CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: INCREASING EQUITY-CENTERED IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT FOR PRE-AP

A disquisition presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Educational Leadership.

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Concluding my acknowledgements as I began in the summer of 2020, shortly after the release of "The Last Dance," a documentary on the 1997-1998 Chicago Bulls championship season. I draw inspiration from a quote by the greatest basketball player of all time, Michael Jordan, made before game one against the New Jersey Nets in the 1998 playoffs: "Starts with hard work, ends with champagne" (Jordan, 1998). It is finish**Ed.D**.!

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Abstract

As a Black Southern woman with a personal history of overcoming systemic barriers, I, the researcher, serve as an Implementation Director for Pre-AP, assigned to support districts in the Midwest and Southwest regions. Implementation Directors for Pre-AP serve as the main points of contact for Pre-AP districts/sites across the nation, acting as instructional leaders and collaborative thought partners with educational leaders. We play a pivotal role in overseeing program implementation, including the development of strategic service plans and the facilitation of professional development. Furthermore, Implementation Directors contribute valuable insights to product development, assessment design, and marketing, ensuring alignment with the perspectives and needs of customers. The national launch of the Pre-AP Program in 2018 aimed to equip students for success in rigorous academic settings. The Pre-AP Equity and Access policy states the Pre-AP program has a dedication to ensuring educational equity; however, I argue an equity-driven approach to implementation is absent within the practices of Pre-AP Implementation Directors. To ensure district and school leaders effectively implement Pre-AP with an equitable approach, Implementation Directors must have a solid grasp of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL). The absence of CRSL knowledge among Implementation Directors serves as a barrier to intentionally infusing culturally responsive practices into implementation support and services for district and site leaders. This, in turn, obstructs the realization of equity-centered objectives within the Pre-AP framework. Building upon the foundational theories of scholars such as Ladson-Billings and Gay, this disquisition expands from culturally responsive teaching to encompass CRSL. The study seeks to explore how sustained exposure to CRSL pedagogy and practices for Pre-AP Implementation Directors can enhance the capacity of district and site leaders to approach Pre-AP implementation through an

equity lens. My long-term goal is to influence school culture and increase the representation of Black learners in Advanced Placement (AP) courses because of ongoing CRSL professional development. The intervention aimed to increase the awareness and consciousness of Implementation Directors by highlighting where equity-driven initiatives can exist in our work. This initiative sought to illuminate the systemic inequitable practices ingrained in the educational system, particularly those that persistently oppress Black learners. Anchored in the theory of improvement, this research proves that professional development for Pre-AP Implementation Directors can narrow their CRSL knowledge gap, fostering equity-focused implementation support for district and site leaders over time, potentially impacting access to advanced curricula for Black students on a national scale. I discovered that this intervention heightened the culturally responsive consciousness of Implementation Directors and strengthened implementation support. The findings also underscored implications for establishing safe spaces, strategic planning, and fostering a community of practice to ensure that equity is ingrained within the Implementation Team's work.

The Problem: The Culturally Responsive School Leadership Knowledge Gap

A National Issue

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced," (Baldwin, 1962, para. 3).

Recent studies on educational leadership underscore the importance of incorporating cultural diversity into leadership preparation programs, urging these programs to actively resist any forms of exclusion or discrimination. Accordingly, educational leadership preparation programs should be designed to equip aspiring school leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to champion social justice, equity, and inclusion in both educational institutions and communities (Barakat et al., 2019; Carter & Welner, 2013; Howard, 2010; Khalifa, 2018). For more than 30 years, academic scholars have named the need for culturally relevant and responsive approaches to improve Black student performance (Carter Jr., 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Khalifia, 2018; Noguera et. al., 2016; Villegas & Lucas, 2007); however, the system continues the one-size-fits-all approach despite research and data. Research reveals students who have culturally responsive experiences in school demonstrate improved academic achievement, increased engagement, and a stronger sense of belonging (Espinosa et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2011). Conversely, the absence of a culturally responsive school environment can perpetuate educational disparities, contribute to low student motivation, and hinder the academic success of marginalized students (Howard, 2010; Milner, 2017). Thus, educational leaders lacking cultural competence perpetuate oppressive cycles, further contributing to the persistence of achievement gaps for Black learners.

In educational settings, a culturally responsive knowledge gap among school leaders refers to a lack of understanding and awareness of the diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences,

and identities of students. This knowledge gap can have a significant impact on student achievement. When leaders lack cultural responsiveness, they may inadvertently perpetuate biases, stereotypes, and inequities that negatively affect students from marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds. The following four sections delve into crucial aspects at the intersection of the achievement gap and cultural responsiveness.

1. Achievement Gap and Cultural Responsiveness:
    a. Research consistently establishes an achievement gap between students from diverse cultural backgrounds and their peers. This gap can be exacerbated when leaders fail to address the unique needs and experiences of culturally diverse students introducing the concept of "education debt" highlighting historical and systemic disadvantages, especially impacting Black students (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2021).
2. Implicit Bias and Stereotypes:
    a. Leaders who lack cultural responsiveness may unintentionally harbor implicit biases and stereotypes that negatively impact students' educational experiences (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Morris, 2018; Khalifa, 2018).
    b. Implicit bias can affect disciplinary practices, tracking decisions, and instructional approaches, leading to disparities in academic outcomes (Howard, 2019).
3. Culturally Relevant Instruction:
    a. Culturally responsive leaders understand the importance of incorporating culturally relevant instruction that connects with students' backgrounds and experiences. When leaders fail to promote such practices, students may feel disconnected from the curriculum and disengaged from learning (Gay, 2018).

b. Research by Ladson-Billings (1994) and Howard (2022) emphasizes the significance of culturally relevant pedagogy in closing the achievement gap and fostering positive educational outcomes for all students. Ladson-Billings (2006) argues that the achievement gap stems from system failures, not inherent deficits, advocating for polices that address and rectify education debt through equity, cultural responsiveness, and meeting students' needs.

4. Cultural Competence and Relationship Building:
    a. Culturally responsive leaders prioritize building trusting relationships with students, families, and communities. When leaders lack cultural competence, it can hinder effective communication and collaboration, further marginalizing certain student populations (Artiles et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018).
    b. A study by Irizarry and Donaldson (2012) and Khalifa et al. (2016) found that leaders who actively engage with culturally diverse stakeholders foster positive school climates, leading to improved student achievement.

In summary, research consistently illuminates the existence of an achievement gap among students from diverse cultural backgrounds and their peers, emphasizing the exacerbation of this gap when leaders neglect the distinctive needs of culturally diverse students (Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Subsequent discussions explore the implications of implicit bias and stereotypes on students' educational experiences, the significance of culturally relevant instruction in mitigating disconnection and disengagement, and the role of cultural competence in relationship building to foster positive school climates and enhance student achievement. These insights collectively contribute to the ongoing dialogue on achieving educational equity through culturally responsive leadership.

The aforementioned litany of research therefore begs the question, when will educators choose to face the problem of closing achievement gaps through culturally relevant practices? In an attempt to do just that, the primary focus of this disquisition aims to further expose and develop Pre-AP Implementation Directors as culturally competent educational leaders. Pre-AP Implementation Directors support school leaders across the country and ongoing exposure to culturally responsive ideologies and practices (including theory and implicit bias awareness) will inform their approach to Pre-AP implementation support as champions of educational equity. In a wider scope beyond Pre-AP Implementation Directors, consultant companies specializing in equity engagement and enlisted by agencies striving to integrate culturally responsive practices, assume a vital role in steering organizational equity initiatives. By adeptly integrating culturally responsive school leadership best practices and customizing them to suit the unique context of the agency that engaged their services, consultants can skillfully lead and augment the execution of equity-focused initiatives within the organization. I purport that increasing the culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) knowledge among Implementation Directors can result in educational leaders facing the problem. Ultimately, exposing leaders to culturally responsive school leadership practices could positively impact change and potentially increase equitable access for Black students, who historically have fallen victim to systemic inequities in educational environments.

Historical Context

The story of the African diaspora in America continues to be written. The fight for educational equity and access is woven into the fabric of that story and is an intricate part of the African American experience. For 93 years (1740 - 1834) in southern slave states, teaching enslaved Africans (African Americans) or free people of color to read and write was illegal

(Maddox, 2022). These anti-literacy laws deprived Black Americans of their access to formal education and even made it illegal for them to own a book. It was not until 1890 that the first *colored* school building opened in Winter Park, Florida (First Colored School Building, 1890, n.d.). Six years later, in 1896, due to the Supreme Court decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, segregated public schools opened in America (National Archives, 2021). Though the school openings were a representation of progress, schools for colored children were met with the challenges of inequitable funding and resources for students who already lived in advert poverty.

Similarly, the end of human enslavement in the United States did not end the belief that Black Americans were inferior to White Americans. In many ways the social change birthed a new era of more sophisticated ways to implant racism in American society. One way was American schooling. During the 1920s "segregation, or racial separation, was carried out by the legislature of southern states enacting laws" (Wadelington, 2004, p. 1). These laws, known as Jim Crow laws, existed for about 100 years from the post-Civil War era until 1968 (Onion et al., 2018). Hence, a new commitment to evaluating students and sorting them occurred alongside a legal sorting out of many Black students, who were constitutionally mandated to attend separate and unequal schools (Feldman, 2018). Feldman (2018) continues that tracking students to situate them for specific roles in the economic hierarchy helped to replicate the existing social and racial hierarchy and provided scientific justification for doing so (pp. 21-22). W.E.B. Du Bois (1920), American sociologist, socialist, historian, and Pan-Africanist civil rights activist, explains White scientists claimed Blacks "could not be educated" due to the underweight of their brains (para. 1). Erevelles (2005) explains that regrettably, the enduring impact of past convictions regarding race and ability, rooted in White supremacy, has intricately woven itself into contemporary

circumstances. As a result of these studies and beliefs young Black scholars have been denied access to advanced curricula ever since.

American education began to evolve at the turn of the century. Despite the changes happening in American schooling Black learners remained caged pupils. Progressive American educators recognized the "one-room schoolhouse" no longer served the purpose of a modernized American education, and it was during the post-era of such "schooling" they were expected to "Americanize" the diverse, unruly mass of immigrants, rural transplants, and the poor (Feldman, 2018, p. 21). The idea of "Americanizing" students, despite their cultural make-up, to meet the needs of a society dominated by Anglo-Saxon beliefs and customs historically deprived and continues to rob Black learners of a high-quality educational experience. Morris (2018) asserted

> An American society that claims to have a just and colorblind education system is unable to recognize the persistence of segregation and how it shapes the identities of Black learners and the impacts of systems that reproduce and reinforce unequal access to educational opportunity (p. 25).

Morris (2018) noted further, that despite a shift in agenda toward equity and equality in the American education system, many schools still perpetuate inequities. Contemporarily, these inequities show up in practices such as tracking and segregation through exclusive educational tactics (privatization; gifted education; IQ testing), which all are rooted in racial discrimination (Potter & Burris, 2020). Additionally, these inequities show up in educational curricula such as Advanced Placement (AP) courses, which has historically been discriminatory in connection to this legacy of exclusion.

Tracking students was introduced in American education post-desegregation. In more contemporary terms, tracking in school systems is often referred to as "ability grouping" or

"academic streaming" (Logsdon, 2022; Warikoo et al., 2016). Warikoo et al. (2016) explains these terms are used to describe the practice of grouping students based on their perceived academic abilities or achievements. Logsdon (2022) emphasizes there are several potential drawbacks to ability grouping. Firstly, ability grouping could assign students to specific tracks, limiting their ability to switch later. Furthermore, the time spent in these grouped settings might detract from regular classroom instruction, potentially causing students to lag and diminishing their chances of returning to mainstream instruction. Moreover, when all students in a group are performing at a lower level, the absence of higher-skilled peers eliminates opportunities for learning from more advanced classmates. While some educators employ these practices to tailor instruction, the potential for inequities and the impact on educational outcomes for students in distinct tracks declares ability grouping (tracking) an inequitable practice.

The 1954 legislation of *Brown v. Board of Topeka, Kansas* marked the beginning of desegregating schools across America (Tyson, 2011). Still, White Americans were not ready to welcome Black students into their schools. The 1956 "Southern Manifesto" condemned the *Brown* decision and granted Southern communities the right to resist integration igniting a string of protests and even violence to prevent Black students from registering into school (Vazquez, 2022). Though integration was another example of the progressive nature of American lawmakers to try and make socially just decisions, integration alone was not a means to an end. Ending segregation merely ended the most obvious form of systemic racism for Black learners. Furthermore, the door was opened for other forms of segregation to be created within the American education system by educators whose beliefs were not equitable or socially just. Tyson (2011) writes the end of segregation in schools did not solve deeper structural and cultural issues but instead distracted progressive educators from them. Thus, integrating schools never meant

Black students would receive the same quality instruction or education White students would receive. Tyson (2011) defines this system as one that “influences students’ educational trajectories”, which perpetuates cycles of oppression that exclude Black students from equitable access and equal opportunities (p. 341).

With systemic racism at the root of why integration was met with resistance, American educators who were not quite ready to integrate discovered labeling students allowed segregation within schools to continue. For instance, White students were designated as "gifted," securing their placement in AP courses. "This discovery underscores the influence of academic labels in sustaining racial disparities, shedding light on one aspect of why Black students are underrepresented in advanced classes during their educational journey" (Tyson, 2011, p. 340). Particularly after schools were desegregated, but never truly integrated - schools continued to deny Blacks access to high-quality education (Wadelington, 2004). I argue that the descendants of enslaved Africans, Africans who contributed years of slavery and servitude for the sustainability of America as the most powerful country in the world, deserve better. Given these points, ignoring the needs of Black learners is an infringement upon their birthright. It is time American educators get it right. The legacy of excluding Black learners' equitable access to high-quality instruction remains active in the American education system. Such systems of oppression can be disrupted by the intentional leadership of someone whose training is rooted in equity-centered leadership practices.

Culturally responsive educational practices are widely recognized as an essential approach to education that promotes inclusivity, equity, and positive outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds. However, research indicates that many preparatory programs for educators fail to adequately incorporate culturally responsive training into their curriculum. In recent years,

some educator preparatory programs have become more deliberate in incorporating culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices. Nevertheless, there remains a gap between programs that incorporate culturally responsive practices into their curriculum for aspiring teacher and leaders and those that prioritize the technical aspects of teacher and leader preparation (Howard, 2010; Khalifa et.al, 2016). As a graduate of reputable educator preparation programs at two predominately white institutions (PWIs), I can confirm that I was not exposed to culturally responsive pedagogy or leadership practices when in pursuit of my teaching license, curriculum and instruction master's, or principal's license. Furthermore, my exploration for a doctoral program, undertaken in the pursuit of advancing my capabilities as an educational leader, was fundamentally grounded in my aspiration to become equity-driven in my leadership. Studies have found that many preparatory programs for educators provide insufficient emphasis on culturally responsive practices (Banwo et al., 2022; Gay, 2018; Gay, 2023). Education programs often focus more on technical skills and content knowledge, neglecting the crucial understanding and implementation of culturally responsive practices (Banwo et al., 2022; Sleeter, 2017). This deficiency hinders educators' ability to create inclusive learning environments and meet the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

The integration of culturally responsive training in these programs is crucial for improving student outcomes and fostering educational equity. The absence of culturally responsive training in preparatory programs for educators undermines the ability of school leaders to meet the needs of diverse student populations effectively. Insufficient emphasis on culturally responsive practices and limited exposure to diverse perspectives hinder educators' capacity to create inclusive and equitable school environments. I posit that reversing the

exclusionary practices preventing Black students from enrolling in AP classes is feasible through the training of more educational leaders in culturally responsive school leadership.

Prioritizing culturally responsive leadership practices (inclusive of implicit bias awareness) in preparatory programs, educational professional development, and/or training, educators can better support the diverse needs of students and promote positive educational experiences for all learners. Based on relevant research and my own personal and professional experiences, I assert that educational leaders who possess a culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) lens can create pathways for Black learners that are more equitable and socially just. As a result, I focused this study on helping Pre-AP Implementation Directors to embrace cultural responsiveness. Through culturally responsive practices, leaders proactively address and dismantle systemic barriers that disproportionately affect Black students, including bias, discrimination, and marginalization (Johnson, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). This approach acknowledges the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy, inclusive curriculum, and supportive learning environments tailored to the unique needs and aspirations of Black students, thus enhancing their academic achievement, motivation, and overall well-being (Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Tracking & Advanced Placement

The Advanced Placement (AP) program has been widely recognized as a benchmark for academic rigor and college readiness in the United States. However, the equitable representation and achievement of Black students in AP courses have been long-standing concerns within the field of education. The historical context of tracking Black students in education is deeply rooted in a legacy of racial discrimination and educational disparities (Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). As previously mentioned, throughout American history Black learners have

faced significant barriers to accessing quality education, perpetuating an achievement gap (Chatterji et. al, 2021; Hammond, 2015; Howard, 2010). During the mid-20th century, the AP program was established to provide academically talented students with rigorous coursework and college credit opportunities (Feldman, 2018). However, the early implementation of AP courses exhibited disparities in access and representation for Black students. Limited resources, biased tracking practices, and structural racism within schools created substantial obstacles for Black learners seeking participation in AP courses (Carter, 2015).

Several pivotal moments and initiatives have shaped the tracking of Black students in the AP program. In the 1980s, the Advanced Placement Equity and Excellence Project emerged as a response to concerns about the underrepresentation of minority students (Finn & Scanlan, 2019). This project aimed to enhance access to AP courses for Black students and other marginalized groups through curriculum development, teacher training, and outreach programs (Finn & Scanlan, 2019; Schneider, 2009)

In the 1990s, the expansion of AP courses and the introduction of pre-AP programs (by title but not created, formally adopted, or recognized by the College Board) aimed to prepare students for the rigor of AP coursework. However, persistent gaps in access and achievement remained for Black students (Finn & Scanlan, 2019; Schneider, 2009). The College Board (CB) responded by implementing targeted outreach initiatives such as the AP Potential program, which utilized student data to identify individuals with potential for success in AP courses (Finn & Scanlan, 2019; Schneider, 2009).

Efforts to increase representation in AP classes for Black students have been discussed by scholars such as Ladson-Billings (2006), Gay (2000), Khalifa (2018), and Love (2019). Their work contributes to the broader discourse on culturally responsive teaching and leadership,

emphasizing the importance of creating environments that support the academic success of all students, particularly those from historically marginalized backgrounds. Disparities in access, limited availability of AP courses in predominantly Black schools, and racial bias in teacher expectations continue to impede equitable representation (Finn & Scanlan, 2019; Morris, 2018). Additionally, concerns have been raised regarding the impact of standardized testing, as Black students face disproportionate barriers to access and performance on AP exams (Feldman, 2018; Finn & Scanlan, 2019; Schneider, 2009).

The historical context, early disparities, and key initiatives emphasizing the need for ongoing research, policy interventions, and equitable practices to ensure equal opportunities for Black students are what led to the creation of Pre-AP. The Pre-AP program is not a program for advanced students but a pathway to advanced curricula for students. Pre-AP is an instructional framework that supports teachers' instruction and ensures learners get access to grade-level content, developing their skill set for their matriculation into AP. I argue developing Pre-AP Implementation Directors as culturally responsive will influence how they approach their work and the support they provide Pre-AP school leaders. These school leaders, if exposed to CRSL practices, can dismantle systemic barriers for Black students within their districts and schools, rewriting the systemic norms for Black learners within American education. By intentionally ensuring their enrollment in Pre-AP, we level the playing field, eliminating the denial of access to advanced academic programs that Black students have traditionally been excluded from. This action underscores the invaluable contribution of a culturally responsive school leader. An equity-centered school leader will lead with equity top of their mind and maintain expectations that the practice of being culturally responsive is no longer the exception but the rule. For this reason, CRSL practices need to be instilled at all levels of leadership, ensuring that from the

onset of their educational journey, learners gain access to high-quality instructional practices infused with a culturally responsive approach. Accordingly, all students will benefit from a heightened sense of cultural awareness of educational leaders.

As an equity practitioner, my long-term end goal is influencing increased representation of Black students in AP courses, addressing the persistently restricted access to Pre-AP and AP courses for Black students has always been a personal mission for me. However, I understand that such a goal is quite ambitious considering the oppressive nature of the American education system. Moreover, my primary aim was to provide my colleagues with content that prompts careful reflection on the aspects of disrupting oppressive cycles within education systems that are under our control. As Implementation Directors, we have an opportunity to emphasize these aspects in promoting educational equity.

Impact of Bias and Deficit Ideology on School Leadership

School leadership is a critical factor in shaping educational environments and influencing the experiences and outcomes of Black students. However, biases and deficit ideologies held by school leaders can perpetuate inequities and hinder educational advancement, implicit biases, unconscious attitudes, or stereotypes, can impact school leaders' perceptions, decision-making, and interactions with marginalized students (Frattura & Capper 2020). These biases may result in differential treatment, lower expectations, and limited opportunities for Black students and their family's ability to support them (Howard, 2010; Howard, 2022). Recognizing and valuing the social capital of Black families and communities is another crucial cultural benefit for fostering student success (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Noguera, 2016). School leaders can leverage the social capital of families to establish meaningful partnerships and collaborative efforts that promote the academic achievement and well-being of Black learners (Ladson-Billings, 1994, Noguera, 2016).

The biases held by school leaders can also impact their expectations and tracking practices, leading to limited opportunities for Black students (Gorski, 2016). School leaders may assign Black students to lower-track classes, underestimate their academic abilities, and restrict access to advanced coursework (Gorski, 2016; Khalifa, 2018, Ladson-Billings, 1995). These biased practices contribute to the persistent achievement gap between Black and White students (Gorski, 2016; Khalifa, 2018). Addressing bias in school leadership involves promoting inclusive and culturally responsive practices. Ongoing professional development can enhance school leaders' awareness of implicit biases and enable them to implement strategies to mitigate their influence (Gay, 2002; Gay, 2010; Gay, 2023). Creating a culturally responsive school climate that values diversity, equity, and positive racial and ethnic identities is also crucial in mitigating bias and promoting educational success for Black students (Howard, 2010; Howard 2022; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Equally important to highlight is deficit ideology, which perpetuates disparities in academic achievement and opportunities for Black students and poses a persistent challenge in educational settings like implicit bias. School leaders have a vital role in addressing and dismantling deficit ideologies to promote educational equity (Morris, 2018). These ideologies are often embedded within educational policies and practices, marginalizing Black students (Morris, 2018). Implementing culturally responsive practices that acknowledge the cultural strengths and experiences of Black students can help challenge and counter deficit ideologies (Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994). By adopting this approach, school leaders can create inclusive and supportive environments that foster the academic success and well-being of Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Morris, 2018). Addressing bias in school leadership and dismantling deficit ideologies are crucial steps in creating equitable educational environments that support

success, increased access to advanced coursework, and the well-being of all students, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Literature Review of the Problem

Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Culturally responsive educational leaders can move the needle within an entire community. Their leadership can yield mindset changes amongst their faculty and staff directly impacting school improvement overall (Khalifa et. al, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004). The journey education has taken to recognize the need for culturally responsive school leaders began with research focused on culturally responsive teaching practices. Culturally Responsive Teaching practices have been laboriously researched and a discussed topic in education for three decades (Carter, 2019; Dover, 2013; Gay, 2002; Khalifa et. al, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Culturally relevant, also known as culturally responsive, and a myriad of other culturally informed named teaching practices were brought to the forefront of academia, by scholar Ladson-Billings (Carter, 2021). At the core of culturally relevant teaching falls a teacher's ability to demonstrate cultural competence, by designing student-centered learning focused on academic success and critical sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Ladson-Billings's research on the subject culturally responsive teaching awakened an untapped area in education reform, and today's educators still reference her academic findings. Culturally responsive practices have been demonstrated to make space for educational access that has historically been denied to African American learners, because culturally responsive teaching calls for a critical and culturally informed equity lens, the framework has become highly debated in modern times (Hammond,

2015; Khalifa et al., 2016). Notably, it's crucial to recognize the evolution of scholarship in culturally sustaining pedagogy. However, for this Disquisition the focus centers on the foundational work in this field (Paris & Alim, 2017).

While culturally relevant teaching is fundamental to educational outcomes, it cannot operate in isolation. The significance of leadership comes into play. The growing framework of CRSL emphasizes that for educational access to be created, leaders must actively participate in it (Gay, 2023; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2021). The shift to include educational leaders in the conversation is the result of CRSL being an undeniable and unavoidable topic when approaching education reform in any context (Gay, 2010; Gay, 2018; Gay, 2023). Research on culturally responsive teaching was meant to shed light on *how* teachers can meet the needs of diverse learners, especially those historically marginalized, within their classrooms – the *how* being strategies for teachers. Those who serve as school leaders must also be introduced to ways they can lead in a culturally responsive manner to ensure all learners receive equitable access to opportunities and the high-quality instruction they deserve. "Every day, children (poor, brown, black, special needs, and English language learners) are blamed for underperforming;" however, it is the nonexistent culture of instruction that is the root of underachievement for marginalized populations (Dickey, 2017, p. 21). Educational leaders play a huge role in the implementation of equitable and just policies, systems, and structures. Focusing on culturally responsive teaching development solely will impact the learners within that teacher's reach. Still, the development of an educational leader to lead with a culturally responsive lens whether at the district or site level will expand the reach to more students. The combination of culturally responsive teaching and leadership development can make a sustainable long-term impact on Black students meeting their maximum capacity for the greater good of American education. Carter (2013), Gay (2010),

and Khalifa (2018) call out the need for all areas of education, not just instruction, to be disrupted to reflect cultural responsiveness (administration, funding, policy, etc.). Educational leaders are the driving force behind the implementation of processes and instructional frameworks.

Closing the achievement gaps, explicitly those of Black students, that have existed since the abolishment of the anti-literacy laws is crucial. This effort must include a focus on building capacity within school leaders to be culturally responsive in their leadership practices as well (Khalifa et al., 2016). For decades educational reformers have emphasized that school leadership is a necessary dimension of any education reform, coming right behind the act of teaching itself (Leithwood et al., 2004). "Surely, if teachers should adjust their craft in ways that respond effectively to children's cultural learning and social needs in the classroom, as Gay suggested, then school administrators must have a similar mandate regarding the entire school culture and climate" (Davis et al., 2016, p. 9). Thus, good leadership creates spaces where students and faculty feel safe, seen, and supported.

As educational leaders, we must be reflective in our practice and must not ever expect those we lead to seek to develop themselves in areas we cannot demonstrate mastery ourselves (Howard, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016). As leaders, we model best practices and behaviors directly and indirectly. Our leadership plays a critical role in establishing school culture and climate. The sustainability of our efforts is determined by our approaches to matters of significance within a school community. Being an equity-focused school leader, who leads with CRSL top of mind, requires ongoing listening, self-reflection, professional development, and data collection and analysis. Rice-Boothe (2022) defines a culturally responsive leader as "one who recognizes the impact of institutionalized racism on their own lives and the lives of the students and families

they work with and who embraces their role in mitigating, disrupting, and dismantling systemic oppression" (para.6). Accordingly, whether, at the district or school level, any leader seeking to ensure equitable access for all students must prioritize the attack on systemic barriers.

Leadership frameworks support and guide school leaders as they develop and hone their leadership styles. Khalifa et al. (2016) developed a framework that introduces the transition of leadership principles into leadership practices. Their report indicates students who are traditionally marginalized underperform due to a school climate that causes them great discomfort, supporting why educational leaders need to possess the skills to address the social cultures within American schools (Banwo et al., 2022; Khalifa et al., 2016). All students should believe they are seen, matter, and are viewed as at-potential instead of at-risk (Khalifa et al., 2016). According to Khalifa's research, leaders need adequate preparation programs that address race, culture, language, national identity, and other areas of difference. Further, leaders need to have an awareness of self and an understanding of the context in which they lead (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018).

Culturally relevant school leadership training is essential to address the diverse needs of students and improve the American education system. Research has consistently shown the positive impact of culturally relevant leadership on student outcomes and school climate (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018). Culturally relevant school leadership recognizes and values the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and identities of students, and integrates this knowledge into decision-making processes, instructional practices, and policy development (Gay, 2023; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2021). This approach fosters inclusivity, enhances student engagement, promotes academic success, and narrows achievement gaps (Banwo et al., 2022; Gay, 2023; Howard, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2021). By preparing school

leaders with culturally relevant training, the education system can better serve the diverse population of students and create equitable learning environments that support the success and well-being of all learners. It is quite clear leaders who develop leaders should possess an understanding of foundational CRSL strategies when charged with serving as an advocate for an instructional framework established to provide equitable access for learners nationwide. As a result of this, my study will center on enhancing the capabilities of Pre-AP Implementation Directors as culturally responsive leaders, fostering the development of cultural responsiveness in Pre-AP implementation support.

Theory Over Gimmicks

> I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing (hooks, 1991, para. 1).

The 2018 Starbucks incident, where two black men faced arrest for merely sitting down, served as a poignant reminder of the deeply entrenched racial biases in our society. Starbucks responded by shutting down half a day for racial-bias training and urging employees to be "color brave" a term coined by Mellody Hobson (Love, 2019, p.129). Professor and author Bettina Love (2019) explains, “To be color brave means to speak openly and honestly about race” (p. 129). However, being color brave alone does not dismantle the systemic racism deeply ingrained within American society. In alignment with both the Pre-AP Equity and Access Policy and the findings of my study, the heightened awareness necessary to initiate a shift toward equitable practices cannot be adequately addressed through a one-day training for implementation directors. Such training lacks a meaningful connection to their specific roles and does not

incorporate a deeper reflective process that outlines practical ways to apply the newly acquired knowledge.

While racial biases, culturally sensitive, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training are considered steps in the right direction, the crux of the issue goes beyond a half-day program. True transformation demands a fundamental shift in mindsets, recognizing the uncomfortable reality that many educational settings still operate under exclusionary principles that persist within current policies and practices. Educational leaders must go beyond superficial initiatives and engage in sustained efforts to increase equitable access for Black learners. Thus, we can not only change perspectives, but we must also equip educators with the knowledge, language, and insight to move beyond notions of individual blame and comprehend the intricacies of systemic oppression (Love, 2019). Moreover, the importance of theory in the work of educators cannot be overstated. Theoretical frameworks help educators understand how the world works and expose barriers that often lurk unnoticed. Integrating theoretical perspectives into educational practices enables educators to navigate complexities, identify systemic issues, and work towards dismantling barriers to create truly equitable learning environments.

Theoretical Framework - Organizational Theory

The exploration of organizational theory heightens the ability of educational leaders to understand how they lead and why they lead the way they do. It can support one in identifying areas of growth and spark reflection on one's practice, which can ultimately directly impact student achievement outcomes. When considering ways in which one can become a culturally responsive school leader, a deeper look into the habitual nature of traditional leadership practices can expose inequities we have innately inherited. In her timely text, *Organizational Theory for Equity and Diversity: Leading Integrated, Socially Just Education,* Colleen A. Capper introduces

organizational theories across various epistemologies to inform socially just approaches to educational leadership. Capper (2019) writes that though leaders are quite aware of how urgent students' needs are "leaders need proactive strategies and practices they can implement now in their educational settings" (p. 16). I argue this urgency has unequivocally increased post-pandemic. Moreover, strategies will develop leaders' ability to see the inequity, name it in context, and disrupt it, not solely fix it.

In this study, I have decided to interrogate the structural-functional epistemology at work within the work of the Pre-AP Implementation Team, the College Board, and the American education system. Structural-functional epistemology represents a viewpoint that sees social structures as crucial for upholding order and stability in society (Capper, 2019). Capper (2019) underscores the interdependence of different elements within a social system and their roles in sustaining equilibrium. This perspective delves into the contribution of various institutions and structures to the overall functioning and stability of a society. Nevertheless, critics argue that it may overlook issues of power, inequality, and the effects of these structures on marginalized groups (Capper, 2019). I argue that structural functionalism does.

In response to student differences, a structural-functional epistemological approach has led to the segregation of students into distinct programs like special education, bilingual education, interventions, schools within schools, alternative schools, standard charter schools, tracking, and other ability-grouping methods primarily designed for students deemed "at risk" (Capper, 2019). As a scholar-practitioner, I became acquainted with this epistemology and realized that leadership traits I possessed align with the structural frame of this leadership style, which surprised me. Recognizing this was both humbling and enlightening for me. Taking advantage of this opportunity, at that moment I aimed to introduce structural functionalism to my

colleagues and anyone who might read my Disquisition (DQ). By emphasizing structural functionalism to my colleagues, I aimed to encourage them to reflect on their practices and cease inequitable approaches aligned with this framework. This is crucial for our ongoing roles as Implementation Directors and advocates for equity. Structural functionalism entails promoting separateness, segregation, and perpetuating historical systems and structures of oppression. Therefore, engaging in a leadership style rooted in structural functionalism lacks cultural responsiveness.

Historically, structural functionalism has served as the guiding framework for organizational theoretical behaviors and practices. Leaders' awareness of this is crucial to counteract the ongoing use of this epistemology, ensuring a commitment to educational equity. Educators rooted in structural functionalism generally perceive the current social order and its institutions valid and desirable. They aim to achieve progress through gradual, linear, and evolutionary changes, often focused on modifying the operations of education systems. Their interest lies in comprehending the functional of institutions and exploring ways to enhance the efficiency of educational bureaucracies, assuming that change is achievable while preserving existing systems (Capper, 2019). Such regulation has a significant impact on the relationships between Black students and their teachers and leads to a disconnect (Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994). This disconnect can result in feelings of alienation, reduced engagement, and limited trust between Black students and their teachers, ultimately affecting their academic performance and overall educational experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2017). As has been noted, being culturally responsive as an educational leader can bridge the gaps between one's home and school. Understanding students and the environments they come

from can only help lay the groundwork for more inclusivity and aid in establishing a culture of community.

For those it was designed to work for, the American education system continues to operate efficiently. Frattura and Capper (2015) explain that public schools in the United States were originally established to cater to white upper-class males. Hence, “the goal of structural functionalism remains on efficiency, not equity. Thus, from a structural-functional epistemology, equity or social justice are not considered - implicitly or explicitly” (Capper, 2019, p. 41). As such, cycles of oppression within American schools thrive when they are camouflaged by tradition. Staats (2016) continues, “In sum, influenced by implicit biases, practitioners’ misunderstanding of the intent behind student actions can lead to blind spots and disproportionate administration decisions by race” (p. 9). This emphasizes the necessity for leadership training that incorporates cultural responsiveness. This is crucial because leadership decisions at every level of education have a direct impact on student outcomes. Therefore, at the core of educational equity, the keys to a socially just education lie in the hands of the holders who are responsible for the implementation of such foundational pillars within all educational institutions - its leaders.

If educational leaders are not equipped with an equity-informed understanding, the cycle of oppression, intentionally weaved into the American education school system, will continue to harm the children it was never designed to teach. Structural-functional leadership does not ensure equity; it continues to make inequity efficient. That's why understanding the structural functional framework, recognizing how it has perpetuated cycles of oppression within school systems, and identifying its manifestations in leadership practices is crucial. This knowledge ensures that

Implementation Directors are mindful of these practices, enabling reflection on their past experiences to prevent them from persisting in their future practices.

Culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) practices can pave the way for a new norm: prioritizing equity over efficiency. And so, CRSL will dismantle structural functionalism within school systems. As Khalifa (2019) emphasizes, leaders should advocate for schools that acknowledge and celebrate the identities of minoritized youth, encourage the adoption of culturally responsive teaching methods, and foster culturally sensitive connections with parents and community members. Culturally responsive school leaders aim to humanize minoritized youth, both within and outside the school environment. Therefore, the shift needed to dismantle systemic oppression within our education system cannot be met with strategies for teachers in isolation. Educational leaders must be rooted in CRSL to model such practices for teachers. Conversely, the lack of culturally responsive leaders and teachers in schools with largely marginalized student body populations in American education "is not the path to freedom" but instead is "the path to bondage" for Black students (Morris, p.7, 2018). In other words, leadership training that develops within leaders the necessary skills to lead for equitable and just implementation of curriculum and instruction can not only begin to dismantle the oppressive nature of American education but can lead to demolishing its existence in education altogether.

Equity Bandages

Equity bandages, within the realm of education, refer to temporary or superficial measures implemented to address educational disparities and promote equity without addressing the underlying systemic issues and root causes of inequity. These measures are often reactive, focusing on short-term solutions that may provide a semblance of equity but fail to produce sustainable and transformative change in educational systems. The concept of equity bandages

highlights the need to move beyond surface-level interventions and engage in more comprehensive and systemic efforts to achieve educational equity. While equity bandages may offer some immediate improvements, they do not address the structural inequities that persist and perpetuate disparities in educational access, resources, and outcomes.

As previously referenced, historically, school systems purposely focused their efforts on Americanizing its students "by encouraging immigrants to abandon their heritage and conform to American ways" (Pai & Adler, 2006, p. 57). Consequently, "when students struggle, rather than address the White male upper-class norm upon which public schools were founded, educational [bandages] are applied where, most often, students are pulled out of the system and educated separately - in separate rooms, programs, tracks, or schools" (Capper, 2019, p. 42). In their review of education research, Khalifa et al. (2016) focused their studies on the influence of leadership practices, policies, and behaviors [actions] on school culture, leadership, and even teacher effectiveness. They highlight how "culturally responsive leadership influences the school context and addresses the cultural needs of the students, parents, and teachers" (p. 4). Furthermore, the impact of school leadership isn't only connected to student achievement outcomes - it transcends into the communities from which students come and plays a significant role in the engagement of their families.

Research has emphasized the limitations of equity bandages in addressing educational inequities. For instance, Oakes (2005) argues that temporary interventions often overlook the deep-seated inequities rooted in historical, political, and social structures. These bandages may divert attention from the underlying systemic issues that perpetuate educational disparities and prevent comprehensive, long-term solutions. Moreover, equity bandages can inadvertently reinforce existing inequities and perpetuate deficit-based narratives. Ladson-Billings (2006)

highlights the danger of superficial interventions that fail to challenge deficit ideologies and instead place the burden of change on marginalized students and communities. These interventions may inadvertently stigmatize and further marginalize already disadvantaged groups. The perpetuation of these structures and ideologies aimed at segregating, restricting educational access, and penalizing marginalized students has detrimental consequences on student achievement (Frattura & Capper, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2006). These practices reinforce systemic inequities by amplifying disparities in educational resources, widening the already-existing achievement gap, and fostering a sense of marginalization and disengagement among marginalized student populations (Frattura & Capper, 2020). Consequently, it becomes imperative to dismantle these systemic barriers and actively cultivate inclusive educational environments that prioritize equity, ensuring equal opportunities for all students (Frattura & Capper, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Educational leaders overseeing diverse populations must embody cultural responsiveness to establish an equitable foundation within the educational environments they lead. Khalifa et al. (2016) write, “Because historically oppressive structures have disadvantaged minoritized students, and because educators and schools have been – intentionally or unintentionally – complicit in reproducing this oppression, culturally responsive school leaders have a principled, moral responsibility to counter this oppression” (p. 5). This is even more true for educators who lead diverse student populations; furthermore, those who choose to serve in spaces where there are large numbers of students who historically are marginalized should possess a sense of obligation to disrupt cycles of oppression so that the harm, they cause no longer negatively impacts the trajectory of their future.

To achieve meaningful and sustainable educational equity, it is essential to go beyond equity bandages and address the systemic and structural factors that contribute to inequities. This requires challenging and transforming policies, practices, and beliefs that perpetuate disparities and marginalization. Efforts to address educational inequities should focus on structural changes that promote inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies (Howard, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). This involves transforming curriculum, instructional practices, and school cultures to recognize and affirm the diverse identities, experiences, and strengths of all students.

While equity bandages may provide temporary relief, they do not address the root causes of educational inequities. To achieve true equity in education, it is crucial to engage in comprehensive and systemic efforts that challenge structural inequalities, promote inclusive practices, and ensure that all students have access to high-quality educational opportunities. Nevertheless, such practices continue inherently at the expense of the type of teaching teachers will provide, and the type of learning Black students will experience. These cycles of educational inequity are why the focus of this disquisition is on educational leadership and developing culturally responsive educational leaders, so they can shift school culture and the culture of instruction to be more equitable and socially just.

Legacy of Advanced Placement

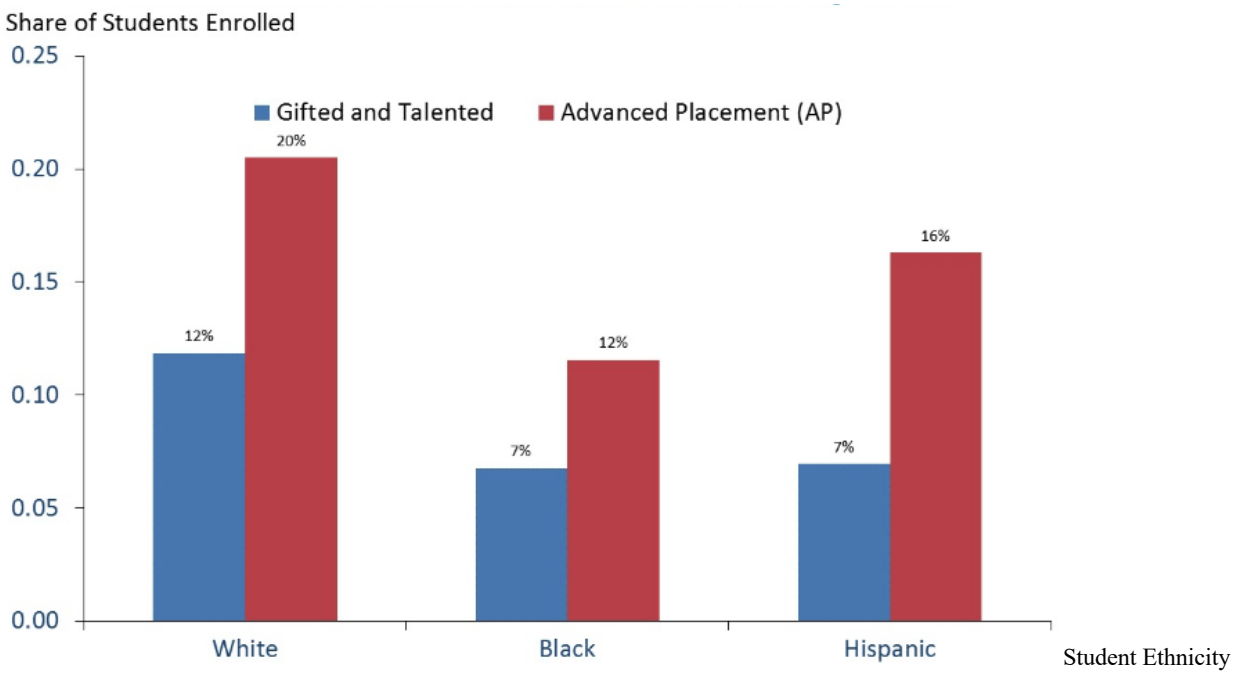
This disquisition centers on a particular problem within Pre-AP leadership support services: the absence of culturally responsive implementation support provided by Implementation Directors. However, it's crucial to acknowledge the complex history of Black students' access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses. While recognizing other access inequities, this study intentionally concentrates on the historical experiences of Black learners.

The gatekeeping methods (i.e., teacher or parent referrals) of enrollment in advanced courses continue to hinder equitable access to qualified Black students. While national data suggest Black learners do not have access to and are not enrolled in advanced courses, the data fails to highlight the hidden traps that prevent AP course enrollment from being accessible. This data is "measured by the availability of these programs in one's school" (Black et al., 2016, para. 6). Figure 1 reflects national enrollment by race and equates to Black students being 40% less likely to be enrolled in any type of advanced courses or gifted programs (Black et al., 2016).

According to a report (depicted in Figure 1) by the Obama administration in 2016, there is a significant disparity in enrollment in advanced classes between Black and White students, indicating an unequal academic playing field (United States Department of Education, 2016). While White students constitute a decreasing proportion of the overall school population, they are overrepresented in advanced classes in K-12 schools. The report highlights that the percentage of Black students enrolled in AP classes or gifted and talented programs is just over half of that of White students (United States Department of Education, 2016). This disparity underscores the need to address the barriers that prevent Black students from accessing these opportunities and to promote equitable enrollment in advanced coursework.

Figure 1

Enrollment in Advanced Coursework by Race



Note: Department of Education, Civil Rights Data - Gifted and talented enrollment is calculated for students in all grade levels. AP enrollment is only calculated for students in high school and is defined as enrollment in at least one AP class.

it is crucial to implement CRSL practices as early as elementary school to include Pre-Kindergarten programs. Starting early with culturally responsive practices helps prepare students for future academic challenges. By laying the foundation in elementary school, leaders create a smoother transition for students to more advanced courses in high school (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2017). By establishing a foundation of cultural responsiveness, elementary school leaders contribute to creating a pipeline that encourages and supports students to take on more advanced courses, including Advanced Placement courses in high school. In essence, culturally responsive leadership in elementary schools lays the groundwork for a more inclusive, equitable, and supportive educational environment that sets students on a trajectory toward success in advanced coursework in high school and beyond (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2017).

I argue that the exclusionary practices of Black students enrolling in AP classes can be reversed if more educational leaders are trained to lead with an equity-focused approach to

school leadership. To put this another way, at the district and school levels barriers to enrollment can be eliminated by leaders. Every school system's overall mission and academic goals for students are enforced by what lives within the policies and practices carried out by district faculty and staff. Despite the governance fulfilled by Boards of Education, it is the responsibility of a district's educational leaders (i.e., superintendents, directors, principals, etc.) to ensure the mission is honored with integrity. District-level administrators are expected to mandate policies for site leaders to implement in alignment with district initiatives annually. I assert that the development of culturally responsive school leaders is imperative to the dismantling of inequitable policies and practices that impact school climate, school structure, teacher efficacy, and student outcomes. Hence, the focus of my study centered around Pre-AP and the team of Pre-AP Implementation Directors who support school leaders across the nation with their implementation of Pre-AP.

Local Context: The College Board and Pre-AP

Pre-AP

Pre-AP is an instructional framework nationally introduced in 2018. Pre-AP was developed to address the equity gap in AP by increasing the pipeline of students who are prepared. The College Board, referencing TNTP's (formerly known as The New Teacher Project) 2018 Opportunity Myth, identified commonalities among underperforming students through internal research and a review of national data. These common factors included: inconsistent opportunities to work on grade-appropriate assignments, the lack of strong instruction, no deep engagement, and few educators who hold high expectations for students. TNTP's research revealed these four academic domains were most likely to be withheld from students of color, those from economically disadvantaged households, English language learners,

and those differently abled. These findings supported College Board practitioners in developing an instructional framework to support educational leaders with an evidence-based way of exposing all students to the instruction, resources, and skill development they need and deserve. The Pre-AP Equity and Access Policy states:

> College Board believes that all students deserve engaging, relevant, and challenging grade-level coursework. Access to this type of coursework increases opportunities for all students, including groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in AP and college classrooms.
>
> Therefore, the Pre-AP Program is dedicated to collaborating with educators across the country to ensure all students have the support to succeed in appropriately challenging classroom experiences that allow students to learn and grow. It's through a sustained commitment to equitable preparation, access, and support that true excellence can be achieved for all students, and the Pre-AP course designation requires this commitment. (The College Board, 2020)

Pre-AP is not a program created to further perpetuate cycles of oppression within America's education system. Conversely, the goals of Pre-AP are to offer educational leaders research-based methods of teaching and learning to meet students where they are and nurture their growth and development. The College Board advocates for equal access for every student, and from the inception of Pre-AP there has been a consistent emphasis on ensuring equitable access. Moving forward, there's a need to invest in the development of individuals responsible for supporting schools in implementing Pre-AP as leaders with a focus on equity. Given the autonomy afforded to Pre-AP senior leadership, they are tasked with establishing professional development opportunities to nurture Implementation Directors who exemplify cultural responsiveness. In

recent years research on leadership suggests that good leaders “understand the necessity for culturally responsive measures…committed to meeting the needs of minoritized students through CRSL” (Carter, 2021, p. 2). The national educational leadership standards provide a framework for effective school leadership practices that contribute to positive student outcomes. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), are widely recognized and adopted in the United States (CCSSO, 2015). These standards outline the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for educational leaders to promote student success and school improvement. ISLLC standards emphasize the importance of equity, cultural responsiveness, and inclusive practices in educational leadership (CCSSO, 2015). By incorporating these standards into their work, school leaders can ensure the provision of high-quality education for all students, including marginalized populations such as Black students. The ISLLC standards provide a research-based foundation for guiding school leaders in addressing biases, dismantling deficit ideologies, and creating equitable and inclusive educational environments (CCSSO, 2015).

To proactively engage with new research-based literature on educational leadership, the College Board must, in real-time, seek to improve and inform practice aligning with the core beliefs of Pre-AP and the Pre-AP program commitment Pre-AP for All. My disquisition aligns directly with the Pre-AP Equity and Access Policy by introducing equity-centered strategies to Implementation Directors as we approach "collaborating with educators across the country to ensure all students have the supports to succeed…through a sustained commitment to equitable preparation and access” (College Board, 2020). Thus, professional development sessions highlighting racial inequities that persistently impact Black students exposes educational inequities to Implementation Directors. To counter these inequities and as a result of the

professional development Implementation Directors will become more culturally responsive with implementation support, which can potentially impact district/site leadership decisions regarding Black student enrollment into AP and other advanced curricular programs.

Pre-AP for All

To further conceptualize the context of Pre-AP, I find it necessary to point out an essential principle of the framework's deliverables. Notably, there are four program commitments: Pre-AP for All, Course Frameworks, Assessments, and Professional Learning. Pre-AP for All means the Pre-AP course framework is the foundation for all sections of a particular course. For example, all sections of English I courses will use the Pre-AP course framework and assessments as their foundation. Therefore, educational leaders should proactively work to dismantle barriers preventing students from enrolling in Pre-AP courses (i.e., teacher recommendations and placement tests). The College Board's rationale behind Pre-AP for All is:

- All students deserve access to engaging, relevant coursework to help them succeed over a school year. Pre-AP provides engaging, grade-level appropriate material to ensure that all students are empowered to grow.
- Increasing access to this type of coursework leads to increased opportunities for all students, including groups traditionally underrepresented in AP and college classrooms.

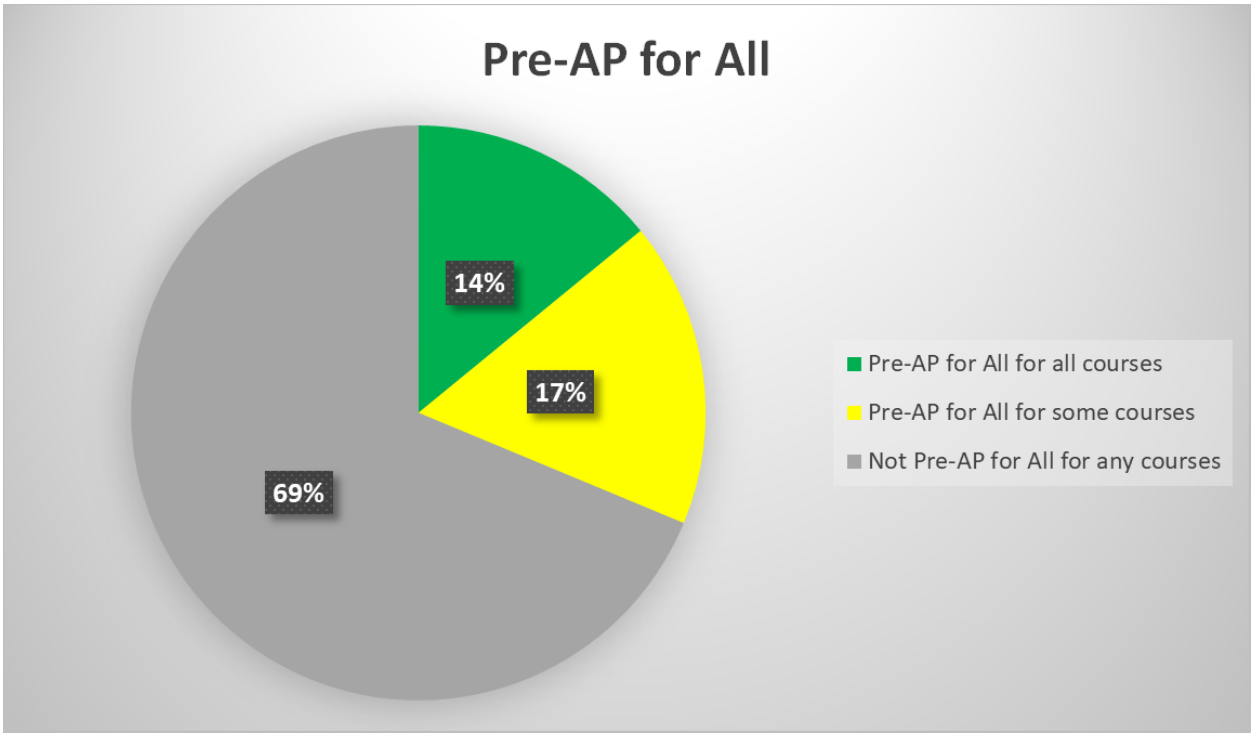
  (The College Board, 2018)

In the summer of 2021, the College Board assessed which schools were implementing Pre-AP for All. The following criteria had to be true to be considered in the study: (1) traditional high school configuration, (2) shared their total enrollment number with the College Board, and

(3) students on Pre-AP Classroom (digital platform). There were only 355 out of 728 schools that met all three criteria for the College Board to analyze Pre-AP for All data. At the time 50 schools were doing Pre-AP for All in all courses, 61 were doing Pre-AP for All for some courses, and 244 were not doing Pre-AP for All for any courses. Figure 2 is a pie graph illustrating the previously mentioned 2021 Pre-AP data collection outcomes.

Figure 2

College Board Pre-AP for All Data 2021



The data represented posits the question, why not Pre-AP for all? If 50 schools were implementing the Pre-AP framework in all courses during a time when most school systems were operating with a sense of urgency as a result of the unfinished learning the pandemic caused, why did the other 305 choose not to implement this framework for all? As an implementation director, part of my role is to provide context for such wonderings to be able to intentionally support leaders in how they approach the implementation of Pre-AP ultimately as a

Pre-AP for All instructional framework. Therefore, driving conversations with school leaders in which we strongly encourage the implementation of Pre-AP with a For-All approach can be done with ease when my colleagues have the language and tools to introduce the idea of such with a CRSL lens.

Positionality Statement

Up until I began this program, I possessed leadership traits that align with the leadership ideology of structural functionalism. Structural-functional leaders typically perceive the current social order and its institutions as both legitimate and desirable and "work to make their institution more efficient" (Capper, 2019, p. 38). As a result of my new learning as a scholar-practitioner, I realized that I perpetuated the *equity bandage* cycle proudly albeit unintentionally. Accomplishments that I was once very proud to achieve I now question. For example, several years ago I served as an AVID coordinator at West Charlotte High School (WCHS aka Dub C), a 100% free and reduced lunch Title 1 school in Charlotte, NC. At the time 89.9% of the student body population was African American. My very first cohort of AVID students successfully achieved 100% college acceptance in 2017. From their freshman year until their senior year, I supported a cohort of 42 students as their AVID elective teacher and program coordinator to ensure they were enrolled in the right courses and provided the resources they needed to be successful in all their classes. In addition to supporting them academically, I routinely scheduled college campus tours to, in a sense, make college tangible. For me, serving as the AVID coordinator was all about exposing my Black underprivileged students to a college-going culture. And, as a Black first-generation college graduate, that work resonated with me deeply; however, retrospective understanding is characterized by a vision of 20/20. Reflecting on my work as the AVID coordinator at my beloved West Charlotte I now know I was operating in a structural-functional space. I have had to consider if my way of serving students and their families was

merely placing an equity bandage where a more equitable approach was needed. Everything I now know permits me to extend grace to myself in the understanding that the answer to my consideration is yes. As a result, early in this program, I felt hoodwinked and ashamed of this revelation – familiar institutional practices fostered segregation and separateness. I believed I was offering open access to all students but due to the program entry process for students (application, teacher recommendations, transcript review, etc.) the AVID enrollment process mimics systems I seek to dismantle. As I continued to reflect, I accepted my role in perpetuating the cycle; however, I decided I would make an intentional effort to disrupt such practices moving forward. Henceforth, my self-awareness has disrupted my unconsciousness of my former leadership behaviors and nurtured my new perspective of how I view equitable and just curriculum and instruction (C&I) and the necessity for CRSL.

As an educational practitioner, I experienced diverse teaching opportunities (having taught in rural and urban North Carolina), served a diverse population of students at the school and district level and was hired as the first Director of Equity and Inclusion for a mid-sized southern school system. Based on these experiences, I am aware of the possibility my colleagues will not understand the impact oppression has on one's ability to gain equitable access. I recognize my privilege with such exposure, how it developed me as a versatile equity-focused leader, and my ability to see the need for CRSL. My development reframes my lens, and I can make the connections of how CRSL correlates to student achievement, despite having worked in spaces where others have a siloed view of education due to their lack of diversity in experience and experiences with marginalized populations.

As a Black woman and marginalized scholar, who experienced systemic racism as a learner and educator in public education, I cannot ignore my connection to equity. My

perspective regarding the significance of ensuring equitable access to learners is authentic and interconnected. The emotional and psychological challenges I have had to overcome from not feeling as if I belonged forced me to strategically bear the burden of marginalization and learn to navigate predominately White spaces at every educational institution I have attended or worked at. This was particularly evident in educational institutions such as Banoak Elementary, Fred T. Foard High School, Gardner-Webb University, Maiden High School, and Hickory Career and Arts Magnet High School. Some of my most racist experiences were in the primary grades and consequently, little to no growth took place in my educational development. The absence of culturally responsive teaching and CRSL in my educational journey impacted my confidence but thankfully never dimmed my light. This being a personal victory I charge to the love and support I received at home from my parents. As the product of a working-class family and growing up in a poor community of individuals who lacked little formal education my relational capacity to poverty and its systemic barriers connected to upward mobility benefits me as a researcher. It enhances my ability to identify issues of poverty easily as they relate to educational gaps and disparities. Seeing and knowing is a benefit I have because I have lived my entire life on the receiving end of oppression and from a very early age felt its weight—a weight that continues to be a heavy lift for me still today.

As a relatively new College Board employee (20 months) and Pre-AP Implementation Director, I have a fresh set of eyes for looking at our programs. This perspective adds to my ability to guide our work with an equitable perspective as I seek to ensure our services cultivate socially just spaces. In this work I tap into my training and previous experiences in public education to guide my choices and develop new ideas when approaching the implementation of Pre-AP. Consequently, my expertise lends itself to my approach in designing this study, which is

also heavily influenced by time spent serving the learners and families of Black students. Equally important to mention is my approach to this study is heavily influenced by time spent advocating for the equitable access of Black students even when school leaders, who served as my superior, were Black too.

Problem of Practice

Pre-AP Implementation Directors must enhance their critical consciousness and cultivate leadership with a culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) lens. This transformation will enable them to influence the development of school leaders, fostering a culturally responsive approach in the implementation support process. The intersections between the Pre-AP framework and the role of its directors must include CRSL. The Pre-AP implementation team support services are solely for educational leaders. Implementation Directors are not ever expected to support teachers, rather we support the district and site leaders responsible for supporting teachers. Pre-AP leader implementation support services are designed to provide leaders (e.g., chief academic officers, district-level curriculum specialists, and principals) with the tools and resources needed for a successful implementation of the Pre-AP framework. By including culturally responsive leadership practices in implementation support services designed for district/site leaders, the opportunity for equitable and just C&I within the development, design, and implementation of the Pre-AP framework should evolve. The evolution of Pre-AP as an even more equity-focused framework will presumably open more pathways for Black learners and prevent their exclusion from AP courses.

The late bell hooks (1994) believed that when educators are open-minded and intentional in their work and choose to lead with their hearts our work becomes “the practice of freedom” (p. 13). Considering the lengths early American lawmakers went to ensure Black people were not

formally educated, one would hope the presence of practices resembling such history in today's American education system would ignite a call to action and a sense of eagerness in educators to condemn existing oppressive cycles. I believe attacking racial injustices within our reach is possible for my team of colleagues. The team of Implementation Directors drives the *how* behind Pre-AP implementation processes nationally. Current Implementation Directors are former principals, district administrators, and master teachers. Each team member possesses a passion for education and believes in the work we do to support school leaders across the country. The relationship-building required to earn and gain the respect and trust of those we serve allows Implementation Directors to be transparent in conversations with leaders intentionally supporting their implementation. Such trust increases the likelihood that the district and school leaders Pre-AP Implementation Directors support will receive and implement equitable practices introduced as a means to improve student achievement outcomes. Therefore, I ask, how can Pre-AP implementation support services build capacity in district and site leaders to support them in establishing a culture of equitable and just curriculum and instruction? First and foremost, Implementation Directors must hold a certain level of knowledge regarding CRSL themselves. Thus, the work of the Pre-AP Implementation Directors is too critical to the advancement of educational equity for the efforts to result in an unintentional approach. An exploratory study on school leadership by Young et al. (2010) indicated multiple school leaders lacked the training and knowledge base to spearhead any initiatives within diverse school environments or implement solution-focused policies addressing issues within those environments. In addition to the aforementioned things school leaders were unable to facilitate meaningful dialogue around diversity with stakeholders.

The proficiency of Pre-AP Implementation Directors in CRSL is pivotal to equity-centered implementation support. If Pre-AP Implementation Directors are not well-versed in CRSL, it is a missed opportunity to deepen the alignment of our work to the Pre-AP Equity and Access policy which states, "the Pre-AP program is dedicated to collaborating with educators across the country to ensure all students have the supports to succeed". By including culturally responsive school leadership practices in implementation support services designed for district/site leaders (i.e., meetings, professional development, focused goals for Pre-AP for All, etc.) the opportunity for educational equity within the development, design, and implementation of the Pre-AP framework can potentially increase the number of Black learners who gain access and enrollment into AP courses over time.

Causal Analysis

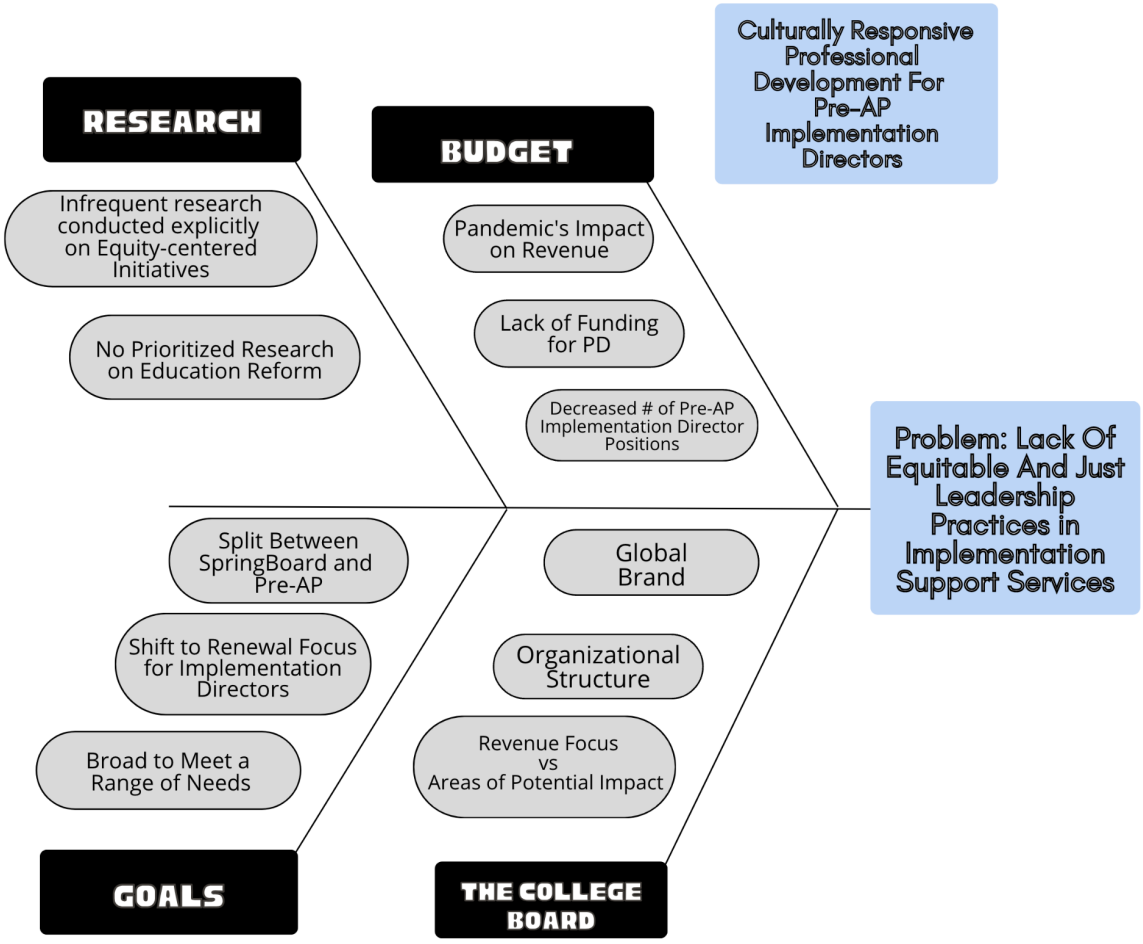
A causal analysis is instrumental in clarifying the intricate relationships and underlying factors that contribute to a problem of practice, offering a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play and paving the way for targeted solutions (Hinnant-Crawford, 2019). Causal analysis, within the context of research and academic discourse, refers to a systematic examination and investigation of the cause-and-effect relationships between variables or phenomena. It involves analyzing the connections and dependencies among various factors to determine the extent to which one-factor influences or contributes to changes in another. The causal analysis aims to establish a cause-and-effect relationship by assessing the presence of a causal mechanism, temporal sequence, and the absence of alternative explanations. This analytical approach typically involves rigorous data collection, statistical techniques, and research designs that allow for the identification and assessment of causal relationships. By employing causal analysis, researchers seek to understand the underlying mechanisms and

processes driving observed phenomena, contributing to the advancement of knowledge and the development of evidence-based interventions and policies (Shadish et al., 2021; Yin, 2018).

Spaulding et al. (2021) describe causal systems analysis as a roadmap highlighting the causes perpetuating a given problem. Depicted by an Ishikawa, or fishbone diagram, the causal analysis visually presents the "why" of a problem in practice. Also referred to as a cause-and-effect diagram, the figures identify the issue in question, the factors causing the problem, and the factors contributing to the problem (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). The "bones" of the diagram are where improvement scientists can focus on making improvements. In Figure 3 I present a fishbone diagram that illustrates the broad categories and contributing factors that may contribute to the lack of equitable and just leadership practices in Pre-AP implementation support services.

Figure 3

Fishbone Diagram Showing Contributing Factors to the Problem



Four factors stand out as causing the problem of lack of equitable and just leadership practices in implementation support services. These four factors are 1) a lack of equity-focused research, 2) budget limitations for implementation, 3) divergent program goals, and 4) the expectations of the College Board as a global brand (as a cultural entity in this context). I have identified these factors based on observations over a year as an implementation director. Conversations with colleagues, my supervisor, my own new learning, weekly organization discussions, and participation in both team and unit meetings support my identification of these four areas. The contributing factors are areas in which I believe change can begin to take place over time through strategic planning and intentionality. Notably, my intervention exclusively targets identified factor divergent program goals. As a result, of the focus for my intervention, I

chose to begin my work on this improvement initiative by delivering a professional development centered around culturally responsive leadership. Delivering professional development is within my locus of control and aligns with my skill set and role as an implementation director for Pre-AP.

Given the intricate nature of the issues at hand, a strategic focus on addressing divergent program goals is highlighted as a crucial intervention. This targeted approach reflects a thoughtful strategy to alleviate a fundamental root cause, demonstrating the author's capacity to implement strategic changes over time and a proactive stance in initiating positive transformations. The initiation of the intervention with a professionally developed session centered around culturally responsive leadership aligns aptly with my role and expertise as an Implementation Director for Pre-AP. This deliberate focus allows for the effective leveraging of strengths and the potential for meaningful change within the scope of influence. The commitment to addressing contributing factors through strategic planning and intentionality speaks to a proactive approach to instigating positive change. By directing efforts towards mitigating divergent program goals and aligning the intervention with the author's role and competencies, there is a clear potential for a substantial impact on advancing equitable and just leadership practices in implementation support services—an aspect that warrants thorough exploration in academic discourse.

This improvement initiative focused on Pre-AP implementation team development. The goal was to enhance the capabilities of Implementation Directors, empowering them to formulate equity-focused implementation support services tailored for district and site leaders. These leaders, in turn, will be responsible for executing equitable and just leadership practices within their respective schools. This strategy provided support to Implementation Directors, who also

serve as leads for annual Pre-AP implementation projects. Implementation Directors play a crucial role in supervising the execution of action steps to fulfill project metrics. Their focus extends to the creation of leadership workshops, tailoring services for district specific needs, and providing tools and resources to enhance the effectiveness of Pre-AP leaders.

Shifting Pre-AP principles into actionable measures supports collective efficacy amongst Implementation Directors through exposure to culturally responsive content, research, and frameworks. In sum, I believe that if the directors have a deeper knowledge surrounding CRSL the implementation services designed (i.e., Learning Walks, One-on-One Coaching, professional development, etc.) will organically begin to reflect culturally responsive strategies for leaders.

Theory of Improvement and Improvement Initiative

My theory of improvement held that culturally responsive professional development for Pre-AP Implementation Directors would increase their CRSL consciousness and they would be better equipped to intentionally support district/site leaders with a more equity-focused lens. Additionally, my hypothesis suggests that as Implementation Directors adopt a more culturally responsive approach to Pre-AP Implementation support, it may influence district/site leaders to embrace equitable practices. Consequently, this shift in approach has the potential to positively impact increased enrollment in AP coursework for Black learners over time. From a tools and resources development standpoint, this proposal sought to influence the creation, content, and design of Pre-AP leadership support services. This intervention deepens the knowledge of implementation directors by focusing on their exposure to and engagement with culturally responsive content in turn reframing their lens with an equity-focused skillset to inform approaches of support. Moreover, I foresaw the necessity for continuous culturally responsive professional development. Additionally, ongoing data collection and analysis were anticipated to

bring about a fundamental shift in the design of Pre-AP leadership support tools, services, and resources. The aim was to make these resources more inclusive of culturally responsive school leadership practices. The overarching goal is to increase the number of Pre-AP schools implementing the Pre-AP framework as Pre-AP for All. The Pre-AP commitment to "Pre-AP for All" by the College Board signifies an initiative aimed at expanding access to rigorous educational opportunities for all students. It emphasizes providing a broader and more diverse student population with access to Pre-AP courses, which are designed to offer challenging and engaging grade-level coursework. The commitment underscores the goal of ensuring that students, regardless of their background or prior academic experiences, can participate in and benefit from Pre-AP programs. The focus is on promoting equitable access to high-quality educational experiences to foster academic growth and success for all learners.

This professional development series, outlined in Appendix D, draws inspiration from Muhammad Khalifa's work on culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL). Khalifa's approach is deeply influenced by Geneva Gay's contributions to culturally responsive pedagogy, extending the focus from teaching to encompass the broader concept of CRSL. I agree with Gay (2010) that professional development to build educator's capacity to be culturally responsive cannot be "decontextualized and ahistorical" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 11). Hence, this initiative included various methods exposing directors to equally significant historical context and culturally responsive language lending itself to their acknowledgment of the role history plays in systemic inequities in schools.

Improvement science is a methodology that involves systematic, collaborative efforts to bring about positive change in a particular setting. Engaging with the improvement science methodology allowed me, as the scholar-practitioner, to acknowledge my role as a part of the

target audience, participate in relative interventions, and present possible solutions to the problem (Hinnant-Crawford 2019, Vogel et al., 2015). Improvement science is most suitable for exploring the problem and issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion within education.

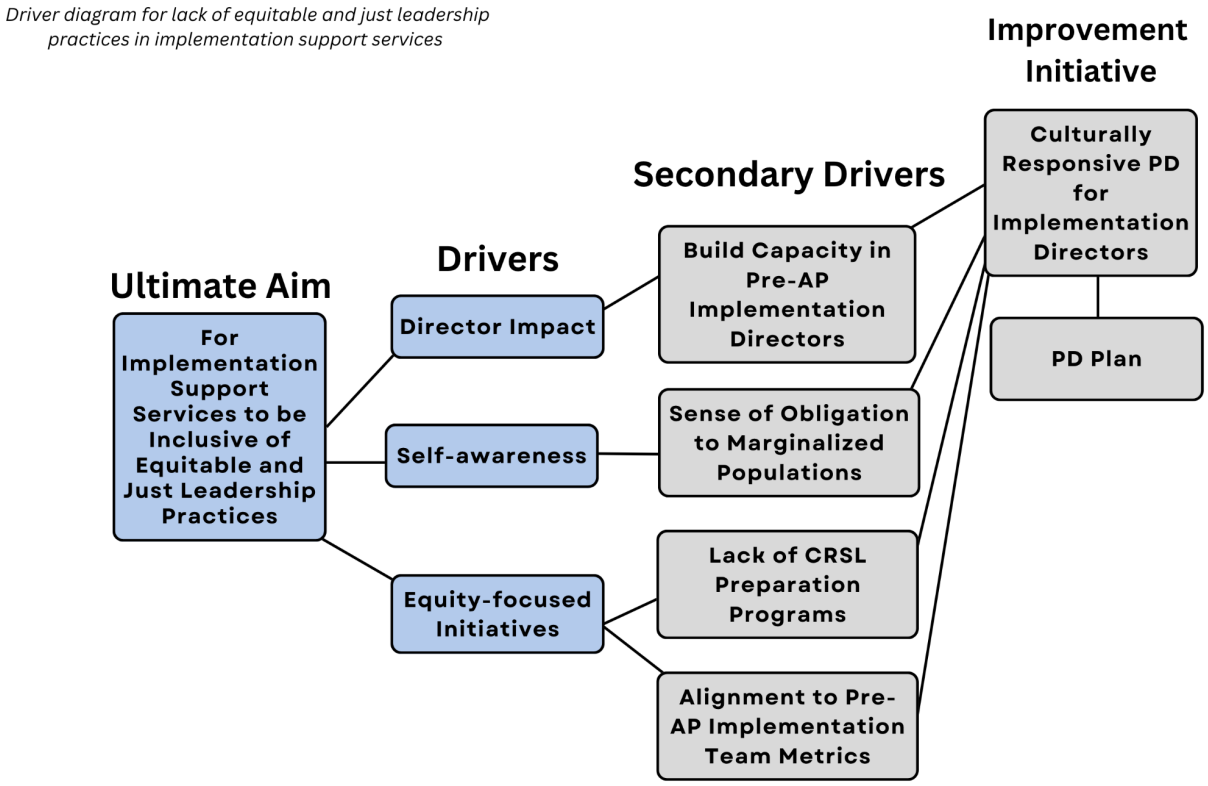
> Improvement science offers leaders a new palette of tools with which to do their work. The tools are being used in diverse teaching and learning contexts. These tools form the basis of what is so often essential to make progress, a common, analytic discourse that helps leaders see and address problems differently (Spaulding et al., 2021, p. 2).

By using an Improvement Science methodology, informed by CRSL theories of change, I aimed to increase the capacity for change and a prescription for the sustainability of the desired outcomes and innovations in equity-driven service to educational leaders.

Hinnant-Crawford (2019) explains a causal analysis involves an in-depth examination and understanding of the root causes and factors influencing a particular educational issue or problem. Following the causal analysis is an analysis of a driver diagram that represents what drove the change in this problem within Pre-AP leadership support services. The driver diagram below illustrates the improvement initiative for consideration (Figure 4). The seven participating Implementation Directors participated in culturally responsive professional development session. For this disquisition, the improvement initiatives pursued were a professional development plan intentionally focused on culturally responsive professional development for Pre-AP Implementation Directors.

Figure 4

Driver Diagram Showing Ultimate Aim, Drivers, and Initiative for the Problem



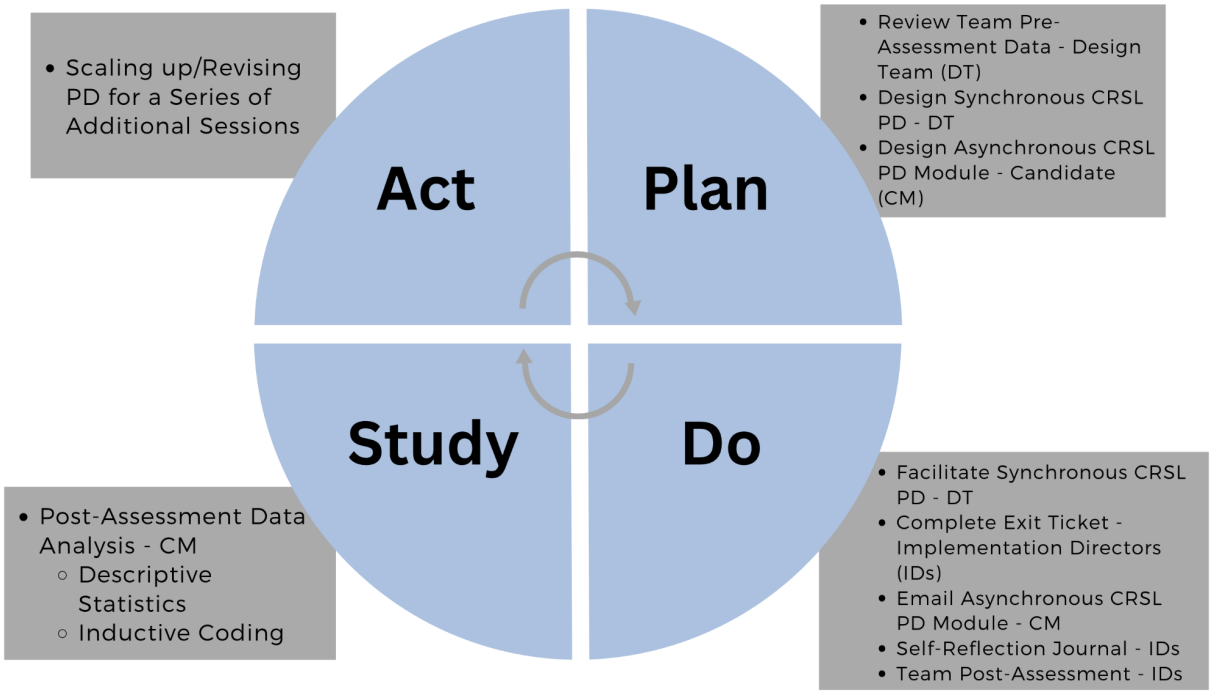
Building the capacity of Implementation Directors to be more culturally responsive in practice included the following goals for directors: 1) explore the historical context of inequities in American education—where the facilitator leads a comprehensive journey into American history reframed for an educator to develop historical content knowledge for equity-centered leadership (25%); 2) develop a foundational understanding of CRSL—where the facilitator explains founding principles of CRSL as explained by scholars to introduce foundational principles of CRSL to Implementation Directors (25%); 3) engage in self-reflection as a practitioner —where the facilitator provides an opportunity for implementation directors to reflect and align one's educational philosophy with CRSL (25%); 4) culturally responsive language development including diverse and equity-focused language—develops a CRSL

language base for Implementation Directors (25%). As a result of the professional development sessions, I anticipated seeing a culture shift arise because of the initiative, aligning with the established beliefs of the organization.

Ongoing and intentional exposure to CRSL research will forever change how my colleagues and I serve our districts. Thus, a Plan, Do, Study, and Act (PDSA) cycle aligned perfectly with my vision that culturally responsive professional development would develop my colleagues as culturally responsive leaders. A PDSA cycle is described by Langley et al. (2009) as a tool that combines learning and action. PDSA cycles are interactive and predictive; activities are easily identified, and the protocol is clearly explained (p. 97). Figure 5 represents my PDSA cycle of improvement initiatives. I remind readers that my aim was for implementation support services to be inclusive of equity and just leadership practices with the goal of Pre-AP for All in mind.

Figure 5

PDSA Cycle, Creating Equity-centered Pre-AP Implementation Support Services



The professional development sessions followed a pre-assessment (see Appendix B) to gather data on the existing level of culturally responsive knowledge possessed by Implementation Directors. After collecting and analyzing the pre-assessment data to ensure intentionality be aligning content to data results in the intervention's design, the intervention took the form of a synchronous professional development session and an asynchronous professional development module. Immediate data was collected through an exit ticket following the synchronous professional development session. A two-week follow-up, comprising an asynchronous module and reflection journal, was employed to gather additional data. Finally, a post-assessment was administered to assess the effectiveness of the intervention.

Figure 6

Timeline of Intervention, beginning July 2023

Proposed Timeline	July 2023	August 2023	September 2023
• Distribute Pre-assessment to IDs via Email	✓		
• Meet with Design Team - ◦ **Meeting Aim:** Review pre-assessment data, the finalized PD plan, and content review and its proposed effect		✓	
• Design PD		✓	
• Deliver Synchronous PD ◦ Exit Ticket		✓	
• Asynchronous Module		✓	
• Self-Reflection Journal • Distribute Post-assessment to IDs via Email		✓	✓
• Data Collection/Analysis		✓	✓

For the 2023 project year, the Pre-AP implementation team has 10 projects geared toward leadership support services. Though my initiative is not part of those 10 projects directly, I anticipated the intervention would produce a more equity-centered focus within the development and design of the said services organically. Figure 6 represents the event timeline for the intervention.

School leaders must lead with integrity and confidence because they will be challenged constantly. Khalifa et al. (2016) highlight the critical role of the school leader to ensure teachers remain culturally responsive. The focus of equity-centered instructional frameworks and teacher preparation is on the ability of the school leader to articulate a vision that supports the development and ability to sustain of culturally responsive teaching (Khalifa et al., 2016). For this reason, my initiative focused on the capacity building of Pre-AP Implementation Directors so they can plant seeds of equity throughout the variety of ways they support and serve school leaders across the nation.

Design Team

The development of a Design Team is essential for the successful implementation of the improvement initiative. Forming a team helps analyze the identified problem, postulate potential solutions, and communicate with others within their network (Bryk et al., 2015, p.159). Individuals selected as members of the Design Team will assist in identifying, developing, implementing, and evaluating the improvement initiative.

My Design Team (Figure 7) for the initiative consisted of myself, and three other Implementation Directors, while my supervisor served in more of an advisory role. Dr. Dean Packard is the Senior Director for Pre-AP Implementation and my direct report. In his role as the Senior Director of Implementation, Dr. Packard actively engaged as a participant in the work of the Implementation Team. As a Design Team member, he advised and provided feedback to the team regarding professional development design decisions. Within the College Board organizational hierarchy, Dr. Packard is an integral part of the decision-making process for Pre-AP Implementation, serving as a member of the senior leadership team. Thus, his involvement as a Design Team member was essential to the intervention. Dr. Packard's heightened sense of where the work of the implementation team sits in advancing educational equity as it connects to other teams within the Pre-AP Customer Success unit was beneficial when designing the professional development sessions. Eden Orlando, Sophia Roy, and Laurie Flynn are Pre-AP Implementation Directors who support other teams (i.e., Professional Learning) within the Customer Success unit. Their participation in big-picture conversations regarding Pre-AP supported centering the intervention's focus in alignment with projected desired outcomes and where the Customer Success unit is expected to take Pre-AP in the future collectively.

Figure 7

Design Team Names, Roles, Home Units, and Race/Gender

Name	Role/Title	Unit	Race/Gender
Cassandra Martin	Pre-AP Implementation Director	Customer Experience	Black Female
Dr. Dean Packard	Pre-AP Implementation Senior Director	Customer Experience	White Male
Eden Orlando	Pre-AP Implementation Director	Customer Experience	White Female
Sophia Roy	Pre-AP Implementation Director	Customer Experience	Biracial Female
Laurie Flynn	Pre-AP Implementation Director	Customer Experience	White Female

After just over a year of working alongside and learning from these people in supporting districts across the nation, I am confident in my Design Team's desire to ensure our support is inclusive of CRSL practices. Each design team member is committed to the successful implementation of Pre-AP and intentionally supporting leaders who lead implementation whether at the district or school site. My colleagues, with diverse backgrounds as former principals, district administrators, and classroom teachers, share a common commitment to enhancing achievement outcomes for all students. They possess a comprehensive understanding of the daily workings of instructional frameworks and educational systems.

At the start of the PDSA cycle, I scheduled a meeting for the Design Team to review the pre-assessment data (within the Qualtrics data collection tool), decide on the professional

development's content with consideration of its proposed effects, and finalize the synchronous professional development plan. The questions in the pre-assessment informed professional development design and content. The pre-assessment data collection served as a model for Design Team members on how to design intentional professional development that meets participants where they are in their content knowledge but with the focus centered on their needs with content development. By incorporating adapted questions from *The dispositions for the culturally responsive pedagogy scale and the culturally responsive teaching competencies to develop the culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy and outcome expectancy scales*[1], the data obtained would provide insights directly linked to the existing CRSL knowledge of Implementation Directors.

During the Design Team meeting, I outlined the improvement initiative, emphasizing the aim to increase equity-centered implementation support. I referenced crucial literature explaining why CRSL knowledge is vital for educational leaders in ensuring educational equity. Additionally, I discussed the necessity of implementing professional development as a suitable intervention and presented the hypothesis. This initiative used self-awareness as a driver to ensure Implementation Directors are reflecting on their practice and leadership behaviors. It is critical that leaders have an awareness of self and their values, beliefs, and/or dispositions when it comes to serving marginalized populations of students (Khalifa et al., 2016). The primary components of the initiative were professional development and data collection through an intervention cycle. The agenda for the meeting with my Design Team is listed in Appendix A.

[1] Manya C. Whitaker, Kristina Marie Valtierra, (2018) "The dispositions for culturally responsive pedagogy scale", Journal for Multicultural Education, Vol. 12 Issue: 1, pp.10-24, https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-11-2016-0060

Again, the primary focus of the meeting was for the design team to analyze the pre-assessment data, intending to inform the design of the synchronous professional development session for Implementation Directors. During the meeting, one decision the Design Team made was to provide Implementation Directors with the opportunity to conduct a close read of the Pre-AP Equity and Access Policy. The aim was for Implementation Directors to identify where the language in the policy directly intersected with our responsibilities and our core values. As a Design Team, we thought pinpointing these connections would prompt Implementation Directors to consider if their personal views on equity align with how the Pre-AP policy guides our work in the program. As a team, we made the decision to establish a forum for the Implementation Team to collectively identify and address the assessed equity gaps. We aimed to openly acknowledge and pinpoint the specific areas within our work where equity should play a central role.

Evaluation

The team of Implementation Directors is comprised of nine educational professionals including myself, all of whom have served in education for at least a decade or more. Four of the nine Implementation Directors identify as persons of color. One acting member of the Implementation Team the Pre-AP Executive Director of Customer Success, Ana Shapiro, was unable to participate in my research. As the Candidate, I did not participate. In total, seven Implementation Directors gave their consent and participated in my study.

Through the intervention this study necessitates a confrontation of our positionality within the Implementation Team, exploring the intersection of Implementation Directors' responsibilities and personal beliefs. As Pre-AP Implementation Directors, our positionalities are multifaceted, reflecting our roles, experiences, and expertise within the Pre-AP framework.

Grounded in educational leadership, we bring a unique blend of insights into curriculum implementation and a dedicated commitment to fostering equitable and just practices. Our perspectives are shaped by direct engagement with the challenges and opportunities of Pre-AP initiatives, encompassing a nuanced understanding of program goals, collaboration with educators, and adherence to the expectations set by the College Board. Informed by continuous learning, interactions with colleagues, and active participation in organizational discussions, our positionalities are dynamic, contributing to evolving perspectives and guiding strategic approaches to address identified challenges within the educational landscape. With a collective focus on incorporating actionable steps that fulfill the Pre-AP program's commitment to equity in consideration of the Pre-AP Equity and Access Policy, Implementation Directors might intentionally center our work to ensure team practices align with those of CRSL.

The asynchronous module delved into the continued disproportionality of Black student representation in AP courses in connection to the historical timeline of racial segregation in the United States. Hence, I examined the efforts to perpetuate racial segregation and underscoring ongoing attempts to uphold racist ideologies that assert the superiority of White students over Black students. In Figure 8 below, the process of designing the synchronous/asynchronous sessions and conducting data collection/analysis is detailed.

Figure 8

Outline of Data Collection, Professional Development Design, and Intervention

Step 1 - Pre-Assessment: Disposition for Praxis, Social Justice, & School Culture - *Implementation Team (Participants)*
● Assessed Implementation Director's current CRSL knowledge - Qualtrics
Step 2 - Data Analysis - *Design Team*
● Data findings used to design synchronous professional development

Step 3 - Synchronous professional development: Exit Ticket - *Implementation Team (Participants)*

- Professional Development Session Agenda
    - Recap/Pre-Work
    - Close Read: Pre-AP Equity and Access Policy
    - Pause and Reflect: Team Shared Equity Norms
    - Discussion: Living Our Mission Conversation
    - Exit Ticket

Step 4 - Data Analysis – *Dr. Cassandra Martin*

- Data findings used to design asynchronous professional development module

Step 5 - Asynchronous professional development module: Reflection Journal - *Implementation Team (Participants)*

- Module Agenda
    - Module Goals & Objectives
    - Synchronous Professional Development Session Takeaways
        - Exit Ticket Data
        - Pre-AP Equity & Access Policy
        - Implementation Vision Statement
    - A National Issue
        - The Problem
        - The Facts
    - Go For Broke
        - Organizational Theory
        - Dig Deep
        - Communities of Practice
        - Processing & Reflection Time

Step 6 - Post-Assessment: Disposition for Praxis, Social Justice, & School Culture - *Implementation Team (Participants)*

- Assessed Implementation Director's CRSL knowledge following the intervention

Step 7 - Data Analysis – *Dr. Cassandra Martin*

- Data findings used to assess growth and themes

First and foremost, creating a safe and open space where Implementation Directors could express themselves openly and honestly was critical. Thus, the Design Team deliberately designed the synchronous session to allow ample time for Implementation Team discussions and reflections, emphasizing the importance of ensuring time for processing and that everyone's voice was heard.

Each member of my design team is highly skilled at designing and facilitating professional development for adult learners. Our design choices were guided by well-established methods for effective adult education. We recognized that adult learners benefit from active engagement, so we integrated elements such as discussions and group activities, which promote interaction and enhance information retention (Gorski, 2016). Based on the pre-assessment data findings, the Design Team identified two key objectives for the synchronous professional development session, aiming to guide changes within the role of Pre-AP Implementation Directors. The first objective involved initiating the development of a set of shared equity norms within the Implementation Team. The second objective sought to identify specific areas where the Implementation Team could practically implement these norms. For example, one actionable strategy discussed involves Implementation Directors asking district/site leaders what their equity goals are for the year.

Beginning-of-the-year meetings are required, notably presenting the perfect opportunity for Implementation Directors to initiate an equity-focused approach to district/site improvement goals. This approach advocates for equity as a catalyst for enhanced student achievement and establishes a link to the principles outlined in the Pre-AP Equity and Access Policy. Furthermore, to intentionally align our work as a team with the "sustained commitment to equitable preparation and access", we must continually seek to self-reflect and proactively attack inequities within our reach through our support allowing culturally responsive leadership practices to be our North Star (The College Board, 2020).

Next, based on Exit Ticket data I independently designed the asynchronous module. The module title, "Go for Broke: A Talk to Leaders," drew inspiration from James Baldwin's 1963 speech, "A Talk to Teachers." I created the module using Canva and it was designed so that

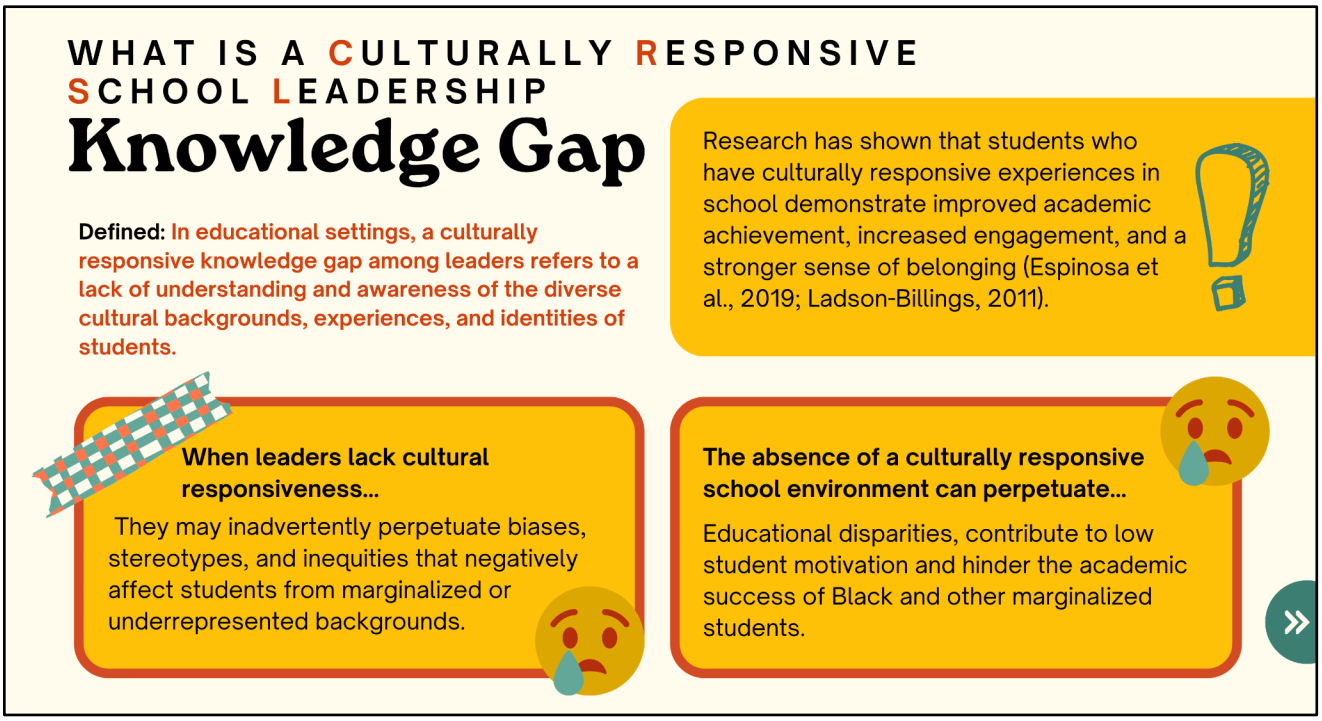
participating Implementation Directors could complete the module in an hour. Interestingly, my analysis of the Exit Ticket data revealed that Implementation Directors could benefit from the content already outlined in my disquisition (DQ). Consequently, a significant portion of the content within the asynchronous module was drawn from the “Historical Context” section included in this DQ. Moreover, the content was expanded upon with the inclusion of videos featuring scholars such as James Baldwin (1968), Gloria Ladson-Billings (2022), Geneva Gay (2015), bell hooks (2017), Muhammad Khalifa (2022), and Bettina Love (2017). Furthermore, the module included Figure 2, referencing the 2021 Pre-AP for All data, which highlighted that out of 355 Pre-AP schools, only 50 fulfilled their commitment expectation to provide Pre-AP for all courses. As previously shared for a site fulfilling the Pre-AP commitment to "Pre-AP for All" by the College Board signifies an initiative aimed at expanding access to rigorous educational opportunities for all students. It emphasizes providing a broader and more diverse student population with access to Pre-AP courses, which are designed to offer challenging and engaging grade-level coursework. The commitment underscores the goal of ensuring that students, regardless of their background or prior academic experiences, have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from Pre-AP programs. The focus is on promoting equitable access to high-quality educational experiences to foster academic growth and success for all learners.

The content of the module also encompassed a comprehensive definition of culturally responsive school leadership, excerpts from scholarly research discussing CRSL ideologies, and delved into historical contexts such as literacy laws and segregation, covering various pertinent topics. An article authored by Dr. Pedro Noguera (2019) was also incorporated to enrich the learning experience. Appendix G provides the full content of the asynchronous professional

development module. Figure 9 offers an example of one slide of the asynchronous module content.

Figure 9

Example of Asynchronous Module Content - Slide 13



Just as in the design of the synchronous session, I adhered to effective adult learning principles when designing the asynchronous module. To align with Guskey's (2002) recommendations for adult learning, I chose to chunk the content into manageable segments, providing clear, well-organized digital resources to help with comprehension (Guskey, 2002). Additionally, the module encouraged reflection and self-assessment to allow the Implementation Directors to connect new knowledge to their prior experiences per adult learning theory (Merriam & Bierema, 2013).

Baseline Data – Pre-assessment – Descriptive Statistics

One of the primary metrics was the Implementation Directors' pre-assessment (Appendix B). This assessment was distributed to Implementation Directors through my Western Carolina University (WCU) student email. In late July, one week ahead of the synchronous professional development session, I sent an email to the Implementation Directors containing a Qualtrics link to access the Implementation Director CRSL Pre-Assessment. Specifically, a short series of questions assessed their existing disposition for praxis, social justice, and school culture, ultimately gauging their belief in the necessity of implementation support services for guiding equity-centered initiatives among school leaders. Appendix B contained the pre-assessment questions administered to each Implementation Director ($n = 7$), who participated in the intervention. While the initiative aimed to further acquaint Implementation Directors with CRSL and connect it to their role in supporting Pre-AP leaders with Pre-AP at their respective sights, the metrics focused on their fundamental knowledge of CRSL and the gaps they had within an equity-focused context before the professional development session. Furthermore, pre-assessment data inspired the design of the synchronous professional development session.

All seven remaining Implementation Directors participated in the CRSL Pre-Assessment, ensuring a 100% response rate. The Design Team used the results of this assessment to shape the content and focus of the synchronous professional development session. Since we had a relatively small group, I chose to analyze the data using descriptive statistics. Experts like Field (2018), Howell (2019), and Gravetter & Wallnau (2016) recommend this approach for small datasets. Descriptive statistics are known for their simplicity and their ability to make data patterns easy to understand. In a small dataset, they quickly show things like the average, variability, and how the data is spread out. Below, I provide the results from my analysis of the quantitative data.

Table 1.1 displays the average scores for items concerning Factor 1: Disposition of Praxis, all of which were above 4. These scores suggest that Implementation Directors already possessed a strong disposition toward praxis. However, it is noteworthy that the statement "I am willing to be vulnerable" had the lowest average score at 4 among the statement sets. This indicates that professional development sessions should prioritize creating a safe space for Implementation Directors to feel comfortable being open and honest, especially if the goal is to see growth in this area in the post-assessment results.

Table 1.1

Disposition for Praxis

Disposition for Praxis

Factor 1: - This is on a low to high scale. 1 is the lowest extent to which you agree.

Field	n	M	SD
I value assessing my leadership practices.	7	4.71	0.45
I am willing to take advantage of professional learning opportunities focused on issues of diversity.	7	4.71	0.70
I am open to feedback about my leadership practices.	7	4.71	0.45
I am willing to examine my own identity.	7	4.57	0.73
I am willing to be vulnerable.	7	4.00	1.07

Note: Results from the Implementation Director CRSL Pre-Assessment (Factor 1) with 7 (# of Responses), Mean (M), and Standard Deviation (SD) The minimum score is 1.00 (the lowest extent to which you can agree) and the maximum is 5.00 (strongly agree) on a 5-point scale.

Table 1.2 displays the average scores for items concerning Factor 1: Disposition of Social Justice, all of which were above 4.4. These scores suggest that Implementation Directors already possessed a strong disposition toward social justice. The lowest average score among the question set was 4.43, suggesting that Implementation Directors might not have been entirely willing to lead conversations on specific social justice topics before participating in the

professional development sessions. In particular, the statement “I believe that hot-topic conversations (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, religion, etc.) should be had with school faculty when necessary and/or relevant” reflects individuals’ comfort levels with facilitating discussions on these topics. This data led me to the conclusion that it is essential to emphasize why leading such discussions is necessary for the development of a culturally responsive lens.

Table 1.2

Disposition for Social Justice

Disposition of Social Justice

Factor 2: - This is on a low to high scale. 1 is the lowest extent to which you agree.

Field	n	M	SD
I value equity (giving each student what they individually need) over equality (giving each student the same thing).	7	4.86	0.35
I believe it is important to acknowledge how issues of power are enacted in schools.	7	4.86	0.35
I believe that hot-topic conversations (e.g. race, gender, sexuality, religion, etc.) should be had with school faculty when necessary and/or relevant.	7	4.43	0.73
I believe that schools can reproduce social inequities.	7	4.86	0.35

Note: Results from the Implementation Director CRSL Pre-Assessment (Factor 1) with 7 (# of Responses), Mean (M), and Standard Deviation (SD) The minimum score is 1.00 (the lowest extent to which you can agree) and the maximum is 5.00 (strongly agree) on a 5-point scale.

Table 1.3 shows the average scores on items related to Factor 1- Disposition of School Culture. The data suggests that Implementation Directors generally had a high disposition toward school culture, but there was still room for growth. Among the statement sets, only Factor 3 had a statement with an average score of 5. Before the professional development session, all seven Implementation Directors strongly agreed with the statement "I believe that schools should adapt instruction to meet the needs of students." However, it's noteworthy that the statement "I believe

that schools should implement strategies to minimize the effects of a mismatch between students' home culture and school culture" had an average score of 4, making it the lowest among the statements set. This indicates that exposure to content about incorporating home norms in educational settings when appropriate could potentially lead to growth for Implementation Directors in this area.

Table 1.3

Disposition of School Culture

Disposition of School Culture

Factor 3: - This is on a low to high scale. 1 is the lowest extent to which you agree.

Field	n	M	SD
I believe that schools should identify ways that school culture (e.g., values, norms, and practices) differs from students' home culture.	7	4.29	0.88
I believe that schools should implement strategies to minimize the effects of mismatch between students' home culture and school culture.	7	4.00	0.93
I believe that schools should adapt instruction to meet the need of students.	7	5.00	0.00
I believe that schools should assess student learning using various types of assessments.	7	4.86	0.35
I believe that schools should use students' cultural backgrounds to help make learning meaningful.	7	4.71	0.45

Note: Results from the Implementation Director CRSL Pre-Assessment (Factor 1) with 7 (# of Responses), Mean (M), and Standard Deviation (SD) The minimum score is 1.00 (the lowest extent to which you can agree) and the maximum is 5.00 (strongly agree) on a 5-point scale.

Collectively, all pre-assessment mean scores were above 4, indicating that Implementation Directors already had a strong disposition toward praxis, social justice, and school culture. This discovery suggested that professional development needed to focus on connecting the Implementation Director's disposition to that of the Implementation Team, emphasizing their collective commitment to praxis, social justice, and school culture.

Furthermore, despite the already strong disposition displayed by Implementation Directors in each factor, there is still potential for further development. Since the primary emphasis is on promoting the adoption of CRSL practices by Implementation Directors in implementation support, any gradual progress in these aspects holds considerable importance.

Primarily, the core objective of this research endeavor is to bolster the Implementation Team's capabilities, empowering us to collectively indirectly broaden access to Pre-AP and AP programs for Black learners. This involves enhancing our capacity to address equity gaps both within our team and in our external support initiatives. I acknowledge that the intervention may not directly result in increased enrollment of Black students in Pre-AP and AP classes. Nevertheless, I contend that the intention to provide more equitable support as Implementation Directors has the potential, over time, to indirectly influence the representation of Black students in advanced curricula courses.

Step three (Figure 8) of the intervention, a synchronous professional development session, had a duration of two hours and 30 minutes. During this, each member of the Design Team took charge of a 30-minute segment, except for me who facilitated for one hour and the final five minutes closing the professional development (PD) session. The PD consisted of five mini-sessions, led by different Design Team members. Sessions occurred in the following sequence:

- Recap and Pre-Work - Led by Eden Orlando
- Close Read: Pre-AP Equity and Access Policy - Led by Laurie Flynn
- Pause and Reflect: Shared Vision of Equity - Facilitated by the Candidate
- Living Our Mission Conversation - Led by Sophia Roy
- Close and Exit Ticket - Facilitated by the Candidate

Process Measure - Inductive Coding of the Exit Ticket

Process measures serve as crucial tools for assessing fidelity and primarily focus on the evaluation of the implementation of the intervention effectiveness (Hinnant-Crawford, 2019). Implementation Directors completed the exit ticket immediately after concluding the synchronous professional development session (Figure 8). Process measures serve as crucial tools for assessing fidelity and primarily focus on the evaluation of implementation effectiveness. The analysis of the data from the exit ticket involved the application of inductive coding. Inductive coding requires researchers to derive categories and themes directly from raw data without predetermined concepts or theoretical frameworks (Smith & Jones, 2020). In contrast to deductive coding, which relies on predefined categories, inductive coding enables the emergence of patterns and themes during the analysis process (Johnson et al., 2018). I utilized inductive coding for open exploration of data, grounded theory development (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), flexibility in adapting to unexpected findings, and obtaining contextual insights into complex social trends (Charmaz, 2006; Thomas, 2006).

I identified three major themes across Implementation Director responses. The three themes I lifted from the exit ticket findings are as follows: What is appropriate equity leadership as an Implementation Director; Implementation Directors need further skill development to make an impact; and Leading for equity is challenging and emotional work. These three themes encapsulate the insights gained from the synchronous professional development session facilitated by the Design Team. The themes shed light on my intervention objective of enhancing the capacity of Implementation Directors to approach their work through a culturally responsive lens. Based on the findings, I intentionally crafted the asynchronous professional development module, constituting phase two of the intervention, to further extend learning in alignment with the identified three themes.

What is Appropriate Equity Leadership as an Implementation Director?

In educational contexts, tension arises between educators' passion for promoting equity and the specific roles they hold within their institutions. (Gay; 2002, Khalifa; 2016, Ladson-Billings, 2011). Frequently, educators find themselves in positions where their direct responsibilities do not encompass the creation of educational content or instructional materials. However, they wield the capacity to provide valuable feedback and support to amplify equity efforts within the materials and curricula designed by their colleagues (Gay 2002, Khalifa 2016, Ladson-Billings 2011). One example of this theme is expressed in the following explanation by an Implementation Director:

> As I noted in previous feedback, I struggle with understanding the best way to use this knowledge with our customers and in our direct work with school leaders who need this. What is appropriate and within my lane?

This Implementation Director's question was thought-provoking, and this theme had a profound impact on me while designing the asynchronous module. I started thinking about how to translate CRSL knowledge into practical applications for Implementation Directors. I began thinking about our team's strengths and how they might create opportunities for the “appropriate” application of this new learning for Implementation Directors.

This finding was a key takeaway from the synchronous professional development session and gave me great insight, informing my design of the asynchronous module. Figure 10 shows the slide from the asynchronous professional development module inspired by the finding “What is appropriate equity leadership as an Implementation Director”. On the slide, I ask participants to dig deep asking themselves six reflective questions about their leadership style, who they are

as a leader, and how both their leadership style and who they are as a leader intersect with their job as an Implementation Director.

Figure 10

Asynchronous Module Content - Slide 32

Implementation Directors Need Further Skill Development to Make an Impact

To make an impact, Implementation Directors need to be better equipped to lead with an equity lens. Implementation Directors articulated a fervent yearning to apply a more profound and tangible influence on the equitable experiences afforded to students within educational settings. They express a pressing desire to bridge the gap between the delineated parameters of their professional roles and their unwavering commitment to furthering equity in education. An example of this theme is conveyed in the following Implementation Director response:

> The content and conversations were powerful and could be useful in our work once we figure out exactly how we'll use our growing knowledge with customers. I'm here for it and believe we can make an impact.

In emphasizing the critical role of cultural responsiveness, Gloria Ladson-Billings contends that an authentic desire to effect positive change forms a fundamental aspect of a culturally responsive approach. Ladson-Billings (2006) stresses the importance of a genuine commitment to making a positive impact as a key aspect of cultural responsiveness. She highlights the educator's essential need to possess a sincere willingness to drive change that addresses the diverse needs of students from various cultural backgrounds. This willingness goes beyond merely incorporating diverse content or strategies; it entails a deeper commitment to understanding and dismantling systemic inequities within educational systems (Ladson-Billings, 2006). By adopting this proactive stance, educators can cultivate an environment where all students feel valued and supported, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable educational experience (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

This reinforces that the desire that Implementation Directors possess to make an impact with an equity-driven approach is the right ingredient when ensuring implementation support for Pre-AP reflects culturally responsive practices. However, it also highlights the need to reconsider our current role within the larger context of the College Board. If Implementation Directors express a desire to be more equitable in their approaches to how we do our jobs, they must be provided with the time and the opportunity to hone their skills to be more culturally responsive. One Implementation Director wrote, “It feels like we always stop short of what we can do in our roles to impact equitable experiences for students in schools.” For this reason, it is important Implementation Directors feel confident in their equity leadership or they will continue to feel limited in their support.

Leading for Equity is Challenging and Emotional Work

Analysis of the data gleaned from the exit ticket responses provided insights into the

evolving perspectives of Implementation Directors. Ladson-Billings (2021), Gay (2023), and Khalifa (2018) describe CRSL as a formidable undertaking characterized by its inherent challenges, emotional intensity, and intricate complexity. Implementation Directors readily recognize that engaging in this work can be an inherently messy and emotionally demanding endeavor. Nevertheless, they consistently emphasize its utmost significance in advancing equity in the realm of education expressed in the following Implementation Director response:

> I appreciated having an opportunity to untangle the complex and nuanced role that we play in driving equity in our given capacities. I learned some new things about myself-namely, that I'm currently in a phase where I don't accept the burden of driving equity in the districts I work in. There are places and times in which I do not feel psychologically safe to engage, and where I encounter trauma as a person of color engaging in the work. Kids are why I choose to persist.

The trauma felt in spaces of oppression is not limited to students. Notably, this Implementation Director's response sheds light on how leading with an equity-driven focus can be emotionally draining and cause psychological trauma. Equity leaders frequently grapple with various forms of psychological trauma as they navigate the complexities of advocating for fairness and justice (Gay, 2011, Khalifa, 2018). The emotional toll on these leaders has been extensively documented in the literature dating back as far as 1957. Below, I've presented scholarly examples illustrating the types of traumas experienced by equity leaders.

Microaggressions and Discrimination: Persistent exposure to microaggressions, discrimination, and bias can contribute to cumulative psychological distress (Sue et al., 2007).

Isolation and Alienation: The sense of isolation or alienation often experienced by

equity leaders in predominantly non-diverse environments has been discussed in research on diversity and inclusion (Cox, 1994).

Emotional Exhaustion: The ongoing effort required to address systemic inequities can lead to emotional exhaustion, burnout, and a sense of being overwhelmed (Maslach et al., 2001).

Resistance and Pushback: Facing resistance, pushback, or hostility from colleagues, superiors, or the system itself can contribute to stress and trauma (Kendi, 2019).

Cognitive Dissonance: Holding a commitment to equity while contending with systemic practices that perpetuate inequity can create cognitive dissonance, causing internal conflict and stress (Festinger, 1957).

Guilt and Anguish: Leaders may experience guilt or anguish witnessing the impact of systemic inequities on marginalized individuals or groups, especially if they feel constrained in their ability to effect meaningful change (hooks, 2003).

Fear of Retribution: Concerns about retribution, including job loss or professional repercussions, can induce anxiety and fear, impacting mental health (Khalifa, 2018).

Vicarious Trauma: Hearing and empathizing with the stories of those who have experienced injustice may lead to vicarious trauma, where the leader internalizes the pain and suffering of others (McCann & Pearlman, 1990).

Recognizing and addressing these psychological challenges is crucial to supporting the well-being of equity leaders and fostering sustainable change. In future CRSL professional development sessions, I think it appropriate to share this information with the Implementation Team as we continue to build our capacity collectively.

Balance Measure - Prompt 1 - Inductive Coding of Journal Entries

The balancing measure seeks to address whether the intended functionality of a system is being realized. It assesses various components within the system, even those that may seem unrelated to the specific outcome in question. Its purpose is to detect any unforeseen repercussions resulting from a change (Hinnant-Crawford, 2019). Following the asynchronous professional development module, implementation directors were tasked with completing a reflection journal. This was done to assess whether the intervention effectively built their CRSL capacity, as outlined in the following paragraphs.

In late August, I sent Implementation Directors a view-only link to the asynchronous module using my WCU student email. Implementation Directors were provided with a two-week window to finish the module and were instructed to complete the reflection journal and post-assessment upon its completion. Participants responded to journal prompts reflecting on how they had implemented their learning since completing the module. This data provided insight into whether the asynchronous/synchronous sessions deepened the CRSL knowledge of Implementation Directors. The post-professional development reflection journal required directors to demonstrate what they learned and how or if they had begun to use the new knowledge in practice. Prompt one of the self-reflection journal prompts was the balance measure which provided additional insight into where each director was situated in their new learning. It was equally important to know if their time spent supporting leaders had increasingly taken away from their work tasks or on the contrary strengthened the support they provided. Prompts from the self-reflection journal are below and included in Appendix C.

> Prompt 1**:** After reflecting on your new learning of CRSL practices, please share how your learning has impacted your *overall work* as a Pre AP-Implementation Director (this isn't exclusive to our team/unit). How has your developing a CRSL lens hindered your

ability to focus your time on the needs of the leaders you support? How has it strengthened the support you provide?

Prompt 2: Explain how this new learning has reframed your thinking and impacted your approach to supporting Pre-AP leaders and when designing new leadership support services.

I used inductive coding for the journal responses where I derived themes and patterns directly from the data itself (Thomas, 2006). By employing inductive coding in my qualitative research, I uncovered rich and contextually meaningful insights about Implementation Directors' thoughts and key learnings after having completed the intervention (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Using inductive coding I named, identified, and established two major themes from the Implementation Director's responses: The Intervention Raised Implementation Directors' Consciousness; and Implementation Director Support was Strengthened. Collectively, the responses highlight that heightened awareness led to tangible actions through the reinforcement of their support. Out of the seven Implementation Director responses, not one stated developing a CRSL lens hindered their ability to focus their time on the needs of leaders. Instead, responses pointed to a more reflective approach to implementation support for Pre-AP.

The Intervention Raised Implementation Directors' Consciousness

Overall, the Implementation Directors' critical consciousness was heightened because of the intervention. The responses from Implementation Directors vividly illustrate the profound impact of embracing CRSL on their professional identity and commitment to equity. One Implementation Director noted, "My decision-making processes have become more culturally competent and at the heart of what I do." This reflects a shift away from bureaucratic routines, emphasizing a deeper dedication to addressing systemic inequities. This transformation

transcends the demands of efficiency and regulation, placing cultural competence and equity at the very core of their work. This marks the initial sign that Implementation Directors are shifting away from structural functional leadership practices toward more culturally responsive approaches.

Another Director remarked, "Efficiency and regulation are integral to our daily tasks in a larger organization, but having a culturally responsive lens and a focus on equity and social justice repositions my purpose." By adopting a culturally responsive lens and prioritizing equity and social justice, the Implementation Director demonstrates the initial stages of their transition. They shift from a leadership style rooted in structural functionalism, emphasizing efficiency and regulation of inequitable practices, to becoming a culturally responsive leader. This transformation signifies an understanding that an equitable approach should permeate every aspect of their work, rather than existing in isolation.

In the asynchronous professional development session, this Implementation Director explicitly identified the presence of efficiency and regulation, characteristic practices of structural functionalism, in our work. However, the newfound knowledge has influenced their commitment to being more culturally responsive, leading them to shed their structural functional ways. The initial challenges encountered on this transformative journey ultimately intensify their commitment to providing steadfast support to educational leaders in their pursuit of equitable educational experiences. In response to prompt one, another Director stated, "I now approach each leader as a unique individual with distinct experiences, strengths, and areas for growth." This statement exemplifies the qualities of an equity leader, emphasizing how the Implementation Director now approaches each district/site leader based on their unique identity directly demonstrating their raised consciousness because of the intervention.

Implementation Director Support has Strengthened

Implementation Directors' implementation support for Pre-AP has strengthened. Moving from a primary focus on efficiency and adhering to organizational regulations to embracing a culturally responsive lens with a commitment to equity and social justice represents a significant shift in the professional identity of Implementation Directors. This transformation reflects an ambitious approach to addressing systemic inequities. As one Implementation Director articulated, "The new learning provided additional resources to strengthen my desire to embrace CRSL practices with districts to ensure equity for all students." Although the initial transition to a CRSL lens posed challenges related to time management and focus, it ultimately fortified the support provided to Pre-AP leaders.

This shift underscores the profound impact of integrating culturally responsive and equity-driven perspectives into the leadership practices of Implementation Directors, making unwavering support for equity a central tenet of their work. Another Implementation Director emphasized, "My newfound understanding of CRSL has enabled me to model and promote culturally responsive practices within the schools and teams I work with." In conclusion, one Implementation Director wrote, "In districts where tracking still exists, my CRSL lens empowers me to approach inquiries with confidence." The aforementioned response serves as compelling evidence that the intervention bolstered the Implementation Director's support and illustrates the practical applicability of the new learning. Although specific examples were not provided by Implementation Directors in their responses, each reply highlights a newfound confidence in ensuring culturally responsive practices during implementation support.

Driver Measure - Journal Prompt 2 - Inductive Coding

As noted by Hinnant-Crawford (2019), driver measures play a crucial role in assessing changes and acting as a link between the change process and the desired outcomes (p. 53). Two rounds of inductive coding yielded two major themes: Existing Barriers Due to Business Partnerships; and CRSL as a Transformative Shift. The themes identified align with the principles of CRSL as advocated by Gay (2023), Ladson-Billings (2021), and Khalifa (2018). These scholars emphasize the importance of recognizing and addressing barriers while promoting transformative, equity-focused approaches in educational leadership. In addition to the quantitative data collection tool, prompt two of the self-reflection journal, another driver measure, captured additional qualitative data to see if the intervention was working. Prompt two in the self-reflection journal can be found in Appendix C.

> Prompt 2: Explain how this new learning has reframed your thinking and impacted your approach to supporting Pre-AP leaders and when designing new leadership support services.

The analysis of the data from prompt two involved the application of inductive coding, a qualitative data analysis technique. This approach allowed for the identification of themes and patterns directly from the collected data, without imposing preconceived categories or frameworks (Thomas, 2006).

Existing Barriers Due to Business Partnerships

The College Board's business partnerships with customers of Pre-AP prioritize the work of Implementation Directors. Though the Pre-AP Equity and Access Policy states the College Board's "sustained commitment" to equity, the responsibilities of the Implementation Directors are to first, support the client's (i.e., school district and/or school site) needs (College Board, 2020). This creates a barrier for Implementation Directors in our efforts to ensure equitable

approaches to our work. Thus, the tension between the desire for progress in advancing equity-focused practices and the reality of internal barriers due to business partnerships with school districts/sites or potential backlash impacts how we support implementation.

Equity-focused leaders will face challenges and need to strategically navigate how they address them with a commitment to equity. Khalifa et al. (2016) highlight the challenges educational leaders encounter when implementing culturally responsive practices and the need to navigate existing barriers while working toward equitable outcomes for all students. An Implementation Director wrote, "We can influence, encourage, teach, but we are always at risk of being disregarded or ousted." In essence, this sentence exemplifies the delicate balancing act Implementation Directors must engage in when striving to promote equity by applying CRSL practices to their work while acknowledging the existing challenges that may impede their efforts. Additionally, the statement highlights a significant challenge faced by leaders working to ensure educational equity, particularly those who may not hold positions of authority.

In terms of our role as Implementation Directors, we are at the mercy of the district/site leaders we support or in this instance customers. The College Board is a vendor and though the Pre-AP Equity and Access Policy states College Board believes access to "engaging, relevant and challenging grade-level coursework", Implementation Directors aren't required to provide equity-driven support (College Board, 2020). Instead, Implementation Directors are expected to prioritize the needs of the districts/sites, that have purchased Pre-AP, to maintain healthy business relationships ensuring renewal goals are met. Thus, from an internal standpoint, the real priority of the Pre-AP program is revenue. This contradiction creates an undesirable space for Implementation Directors to be in. Notably, if an Implementation Director commits to

purposefully leading for equity, there's the potential to damage a business partnership, which could result in an Implementation Director's possible termination.

Hence, to connect the previously noted Implementation Director response, "We can influence, encourage, teach, but we are always at risk of being disregarded or ousted", to situations where the choice is between advocating for equity and potentially jeopardizing employment, opting not to lead for equity may seem like the safer and more pragmatic decision. The fear of being disregarded or ousted can create a significant dilemma for leaders, making the path of least resistance more appealing. This reflects a broader challenge within systems that may not fully embrace or support efforts toward equity and social justice. Balancing the commitment to fairness with the practicalities of professional survival underscores the complex decisions leaders face in navigating systems that may resist change.

Even with the ability to influence, encourage, and teach, there remains a risk of being disregarded or even marginalized. This emphasizes the entrenched barriers within educational systems that may resist change and equity initiatives. To overcome this, it becomes crucial for leaders to strategically navigate systems, build alliances, and persistently advocate for equity. Collaborative efforts, community engagement, and fostering a shared understanding of the importance of educational equity are essential components in dismantling existing barriers and creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. Another Implementation Director wrote:

> I'm left wondering if I might need to be more explicit when understanding the goals of the system concerning what level or types of changes, they are willing to make. For instance, does the system have the capacity to alter, sometimes fundamentally, the

pedagogy of the school, or is their work in Pre-AP about providing an Honors track without much change? I think this is amplified with the Customer Success model because we are there to meet their needs and not help them change their systems.

This reflection raises critical questions about whether the system, in this case, any school system the Implementation Directors support, is genuinely committed to making these fundamental changes in pedagogy and curriculum. It highlights the potential tension between advocating for substantial transformation and merely offering an "Honors track without much change." This system, in other cases, can be the College Board and fulfilling the obligations of the job versus fulfilling moral obligations to learners. This tension is at the core of CRSL, where leaders must navigate the balance between advocating for meaningful change and meeting the immediate needs of the districts we support or meeting the expectations of our organization in our roles.

The examination of the Pre-AP program's internal dynamics reveals a critical tension arising from business partnerships prioritized by the College Board. While the Pre-AP Equity and Access Policy professes a commitment to equity, Implementation Directors, tasked with supporting school districts, find their efforts constrained by the primary obligation to fulfill client needs. Understanding the challenges highlighted by Khalifa et al. (2016) and the delicate balancing act faced by Implementation Directors, as emphasized in the Implementation Director reflection, sheds light on the internal barriers stemming from business partnerships. It has illuminated the complex decisions Implementation Directors face in navigating systems resistant to change and the potential consequences of advocating for equity in a revenue-focused environment.

One of the findings from my driver, "Existing Barriers Due to Business Partnerships," points out a barrier. However, this discovery emphasizes that Implementation Directors are actively reflecting on their role and positionality as College Board employees and support specialists to school districts. Instead of signaling an inability to bring about change, this awareness indicates a recognition of an existing inequity within the system. It highlights a challenge or barrier that must be strategically addressed to ensure an equity-focused approach to the support provided. This revelation as a result of new learning can assist Implementation Directors in strategically navigating systems and building alliances as advocates for equity to overcome entrenched barriers.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership as a Transformative Shift

CRSL knowledge shifts mindsets transforming one's approaches to their work. Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (2017) argue that cultural responsiveness is not just about addressing the achievement gap but also recognizing and rectifying the broader "education debt" owed to Black students, which implies a transformative shift in education practices. Although Ladson-Billings' primary focus is on teaching, the principles of culturally responsive teaching can be extended to leadership practices within education settings. Khalifa et. al (2016) highlight the importance of leaders possessing self-awareness and a comprehensive understanding of the context in which they lead. Read the following Implementation Director response to gain insight as to how their new learning has positively impacted how they approach implementation support with their districts/sites:

> My new learning of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) practices has profoundly reframed my thinking and significantly influenced my approach to supporting Pre-AP leaders and the desire to design improved leadership support services. It has

> shifted my focus from a conventional, one-size-fits-all approach to a more nuanced, culturally sensitive perspective. Now, I prioritize understanding the unique backgrounds and experiences of the leaders I work with, recognizing that their success hinges on culturally relevant support. This perspective has influenced my desire to develop more inclusive and equitable leadership support services, ensuring that they address the diverse needs of our leaders, foster cultural competence, and promote a more inclusive educational environment.

Additionally, this Implementation Director's response articulates the shift within their learning. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the unique backgrounds and experiences of leaders. This aligns with the core principles of CRSL, which prioritize cultural competence and the development of inclusive educational environments. The themes derived from the data emphasize the project's alignment with the overarching goal of enhancing equity-centered implementation support for Pre-AP.

The analysis employing inductive coding revealed two major themes: "Existing Barriers Due to Business Partnerships" and "Culturally Responsive School Leadership as a Transformative Shift." The first theme exposes the tension between the College Board's commitment to equity and the practical priorities for Implementation Directors, who must prioritize client needs over advocating strongly for equity. This complex dilemma reflects a broader challenge within systems resisting change. Although the data highlighted a barrier, this discovery emphasizes that Implementation Directors are actively reflecting on their role and positionality as College Board employees and support specialists to school districts. Instead of signaling an inability to bring about change, this awareness indicates a recognition of an existing

inequity within the system. It highlights a challenge or barrier that must be strategically addressed to ensure an equity-focused approach to the support provided.

The second theme underscores the transformative impact of CRSL knowledge on mindsets and work approaches, aligning with Ladson-Billings and Gay's argument that CRSL signifies a profound shift in education practices. Addressing the query on how this new learning has reframed thinking and impacted the approach to supporting Pre-AP leaders and designing new leadership support services, an Implementation Director emphasized a positive shift toward a nuanced, culturally sensitive perspective. This response highlights the importance of understanding leaders' unique backgrounds and experiences, aligning with CRSL principles, and influencing the design of more inclusive and equitable leadership support services to foster cultural competence and promote a more inclusive educational environment. This aligns with the overarching goal of enhancing equity-centered implementation support for Pre-AP.

Outcome Measures

This initiative seeks to build capacity in Pre-AP Implementation Directors to be able to support school leaders with Pre-AP implementation. Leveraging data to shape culturally responsive professional development (PD) for Implementation Directors directed our focus on embedding an equity-driven approach in Pre-AP implementation support. Building capacity in culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) is crucial for those advocating for an equity-centered instructional framework. It provides Implementation Directors with the necessary knowledge to design services that incorporate culturally responsive leadership practices, enabling them to support leaders in implementing Pre-AP with integrity.

The post-assessment (Appendix B) will contain the same questions as the pre-assessment. Descriptive statistics was used to evaluate the post-assessment data due to the low number of

participants. While descriptive statistics can be applied to datasets of any size, they are particularly suitable for small data samples as they allow for a meaningful examination and interpretation of limited data points. Only seven Implementation Directors participated in my study, which supports my decision to use descriptive statistics to summarize and describe the data. Descriptive statistics helped me organize, present, and analyze the data collected in a meaningful way providing insights into the central tendency, variability, and distribution of the variables under the study (Field 2018; Gravetter & Wallnau 2016; Howell, 2019). I learned the content of the synchronous PD session and asynchronous module influenced the disposition for praxis, social justice, school culture, and the belief in the need for implementation support services to guide equity-centered initiatives for school leaders of Implementation Directors.

Outcome Measures - Post-assessment - Descriptive Statistics

In early September, I distributed the post-assessment to Implementation Directors using my Western Carolina University student email, like how I sent the pre-assessment. The email contained a Qualtrics link for easy access to the assessment, along with clear instructions on how to complete it. I expressed my gratitude to the participants for their continued cooperation and informed them that the data collection phase was now concluded. I also reassured those who had requested survey results that they would receive them after my final defense.

Despite their busy schedules, all seven participating Implementation Directors diligently completed the post-assessment by the date I had requested. In the context of quantitative data analysis, when both the pre- and post-assessments have 100% completion, it means that every participant in the study completed both the initial assessment (pre-assessment) and the follow-up assessment (post-assessment). This high completion rate indicates that there was full

participation among the individuals involved in the assessments, suggesting a comprehensive dataset for analysis (Field 2018).

It is important to remember this initiative aimed to build capacity in Pre-AP Implementation Directors to support school leaders with Pre-AP implementation. This was particularly significant for Implementation Directors, who serve as the face of an equity-centered instructional framework. The initiative equipped Directors with the necessary knowledge to start implementing culturally responsive leadership practices. They can apply these practices when creating services, aiding Pre-AP leaders across the nation, and collaborating with other teams within the College Board organization.

The post-assessment (Appendix B) contained the same questions as the pre-assessment (Appendix B). Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the post-assessment data due to the low number of participants. Descriptive statistics, while applicable to datasets of any size, were particularly suitable for the small data sample of only seven Implementation Directors participating in the study. They allowed for a meaningful examination and interpretation of limited data points. Descriptive statistics aided in organizing, presenting, and analyzing the data collected in a meaningful way (Field 2018; Gravetter & Wallnau 2016; Howell 2019). The post-assessment aimed to understand if the content of the synchronous professional development session and asynchronous professional development module influenced the disposition for praxis, social justice, and school culture. Below, you'll find the results from the quantitative data analysis.

In Factor 1, which assesses Disposition for Praxis, I observed some interesting trends. Statements one and three showed a decrease in scores, while statements four and five exhibited an increase. It is worth noting that statements one and three in Factor 1 specifically referred to

assessing one's leadership and receiving feedback on leadership practices. This raises the question of whether the content covered in both the asynchronous and synchronous professional development sessions might have made some participants uncomfortable because, in CRSL, conversations about leadership and equity can be sensitive due to concerns about bias, privilege, or systemic inequities (Khalifa, 2018). This is where the connection between the theme of "Challenging and Emotional Work", as identified in the exit ticket data, persists and is mirrored in the post-assessment. On a more positive note, statements four and five showed growth. This is an exciting development as it suggests that after the professional development sessions, Implementation Directors became more open to self-examination and vulnerability. Interestingly, statement two remained unchanged throughout the assessment process.

Table 2.1

Disposition for Praxis

Disposition for Praxis

Pre-Assessment

Factor 1: - This is on a low to high scale. 1 is the lowest extent to which you agree.

Field	n	M	SD
I value assessing my leadership practices.	7	4.71	0.45
I am willing to take advantage of professional learning opportunities focused on issues of diversity.	7	4.71	0.70
I am open to feedback about my leadership practices.	7	4.71	0.45
I am willing to examine my own identity.	7	4.57	0.73
I am willing to be vulnerable.	7	4.00	1.07

Post-Assessment

Field	n	M	SD
I value assessing my leadership practices.	7	4.57	1.05
I am willing to take advantage of professional learning opportunities focused on issues of diversity.	7	4.71	0.45

I am open to feedback about my leadership practices.	7	4.43	1.05
I am willing to examine my own identity.	7	5.00	0.00
I am willing to be vulnerable.	7	4.10	0.64

Note: Results from the Implementation Director CRSL Pre-Assessment and Post-Assessment (Factor 1) with 7 (# of Responses), Mean (M), and Standard Deviation (SD)The minimum score is 1.00 (the lowest extent to which you can agree) and the maximum is 5.00 (strongly agree) on a 5-point scale.

Turning to Factor 2, Disposition of Social Justice, there were improvements in statements one and three, while statements two and four remained constant. It's highly encouraging to observe an increase in Implementation Directors' appreciation for equity over equality. Additionally, their belief that discussions surrounding sensitive topics like race, gender, and sexuality should take place among school faculty is equally promising. These mindset shifts align with developing Implementation Directors' capacity to engage in more inclusive conversations with Pre-AP school leaders, fostering a more equitable approach to implementation support. This finding is further supported by the qualitative data, specifically reflecting the theme of "Raised Consciousness" lifted from responses to reflection journal prompt one. Qualitative data revealed the intervention heightened the critical consciousness of Implementation Directors, influencing a transformative shift in their professional identity and commitment to equity. These transformations, despite initial challenges, deepened the Directors' commitment to supporting educational leaders in creating equitable educational experiences. Corresponding with the positive changes observed in Factor 2, where Implementation Directors increasingly value equity over equality and support discussions on sensitive topics within school faculty, it is evident that their capacity for inclusive conversations is growing. This, in turn, fosters a more equitable approach to Pre-AP implementation support.

Table 2.2

Disposition for Social Justice

Disposition of Social Justice

Pre-Assessment

Factor 2: - This is on a low to high scale. 1 is the lowest extent to which you agree.

Field	n	M	SD
I value equity (giving each student what they individually need) over equality (giving each student the same thing).	7	4.86	0.35
I believe it is important to acknowledge how issues of power are enacted in schools.	7	4.86	0.35
I believe that hot-topic conversations (e.g. race, gender, sexuality, religion, etc.) should be had with school faculty when necessary and/or relevant.	7	4.43	0.73
I believe that schools can reproduce social inequities.	7	4.86	0.35

Post-Assessment

Field	n	M	SD
I value equity (giving each student what they individually need) over equality (giving each student the same thing).	7	5.00	0.00
I believe it is important to acknowledge how issues of power are enacted in schools.	7	4.86	0.35
I believe that hot-topic conversations (e.g. race, gender, sexuality, religion, etc.) should be had with school faculty when necessary and/or relevant.	7	5.00	0.00
I believe that schools can reproduce social inequities.	7	4.86	0.35

Note: Results from the Implementation Director CRSL Pre-Assessment and Post-Assessment (Factor 1) with 7 (# of Responses), Mean (M), and Standard Deviation (SD)The minimum score is 1.00 (the lowest extent to which you can agree) and the maximum is 5.00 (strongly agree) on a 5-point scale.

Lastly, in Factor 3, Disposition of School Culture, statements one and two (relative to home and school differences) and 4 (relative to assessment types) indicated increases, while statement 3 (relative to instruction) decreased, and statement 5 (relative to cultural background) stayed the same. Statement three, *I believe that schools should adapt instruction to meet the needs of students*, decreased from 5.0 to 4.86. Out of the five statements for this section,

statement 3 is the only one addressing instruction. I wonder if that played a factor in the decrease from 5.0 to 4.86. Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasizes that culturally responsive teaching constitutes an ongoing process, mandating continuous reflection and professional growth.

Table 2.3

Disposition of School Culture

Disposition of School Culture

Factor 3: - This is on a low to high scale. 1 is the lowest extent to which you agree.

Field	n	M	SD
I believe that schools should identify ways that school culture (e.g., values norms, and practices) differs from students' home culture.	7	4.29	0.88
I believe that schools should implement strategies to minimize the effects of mismatch between students' home culture and school culture.	7	4.00	0.93
I believe that schools should adapt instruction to meet the needs of students.	7	5.00	0.00
I believe that schools should assess student learning using various types of assessments.	7	4.86	0.35
I believe that schools should use students' cultural backgrounds to help make learning meaningful.	7	4.71	0.45

Post-Assessment

Field	n	M	SD
I believe that schools should identify ways that school culture (e.g., values norms, and practices) differs from students' home culture.	7	4.57	0.88
I believe that schools should implement strategies to minimize the effects of mismatch between students' home culture and school culture.	7	4.57	0.49
I believe that schools should adapt instruction to meet the needs of students.	7	4.86	0.35
I believe that schools should assess student learning using various types of assessments.	7	5.00	0.00
I believe that schools should use students' cultural backgrounds to help make learning meaningful.	7	4.71	0.45

Note: Results from the Implementation Director CRSL Pre-Assessment and Post-Assessment (Factor 1) with 7 (# of Responses), Mean (M), and Standard Deviation (SD)The minimum score is 1.00 (the lowest extent to which you can agree) and the maximum is 5.00 (strongly agree) on a 5-point scale.

This data point correlates to the decrease seen in Factor 1 surrounding assessing one's leadership practices, which requires consistent self-reflection. Despite this decrease, the increase in each of the statements below aligns with the theme "CRSL as a Transformative Shift" requiring equity leaders to develop inclusive educational environments (Ladson-Billings 2006).

- I believe that schools should identify ways that school culture differs from students' home culture.
- I believe that schools should implement strategies to minimize the effects of mismatch between students' home culture and school culture.
- I believe that schools should assess student learning using various types of assessments.

A change in the beliefs of Implementation Directors regarding the crucial role of educational leaders in deliberately establishing safe and inclusive environments is not just promising; it's genuinely encouraging. I am encouraged by my colleagues on the Implementation Team's willingness to learn more about CRSL to best serve our districts and sites.

In summary, each assessed disposition (Praxis/Social Justice/School Culture) showed improvements in at least two areas, totaling seven areas with increases. There were decreases in only three areas, and four areas remained unchanged, demonstrating the overall success of this professional development intervention in enhancing the CRSL knowledge of Pre-AP Implementation Directors.

Implications for Practice

Upon analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data, it is evident that overall, the initiative was a success in increasing the CRSL knowledge of Implementation Directors.

Due to the professional development and data collection initiatives, Implementation Directors have started implementing the new learning into their practices. They feel empowered to think, plan, and act in ways that ensure equitable implementation support. Implementation Directors have collectively expressed the willingness to center equity in our approach and want to continue learning practical ways to apply their new knowledge.

The professional development served as a kickstart for potentially facilitating both the synchronous session and asynchronous module with another College Board team. With this in mind, I would be remiss if I did not point out quantitative data results suggest the intervention has room for improvement. Notably, research studies, such as those by Paulhus and Reid (1991) and Podsakoff et al. (2003), emphasize the prevalence of social desirability biases, inherent optimism, and a lack of accurate self-awareness as contributing factors to participants overestimating themselves in self-report data. The implications of such overestimation can raise concerns about the reliability and validity of baseline measurements derived from self-reported data. Scholars, including Fisher (1993) and Dunning (2011), have explored methodological approaches to address this bias, advocating for the use of more objective measures, clear instructions, and anonymity to foster honest responses. Recognizing and mitigating factors influencing participants' self-perception in pre-tests are vital for enhancing the credibility of self-report data and, consequently, bolstering the validity of research outcomes.

However, each of the identified areas and intended outcomes holds significance, emphasizing the need for ongoing reflection on professional development to enhance the training process and meet the specific needs of Implementation Directors. The continuous capacity-building within the Implementation Team to become culturally responsive leaders is crucial. As this capacity grows, equitable practices will naturally become ingrained in our leadership

approach. Implementation Directors, in turn, will serve as exemplars of equity leadership, setting a model for others to follow.

My research makes a meaningful contribution to the field of education by providing valuable insights for high school administrators and teacher leaders, education consultants, district-level administrators, and people in similar leadership roles who aspire to improve their cultural competence and integrate culturally responsive practices into their organizations. It underscores that, in addition to the efforts of Implementation Directors at The College Board, any organization seeking to enhance equitable access for marginalized populations must prioritize the development of a culturally responsive lens. The qualitative data yielded positive themes, including "Implementation Directors Need Further Skill Development to Make an Impact," "The Intervention Raised Implementation Directors' Consciousness," and "Implementation Director Support Has Strengthened." These findings signify considerable advancement in guiding Implementation Directors toward leading with a deliberate focus on equity. This implies the continuation of CRSL professional development sessions will continue to enhance the Implementation Directors' capacity.

Equally important, Improvement Science proves invaluable in tackling organizational challenges by offering a systematic and data-driven approach to testing multiple interventions and simultaneously acknowledges the multifaceted nature of issues, enhancing the likelihood of finding comprehensive and sustainable solutions (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). Moreover, Improvement Science emerges as a potent tool for organizations navigating complex problems by providing a structured, collaborative, and adaptable framework (Hinnant-Crawford 2020, Spaulding et al., 2021).

To ensure the continued growth of the Implementation Team their exposure to CRSL must continue. As emphasized by Ladson-Billings (2006) and Gay (2002), culturally responsive efforts must be ongoing and continuous. This is particularly crucial in the field of education, which is dynamic and constantly influenced by societal changes that impact educational settings. As previously mentioned, for me, the long-term objective is to increase access to Pre-AP and AP courses for Black learners. One of my aims is to ensure it remains one of the central focuses of Pre-AP implementation.

Other implications from this research suggest collectively the Implementation Team must navigate the tension between making progress toward equitable practices while addressing existing barriers and resistance within educational systems. Implementation Directors should be strategic in finding ways to move forward without compromising their commitment to equity and as a team have a shared vision and well-defined understanding of their responsibilities in advancing equity internally and externally. With a proactive and intentional approach, we can potentially expand opportunities for Black students to access Pre-AP and AP coursework. Research suggests leading with an equity-driven approach within small teams can yield transformative outcomes in alignment with culturally responsive principles.

While our Implementation Team consists of just nine members, externally the scope of our impact extends far beyond our team's size, encompassing schools nationwide and transcending the limitations of our small team. Ladson-Billings (2011) emphasizes the power of collaborative problem-solving, an approach that small teams can readily employ to address educational disparities and advocate for change. Additionally, Khalifa's (2018) work highlights the significance of culturally responsive leadership, with small teams positioned to provide individualized support. This collaborative and contextually grounded approach, rooted in

continuous learning and accountability, can drive tangible improvements in educational equity for Black students (Gay 2002, Khalifa, 2018, Ladson-Billings 2006).

The implications for practice stemming from exposure to microaggressions, discrimination, and bias are significant. Persistent encounters with these factors can contribute to cumulative psychological distress among individuals (Sue et al., 2007). Leaders working in predominantly non-diverse environments may grapple with feelings of isolation and alienation, as discussed in research on diversity and inclusion (Cox, 1994). The ongoing effort required to address systemic inequities can lead to emotional exhaustion, burnout, and a sense of being overwhelmed (Maslach et al., 2001). Additionally, the resistance, pushback, or hostility that leaders may encounter from colleagues, superiors, or the system itself can contribute to stress and trauma (Kendi, 2019). Holding a commitment to equity while contending with systemic practices that perpetuate inequity can create cognitive dissonance, causing internal conflict and stress (Festinger, 1957). Leaders may also experience guilt or anguish witnessing the impact of systemic inequities on marginalized individuals or groups, especially if they feel constrained in their ability to effect meaningful change (hooks, 2003). Concerns about retribution, including job loss or professional repercussions, can induce anxiety and fear, impacting mental health (Khalifa, 2018). Furthermore, hearing and empathizing with the stories of those who have experienced injustice may lead to vicarious trauma, where the leader internalizes the pain and suffering of others (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). These considerations underscore the importance of proactive measures to support the mental and emotional well-being of equity leaders in the face of these challenges.

Lastly, CRSL is not only intellectually demanding but also emotionally taxing. Implementation Directors may encounter resistance, difficult conversations, and emotional

challenges and must be prepared to address these challenges while remaining committed to team goals. In essence, a united stance for equity within the Implementation Team provides emotional support, resilience, and a shared commitment to the cause. This, in turn, positively impacts the emotionally taxing work of CRSL by making it more sustainable and effective.

Recommendations

Safe Spaces and Professional Development

For professional development sessions on CRSL creating a safe and inclusive space for colleagues to engage in discussions and learning is essential to fostering an environment conducive to growth and transformation (Gay 2023, Khalifa 2018, Ladson-Billings 2017). I observed the significance of this while facilitating the synchronous session, and this appreciation for such a space was articulated in a reflection journal response. As a result, I have pinpointed six essential factors to help create secure environments for teams participating in CRSL professional development sessions.

Clear ground rules should be established. Ground rules should emphasize respect, active listening, and open-mindedness. All participants must understand and commit to these rules to build trust and civility.

Facilitation is important! A facilitator who is skilled at guiding discussions, navigating challenging conversations, and maintaining a safe atmosphere for all participants is key.

Ensure diversity of voices and experiences to enrich the learning process, allowing individuals from various backgrounds to contribute to the dialogue.

Use inclusive language that respects all participants and avoid exclusionary terminology. The goal is not judgment but collective learning and growth, so foster a non-judgmental atmosphere where participants feel safe to share their experiences.

Provide resources, promote active listening, and encourage regular reflection to enhance understanding.

Create opportunities for colleagues to apply their knowledge and skills in practical ways, translating learning into action for a more equitable educational environment.

In conclusion, the establishment of a safe and inclusive space in professional development sessions on CRSL is paramount for fostering an environment conducive to growth and transformation, as highlighted by Gay (2023), Khalifa (2018), and Ladson-Billings (2017). My observations and reflections from facilitating a synchronous session underscored the significance of this approach. To ensure the effectiveness of such sessions, I have identified six crucial factors: clear ground rules, skilled facilitation, diverse voices, inclusive language, provision of resources, and opportunities for practical application. These elements collectively contribute to creating an atmosphere where participants feel safe, respected, and empowered for collective learning and growth. As we consider these factors, the key takeaway is the pivotal role of intentional, inclusive, and respectful practices in advancing equity and transformation in educational settings.

Intentional/Purposeful Planning

Intentional planning is a crucial component in the development of educational leaders' capacity in CRSL. Howard (2021) has consistently emphasized, that culturally responsive practices are not a matter of chance but require deliberate planning and execution. Noguera (2016) asserts planning for equity is imperative because it involves engaging with the community understanding its needs and involving stakeholders in decision-making processes. The role of educational leaders in driving intentional efforts to promote equity includes creating inclusive polices, fostering a positive school culture, ensuring the fair distribution of resources

(Blankstein et al., 2016). Purposeful planning allows educational leaders to align their initiatives and strategies with the principles of culturally responsive education. This was instrumental from the beginning of and until the end of my project. Every aspect, including the timing, pacing, and strategic distribution of data collection tools, as well as the sequencing and selection of professional development content, played a pivotal role in ensuring the success of my intervention. Despite their seemingly minor nature, these elements collectively exerted a substantial influence on the overall outcome. Through intentional/purposeful planning, leaders can design curricula, professional development (PD) programs, and policies that reflect cultural inclusivity and equity and it provides a structured framework for capacity-building efforts (Ladson-Billings 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Noguera, 2016). Khalifa (2018) advocates for leaders to actively engage in the development and implementation of plans that address the unique needs and identities of minoritized students. Specifically, Khalifa encourages leaders to integrate culturally responsive practices into school policies, teaching methods, and relationships with parents and communities. By being intentional in their planning, school leaders can create environments that honor and celebrate the diverse backgrounds of students, fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational experience (Khalifa, 2018). Educational leaders, through planning, can design ongoing PD opportunities that foster self-awareness, cultural competence, and the acquisition of relevant skills. By embracing and implementing the concept of purposeful planning, educational leaders can effectively build capacity around culturally responsive school leadership, leading to more inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students.

Allyship and Teamwork Lead to Transformative Change

The collaborative efforts of allyship and teamwork are essential for transformative change in CRSL. As educational organizations seek to embrace cultural responsiveness, it is vital

to foster allyship and teamwork among educators, administrators, and stakeholders. Building trust and cultivating a shared vision for equity emerged as recurring themes during my intervention. I introduced the concept of "Communities of Practice" (CoP) to Implementation Directors through the asynchronous module focusing on how the Implementation Team can leverage our collective strengths as a CoP to ensure we plant seeds of equity internally and externally.

The connection between allyship and communities of practice in the context of cultural responsiveness lies in the collaborative and supportive nature of both concepts. A community of practice is a group of people who share a common interest or profession and come together to learn from one another, share experiences, and collectively develop their knowledge and skills (Wenger, 1998). In the realm of cultural responsiveness, a community of practice could be a group of educators, administrators, or individuals within an organization who are dedicated to advancing cultural competence and equity in education. Allyship, on the other hand, refers to the active and intentional efforts of individuals to support and advocate for marginalized groups, challenging systemic inequities and biases (hooks, 2000). In the context of culturally responsive education, allies work collaboratively with others to foster an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

The connection between allyship and communities of practice can be seen in how allies participate in and contribute to these communities. Within a community of practice focused on cultural responsiveness, allies actively engage in conversations, share resources, and learn from the experiences of others to enhance their understanding of diverse perspectives and cultures. This collaboration helps build a collective understanding of culturally responsive practices and strengthens the community's ability to create inclusive educational environments. The connection

between allyship and communities of practice lies in their shared commitment to continuous learning, collaboration, and the development of skills and knowledge necessary for promoting cultural responsiveness and equity in educational settings. Both concepts emphasize the importance of collective efforts and mutual support in fostering positive change.

My intention behind incorporating the notion of "Communities of Practice" was to emphasize the strength that lies in the team coming together as culturally responsive leaders committed to equity. This also aimed to empower Implementation Directors to identify their allies in this work beyond our Implementation Team. Ladson-Billings (2017) suggests that allyship involves individuals from diverse backgrounds coming together to challenge systemic inequities and cultivate a shared commitment to justice.

Allyship and teamwork create environments where a community of like-minded advocates can come together and simply exist. Gay (2010) advocates for the power of teamwork in culturally responsive education, emphasizing the importance of collaborative professional learning communities. She argues that educators must work collectively to develop and implement culturally responsive practices effectively. These collaborative communities facilitate the exchange of ideas, strategies, and experiences, resulting in transformative changes that positively impact student learning outcomes.

Limitations

This study's limitations encompass a relatively small and specific sample size of College Board Pre-AP Implementation Directors, a primary focus on exclusionary practices towards Black students, and the use of 2021 data from schools already offering Pre-AP coursework. Henceforth, acknowledging the limitations within my study is crucial for interpreting the study's findings accurately and identifying avenues for further research that can address these constraints

and expand our understanding of educational equity and access to advanced coursework for Black students.

The relatively small sample size of participants consisted of Pre-AP Implementation Directors at the College Board. While these participants offered valuable insights into the context the findings may not be generalizable to other educational settings or institutions. Additionally, while focusing on barriers to advance curricula for Black students, it is essential to acknowledge that the issues surrounding educational equity extend beyond a single racial or ethnic group. Another key point, the data used in this study were collected from schools in 2021 that were already offering Pre-AP coursework. Since educational landscapes are continually evolving, more recent data might yield different statistics and insights regarding schools' implementation of Pre-AP for all students. It is essential to recognize that educational policies, practices, and priorities can change over time, potentially affecting the findings and conclusions of this study. Conducting longitudinal research to track the evolution of Pre-AP implementation and its impact on marginalized student populations could provide more robust and up-to-date insights.

Future Areas of Research

By designing professional development sessions centered around CRSL and subsequently gathering and analyzing data gathered during this improvement initiative, I have initiated a process of instigating positive change within my team. I firmly believe that this change can have a ripple effect within my organization. While I did not anticipate fully resolving the issue of Black students' limited access to Pre-AP and AP coursework, my primary aim was to introduce my colleagues to content that could stimulate thoughtful reflection about what's in the locust of our control and our responsibility as Implementation Directors in advancing the cause of educational equity. This approach aligns with the insights of scholars who stress the importance

of raising awareness and prompting action to address equity issues (Gay 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Although my improvement initiative primarily aimed to enhance the capacity of my team of Implementation Directors at the College Board, I am enthusiastic about extending its impact to strengthen the culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) capacity of other teams within the Customer Success unit, such as Professional Learning, Product, Content, and Program Delivery. Additionally, I aspire to utilize the insights and findings from this study to enhance the CRSL knowledge of aspiring school administrators and other educators in the future. This expansion aligns with the research conducted by scholars who emphasize the importance of spreading CRSL practices and knowledge beyond individual teams and into broader educational contexts (Khalif, 2018). Future research must delve into the experiences and hurdles encountered by various marginalized student groups, including but not limited to Latinx, Indigenous, and economically disadvantaged students. This comprehensive exploration is crucial for gaining a nuanced understanding of the broader educational equity landscape. It underscores the imperative for educators to proactively address equity concerns for all students, transcending a retroactive approach. Investigating the lack of access to Pre-AP and AP coursework for these diverse groups will contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced comprehension of the challenges in promoting educational equity.

Conclusion

In summary, my research focusing on the professional development of Pre-AP Implementation Directors as culturally responsive educational leaders marks a noteworthy but modest stride in tackling the obstacles impeding Black students from accessing Pre-AP and AP classes. This research has not only enhanced my expertise as an equity practitioner but has also

allowed me to achieve my personal goal of planting seeds to advance equity for Black students within my team. This study also highlights the potential role of consultant companies within system change, particularly when focused on issues of equity and justice in our current political moment. Collaborating with external entities specializing in equity-driven strategies can offer valuable perspectives and expertise, facilitating a more comprehensive and effective implementation of culturally responsive practices.

It is important to acknowledge that systemic inequities persist in American school systems due to the lack of culturally responsive leaders and inequitable education policies. Access to advanced coursework remains a challenge because some educational leaders prioritize systemic traditions over the needs of Black learners and their families. The absence of leaders with an equity-centered approach perpetuates oppressive school cultures and social climates, sending a message that Black students and their families do not matter. Hence, my improvement initiative aimed to make a difference within my reach. Comparable interventions could be introduced within the College Board, as well as other non-profit organizations and consulting firms, to promote a culturally responsive approach to leadership. This initiative aimed to enhance equity-focused practices, with the potential for national and international expansion.

My examination and critique of the structural functional epistemology in this DQ, particularly within the College Board context, is a pivotal focal point. To actively promote equity in education, leaders must distance themselves from the traits and behaviors associated with a structural functionalist leader to meet the needs of the learners. To achieve this, individuals must recognize when they are operating as structural functionalists, and then make a conscious and deliberate decision to discontinue such practices. Moreover, the endeavor to discard structural functional practices necessitates a collective approach. To be more culturally responsive

educators must persistently engage in reflection, establish environments conducive to disruptive change, and consistently issue deliberate calls to action to dismantle inequitable practices. This shift contributes to fostering equitable learning environments where every student has the opportunity to flourish.

James Baldwin's call to "go for broke" in his 1963 speech remains relevant today, urging educators to be fully committed to student well-being. This motto can serve as our guiding principle as Implementation Directors, provided we are equipped with the necessary tools and resources to develop as culturally responsive school leaders. CRSL indirectly challenges unjust policies, practices, and beliefs that systematically hinder Black learners' equity access. Carter (2021) emphasizes that leaders with CRSL training must reject the at-risk narrative imposed on Black students. Therefore, this improvement initiative served as an intentional act of empowerment for those dedicated to supporting leaders working tirelessly to meet the urgent needs of students, my colleagues the Pre-AP Implementation Team.

Through purposeful CRSL professional development, Implementation Directors can break down inequitable systems and potentially overcome barriers that prevent brilliant Black students from accessing enrollment in Pre-AP and AP classes. Extending access and intentionally preparing Black students for post-secondary experiences can potentially alter the course of their lives, triggering generational change within their families. This initiative constitutes a proactive measure aimed at dismantling barriers and fostering increased equity in educational opportunities for Black students and explicitly addresses the deeply embedded discriminatory practices within the American education system. It underscores the necessity for educational leaders to elevate their efforts comprehensively, ensuring an unwavering

commitment to securing the rightful educational experiences for all students, especially those of African descent. Truly, the time is now we “go for broke”.

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Appendix A.

Agenda

Meeting Agenda

Date:
Start Time:
Norms:

- Respectful of others
- Present
- Solution-focused
- Authentic

Meeting Aim: Review pre-assessment data, the finalized professional development plan, and professional development content review and its proposed effect

Topic(s):	**Notes:**

● Explanation of Improvement Initiative
  ● Problem
  ● Important Literature
  ● Discuss Intervention and Hypothesis	

● Review of -
  ● Pre-assessment Data
  ● Create and Finalize Professional Development Plan	

● professional development
  ● Decide on Professional Development Content
  ● Design Professional Development	

Appendix B

[2]Pre/Post Assessment Survey

This is on a low to high scale with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest.

Factor 1: Disposition for Praxis

1. I value assessing my leadership practices.
2. I am willing to take advantage of professional learning opportunities focused on issues of diversity.
3. I am open to feedback about my leadership practices.
4. I am willing to examine my own identity.
5. I am willing to be vulnerable.

Factor 2: Disposition of Social Justice

1. I value equity (giving each student what they individually need) over equality (giving each student the same thing).
2. I believe it is important to acknowledge how issues of power are enacted in schools.
3. I believe that hot-topic conversations (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, religion, etc.) should be had with school faculty when necessary and/or relevant.
4. I believe that schools can reproduce social inequities.

Factor 3: Disposition of School Culture

1. I believe that schools should identify ways that school culture (e.g., values norms, and practices) differs from students' home culture.
2. I believe that schools should implement strategies to minimize the effects of the mismatch between students' home culture and school culture.
3. I believe that schools should adapt instruction to meet the needs of students.
4. I believe that schools should assess student learning using various types of assessments.
5. I believe that schools should use students' cultural backgrounds to help make learning meaningful.

[2]Adapted from *The dispositions for the culturally responsive pedagogy scale* and *the culturally responsive teaching competencies to develop the culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy and outcome expectancy scales.*

Appendix C

Reflection Journal Prompts

As an organization, we recognize the vital role educational equity plays in ensuring historically marginalized students gain access to advanced courses; however, do you understand what **your** role in that work is as an implementation director?

Prompt 1: After reflecting on your new learning of CRSL practices, please share how your learning has impacted your *overall work* as a Pre AP-Implementation Director (this isn't exclusive to our team/unit). How has your developing a CRSL lens hindered your ability to focus your time on the needs of the leaders you support? How has it strengthened the support you provide?

Prompt 2: Explain how this new learning has reframed your thinking and impacted your approach to supporting Pre-AP leaders and when designing new leadership support services.

Appendix D

Objective/Focus: Raising Culturally Responsive School Leadership Consciousness

Intervention Outline

Part I. - 2 hours 30 minutes

- Synchronous - Facilitated by Candidate (1 hour)/Design Team
    - professional development Introduction
        - Aim
        - Content
            - Review of past Culturally Relevant Teaching sessions
            - Text - Five Practices of Equity-Focused School Leadership
            - The College Board Pre-AP Equity and Access Policy
    - Self-reflection Activity
    - Whole Group Activity/Discussion - Prompt
    - Exit Ticket

****The Candidate will review the expectations of the asynchronous module.***

Part II. - 44 minutes to 1 hour

- Asynchronous - Interactive Module
    - Digital notebook
    - Videos
    - Language Exploration
    - History/Timeline, Scholars of Practice, Data Analysis
    - Scholarly Article Read and Review

****This outline reflects the intended structure of the professional development sessions. The content of the synchronous session will be decided on after the pre-assessment data has been reviewed and discussed by the Design Team. The content of the asynchronous session will be designed using exit ticket data from the synchronous session.***

Appendix E

Intervention Timeline

Proposed Timeline	July 2023	August 2023	September 2023
• **Distribute Pre-assessment to IDs via Email**	✓		
• **Meet with Design Team -** ◦ **Meeting Aim:** Review pre-assessment data, the finalized PD plan, and content review and its proposed effect		✓	
• **Design PD**		✓	
• **Deliver Synchronous PD** ◦ **Exit Ticket**		✓	
• **Asynchronous Module**		✓	
• **Self-Reflection Journal** • **Distribute Post-assessment to IDs via Email**		✓	✓
• **Data Collection/Analysis**		✓	✓

Appendix F

Exit Ticket

1. Knew-New-Q.
    - Because we all have varied experiences on the topic of equity, we want to honor what we already **knew** before today's session and highlight what is **new** that you intend to apply to practice (be detailed and specific) and tackle any **questions (Q)** that arise.

    Fill in the table with your response:

Knew:	**New:**	**Q(uestions):**

2. Next, reflect on your experience as a participant in this professional development session. What was your experience like and how useful was the content of the professional development?

Appendix G

Asynchronous Module Agenda