize achievement, and how these conceptualizations related to a leadership critical race achievement ideology. Finally, the purpose of this study was to understand how these conceptualizations affected their practice as school leaders. A leadership critical race achievement ideology was adapted from Carter's (2008) framework initially designed for students. Figure 1 represents the framework and tenets used for this study. This framework allows leaders to develop equitable schools while helping students of color understand that achievement is a part of their racial identity and not separate. This study focused on school leaders that serve high populations of minority students. The goal of this study was to discern school leaders' achievement ideologies and how these leaders operate within these ideologies. Finally, the goal of this study was to see if these ideologies function within, similarly, or differently from a leadership critical race achievement ideology.

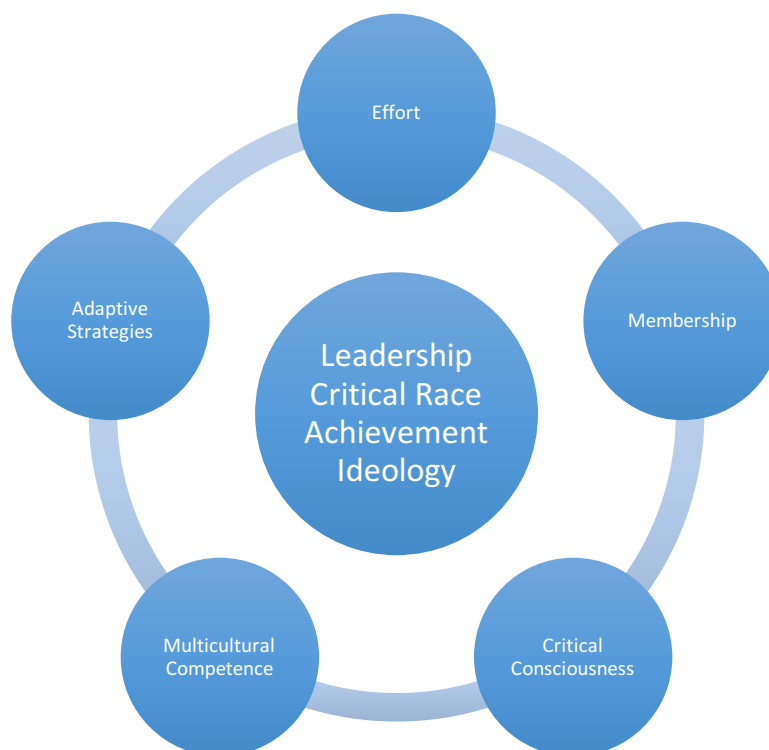


Figure 1. Leadership Critical Race Achievement Ideology framework and tenets (Carter, 2008).

This figure shows the tenets of the conceptual framework.

Statement of Research Questions

To understand what school leaders believe about achievement and how that compares and contrasts with a leadership critical race achievement ideology, this study was guided by two research questions:

1. What is the achievement ideology of a school leader?
2. How do the achievement ideologies of school leaders compare and contrast with a leadership critical race achievement ideology?

Possible Limitations

This research has limitations. First, as this study studied a specific group of school leaders it may not be easily generalizable to other schools, cities, or leaders. All participants will be selected purposefully. Furthermore, participants will come from schools that serve a high population of students of color, thus limiting generalizability to schools that have lower percentages of students of color. The researcher will make efforts to ensure participants represent a variety of backgrounds. A final limitation is that of researcher bias that will be removed as much as possible. The researcher is a White male that has worked in urban school districts and is currently an administrator at the secondary level.

Chapter II

Literature Review

In this chapter, I present a review of the literature relating to the study. The literature is pulled from topics relating to social justice, achievement ideologies, critical race theory, critical consciousness, and how these yield a leadership critical race achievement ideology. Throughout this literature review, it is important to note that the research focuses primarily on leaders that espouse a social justice agenda and beliefs and has not yet been applied to leaders that do not.

Social Justice

School leaders that seek social justice and equity are in need in today's schools (Diem & Carpenter, 2012). Moving beyond the goal to simply eliminate racism and systemic issues that impede the access and achievement for students of color, these leaders need to also empower students to achieve while maintaining a positive racial self-concept (Carter, 2008). Social justice leaders face many challenges on their journey both personally and professionally. This next section will outline the personal challenges faced by aspiring leaders as they begin to interact and challenge ideas of social justice and inequity. This challenge is important as Picower (2009) contends it is critical for leaders to "examine [their] social positionality as it intersects with those of their students" (p. 199). Aspiring leaders must abandon the ways of old and begin to operate under an ideology that will benefit the changing schools.

What is social justice leadership?

Social justice leadership is more than a mantra, it is a call to action. Theoharis (2009) states social justice leadership is "the leadership needed to close the access, opportunity, and achievement gaps" (p. 1). Oliva (2010) goes on to further posit, "social justice demands deconstructing those realities to disclose the multiple ways schools and their leadership

reproduce marginalizing and inequitable treatment of individuals because their identities are outside the celebrated dominant culture” (As cited in Miller & Martin, 2015, p. 131). Theoharis (2007) defines social justice as centered on “ideas of disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary practices” (p. 223). Similarly, Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) define social justice as “the exercise of altering these [institutional and organizational] arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions” (as cited in Theoharis, 2007, p. 223). School leaders for social justice are also described as “individuals who engage in critical analysis of conditions that have perpetuated historical inequities in schools and who work to change institutional structures and culture” (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005, p. 202). Finally, the importance for studying social justice leadership is described by Bogotch (2000) since “there are no fixed or predictable meanings of social justice prior to actually engaging in educational leadership practices” (p. 153).

Why study social justice leadership?

Schools in the United States have served as a mechanism for assimilating students that are culturally and linguistically diverse to dominant culture (Cooper, 2009). After segregation was deemed illegal and schools integrated, curricula and experiences failed to adapt to meet the needs of the diverse student populations (Brooks, 2012). Furthermore, as Cooper (2009) states, schools are “failing to recognize and affirm the knowledge, experiences, and assets of culturally diverse populations, which has contributed to the marginalization and disengagement of students and families of color in schools” (p. 698). Howard and Navarro (2016) further posit:

The ethnic and racial realities of U.S. schools today merit that a notable shift has

occurred in terms of the makeup of youth that schools are serving, where surging numbers of Latino and Asian American children in recent years have changed today's ethnic landscape, and will continue to do so in years to come (p. 254).

Schools will continue to see diverse student populations increase, thus creating a greater need to address the ways in which schools are run and the leaders placed to lead them.

Not only are schools failing to engage and respect the diversity of their students, but they are also creating and perpetuating achievement gaps through blaming external factors such as a lack of school preparedness and parental involvement and caring (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). This mentality is pivotal for schools to analyze and address as they continue to serve more diverse student populations (Brooks, 2012; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). As curricula are geared toward the dominant culture, so, too, is academic success measured in observable characteristics that reflect the dominant culture (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003). The dominant societal perceptions and norms create conflict within the Black community as many students do not wish to assimilate to the White culture (Carter, 2008). Issues created by the dominant perceptions and norms have led scholars and researchers to identify and apply new analytical lenses. Researchers feel strongly about issues of social justice and have used a variety of methods to identify, but also address injustice. Malacrida (2007) writes:

In many ways, qualitative research with vulnerable and marginalized people is akin to witnessing. One of the primary reasons that many of us engage in such research is to provide an opportunity for emancipatory knowledge production in which such people's stories are told as a way of naming hurts and outlining injustices and as a way to move toward positive social change (p. 1337).

As a way to analyze the educational system, researchers use Critical Race Theory as an

analytical lens to identify issues that impede the academic success of Black students.

Leadership preparation

Leadership development is a key component in the development of social justice leadership. First (2012) articulates, “many of today’s educational leaders operate without a reflected-on and articulated concept of justice to guide their leadership and decision making” (p. 335). Without a developed social justice concept, school leaders are not able to effectively address issues of inequality in diverse schools. While some develop a social justice perspective from their lived experiences (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011), many require a strong leadership preparation program that forces them to confront ideas of racism, privilege, and the historical subjugation of groups of people (Capper et al., 2006).

School leadership no longer fits into the same box as in years past. With changing demographics, “schools in a racially diverse society will require leaders and models of leadership that will address the racial, cultural, and ethnic makeup of the school community” (Miller & Martin, 2015). Furthermore, school leaders are called upon to fix inequities engrained within school culture, but traditional leadership preparation programs only skim the surface when addressing issues of social justice (Diem & Carpenter, 2012). The need for changing leadership preparation programs is seen in a survey conducted by Hawley and James (2010). While there was only a 30% response rate of the 62 institutions surveyed, the majority reported that issues of social justice and diversity were only taught in one class throughout the program (Diem & Carpenter, 2012). This lack of emphasis is not adequately preparing future leaders to work in diverse schools.

In order for this to happen, Brown (2006) argues “leadership preparation programs must change in a way which provides increased knowledge to improve equity and equal opportunities

for all racial and ethnic groups” (As cited in Miller & Martin, 2015, p. 129). As schools have seen changing demographics over the years and principals now face unique challenges, leadership preparation programs have a responsibility to address issues of social justice and diversity (Dantley & Green, 2015; Diem & Carpenter, 2012).

In beginning this process, Capper et al. (2006) and Diem and Carpenter (2012) posit that strong leadership preparation programs infuse ideas of social justice throughout the entirety of the program and not as stand-alone courses. Furthermore, these programs must attend to critical consciousness, knowledge, and practical skills focused on social justice (Capper et al., 2006). Skills in social justice practices provide future leaders with an understanding of social issues, the ideas necessary to be active change agents, and practical skills to carry out these ideas (Capper et al., 2006; Miller & Martin, 2015). A challenge faced by learners within these classes is the dissonance created by the challenging ideas and the accepted social order (Alexander, Schallert, & Reynolds, 2009). Ideas of White privilege, supremacy, and racism are not easily accepted, but through the direction of leadership courses with a focus on social justice, students will gain a better understanding and how to work within the system. More than just a focus on social justice, “candid discussions of oppression and discrimination are vitally important to critically reflect on [aspiring leaders’] own participation in these social systems” (Miller & Martin, 2015, p. 131). In addition, Rivera-McCutchen (2014) cautions that leadership preparation programs must be careful in their development to not inadvertently exclude others that may not fit in a narrow scope of race, class, gender, etc.

Additionally, Capper et al. (2006) posit different approaches to teach anti-racist education: the personal approach, the institutional approach, and the multiple fronts approach. All three of these approaches seek different aspects of the learner’s consciousness to develop.

On the personal approach, Young and Laible (2000) write the development of an antiracist consciousness is done through “discussion and personal contact with diverse groups” (As cited in Capper et al., 2006, p. 211). Discussions at a basic level can help learners understand that White genetic superiority has been proven false (Fordham, 2008; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). The institutional approach goes deeper in understanding and explanation of concepts such as the institutionalization of White racism (Capper et al., 2006). Through challenging mainstream ideas, learners are able to see how taken-for-granted liberties and access have been denied to people of color. Moving beyond identifying, these learners are then encouraged to work against these barriers. Lastly, the multiple fronts approach builds upon the previous two by encouraging learners to see and understand that White racism is systemic and permeates many facets of society, particularly education (Capper et al., 2006). Seeing and interacting with certain systemic issues allows learners to begin their journey toward social justice gradually that eventually leads toward bigger picture understanding. Learners are also able to leave the program with an activist agenda that seeks equity for all students.

In a similar study, Miller and Martin (2015) provide specific preparation that first expose aspiring leaders to the curriculum and second to the actual needs of organizations. As aspiring leaders must obtain a graduate degree to serve as school leaders, the academic preparation “involves the professional socialization provided by the information, skills and principles that an individual will need to carry out their leadership role regardless of the school” (Miller & Martin, 2015, p. 131). Many university programs end the training here, leaving leaders with generic skills that do not equip them to enter racially diverse schools or develop a social justice framework for leading (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2012). The second component identified in the study, the organizational component, “focuses on the context of schools facing

demographic changes” and “socialize[s] their principals to the environment and expectations of the organization” (Miller & Martin, 2015, p. 131). Miller and Martin’s (2015) framework, similar to Capper et al. (2006), challenges leadership preparation programs to move beyond traditional skills and theories to application in real-life settings that equip aspiring leaders with the skills necessary to challenge mainstream ideas and fight for equity. With this understanding, leaders are able to develop an achievement ideology that is inclusive of all students. Social justice leadership calls leaders to challenge mainstream ideologies and beliefs that marginalize people of color. In order to understand how leaders can flip the mainstream ideology of achievement, they must first understand the perceptions and beliefs of achievements. The next section moves through the dominant ideology of achievement, or beliefs on achievement.

Ideology of Achievement

An ideology of achievement is a perception of success achieved based on social standards of hard work and education (Ford & Harris, 1992). Furthermore, this belief suggests that “students who support it increase their opportunities for succeeding both in school and life” (Ford & Harris, 1992, p. 47). The achievement ideology, as defined by Ford (1992a), argues “individuals believe that with education, hard work, and hard effort, anyone...can become successful in life” (p. 198). Finally, anyone who supports society’s work ethic creates chances to increase their effort and succeed socially and academically (Ford, 1992b). As a socially accepted ideology, Mehan et al. (1994) write that the achievement ideology characterizes students as believing in hard work and individual effort. While these statements reflect society’s perceptions of the achievement ideology, there are factors that work against marginalized students in the mainstream education system.

A commonly espoused idea is that education is the key to success, prosperity, and dreams

(Ford, 1992a). As a country formed on blended groups of people from around the world, the American Dream “contend[ed] that success ensues with effort and hard work, irrespective of one’s racial origin” (Ford & Harris, 1992, p. 47). This mainstream achievement ideology is based on meritocracy and individual effort (Carter, 2008) and that the path out of poverty can be found through hard work and sheer determination (Valadez, 2000). The problem with a mainstream ideology of achievement is that it works to benefit the majority, dominant culture and implicitly requires the assimilation to the dominant culture for success in school (Mehan et al., 1994). This achievement ideology has been challenged by those not a part of the dominant culture.

While education was limited to Whites for many years, the achievement ideology established does not align with people of color and other marginalized groups. Ford (1992a) writes, “the reality of democracy and education for some African-Americans and many African-American males is that the American achievement ideology is biased in favor of Whites” (p. 198). Furthermore, the current education system differently educates students based on class (Valadez, 2000). In addition to racial biases, the social class differences in schooling “train students from the upper classes to assume positions at the top of the social ladder while socializing working-class students to accept positions at the lower end of the economic structure” (Valadez, 2000, p. 214).

Since beliefs of achievement are based on dominant culture characteristics, it is not surprising that many teachers base their perceptions and actions on the physical appearance of their students (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011). The idea of lookism is defined by Ayto (1999) as “prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of appearance” (As cited in DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011). In their study of teachers’ perceptions toward students of color,

DeCastro-Ambrosetti and Cho (2011) asked teachers to identify which students they believed were most likely to achieve academically, have athletic success, be perceived as outsiders, face academic adversity, and challenge classroom authority. The results show that teachers identified both the Asian male and female as being the most likely to achieve academically. In terms of athletic success, the Black and Hispanic males were selected. As perceived as outsiders, the Black male was selected as most likely to join a gang and commit a crime before graduating, while the White male was selected as most likely to use drugs. The academic adversity category showed teachers identified the Black males as most likely drop out of school and the Hispanic female and Black female as most likely to have a child before graduating. The last category, challenge to classroom authority, showed the White male as most likely to cause a classroom disruption with the Black male closely behind (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011). These perceptions of teachers play out in daily interactions with students, whether overtly or subtly, which in turn creates a sense of disenfranchisement and underachievement of students of color.

The disconnect between the accepted achievement ideology and realities of people of color has led to their underachievement (Ford & Harris, 1992). Furthermore, operating under the belief that achievement is more for White people, people of color's school experiences are affected. Ford and Harris (1992) posit that "an individual's beliefs about outcomes guide his or her subsequent behavior" (p. 47). Many students of color are seen as disinterested, troublesome, and intellectually inferior (Neal et al., 2003; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). These behaviors represent teachers' perceived motivations behind achievement. Ford and Harris (1992) write that "motivation is a function of the strength of the motive, the expectancy of success, and the incentive value placed on success or failure" (p. 46). If a system is designed to limit access and achievement of people, what is the motivation? This in turn leads to resistance by students of

color.

What is learning?

In a commonly espoused achievement ideology that anyone can be successful, time and time again the question is raised about what exactly learning is. Learning, as defined by Alexander et al. (2009) is

A multidimensional process that results in a relatively enduring change in a person or persons, and consequently how that person or persons will perceive the world and reciprocally respond to its affordances physically, psychologically, and socially. The process of learning has as its foundation the systemic, dynamic, and interactive relation between the nature of the learner and the object of the learning as ecologically situated in a given time and place as well as over time (p. 186).

An accepted component of learning is that it brings about change, whether that change is simply learning to walk or understanding complex ideas such as those found in literature (Alexander et al., 2009). Alexander et al. (2009) state “one cannot prevent learning from occurring (inevitable), nor can one hope to survive unless learning happens (essential)” (p. 178). While this statement is true at a biological level, the current reality of the achievement ideology systematically limits who has access to learn. Learning is also interactional. The context, time, and space are all contributing factors to students’ learning (Alexander et al., 2009).

How do perceptions affect learning environments? While U.S. schools have become increasingly more diverse, the teacher population has not. Many teachers are unfamiliar with their own biases and perceptions, or as DeCastro-Ambrosetti and Cho (2011) write, “teachers are exposed to certain socializing experiences in addition to their own prejudices” (p. 51). Based on their experiences, White teachers sometimes unknowingly place Black students at a disadvantage

in the classroom. A major contributor to this is the amount of time Black students spend out of the class due to referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. On average, Black students are more likely to be suspended and expelled than any other student group (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Unfamiliar with their students' culture, many White teachers believe the stereotype that Black males are hostile, angry, and prone to violence (Neal et al., 2003). Neal et al. (2003) further posit that teachers' perceptions of Black students are based on their movement styles and cultural interactions. The media and pop culture have not done a great job of portraying Black people in general and the way they walk, or swagger. Neal et al. (2003) describe this style of walk as being related to music, rhythm, and dance, which is an integral part of Black students' development and psychology. The clash of the media and true culture often leaves teachers believing their students are hostile and aggressive, leading to time out of class and lower academic expectations (Neal et al., 2003).

In addition to their movement styles, many teachers base their perceptions and actions on the physical appearance of their students (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011). For example, society believes that students who walk and dress appropriately will be successful and care about their academic success. Society defines appropriately as that of White students typically and classifies Black students as thugs or from the 'hood (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011; Fordham, 2008; Neal et al., 2003). Similar to their movement styles, teachers that are prejudiced toward a specific group of people, or are unfamiliar with cultural styles are more likely to base their perceptions of achievement and ability on them (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011; Shields, 2004). Learning is unable to take place when teachers maintain these negative perceptions toward students. The lack of understanding of cultural differences creates "cultural battlegrounds in which teachers communicate lower expectations, fail to connect with their

culturally different students, and thus contribute to low academic performance and high dropout rates” (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001, p.538).

Not only are students influenced by these factors, but they in turn influence and affect their environments, as well. When an environment is negative or not perceived to be attainable, students of color underperform and develop acts of resistance (Carter, 2008). These components of learning as an active process are impacted by the achievement ideology and lead to lower academic achievement of students of color.

Resistance. The idea of resistance toward academic achievement is prevalent among students of color as a way to avoid assimilation into a dominant White culture (Akom, 2003; Carter, 2008). Students are perceived to be disengaged in school or work hard, when they are actually resisting the idea of assimilation to the mainstream ideology of achievement (Carter, 2008). The mainstream ideology of achievement requires students to act a certain way and espouse specific characteristics for success. In order for this to occur, students of color must abandon parts of their culture and assimilate to the White culture (Carter, 2008). For example, as Fordham (2008) writes, in order to assimilate to this mainstream ideology, students must abandon their speech style, movement styles (Neal et al., 2003), dress styles (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011), and other aspects of expressive culture such as music and dance. These aspects must be abandoned if they are to fit in with White culture and in the eyes of schools, to succeed academically. This abandonment of culture is not asked of any other group of people. Carter (2008) writes:

A shared history of discrimination and the perception that schools are primarily controlled by whites lead black students to actively resist activities and behaviors associated with academic success, since these activities are equated with assimilation into

the white middle class and thus viewed as compromising a black social identity and group solidarity (p. 468).

This active resistance to the mainstream ideology of achievement has helped create the achievement gap and lack of success for students of color. With the belief that success is not attainable, the underachievement of people of color comes as no surprise.

As this issue has been noticed, researchers have been developing frameworks and theories to address these issues. One theoretical framework, critical race theory, will be explained as it has been developed to identify specific issues in education that act as barriers for people of color. Furthermore, it provides an activist mindset that calls for the challenging of these barriers.

Critical Race Theory

Critical legal studies came about as a critique of the law in how issues of race and racism were addressed, from both the conservative and liberal approaches (Price, 2010). While critical legal studies was originally applied to the legal system to address issues of racism and inequality (Carter, 2008; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Stovall, 2004; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011), critical race theory was developed as an offshoot and has since been applied to education to help school leaders understand and address the issues that impede Black students' academic success and bring about change that will implement social justice (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Price, 2010). Critical race theory is not only a lens through which to analyze systems; it differs in that it has an activist agenda and seeks to identify and change the systemic racism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Price (2010) argues, "Thus CRT shifts paradigms from the goal of equality, to that of social justice through radical reform" (p. 151). The tenets of critical race theory include counter storytelling, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, intersectionality, the permanence of

racism, and the critique of liberalism (Carter, 2008; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Love, 2004; Stovall, 2004). Using these tenets, “from its outset and despite the central position of ‘theory’ in its name, CRT has explicitly centralized activism. It is not enough to critique, and thereby intellectually rework, racism; rather, racism must be addressed and redressed through action” (Price, 2010, p. 151). While the central idea of critical race theory is to improve the academic access and success of Black students, each of these tenets exposes different aspects of the systemic racism currently in the education system of the United States.

Counter storytelling

The education system has been dominated by White culture and norms for years. Because of this, people of the dominant culture are unaware of the stories and experiences of people from the minority culture. In her article, Love (2008) uses the idea of counter storytelling to “make the assumptions made by the dominant culture more visible and explicit” (p. 232). This tenet of critical race theory allows White people to hear stories from people of color to gain access to the world and opportunities denied to them through White domination (Love, 2008). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) affirm this thought by stating that counter storytelling “aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (As quoted by DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

In working with its activist agent component, critical race theory uses counter storytelling to give voices to those that have been historically marginalized by the dominant culture (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). In addition, conversations about race, achievement, and experiences typically come from the point of view of the dominant culture. Counter storytelling allows for a switch in the discussion, for example, when discussing achievement data, this tenet discusses the same data but with a different premise and goals in mind (Love, 2008). While counter storytelling

gives voice to marginalized people, the activist aspect of critical race theory uses counter storytelling to expose racial privilege and its place in education's history (Love, 2008). Counter storytelling exposes racial privilege and gives a voice to marginalized people, but the tenet of Whiteness as property addresses the issue of access to quality curricula and programs.

Whiteness as property

Another tenet of critical race theory is Whiteness as property. While counter storytelling gives voice to marginalized people, Whiteness as property is analyzed to make visible educational inequities in policies and practices that have guaranteed educational opportunities to be enjoyed almost exclusively by Whites (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Historically, Whiteness afforded Whites the "privilege and protection from being the object of property, and instead they had the right to possess property... additionally, whiteness as property could be exhibited in citizenship, voting, knowledge, career and educational opportunities" (Dorsey & Chambers, 2014, p. 62). This historical privilege made access to education almost exclusively to Whites which created a system designed for them and to benefit them. This system is still seen today. Furthermore, critical race theory analyzes the formal processes of admission into rigorous curriculum and programs, such as gifted education programs. Schools reify this notion of Whiteness as property and continue to exclude Black students from these programs (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). It can be argued that while schools are desegregated, schools that perpetuate these policies and processes that schools have essentially been re-segregated (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). This aspect of critical race theory allows school leaders to evaluate the practices and policies in place within their schools to move toward a more equitable school and system.

Interest convergence

Another important tenet of critical race theory is interest convergence. Critical race

theorists use this tenet to critique the gains and opportunities of Black students in comparison to the measured enthusiasm (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). This idea was seen from the onset of the *Brown v Board of Education* (1954) ruling. Bell (1980) wrote in his commentary on the case, “further progress to fulfill the mandate of *Brown* is possible to the extent that the divergence of racial interests can be avoided or minimized” (p. 528). Researchers argue that many gains for Black students within educational opportunities arise from the convergence of interests with Whites. While on the surface it appears that Black students are afforded equal access and opportunities, these concessions are given as they do not upset or disrupt the way of life for the dominant White culture (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Interest convergence is the easiest way for schools to pretend that they are equitable. By converging the interests of the dominant culture with the needs of Black students, schools are espousing equity without addressing the systemic issues and creating social change. In their article, DeCuir and Dixson (2004) followed Black students at a predominately White private school. One student stated that all the Black students within the school served a purpose on an athletic team and that people did not care about him as a person, but how he would perform on the football team. This idea of interest convergence showed in the school’s desire to improve its athletic teams and families of Black students to provide a more rigorous education for their students (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). This tenet provides school leaders with the question of how they are implementing equity and if they truly are, or just converging interests.

Intersectionality

Racism does not only occur in the Black/White binary (Capper, 2015). This tenet seeks to identify the extent to which oppression occurs between race and other identities such as social class, language, ability, sexuality, and gender identity (Capper, 2015). The main purpose of this

tenet is to not only eliminate racism, but oppression of all kinds. Intersectionality reminds researchers and those with social justice agendas that oppression occurs beyond a simple binary and to look at oppression at all levels and work to eliminate it (Capper, 2015).

Permanence of racism

While sounding as a pessimistic take on the theory, this tenet of critical race theory is necessary as one hopes to move forward in social justice and change. By accepting this tenet, it allows people to accept a realist view of the American social structure (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Instead of being individual acts and thoughts, racism is understood to be normal (Capper, 2015). The American social structure that has developed over time is based on a system that has historically oppressed and exploited certain groups of people. In today's understanding of the social structure, racist structures play out both consciously and subconsciously (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Embedded racism impacts current school practices and organizations (Capper, 2015; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Accepting that racism is pervasive in educational culture, organization, policies, and practices helps leaders understand that social justice is life-long work and must be challenged daily (Capper, 2015). In the final tenet of critical race theory, the critique of liberalism works similarly to interest convergence in that it challenges and analyzes what society says and does.

Critique of liberalism

The final tenet of critical race theory is the critique of liberalism. This tenet challenges leaders to critique liberalism as liberalism, as Theoharis and Haddix (2011) posit, is “not a mechanism for substantive, real change (p. 1335). Liberal ideologies like colorblindness and promotion of diversity but not equity, fail to understand and take into consideration the idea of the permanence of racism (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). This tenet goes on to further challenge

the idea of colorblindness in its definition. When talking about difference within colorblindness, it almost always refers to people of color, as being White is considered normal (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). This goes on to further challenge the belief that the dominant culture is superior to others and perpetuates the construction of othering people of color (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). The tenets discussed above work as an analytical lens to evaluate the issues impeding the academic success of Black students in U.S. public schools.

Critical Consciousness

Originally developed by Paulo Freire (2000), critical consciousness is defined as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 35, as cited by Diemer, McWhirter, Ozer, & Rapa, 2015, p. 810). Developed to help marginalized people groups identify and interact within a society that held deeply to oppressive practices, critical consciousness can be defined as a way for people to “learn to critically analyze their social conditions and act to change them” (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011, p. 44). Similar to critical race theory, critical consciousness seeks to identify systemic barriers and injustices, but differs in that it directly calls people to take action (Diemer et al., 2015; Watts et al., 2011). Three tenets of critical consciousness are critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action (Diemer et al., 2015). These tenets will be further explained.

Critical reflection. Critical reflection refers to the way in which people are able to see the world in which they live and interact, but more, are able to see themselves in the world, as well (Diemer et al., 2015). More detailed, critical reflection is a “social analysis and moral rejection of societal inequalities” (Watts et al., 2011, p. 46). Whether a person is from a marginalized group or the dominant culture, critical reflection allows a person to have a clearer

understanding of what transpires, how certain groups are affected, and ways in which they may benefit (Diemer et al., 2015). Hopper (1999) articulates that being critically reflective means “learning to see, in the mundane particulars of ordinary lives, how history works, how received ways of thinking and feeling serve to perpetuate existing structures of inequality” (p. 210, As quoted by Diemer, Kauffman, Koenig, Trahan, & Hsieh, 2006, p. 445).

Measuring critical reflection, Carlson, Engbretson, and Chamberlain (2006) conducted a study using photographs in a low-income area. The results yielded a four-stage understanding of critical reflection. The four components were:

1. Passive adaptation;
2. Emotional engagement;
3. Cognitive awakening; and
4. Intention to act.

These components of critical reflection show the process of understanding how the world is, one’s place in it, and how it can be affected. Ultimately, this process of reaching critical reflection is influenced by many factors. Watts et al. (2011) write that people’s “interest in social justice organizing stemmed from critical values instilled through family in childhood and adolescence, a salient and positive social identity, personal experience with injustice, and critical reflection” (p. 49). Moving beyond critical reflection, the next tenet, critical motivation, is explained.

Critical motivation. Critical motivation is an “individual’s agency and commitment to address perceived injustice(s)” (Diemer et al., 2015, p. 810). Sometimes also referred to as political efficacy, this tenet explains “people’s beliefs about their capacity to be effective political actors and beliefs that government structures and officials are responsive to one’s

political interests” (Watts et al., 2011, p. 50). This component of critical consciousness manifests itself differently at different stages of life. For youth, this component is less developed due to barriers and restrictions of their participation in political movements, social groups, and voting (Diemer et al., 2015). While for adults this tenet is seen through voting and political action, for youth this may manifest as forming a group in the community or school that addresses perceived issues. While it does not affect change at a large scale, it has implications for their immediate community. Critical motivation ultimately leads to the last tenet, critical action.

Critical action. Critical action, or the behavior part, refers to “actions designed to counter or respond to injustice in a liberatory manner” (Diemer et al., 2015, p. 810). Furthermore, it is “individual or collective action taken to change aspects of society, such as institutional policies and practices, which are perceived to be unjust” (Watts et al., 2011, pp. 46-47). While this component of critical consciousness implies action, it may manifest in different facets such as “voting, community organization, and peaceful protests” (Watts et al., 2011, p. 47). Critical action may take place at the social level within a community and within the political world, as well. By attaining this level of critical consciousness, researchers argue that one has had substantial critical reflection and critical motivation (Watts et al., 2011).

Dominant allies. While the concept of critical consciousness was designed toward marginalized groups of people (Diemer et al., 2015), it is relevant and important for dominant culture and privileged members of society to understand, as well. Watts et al. (2011) argue that “although privileged youth have many more opportunities than those who are marginalized, they too can benefit from learning how social injustice operates and ways they can promote a more just society” (p. 44). In order for change to occur, a partnership must be forged among different groups in a society. One of the ways this can happen is for dominant groups to develop a critical

consciousness. Diemer et al., (2015) argue “those who experience relative privilege in some areas of their lives may also critically reflect upon inequality, develop the agency to produce change, and participate in critical action to create a more just world” due to having experience in being marginalized or “their alignment as an ally to those who experience marginalization or oppression” (p. 811).

As school leaders, whether they are part of a people group that has suffered oppression and marginalization or from the dominant culture group, it is key to have this understanding. However, being an ally demonstrates an understanding of the systemic issues and represents a desire to take action against them. The most important component of being an ally, is as Diemer et al. (2015) write, that “White allies, in turn, may have heightened levels of [critical consciousness] relative to their White counterparts who do not recognize or acknowledge the inequities” (p. 811). Building leaders have a responsibility to understand the historical oppression and marginalization of groups of people and counteract them when possible. Through the development of their own critical consciousness, leaders are able to begin fostering this development within their staff, as well.

The mainstream ideology of achievement explains how education is centered. Using critical race theory and critical consciousness as frameworks to create a new ideology of achievement, the leadership critical race achievement ideology was developed. This framework will be explained in the next section and details how leaders can actively use this framework to lead for social justice and create equitable experiences for all students.

Conceptual Framework: Leadership Critical Race Achievement Ideology

Addressing the issue of underachievement, Carter (2008) used critical race theory to develop a new achievement ideology that conceptualizes achievement as occurring within one’s

sense of self of their race as opposed to occurring externally or being a White trait. While this framework was developed for students, adapting it for leaders allows for a greater analysis of the social justice work being done in schools. Social justice leaders are those that “keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalizing factors in the United States” (Theoharis, 2009, p. 11). A critical race achievement ideology, when held by a leader, “represents an acute awareness of and resistance to the mythical bootstraps theory” (Carter, 2008, p. 478). Leaders operating with a critical race achievement ideology are able to understand the mainstream notion of achievement and challenge systems. The tenets developed by Carter (2008) of the critical race achievement ideology when adapted to leaders are:

1. Leaders believe in students and feel that individual effort and self-accountability lead to school success;
2. Leaders view achievement as a human character trait that can define membership in a racial group;
3. Leaders possess a critical consciousness about racism and the challenges it presents to present and future opportunities to members of minority racial groups;
4. Leaders value multicultural competence as a skill for success; and
5. Leaders develop adaptive strategies for overcoming racism in the school context that allow students to maintain high academic achievement and a strong racial/ethnic self-concept.

Effort

The first tenet of this framework believes that “possessing a sense of self as an achiever and internalizing the concept of hard work and individual effort are two character traits necessary

to sustain school success” (Carter, 2008, p. 479). School leaders are tasked with the job of ensuring students maintain this belief of sense of self as achievers and understand how their effort impacts their school success. In addition, in order for students to believe their effort impacts their success, they must “perceive that one has the skills and resources to prosper” (Carter, 2008, p. 480). Ensuring students have the resources and development of skills falls to school leaders and their work as students need “models and people who can convey to them how to personally negotiate” barriers and constraints that limit them (Carter, 2008, p. 482).

Membership

Challenging the mainstream narrative on the ideology of achievement, the second tenet of the leadership critical race achievement ideology framework believes that leaders must refrain from believing that success is a trait of a specific racial group (i.e. White students). As students face the challenge of succeeding in school by assimilating to the dominant culture, it is the challenge of school leaders to believe and help students believe that “school and life successes should not come at the expense of one’s racial identity” (Carter, 2008, p. 482). Conceptualizing achievement as occurring within one’s racial identity has shown to sustain high levels of success for Black students (Carter, 2008). Feeling as if they belong to their racial group both socially and academically allows students to maintain success. It is the role of school leaders to help foster this belief by challenging “dominant discourse” and showing how students can “deconstruct normalized conceptions of achievement” (Carter, 2008, p. 483).

Critical consciousness

The third tenet of this framework calls leaders to specifically understand, interact with, and challenge racist structures that limit opportunities for students of color. Furthermore, this tenet requires leaders to understand how racism interacts with systems so that they can “resist

racism” and help students develop strategies for “school success and the maintenance of a strong racial self” (Carter, 2008, p. 484). Schools leaders that are critically aware are able to see the different ways in which systems and structures interact that may limit accessibility and success and actively challenge them.

Multicultural competence

This next tenet of the framework argues that the practicality of developing different cultural codes, or behaviors, is important for navigating different social contexts (Carter, 2008). School leaders that work for social justice understand that the dominant narrative expects certain qualities and behaviors. These behaviors differ at times from different racial groups. In order to move through different systems, leaders help students “understand the utility of acquiring various social and cultural codes for navigating the school context and then when to situationally apply specific sets of codes” (Carter, 2008, p. 487). By believing in multicultural competencies, leaders are able to help students navigate different situations while being able to maintain their cultural identity and succeed simultaneously.

Adaptive strategies

The final tenet of the leadership critical race achievement ideology believes that school leaders must develop adaptive strategies for “school adjustment and success that reflect positive achievement attitudes and beliefs and a desire to overcome racism as a potential barrier to success” (Carter, 2008, p. 489). Understanding that racism is permanent and pervasive, it is the role of a school leader to help students of color overcome these barriers with adaptive strategies. It is important to note that while students may develop maladaptive strategies, it is necessary for leaders to help students develop strategies that allow them to overcome racism while still maintaining positive beliefs about their sense of self and succeeding academically (Carter, 2008).

The leadership critical race achievement ideology allows leaders to have a better understanding of their current reality, as well as provide practical steps for creating an inclusive learning community. In addition, operating under this new achievement ideology, leaders may be more equipped to work with diverse student groups than leaders that do not understand or operate with the same beliefs. Helping students have a positive sense of self within their racial identity as well as seeking equity for students of color are ways that social justice leaders are operating with a leadership critical race achievement ideology. Furthermore, as Thomas et al. (2014) posit, “critical consciousness has been conceptualized as a component of identity development” and that with this development, an understanding of their social identity is created (p. 486). A leadership critical race achievement ideology stems from the development of critical consciousness.

While the leadership critical race achievement ideology framework provides a way for leaders to interact and guide their practices, it will truly be effective when the beliefs are shared throughout the learning organization. As schools have more students of color, across the United States 90% of teachers is White (Picower, 2009). It is important that leaders move beyond attaining critical consciousness and move toward activism. Once this critical consciousness is attained by leaders, they now must move beyond it and share and foster these beliefs throughout the school. With the goal of student success, access, and increased learning, it is important for leaders to impart the critical race achievement ideology throughout the school and community.

Summary

A new generation of students and issues calls for a new style of leadership. Diverse student populations require leaders that are socially just and seek to end systemic issues, close the achievement gap, and create open access to all students. Developing these leaders begins

with leadership preparation programs. Programs that reach different levels such as the personal, social, and organizational levels are able to demonstrate the need for social justice leadership. Once leaders are able to attain this critical consciousness they are able to move toward praxis and implementation. One framework is developing a leadership critical race achievement ideology. This allows leaders to use critical race theory to analyze current practices and create more inclusive learning communities. Furthermore, by sharing these beliefs and fostering them throughout the building they will begin to move this ideology from the self to the organization. Through a commitment to social justice and a leadership critical race achievement ideology, school leaders can improve the schooling experience of historically marginalized students.

Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the achievement ideologies of school leaders and how they compare and contrast with an achievement ideology rooted in social justice. Furthermore, this study sought to understand how leaders conceptualize achievement, and how these conceptualizations related to a critical race achievement ideology. Finally, the purpose of this study was to understand how these conceptualizations affected their practice as school leaders. Critical race achievement ideology was adapted from Carter's (2008) framework initially designed for students. This framework allows leaders to develop equitable schools while helping students of color understand that achievement is a part of their racial identity and not separate. This study focused on school leaders that serve high populations of minority students. The goal of this study was to discern school leaders' achievement ideologies and how these leaders operate within these ideologies. Finally, the goal of this study was to see if these ideologies function within, similarly, or different from a critical race achievement ideology. This study hopes to use the data to show how other school leaders can begin this process of school equity.

This study was guided by two research questions:

1. What is the achievement ideology of a school leader?
2. How do the achievement ideologies of school leaders compare and contrast with a leadership critical race achievement ideology?

Research Design

This study utilized a case study design. The participants for this study all belonged to the same school district and were selected for the commonalities among them based on how the

schools operate. A case study is defined as “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ of a case or multiple cases over time through detail, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). This bounded case study was informed by grounded theory to learn about and later analyze the beliefs of school leaders about achievement.

A qualitative design was chosen for this study as it looked to understand the meanings that people attach to their experiences (Pope & Mays, 2006). Since this study looked to understand school leaders’ beliefs about achievement, this taken for granted idea needed to be questioned. This design was also chosen as one of its distinguishing characteristics is that it “studies people in their natural settings rather than in artificial or experimental ones” (Pope & Mays, 2006, p. 4). School leaders were asked about topics with which they work daily and how they impact their practice.

This study used a qualitative design informed by grounded theory. To conduct this qualitative study, an interview protocol was utilized. Traditionally, studies have tried to verify theories and test their natures (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kempster & Parry, 2010). These research methods included hypothesis testing, quantitative data, and quantitative analysis (Kempster & Parry, 2010). While not all studies are used to verify theory or test them, a different kind of research design was needed. Grounded theory allows for the generation of and expanding theory (Parry, 1998) and representing reality (McCreddie & Payne, 2010). In addition, Thornberg (2012) argues that grounded theory “in contrast to only verifying theories by quantitative methods, they offered a set of qualitative methods for generating inductive theories from data” (p. 244). Kan and Parry (2004) used grounded theory in their study as it “uses qualitative research methods with the aim of generating theory which is grounded in the data, rather than testing existing theories” (p. 470). Furthermore, this theory “incorporated the complexities of the

organization under investigation without discarding, ignoring, or assuming away relevant variables” (Kan & Parry, 2004, p. 470). Using grounded theory allows for qualitative analysis of qualitative data (Parry, 1998). While being informed by grounded theory, however, this work draws from existing theory and seeks to build on this in the domain of leadership. In this way, the study draws on the traditions of grounded theory outlined above, but begins with a set of theoretical constructs and will be built on, added to, and refined guided by the analysis.

As this study focuses on leadership and ideas that are not easily tested, grounded theory is able to “generate credible descriptions and sense-making of peoples’ actions and words that can be seen as applicable” (Kempster & Parry, 2010, p. 106). The use of grounded theory is to provide significant contributions to the field that might not otherwise occur from other research methods (Kempster & Parry, 2010). Qualitative analysis rooted in grounded theory is needed as the dominance of quantitative techniques has created a story of missed opportunities within leadership studies (Conger & Toegel, 2002). Lastly, grounded theory enables the “emergence of nuanced and contextualized richness within organizational structures, relationships and practices” (Kempster & Parry, 2010, p. 108). This study chose to follow a grounded theory model as the study focused on the detailed nuances of the conceptualization of school leadership and practices. Furthermore, the conversations held between researcher and participants were analyzed at the word level to develop themes that were applicable to the study. Grounded theory allowed for the sense-making of participants’ descriptions of their lives, leadership styles, and actions as building leaders.

The specific nature of this study focused on how leaders conceptualize achievement. Being conducted in a qualitative manner, it was important to be able to analyze the data using qualitative analysis. Furthermore, as this concept has rarely been studied in leadership, this

study needed a way to analyze the data and add to the literature. Participants were asked to reflect on a task in which they are involved that views achievement. Looking specifically at leaders' thoughts and reactions to classroom observations, data meetings, and leadership team meetings about achievement allowed for a story to be told that has rarely been seen or addressed. Furthermore, the words used by leaders to describe achievement and what they believe it to be and how it is played out is able to be analyzed through a study informed by grounded theory.

Participants

The population of this study was school leaders. The leaders selected served in a school district in Southeastern Virginia that serves a majority minority student population. The community from which these leaders were selected is minority majority with less than 50 percent of the residents being White. The majority demographic of this community is Black residents (United States Census Bureau, 2016). The selection criteria were leaders that serve in public schools and are at the secondary school levels. Participants were limited to just principals and assistant principals as they have direct contact with students. The study had 14 school leaders participate in the study.

Participant profiles. The participants in this study were school leaders. These school leaders were principals and assistant principals. All participants work in schools that serve high populations of minority students. Participants were identified from working in schools that serve majority minority students in a public school. In total, 14 principals and assistant principals were selected. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Basic demographic information was obtained through a questionnaire before the interview. Profiles were created to provide a detailed description of the participants used for this study (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Participant	Age Range	Race	Gender	Years in Education	Educational Level	School Setting	Position
Timothy	30-39	Black	Male	11-15	Doctorate	Middle School	Assistant Principal
Russell	50-59	Black	Male	20+	Doctorate	Middle School	Assistant Principal
Brett	50-59	White	Male	20+	Master's	High School	Assistant Principal
Carol	40-49	White	Female	20+	Master's	High School	Assistant Principal
Beth	40-49	Black	Female	16-20	Master's	High School	Assistant Principal
Sandra	30-39	Black	Female	11-15	Master's	High School	Assistant Principal
Michelle	40-49	Black	Female	16-20	Doctorate	High School	Assistant Principal
Thomas	50-59	Black	Male	20+	Master's	Middle School	Assistant Principal
Michael	30-39	Black	Male	11-15	Master's	High School	Assistant Principal
Ryan	40-49	Black	Male	20+	Doctorate	High School	Principal
Karen	30-39	Black	Female	11-15	Master's	Middle School	Principal
Stephanie	40-49	White	Female	20+	Master's	High School	Principal
Jacob	40-49	White	Male	16-20	Doctorate	High School	Principal
Amy	40-49	Other	Female	16-20	Master's	High School	Principal

I am choosing to include these categories as they are relevant to the level of critical consciousness, as well as their backgrounds that influence their philosophy and leadership styles.

Measures

The data sources for this study was an individual interview that lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interview focused on leaders' reactions and reflections on standards of practice.

The interview questions were informed by the research questions of the study. To ensure content validity, a blue print was developed to create the questions, all questions were checked by an

expert, and a pilot study was conducted in a school district of similar size and population. See Appendix B for the developed interview protocol and questions. Before conducting the interview, each participant completed a brief questionnaire that helped guide the interview. The interview was conducted either face-to-face or via an online video conferencing platform depending on geographical location. All interviews were recorded. Once completed, the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Data Collection

Before beginning the study, permission was received from the Institutional Review Board to conduct research. Following approval, participants were given an informed consent form to complete. In order to understand the participant profiles, each participant completed a demographic and background questionnaire. The questionnaire asked participants to respond to demographic information and also contained questions that were used to gauge participants' knowledge and beliefs about achievement and the achievement ideology. To ensure the confidentiality of all participants, pseudonyms were assigned. There was one interview conducted with each participant. The interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interview first asked leaders to discuss their beliefs about achievement, what they feel are challenges students face, and what they believe is their impact on achievement. The leaders were also asked to reflect on a standard of practice from within the school district (classroom walk throughs, data meetings, etc.).

All interviews were recorded using either a handheld recording device or via Adobe Connect, an online video conferencing platform. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via Adobe Connect depending on schedules and availability. Notes were taken throughout the interview process that reflected the researcher's reactions and thoughts. These notes were also

used to prompt probing questions and follow up questions throughout the interview.

The data collection process was completed when the researcher believed he had reached saturation. Data saturation is defined as “when the researcher gathers data to the point of diminishing returns, when nothing new is being added” (Bowen, 2008, p. 140). The researcher believed he reached saturation upon reviewing field notes of interviews and after looking at the analysis documents for each interview. It was determined that the study was complete at the point that the researcher noticed repetition among the participants and it appeared that no new information was going to present itself (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kendall, 1999).

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the interviews, the data were transcribed verbatim. The data analysis process was done carefully to ensure accuracy, but also to ensure that researcher bias did not influence the way the data were analyzed. The first step of data analysis involved reading deeply and carefully at the transcribed interviews to understand the participants’ experiences and to break down the transcript into natural segments. Identifying breaks and noting where participants restarted and changed their thought process allowed for a clearer understanding of what each participant said and its meaning. Second, the researcher looked at the field notes written immediately following the interviews. The initial reactions helped understand the context of reading the transcribed data. This gave more context to the participants’ responses and how it guided the rest of the conversation.

This study employed the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initial codes were developed prior to analyzing the data. These codes were based on the literature of the topic. The data were read first for general content and open coding. Based on the general reading, further codes were added if necessary to create a codebook. The data were then coded

at the sentence level. Based on the reading of the data, sub codes were developed, as well. Coding was checked with rereading the text to ensure accuracy and context. Next, to identify themes and patterns across the interviews, the data were axial coded, and upon further reading, selectively coded to see if any true themes were present among the interviews. Axial coding makes connections between categories and subcategories by putting the data back together (Kendall, 1999). In addition, this organization of the data “connects subcategories of data to a central idea, or phenomenon, to help the researcher think systematically about the data and pose questions about how categories of data relate to each other” (Kendall, 1999, p. 747). The researcher used axial coding to understand how the different themes and beliefs about achievement were connected and the relationship between different elements.

It is imperative to establish trustworthiness within a research study (Hays & Singh, 2012). In order to establish the fidelity with which a study was conducted, Guba and Lincoln (1986) offer four criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To maintain credibility of the study, the researcher used a triangulation methodology, using different sources of data that included one-on-one interviews and also a pre-interview questionnaire in which participants responded to questions that were used to guide the interviews. To ensure transferability, the researcher’s appendices outline the different protocols, documents and forms, and analysis procedures that outline the process in which the entire study was conducted. Finally, dependability and confirmability were established through the use of a research team that served as external members who verified data and provided insight.

To further establish trustworthiness, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal to detail reactions, notes, and observations throughout the process. The reflexive journal was used to detail the researcher’s experiences with the data collection, reactions to participants, and as a

way to check for biases that would interact with the data (Dowden, Gunby, Warren, & Boston, 2014; Hunt, 2011). In this journal field notes and memos were important to keep, as well. These kept a record of the research and maintained the context and fidelity of the data analysis. All of this was a part of the audit trail that maintained a record of the process. The researcher worked with a research team that assisted in analyzing data. These team members helped establish credibility and trustworthiness. The team members assisted in reading through transcribed interviews and identifying codes and themes. The researcher also used an auditor to ensure fidelity of the research. In addition, the researcher employed member checking. This allowed the participants to remain connected to the study by checking with them to make sure their statements and intentions were not taken out of context and used correctly. Member checking was employed since at times “the potential for researcher bias might be reduced by actively involving the research participant in checking and confirming the results” (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016, p. 1802). Participants were able to review transcribed interviews and note if anything was inaccurate or needed clarification. Finally, the researcher took advantage of peer debriefing. This allowed a member of the research team to ask questions and challenge findings for further investigation and clarification.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is the very specific concept being studied. Since critical consciousness and leaders that operate with a leadership critical race achievement ideology is specific, learned and developed, and not common in all school leaders, the results may not be generalizable to all school leaders. A second limitation is the data collection tool. As the data will be received from interviews, researcher bias may affect the questions asked and also how the data are analyzed.

Chapter IV

Analysis of Results

The researcher explored the achievement ideologies of school leaders currently serving in secondary schools in an urban community. This research was conducted with the intentions that the beliefs and practices of these school leaders would give insight into what school leaders believe about achievement. This chapter presents findings that were guided by two research questions: What is the ideology of achievement of school leaders? and How do the achievement ideologies of school leaders compare and contrast with a leadership critical race achievement ideology? The researcher utilized a qualitative methodology in examining these research questions which drew primarily from school leader interviews. After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, the researcher went through each interview and pulled out themes that addressed the research questions. To assist with this, the researcher developed an interview analysis document (See Appendix E). This document supported the development of emergent themes, as well as understanding the data with the theoretically derived lens. In all of the interviews, the researcher identified ideas of beliefs about achievement, challenges to achievement, the school leaders' impact on achievement, and how they put their beliefs into practice. The second section allowed for looking for specific themes that were developed in the conceptual framework of the study: effort, membership, critical consciousness, multicultural competence, and adaptive strategies.

The coding process contained two phases, initial coding and focused coding (Charmaz, 2008). During the first reading of each interview, or the initial coding, the researcher identified different ideas and phrases that came about pertaining to each question asked. The second reading of the interviews, or focused coding, allowed for the researcher to identify codes and

themes that emerged from the first reading. These words and phrases were put into the analysis tool. These ideas were also informed by the research and theoretical ideas of the study (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000). The researcher also utilized the constant comparison method (Bowen, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000). The identified themes were checked against the data to establish the categories. In addition, the researcher utilized a research team that also used the analysis tool and provided identified themes. These were compared to the researcher's themes and the discussion with the team helped establish reliability and confirmability of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The themes from the conceptual framework were used as a priori codes (Richards, 2006). This study used multiple coding as a way to "furnish alternative interpretations and thereby act as a 'devil's advocate'" (Barbour, 2001, p. 1116). The themes developed a priori allowed the researcher to specifically search for ways in which the participants' ideologies of achievement compared and contrasted with the leadership critical race achievement ideology.

After analyzing every interview with the analysis tool, the researcher then went through each analysis document and created an Excel spreadsheet where each interview was identified, the themes were placed into their corresponding boxes (beliefs, challenges, impact, and practice). After the themes were listed, the researcher created lists of the themes identified. These themes were marked for repetition among interviews and were then grouped based on commonalities. The researcher utilized color coding to group the themes. Once the themes were chosen as most relevant and purposeful for the study, the researcher created separate tabs in the Excel document for the sections of beliefs, challenges, impact, and practice. Within each tab, the researcher created boxes for the subthemes that pertained to each theme. The researcher then went through every interview and found quotations and evidence that discussed the themes. Finally, the

researcher also created tabs for the tenets of the conceptual framework and evidence from the interviews. This process created a starting point for the analysis and this chapter of the study.

As noted in Chapter 3, all school leaders selected for this study worked at the secondary level in a school district that serves predominately minority students. Every participant had at least 11 years in education. Ten of the participants work at the high school level while the remaining four work at the middle school level. Nine of the participants were assistant principals and five were principals. Five of the participants hold doctorate degrees and the remaining nine hold master's degrees. There was an even split between male and female participants. Nine of the participants identified as Black, four identified as White, and one identified as other. All participants were in the age range of 30-59. Additionally, to note, one of the participants serves as the principal of the district's alternative education program and another serves as an assistant principal of the district's gifted education center.

Beliefs of Achievement

The mainstream ideology of achievement argues that anyone can be successful if they work hard and try (Ford, 1992a; Ford, 1992b; Ford & Harris, 1992). Additionally, society's belief of achievement is based on meritocracy and individual effort (Carter, 2008). Researchers have argued against this belief and point out systemic issues that may limit one's effort from being the only factor in achievement. Researchers have focused on teachers' beliefs of achievement and how that impacts students (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011), but there is scant research on what school leaders believe about achievement and how that impacts not only student achievement, but also their practice as leaders.

Goals

While trying to discern the beliefs about achievement, or their ideologies of achievement,

each school leader was asked what achievement was to them. Each leader took that question to mean different things. While some asked specifically if the question related to academics or in general, one common theme was that achievement is meeting goals. Five of the school leaders, representing both middle and high school, believe that achievement is setting and reaching a goal. Michael stated, “achievement is you’re going toward a long-term goal” and that it is “something that is gained over a period of time.” Echoing that belief, Michelle “consider[s] achievement as attaining a goal that you set, whether it was to graduate on time, or to make the honor roll this year, or make first chair in band. I would consider that achievement.” Another belief that was discussed was that students should not settle with reaching a goal. Amy said, “achievement is the ability to reach your goals, and to continue to set goals. To never plateau with your learning and growth.” This component pushes students to continue learning and setting goals to reach.

Not only do these leaders believe that achievement is meeting goals, but also it is the responsibility of the schools to provide students with the skills and resources to set and meet those goals. Stephanie, a high school principal, stated:

I think part of that achievement piece is preparing them and mentally focusing them. It’s helping them really set that desire and those goals to go beyond where they have been. I think it comes down to what the long gain picture is. And so I think we have basic learning and fulfilling, mastery of concepts, and core concepts and mastery of skills, etc. But I think the achievement piece is that growth beyond, going beyond the core, whether it is not necessarily in seeking knowledge, but just an action, too.

Similarly, Thomas, a middle school assistant principal talked about using the skills learned to reach a goal. He stated, “Achievement is being able to set a goal and using your knowledge and

information to accomplish that goal by specific steps, objectives, and action plans, all of the supporting components to achieve success of that goal. Achievement is the sum of the learning process.” Similar to their beliefs that achievement is seen through accomplishing goals, success is also seen as achievement.

Success

Another prevalent theme from the question asked about what achievement is was the idea of success. This idea of success was taken by a couple of leaders to mean how they show success at school, whether academically or personally. Simply put, Beth said, “achievement for students is success on tests, success in coursework.” When asked if achievement is viewed differently by different groups of students, Beth went on to say:

A student who’s at risk, success for them might be going from an F to a D. For a high achieving student it may be mastering that AP test with a 3 or better. It may be all As, you know. It varies. Success for some students might not have anything to do with school. It might be coming to class or coming to school every day, getting to school every day, getting to all their classes. It could even be success on extracurricular versus what they do in the classroom, so yeah, success is different for every student.

Beth was pushed further to discuss how achievement is viewed differently by students and how that impacts their success. When asked about achievement being viewed differently by racial groups as her school is predominately Black, Beth affirmed that achievement is viewed differently among racial groups, that students want to fit in with their peer groups, and at times racial groups. She was asked what factors play into students viewing achievement differently and went on to further say:

I don’t think it has to do with how schools are set up because for the most part, district to

district, school to school, I think the setup is the same. You have students that are gonna do school the traditional right way, the expected way, and there are students who do school their way. That population of students who do school their way are frustrated in some way and when I say frustrated, something isn't working. They're not experiencing that success in school. And whether it's because of an achievement gap from two or three years ago that they're still experiencing some lag or whether it be something that recently occurred that's impacting them, their attendance, something going on at home that's changed, there's something impacting their performance and desire to be in school. Interestingly, studies (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011; Neal et al., 2003) have found that the "expected" way to do school is one of the things that limit students of color from wanting to achieve and participate. This assimilation to the dominant culture creates acts of resistance and disengagement (Akom, 2003; Carter, 2008; Fordham, 2008).

Echoing beliefs that success is school based, Michelle stated, "student achievement to me speaks to the level of attainment that a student reaches in terms of their academic work. So when they achieve they are successful in their classes. They have mastered the content to the point where they can move on to the next level of that content area." This success is measured by the output of the student and reaching benchmarks determined by teachers, schools, and the state.

Moving toward a more broad view of success, a few leaders said that it can occur anywhere within a student's life. While still centered around school, Sandra said, "achievement for me is accomplishing something that you may not have accomplished before, learning new information, gaining new knowledge." When she was pushed a little deeper into what achievement might look like, she said, "achievement is going to look like you have accomplished something new. Again, acquiring information is a part of it, but it's not total. Experiencing

success, experiencing improvement is achievement for me. And even something as simple as just the ‘ah-ha’ moment when students make a connection. That’s going to be achievement for me.” Timothy declared that “achievement is success in anything that you do. From an educational standpoint achievement could be, you know, making your first A on a test. It could also mean passing a standardized test, but achievement just means being successful.” When he was asked how his definition of achievement differs from learning he said, “learning could be different what you learned in school. You can have street knowledge versus book sense. So achievement and learning, it doesn’t go hand in hand. You can achieve a majority of things and you may never step foot in school.” Timothy’s belief of achievement being success gears more toward the person as a whole and in every facet of their life, not just within a school setting.

Building upon the belief that success is more than school based and impacts a student’s life beyond school, Jacob iterated:

What is achievement? I mean, in a general sense it’s just a child being successful. You know, I think those are difficult things that in schools we tie so much to grades, and if you will, just meeting those standards of expectations and sort of a, very narrow, conception of achievement, but I mean, achievement is so much broader than that. I think much more of a flourishing kind of conception, but I mean it’s just we’re trying to get kids to be successful in their lives. It has to do with how they view themselves, how they’re able to critically think, how they are as citizens, how they’re able to navigate the world, as well. Success comes in a variety of ways.

Jacob, in his beliefs of achievement, posits that success can be seen in a school setting, but it is the role of the school leader and the school to work toward success in all facets of their lives and not be limited to standards set by the state and district.

Growth

Many of the leaders in this study stated that achievement is reaching goals and attaining success, or mastery. Other leaders when asked about achievement talked about the growth component. Students may go through school and not experience a lot of success, but these school leaders identify and recognize growth as an important part of achievement. Beth stated, “I think it also means the growth that they have, from facing challenges to overcoming them, whether it be grades, personal, or social.” She recognizes that growth looks differently for each student and represents achievement. Karen, a middle school principal, stated, “Achievement is growth. I don’t look at it as pass or fail, but anywhere where there is growth, from a student moving from one band to the next, that is some achievement there.” In an era dictated by passing or failing scores, Karen looks to how students grow from year to year and even from one assessment to the next, that is how she defines achievement.

Stephanie echoes the belief about growth as achievement, but she also takes it further by saying, “I think it goes back to the growth piece of it. I think an important piece of achievement is not only finishing, but providing opportunities beyond what they initially do.” It is the responsibility of the school and leaders to not be content with students just meeting a goal, but there needs to be a push for growth beyond the basic level of achievement set by the school, district, or state.

Expectations

Outside of their definitions of what achievement is, school leaders believe that achievement is tied to expectations. Student achievement is not only based on the expectations of teachers, but also the expectations leaders have for students and teachers and how leaders run their buildings. Expectations of students greatly influence how well they will succeed in school

(Davis et al., 2015; Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2003; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Neal et al., 2003). Many of the leaders when asked about achievement identified expectations as a major impact on students. Brett stated:

I think if people think you're not going to do well and you think you're not going to do well, you're definitely going to live up to that because you're just going to say, 'you know, what's the point?' And I have seen some kids do that. They'll live up to your expectations. But if you can get them to be successful or you can believe that they'll be successful, then they'll try. And you genuinely just have to care about them as people. You can't pre-judge or be predisposed to what they are or what they're not. And I think sometimes we make it too easy for them to fail. We just say, 'hey, you know it's okay if that kid keeps their head down over there, at least they're not creating hell for me.'

Students will work to the expectations set. Brett's assertion that expectations of student success will be met by the students is echoed by Ryan. He stated, "Absolutely. Your expectations and your conceptions always lead to what you're gonna do and how you perceive things. If I have low expectations for you, then I'm going to celebrate more in the small achievements and not push towards the bigger one." The lower expectations do not lead to higher levels of achievement and everyone becomes complacent with just meeting the bare minimum.

When Michael was asked about achievement he provided many anecdotes about students who will achieve by showing growth moving from a 30% mastery to a 60% mastery, but his argument is that while it is achievement, it's not to the level expected by the school. He went on to further say:

When I think of achievement I think about how can I move these kids toward the bigger goal, the larger goal. And so I've been working with teachers a lot on how do we look at

individual students and not just say, ‘well the nine weeks is over this is it, we’re done with this.’ We still have to move this kid from a 30 and get them up here to the 70, 80. And so one of the things teachers talk about is, you know, well we keep giving kids opportunities, but we’re not holding them responsible, we’re not holding them accountable. We actually are, because in making sure they achieve we’re saying we’re not gonna leave you here. We’re gonna meet you here, we still have more stuff to give you, but we’re gonna pull you up and get you closer to where you need to be. So when I think of achievement I come back to high expectations and not being held back by arbitrary deadlines and arbitrary benchmarks.

Michael’s expectations that students will achieve and not be let off the hook with zeroes shows his commitment to the students and doing what is necessary to help them succeed. His beliefs further show the students that what they do does matter and it is noticed when they are not completing assignments and are still held to the expectation of completing them.

A main priority of schools is having students pass courses and state assessments and then graduate. Many students with whom these leaders work come from poorer areas and have not always experienced success in schools. Carol said about achievement and expectations, “A lot of our kids, they’ve grown up for 18 years with never even the expectation of finishing school being put into them, or not been molded to want anything more than that or to think it’s possible to have anything more than that.” Working within the mentality that graduating school, let alone class achievement, is a priority, school leaders are tasked with instilling these ideals in students. Carol went on to further say, “And so when you start to have these dialogues with kids about what are you gonna do after high school, and if you do it early enough, they start to catch on that, okay, you expect me to do something beyond high school.”

Stephanie and Jacob took a different stance when discussing expectations for student achievement. Stephanie acknowledges that expectations must be sent from the top down and made it a priority as a principal. She said:

Well I think one thing you have to do is surround yourself with a staff that have the same values as you do. There's a persistence piece that you don't always see in schools. As a high school principal I made it abundantly clear where I stood and what I expected and what I believed about kids. I was not angry at the staff that did not hold the same belief, but then I was not probably the person they wanted to work for or work with. It took a while to change, you know, taking an organization and changing the way they believe about kids. The school I took over was labeled a drop out factory in the local paper and it ended up with the highest graduation rate in the city of all the schools by the time I left. The tone of the school is set by the principal, and those beliefs are shared. Stephanie was clear about her beliefs and made sure that the teachers who worked in a struggling building shared those beliefs. To raise a school from a drop out factory to the highest graduating school in the city demonstrates how expectations of students can positively impact a culture.

While Stephanie spoke to the expectations of the staff and that belief sharing, Jacob spoke about the academic expectation side and how that coupled with beliefs impacts students. He said:

I think the other thing that you need to do is that you need to make sure that what your school is providing as its core function is central to allowing them to achieve. You know, we need to make sure that we have the best curriculum possible assigned to industry and college standards and that we hold our children to that level of expectation that we hold kids to in Pine Grove. I think that's one of the places that urban schools get themselves

into trouble is that we play into almost our worries about how society views our kids. As much as we don't want to say that our children aren't capable of achieving at a level that's just as high as any affluent White community, that we play into that in our desire to try and do something better. We err on the side of coddling and encouraging and don't actually hold them to an academic standard.

Jacob's assertion that by worrying about society's views of the students in the school, the academic expectations are lowered is echoed by the statements from other leaders. Whether they're based on societal perceptions or personal biases, the expectations held by school leaders and teachers can negatively impact student achievement.

In summary, goals, success, growth, and expectations emerged as the beliefs held by leaders about achievement. The first three beliefs were seen in how students are able to demonstrate achievement. The last component represented how leaders' expectations guide the direction of the building and how these expectations impact teachers and student achievement.

Challenges to Achievement

The mainstream ideology of achievement contends that anyone can be successful with hard work and effort (Carter, 2008; Ford, 1992a; Mehan et al., 1994). Researchers and practitioners alike have addressed the problems with this belief, that there are systemic barriers that limit the success of certain students. Every participant was asked about what they believe are the challenges to student achievement. Many of the participants defined achievement as meeting goals, experiencing success, or meeting expectations. These definitions did not align with the commonly espoused belief of achievement. It was not until they were asked about the challenges that it was clear that what they believe are the challenges prove the mainstream belief, that it is based on hard work and effort.

Self-motivation

The researcher asked each participant to identify what they felt were the biggest challenges to student achievement. Without hesitation, four of the participants identified self-motivation as the biggest challenge. Brett commented, “self-motivation I think would be the biggest one.” He went on to further discuss that the important thing is to receive a quality education. He commented further:

It really doesn't matter what high school you attended or what college you attended, but if you don't put forth a good effort, then it's all for none. You've wasted four years of your life to do what? And so you have to have a game plan and I don't think that they sit down and write a goal. You need to write some goals down. You have to have a purpose and you have to have a sense of direction and you have to say, 'hey, this is what I need to do to get here and I'm just going to do it'.

Brett's comments about the challenges facing students and their achievement fail to account for any other causes aside from motivation that would limit a student's ability to achieve. The meritocratic view coincides with the mainstream belief of achievement that centers around hard work and effort. Brett's ideas were mirrored by Michelle.

When asked about the challenges students face, Michelle states, “It's a lack of effort, a lack of perseverance, work ethic, dedication. It's the give me generation, they want answers.”

When asked to expound further on her statement, Michelle said:

There's a lack of work ethic, there's the give me, or they want to look it up and get a quick answer instead of chewing on it, reading over it, re-reading it if they have to, doing some writing. They don't write anymore, they want to text everything. That lack of motivation and dedication and just wanting everything given to them and when you don't

give it they think they're gonna wait you out and you're just gonna give it to them.

Michelle's comments, similar to Brett's, put the challenge on the students and not on the system or anything else. The belief that the students lack motivation does not address what causes this motivation, but just that it falls to the student.

Two other participants also identified self-motivation as challenges students face, but they referenced it into their experiences at school. When asked about the challenges, Carol broke it into two categories. The first she mentioned were basic academic skills that students are lacking. She also stated, "When you come out of the realm of academics, motivation is a huge piece." She was asked to further expound on why students aren't motivated to do well in school. She explained:

The more you talk to kids, it seems as if they don't understand the purpose. It's whether they could look it up, or Google it, you know, why do I need to know it? And I mean, that's always been an issue in education. Kids wanna know why. But I think this generation of kids really need to understand why, and to understand the things that we're teaching which are really the foundation, or the springboard, for what you can do later on. But you have to have some basic understanding and you have to learn how to learn. You know it's not all about just Googling. You can Google it, but if you can't read it and understand what's written there, you're not gonna learn it. So really trying to incorporate that into getting kids to understand. And I think that we damper their motivations sometimes in how we teach. These kids, it used to be you could gauge their attention span by their age. I think it's probably like half their age at this point because everything is so fast moving in the world and they're very used to that and they're very used to multitasking and doing multiple things at one time. Which is difficult for those of us who

are a little bit older to understand and grasp that there can be multiple things going on for a kid and they're still with you and attending. Probably easier for them to do that. But I think we need to adjust how we teach to get them all motivated and engaged.

Carol's discussion about the motivation of the student being impacted by the way teaching occurs and differences in the way students interact begins to identify a challenge that is caused by the system. While it puts it on the student still, she was able to see that there are other factors that influence this motivation. Beth iterated a similar sentiment as Carol, that the motivation of students is impacted by multiple factors. She states:

Their motivation. Home life is a big factor in their motivation or desire to be successful. Parent expectations and values. Once they get through the door, motivation is determined by how well they know the subject or what's their prior knowledge and how much frustration they experience in the class. If the class is challenging them in the right way, if it's differentiated enough to appeal to their learning style, to their interest. Is it rigorous enough, and then, is it challenging enough? And then at the same time, is it appropriate for them to gain and then when it's not, how are we bridging that gap so they do experience success?

Beth's view on the challenges facing students also contradicts the mainstream ideology of achievement. Similar to Carol, she addresses that what is happening in school, and specifically in the classroom, impacts a student's motivation to succeed. Beth also articulated that students are impacted by their families' beliefs, and that they bring it with them when they walk into the building daily.

Resources

Another challenge expressed by the participants to student achievement was resources.

The participants took it in two different ways. The first way in which resources impact student achievement is in the lack of resources available to students and their access to them outside of the school. When asked what she believed were the challenges to student achievement, Beth did not hesitate to say resources. She said:

Resources. Even the resources we can provide in the school with, you know, budgets being the way they are, definitely resources. With so much technology being out here and teachers relying so much on that, not having internet at home and things like that really can impact students and how students are able to work.

With a push to incorporate technology into schools and providing students with devices, these resources can still negatively impact student achievement once they leave the building. The lack of resources at home and their ability to utilize them almost defeats the purpose of having them.

Karen echoed Beth's belief that lack of resources are impacting students' ability to achieve. She stated, "It's to ensure that they have the actual tools in order to achieve. Because right now we're moving into the technology world and some students, even in this day and age, do not have access to internet at home, and a lot of the things that we do expect from them, those require some type of technology." When asked how this issue is addressed at her school, she replied:

Well, we are offering times here at the school where they can like submit assignments or look up, maybe Google, whatever they're supposed to Google on the Internet, or type an assignment. North County Schools does offer Chromebooks and iPads to every student grades five through eight here at our school.

While all the students at Karen's school have the technology given to them, there is still the challenge that students cannot use them when they leave the school. She stated that teachers are

relying more on technology and moving into that world, and the lack of resources at home limits students from being able to take full advantage of all they offer.

While Beth and Karen believe that technology, or the lack of it, is negatively impacting student achievement, Michael and Sandra stated that the presence of technological resources is negatively affecting student achievement. Michael's response to the challenge to achievement was, "Believe it or not, technology I think is one barrier. Technology is great, but I think it's crippled students so much. I think there have been a lot of shortcuts along the way that we've taught students and we haven't ensured that they understand the basics." Technology is taking the place of full explanation and just allowing students to complete work faster without necessarily understand how or why. Michael reflected on how as a student he learned to struggle through hand computing math problems and it was not until later that the calculator shortcuts were introduced. He noticed that teachers no longer have students struggling through the problems, but are just learning to use the calculator and are failing to grasp the concept.

While Michael argued that the use of technology was crippling students' understanding of concepts and how to work out problems, Sandra believes that a challenge to student achievement is how technology distracts students. She stated:

Being distracted would definitely be number one. Students are very, very social. And with technology, it has just increased the level of socialization in our schools tremendously. So it's very, very hard for kids to stay on task and get things done because they're constantly distracted by social media or by just socialization itself, so the technology has definitely created a challenge.

Sandra has noticed that the inundation of students with technology is negatively affecting how much they focus and the increased distraction. Teachers now face the normal challenges of

teaching content with competing with cell phones, social media, and the overall obsession with technology.

Leader Impact on Achievement

Research has shown that teachers have the greatest and most direct impact on student achievement (Hattie, 2009). As schools adjust to changing demographics, so, too, must the way in which school leaders interact and impact student achievement. When asked about their impact on achievement, and how students view their impact on achievement, three main themes were present. The three themes presented by the participants were support and relationships, advocate, and impact unknown.

Support and relationships

Administrators are tasked with many levels of support on a daily basis. Whether it's supporting students, staff, family members, or other stakeholders, administrators are often seen as support within their buildings. Michael stated:

But what I think students view about the role, I think they see you as support, they see you as an advocate. That's specifically what I see, think students see me as their support, as their advocate. They see you as the Mr. Fix It. They're often amazed that, 'how do you remember my grades, you know, and I'm one of so many kids?'

Michael's view is that students see him as someone they can go to when they need a problem solved or some other form of support. He went on to further discuss about his time in working in middle school:

You know, the middle school, I think students really, really understood the function of the system, principal. Believe it or not, I think they understood more than at high school. I think because at middle school we have more frequent meetings, whether it's at

progress report time, report card time. At the middle school we used to review their data with them, you know, this is where we are as a grade level. And then we had them do their own individual reports to kind of keep track of their progress. You know, we were a school within a school type model, so they knew my role that I was in their classroom, that I was their principal for the seventh and eighth grade levels, so I think they really understood my role. At the high school level, I think it's in those individual conversations that you have that sometimes kids really, really figure out what it is that you do.

It is important for students to know whom they can trust and who will be there to support them. Beth responded to how she believes students view her role in their achievement by saying, "I think they believe I care. I think they believe they can come to me and ask for help and support. I think they believe I'm accountable for them and to them. And, I think they have a high expectation of what I can get done." When asked to go further, Beth further stated that in order to be a support for the students she first has to gain their trust. She stated, "I think I do a great job of building relationships, getting kids' trusts, to learn their story, to know what's going on outside of this building so when they come into this building I know how to best serve them." In order for Beth to be able to be supportive of her students, she first had to build the relationships with them. She believes that by building those relationships she is better able to support her students.

In a similar fashion, Michelle talked about how it is important for students in the school to know where their supports are, and who can help them. She said about her impact on achievement:

Young people know that they can come and they'll be helped. Like, the word is out there, if you need help, and we all have our departments, as I shared, that we're assigned to supervise directly, but people from parents and children, students from other departments are always sent to me because, 'She can help you,' and, 'they told me you can help me,' and I'm like, 'Well, I hope I can because I don't want to let you down.'

Michelle's response goes beyond her assigned duties. She has her departments to supervise, but never hesitates to help a student regardless of the department. Her willingness to help anyone that enters her office has her known as a support across the building. After giving a few anecdotes of students that have come to her she said, "So, I don't know, I guess it's how I was brought up, I just was brought up to help people, but it hasn't changed. Like, it's a good thing, but sometimes it's overwhelming, 'cuase one day I was like, 'I've met my problem quota for the day,' I was just...but I didn't, I kept working. I don't shut down." Her dedication to her students shows in the work she puts in and students' responses to seeking her help. Michelle also understands that she is able to support students only once she has established those relationships. While she has students from other departments approaching her, the relationships she has built are known throughout the school. She further commented about relationships and their impact on achievement, "It's all about having positive conversations. Again, it goes back to the relationship you have with young people, and being approachable, but I feel like I've made a positive impact."

While the three participants above mentioned their impact was on being a support to students, three other participants discussed how their impact is seen by their support of staff. Stephanie, a director of the alternative education program stated:

I try to make a halfway decent environment for the employees to like. So I believe that you got to feed the teachers so they don't eat the children. So really it is important. My job is totally to support what do teachers need to help kids be successful. As it was my philosophy as a principal. And so I think one of the things you'll do trying to support staff members is really listening to them, what are their needs? One thing here is combinations of children can be very challenging. I mean you have kids with significant community charges or real behavior charges that have situations that remove them from school. Those behaviors don't go away and so we got to think how am I gonna get the best out of this kid with this nonsense. Teachers will come down and say, 'This is not working and you must do this and you must do that.' And I do all that because in the end the only thing that happens is kids not want to achieve. My teachers know and they do have days and they say, 'I just, I'm done. I need a break from this kid,' and so we will work on let's rethink this. But it's always about I'm not putting the kid out of school, we just got to figure it out. So there's sometimes a lot of mediation.

Stephanie believes in supporting her teachers and working with them when there are challenging days. She understands that by supporting teachers and addressing issues ultimately support student achievement.

While Stephanie believes her role is providing an environment where teachers want to work and know they are supported when handling difficult situations and students, Russell's belief of his impact involved more support in the day to day workings. He said:

My impact as a school leader on student achievement is really three pronged. One, to conduct observations and provide support when needed as it relates to the observation to the teacher's instructional practices. Two, to give my input relative to the creation and the

fidelity of the school improvement plan. Third, to provide teachers with the skillset and the knowledge that they need to help them to address student discipline in the classroom. Because we all know a class that's chaotic makes it difficult for a child to learn. So those are the three things that I as a school leader play in terms of the student achievement of the students.

Russel's support comes in terms of how he completes his assigned duties and the practices of the school. He was asked what the students believe of his role in their achievement and he said:

Well, based on some of the conversations I've had with the kids, they just see me as someone who gives consequences based on students' inappropriate behaviors. There are some schools where the discipline is addressed by deans, therefore the assistants can focus on classroom observations. But for me, in terms of my job responsibility entails, it does not provide a lot where the kids can see me having a link to their academic achievement.

While he focuses on the rote responsibilities of his job, students are unable to see how he impacts their achievement and how his responsibilities play out in their success.

The final participant to discuss support as their impact on achievement, Jacob's stance on his impact was one that supports teachers with the ultimate goal of impacting student achievement. He articulated:

I think it's this subtlety, it's what you're asking in the prior questions about this achievement in belief is that if you don't actually believe that your kids can achieve, then you might as well just hang it up. You might as well get out of the business. It's the power of those individual conversations that we have as a leader, one with kids, but two

with teachers in terms of the role that we can have and the meaning that we can have in our kids' lives. The biggest thing that we do as principals is we're cheerleaders.

Jacob believes that it is the role of the school leader to have the conversations with teachers about what they believe, as well, and then to be their cheerleaders, to help them understand that they play a pivotal role in their students' lives.

Advocate

Similar to being supportive, four participants identified their impact on achievement as being an advocate. Two of the participants that identified advocacy referred to it in the sense of being an advocate to have the right people in place, to ensure that the building is run in a positive way, to be an advocate for the students' education. The other two participants referred to advocacy to the students directly. Brett explained his impact on achievement as being an advocate for the teachers and staff in the building. He first said:

I think the more I'm a thorn in the teacher's side, or at least I'm visible and that they know I'm looking for those people that are questionable or marginal, then at least they'll try to do a better job. Majority of the teachers do a good job, but there are some that need a little more guidance and love and attention. And so I think if I'm, it doesn't mean you're doing a formal observation, but it means that you actually spend time looking at lesson plans, that you actually spend the time sitting in the classroom.

He believes that he is there to ensure that teachers are held accountable and be what the students need. Aside from just the level of instruction, Brett also feels he is an advocate to the students by the type of people that are in the building. He commented:

I think my impact on achievement is if I have somebody that's just here collecting a paycheck and not trying to do a good job, it's imperative on me to call their bluff and to

just have a tough conversation with them. And I'm not there to micromanage people, but by god I know how to do it. So don't put me in that situation because I'll start micromanaging you and you'll love seeing me every day.

Working in a high needs school, Brett believes in making sure that the adults hired are doing what is necessary for the students.

Michael shares a similar belief as Brett. He understands that his role as a school leader is very important and has an impact. He said:

I think my role is pivotal. I think if I accept, I have to say this appropriately, if I accept teachers saying, 'it's just the kids' or 'it's just the parents,' then I'm just as guilty as they are. My role is to ensure that students get the best every day and the way I kind of guide myself is if I have a teacher in my building would I want my child or my children to be in this classroom? Is this the instruction that I expect my children to receive? And if my answer is no, then I have to do one of two things. I have to support this teacher and help to build skills and get him or her where she needs to be, or I need to help them find something else to do.

Brett's response shows that he believes his role as a school leader is important and affects student achievement. He also believes that he must be accountable to the students in the classrooms by ensuring they are receiving the best quality of education possible.

The other participants that mentioned advocacy spoke about the way in which they are advocates for the students directly. Responding to her impact on student achievement, Stephanie said:

I, you know, probably an annoyance. They go, 'She will need a new one.' I tell kids, 'Yeah, do you want me to leave? You wanna do what you gonna do?' You know, I think

they know I'm an advocate. I also can be the heavy, you know? Kids end up in court when you're not doing what you need to do. And so it's a difficult situation cause you're trying to create an environment where kids want to come to school and they enjoy coming to the school, but at the same point they have to be accountable. So, you know, 'well she's the one taking me to court' truancy court and I'm not, you've done that. I had a couple of kids who had some real serious community charges and one of the kids he just gave us hell. He drove all the teachers bananas, but I overheard him one day and the kid, I had something to a young man and he has got something to complain about me. And he goes, 'don't you understand? She's trying to help you finish school.' And he goes, 'Well she's always on your ass' and he goes, 'I know, because she wants me to finish school.' And so that was a very, you know, and they didn't even know I was sitting in my office and they didn't even know they were kind of having this conversation outside my door and they didn't even know I was listening to them because I was typing in my computer or whatever. And that was like the best, you know, that was worth the paycheck right there. And so if kids heard that about me, you know, she does care and I always take them back.

Stephanie's story shows how she feels she is an advocate for students, that she will do whatever she needs to help them be successful. Students know that she holds them accountable because she cares and wants them to succeed.

Similarly, Sandra commented that she believed she is an advocate for students and that there was a level of trust between her and the students. She said:

Hm. Being here at Ridgeway, I don't know that the students really know what I'm about, and you know, how I move. I can say at Bluestone the students knew that I was very

involved with instruction. So students would come to me when they felt they weren't getting what they needed in classrooms. They knew that I was a supporter of them and so they knew that they would have to come to me with the truth because I would get to the bottom of it, but they trusted me to be an advocate for them and to provide them with some advice or, you know, strategies to get things done in a class. So I would say that in the past students have viewed me as an advocate for them being successful, and a motivator.

Sandra's comments demonstrated that she also works to advocate for students. She believes that her impact is in how students trust her and that her role is to be their voice and advocate for them.

Unknown

The third theme that emerged when asked about their impact on achievement was the idea that the school leaders' impact is unknown. Some of the participants discussed the idea that it was an indirect impact, that it was a trickle-down process, and others that students were unaware of their impact. When asked about how students view his role in their achievement, Brett said:

You know, that's a good question, I'm not sure they see it as a direct influence. I think more of an indirect. Because it is more indirect. You know, our job is a supportive role. It's not like when I was in the classroom where I was responsible for everything that went on. I would see my principal, you know, every day I would see him, but as far as observations and evaluations and whatever, a couple of times a year because that's all people would do. So you were very independent. I think the kids view us as, I don't know, that's a good question, Andrew. I think it's more, you know, secondary in nature.

Even though the principal sets the tone and should be setting the tone for what the building expectations are. And that just to be reaffirmed and us too. We have to, as the AP, you have to reaffirm what his vision is.

Brett's belief that his role in supporting the vision of the principal makes it to where students are unaware of their impact on their achievement.

In a similar fashion, Carol stated:

I think we have a lot of impact, but I think it's difficult to quantify, though, because I can't say I have a direct...there's no direct impact. I think it's very interesting in how we work with teachers and how we work with kids and how we set expectations for what occurs in a classroom and the dynamic and rapport that's developed between students and teachers and parents in the community. I couldn't quantify, but I do think we have a tremendous impact.

She also saw her role as supportive and not as much direct impact with the students. She was asked how she believes students view her role to which she said:

I think that I would have to say that the vast majority who don't need a great deal of intervention or don't need an opportunity to sit in a meeting or a one-on-one with an assistant principal or administrator probably don't see that direct impact, but those young people who are more at-risk or probably are struggling see a much more direct impact.

In a shift from her first response, Carol noted that students that are seen more frequently by an administrator for behavior issues or those that struggle in class will see more of an impact, whether it is from extra supports put in place or even just checking in with them more frequently.

While Brett and Carol believed that their impact was not a direct impact, Ryan believes that his impact is seen through a trickle-down process. He said:

So I think theoretically my impact would be through how I set the stage for instruction, how we monitor instruction as an administrative team, how we provide feedback and coach teachers towards improving. What structures we put in place to support teachers and students when they are struggling. And again, setting that bar high to say, 'our expectation is...'. So as a leader, a school leader, it's some hands on but it's mostly trickle down. Most of it is we have administrators, we have assistant principals, how do I hold them accountable and how do they hold teachers accountable? And how teachers hold students accountable? And then what do we do to support students who need extra help? So I think it all trickles down from the vision you set and the expectations you put in place, and then the systems you put into place to monitor the progress.

As a principal, Ryan sees his impact as the overall vision he sets for his school and how the different pieces of the team are working together to see that through and maintain a system of accountability.

Brett, Carol, and Ryan were able to articulate to some extent where they see their impact whether it is indirect or through a trickle-down process. The other participants when asked stated that students did not see their impact. Some of the participants had stated what they do in their role to impact achievement, but when asked how it was viewed by students stated it was unknown. Ryan articulated previously that he believes his impact is in the vision set, but when asked how the students view his role in their achievement he said:

I don't think they see it. I think they see...well I speak for me, I think they see, 'cause you'll hear students say, 'Oh, I wish I had your job 'cause you just walk around all day,' or, 'You just sit in my classroom.' So I don't think they see that role, I think they see the principal more of as a building manager, more of someone who sets rules, someone who

does this, but not really. You know, 'cause you'll have students ask you if you're a teacher. You know, 'You a teacher? You used to, you taught?' So it's like, or, 'Do you have to be a teacher to be a principal?' which you don't, but you know. So those are the kinds of things that let me know they don't really see me as a teacher, which is, I don't know how to combat that, you know. I work with them in the classroom. High school level's more difficult because I may not know the content sometimes when I go in there. But yeah, I think they see my role as separate from their actual classroom achievement. This notion that school leaders are not directly tied to student achievement is seen in the responses from other participants, as well. Timothy commented:

I don't think they really understand what my role is. I think they see me as you know the person they go to when they do something wrong. But as far as whenever I come in the classroom to ensure that my teachers are teaching, they think that I'm checking up on them rather than you know, 'oh, he's not really ensuring that I'm getting a quality education.'

Timothy's comments show that students view their administrators as only worrying about behavior and not necessarily their education. This idea was echoed by Russell:

Well, based on some of the conversations I've had with the kids, they just see me as someone who gives consequences based on students' inappropriate behaviors. But for me, in terms of what my job responsibility entails, it does not provide a lot where the kids can see me having a link to their academic achievement.

While Timothy and Russell posited that students only view them as someone who gives consequences and Ryan said that students view him as a building manager, Jacob's response was more on what he hopes students believe about his role, but with it still unknown. He stated:

Hm. You know that's interesting to think about. I think on one hand I don't know if they really care who we are. But that's not true. I would think, or I would want them to say that the role that I have, the role that people work with me, is we're trying to develop the best environment with the best academic programs for them to be successful.

The school leaders interviewed shared what they believe is their impact on achievement and how students view their role in their achievement. The next section of questions looked to see how leaders connected what they believe about achievement to how it is played out in their daily practice.

Standard of Practice

In order to understand how leaders impact student achievement, the interview then focused on a standard of practice in which the leaders participate that is geared toward affecting achievement. Six of the fourteen participants discussed Collaborative Learning Teams (CLT) as a practice used in their schools that is designed to impact student achievement. Each participant was asked to describe their role in the CLT, how often they occur, what data are collected, how the CLT impacts decision making, and the overall impact of CLT on student achievement.

Role and frequency

There was commonality among the participants' role in their respective CLT. As the school leader, everyone mentioned that they served as a member and not the one to run them. Michael shared about his role:

It depends on the CLT. There is one CLT where there was a bit of a climate issue so I had to go from being a guide on the side of support to actually running the CLT so that we could accomplish what we needed to accomplish. So I did that last year, I took over the CLT and ran it. This year I was able to give it back to that group and allow them to run it.

So what I've seen happen is I've seen it where administrators provide 'these are the things that I want you to discuss in CLT this week.' And that works, but I think it's helpful if I say, 'Well these are some things that I think you should cover, you can add this in.' A lot of teachers are kind of coming up with their key things to discuss.

While he serves as a participant, he was able to get there after addressing the climate issues that were negatively affecting the productivity of the CLT. Similarly, Beth also mentioned having to take a more directive role at the beginning of the year before the CLT was able to function on its own. She said:

I'm a participant. I don't facilitate, the teachers facilitate. I just kind of watch them for the most part, unless a question is directed to me. They really run their own CLTs.

Initially, at the beginning of the year, with science because we had five brand new science teachers, I facilitated a lot of the start just to model what it looks like and what they should talk about and drive what data came into the meetings. And now, they kind of do it all themselves.

Carol mentioned about her role, "Generally it's gonna be observer. We don't facilitate them as a general rule. We may provide and be participants, you know, might provide some suggestion, pose a question, but we don't facilitate them." With a functioning CLT, this role was echoed by Ryan. He shared:

I attend the science CLTs and so my role in there has been to be a participant not a facilitator. So I kind of participate, I ask questions, try to ask guiding questions. I don't run the CLT, I don't stand up, talk, tell them what to do, I try to keep them on track. They're new teachers so I'm trying to get them really involved in the CLT process and understand what it should look like. I'm not able to be there as much as I...I'll change that,

I don't make it my business to be there as much as I should. So that's something I need to improve on, but when I'm there I take a participative role.

Michelle shared:

Every administrator has a content area. I have math, another administrator English, one science, and one social studies, and we are always in the CLT meetings. We're a member, we don't facilitate, we're just present, but whenever there's data, benchmark data, CSA data, four and a half weeks' data, we facilitate a discussion and an analysis of the data.

The only participant that deviated from the participant role was Timothy. He stated, "I facilitate. I ensure that it doesn't turn into a session we're griping about the kids. We keep the agenda and we keep it moving, let's continue to discuss the data."

There was very little variety in terms of how often the CLT meets. The participants shared that some meet weekly while others meet bi-weekly. Some of the smaller departments meet at least once a month.

Data collected

The purpose of the CLT is to examine student data and determine the direction classes and the school will take. Each participant identified which pieces of data are collected and analyzed. They all shared similar ideas about what is collected. Carol said about her CLT, "They look at student work. So they're looking at achievement of individual students and they look at common assessment data, they look at their CSA (critical skills assessment) data of course quarterly. That's gonna be the biggest focus is really looking at that." Similar to Carol, Beth shared about the data collected in her CLT:

Common assessments, power tests, and by power tests those are the district wide generated tests. So, power tests, the benchmark assessments, SOL performance from the previous year. Other data we collect is looking at not just the test, but also how the questions were formed and do we think that was part of what was wrong, what was right. We do a lot of technology things like Kahoots and stuff and analyze data from what percent got this Kahoot correct.

Michelle's comments were also very similar to Beth and Carol in terms of what data are collected:

The majority of the conversations in those meetings are focused on either formative assessments or summative assessments. So we give quizzes, we have power quizzes. Algebra II there's a teacher that creates the power quizzes, share with the group, they all give feedback and implement those. We have standard tests that we have to give for math, and then we have quarterly CSAs. Those data are what is at the center of our conversations, and fortunately we always have data which is a great thing because the data doesn't lie. It paints a picture, sometimes a good one that we're happy about, and we extol each other for, and sometimes it's a not so great picture.

Moving beyond just looking at data from common assessments, some of the participants shared how the CLT is a time to share about teacher practices, as well. Michael shared:

Your common assessments, we also go over your critical skills assessment data and at times we just discuss formative assessments, even if it's not the same data. We discuss sort of where are your kids with this particular skill? And teachers kind of share their reflection of their data points. And then they share feedback based upon that. So for instance, if a teacher's having a difficult time getting a kid to understand figurative

language, a teacher would share what are some ways that she helped a student understand that. They do a lot of sharing, and sharing of resources, as well.

Michael's school takes the data collection piece a step further by also sharing strategies used in classes and the resources teachers have. Like Michael, Ryan shared that his CLT looks at more than scores from an assessment. He said:

Common assessment data, a lot of it's anecdotal so some of it's not as quantitative as it should be. They look at data from activities that students did. Of course when we have our quarterly benchmark, or critical skills assessment review, we look at that data and figure out what we need to do based on specific skills.

The last participant that discussed CLT as his standard of practice, Timothy also shared that his school looks beyond test scores and more into teacher practice. He shared:

A lot of data. Sometimes it's behavioral data that's collected. You know science data, language arts data, math data, and the teachers sit down and they discuss this is what I did in the classroom for this particular. And so they do talk about individual students because sometimes the student may be performing well in another classroom but not in the other one. We're like, 'Well what are you doing differently that I could use in my classroom?' And so it's meaningful conversation. And then typically we'll look over SOL so we'll break it down, well not in SOLs, but in strands, standard strands. And we'll break it down so I'll go into the language arts CLT with the two language arts teachers and then we'll discuss what type of common assessment they had and like, 'Okay, well why did you get a 90% and you got a 70% but y'all have the same lessons and the same assignments and the same test?' So we'll break it down like that where we're looking at

those common assessment scores for language arts and I look at science and I look at history and I look at math.

The data collected and the conversation of the CLT helps in the decision-making process by the school leaders.

Decision making

Every participant shared that the purpose of the CLT is not just to discuss data within the team, but its purpose is to guide the decision-making process. Some of the leaders discussed using the data in specific classroom decisions while others mentioned a bigger picture. Michael looked at the classroom level and how the CLT drives decisions for classrooms. He said:

If we're meeting as a team and let's say for instance in pacing, the next skills coming up, we look back at the diagnostic that was done and kids seem to be okay with that we can look at whether or not we're gonna shorten that from a full two weeks down to a week. And then we look at some of the skills that were areas where kids were deficient, we'll go back and we may address some of those during that time to extend their learning.

Like Michael's CLT, Ryan's also looked at the classroom level and how it drives the future lessons. He shared:

We use it as what teachers need to plan, what needs to go. So what do we need to use maybe for our warm-up activities? What do we need to focus on in terms of any spiral back interventions? Then from a broader perspective what do we need to focus on in after school efforts? And so our boot camp right now, what do we need to look at to focus on based on what we know our students struggle with?

Timothy not only discussed the classroom level in terms of lesson planning, but he also brought up how the data and discussion from the CLT can drive resources needed. He stated:

We use that data in decision making based on where we are going to go with the curriculum. If those students are not passing it, you should not be moving on. You need to be reteaching that information. The students who are in there who are getting it, you got to find some type of enrichment to ensure that they're going to maintain it in their heads. So as far as decision making is concerned you're either going to reteach, stay there, or you're going to move on. It's also going to let us know what type of resources need to be brought in, as well, if they're not getting it from the teacher, okay, well, do we need to offer after school tutoring? Do we need to bring in some other people from the district to help teach that lesson because sometimes the teacher might not be as strong in grammar or in writing essays. So what type of professional development do we got to provide for that teacher to ensure they're teaching that standard?

The final participant that focused more on the classroom level, also mentioned how these classroom level decisions can affect the bigger picture of the school. Carol shared:

They develop a lot of common lesson plans so they're able to go back and say, 'Okay, this is how I addressed it. This is how my kids did.' We're gonna go from there. They do common lesson planning. The math department especially works really well about this time starting to divide kids up. They kind of flip flop. So, you know, kids who doing well, high, medium, and low performers, and then providing the interventions that they need. They use a lot of that time to develop those kinds of plans.

Carol's mention of the math department using the CLT to determine which students need to be in which class and the interventions they will receive speaks more toward the bigger picture of the school.

The final two participants that spoke about CLT discussed that the decision making affects a bigger picture of the school and not only the individual classroom instruction. Beth shared:

It drives what the common assessment is gonna look like. The CLT drives which students we work with, how we remediate for testing, how we remediate to recapture things after school. It drives how we plan. If we're off pace, why are we off pace? Is it a valid reason to be off pace and how we're gonna recapture and get back on track. It drives all our work with our students. The RtI, how we identify who's off track and how we determine how we're gonna work with them moving forward.

Beth's discussion about it driving the identification of students that need more support and how to bring them back moves beyond just the classroom level and brings it to the greater body of the school. Similar to her, Michelle said:

I can give you a couple of examples. In about December, January, before the new semester started, I surveyed the CLTs that I work with and asked them specific questions. One, thus far, over the course of the semester, because we did it in chunks, we got to the end, so it was like a summative check in, what results in your data surprised you? What results did you expect, or anticipate? What resources, tangible or intangible, do you need? What suggestions do you have for our CLT moving forward, et cetera? A teacher shared, 'It would be awesome if instead of starting with the strengths can we look at big picture holistically how we did first?' 'Cause we eventually get to that point but I was all about focusing on strengths.

Michelle looks to use the data from her CLT to not only make decisions about classroom instruction, but also how it can better support the teachers. Her use of questioning and having teachers reflect moves to a greater level of change than just the individual classroom.

Impact

The last theme pulled from the discussion of the CLT, or the leaders' standard of practice, was how it impacted student achievement. Every leader shared that they believe the impact of the CLT is great. From refining teacher practices to sharing resources, the CLT changes the way teachers interact and how students are taught. Michael shared:

I can't imagine life without CLTs anymore. You know, one of the things I used to always say when I worked in the middle school, those decisions are made in isolation. And so when it comes to instruction decisions, this a big shift to move and we have 1700 kids and thinking that you have one teacher that can operate in pure autonomy to determine what happens with 150 kids is kind of insane. I don't believe that any of those instruction decisions should be made in autonomy. CLTs are, I think, critical, you have to have these conversations, whether it's the form of sit down CLT that we do once a month or twice a month, or the CLTs that happen every day, that collaboration where you're bouncing off things, which sometimes, believe it or not, are probably the best meetings. The ones that you have informally in passing or huddled at lunch, because it's really in real time.

Michael continued to discuss the benefit to teachers and also shared that instead of seeing it as one more meeting they have to attend it is beneficial. He said, "I think the selling point probably for teachers was they thought it was solely about a safety net for student achievement, or just that

they were told to do it. But I think it's all about refining practices in order to ensure student achievement."

Carol shared, "When it's well planned and everyone is participating and being honest in that participation, I think it works really well. I think we've seen a huge impact, again, especially in our math department." Her expression of concern that it needs to be well planned and have full participation is important. Without that it is just another meeting that teachers attend and do not take back to the classroom. Ryan echoed Carol's sentiment about the execution of the meetings. He said:

When we do it with fidelity then they help us focus on the right things to do or the important things to do. It always has to translate into good instruction so the CLTs themselves give us tools to use, or the subject matter to cover, or even strategies to use it. That has to translate into the classroom. That's the major part of the CLT that doesn't just stay in the meeting. If you just having a meeting and not doing the right thing in the classroom, then you don't truly have a CLT. You have a meeting that went okay, but you don't have the follow up, which is part of the whole process. So if that's being done it helps students. If I go back to my definition of achievement, then it's meeting those standards, that CLT will address the standards and students will be able to achieve those expectations.

Beth was able to articulate specifics about how the CLT at her school is impacting classrooms, which is changing instruction. She said:

I think it is a positive impact on it because we're not just looking at a teacher in isolation. They're talking about all their kids and their experiences are coming out and they're supporting each other and coming up with ideas and they're doing some commonality

things. And they're saying, 'well I did this well so I'm gonna pull these students and you can do the next lesson so those who are ready can move on. I'll work with the ones that still need support' so we're seeing some across class work which I think is a real benefit because those students aren't just sitting and waiting for the rest of them to catch up, they're able to move on with one teacher while the other teacher recovers and brings everybody back together and they can go to their classes. There are great conversations and sharing coming out of it.

She went on to further say about the changing culture of the school:

I think by improving instruction and way teachers work together, taking that focus from 'me me' to 'us us' gives everybody ownership of every student and how students are successful. And anytime you're working to improve instruction, you're definitely impacting student performance.

Michelle also shared that the impact of the CLT is more than just an individual teacher's classroom, but its impact is instead seen on a bigger scale. She said:

The conversations aren't just, okay this is what we did as a group, we did good here, didn't do so good there, all right, next. It's, 'How did you teach this, you did well?' We still focus on the strengths. But you see there's a teacher with all green, the whole way down, 'You outperform the district in everything, what are you doing in your class, and why are you doing it and how often?' And so we have those conversations. We talk about best practices and all the time it's a research based instructional strategy, it's either small groups or it's summarizing and note-taking. So that's what we do with the data. The teachers also share the data with their classes, they show them, 'This is how you performed on this assessment.' Students are also monitoring right now their own

performance as we're reviewing for SOLs, at the end of each quiz or test they're doing a little bar graph to see where they are with particular concepts and then they have goals that they have to set. They're making commitments.

The bigger picture is changing the way instruction happens, but also how students understand their progress and achievement. The CLT is allowing for a culture change within the school to impact student achievement. Lastly, Timothy talked about how the CLT provides a time for teachers to discuss the important components of their classrooms, as well as being held accountable to more than griping about students. He shared:

Greatly because again the teachers do have the opportunity to talk about the students, the curriculum, and the instruction, rather than it just being another session where, 'I don't like this kid and this kid ain't doing what they supposed to do and I can't get in contact with whatever.' Yea, we already know that. Let's talk about the data and let's see what we're going to do to still get that student to where he needs to be.

Every leader shared that the purpose of the CLT and its impact was ultimately student achievement. Each participant discussed the different ways in which the CLT impacts their school, teachers, and students.

Connection to Research Question 1

The first research question posed by the researcher looked at what the ideologies of achievement were for school leaders. When asked about their own beliefs, the leaders identified their beliefs, what they believed were challenges to achievement, their impact on achievement, and how they put it into practice. School leaders were more open when discussing their practice versus their beliefs about achievement. Many of the leaders were unwilling to provide in-depth detail. When the participants were asked questions relating to race and beliefs about

achievement, many of them were uncomfortable and unwilling to share information. Most of the answers remained at the surface level. Discussing their impact provided a variety of answers from building relationships to not believing their impact is seen or known by the students. As they discussed their practice, the leaders were able to articulate how they participated in the practice, but did not truly connect it to how it represents their beliefs of achievement and its purpose.

Drawing from the participants' own language, these were the themes identified as the beliefs of achievement. While the school leaders remained at the surface level, this may be in part due to the lack of understanding of what achievement is. In addition, if leaders are unable to articulate what learning is, it is more difficult for them to understand and develop beliefs of achievement. When asked about achievement, the participants used the words identified as the themes to represent their understanding. While some of the subthemes share similarities, they were identified as separate themes to capture what the participants stated about achievement.

Leadership Critical Race Achievement Ideology

Challenging the mainstream ideology of achievement that anyone can be successful with just hard work and effort, the leadership critical race achievement ideology (LCRAI) was adapted from Carter's (2008) framework that posits there are systemic barriers that limit success. There are five tenets to this framework that were used to guide data analysis. The five tenets, or themes, are effort, membership, critical consciousness, multicultural competence, and adaptive strategies. Throughout the interviews, and then in analysis, the researcher identified examples of the leaders' espoused beliefs that are part of the LCRAI.

Effort

Similar to the mainstream ideology of achievement, the LCRAI believes that an individual's effort is vital to one's success. In addition, students internalize the concept of hard work and believe that they have the tools to be successful (Carter, 2008). The leaders that expressed beliefs of effort had in common the idea of not only the students putting forth the effort to succeed, but also the role of the leader in developing that effort. Karen said, "The students determine whether they're going to put forth the effort to achieve, and to ensure that they are here every day, to ensure that they are focused and ready to learn when they arrive here at school." Karen's belief is that it is up to the student, while Brett's belief is that their effort is important, but it needs to be developed. He said:

I think for the kids, the biggest thing is they need to understand the importance of what this will do for you and how this levels the playing field as an adult because at the end of the day, a quality education is a quality education. It really doesn't matter what high school you attended or what college you attended, but if you don't put forth a good effort then it's all for none.

He understands the effort component required by the students, but he also knows that it is up to the schools to help them understand why it is important that they place that effort into their school work.

There are popular beliefs about certain students that they are aggressive or have no desire to succeed in school (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011). While this belief has left students disenfranchised, Stephanie's experience with students is one that never had students wanting to fail or be unsuccessful. She said:

I've never had a kid who's come to me and said, 'I just want to be a high school drop out.' Now had kids say, 'I want to drop out because I am discouraged,' but I've never heard a

kid say, 'I just wanna be a drop out, I wanna be a failure.' And so I think the one thing is you are coming here and one way or another we are going to obtain a credential for you so if it's a diploma or a GED that is a nonnegotiable. The conversation with kids every time is, 'Is this getting you to where your goal is?' and it always goes back to that is your behavior or your efforts. You sticking your face in your phone all day, is that going back to what we're supposed to be doing?

Stephanie's remarks about students feeling discouraged and wanting to drop out acknowledges how a system has not worked for the students. In addition, she recognizes the barrier but also contends that the students' effort and what they do impacts their success. Like Stephanie, Michelle also argues that teachers and leaders are available to help, but individual effort needs to be present, as well. She said:

Like, this young lady needs six SOL and I said, 'Here's the deal. You just heard that from this person, and now I'm gonna be real. You are not going to graduate if you are not here for SOL remediation at night, and if you do not go to all your classes during the day. But don't just go, need you to stay, need you to participate, need you to engage, need you to answer questions, need you to ask questions,' trying to tell her, 'this is what it looks like when you're engaged in your learning'.

The constant communication about what the student needs to do to be successful is important for the student to understand she has the ability to succeed and the tools she needs.

Membership

The second tenet of the leadership critical race achievement ideology is the idea that academic achievement occurs within one's racial identity. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the leader to challenge mainstream discourse and show students that they can be successful and

maintain a positive racial self-concept (Carter, 2008). Brett articulated that a main thing that his school does and that everyone should do is work on exposing students to successful people and different ways that they can excel. He said:

So the things we're trying to follow up on and show the current kids and families that you can achieve when you come from here and you can excel and you can do something beyond the neighborhood and think a little bit bigger, but a big part of that is exposure. Expose kids to different things and give them the opportunity to view themselves differently, other than just a kid from Bluestone High School. Hey I can compete against all these other schools. Not just on the athletic field but academically or in head to head competition.

Jacob shared this belief. He said:

We need to expose those children to people that look like them that have also been successful. That doesn't mean that it always has to be someone on faculty, but it's certainly through sets of guest speakers, through sets of content coverage that you're exposing children to a wide array of people that have been successful and met with achievement.

Brett also understands that his school faces many challenges within the city and the belief about those students and where they come from negatively impacts students. The culture of education is not one of success throughout generations. Brett tries to use any chance he can to explain the importance of education and how it can benefit them. He stated:

Well and I think a lot of their parents have not been successful in school, or had good experiences and that's very difficult to break, it really is. And it, you know, when you have PTA meetings or other activities and stuff and you can barely get the kids and the

parents in it says one thing, yet I'll have another activity and it'll be packed. And so what you have to do is you have to be creative. On those events and activities that you know you're going to have a good turn out of adults and kids then those are the opportunities for you to sell the importance of education to their kids and their families and to the community.

Brett believes in using every opportunity to share how success in school is possible and what it means for them coming from the neighborhoods around the school. He further said:

Getting kids involved in those things, outside of the norm, starts showing you the importance of education and changing your cultural headset. Because we do have a lot of kids that their parents have had baggage and bad experiences and it is difficult to change that, it really is. You have to work at it, you have to. It would be so easy to be confrontational with people. It's so easy to just hang up. It's so easy not to make the phone call, that's the easy way. The harder thing is to convince people that the only way you're going to do something better with your life or something meaningful is that you need to start here with a bonafied education and it doesn't mean that you have to go to college. It means that you have to be able to be independent and take care of yourself and that's only going to happen by changing your perspective on what education is.

By helping students challenge the belief that they cannot be successful because of the neighborhood they come from or the school they attend, Brett is helping them to see that who they are and academic success can occur at the same time. He finished with, "But if you can get them to be successful or you can believe that they can be successful, then they'll try. And you genuinely just have to care about them as people. You can't pre-judge or be predisposed to what they are or what they're not."

While Brett discussed challenging the belief about students and where they come from and how that impacts their beliefs about achievement, Thomas shared how he as a Black male in a position of leadership helps students of color to see they are capable of success. He shared:

Here in my office I have visuals, since there are so many African American students here, I have visuals of great African Americans in history and other things in relations to STEM initiatives, so when they come to my office and see visuals. And also, I like to give examples of individuals who have been successful, past and present, and also try to show them examples of peers that they read about in a book or magazine online who are successful and show them, y'know, they can do it, you can do it also. I try to talk about the positive aspects of learning.

The conversations and representations of successful people of color is a way to connect with students and demonstrate that academic achievement can occur while being a member of a racial group.

Russell, similar to Thomas, shared that he uses his experiences as a Black male in a leadership position with an advanced degree to connect and inspire students. He posited:

I try to model for them. I try to model for them and being an African American man who has a doctorate. And hopefully that will dispel their belief that their academic achievement is pigeon holed to their racial identity. I also have very frank and open conversations with some African American students. In my previous school there were students who had that aversion to academic achievement. And so therefore I had to have frank and open discussions with some of those students, of course with some of their parents' permission, to show them that they can work and achieve just as much as anyone.

And, again, I tried to use myself as a model to say, 'If I can then definitely you can as well.'

Russell understands that there is a belief that certain groups of students are unable to succeed and must abandon parts of their culture. He uses his own experiences and successes to show students that it is possible and success and identity occur simultaneously.

Timothy echoed:

I would always make sure that I would take my students on trips so they could see what Hampton University look like, this is where Dr. Oakland went to school at and you know, you come from the same neighborhood as I do so sometimes if that role model isn't there, you know. I know some people stepped in place as well as myself to push students to get where they need to be.

Sandra understands the importance of helping students to understand that their racial identity and academic success are not separate or that achievement belongs to a particular racial group, she identified that this is an area that she needs to improve with her students. She said:

I definitely believe that I could probably do a little bit more of the motivating students and providing a positive role model and positive example for them, knowing that I come from somewhere very similar to where they do. I don't think they know that. They see us and they see people who've always been successful. And that's not always the case, so I think I could probably definitely do more of that. How I could make that fit into what my instructional duties are and my other duties, it'll probably be tough. I would probably have to use lunch duty, but I could use lunch duty. I'm there almost two hours every day, which is a large chunk of time to actually, you know, engage in those conversations with kids and talk with them.

She recognizes that students tend to view teachers and leaders as people who have always been successful and the importance of sharing their stories and using it as a time to show overcoming adversity and maintaining that academic success.

Critical consciousness

The third tenet of the leadership critical race achievement ideology calls leaders to understand and challenge racist structures and barriers that limit student success in schools. It furthermore calls leaders to understand and challenge beliefs that limit student success. Carol shared:

I think as an adult who works with children you need to understand where you are. You need to understand your beliefs. I've done some training with teachers both at the elementary school and here about understanding where you are with your beliefs, accepting them and then understanding that you have your beliefs and that's okay, but if they're negative toward any one group, you need to understand that they're there, and you have biases, but you can't put them on to kids or to other people. And I think it's wrong to ever think that we don't have biases. You know, I'm very well aware of what mine are. Unfortunately it's sometimes high school females. But I know that and I still enjoy them, but I find them much more difficult to work with sometimes. And so when I'm in that situation I have to just kind of frame myself and say, 'Okay, you know you can't put this on that child, you know it's your thing,' and take a deep breath and you go and you do what's best for kids regardless. And as long as you have that basic belief, I could go on, but you need to understand where you are.

Carol's statement reflects the notion that leaders need to understand beliefs about students and achievement and challenge them. She also reflected that it is important for leaders to challenge

teachers on their beliefs, as well, and how they are impacting students in the school. It is her job and responsibility to stand up against these beliefs and ensure equity for all students.

Michelle echoed this thought. She shared:

Sometimes teachers perceive students to be a certain way just on their physical appearance, or their race, ethnicity, gender, whatever, and then what they expect when they see the child is what they expect of that group of people, so they kind of impose those biases on them, and I think one thing we can do to improve that is actually explore our biases at the beginning of the school year. Like, if you see a kid coming in and look like this, what are your thoughts initially? Be honest, and write them down, and just kind of debunk some of those stereotypes.

Michelle argues that teacher and leader biases need to be explored, talked about, and debunked. She understands how important it is to address these issues so that all students do not feel they need to abandon parts of their racial identity to fit in and succeed academically.

While Carol and Michelle discussed the ideas of challenging biases of leaders and teachers and addressing them, Russell discussed the systemic issue of the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted and talented programs. He said:

And actually one of the reasons why I try to be a model to the kids is one of the findings in my study indicated that of all the school divisions in Virginia there are only five that have a proportional representation of their African American students in gifted education in comparison to the African American students percentage in an overall student body.

His understanding of the barriers students of color face in being represented is a reason he works hard to help students see they can be successful and to enter into these programs.

Jacob shared that one of the barriers he believes that limits the success of students of color is urban schools themselves. He shared:

That's one of the places that urban schools get themselves into trouble is that we play into almost our worries about how society views our kids. I think we play into, as much as we don't want to say that our children are incapable of achieving at a level that's just as high as any affluent White community, that we play into that in our desire to try and do something better we err on the side of coddling and encouraging and don't actually hold them to an academic expectation.

His statement touches on the fact that people in urban schools work so hard to encourage students and coddle that they are not actually holding them to high standards. This belief that people are coming to the city schools to “save” them is actually hurting them and that students do not need to be saved, they need to be given the same academic opportunities.

Multicultural competence

The fourth tenet of the leadership critical race achievement ideology discusses the importance of developing different cultural codes to navigate different social contexts (Carter, 2008). School leaders are tasked with helping students develop these different codes to be successful in a system that demands certain expectations, while still being able to maintain their own identity. Jacob shared, "But we need to prepare students to understand that they're working in a White constructed environment." He understands that society has a certain set of norms they expect and that to be successful students must learn to navigate them. He also shared, "They need to understand, if you will, a White upper-class norm and just understanding when it's appropriate to use certain types of language sets versus others." When asked how his school helps students to understand and accomplish this, he said:

I think the best example is when CTE (career and technical education) programs do this employability profile and then they work on the interview part of things and what more so the teachers are sharing with the kids, to a lesser extent myself, is just going into an interview environment or going into those work environments the child needs to very quickly take on the expectation of that environment.

Jacob understands the importance of helping students develop these competencies to be able to move throughout different situations and expectations to be successful.

Sandra also was able to share how she works with students to develop these codes and how they can be successful in different settings. She shared:

What I like to talk with students about whenever I get the opportunity is code switching. You have to be able to turn it on and turn it off in order to be successful in this world. And that's not something they know a lot about. So I try to talk with them about code switching. You have to know your audience, you have to know your setting, and you cater to that setting. Everything that you can do at home, you can't do here at school. So I use school as an example, and then we talk about once they graduate and get into the real world, some of the things that are allowed here at school won't be allowed in the workforce.

Timothy echoed this:

It was kind of interesting growing up you know. Coming from the projects I had to be this way but if I'm sitting amongst this group, okay, let me make sure I change this up. Let me make sure that I'm not splicing any verbs, you know, that they agree. So yea, and I see it you know, in my previous school where I had some students who, um you know, they were, it was just interesting seeing how they could actually, I like to call it the

chameleon effect so depending on what type of environment they were in you know you can actually switch it on and switch it off.

Both he and Sandra understand how it is imperative for students to not only understand the utility of developing these codes, but also how to utilize them and when.

Stephanie shared the importance of needing to help students develop these skills by expressing how society actively works against certain groups of students when they do not espouse dominant culture traits. She shared:

And so really there's a kind of stickiness that we just keep going back to the same theme and it's like I don't wanna take anybody's identity away. What I'm trying to do is, what you're doing or how you're expressing yourself. For instance a lot of the young ladies I have are very outspoken. They become very frustrated. They are removed from school. They're not attractive to have in school because they are perceived as loud and disrespectful. That is a kid trying to have a voice in a situation. What we do to females in our society is ridiculous and so we have to take our own personal value out and try to say, 'Okay, I understand you're upset and right now your voice is very raised, but let's sit and talk about, you know, tell me what' and really trying to understand what kids are frustrated with.

Stephanie understands that when students of color do not utilize the same methods of communication or are perceived a certain way, they are discounted and penalized. She works to help them see how they can work within a situation and still express their concerns.

Adaptive strategies

The fifth and final tenet of the leadership critical race achievement ideology calls leaders to help students develop strategies to overcome racism and other barriers that limit them from

achieving success (Carter, 2008). Jacob stated that one of the things he believes will help students overcome these barriers is to obtain their credentials. He said, "We need to credentialize our kids so that they can be recognized not for what they look like, but for what they bring to the table." He also articulated that it is important for leaders to be very honest about the current reality and help students overcome that. He shared, "And as honestly as possible, sharing that with our kids. I don't think there's anything wrong with approaching our kids and very loudly articulating the reality of the situation and giving them the skills and the abilities to fight against that."

Michael echoes Jacob on addressing the reality of a situation and perceptions placed on students. His conversations with students are directed at overcoming these issues and helping them move throughout a situation that is a barrier. He stated:

I often have conversations with students, about what, 'I'm not going to do anything because this teacher doesn't like me.' Ok, how does that help you? And so having to redirect them, that when you feel that there is a perception that has been placed on you, like, are you just gonna live that out or are you going to prove that misconception wrong?

He challenges the students to move beyond perceptions placed on them, to challenge them, and to be successful. He also shared:

Those conversations always go into real world and I've also shared my personal experiences. I was a student identified gifted. But then I remember this one teacher in particular was the gifted teacher. She had not worked with us long but she came in and she just, it was clear she didn't like any of the little Black boys. And so I often share that story about how I could've, ya know, I mean everything I did was like a C or a D, C or D. And I remember her telling me that I wasn't gonna be anything, wasn't gonna do

anything. So I could've just shut down like I see kids do all the time. Or I could make a decision that I'm gonna prove her wrong and so that was the attitude that I had. And so I'll just share stories like that with students, not to, you know, to be negative but to definitely show them that they are overcomers, they are people who, you know, we don't just talk this talk, we actually have walked in their shoes and that we want them to respond different to that.

In a similar fashion, Russell also uses those conversations with students to express to them how they can overcome these barriers. His personal stories of overcoming issues are a way to connect with the students and show them how they, too, can be successful. He stated:

I try to encourage kids individually based on their own individual needs. And I also kind of let them know that I was them when I was their age. As a matter of fact, as a seventh grader, I intentionally lost a spelling bee contest because I was afraid of what my friends were going to say to me and characterize me as a spelling bee champion. And so I use that experience to let the kids know that I know how you feel about things just to give them an idea of what you're going through is not unique to yourself. And so I have to make that connection with the students. Then I either identify their parents' expectations, to let the kids know that they would want to meet their parents' expectations in terms of the academic success, but for those homes where the parents don't have as much of an appreciation for academic success, then in that case what I do is try to encourage kids to work towards their best academically. I make a connection between earning potential and academic achievement. And usually when they see the connection between earning potential and academic achievement, that really helps to motivate them despite any of the challenges and despite any of the uphill battles that they would have to encounter in their

own education, they would see an end to their working and that end would actually be a benefit to them in terms of a high paying job.

Russell and Michael both are able to connect to students and show them how they can overcome barriers and obstacles to meet success.

Sandra articulated that her students are able to see people of color in successful positions but there is a lack of mentoring and insight provided by them. She shared:

Kids do see people of color in positions that require professionalism and expertise, and positions of power. Let's be honest about it, but I don't know if those same people are coming back and talking to students and providing them with insight. Again, with me, I talk about the code switching and every opportunity I get I let children know where I'm from. I grew up in the inner city of Greenleaf, which is more urban than Dewey, but I knew that wasn't it for me, you know. And so you have to talk to them about don't be a victim of your circumstance. And I don't think they hear that enough and I don't think they see it enough. And when they do see it, often they don't believe that it can come to fruition for them.

Sandra works to help her students understand how they can overcome certain situations and shares her personal experiences about leaving a situation that was not benefitting her. She addresses the disconnect between people who are successful outside of schools sharing insight into specific ways they were able to achieve that success and share it with students. Many times students see these people but are unsure how they can also achieve that success or work through their barriers. There needs to be more sharing of how people attained their success.

Connection to Research Question 2

The second research question posed by the researcher sought to see how the achievement ideologies of school leaders compared and contrasted with a leadership critical race achievement ideology. The five tenets of the framework were used to analyze the data. The participants were not asked questions directly relating to the framework, but instead the researcher looked to see how their answers corresponded. There were many participants that did not espouse any beliefs or ideas of the LCRAI while there were those that shared many beliefs. Some of the participants expressed basic beliefs of the LCRAI but did not expand further that would provide in-depth details as to how they might develop adaptive strategies for students. One of the most common beliefs expressed was the idea of membership. It has been a push in education to have diverse curricula that show people of all cultures and connections and showing students of color successful people with whom they can relate. While this tenet was the most discussed, the idea of critical consciousness and being able to understand and identify racist structures and barriers was the least discussed. There is a lack of understanding across the participants about understanding the oppressed and how the current education system and society are working against them. Even though many of the participants expressed ideas of social justice and equity, they do not fully operate with a leadership critical race achievement ideology.

As some participants did not express any components of the leadership critical achievement ideology and others very little, it ties into what the leaders believe about achievement. As stated earlier, many of the participants do not have a clear understanding of what achievement and learning is. This is reflected in looking at how their beliefs compare and contrast with an ideology rooted in social justice. Unless school leaders understand what achievement and learning are, they cannot understand theories like critical race theory and how they can greatly impact one's beliefs and thus their practice. It is not surprising that many

leaders did not express ideas from this framework as their limited knowledge of what achievement is impacts their ability to understand ideas of critical race theory and critical consciousness and how they guide a belief system rooted in social justice.

Summary

The goal of this study was to explore the achievement ideologies of school leaders and to see how they compare and contrast with an achievement ideology rooted in social justice. This study hoped to gain insight about leaders' beliefs that could provide guidance for school leaders working in urban schools or schools with diverse student populations. The findings demonstrated the beliefs of fourteen leaders from an urban school district that serves majority minority students. This study utilized individual interviews. Data analysis occurred throughout the process, beginning during the interviews themselves as it helped direct the conversation. Following the completion of each interview, the data were transcribed verbatim. This allowed for analysis of the data and identification of codes. The interviews were continuously analyzed and coded until the four themes and subthemes were identified. The beliefs of achievement identified were (a) beliefs of achievement, (b) challenges to achievement, (c) impact on achievement, and (d) their beliefs in practice. The final piece was using the conceptual framework of the leadership critical race achievement ideology to compare and contrast the participants' beliefs. The five tenets included (a) effort, (b) membership, (c) critical consciousness, (d) multicultural competence, and (e) adaptive strategies.

Every participant is a current school leader, either a principal or assistant principal. They were all asked about their beliefs of achievement and what it meant to them. Within this theme, four subcategories were identified. Participants discussed achievement as setting and attaining goals, finding success whether it be in academics, extracurricular activities, or personal

accomplishments, experiencing some type of growth, and the expectations set by school leaders in terms of what students are able to accomplish.

Challenges to achievement guide many of the practices of school leaders. Leaders are tasked with identifying areas in which students are not succeeding and helping to overcome them. Participants expressed that two major challenges to student achievement are self-motivation and resources. Students are not putting forth the effort, or do not have that desire to achieve and it impacts their success. The leaders also identified a lack of resources as a challenge to achievement. These resources were identified as what is available in school and also what students have access to at home.

The theme of leader impact on achievement was identified as leaders being a support to students and building relationships, serving as their advocate, and then for some that their impact is unknown. Leaders believe that they are able to build positive relationships with students which allows them to support them when they seek help. Several participants also identified their impact as being an advocate for the students in terms of how teachers are hired and retained and how the building operates to their benefit. Finally, multiple participants expressed that they do not believe students see or know what their impact is, that they are seen as building managers and the people who give out consequences.

Leaders were asked how they put their beliefs of achievement into practice and a majority of the leaders identified collaborative learning teams (CLT) as how they impact achievement and are able to monitor it. The participants expressed how often they occur, the data they collect, how it impacts their decision making, and the overall impact it has on student achievement. Each leader that identified CLT as their standard of practice shared that they cannot imagine

their schools operating without them, that they have a tremendous impact when executed with fidelity.

The first tenet of the conceptual framework used to analyze the participants' interviews was effort. While school leaders understand that there are other systemic barriers that limit the access and success of students of color, it is also known that students' individual effort and hard work are necessary to achieve. Leaders identified effort as being an important part for them to succeed, but more that they need to encourage them and let them know they have the ability to succeed. The idea that students believe they have the skills to achieve is important.

The second tenet of membership helps students feel that they can belong to their identified racial group and still achieve. Participants identified ways in which they help students see this through seeing examples of successful people of color in offices and texts, to sharing personal stories about how they overcame barriers to be successful. Leaders also identified the importance of exposing students to as many experiences as they can to see people of color succeeding and in positions of leadership and power.

Critical consciousness calls leaders to understand and challenge racist structures that limit the access and success of students of color in the education system. Leaders shared their understanding of disproportionality of students of color represented in gifted and talented programs and the biases that teachers and leaders bring into schools on a daily basis. The participants not only identified these issues, but also shared ways in which they work with teachers to understand their biases and how to not allow them to impact the students with whom they work.

Navigating different cultural norms is a challenge for students of color in a White dominant education system. The tenet of multicultural competence calls leaders to help students

navigate these different social contexts. The participants identified helping students learn to code switch and work within the different systems. The leaders understood how neighborhood and home life actions and school expectations differ. They expressed the importance of sharing this with students and helping them to know when to use which cultural set and how this can impact their achievement.

The final tenet of this framework, adaptive strategies, calls leaders to help students understand that racism is permanent and to develop strategies to overcome these barriers. The goal of this tenet is to help students maintain a positive racial self-concept while working to overcome these barriers and succeed. Leaders shared their experiences overcoming barriers with students to show they are not alone and it is possible to overcome challenges, succeed, and maintain a positive racial self-concept.

Chapter V

Discussion

The previous chapters in this study presented the problem, a review of the literature, the method used to conduct the study, and the findings of the study. This chapter presents a summary of the study and the important conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter 4. This chapter is organized by presenting the problem, methodology, a summary and analysis of the findings, implications for educational leaders, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

Restatement of the Problem

School leaders are tasked with ensuring student achievement occurs. Today's schools have student bodies much more diverse than in years past (Cooper, 2009; Furman, 2012). While school demographics change, the leadership styles and importance of ensuring academic success have not. Working within an educational system that favors the majority White culture (Cooper, 2009), school leaders are tasked with dismantling these barriers and providing an equitable school experience. In addition, the dominant ideology of achievement contends that anyone can be successful as long as they work hard and try. This ideology does not take into account systemic barriers that have perpetuated the marginalization of specific groups of people (Boske, 2012). Beliefs of achievement have been studied within teachers but never with school leaders. This study sought to understand what school leaders believe about achievement, how it impacts their practice, and how they compare and contrast with an achievement ideology rooted in social justice. Also, this study sought to add to the body of research about achievement ideologies and its impact on student achievement, but more specifically what school leaders believe and how

that compares and contrast to social justice leadership. This study was guided by two research questions:

1. What is the achievement ideology of a school leader?
2. How do the achievement ideologies of school leaders compare and contrast with a leadership critical race achievement ideology?

Review of the Methodology

The researcher utilized qualitative methods rooted in grounded theory. This study used semi-structured interviews. The researcher interviewed 14 school leaders. All participants are school leaders at the secondary level and are currently principals or assistant principals. The participants work in the same school district. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Field notes were taken during every interview and were reviewed upon completion of the interview and initial reactions were recorded. 13 of the interviews were conducted face-to-face while one was conducted via Adobe Connect, an online video conferencing platform. In order to ensure accuracy, the researcher immersed himself in the data and also utilized a research team to help analyze the data and identify themes. To remain organized, the researcher developed a data analysis tool for each interview and all themes, codes, and evidence were put into an Excel spreadsheet. These organizational tools allowed for easy access to the data and subsequent analysis. After completing all interview analysis, the researcher determined that he had reached saturation and no new codes or themes were identified.

Summary of Findings

Literature has focused on mainstream achievement ideologies (Ford, 1992a; Ford 1992b; Ford & Harris, 1992) and how those beliefs relate to teacher beliefs of achievement and perceptions that influence student achievement (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011). However,

there has been an absence of looking at what school leaders believe about achievement, how it guides their practice, and with today's student population, how it relates to social justice. For this reason, this study explored the achievement ideologies of school leaders. This study examined the beliefs of 14 school leaders at the secondary level. The focus of the study was on what school leaders believe about achievement, but also how it affects their practice. Lastly, the data were analyzed to see how their achievement ideologies compared and contrasted with a leadership critical race achievement ideology.

Emergent themes

The data analysis consisted of identifying emergent themes as well as using the conceptual framework as a guide. The emergent themes identified were beliefs of achievement, challenges to achievement, impact on achievement, and their practice as leaders. The facets of the conceptual framework used to guide analysis were effort, membership, critical consciousness, multicultural competence, and adaptive strategies.

Beliefs of achievement. The mainstream ideology of achievement espouses hard work and effort. As school leaders must be willing to challenge this belief and look at possible barriers to achievement (Carter, 2008), every participant was asked about what achievement is to them and what it means. One of the first themes that emerged was the different leaders' beliefs of achievement. This manifested in different ways, but four subthemes that emerged were the ideas of setting and attaining goals, finding success, experiencing growth, and the expectations from leaders.

Goals. Setting goals is a way to measure success. Of the leaders that identified goal setting as a measure of achievement, they all shared that it involved not just setting the goal, but also attaining it. One participant even mentioned that it is not just attaining a goal one time, but

it is the continuous cycle of setting goals and reaching them. Another participant also shared that these goals are not strictly academic, but can relate to personal goals and extracurricular goals, as well.

Success. Similar to goal setting, another subtheme that emerged was the idea of finding success. Again, this was not held to just academic success, but success in anything a student does. Many of the participants did speak strictly to success being the completion of coursework, scoring a passing grade on a state exam, and accomplishing something new. One participant identified being successful as achievement, but also commented on the very broad definition of achievement that is used to be relating to academic success that schools fail to account for other ways that students have success.

Growth. Schools are judged based on how many students pass state examinations. There is at times very little attention given to the growth students experience, even if that growth does not yield a passing score or grade. Multiple participants identified experiencing growth as their definition of achievement. These leaders understand that sometimes improving a score, even if it is not to an identified passing score, but growth is seen, is success. In addition, one participant shared that achievement through growth also means going beyond mastery and moving them forward still.

Expectations. The final subtheme is that of expectations put on students and staff. Hattie (2009) shared that expectations impact how a student will succeed in school. Some of the participants identified that expectations impact how well students will achieve. Several participants identified that students will live up to the expectation placed on them, and if it is believed they will not achieve then they tend to live up that belief. Having conversations with students about the importance of school and the expectation of what they will accomplish will

impact what they do. Other participants identified the importance of having high expectations for the staff in the buildings and surrounding students with people who believe they can succeed and are going to work for it. Finally, one participant expressed the importance of holding students in an urban setting to the same expectation that they would hold suburban students, that it is important to maintain the high academic expectations regardless of where the school is located.

Challenges to achievement. To understand more of the participants' beliefs of achievement, they were all asked what they believe are some of the challenges students face that impact achievement. Research shows that there are many challenges to achievement, whether it be poverty or school funding (Norman, Ault, Bentz, & Meskimen, 2001), but it was important to understand what school leaders believe are the challenges students face. Two major subthemes emerged, self-motivation and resources.

Self-motivation. Several participants were quick to identify self-motivation as the biggest challenge to academic success. Students were identified as being from the "give me" generation, not willing to work for anything and just want the answer instantly. Participants discussed that they have no game plan, no goals, and are unmotivated to work. Another participant identified students' home lives as a factor that limits their motivation. The last part of self-motivation that came out was how schools teach students and how that dampers their motivation. In an era of electronics and the Internet, a participant identified the antiquated teaching styles as a major factor in their lack of motivation. This ties in with another leader's statement that motivation is determined by how well the content knowledge is known and understood. Frustration at not understanding content material impacts how much a student is motivated to keep working.

Resources. The second subtheme to emerge as a challenge to achievement was lack of resources. There were two components to this that came about. The first was the lack of resources available in schools due to budget cuts as well as the lack of resources students have at home. Many times, schools are relying heavily on technology for lessons and assignments that students without that access at home are unable to complete. One leader mentioned her school's attempt at providing adequate time at school to complete and submit assignments, but still noted the challenge it poses. A few leaders also identified having too many resources or technology as a major impact on achievement. Students' obsession with cell phone and social media has led to a distracted generation of students. The participants have not yet been able to identify ways to combat cell phones and their impact on achievement.

Impact on achievement. The third emergent theme that came out was the leaders' impact on achievement. While teachers have the most direct impact on student achievement (Hattie, 2009), school leaders impact achievement in how they run the building and the vision they set. When participants were asked about their impact on achievement, three subthemes developed, being a support to students and staff and developing strong relationships, being advocate to students and for students, and the idea that their impact is unknown.

Support and relationships. Serving as a support to the school community was a response from several participants about their impact. Some of them mentioned the importance of building relationships with students to ensure that students trusted them that would lead to their being able to support them more. One participant mentioned that her impact is being available for anyone that needs her, that her door is open and she is there to support them. The idea of caring about students and really working with them to meet their needs came through. One participant also mentioned that his impact is in how he supports the teachers with whatever they

need. He mentioned supporting students, but really focused on supporting teachers through classroom observations and assisting with classroom management.

Advocate. Serving as an advocate related similarly to being a support, except that some of the participants articulated that as an advocate for students it was their job to ensure that they had quality teachers in the building that believed in students and wanted them to succeed. A couple of them even mentioned that if they feel teachers are not there to really do their job then it fell to the leader to help them find another place to be. The other participants mentioned that they feel students know them to be an advocate for their success and that they care.

Impact unknown. The last subtheme that emerged was the idea that the leaders' impact was a trickle-down process, indirect, and unknown by students. When the leaders were asked to describe their impact on achievement, the idea of indirect impact came about, that a lot of what leaders do is behind the scenes and trickles down to the teachers and then to the students. This corresponded with the leaders that believe their impact is indirect, that they no longer have that direct impact on students being out of the classroom. Several participants also identified that they are seen by students as only a person who gives out consequences and not tied to their achievement. One participant articulated that students view him as a building manager and not a teacher or someone who impacts their success.

Beliefs in practice. The final emergent theme was the idea of how school leaders put their beliefs into practice. Each leader was asked to identify a standard of practice in which they participate that they believe impacts achievement. The majority of the participants identified collaborative learning teams (CLT) as something in which they participate that affects student achievement. The components to the CLT they discussed were their role and frequency of the

CLT, the data they collect, how this data impacts decision making, and the overall impact of the CLT on student achievement.

Role and frequency. Almost every participant that identified CLT as their standard of practice stated the same role in the CLT. Many of the leaders are participants, they do not run the CLT. They articulated that this is to give ownership to the teachers and to allow a fluid discussion that is not directed by the school leader. They mentioned they wanted the conversation to be authentic with an ownership of the data and decisions. One participant mentioned that he serves as the facilitator of the CLT to ensure that the time is not used as a gripe session about students and what is not happening, but instead focuses on the task. Two other participants shared that at the beginning of the year they had to serve as a facilitator due to having many new teachers, but once the expectation was established they moved back into the participant role. All leaders shared that the CLT occur every two weeks. Some of the teams meet more infrequently depending on the content, but the major content courses meet at least every other week.

Data collected. The purpose of discussing the standard of practice was to identify how it impacts student achievement. The participants were asked about the data they discuss and collect for CLT. Every participant identified the same data sources: common assessments, Standards of Learning (SOL) exams, and critical skills assessments, or benchmark tests. The assessments are either formative or summative and range from district generated to teacher generated common assessments to individual student work. A couple participants identified that it is almost exclusively assessment data, but at times they discuss behavioral data. One mentioned that the discussion is also very anecdotal in nature and at times hard to quantify.

Decision making. The participants then shared how the data collected drives the decision making for the school and departments. They expressed how after looking at the data there is a lot of discussion about best practices and how some teachers may have scored higher or their students had more success with a skill. The brainstorming of ideas for best practices is very important. The data discussions also drive pacing questions and whether to move on, reteach a skill, or to provide enrichment. One leader even shared that due to the data discussions in a mathematics CLT that students were shifted into different classrooms to meet their needs and use the strengths of different teachers. Another leader shared that she uses the CLT to determine not only the needs of students, but also how she can support her teachers.

Impact. Every participant when asked about the impact that CLT have on student achievement did not hesitate to say that it is very great. Most of the participants have been operating in CLT for many years that they no longer can imagine their schools not having them. A couple participants did mention that for the impact to be what it should it requires everyone to participate and be honest in that participation. When run with fidelity, the impact is great. They were asked if these impact student achievement or teacher practices and everyone agreed that the two go hand-in-hand, that by improving teacher practices student achievement will follow. The CLT are giving teachers the opportunity to learn from each other and develop best practices.

Conceptual framework

The second research question asked how the ideologies of achievement of the school leaders compared and contrasted with a leadership critical race achievement ideology (LCRAI). The LCRAI is an achievement ideology that calls leaders to understand and challenge systemic barriers that limit students of color from achieving. It also challenges leaders to help students navigate a system designed to benefit the dominant White culture while maintaining a positive

racial identity. This study used the five tenets of the framework as a guide in analyzing data to identify if the tenets were present. The five tenets used were effort, membership, critical consciousness, multicultural competence, and adaptive strategies.

Effort. The first tenet of the leadership critical race achievement ideology posits that one's sense of self as an achiever, hard work, and individual effort are key factors to achieving success (Carter, 2008). In addition, it is the responsibility of the school leader to ensure students have the skills to succeed, and even more, perceive that they have the skills necessary. The leaders that demonstrated this tenet all stated that students need to put forth the effort to succeed. One stated that students alone will determine if they are going to put forth the effort. Another participant connected the effort level of students to them understanding the importance of education and how it will benefit them. Another leader stated that she has never had a kid tell her he wants to just be a drop out and a failure, but instead noted the discouragement he faces and how it is her job to help him understand his role in succeeding and the effort he needs to put forth.

Membership. One of the challenges students of color face in succeeding is not feeling that academic success can occur within their racial identity (Carter, 2008). The second tenet of the framework tells leaders they must refrain from believing that success is a trait of one specific racial group. In addition, it is key that school success does not come at the expense of one's racial identity. Leaders must challenge the dominant discourse about achievement and demonstrate to students how they can be successful and a member of their identified racial group. The participants that demonstrated this belief talked about exposing students to successful people of color. In addition, a participant discussed the importance of exposing the students to other experiences outside of their neighborhood where they can view themselves as

an achiever and not just a kid from their neighborhood where they deal with stereotypes and other labels. They mentioned how it is important for them to see people in positions of power and leadership that look like them. A couple of the participants who are Black males with advanced degrees shared how they share their personal experiences with their students to show how a member of their racial group can be successful. One participant explained how he saw students with an aversion to academic success and how he worked harder to connect with those students and share about his own successes and challenges. Another participant makes it a point to have in his office on display posters and other positive examples of people of color succeeding.

Critical consciousness. The third tenet of the leadership critical race achievement ideology framework calls leaders to understand, interact with, and challenge racist structures that limit access and opportunities for students of color. The leaders that discussed this tenet of the framework briefly touched on the idea of examining biases within themselves and helping teachers to do the same. They discussed that by understanding these biases they can consciously challenge placing them on students and letting it affect how they interact with students. One participant expressed that the reason he tries hard to model for students is because of his knowledge of the lack of representation of Black students in talented and gifted programs. He understands that structure that historically has limited the access of students of color into those programs and he works to dismantle it within his school.

Multicultural competence. The fourth tenet of the framework discusses leaders helping students to develop different cultural codes or behaviors to navigate different social contexts. Understanding that the dominant narrative expects certain speech patterns and styles, leaders are tasked with helping students navigate these expectations while maintaining their cultural identity.

One participant was very clear that it is imperative that school leaders prepare students to understand they are working in a White constructed environment, that there will be certain expectations of behavior, dress, and speech. Another participant shared her experience with a student who was in an alternative education placement and how she expressed herself. She validated the feelings of the student, but shared with her that the way in which she expressed herself was working against her and how to do it in a way that people would listen. Finally, two participants discussed how they have conversations with students about code switching, how there are certain expectations in school and in the work place when they leave school. One leader shared she understands how people speak in the neighborhood and at home, but at school they have to switch it off and on to navigate that system. The competencies are helping students be more successful in school.

Adaptive strategies. The final tenet of the leadership critical race achievement ideology directs leaders to help students of color to develop strategies to overcome barriers and racist structures. The participants that expressed this tenet shared how they overcame barriers and obstacles throughout their educational careers. Two leaders shared how they have conversations with students about moving beyond the racism, the barriers. These participants have walked in the shoes of the students and share that with them. Another participant articulated that it is important that students leave high school with some form of credential and that they are clearly articulated the reality of the world and given the skills to fight against these barriers. Finally, one leader shared how important it is for her to spend more time talking with students about her life, her experiences, and how she relates to the students. She understands the power in showing students that they can overcome barriers and obstacles like she did.

Surprises

Throughout the data collection and analysis procedures, there were a few surprises identified by the researcher. Every interview was conducted at the location chosen by the participant to create a comfortable atmosphere and for convenience. Many of the participants were unwilling to go deep into certain components of the discussion. As this study looked to understand how their beliefs of achievement aligned with social justice, there were questions and follow up questions that related to race. Participants were quick to end the conversation about race and instead move to the next part or brush it off. There was no difference between the Black or White participants in terms of unwillingness to discuss race. Whether this was due to the fact that the researcher is White and they felt uncomfortable discussing race, it was noticed and surprising.

Another surprise was how many participants were unable to articulate what achievement is. When asked the questions about achievement, the participants gave short answers and did not tend to elaborate without prompting. It appeared as if they did not truly understand what achievement is, or did not have their own definition or beliefs of achievement. As the conversations continued, it was surprising how none of the participants articulated systemic barriers as a challenge to achievement. As leaders working in an urban environment with predominately minority students, it was surprising that no one mentioned outside forces impacting achievement.

The last area of surprise was that the leaders that said self-motivation was a challenge to achievement were in turn affirming the mainstream ideology of achievement. As this belief contends that anyone can be successful with hard work and effort, by stating that students' lack of motivation was the biggest challenge fails to account systemic issues and barriers. Again, it goes back to leaders working in urban environments and failing to identify other reasons that

students may not have motivation and placing all of the blame on the students and their lack of effort.

Implications for Educational Leaders

The diversity of students in schools is only going to increase as the years go on (United States Census Bureau, 2015). As schools continue to learn how to adapt to diverse student populations, so, too, will school leaders need to learn to operate in ways that promote success for all students. As stated in an earlier chapter, leadership preparation programs do not currently emphasize social justice. A vast majority of the programs offer a stand-alone class, but do not fuse ideas of social justice throughout. This study provided insight into how leaders were trained and what they understand about achievement and justice. While some leaders articulated components of social justice, there was not an overall understanding of social justice leadership and its call to challenge racism and barriers to students. Social justice can no longer simply be a mantra by which a school leader goes, but it is a call to action and a commitment to all students. School leaders must begin to challenge their own biases and prejudices in order to work within diverse school communities and create equitable opportunities. As programs are able to discuss critical consciousness and help leaders to develop their own critical consciousness, they will be able to see, interact with, and challenge racist structures.

One way in which school leaders can better understand ways to help their students succeed and overcome barriers is to have an in-depth understanding of critical race theory. With this understanding, leaders will be exposed to voices of historically marginalized people and make connections as to how they can best serve these students in their schools. Developing an activist mindset and developing their critical consciousness, leaders will be able to acknowledge the experiences of the oppressed and work to take down barriers within their schools that

continue to limit the access and opportunity for certain groups of students. It is important that leaders become allies of marginalized students and challenge systemic issues. Regardless of the race of the participants, the ideas of critical race theory and critical consciousness were not present or discussed.

In addition to infusing social justice throughout leadership preparation programs, they also must address the mainstream belief of achievement and how that thinking is impacting students. It is important for school leaders to understand that as students of color face assimilation into the dominant culture, they develop acts of resistance to achievement as it is seen as abandoning their culture and racial identity. It is the job of the leader to recognize when this happens and work to build up the student as a racialized being. By accepting that hard work and effort are the only things needed to succeed, leaders are unable to understand, let alone challenge, the other barriers students face. It has become imperative for school leaders to understand what systemic and historic barriers continue to limit the success of students of color. As the leaders in this study were unable to articulate in depth what achievement is and even affirmed the mainstream belief of achievement, it is evident that this must be addressed at the university level.

While also understanding the detriment of the mainstream belief of achievement, school leaders must begin to incorporate a leadership critical race achievement ideology. This new belief positions leaders to help students in multiple ways. It contends that effort is important for students to succeed, but it also acknowledges that there are other barriers that must be overcome. With this belief, leaders are able to share with students specific strategies and skills to overcome racism and how to function in a White dominated society and culture. These are life-long skills that will benefit the students long after they leave high school. Another specific component of

this belief is that it falls to the school leader to identify and dismantle ideas of racism, White supremacy, and oppression. School leaders must be concerned with the day-to-day operations of the school and academic instruction, but they are also charged with ensuring that schools are equitable for all students. With this charge, school leaders cannot sit by idly and perpetuate racist structures whether consciously or through inaction.

Quite a few participants in this study were unable to articulate their impact on achievement, or believe that it is unknown. Leaders expressed that students only know them as disciplinarians and not caring about their success or having a direct impact on it. A leader's impact should be known by the students. School leaders must be present in the students' academic lives. Academic discussions should not be limited to school counselors and teachers, but school leaders should be participating, as well, working with students who are struggling and encouraging those who are succeeding. The school runs based on the leader's vision, if it is unknown by students then a system cannot truly change. Likewise, if a leader does not know the students and is not involved in their academic lives and building relationships, his vision cannot truly affect change.

Finally, school leaders must be advocates for students. It is imperative that school leaders are putting in front of students people that truly believe they can achieve, care, and are willing to work for more than just a paycheck. When leaders are aware of teachers and other building personnel that are not truly committed or are reaffirming deficit thinking and barriers, it is their responsibility to work to remove them or address the situation. It falls to the school leaders to challenge ideas of lookism (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011) and develop policies that do not single out specific groups of students, but instead look to create an inclusive community that believes in the success of all students.

Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations that must be acknowledged. The purpose of addressing limitations from this study is to offer insight and suggestions for future researchers that wish to conduct similar or replicate studies (Creswell, 2005). The first limitation is the researcher only interviewed school leaders from one school district. These participants are only able to express their beliefs and opinions that may not reflect similar ideas elsewhere. Similarly, the participants in this study were the only ones that responded to an invitation to participate. All of the school leaders selected for this study met the criteria of being a secondary school administrator that work in a majority minority school district. This criterion is another limitation that may limit the generalizability to other school districts and leaders.

Recommendations for Future Research

Almost all research on achievement ideologies has focused on teachers' beliefs and students' beliefs (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011; Deschenes et al., 2001; Fordham, 2008; Neal et al., 2003; Shields, 2004). There has been insufficient research on what school leaders believe about achievement, how they conceptualize it, and how it impacts their practice. With little to no research on school leaders' beliefs of achievement, specifically how they relate to social justice, the researcher felt it a need in the literature. As this study is one of the first to study this topic, there are areas of future research that became clear.

Looking at beliefs of achievement, one recommendation for future research is to look at the beliefs of achievement of central office leaders. Members of the district leadership team and the ones who hire building leaders, it would be beneficial to understand how they conceptualize achievement and how it impacts hiring processes. It is unknown if district leadership team

members take into account how prospective school leaders view achievement and how it guides their practice.

This study focused mainly on regular middle and high schools, however there was one participant that worked in a gifted education center and another that worked in the alternative education program. Another recommendation for future research is to look more closely at both of these programs and how beliefs of achievement are present and guiding practice. Both of these schooling environments have historically limited the participation of students of color (gifted education) and had an overrepresentation of students of color (alternative education). It would shed light onto how these programs function within the current education system and challenge mainstream beliefs.

A final recommendation for future study is to explore beliefs about achievement in school districts that differ from the one in this study. It would be beneficial to explore rural and suburban districts, as well as areas of extreme wealth and poverty. These differing school districts would provide a more whole picture about school leaders' beliefs of achievement, their practice as leaders, and their impact on student achievement.

In addition, to improve the study presented, future researchers can improve parts of the methodology to have a clearer picture of leaders' beliefs. As this study only conducted one interview with participants, it may improve the discussion if the researcher spends more time with each participant. Spending more time would build trust with the leaders and create an easier atmosphere to discuss sensitive topics such as race. In addition, by adding in a shadowing component to see how school leaders put into practice their beliefs versus stated would enhance the researcher's understanding. Finally, by introducing a critical incident component where a second interview is derived from a moment or practice the researcher observed and discusses

with the leader will give more insight into what school leaders believe and how it is put into practice.

Conclusion

There is a need for school leaders to operate with a leadership critical race achievement ideology. As schools have become, and continue to be, more diverse, the way in which schools operate needs to adjust. School leaders have operated under the same beliefs as in the past. These beliefs and acceptance of the mainstream belief of achievement have created systemic barriers that limit certain groups of students from achieving success. It is imperative that school leaders understand these barriers exist and work to dismantle them. The purpose of this study was to explore the achievement ideologies of school leaders and to compare and contrast them with an achievement ideology rooted in social justice. In order to determine this information, interviews were conducted with fourteen secondary school leaders. Each participant was either a current principal or assistant principal. The research utilized a qualitative design rooted in grounded theory. The data were analyzed for emergent themes as well as using a conceptual framework. The results of this study show that school leaders do not fully understand what achievement is or the systemic barriers that are in place. The results also indicate that school leaders care about their students. The participants of this study were more comfortable speaking about what they do in their daily practice than speaking about their beliefs of achievement. While this is a step in the right direction in identifying what school leaders believe, there is still a great need for further research and exploration.

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APPENDIX A

Invitation Letter

Dear Prospective Participant,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study for my dissertation. The title of the dissertation is *What Do You Believe? School Leaders and an Ideology of Achievement*. The purpose of this study is to identify and explore school leaders' achievement ideologies. You were identified as a prospective participant based on your current position as a school leader in an urban school district. With your participation, your answers to the interview questions will provide insight into the beliefs of achievement of school leaders.

Participation in this study will consist of one interview. The interview will take between 45 and 60 minutes. All responses are confidential and no identifying information will be revealed in the final report. The interview will be recorded and kept in a secure location. Only authorized users will have access to recordings and original responses. If responses are used in writing, non-identifying information will be used.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please understand it is voluntary and you are able to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. You also have the right to not answer any question for any reason. If you decide to participate, please feel free to contact me at alloy004@odu.edu or by phone at 585-469-5726. Upon agreement you will be mailed a letter of consent. This letter must be signed before moving forward. After I have your answer I will be in contact to arrange a time for the interview and answer any questions you may have. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Andrew Lloyd
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Foundations and Leadership
Darden College of Education
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia

Steve Myran, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Educational Foundations and Leadership
Darden College of Education
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

Position and Level:

Interviewee:

Interviewer:

Opening script:

Thank you for coming today and agreeing to participate in this research study. Again, my topic is researching school leaders' ideology of achievement. We have gone through the informed consent document and by signing you agreed to partake in this anonymous interview. You may withdraw your participation at any time. In order to make this process more fluid, I will be audio recording the interview. Your participation in this study will remain confidential and all recordings will be destroyed upon being transcribed.

This interview is scheduled to last no more than one hour. There are several questions I would like to cover in this time. Please note that it may be necessary to interrupt you and move on to remaining questions and complete the interview if time becomes an issue.

You have been asked to participate in this study as you have been identified as a school leader that works in a district that serves majority minority students. My research project is focusing on the ideology of achievement of school leaders and how that impacts their practice and guides their leadership. This study does not look to evaluate you as a leader, but instead to gain insight into what school leaders believe about achievement.

- I. Background and Opening Questions
 - a. What is your current position?
Probes: How long have you been in this position?
 - b. How long have you been a school administrator?
Probes: At what levels and settings? What have been your main responsibilities in these positions?
 - c. What is the demographic breakdown of students in your school? Teaching staff?

- II. Achievement
 - a. What is achievement?
Probes: How does this differ from learning? Is achievement viewed differently by different groups of students? Why do you think that is?
 - b. What does achievement look like?
Probes: Who determines if achievement happens?
 - c. What do you believe are the ways students can achieve?

- d. What do you believe are the biggest challenges students face today in terms of achievement?
Probes: Why do you think these are there? How can they be overcome?
 - e. Share with me what you know about and what your school does in regards to the achievement gap.
 - f. Do you believe there is a connection between beliefs of achievement and the achievement gap?
Probes: What is it? Why is it there? How can we overcome that?
- III. Wrap Up
- a. What do you believe is your impact as a school leader on student achievement?
Probes: How do you think students view your role in their achievement?
What is your role as a school leader in helping students achieve?
 - b. Would you be willing to share academic achievement data of your school?
Probes: What information is able to be shared? How would I be able to access this information?
- IV. Speaking of your impact, tell me about a standard of practice in which you participate that focuses on achievement.
- a. What is the frequency of this event?
 - b. What types of data are collected?
 - c. How do you use this data in decision-making?
 - d. What is your role in this standard of practice?
- V. How does this practice impact student achievement?
- a. How is it relayed to staff? Students?
 - b. How do you measure the effectiveness of the implementation?
- VI. Is this standard of practice a school initiative or district?
- a. Who created it/determined it was going to be done?
 - b. How was it designed?
 - c. Is it designed to impact student achievement or teacher practices? Why?
- VII. How often do you look at student achievement data?
- a. What trends do you look for?
 - b. What interventions do you put into place? How are they determined? How do you know if they're effective?
 - c. What do you take into account when looking at scores/grades that are failing/poor?
 - d. How often do you have conversations with teachers about this data? Students?
 - e. What types of trends do your data show?
 - i. What do you believe are possible causes of these trends?

Thank you very much for your time, insight, and willingness to participate in this study. If you have any questions about my research or this study, please do not hesitate to contact me. If I have any further questions is it ok to contact you via email? Thank you again for your time.

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Document

PROJECT TITLE: What Do You Believe? School Leaders and an Ideology of Achievement.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this form is to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. This qualitative study's purpose is to gain knowledge on school leaders' ideology of achievement.

RESEARCHERS

The primary researcher will be Andrew Lloyd, a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, Darden College of Education, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia. The project will be supervised by Dr. Steve Myran, Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, Darden College of Education, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

There have been studies conducted on teachers' beliefs of achievement and the ideology of achievement for students and teachers. There has been little, if any, research done on the ideology of achievement of school leaders and how this directs their decisions of school operation.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research of your ideology of achievement as a school leader. If you say YES, then your participation will last for one interview session (either individual or group session) located at _____. Approximately 15-20 individuals will be participating in this study.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA

You should be a school leader currently working in the selected school division. To the best of your knowledge, you should not have any conflict of interests that would keep you from participating in this study.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

RISKS: If you decide to participate in this study, then you may face a risk of discussing potentially uncomfortable topics. The researcher tried to reduce these risks by allowing the participant to choose not to answer any question that they do not feel comfortable answering. As with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS: The main benefit to you participating in this study is that you are aiding in research that hopes to better prepare school leaders and how they operate. Your participating in this research is a valued part of this process.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS

The researcher is unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

NEW INFORMATION

If the researcher finds new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then he will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The researcher will take reasonable steps to keep private information, such as identifying information confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study – at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with the selected school division, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm arising from this study, neither the selected school division nor the researcher is able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact the current IRB chair at Old Dominion University, who will be glad to review the matter with you.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researcher should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the research should be able to answer them:

Andrew Lloyd, M.S.Ed.
Phone: (585) 469-5726
E-mail: alloy004@odu.edu

Steve Myran, Ph.D.
smyran@odu.edu

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call the current IRB chair, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature

Date

By signing below you agree to have the interview recorded and the data used for this research project.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature

Date

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

Interview Analysis Document

Interview #: _____

Ideology of Achievement

Effort	Membership	Critical Consciousness	Multicultural Competence	Adaptive Strategies

VITA

Andrew Lloyd

Education:

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2017 | Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
<i>Doctor of Philosophy</i>
<i>Educational Leadership</i> |
| 2014 | Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
<i>Master of Science in Education</i>
<i>Educational Leadership</i> |
| 2010 | Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
<i>Bachelor of Arts</i>
<i>Foreign Languages and Literature: Teacher Preparation</i> |

Professional Experience:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 2017 – Present | Vice Principal
Grant Middle School
2400 Grant Blvd.
Syracuse, NY 13208 |
| 2016 – 2017 | Vice Principal
Public Service Leadership Academy at Fowler
229 Magnolia St.
Syracuse, NY 13204 |
| 2015 – 2016 | Spanish Teacher
Phoebus High School
100 Ireland St.
Hampton, Virginia 23663 |
| 2010 – 2015 | Spanish Teacher
George P. Phenix PreK-8 School
1061 Big Bethel Rd.
Hampton, Virginia 23666 |

Professional Endorsements/Certifications:

- Virginia Department of Education:
- Post-Graduate Professional License:
 - Admin. and Supervision PK-12
 - Spanish PK-12