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On Finding Cultural Humility: A Critical Narrative Case Study of School Equity and the Collaborative Process

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

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DEDICATION

I'd like to dedicate this dissertation to my great-aunt Bea Gotthelf and her late husband, my great-uncle Harold Gotthelf. In the middle of the 20th century in Mississippi, they held views that were unpopular and stood by their conviction in embodying cultural humility in everything they did. They suffered for the stands they took, but it also lit a fire under generations to follow. I am one of those who followed their lead and worked for a world that would be more just.

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ABSTRACT

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The ever-changing cultural diversity of the student population necessitates shifts in schooling. For too long schools have been aggressive and unconnected spaces for students of color. This critical narrative case study will explore and understand how one independent school engages in the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work to create space for its member voices and experiences. This dissertation study included document analysis, narrative interviews, and a focus group to uncover an in-depth overview of the interactional dynamics of one school site through an oral history and narrative of its members. Findings highlight how the tenets of cultural humility, including critical self-reflection, mitigating power dynamics, and mutually sustaining partnerships play out at the school. An emergent theme indicated the role of learning how to navigate spaces, experienced by parents, was also important as the school engaged in DEI work.

CHAPTER 1

Background

I wanted to examine closely from the inside, how one independent school community has developed meaningful and important dialogue, disruptions, and partnerships around connectivity and collective learning. I wanted to look closely to analyze successes and areas for developing community standards for change and social justice work. As the assistant head of school and as a parent at the site I did my research, I have been living the research for 10 years as of the time of the study. The school has 465 students; it is a preschool to eighth-grade independent school in West Los Angeles and it has 57% students of color and 51% faculty and staff who identify as people of color. This is my community.

Although this community was beautifully and intentionally very diverse, conversations and discussions around race were few and far between; yet, race was always at issue. People struggled talking about their own experiences around challenging moments, and it was difficult to find spaces to have critical conversations around race and equity. The school was beginning to understand it needed to reflect on practices and protocols and begin to reshape some of what it hoped to be. In the early years, it was simply about getting people in the same room to talk and to learn from one another, but it took more than just wanting that, it took a dedication and commitment to looking at ourselves as members of a community and as an institution. The school needed to find a common purpose, a shared vision around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and the school needed to begin to operationalize DEI in the school setting. There was an urgency.

The research for me is personal, I am a White, cisgender female, gay, school administrator and parent, and I am deeply committed to DEI work. I am intimately connected to the school at many touchpoints and I, too, along with the participants, have a vested interest in cocreating the narrative. I share my own reflections and vulnerabilities on this journey throughout the work and hope to use the frame of cultural humility to curate products of meaning about the school and myself. This journey is a personal one as well, and I grew through it—I was self-reflective, I broke down many power dynamics schools typically have, I created lasting partnerships, and I navigated different spaces. I tried to be a humble participant on the journey.

This project examined and engaged an independent school community in a collaborative process to extrapolate key themes that might illuminate and transform educational practices to meet the needs of a school with a diverse community, bringing the process of cultural humility into the field of education. Grounded in the work of Darder (1998), Dewey (1963), Freire (1970), Khalifa et al. (2016), Ladson-Billings (1995b), Shields (2010), and Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998), this research listened to multiple voices in the school community as integral participants informing the process where change and transformation were possible. If the mission of education is "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p.1), then maybe we can learn from this school and what is uncovered by this research about intentional transformation and justice.

During this research (2019–2020), the COVID pandemic took over the world. Life was dramatically changed for everyone, and communities were in quarantine. Although this school community had already been quite engaged in addressing issues of equity and justice for years,

the COVID-19 pandemic rose to truly highlight the inequity and how it impacted families. There was a racial reckoning in the United States and inequities needed to be addressed and there was an urgency. Schools had to continue, so they did so from home, virtually, with parents who were ill-equipped to teach their own children. Having school on Zoom (i.e., a platform enabling a teacher to have a whole class on a screen in front of them or a meeting for a faculty or a workshop taught with hundreds of participants; www.zoom.us) meant for many students in public schools in urban or rural areas, that internet and computers were necessary to learning. Not everyone had this luxury. At the specific independent school, fifth through eighth graders traditionally were given a computer to take from home to school at the beginning of the year. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the school provided additional devices so students in preschool through eighth grade also had devices. This moment, yet again, shone the light on the inequities that continued to exist in different areas and schools in the United States. In an independent school, where funding was not an issue, there was a sense of access to top notch curriculum and technology most of the United States did not have. But this was also an important differentiator in how this one school operated to meet the needs of the entire community. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been devastating and pervasive, and yet perhaps an opportunity to reimagine what education can and should look like moving forward.

I uncovered stories by studying the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and developing attitudes of parents, especially Black parents, of one independent school community who lived in a racially and culturally diverse school setting. Using qualitative methods of critical narrative inquiry and document analysis, I studied the intersecting and interweaving relationships of race and ethnicity (Crenshaw, 2019) as these concepts were embedded and narrated into the teaching,

learning, and lived experiences of members of a diverse, independent school in West Los Angeles. This study contributes to conversations about how the intersections of identity (e.g., class, gender, ethnicity background) influence decision making and understanding in equitable and culturally relevant ways (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). I examined the developments, influences, philosophies, and pedagogies that contributed or did not contribute to the culture of one school setting.

The systems, structures, and culture of schools have the power to influence and impact how students are educated, even more how they feel about their education and about themselves. There are race-related messages in the educational experience that convey (intentional and unintentional) bias for students (and parents) of color in schools, which impacts their sense of self and their success in academics (Hook & Watkins, 2016). Having positive and validating concepts of culture in the classroom and in the school community at large are paramount to fostering positive identity, connection to school, and success (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007), thus creating space for success for students of color.

According to Woodson (1990), by the end of the 1700s, an estimated 15% of African Americans could read, possible predominantly by efforts waged by African Americans themselves despite opposition from politicians and ordinary citizens at the time. In the 1800s, most southern states enacted legislation making it a crime to teach enslaved children to read or write (Anderson, 1988); despite this, literacy among African Americans continued to rise. Harris (1992) validated there was opposition to teaching African American children on the basis they were intellectually inferior and incapable of learning more than the basic skills. Yet for those whites who admitted African Americans were capable, they still deemed education should

consist solely of basic rudimentary skills to keep them in a guaranteed caste-like status, unable to advance socially.

By the mid-1800s, the United States became engrossed in moral problems in a more stratified class system in U.S. cities dealing with crime and poverty. Schooling became an obvious way to fix the problems with crime that were created by a lower class in society. Schools began in a concerted effort to expose this undesirable lower caste of people to education in the hopes it would provide the lower class child with an alternative environment and better role models that could alter the ways lower class, often immigrant and African American children, behaved. Newcomers learned to vie for the good favor of the dominant caste and to distance themselves from the bottom dwellers creating a new template for hierarchy. During these times, there were blurred lines between poverty and crime and many new immigrants became feared and society began equating cultural diversity with immorality and deviance (Katz, 1987). Ethnic diversity became a source of anxiety in the expanding cities, and this had implications on U.S. schooling. This stratified, class society traced the problem as a moral failure and attributed it to inferior cultural norms and ways. The devaluing of one culture to inferior cultural patterns became a way the dominant power dynamic necessitated a control over the lower culture. There was an attempt to force immigrants, or anyone else who was not of white European decent, to assimilate to the Anglo American civilization clearly seen by white Anglo Americans as better (Katz, 1987). U.S. schools have inherited the distorted ways of authoritarian system constructs. Seeing certain members of society as less than began to shape the education system, and weakening the connection immigrants had to their families and origins (Katz, 1987). Public schools became agents of a white, Anglo American cultural standardization and indoctrination. A

deficit approach to teaching and learning in the public schools was the foundation of schooling, focusing teaching on what the students cannot do instead of what the student can do. Schools supported students to teach those who did not have the ability or modeling or support at home. This deficit thinking (Black & Yasukawa, 2011) from 200 years ago created a power dynamic among classes and races of society and maintained a power dynamic necessary to keep people stratified. This has continued in schools today positing that students fail because of some internal deficit or deficiency or non-Eurocentric life, not systemic failings of the organization and systems of schooling (Valencia, 1997), and undervaluing certain groups of students.

By the 1900s, W.E.B. Du Bois continued to urge social and political equality, urging African Americans should receive basic instruction in reading, writing, computing, and training to assume jobs. Affirming the African American community as a community of members that must strive to reform social and economic conditions thus hoping to alter social mobility among African Americans. Du Bois (1968) asserted, "Racism is intertwined with a long historic evolution, with peculiarly pressing social problems of poverty, ignorance, crime, and labor" (p. 44). Du Bois's words came two years after the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1892, which gave legal sanction to Jim Crow segregation in the south asserting "separate but equal" affirming racial segregation in the U.S. South. More than 50 years later in 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned Plessy, which made racial segregation illegal in schools and other institutions.

From the 1950s until the 1980s, there was still a struggle to end segregation and unequal conditions for students of color in schools. In 1954, the Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling held public schools may not exclude minority students from white schools by

sending the minority students to a school separately servicing minority students—declared "separate but equal" schools are neither equal, nor constitutional. It has been debatable if this change benefited communities of color with minimal successful results for students of color in the last 50 years (Banks & Banks, 2004). U.S. schools, then and now, have reinforced and provided a vehicle for dominant culture by maintaining marginalized populations and ensuring the dominant culture can maintain its privilege and power over society and institutions. Darder's (2012) work on hierarchical structure found "students are socialized to understand their perceived place in society within the hierarchical structure that is informed by values that benefit the dominant culture" (p. 6).

The *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 refused funding to schools continuing to engage in discriminatory practices (Spring, 2000) laid out by the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Desegregation was the law and continued to be met with resistance from citizens steeped in historical and systemic racism.

Growing out of this historical racist period, private independent schools began to find success. There was an exodus of white people from public schools to private schools in the 1940s in response to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling to desegregate; fearing it might move to everyone's neighborhood, private schools were formed compelling white people to preserve the White traditions of white communities. Private schools had another surge in enrollment in the 1960s as well. Private schools have not enhanced the hopes of social mobility for students of color as evidence shows African American students are greatly underrepresented in independent, private schools in the United States. In 2015, Black students represented 5.6% of private school enrollment, thus making their underrepresentation considerable. Evidence from qualitative

research indicated the experiences also triggered feelings of racial isolation (Perry, 1977). Private schools were still bastions for white people and institutions where white dominant culture was extolled creating institutions that did not create a safe space for all its members.

In 1974, 20 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) pushed for desegregation, Governor Milliken of Detroit, Michigan was sued for policies maintaining segregation in schools. School policies reinforced racist housing practices keeping families inside the city of Detroit, not allowing them to buy property outside Detroit in the suburbs. The suit charged the Detroit, Michigan public school system, claiming it was racially segregated because of official policies. After reviewing the case and concluding the system was segregated, a district court ordered the adoption of a desegregation plan for 85 outlying school districts. This was not unique to Detroit; many cities across the nation were the same with race-based restrictions, "covenants," on housing making it nearly impossible for Black families to move out to the suburbs to enjoy a better life and enroll their children in better schools. The public schools in the city were not receiving anywhere close to the monetary funds pouring into the new suburban schools in the suburbs of Detroit (Adams & Black, 2019). There was pushback resulting from these lawsuits and ultimate changes in policy and racism, and racist practices continued. The opposition and the culture around oppressing African American students that was rampant then continues today (Bell, 1980).

Society exists and survives through the transmission of habits of doing, thinking, and feeling from one group to the next and a community or society must have common aims, beliefs, aspirations, and knowledge as its common understanding (Dewey, 1963). Therefore, the unintended impact of hundreds of years of educational policy has had on racism and white self-

interest has become a transmission of specific beliefs that simply are a barrier to success for all students.

Racism exists and has existed for hundreds of years and there are implications even schools with good intentions to teach racial and multicultural tolerance, as there still exists an asymmetrical distribution of power and cultural capital that promises a coexistence and tolerance (Bartolome & Macedo, 1999), creating a veil to hide racism behind. To teach with every child at the center of the educational system, the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy connects literacy to freedom and education to humanity, by focusing on student learning, developing cultural competencies, promoting sociopolitical consciousness, and embracing different cultures of our students (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Culturally relevant pedagogy would dominate discourse on education and reform for years to come and help change the way educators work with students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Gay (2002) also echoed Ladson-Billings's (1995b)work with a dialogue about reforming and transforming all aspects of educational institutions on a larger institutional stage in areas such as pedagogy, funding, policymaking, and administration so they too would be culturally responsive. If teachers were going to shift the ways they effectively educate children's cultural learning and social needs in the classroom, then school leaders would need to do the same regarding school climate, culture, and policy in schools (Khalifa et al., 2016). As Gay (2002) championed shifting practices from teachers, she was also an ardent believer the institution needed to change as well. Culture is a dynamic, complex, interactive, and changing force, and schools need to operate in ways that suggest this impact of culture on students and schools matters (Gay, 2000). School administrators must have a similar mandate

with school culture and climate as crucial components of educational reform (Khalifa et al., 2016).

The disenfranchisement of African American students throughout the centuries has situated education on an unequal platform with certain students gaining access and opportunity and others not. The importance of having positive and validating concepts of culture in the classroom and school community has been the preeminent notion to fostering positive identity and connection to school (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007). Furthermore, students of color have not been achieving at the rates of their white counterparts. This gap in achievement has existed since the U.S. education system began and the consequences have had a lasting impact not only on the state of education, but on society at large. Education should be motivated by character, rights, and duties contributing to our society—to our democracy, and the interconnectedness of the student and the school should be at the center (Dewey, 1963). Yet there has continued to be educational practices resulting in gaps in achievement and gaps in opportunities for students of color. Darling-Hammond (2018) stated, "To survive and prosper, our society must finally renounce its obstinate commitment to educational inequality and embrace full and ambitious opportunities to learn for all our children" (p. 8).

According to Geiger (2018), students of color made up 51% of the population in U.S. schools and the percentage of teachers of color remained at 20%. The cultural diversity existing in the student population has not been reflected in the teacher workforce. The teacher workforce has predominately comprised of white, middle-class women and there inherent chasm will continue exist if we do not begin to unravel what this means for students of color and for white

students who do not see teachers of color in their educational institutions either (Geiger, 2018). Independent schools are even less diverse with even fewer teachers of color.

According to the data, the average teacher in the United States is White, female, and has been teaching for 15 years, often without professional training on teaching linguistically or ethnically diverse student populations. In 2018, 79% of public school teachers and 85% of private school teachers were White. There has been consistently great concern with readiness to teach racially and ethnically diverse students (Douglas et al., 2008). Although the urgency in teacher preparation is evident, leadership also demands change. Changing teacher practices is just one part of a system that needs reforming (Khalifa et al., 2013). Transforming all aspects of schooling must begin including areas of leadership, funding, policy, and practice by altering the daily experiences of the community. There is a need to deconstruct and critique the inner workings of a school down to the knowledge frameworks that perpetuate inequities. The pervasiveness and hegemony of power and privilege in schools needs to be examined and school leaders must refocus efforts on liberation, freedom, democracy, equity, and social justice. Social justice leadership emphasizes moral values, respect, care, and equity always leaning toward the impact of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability on students, on schools, and on learning (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). The question of who is benefitted and who is harmed in the educational system becomes foundational for looking deeply at access and impact (Foster, 2004). The goals will be played out differently in each school organization, but there are underlying necessities for leaders to transform practices.

Culturally responsive leaders address the cultural needs of the students, parents, teachers by promoting a school culture and climate inclusive of marginalized students (Shields, 2010).

Culturally responsive leaders will be integral as research shows they have a profoundly deep impact on instruction and student learning. Schools must be continuously responsive to marginalized students and have a relationship with community members they serve. White resistance to and fatigue from talking about and working with race (Flynn, 2015) is also a barrier to creating meaningful partnership in diverse schools. It appears the continued production of a predominantly white teaching force in the United States has not necessarily altered the experiences for children of color in schools. Many teachers and schools continue to be unprepared for the growing diversity among students and communities (Gay, 2000). Dewey (1963) found educational reforms could be a major factor in social change that they could lead to a more just and free society, a society in which:

> the ultimate aim of production is not a production of goods, but the production of free human beings associated with one another on terms of equality. But we are not in the business of producing free human beings in our educational system today. Students and parents are bound by rules that are arbitrary and often unfair. (p. 3)

Statement of Problem

Schools in the United States have difficulty navigating the diverse, cultural landscape of the communities they serve and the needs of their marginalized student populations and families suffer for it. Schooling is a contextual and situational process (Gay, 2000) and cannot be understood in a vacuum, but seen by its personal, social, historical, and political context (Nieto, 2010). Accountability measures and standardization of curricula have worked to strip education of its democratic ideals, personalization, and transformative powers, derailing critical thinking abilities among poor and working-class students. The consequences result in a stratified society

where students are typically taught from a middle class, Eurocentric framework that shapes school classrooms and practices (Boykin, 1994). The benefit of tapping into prior experiences, language, community settings, and ethnic identities of students is these features allow students to see themselves in the classroom, in the literature and make connections to the content or stories ("mirror books"), thereby validating their own experiences. "Cultural blindness" (Gay, 2000), or not seeing or recognizing the value diverse cultures bring to the table, in turn can create disconnected, negative experiences for typically marginalized students of color. Those without a sense of voice or power will be left feeling separate from or other in their own schools. Educational failure is too complex to be "fixed" by any specific approach or program, but if broadly conceptualized and implemented, cultural humility begins a process that schools might find useful.

There are great disparities in the schools U.S. students attend. Many studies have shown schools in neighborhoods with a higher percentage of white students have had more resources and more access to better resources compared to their school counterparts serving predominantly lower income and students of color (Banks et al., 2013). In private independent schools, the disparities grow and often disenfranchise the smaller population of students of color. These disparities have severe and lasting consequences for U.S. society at large as those who do not succeed in school become part of an underclass, as there is a connection between educational success and attainment and income (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The larger history of race in the United States still holds the history of a United States still affecting daily experience and processes, often in forms so automatic we are not conscious of them (Lewis & Diamond, 2015).

Multicultural education grew out of the sociopolitical context of the 1960s social protest movement "as a scholarly and activist movement to transform schools and their contexts" (Sleeter, 2001, p. 240). Much of multicultural education as embodied today has failed to address power, privilege, and racism explicitly or critically. Banks and Banks (2004) argued there has been a great deal of consensus about multicultural education's goals and theoretical framings but acknowledged there has been a gap, as other scholars have noted (Gay, 2004), between the theory and practice in classrooms.

Some of the effects of the achievement gap in schools are the high rates of absenteeism, high dropout rates, high degree of students who are unmotivated and disengaged, and high teacher turnover rates. Multicultural education and cultural competence stress the need to actively seek cultural experiences that expand one's own cultural worldview (Meleis, 1999). Well-trained teachers in cultural competence demonstrate behaviors instrumental in supporting academic achievement (Gopalkrishnan, 2019). Cultural competence also may have relevance to one's attitudes toward and knowledge about interacting appropriately and effectively with diverse groups of people (Banks et al., 2013). Cultural competence, or the idea an individual's culture and experiences play an important role in their understanding and connecting to school content, was revolutionary for teaching teachers about the cultures of their students and it has been a mainstay of practices in multicultural teaching and learning over the last 30 years. Although cultural competence has been a respected framework, referring to the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed by individuals, professionals, organizations, and systems to function effectively and appropriately in culturally diverse situations, it has also been limited. Although cultural competence has focused on knowing about cultural differences and being more

comfortable with those who are different through providing cultural sensitivity (Johnson & Munch, 2009), it has used group membership all too often as a substitute for cultural diversity, which in turn has made those typically more in a role of power and influence think they "know" or "understand" the other. This leads to thinking they know how to do right by them. In other words, by understanding common traits, values, beliefs, and attitudes of the group, teachers and administrators may feel they can better understand the experiences of a member of that group (Danso, 2018), ignoring each person's experience is unique and identity is intersectional and does not always fit into a preconceived learned notion of identity. Understanding and learning about a specific cultural group is simply a small representation of that group and may not be relevant to the whole of that group, thus misplacing care and perhaps increasing microaggressions and stereotyping. Not all members of a group will be the same and this stereotyped and reductionist thinking about cultural groups gives a false sense of understanding about that cultural group (Johnson & Munch, 2009). An unintended consequence of practicing cultural competence can result in one group, typically the group with the power in the dynamic feeling better than the other party who typically does not have the power in the dynamic (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014). The creation of this power dynamic can have long-lasting implications in marginalizing or silencing narratives, counternarratives, and stories that deviate or transgress the main dominant ones (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). These important detractions of cultural competence can have lasting effects on students and communities. Teachers and leaders with a sense of cultural competence are ill-equipped to serve the students they teach as they were inadequately prepared to effectively teach students of color (Johnson & Munch, 2009). This limitation of cultural competence becomes part of the problem for students' sense of well-being

and success in schools by failing to account for the structural forces that shape the experiences of individuals (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014). A more sustainable system of learning, teaching, leading, and transforming education is necessary today in schools.

Purpose of the Study

It has been over a century since Du Bois (1966) predicted racism would continue to stand out as one of the key social problems in the United States. Racism continues to be overtly shaped by social institutions impacting and shaping not only policy, but our educational systems in the 21st century, just as it did in the beginning of schooling in the United States (Banks & Banks, 2004). The absence of attention to race in the courts and the law has been clear and evident (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), allowing for the existence of deficit-based beliefs about people of color (Solórzano, 1997). Teachers and school leaders need to continue to find the necessary tools to effectively analyze, challenge, and change the impact of race and racism in U.S. schools and society. This increasing cultural, racial, and ethnic divide necessitates school practices that are more inclusive, equitable, and democratic with the intent to create environments that nurture students, transform schools and challenge the status quo (Shields, 2010). Social justice educators must help policymakers and the public understand that despite well-intentioned reforms and efforts, many students of color are not receiving an education like their White, middle-class counterparts. Shields (2010) asserted, “Based on socially constructed and stereotypical images, educators may unknowingly, and with the best of intentions, allocate blame for poor school performance to children of minoritized groups based on generalizations, labels, or misguided assumptions” (p. 111).

The purpose of this study was to understand the tensions associated with implementing liberatory collaborative practices in an independent school. In this study, I conducted a critical, narrative case study to analyze, interpret, and critique the experiences of the community in cocreating change and transformation. This specific site of study is an independent school on the Westside of Los Angeles boasting 58% students of color and maintaining over 40% staff of color. The preschool through eighth-grade community created in 2013 a school-site DEI committee consisting of faculty, staff, administrators, and parents. These efforts to support student learning and community well-being has merited interrogation. Teachers and leaders, who are deeply aware of their own beliefs, biases, and attitudes, can better understand how their values and their worldview impact their working relationships.

The cultural humility framework, coming from the fields of nursing and social work, attempts to shift the experiences of medical patients to a more connected, heard, and visible experience (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Borrowing from the medical field, cultural humility was the theoretical lens applied to analyze and critique school culture and process in this study. Cultural humility requires dedication to lifelong self-evaluation, it intends to redress power imbalances, and it aspires to create critical partnerships in a community organization (Foronda, 2008). Through the lens of cultural humility, school community members are called to be truly self-reflective and self-critical, and this process allowed the culture and climate of one diverse, independent school in Los Angeles to emerge. Listening to the Black parents provided a view into the inner workings of one school community. The study allowed stakeholders to reflect deeply on their beliefs and attitudes (Nieto, 2010) and challenge the status quo.

This research analyzed and examined closely the practices and procedures at a racial and ethnically diverse independent school in Los Angeles to predict future trends and illuminate previously hidden issues. Participants were encouraged to engage in a personal relationship with the researcher to be treated as coresearchers, to share authority, and to author their own lives in their own voices (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) to meaningfully and evocatively consider topics that matter and topics that make a difference. Researching from an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984), researcher and participants explored the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions through language, and history (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Noddings's (1984) theory challenges the traditional "masculine" approach to educational structures that rely on hierarchy and the loss of relation in educational institutions, and can address issues of race, class, and power. A caring theory is one of the pillars of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000). Educators, institutions, and researchers must attempt to learn, understand, see, and know their stakeholders' historical, political, and personal stories.

The research engaged a selected group of stakeholders, mainly Black parents, from a preschool through eighth grade independent school. Participants cocreated processes as part of a reflective practice that: (a) valued self-reflection and self-critique as a lifelong individual and institutional process, (b) acknowledged power dynamics and differentials and challenged them on an institutional level, and (c) worked toward developing and maintaining partnerships with collaborators in the school community who work for social justice (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). This study applied the lens of cultural humility to examine school practices and perceptions of community members and to evaluate the influence of school culture and practices around reflection, humility, culture, identity, care, equity, and inclusion. Through the lens of

cultural humility, I specifically engaged in critiquing and examining systems of schooling by engaging in discourse on the organizational culture of one school site.

As a researcher, I have been dedicated to interrogating my own biases, centering others' stories. I engaged as an antiracist educator aspiring to develop tools that disrupt the predominant social, cultural, and political practices that generally benefit a dominant social group. When it comes to antiracist traditions, Thompson (2003) suggested identity theorists, critical pedagogy, and "race traitor" traditions make assumptions that "we know what it means to be an anti-racist White person" (p. 20). This results in the fantasy of being an exceptional White person instead of acknowledging we cannot avoid the unintended privileges and contradictions that necessarily come with a process of becoming antiracist. White racial identities must be uncovered and unpacked when participants in a study are involved. Participants in this study provided further evidence and understanding that an evolving intersectionality of identity influence one's understandings and interpretations of a community. Participants' life stories represented complicated articulations of experience. A deep look at the pedagogy of teaching and learning that embraces, rejects, or transforms critical social justice in the school was undertaken.

Conceptual Framework

Cultural humility includes three critical, core elements: lifelong critical reflection and learning (institutional and individual accountability), mitigating power imbalances, and developing mutually beneficial partnerships (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 2000). Cultural humility has an inherent commitment to exposing the underlying relationships through critical examination of how historically linked contexts are mediated by relationships of domination and subordination and the need for self-reflective and self-evaluative critique (Fisher-Borne et al.,

2014). The need to develop a discourse of social transformation and emancipation that does not cling to its own doctrinal assumptions will be imperative. Cultural humility by nature recognizes that a system is not unmoving, unchanging, but it is dynamic and constantly shifting; therefore, the participants must have a dedication and commitment to lifelong unlearning and relearning through reflection (Freire, 1970).

In my interviews and analysis, I looked at multiple voices, counter storytelling, interest convergence, and the critique of privilege, providing a space for humanizing and participatory experiences to reveal voices, identities, and lived experiences. Participants "won't be the only ones sharing because engaged pedagogy does not only empower students but employs a holistic model of learning where ALL will grow and be empowered by the process" (hooks, 1994, p. 62). Dialogue is an instrumental facet of cultural humility and there is a commitment and connection to critique (self and institutional), acknowledging and dismantling power dynamics, and transformation of the community partnerships. Cultural humility facilitates a deep analysis of the systems and embodies lifelong reflection, dismantling the power dynamic and building capacity among stakeholders (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014).

The importance of critique and transformation exists through communication as "dialogue cannot exist without humility . . . men and women who lack humility cannot come to the people, cannot be their partners in naming the world . . . it requires faith in their power to make and re-make, to create and re-create" (Freire, 1970, p. 63). Critical theorists study how the construction of knowledge and the organization of power in society generally, and in institutions such as schools, hospitals, and governments specifically, can lead to the oppression of

individuals, groups, or perspectives. Critical theorists are concerned with equity and justice in relation to issues such as race, socioeconomic status, religion, and sexuality.

I asked participants to work with me to critique respective assumptions of the school, critique the power dynamics that exist, rethink the educational space, and be a part of the transformation of the organization. Together, we worked to interrupt systems, policies, and practices that work for some, maintaining marginalization for others. The work urged multiple voices to create change that encourages individuals to reach their potential by creating a new paradigm of cultivating a shared vision of how people in schools should be in relationship with one another, helping to shape a school's values and guidelines for interaction (Annamma & Winn, 2019). Both cultural humility and critical theory are oriented toward critiquing and changing society.

Critiquing and changing how equity in schools is operationalized requires liberatory practices. By "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them" (Beauvoir, 1965, p. 34), the members of a community can be active voices in changing oppressive situations and experiences. The oppressed, or marginalized members, are people living inside and outside the society. They have always been "inside"—inside the structure that was made for them by others. The solution is "not to integrate them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so they can become beings for themselves" (Freire, 1970, p. 47).

Research Questions

Building on the concept of cultural humility, the three main research questions addressed the three components in the framework of cultural humility (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014), respectively: lifelong critical reflection and learning (institutional and individual), mitigating power imbalances, and developing mutually beneficial partnerships. The questions guiding this study were:

1. What does the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiative look like in a preschool to eighth-grade independent school?
2. What personal self-reflective lessons can be learned during the journey toward the empowerment and advancement of all stakeholders in a diverse community focused on cocreating change?
3. What are the possibilities for creating institutional mindfulness around documenting the social justice dimensions of a collaborative community?

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study was the potential to impact the current achievement gap between students of color and their White counterparts. The study provided important information about the practices of school policies and have a significant impact on lessening the disenfranchisement of students of color in the school. This study may offer insight into operationalizing reflective practices that challenge the status quo and create lasting partnerships among all stakeholders. This study provided narrative evidence to support the positive or negative impact school policies, procedures, and culture have on individuals which in turn impact their connectedness to the institution.

Research Design and Methodology

To address the research questions, this critical narrative case study co-constructed a narrative focused on analyzing, examining, and attempting to understand the culture of one school, examining my own experiences in the school (Yin, 1994). In this narrative case study, I was in the role of researcher from the inside. Knowledge acquired "from the inside" has the potential to be inherently more valid, meaningful, and relevant than from a researcher "from the outside" might find (Iacono et al., 2009). To add to this method, my role at the school as administrator and parent situated me inside the case. As such, this research located the personal experiences of the researcher in a context that relates to larger social issues and allows the opportunity for the researcher to identify the history of experiences as the researcher moves through the research (Iacono et al., 2009). This method created the space for lived experiences to be shared, expressed, analyzed, and critiqued through the lens of varied theoretical approaches and models. This method also has the potential of lacking objectivity. The study was a personal, collaborative, and interactional relationship between and among participants and researcher (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) centered on how human experience provides meaning and conceptualizes the moral and ethical choices human beings face in a changing world. The research was completely open, and the participants were informed on the nature and scope of the study (Iacono et al., 2009) before it began.

I interviewed participants and conducted a focus group, to gather personal narratives. I analyzed documents and data to describe the DEI efforts of the school and to glean a description of the culture-sharing group themes that emerged from the overall interpretations (Yin, 1994). I continually reflected on my interactions and relationships in my community (Ellis & Bochner,

1992). I compiled a detailed description of the culture-sharing group focusing on the life around the school to help create a cultural portrait of the school. The three themes of cultural humility, along with emergent themes, were captured.

"Self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self and others in social context" (Spry, 2001, p. 710) has the possibility to bring to forth the shifting aspect of the self and create new ways to think about experiences in a broader social context. As concepts of self and other are intertwined to co-define the cultural context in our specific school setting, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also found researchers tried to understand the interaction of individuals not just with others, but in the culture of the greater society in which they work and live. Throughout the research, my voice, and the voices in the school were captured and documented as part of a collaborative reflection on policy and practice in the school (Tedlock, 2000). I analyzed which stories are told, which stories are listened to, and how we tell the stories. By interrogating the knowledge, positionality, and personal histories, I gained the kind of clarity required to provide an authentic form of caring in the institution. I interrogated how the school operationalizes equity and justice and revealed the policies and protocols that potentially marginalize or silence counternarratives and stories that deviate from or transgress the status quo (Ellis & Bochner, 1992). Participants were open and willing to explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged themselves with cultural descriptions through language, and history, as participants were treated as coresearchers and shared authority (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

According to Fine (2016), a research project makes visible how history and structures distribute and allocate resources and opportunities unevenly revealing how communities of privilege benefit from and reproduce unjust arrangements. Fine cautioned when research teams

work together, everyone can grow uncomfortably aware how the production of knowledge is transformed when those who have been objectified by scholarship begin to shape the inquiry. I analyzed the school site as true transformation through self-reflection became important for change to transpire.

This critical narrative case study analyzed the school's interpersonal practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping care for members inside and outside the school community (Maso, 2001). I did this by becoming a participant observer in the culture that was being studied. I took field notes of cultural happenings, interviewed members, examined dialogue, observed participant engagement with these happenings where the psychological, sociological, and cultural factors could be treated as variables with systems of analysis representing the culture of the school (Geertz, 1973). This study analyzed, investigated, and collaboratively explored how different members of a school community enacted a culture of cultural humility without intending to do so. I sought to understand the "degree to which the collateral damage of oppression coagulates in—but does not originate from—communities of color" (Fine, 2016, p. 23). Data were collected through interviews of parent/caregivers, focus groups of Black parent/caregivers, recorded observation notes from school functions, and analysis of school documents and artifacts. Participants were a selected group of stakeholders from the school, some of whom have been engaged in DEI work over the last 1 to 8 years, and a few who have not been engaged in the work much at all. The team consisted mainly of parents, a few who also were staff or administrators at the school. The findings offer school practices that influence the validity, enrichment, empowerment, and inspiration of experiences of students and families. This allowed a true and deep understanding of the climate of the learning environment.

In my role as assistant head of school, I was a part of the discovery team as a participant and a researcher. Over the course of 2 months, I performed interviews and uncovered, discovered, analyzed, and critiqued the state of meeting the needs of a very diverse community through practices of self-reflection, power dynamics, and meaningful partnerships (i.e., cultural humility).

Site, Participants, and Data Collection

The focus of this study was one preschool to eighth grade, very diverse, independent school in Los Angeles. In its 40th year, the school provided a competitive independent school education with community, character, diversity, and community as its foundational pillars. The study revealed findings and evidence about the research questions. The production of knowledge shifts when stakeholder voices are encouraged, heard, and internalized (Fine, 2016). This school had 57% of students identifying as students of color, and 40% of faculty and staff identify as people of color, supported by literature highlighting the importance of schools having faculty and staff members identifying as people of color for student success for all. Participants were members of the community as parents, and many were part of the DEI efforts at the school. Participants volunteered to participate. They reviewed the case as more than a professional courtesy, but more as a validation of the findings in the report.

The inclusion of stakeholder participants using personal interviews and focus groups enhanced the quality of the project to ensure triangulation, which "assumes that if two or more sources of data, theoretical frameworks, types of data collected, or researchers converge on the same conclusion, then the conclusion is more credible" (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). Through deep evidence study, the researcher also examined sources such as school documents and course

schedules (Yin, 2014). The triangulation of the evidence was to pursue strategies that develop convergent evidence (Yin, 2014) from multiple sources as part of the same study. This triangulation allowed the researcher to use Chang's (2008) 10 strategies for analysis and interpretation of these sources of searching for recurring topics, themes, and patterns, looking for cultural themes, identifying exceptional occurrences, analyzing inclusion and omission, connecting the present with the past, analyzing relationships between self and others, comparing the self with other people's cases, contextualizing broadly, comparing with social science constructs and ideas, and framing with theories.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

Because this project spoke to specific life events of the researcher and participants, individuals who were invited to participate in this project knew the researcher personally and professionally. From the personal perspective, individuals were members of the researcher's school community (other parents) who were present at the time of specific events to obtain a perspective beyond that of the researcher. From the professional perspective, the criterion for participants was professional connection with the researcher (i.e., previous or current coworker, previous or current parents). The limitation was clear participants had a personal or work connection with the researcher and this prior relationship in its hierarchical nature may have resulted in skewed results and answers from participants. To address this potential power dynamic, all participants were provided with introductory information to the scope and purpose of the project and the opportunity to ask questions and engage in the topic in an informal way with informed consent.

My positionality was extremely important in this research. At the time of the study, I was administrator and a parent at the school. I was very engaged in the DEI work of the school with other parents, administrators, teachers, and students for the 8 years prior to the study as founder of the DEI leadership team and was intimately connected to all the stakeholders that were part of this research. I specifically worked and oversaw all the DEI initiatives at the school. I have had multiple touch points that connected me in ways that could help reveal or obfuscate experiences.

Delimitations

The design of this research study employed interviews, focus group dialogue, observations, and review of materials. The delimitations of this study were specifically that the research was conducted solely at one school site, making generalizability challenging. I wanted to hear many voices from the community, but still my sample size was small and limited to those who agreed to participate in the study. This purposive sampling may have affected the generalizability of the research findings; yet as a qualitative study, the intention was less about generalizing findings and more focused on providing a rich, detailed description of the work so others might find the study transferable to their own contexts. This study examined the perceptions and practices of one specific independent school and as a result did not explore the leadership or structure of other schools or social justice leaders. This study qualitatively measured the perceptions and practices of the current DEI practices and community. The voices captured in this study may be incomplete and limited to the people interviewed.

There are three pitfalls associated with conducting this narrative case study research. First is self in isolation, second is overemphasis on narration, and third is a tendency to neglect ethical standards of others in self-narratives (Ellis & Bochner, 1992). To mitigate these limitations, I

provided opportunities for participants to review the material, specifically their own reflections in the study. The study gained a true picture of how cultural humility is operationalized in this school setting through multiple voices and perspectives. It was important to perform a review the documents with participants as well to see if their experiences aligned with the mission and culture of the school. I did this by engaging the focus group after the data had been analyzed to assure their experiences and narratives were represented properly.

Connections to Social Justice

One of the most appealing aspects of narrative inquiry is its collaborative and caring approach to research "participants." Although much research is presented by unequal power relations, the goal of narrative inquiry is to build caring, intimate, and trusting research relationships. This approach allows the researcher to become invested in participants' lives in a way that is interconnected, made rich with relationship and meaning. This caring approach allows a sense of collaboration to take priority (Hollingsworth, 1992; Noddings, 1984). The relation is always more important than the research itself (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000).

This experience garnered that collaborative participation as I grew with each voice I listened to, truly exhibiting the importance of a diversity of voice in leading. It is the responsibility of all members to question power and privilege in a system. The connection to social justice is apparent in the concept of transformative approaches in education. Transformative learning incorporates a process of effecting change by using deep self-reflection as a tool for personal change by continually deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge frameworks and developing and beginning to understand one's own culture and its connection to power and privilege (Shields, 2010). This narrative case study found through multiple participant

voices and by encouraging deep diverse dialogue, a community could create and cocreate transformation together. According to Freire (1970), “Human beings not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection . . . to transform the world” (p. 61). This research encouraged a critical dialogue with an ongoing need to hear more voices on the marginalization of students and families of color, which in turn has the potential to examine old knowledge and narratives and then reassemble a new dominant knowledge or narrative and dismantle the status quo for all stakeholders and for schools in general.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the historical context of the study, the research questions, the purpose and significance of the study, the theoretical frameworks, and the methodology. Chapter 2 articulates the centrality of the impact racism has on U.S. schooling and provides a review of the literature with a more thorough introduction of disenfranchised students and the lens of the cultural humility framework. Chapter 3 includes a more detailed outline of the research design and methodology for the analysis of the data collected. Chapter 4 presents the narratives and findings of the critical narrative case study, and Chapter 5 discusses the findings and provides recommendations for future work.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are three basic tenets to the framework of cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998): a lifelong commitment to self-reflection and critique, challenging power imbalances, and institutional accountability and partnerships. A cultural humility framework finds many different cultural factors should be considered when providing care. Cultural humility describes how cultural factors influence the way people see and experience the world and the choices they make. Cultural humility is a process of self-reflection, inquisitiveness, critique, and lifelong learning that recognizes that power imbalances exist. Cultural humility is a process of openness and self-awareness that incorporates self-reflection and critique while willingly interacting with diverse individuals (Foronda et al., 2016). It is a process that could be a tool for those who work with the increasing cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity. It is a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique helping members of the community be aware of their own positionality and processes, values, and beliefs that come from a combination of cultures to increase the understanding of others (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Cultural humility recognizes power differences exist and guide much of the organization.

To provide background for the current study, this chapter reviews the literature and discusses the various aspects of cultural humility. To begin, a cultural humility framework focuses on a lifelong critical self-critique and self-reflection. Next, a discussion on redressing power imbalances is provided, followed by literature on developing mutually beneficial and institutional partnerships as foundations for understanding schools, communities, care, and systems of privilege. Discussions of the history of independent schools and privilege are woven

throughout discussion of theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of engaging a cultural humility framework to situate the current study's context.

Cultural Humility and Critical Theory

Lifelong Commitment to Self-Reflection and Critique (Institutional and Individual)

A cultural humility framework draws on self-awareness and self-evaluation to the extent that people appreciate who they are according to a cultural perspective. They must understand their culture shapes the lens through which they view the world. Narayan (1999) found each person understands themselves through their own experiences and knowledge; therefore, they are privileged to know themselves more than they know another. Knowing themselves as part of a social group, and experiencing solidarity in a social group, brings social capital and creates ties and bonds. Social capital cutting across groups and bridging two or more groups increases social capital, which is essential for social adhesion (Narayan, 1999). By engaging in a process of true, deep, and ongoing self-reflection of biases, people are encouraged to assess ways in which their own attitudes, preconceived notions, and behaviors prevent them from understanding and learning from the other, thus propagating privilege and power dynamics. Their own knowledge will not reveal new insights or awareness, but through self-reflection, self-critique, and self-awareness, they may connect differently to others (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). A cultural humility framework can lead to mutual empowerment, respect, partnership, care, and lifelong growth through critique and reflection.

The importance of understanding the fluid nature of culture and challenging individuals and institutions to be self-evaluative and address structural inequities as a lifelong process is imperative to creating change in an organization (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). The cultural

humility framework provides a deep foundation to begin evaluating how the structural forces in the institution affect the client experiences, acknowledging the layers of cultural identity (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014). A commitment to self-evaluation and self-reflection allows individuals to understand their own culture and the cultural norms of the organization or community and recognize how that culture affects those whose culture is different as a beginning point (Lindsey et al., 1999).

Critical Theory and the Ethic of Critique

Critical theory asserts oppression felt by marginalized groups in society (e.g., cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, and gender) is often supported by the oppressed people who believe in the system themselves as an integral part of the manipulation by those in power to enforce and legitimize the values and beliefs of those in power (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Critical race theory (CRT) is critical theory applied to education, race, and the educational achievement gap. CRT (Solórzano, 1997) looks at discourse on race and racism to eliminate racism and stereotypes in hopes of changing laws, social policy, and organizational cultures. One fundamental understanding of CRT is recognition racism exists, has been normalized, and cannot be denied it exists, but by accepting its existence, there are ways to begin to understand it and expose it in an attempt to dismantle it (Solórzano, 1997).

The ethic of critique draws much of its philosophical underpinnings from critical theory, which analyzes inequities of social class, race, and gender (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). In education, critical theorists often look at how societal social structures and inequalities are apparent in U.S. schools. Educators have a responsibility for helping students become liberated from those structures that oppress them (Freire, 1970). Critical pedagogy purports a belief

ignorance and illiteracy are necessary ingredients of poverty, hunger, misery, and oppression. Freire's (1970) definition of illiteracy is not the inability to read, but the inability to read critically. According to Freire (1970), *conscientizao* (conscientization) represents "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 74). Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy calls for educators to understand education is political. The ethic of critique looks to protect and expand basic human rights and critical theorists are often concerned with finding the voices of those who are silenced (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). Many critical theorists call for action, mainly political action with the goal being the transference of knowledge that is empowering to all, not just a few. The foundation of empowering includes multiple intersecting identities that people encompass that operate together and have an impact on everyone. The ability to be reflective, critical, and self-aware necessitates understanding one's own identities and the identities of others.

Intersectionality

The emergence of the work on intersectionality was concerned with acknowledging and accessing one's social and political identities such as race, gender, class, or sexuality and recognizing how those identities are overlapping categories that impact institutions and individuals (Crenshaw et al., 1996). Understanding these overlapping identities may lead to understanding discrimination. Intersectional identity is occupying multiple positions or identities in socio-cultural-political and structural fabric of society (Crenshaw et al., 1996). These identities or positionalities intersect and result in different behaviors. For example, people occupy social positions and may respond differently depending on gender, race, class, age, gender identity, socioeconomic class, or sexual orientation. Most people belong to multiple

identities. These identities operate together, they intersect, and they impact everyone. Intersectional identity development people of color experience unique identity development because of oppression and marginalization (Crenshaw et al., 1996).

The importance of this seminal work on intersectionality exemplifies the value in understanding oneself and through that understanding have a notion that others have multiple identities that contribute to how they see and experience the world. Impacted and oppressed by multiple sources of one's identity, intersectionality interaction between and among the multiple identities exemplifying that no one person can be known through one identity, only reinforcing the need for self-critique and self-evaluation to understand one's positionality (Crenshaw, 2019). Understanding intersectionality will ultimately transform relationships to a care-based interaction in schools and lessen oppression and marginalization.

Ethic of Care

U.S. culture embraces a value of hierarchy and the productive processes of society above processes and traits of care and nurturing. Functions, tasks, and knowledge are placed above an ethic of care (Martin & Marsh, 2008. According to Webb et al. (1993), "Caring binds individuals to their society, to their communities, and to each other" (p. 34). This bond is of great value to a community and through care, the value of a society, community, and a school. Care is central to education, central to cultivation of nurturing children in society, shifting from a top-down authority toward a more caring profession that creates relationships and connections and include members in the decision-making process (Noddings, 2002). Care is one of the desired outcomes of cultural humility as it benefits mutually among partners and collaborators in a school challenging the traditional methods of hierarchical structures, flattening the experience for all

members. Care is the absolute moral characteristic of social responsibility of a school as it holds its participants, enveloping them with care to achieve its goal of educating. Understanding students' perspectives and experiences is contingent upon their cultural inclusion and caring communities accept and embrace; they respond, sympathize, empathize, and challenge (Noddings, 1995). Building a sense of belonging and a culture of care for all students is imperative. Care is a pillar of culturally responsive pedagogy for ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2000). Schools demonstrating patience, persistence, validation, and empowerment are exhibiting caring relationships for its students. Showing support for students' emotional, physical, and interpersonal lives also shows care. This care leads to a climate of care, which have proven to result in student success (Siddle Walker, 1993).

The concept of caring in schools requires an ongoing action-driven process of supportive affective exchanges in a reciprocal relationship. It is sensitive to, emotionally invested in, and attentive to the needs and interests of others. In institutions where there is reciprocity, students need to feel they have a personal connection with teachers and administrators when people in the school community acknowledge them, honor their intellect, respect them, and make them feel they are important (Tarlow, 1996). According to Gay (2000), for teachers to exhibit culturally responsive teaching, they must understand themselves and thus gain competence in cultural diversity and be committed to its inclusion in the educational process. When exhibiting care:

> It places teachers in an ethical, emotional, academic partnership with ethnically diverse students, a partnership anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence; that is, an unshakable belief that marginalized students not only can, but will improve their school achievement. (Gay, 2000, p. 52)

Openness

Openness reflects a willingness to imagine the other. hooks (2014) found cultural humility as two distinct parts: intrapersonal and interpersonal. The intrapersonal dimension involves practitioners developing awareness of the limitations in their ability to understand a client's worldview and cultural background. Cultural humility at the interpersonal level takes an other-oriented position toward the client, marked by respect and openness to the client's worldview.

Commitment to Redress Power Imbalance

Redressing the power imbalance in institutions acknowledges that power differentials exist between provider and client, and it urges the opportunity to question and commit to institutional accountability (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014). Institutional accountability encourages practitioners and institutions to ask and understand what structural forces come into play when addressing client issues. A commitment to holding the institution to a standard questioning its own effectiveness, professional training, and strategic planning in imperative for aiming to grow and transform as an institution (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014).

Social Justice Leadership

Social justice leaders are change agents who are persistent, committed, courageous, and concerned with the quality of democracy in their schools in personal, interpersonal, and institutional practices (Furman, 2012; Theoharis, 2007). Social justice leaders leverage authentic communication to build meaningful relationships with others (Shields, 2010). If teachers need to shift the ways they effectively educate children's cultural learning and social needs in the classroom, then school leaders would need to do the same regarding school climate and culture

(Khalifa et al., 2016). Social justice leaders through a cultural humility framework would include an assessment of the organizational environment around policy, knowledge, skills, and attitudes of all stakeholders (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998) to begin to understand the power imbalance and institutional culture can contribute to the lifting up of some and the marginalization of others.

Theoharis's (2007) concept of social justice leadership necessitates school principals advocate for inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups of children. What emerges is a way school principals promote school cultures and enact administrative behaviors—with the help of parents and students—embracing identities of Black, Latino, and at-risk students. Black and Latino boys are at risk because of factors related to their personal, home life, and constructed school lives (Noguera, 2003) as schools delegitimize understandings and cultures of Latino immigrants (Valenzuela, 1999). Statistics on dropout and completion rates, along with student suspension rates, show the gap between White students and students of color. The result of these data exemplifies typically schools are more supportive of white middle-class identities (Noguera, 2003) and exclusionary toward marginalized Black, Latino, and indigenous identities (Gregory et al., 2010).

Action-oriented, Transformative, and Sustainable Leadership

A fundamental concern today for social justice and democracy at the heart of the work of a school leader is whether they adopt a critical role of challenging the dominant social order to develop and advance society's democratic imperatives (Giroux & McLaren, 1991). A stance for social justice recognizes passive leadership practices contribute to a reproduction of the existing society with its historical and structural inequities, and a social justice practice demands a

critical, active role challenging the dominant paradigm and social order. A critical and active role leads to transformation and a true realization of a democratic society. There is a hierarchy in schools as to who participates and whose voices are heard. Leaders for social justice need to illuminate and interrogate power imbalances, social structures, and cultural practices that contribute to inequities. Leaders for social justice need to bring democratic practices to mediate cultural dominance.

Sustainable leadership is the "capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose" (Fullan, 2005, p. 114). Sustainable leadership develops and engages in deep and meaningful learning that envelops the community and positively benefits those in the community. The principles of sustainability are depth, learning integrity, endurance, succession, breadth, distribution, justice, diversity, complexity, cohesion, resourcefulness, renewal, and a conservation of history (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Collaborative leadership creates transformational relationships with members of the community unites everyone in mutual commitment to share in solving problems and creating solutions. Transforming the relationship between leader and followers so participants of the community are motivated, engaged, and committed by a unity of purpose and mutually shared values and vision.

The importance and value of moving an institution into a transformative space, requires attention to building greater levels of trust not only between the leader and the followers (i.e., teachers), but among all the collaborating followers (i.e., students, teachers, parent/caregivers). Transformative leaders recognize this is a lifelong process of growth and development of

building human capital in an organization (Fullan, 2006) allowing itself to be questioned and challenged.

Independent Schools and Privilege

Independent schools find themselves in an interesting space in the frame of education, many of whom began as safe havens for Whites to escape the effects of desegregation. Beginning in the 1940s, as a response to the U.S. Supreme Court decisions outlawing segregation and dismantling "separate but equal," the sentiment compelled citizens to move their children to private schools (Southern Education Foundation, 2019). Although the institutional designs of independent schools did not welcome students of color, many independent schools in the last 20 years have had a dedication to creating spaces for "cultural competencies that envision a community for a changing nation and a demanding world where equity and justice prevail" as part of their mission (National Association of Independent Schools, 2002, p. 1), but at its core it has been a world rife with privilege and inequity.

Herr and Anderson (2005) shed light onto the experiences of African American students in independent school as undermining of their success:

> While private schools are touted as one of the solutions to the failure of the public schools, what actually transpires when minority students enter private educational settings, particularly those previously occupied by children of the dominant culture, has yet to be sufficiently explored . . . the experiences of students of color need to be interrogated as they make their way through privileged hallways . . . children of color may unwittingly be thrust into private school environments that undermine their success. (p. 112)

Independent schools have enrolled under 35% students of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), their experience is specific to the students of color in independent schools. Independent schools are typically places of higher class, mobility, wealth, and privilege. The percentage of students of color has been eclipsed by the percentage of teachers of color or heads of school of color, which has sat at 9%. Only 39% of new teachers reported in a national teacher survey they felt prepared to address the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Teel and Obidah (2008) argued one of the most significant factors facing schools has been ill-prepared white teachers who have not understood the culture of the students they teach and have not taken the time to explore their own racial identity and privilege (Sleeter, 2001). It has been the responsibility of these institutions to make every effort to engage in intentional pedagogy around race and privilege to situate themselves as institutions educating for "equity and social justice," like they have claimed in their vision.

Data provided by the National Center for Educational Statistics in 2018 found independent schools in the United States educated 5.8 million students in 2015 and over 65% of the students educated in independent schools were white. Heads of school in independent schools have been led by 66% men and only 7% of heads of school have been people of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Independent schools have educated only 9% of the population of U.S. students and more than 65% of those students have been white, creating an imbalance where differences and inequalities have had a serious impact on social justice in the U.S. experience. In a segregation analysis, Ee et al. (2018) showed the racial makeup of independent schools leaves many students isolated and segregated by the mere fact private schools are predominantly filled with White, affluent students. Independent schools do not match

the demographics of the nation's public schools and they disproportionately serve white and higher income families. The nation's private schools need to begin to consider how to incorporate the nation's growing diversity into their system to "offer diversified interpersonal contact and to develop appropriate social skills for their students who will work in a racially diverse society" (Ee et al., 2018, p. 41).

It is important to look closely at how the imbalance of students of color in schools provides an experience in independent schools different from their peers in public schools. Students of color are often on the outside or are glorified by tokenism by virtue of their identity. Privilege refers to the structural advantages (e.g., ideological, material, cultural, legal) given to some social identities at the disadvantage of others. It does not seem to make a difference whether these advantages are readily perceptible, actively sought after, or even desired (Stoudt, 2009). Everyone in the system contributes to reproducing power relationships and the most privileged, those who are given accumulated and intersectional assets (e.g., able-bodied, wealthy, American, white, heterosexual, male), are more likely to succeed and profit from these institutional structures because of their identities (Stoudt, 2009). Stoudt (2009) posited those who have privilege and benefit from this unequal distribution of resources must examine and interrupt power and privilege to interrupt power. The study of privilege is important to the pursuit of social justice. According to Stoudt (2009), "Elite private schools, like all systems, create discourses that become learned, embodied, and performed" (p. 17). Stoudt focused on the language used in elite private schools and how powerful it is to examine the role of language and discourse when conducting research with people who are predominantly privileged and in institutions designed to reproduce those systems of privileges.

Learning to affirm all students' sense of identity is at the core of much of the literature around care for students. According to DeCuir-Gunby and Williams (2007), solidifying students' academic and personal self-concept occurs in schools. Interactions in the school context may convey various negative racial stereotypes for minority groups; thus, unanswered questions remain with how school settings instill values to enhance or thwart personal development (DeCuir-Gunby & Williams, 2007). The structure and culture of a school may also influence and reflect the feeling of marginalization (DeCuir-Gunby & Williams, 2007) and students attending predominantly white schools may have distinct challenges, including negotiation of their race-related identity and increased experiences with racial discrimination and microaggressions that amplify one's awareness of racial dynamics. Although literature in the independent school realm has been relatively minimal, some studies have explored the social experiences of African American youth attending elite, private schools, they contend independent school contexts, which often are predominantly white, help to marginalize African American students. Often, African American students do not feel as though they are a part of the school culture or reflected in the curriculum (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007).

The National Association of Independent Schools mission attempts to support the mission diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in independent schools. The DEI research and articles from NAIS are written from the inside with an impartial bias and a vested interest in a successful outcome. Two positive endeavors independent schools have undertaken have been the NAIS created Equity Design Lab and Diversity Leadership Institute and these two branches have begun to tackle issues around diversity, identity, equity, and privilege in U.S. independent schools to shift how schools educate and support students of color in independent schools.

Blackburn and Wise (2009) contended by raising awareness about white privilege and institutional racism, schools will refocus commitments to creating equitable educational experiences for all students, faculty, staff, and parents. Independent schools are often rooted in a history of racism and white privilege, starting from the reason for their inception. Some were only formed after public school integration began, specifically by those who did not want their children going to school with students of color. Students of color have the pressure of trying to fit in in two different worlds: forced into an emotional and psychological tug-of-war between the need to fit in and the need to succeed in the dominant culture. White students typically do not experience this conflict, yet another way in which white privilege exists in independent schools, is simply having the privilege of not having to see their group's narrative, or the preexisting curricula, as a racially specific one (Blackburn & Wise, 2009).

Regarding privilege in independent schools, Heuman (2018) had students engage in self-reflective activities to gain a better understanding of domination and power in their schooling. He had students begin to think more about the intersection of identity by untangling the systems of power, sharing how to become more self-reflexive about their experiences, and urging them to be in active negotiation with their own participation in such systems. Focusing on the individual and the institution which they internalized made negotiations of domination and power concrete, vivid, and understandable for students. As a result, they grasped and articulated how the systems and institutional mechanisms of privilege functioned. As Heuman (2018) contended, this could encourage self-reflexivity:

> Participation in systems of power—whether within patriarchy, whiteness/race privilege, and/or heteronormativity which is in recognition that we all participate in systems of

> power and that it is a matter of how we will participate in such structures that defines us. Everyday performances of privilege and oppression instills agency in students by opening up spaces for interactive interventions focused on communicative tools for resistance, formulating counter sentences, and speaking truth to power. (p. 3)

The importance of preparing students and providing them with the tools for transformative action cannot be underestimated. If schools do not begin to grapple with the concepts of privilege and power, then they cannot position themselves as agents of transformative change. If the institutions to do interrupt systemic injustice, then they are impacting society. It is the systemic context shaping experiences and perceptions and adding to institutional racism supports the notion only change can happen if those in power are willing to look at and evaluate the system and to make some changes.

A core finding revealed Black students attending independent schools needed to learn how to navigate and figure out how to "do prep school" as the culture of a predominantly white institution necessitated learning on the part of its members who did not share their history and culture (Nelson et al., 2017). It also discussed how Black students needed teachers who were culturally knowledgeable and equipped to challenge independent school cultures, which were historically rooted in white upper class social norms. They needed teachers and administrators who were committed to the values of student diversity and high achievement, many independent school leaders and teachers have attempted to foster a more inclusive learning context in which:

> All students can excel academically, thrive socially, and, therefore, acquire the critical knowledge, skills, and worldviews necessary to reach their full potential in school and life. Previous scholarship exploring diversity and inclusion at independent schools has

> typically focused on the teaching and learning experiences of people of color within these distinct academic settings. (Nelson et al., 2017, p. 95)

Yet again, asserting the importance of an opportunity to be reflective of practices and protocols for the institution and look deeply at their own participation at the power imbalance, which compromises the vision of success, achievement, and social justice for all.

Equity Pedagogy

The concept of equity pedagogy is not limited to teaching strategies and classroom environments that must help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function in and create and perpetuate a just and democratic society but includes entire institutional dedication (Banks & Banks, 2004). Equity pedagogy suggests it is not enough to simply teach marginalized students, but it must also intend to question its assumptions, paradigms, and hegemonic traits, helping students become reflective and active students in a society reducing their status although intended to educate (Nieto, 2007). Just preparing students to fit into society and experience social class mobility in the already existing structures is not helpful in building a democratic and just society (Banks & Banks, 2004). An education for equity encourages students to acquire those basic skills for agents of social change. Equity pedagogy involves the dismantling of existing social and political school structures that foster inequality. Equity pedagogy is not manifested in specific strategies but is a process that locates the student at the center of transactions in schools. It enriches and enables all stakeholders to create a more just and caring environment and society (Banks & Banks, 1995).

Fostering voice and open communication are also inherent in redressing power imbalance. Critical theorists believe giving voice of all stakeholders is key to promoting a culture

of social justice and equity that has a great impact of preparing students (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Developing a school culture that is inclusive and encourages multiple voices to be heard, especially the most marginalized, creates schools committed to equity and confronting and challenging the "regimes of truth" (Nieto, 2007, p. 304) often invisible but serve to perpetuate inequities.

Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

Mutually beneficial partnerships refer to a process of mutual understanding, involvement, and awareness in an institution. The concept has all members challenged to identify, understand, and build upon assets and strengths of one another in the structure and engages in efforts to change and transform (Ortega & Faller, 2011). The aspect of mutually beneficial partnerships in the cultural humility framework focuses on all members' well-being and includes transparent assessments of the organization—the environment, policies, practices, procedures, knowledge, and skills uncover barriers and obstacles in the organization that inhibit partnership. Partnership brings attention to the interactive space among its members, recognizing each member brings their own lens and their own intersectional identity.

Ethic of the Community for Social Justice Leaders

Advocates of building community in schools assert it benefits reducing a sense of alienation for students, enhances achievement and collegiality for educators, and inspires more democratic practices (Furman, 2004). Educational leaders creating a personal and professional understanding of one's leadership ethic must consider self and community, as every decision made should be made with the greater good of the community in mind. Educational leaders create their own codes based on experiences and expectations of their beliefs and ideals for what

is good or bad, right or wrong. This is a process recognizing this reflection is imperative to be a social justice leader with community at the forefront in mind of action transformative leaders must develop a critical awareness of oppression, exclusion, and marginalization (Furman, 2004). Social justice leaders focused on the community look deeply at institutional power arrangements and practices across cultural groups through inclusive, democratic practices and actions. In the dimension of the community, social justice leaders find proactive efforts to establish democratic forums and processes for dialogue and decision-making team-building skills, open communication, and inclusion (Furman, 2012).

School Culture and Climate

Porter and Samovar (1991) posited the dominant culture possessed instruments of power allowing it to set the broad societal agenda others generally follow. This power resides in the ability to control the major institutions—governmental, educational, mass media, economic, and the like. Understanding the intimate connection between the culture of a school, who makes the decisions, and how the school communicates its mission is critical to improving intercultural interactions. School culture is tied to the rule-governing system that defines the forms, functions, and content of communication that is largely responsible for the construction of our individual understandings of behaviors and meanings (Porter & Samovar, 1991). The culture of a school embodies beliefs, policies, and actions of a given community and is created through the combined understandings and perceptions of its members. According to Juvonen et al. (2006), the level of engagement, conflict, and/or cooperation among teachers, administration, parents and students and the sense of collaboration among the stakeholders are all integral and contributing factors in the formation of school culture. Grounded in the daily experiences of the

members of the school community and unique to each school setting, the interpretations, communications, and perceptions of what goes on inside the school are the sources defining the school culture (Juvonen et al., 2006).

The purpose of education was not always agreed upon, hooks (1994) purported "education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination" (p. 4) was at the crux of what schools put into question. Creating true democratic environments will foster and encourage marginalized voices opening communication as schools try to operationalize their missions. School missions have been tied to expressing care through equity, yet do not always achieve equity. Dewey (1963) asserted the operations of education perpetuated its own quality of life, which prevailed in group action and thought.

An increasing cultural, racial, and ethnic divide necessitates school practices that are more inclusive, equitable, and democratic with the intent to create environments nurturing students, transforming schools, and challenging the status quo (Shields, 2010). Policymakers, educators, and the public are aware that despite well-intentioned reforms and efforts, many students of color are not receiving an education like their white, middle-class counterparts. In accounting for the status quo, Shields (2010) discussed:

> Based on socially constructed and stereotypical images, educators may unknowingly, and with the best of intentions, allocate blame for poor school performance to children of minoritized groups based on generalizations, labels, or misguided assumptions. Anticipating or permitting lower performance from any group of children is inequitable. Educational practices that ignore such inequities, either by essentializing difference or

> attempting to ignore it, are manifestations of firmly rooted and pervasive attitudes that may best be described as pathologizing the lived experiences of students. (p. 111)

Furthermore, as the demographics of the United States are shifting and student populations have diversified increasingly, educational policies in schools seeking to control students have developed and in turn failed students (Moll & Arnot-Hopffer, 2005). The persistent failure Black youth experience in schools is partly due to cultural incongruence of the curricula and the systems they encounter that is typically white, middle-class, and Eurocentric. Culture does influence all dimensions of human behavior, including teaching and learning, but teaching and learning does not always include all cultures (Gay, 1994). Further complicating work in schools, teachers are legally responsible for the increasing accountability to mandated policies, leaving little room for addressing the reality of growing diversity in schools (Moll & Arnot-Hopffer, 2005).

A school culture may be characterized by the actions and language through which meanings and values are transmitted from one generation of the organization to the next. There are certain perceptions held by members of the community and how those perceptions are developed, communicated, and transmitted is very important (Owens & Valesky, 2015). The culture of a school community has a powerful influence on the climate, the attitudes, and the feelings of the community members. The climate is produced by dynamic interaction of the people who work, live, and learn in the organization. Voight et al. (2013) compared California middle and high schools and found some schools did better than others. The schools that did better were named “Beating the Odds.” “Beating the Odds” schools had similar school climate characteristics that distinguished themselves as a successful school. The qualities of these

successful schools had high expectations for student performance, caring relationships, meaningful participation, perceived school safety, and school connectedness (Voight et al., 2013). In other words, there were mutually beneficial partnerships among stakeholders that engaged school members.

Limits of Cultural Competence in Schools

Educators attempt to take the different experiences and needs of each of their students into consideration. Culturally responsive educators use the cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds of their students when planning and implementing instruction. To support democracy, educators must eliminate disparities in educational opportunities, especially those who have been poorly served by the current educational system. The goal became to include and design programs that made equity, inclusion, and social justice centrally important to education, but really did not address the relationship between those who were succeeding (i.e., White, middle class) and those who were not succeeding (i.e., minorities, lower class; Banks et al., 2013). Cultural competence began as an attempt to look at teaching differently. In the guidance of cultural competence, teaching diverse learners was more about teaching pedagogy and understanding those who are taught, than trying to understand the history and systemic nature of privilege.

Schools have been dedicated to acknowledging cultural competence and although this has been an incredibly positive paradigm shift for schools in the last 15 years, it is not enough. According to Fisher-Borne et al. (2014), there was a distinction between cultural competence and cultural humility in the fields of nursing and social work institutionally as an expanded framework for assessing effective services for minority populations as:

> The practice of training practitioners for working with diverse clients often treats the process in a linear fashion that often suggests that "knowing" about group differences alone is a sufficient strategy. . . . To date, their description of cultural competence as 'a set of attitudes, skills, behaviors, and policies enabling individuals and organizations to establish effective interpersonal and working relationships that supersede cultural differences. (p. 168)

Culturally Relevant, Responsive, and Sustaining Pedagogies

The foundations of culturally relevant pedagogy began with Ladson-Billings's work in the 1990s, asserting the imperative linking school and culture. Pewewardy (1993) claimed instead of inserting education into the culture, schools were inserting culture into the education. Culturally responsive pedagogy asserts the connection between the home culture and the school culture and recognizes it is tenuous. If the home culture is not being valued or recognized, then students are more likely going to feel not included or valued in the school culture. Culturally responsive pedagogy attempts to locate the problem between what students experience at home, be sensitive to that connection and what they experience at school and a dedication to collective empowerment. Ladson-Billings (1995b) asserted that culturally relevant pedagogy adheres to these three principles that students must experience success, students must develop and maintain cultural competence, and students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). In the formulation of Ladson-Billings's work, she proposed three things, producing students who (a) demonstrate cultural competence, (b) can achieve, and (c) can both understand and critique the existing social order (Paris, 2012).

Gay's (2000) work expanded the traditional view of culture beyond race and ethnicity, acknowledging culture determines how we think, believe, and behave. Culture is a community member's beliefs, motivations, and social groups and norms. Thus, the teacher who practices culturally responsive teaching understands that culture manifests in a variety of adaptations of how students prefer to learn and can use as a bridge that connect prior knowledge with new knowledge. A students' culture is a strength or a starting point and used as an asset to build on their funds of knowledge upon (Gay, 2000). This has been part of the national conversation on educating the marginalized for the last 25 years with Ladson-Billings and Gay at the helm.

Khalil and Brown (2015) recognized schools reflect society, which includes multiple cultural identities with connections to social power, and these identities are based on historical, political, and economic factors. When teachers enter a school, their cultural identities follow them and how they interact mirrors the interactions occurring in society. Given this, it is vital that teachers be aware of privilege and prejudice in themselves, in their society and in their schools (Solomona et al., 2005). The growing mismatch between teacher candidate demographics and the K–12 student population signifies that teachers must be consciously aware of the inequitable distribution of power and the existence and prevalence of prejudice and racism embedded in schools and throughout society, to ensure they are not vehicles for prejudice, classism, and racism (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

A cultural disconnect experienced between administrators, teachers, students, and the community may result in pedagogical and philosophical obstacles that pose a challenge to what exists in a school and in a classroom. Bridging the culture of the school and the climate around race necessitates relationship building, trust, and caring skills that are congruent with student

cultural norms. This is key to a school's ability to effectively connect with typically marginalized students and promote educational equity (Delpit, 1995; Duncan-Andrade, 2005). Khalil and Brown (2015) wrote:

> An educator's ability to look beyond the day-to-day stressors of the school to the larger structural context of society and historical marginalization can empower the educator to see their societal role in educating and inspiring students. Such a position requires informed hope. (p. 80)

Culturally sustaining pedagogy specifically moves toward the sustaining linguistic and cultural pluralism as part of what schooling must be (Paris, 2012). Countering the deficit thinking as the dominant language and literacy and cultural practices in schools were consistent with white, middle-class norms and anything outside that norm was considered deficient and unworthy and less than. Deficit approaches tried to eradicate what many students of color brought from their homes, from their communities and replace them with what was thought of a superior practice, language, and norms (Paris, 2012). This "culture of poverty" pervaded society, systems of practice, and schools, creating a climate that assumed that poor students and students of color were bankrupt of any language or cultural practices and that they brought no value. The centuries of unjust practices revealed that those practices have embedded themselves into the way people think and behave, the simple desire to change the orientation cannot undo a historical racism. A sustaining pedagogy requires more than achieving relevance and responsiveness but asserts and requires maintenance and explicitly supporting multiculturalism and multilingualism, perpetuating, and fostering and sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling (Paris, 2012).

Deficit Thinking and Marginalization

Deficit thinking sees the marginalized student as less than and carries inadequacies often attributed to poverty, race, and/or inadequate socialization from home (Valencia, 1997). Only by interrogating everyday forms of power and privilege that have become rigid standards by which people of color are judged in society, can schools shift this belief system of deficit thinking. Deficit thinking is a cycle and those in educational leadership need to recognize the detriment it takes on young students. Deficit thinking can shape one's ability to see students as having potential for developing competencies as adults (Valencia, 1997). Unrecognized bias and racism pervade schools and the assumption that people of color need to change and conform to the system, as if the system is working already and the people of color simply cannot function in the structure. School leaders do not recognize deficit thinking in themselves and their teachers, their schools will continue to perpetuate deficit thinking and underestimate the important role educators play in shaping mindsets. Deficit behaviors blame the students and/or their familial, cultural, and communal practices rather than analyzing how systemic inequities (Yosso, 2005) and fixed mindsets (Dweck, 2006) might be at the core. The importance of equity and social justice frameworks to address unequal schooling conditions is tantamount to student success for all.

Khalifa et al. (2013) resisted the deficit model and tried to highlight empowering constituents from school leaders by helping families and students join the struggle for social justice. This has the power to reshape and modify the educational system by helping students and families understand that they may have been marginalized, what services they qualify for,

understand their legal and educational rights, and understand the opportunities they are entitled to so they can destabilize the status quo by collaborating in the community (Khalifa et al., 2013).

Schools continue to play a significant role in the failure of Black, Latino, Native American, and other marginalized populations of students. Because students of color are often marginalized in schools, they are at significantly higher risks of school failure. School systems, leadership behaviors, teacher behaviors, and school culture need to advocate for students' educational interests, and this will affect academic and social success of all. Theoharis (2007) defined social justice leadership to include parents and students in the struggle for school inclusion and social justice in which school principals advocate for inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups of children. The way school principals promote school cultures and enact administrative behaviors emerges, with the help of parents and students, to embrace identities of typically marginalized students.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism (Paris, 2012) as part of the democratic mission of schooling and responds to social change. Culturally sustaining pedagogies also recognize students are dynamic beings with assets contrary the concept deficit thinking (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Asset-based education validates students of color in an educational setting and insists all students are valued, validated, and legitimized as funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994). In direct opposition to what traditionally has transpired for students of color is deficit thinking. If teachers are to behave as educational and social activists, they must understand the interplay between power, schooling, and intersectionality in society and their own agency to create lasting change in and beyond their classroom walls (Nieto, 2007).

Students of color have not been achieving at the rates of their white counterparts (Aud et al., 2011), this gap in achievement has consequences and a lasting impact not only on the state of education, but on society itself and in effecting social mobility and opportunity. A culture of care must incorporate stressing needs to understand and interrogate social, cultural, and political structures reproducing and normalizing racism in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical race theory (CRT; Ladson-Billings, 1998) builds connections to critique how the law reproduces and normalizes racism, focusing on the self-interest of the privilege of white America being preferred to the interest of people of color, and acknowledges the two realities of dominant and oppressed.

Community Collaboration and Inclusive Voices

Community participation connects stakeholders' lived experiences to the health and well-being of the community organization. Community based participatory research is a collaborative approach involving all stakeholders in the research process and recognizes the strengths each member brings. It begins with listening to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action for social change to improve the health of the community. There is an emphasis on action, relevance, and accessibility to address social inequities (Israel et al., 1998). When members of the community are included in the process there is a greater sense of meaningful participation and buy-in from all stakeholders (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). It is transformative and expands the traditional notions of organizations or schools to redress power imbalance and facilitate mutually beneficial partnerships (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008).

Gay (2000) asserted "culture determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these in turn, affect how we teach and learn" (p. 9) as a dynamic system of behavioral standards, codes,

social values, worldviews, and beliefs to give meaning to the lives of others and the self. Understanding the role of culture in students' lives and appreciating the deep value in cultural diversity allows multiple identities to coexist. Boykin (1994) found the "cultural fabric" of U.S. schooling was middle class and Eurocentric and has been so deeply ingrained in the structures, programs, and ethos of Eurocentric middle class it has been considered the "normal" way of being, devaluing those students who were not white and middle class. Identity is tied to a common history, ancestry, and geographic origin and is influenced by the wider culture's expectations and roles. Organizational, occupational, and social cultures shape people's values and affect who they are and how they behave in complex systems including knowledge, beliefs, art, law, schooling, morals, customs, and acquired habits (Lindsey et al., 1999).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

With repeated efforts to institute educational reforms with little success, research is the one place that can redress wrongs and make a difference in social, cultural, and political outcomes of individuals, society, and schools (Clissett, 2008). Qualitative research contains a range of approaches in the exploration of "human experience, perceptions, motivations, and behaviors" (Clissett, 2008, p. 100). Although disparities still exist among students, the role of educational leaders and educational research is to enact a social justice experience for all (Shields, 2010). Critical research is rigorous and activist and has the potential to inform policy and practice and empower communities. This research began with sharing experiences and asking questions of inequity and disparity and creating critical advocacy for its members. The voices of the community were at the forefront of this study, followed by my own journey to understanding social justice leadership through a cultural humility lens. A critical researcher's role is not simply to describe the world as it is, but to narrow in on what needs to be changed (Shields, 2010).

Research Questions

To build on the cultural humility lens, this study was guided by three questions embedded into the pillars of cultural humility:

1. What does the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiative look like in a preschool to eighth-grade independent school?

2. What critical self-reflective personal lessons can be learned during the journey toward the empowerment and advancement of all stakeholders in a diverse community focused on cocreating change?
3. What are the possibilities for creating institutional mindfulness around documenting the social justice dimensions of a collaborative community?

Rationale for Qualitative Approach

To align with a critical worldview and to answer the research questions, a qualitative research approach delving into the "experience, thought, perception, affect" (Fischer, 2006, p. xvi) of intention, motivation, and action was most appropriate for this study. Qualitative research identifies life events as phenomena to be explored rather than measured (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative approaches provide a means of examining institutions and aspiring to "study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5). Conducting qualitative research using a participatory, critical case study yielded the opportunity to identify multiple vantage points to deal with questions of identity, precisely because this method gives the researcher the avenue to question how their own identity comes into play in the research process (Fine, 2016). The production of knowledge shifts when we include voices (Fine, 2016) as qualitative research focuses on human intentions, motivations, emotions, and actions (Adams et al., 2019). Identity is a construct that cannot be studied from outside in as it is an individualistic experience that shapes thoughts and perceptions which impacts, affects, and leads to action. Identity is nonlinear and cannot be understood through specific measurements, but instead as an exploration of human emotion, experience, perception, motivation, and behavior (Clissett, 2018).

Qualitative research "privileges evocative stories that illustrate the human experience and the meaning individuals make of them" (Jones et al., 2012, p. 703) seeking to uncover emotions that "are important to understanding and theorizing the relationship among self, power, and culture" (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 767). Researchers use narrative and storytelling to acknowledge the overt and hidden perceived meaning of identity, relationship, understanding, and experiences, creating "relationships between past and present" (Chang, 2008, p. 43).

In this study, I was the researcher and intimately a part of the culture and behaviors being examined. Although the stories of the participants became the source of data, this method did not exist in isolation; rather, my own stories were interrogated in relation to the narratives of others (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). Qualitative data fall into four basic categories: "observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials" (Creswell, 2007, p. 129). I used those four basic categories to "collect people's life stories in order to study various aspects of the human experience" (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 1). The primary way I gathered stories was through narrative interviews. The research examined individuals interacting in their environments and how they constructed meaning of those experiences, focusing on the participants' perceptions of their own experiences, which revealed how people made meaning in their lives (Creswell, 2003).

Embedded in the research was the desire to share the stories, experiences, and oral histories in the hope of connecting to the human spirit. Qualitative research focuses on processes, and qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how things occur and how people react to the state of things (Creswell, 2003). After reviewing documents, I conducted narrative interviews, which allowed me to gain insight into the lived experiences of my participants. The direct interviews followed the structure and design of a question-and-answer session with room

for divergence. I then conducted a focus group with a specific group of parents/caretakers who identify as Black or African American to illuminate the lived experiences of stakeholders connected to the DEI work of the school. This research project was a critical narrative case study, which by design focused on the participants as the main informants, supplemented by my own reflection of the shared stories, to inform this critical case study of a specific school culture.

Critical Narrative Case Study Design

The specific qualitative approach used in this study was a narrative case study that consisted of "research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). This exploration of narrative data collection consisted of conversations or stories that reconstruct lived experiences situating them in a social context (Creswell, 2007). Looking at participants from one specific school site with the goal of social change through sharing stories, democratizes the right to research by challenging traditional designs of social inquiry that are influenced by those who live the experience, the client (Fine, 2016). This approach is "meant to invite the reader into the story in such a way as to promote a more just society" (Holman-Jones, 2005, p. 290). Sharing stories throughout time has served to bring others into the experiences of people different from themselves to create a space of understanding for the lived experiences of others. As researcher, I also participated from the inside.

As a critical narrative case study, I examined the self and the institution through the lenses of cultural humility by employing the use of personal narrative and the narrative of others participating in the case study. The purpose of this research was to find voices in the community, and my own, by gathering information and experience. According to Adams et al. (2017),

"Qualitative research focuses on human intentions, motivations, emotions, and actions" (p. 21). Qualitative research delves into the "experience, thought, perception, (and) affect" (Fischer, 2006, p. xvi) of intention, motivation, and action. It identifies life events as entities to be explored rather than measured. Qualitative approaches provide a means of examining phenomena to "study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5).

The narrative method addresses identity questions, precisely because this method can provide the researcher the avenue to question how their own identity comes into play in the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Identity is a construct that cannot be studied from the outside in, as identity formation is an individualistic experience that shapes thoughts and perceptions that leads to action—it is nonlinear and circular in its nature. This case study examined how "cultural self-analysis rests on understanding the self as part of a cultural community" (Chang, 2008, p. 26). Culture is what shapes individuals to be who they are and to see the world from a specific lens. Individual culture "refers to individual versions of group cultures that are formed, shared, retained, altered, and sometimes shed through human interactions" (Chang, 2008, p. 17). Culture is the realization that "different kinds of people possess different assumptions about the world (which) stem from race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, class, education, or religion" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 2).

Adams et al. (2017) found qualitative research should critique, contribute to, or extend existing research. It should embrace vulnerability to understand emotions and improve social life. It should disrupt taboos, break silences, reclaim voices, and qualitative research should make research accessible to multiple audiences (Adams et al., 2017. The narrative nature of the

research does not exist in isolation but exists in relation to the narratives of others (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008) creating a whole picture of the organization through multiple voices, experiences, and contributions.

The Case Site

The focus of this study was one preschool to eighth grade, very diverse, independent school in Los Angeles providing a competitive education with community, character, diversity, and community as its foundational pillars. The study addressed questions from the vantage point of the participants of color in the school that revealed findings and evidence about the research questions. The production of knowledge shifts when stakeholder voices are encouraged, heard, and internalized (Fine, 2016).

The case site was an independent school with 560 students and 70 faculty members. Teachers could have smaller sections of students. The case site had 57% of students identifying as students of color and 45% of faculty and staff identify as people of color. It had an average tuition of $30,000 per year and approximately 35% of the families received financial assistance. Participants were Black parents of students at the school, and most were connected to the DEI work of the school.

The inclusion of stakeholder participants using personal interviews and focus groups enhanced the quality of the project to ensure triangulation, which “assumes that if two or more sources of data, theoretical frameworks, types of data collected, or researchers converge on the same conclusion, then the conclusion is more credible” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). Because this project speaks to specific life events of the researcher, individuals who were invited to participate in this project knew the researcher personally and professionally.

Through deep evidence study, I also analyzed sources such as school documents, the school calendar, and communication from school leaders to parents (Yin, 2014). The triangulation of the evidence was strategic to develop convergent evidence (Yin, 2014) from multiple sources as part of the same study. I then used Chang's (2008) 10 strategies for analysis and interpretation of these sources of searching for recurring topics, themes, and patterns, looking for cultural themes, identifying exceptional occurrences, analyzing inclusion and omission, connecting the present with the past, analyzing relationships between self and others, comparing the self with other people's cases, contextualizing broadly, comparing with social science constructs and ideas, and framing with theories.

Research Procedures

The primary method of data collection included critical narrative sessions with parent participants, each lasting up to 1 hour. I conducted eight critical narrative interviews with individual participants. The individual interviews provided a chance for narrative data to emerge. Following these individual interviews, I conducted a focus group of seven parents that lasted 2 hours. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all the interviews and focus groups were conducted and recorded on Zoom. The transcripts were analyzed and coded by themes of cultural humility (i.e., self-reflection, power dynamics, and mutual beneficial partnerships). Later, when coding the critical narratives, I further identified an emergent theme. During this process of coding and careful dissection of themes, I reflected to participants what I saw as emerging to make sure I did not misrepresent their thoughts.

Research Participants

Purposive and convenience sampling was used to select the 13 total parent participants, who participated in interviews (n = 8) and two of whom also participated in focus groups, along with additional parents (n = 7). I had a relationship with each of the parents, as their assistant head of school overseeing their children's education, as a peer in my role as a parent of a child in the same grade level, or as a DEI workshop leader and participant. Although most of the participants had several years of experience in the DEI workshops and initiative (see Tables 1 and 2), I was also interested in asking people who had minimal experience in the DEI initiative to learn about their experiences.

Table 1

Interview Parent Demographics

Participant	Race	Positionality	Education	Years at school	Grades of child(ren)
Nala	Black	Parent	BA	9 years	third and eighth
Nikita	Black	Parent and board member	BA	8 years	third and seventh
Cherie	Black	Parent and staff	BA	9 years	fourth and eighth
Maggie	White	Parent	BA	10 years	alum and eighth
Anita	Black	Parent	Master's	7 years	sixth
Lindsay	White	Parent	Master's	3 years	kindergarten and second
Dena	Black	Parent	Postgraduate	8 years	sixth
Dara	Black	Admin and board member	Postgraduate	13 years	

I also led one focus group of seven Black parents (see Table 2) lasting over 2 hours. The focus group with Black parents captured their collective experiences at the school.

Table 2

Focus Group Parent Demographics

Participant	Race	Years at school	Grades of child(ren)	Involvement in DEI
Nala	Black	9	third and eighth	Highly
Amal	Black	3	third, sixth, and eighth	Highly
Karen	Black	7	seventh	Highly
Natalia	Mixed	4	kindergarten and third	Highly
Tina	Black	4	third	Moderate
Tani	Black	3	second	Moderately
Anita	Black	7	sixth	Highly

Data Collection

Multiple forms of data were collected to answer the three primary research questions, including narrative interviews, a focus group, document analysis, and personal reflection. The triangulation of these forms of data improved the confidence in reporting the findings (Hatch, 2002). I began with document analysis of school communications and examined the language in those communications to describe the DEI work of the case. I then conducted semi structured interviews, focusing on narratives of participants related to their lived experiences of DEI work at the school. I then conducted a focus group, creating the space to engage in dialogue around deep and important issues with Black or African American parents/caretakers at the school. I then reflected on my own personal experiences.

Interviews, Focus Groups, and Document Analysis

The foundational strength of semi structured interviews is that it can provide a true means for revealing experiences and exploring personal perspectives by engaging in analysis of the culture and climate of the school (Hatch, 2002). A wide representation of all the different categories of stakeholders was imperative for gaining insight into the culture of the school. Some participants were steeped in the work of DEI, and some of the participants were new to the work.

This provided a range of experiences with which to understand how participants made sense of the culture of the school. The use of focus groups allowed participants to feel less under the spotlight in hopes that true data emerged when in groups. Participants were interviewed 2–3 times throughout the study and all interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. To provide a common framework, protocols were used during the interview that provide structure for recording the information and perspectives garnered from interviews and focus groups (Gay, 2002). The protocols reflected the tenets of cultural humility and were based on the three strands of cultural humility: self-critique, disruption of power imbalance, and mutually beneficial partnerships (see Appendix A). After the interviews, I shared the findings to allow participants to confirm or alter their input.

The document analysis allowed me to analyze the system of the school on a deeper level, looking for language and tone in revealing and triangulating the culture and climate of the school. This triangulation provided an alternate perspective on the phenomenon being studied (Hatch, 2002). As a source of information, it represented data participants may not have considered in sharing their experiences. Coupled with the inclusion of stakeholder participants' voices captured through personal narrative interviews and a focus group (see Appendix B), also enhanced the quality of the project to ensure triangulation, which "assumes that if two or more sources of data, theoretical frameworks, types of data collected, or researchers converge on the same conclusion, then the conclusion is more credible" (Tracy, 2010, p. 843).

Analytical Plan

To analyze the data, I engaged in multiple cycles of coding (Miles et al., 2014). First, I coded the data inductively, allowing themes to emerge. Then, I examined patterns among the

codes using the analytical memos from the inductive cycle to eventually categorize themes. During this cycle, I deductively analyzed themes by examining the data for the core components of cultural humility. The triangulation of the interviews, the focus groups, and the data improved the confidence and validity of the study.

Limitations of the Study

Positionality and Bias

As a parent and administrator in the school setting that was studied, I possessed researcher bias. To practice openness and reflexivity, I revealed my underlying assumptions that caused me to formulate a preconceived set of understandings, definitions, or presumptions of the findings (Gay, 2002). The inclusion of participants "assumes that if two or more sources of data, theoretical frameworks, types of data collected, or researchers converge on the same conclusion, then the conclusion is more credible" (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). Because this research project spoke to specific life events of the researcher, individuals who were invited to participate in this project knew the researcher personally and professionally.

Limitations

My positionality was extremely important in this research, as I have been an administrator and a parent at the school under study. I have overseen the work of DEI at the school, working with parents, administrators, teachers, and students for the past eight years, and I have been intimately connected to all the stakeholders who participated in this research. I have had multiple touch points connecting me to the school, the work, and the people, in ways that helped reveal or obfuscate experiences. There was a possibility members of the community might have felt uncomfortable revealing their true thoughts and feelings to me due to my role as

parent and administrator. The nature of the DEI work previously done at the school has been exploratory, trying to uncover inequities, and I have been an integral part of that work. This study followed along the same line of inquiry and critique to constantly get better. As the researcher, however, I have been intimately a part of the culture and experiences shared by participants, given my connection to the school. On the one hand, stories from the researcher became the source of data and research, but on the other hand, the narrative nature of this study meant this method did not exist in isolation but in relation to the narratives of others (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008).

Delimitations

The design of this research study limited data collection to interviews, focus group dialogue with one group of parents, personal reflection, and review of documents. The research was conducted solely at one school site, making generalizability challenging. Purposive sampling affects the generalizability of the research findings; however, this study examined the lived experiences of a school community related to the DEI practices of one specific independent school. The purpose was not to generalize findings but rather conduct an in-depth review of DEI work at one independent school site. As a result, the study did not intend to explore the leadership or structure of other schools or social justice leaders. This study qualitatively measured the perceptions and practices of this current school leadership team and community around the school's DEI practices from the view of parents.

Conclusion

The goal of this study aligned closely with the tenets of qualitative research as it looked to understand what is happening, why, and how the human condition might be affected

(Creswell, 2009). Every effort was made to be transparent about possible researcher bias as I am a member of the community. The study engaged a school community in a collaborative process to illuminate and transform educational practices to meet the needs of a school with a diverse community, enriching the research of cultural humility in the field of education. The findings provide a true picture of how cultural humility can be operationalized in this school setting. My connection and commitment to the school in general helped me align with the participants to allow the experiences and stories to emerge.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The current study examined one independent school's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiative from the view of predominantly Black parents. This chapter describes the perspectives and experiences of the 13 parent participants (two parents participated in both the individual interviews and the focus group). The presentation of their unique voices through personal semi structured narrative interviews and a semi structured focus group, highlighted their perspectives and experiences at the school.

The purpose of this study was to understand the tensions associated with and the outcomes of implementing collaborative practices related to DEI work in an independent preschool through eighth-grade school. This study was a critical narrative case study that aimed to retain the voices of the school community. I maintained the integrity of their perspectives by coding emergent themes when they shared their experiences, thus cocreating opportunities for change and transformation at the school. Aiming to gain an authentic understanding and seek to truly understand the reality as perceived by those who live the reality is tantamount (Freire, 2000). Authentically understanding the power dynamics around dialogue and discourse becomes "an effort to develop a critical discourse in the face of dominant discourse that has worked systematically to silence the voices of marginalized populations" (Darder, 2012, p. 94). Darder (2012) claimed voice is developed through gaining opportunities to enter into dialogue and engage in the critical processes of reflection by sharing thoughts, ideas, and lived experiences. The participant voices, along with the triangulation of the document review, provided insight

into the complexities of this independent school community trying to embrace an initiative in its entirety.

Building on the concept of cultural humility, the three main research questions stemmed from the three components in the framework of cultural humility (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014), respectively: lifelong critical reflection and learning (institutional and individual), mitigating power imbalances, and developing mutually beneficial partnerships. The questions guiding this study were:

1. What does the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiative look like in a preschool to eighth-grade independent school?
2. What personal self-reflective lessons can be learned during the journey toward the empowerment and advancement of all stakeholders in a diverse community focused on cocreating change?
3. What are the possibilities for creating institutional mindfulness around documenting the social justice dimensions of a collaborative community?

As the assistant head of school and as a parent at the institution for 10 years, my presence in the research allowed me to maintain relational connections with each participant. As a member of the past DEI leadership team and having worked closely with some of the teachers and parents on DEI efforts, my perspective became the instrument of analysis. The inclusion of stakeholder participants using personal interviews and focus groups enhanced the quality of the project to ensure triangulation, which "assumes that if two or more sources of data, theoretical frameworks, types of data collected, or researchers converge on the same conclusion, then the conclusion is more credible" (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). As a participant interviewer, my own

positionality in the school allowed me to understand intimately what participants were referring to when discussing their experiences. For example, as a leader on the school's DEI committee for the past 8 years, I understood the workshops, challenges, and episodes participants often referred to in their narratives. In addition to interviews, I also reviewed sources of information such as anecdotal notes, archival records, and physical artifacts, including school newsletters and course descriptions (Yin, 2014). This triangulation allowed for analysis and interpretation of recurring topics, themes, and patterns, looking for cultural themes and analyzing relationships between self and others.

Each individual participant was a member of the school community. The criterion for selecting participants was a professional connection with myself, an administrator and parent in the school (i.e., previous or current coworker, previous or current parents). As such, preexisting power dynamics given my role at the school and previous relationship with the participants were a possibility and should be noted when reviewing the findings.

Findings were organized by first presenting the information from the document review, followed by data from the narrative interviews and focus groups, with the three themes of cultural humility as the areas of focus: critical self-reflection, mitigating the power dynamics, and creating meaningful and lasting partnerships. Each interview was connected to one of the tenets of cultural humility. I had 60-minute interviews with parents (some of whom were also school staff). I also had one focus group of Black parents to dive deeper into their experiences around race and inclusion in a space they felt safe with one another.

I analyzed the data first by hand, going through each transcript after the initial interview and noting concepts and ideas that connected to the three themes. I then coded the transcripts

also allowing themes to emerge outside the three tenets of cultural humility. I validated the interviews by member checking and sending transcripts to each person to verify that their words and sentiments were captured.

Document Review Findings

First, I performed a document review by looking at archived weekly newsletters to the whole school community about events and workshops offered to the parents. I selected documents for review between the years 2013 and 2020, which coincided with the start of the DEI work at the school through the most recent school programs. These documents allowed me to assess the communication of issues of race from the school leaders and from teachers to parents. I also reviewed the school website and all school calendars to determine frequency and depth of the DEI initiative around how issues of race were embedded in the school's ethos. Findings indicated DEI work at the school spans across the curriculum, to parent events, to student events, and that the frequency of DEI offerings has steadily improved over time.

Curriculum and Communication

The document review uncovered that the original DEI efforts at the school consisted mainly of biannual parent meetings. However, reviewing the school calendar from the last two years (i.e., 2018–2019, 2019–2020) showed the school curriculum included many references to antibias and antiracist teachings in specific courses, such as English or Social Studies. There were also standalone curriculum opportunities delivered in social justice or antibias classes that began three years ago (i.e., 2017–2018) with the adoption of the school's antibias curriculum program. There were also many schoolwide events offered for students, including book clubs and the creation of affinity groups. Communication from the school leadership was frequent

about current events. For example, there were whole community email blasts that signified a top-down stance supporting topics such as Black Lives Matter or admonishing other injustices around White supremacy culture affecting the Black community, such as the killing of Breonna Taylor or George Floyd, and police brutality. Additionally, the middle school student council was invested in communicating ideas to the entire community by creating videos about White privilege, police brutality, having hard conversations, and social justice.

Frequency and Attendance

The kindergarten through eighth grade curricular document review also revealed the parent community and the staff community were engaged in antiracist work approximately once a month; there were activities ranging from optional book clubs, workshops, affinity spaces, critical conversations, and conversations with Black leaders in the community. This engagement steadily grew from 7 years ago when the events were less frequently occurring only a couple times a year for all stakeholders. In the last few years, there was marked increase in more opportunities for caregivers and students to engage in social justice programming. For example, there were affinity spaces in the 2019 school year, and the reenrollment (and enrollment) documents parents signed included a mandated activity involvement in the DEI initiative. The document states each parent must attend at least one of the many DEI activities available at the school.

I also found the number of attendees at the DEI workshops and events had steadily grown from an average of 15–20 participants in 2018–2019 to some events having up to 140 attendees (out of the 380 families that attend the school) in 2019 and 2020. This growth in participation was due to parents and school staff intentionally trying to grow the experience and better

communication around upcoming events. Two events garnering great attendance occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic where attendees could join virtually from home. The increase in accessibility via virtual events due to safety measures required during the pandemic was a lesson that the school was discussing as an area of priority to harness post-COVID; the school intends to host as many events in a virtual space as they do in-person, thus allowing for more participation.

Based on the review of documents, the school's DEI initiative began as a group of interested parents and school staff who desired to begin unveiling and understanding how systems and events had an impact on the members of the community. What began in 2013 with book clubs twice a year and occasional meetings/trainings for faculty/staff and parents, with minimal work with students, grew into a leadership team with 8 to 10 faculty members with focus on the three stakeholder groups students, caregivers, and staff, who meet monthly and plan events and experiences for engagement. The DEI team provided monthly workshops or internal educational meetings or brought in speakers and workshops from outside the school. In conclusion, the DEI efforts were pervasive at this private, independent K–8 school.

Narratives and Focus Group Findings

Data from the seven narrative interviews and one focus group with eight Black parents were coded based on the themes of cultural humility (i.e., critical self-reflection, power dynamics, and mutual beneficial partnerships). Additionally, I further identified an emergent theme that fell under the specific category of "navigating spaces." I organized the participant narratives by theme. To connect to each theme in cultural humility, I brought together each participants' thoughts and experiences with each theme and found their own words tell the story

about how the school has met or not met that criterion. Following the narrative data for each theme, I included salient points made during the focus group related to the theme. I then concluded each thematic section with my own reflection.

Critical Self-Reflection

The first tenet of cultural humility is the notion of critical self-reflection. Each participant described aspects of self-reflection related to their experiences with DEI initiatives at the school. Often, through their own self-reflection, participants reflected on how the school responded to their realizations or requests, extending the notion of reflection to evaluation of the school. The following section describes the narratives of each parent related to critical self-reflection.

Nala. Nala grew up in south Los Angeles and has been a parent at the school for 9 years. Nala has a son in eighth grade and a daughter in the second grade. Nala is an African American mom, and she has been quite involved as a participant in the DEI initiative and on the parent group for all her time at the school. Nala grew up in integrated schools from the fourth through 12th grade and then attended UCLA for college. Nala found herself in the minority group in very large majority spaces and she attributes having attended schools in mostly White spaces, she felt equal, and she knew how to navigate these spaces. Nala began participating in the DEI work in her first years with a kindergarten child and worked closely with the parents in her cohort to begin having meaningful discussions about race.

When reflecting about how Nala connected to self-critique about her space in the institution, she knew she was there to advocate for her children as she felt she had already "done my work, these are areas, I see blind spots." Nala was thoughtful about her reactions making certain that she knew how to navigate diverse spaces and would make sure that if things were not

being handled fairly, she would speak up about it. Nala discussed different treatment for different students and that sometimes she had to check herself, reflecting on when she needed to advocate for her children:

> To really assert not only being a parent, but as being a Black parent and really establish and make it very clear that this is a Black child, this is a Black boy and there are certain things that have to be handled differently. So those things did require me to have maybe a more visible place in school. It's definitely driven by race and gender.

Beyond the roles of race and gender, this parent discussed her practice of reflection given her concern that she might be too sensitive. She shared:

> I always like to check in and make sure that I'm not being overly sensitive because certainly when race is on the table . . . the first thing is, "Oh, you're being sensitive." I'm not saying the school put that on me, that's just in general and . . . so I do a self-check. What is upsetting about this? Or what's disturbing me? Or what's great about this? And "where are these feelings coming from?

Additionally, she reflected on a specific incident that had occurred where she was able to act on her self-reflection to improve the DEI initiatives at the school. One important aspect of the school for Nala was her ability to be responsive to students' and family's needs. Nala felt she had learned to navigate different spaces and wanted to make sure she advocated for her children when maybe the White teachers or White staff treated the situation in a way that might have been unfair to her child. Nala said:

> In fifth grade and it was colonial history . . . in taking a look at the syllabus and being able to go to the teachers and admin and say, "this is great, but it's glaringly missing

> a conversation about slavery" and . . . watching that curriculum evolve relatively quickly . . . is definitely an example of where the school recognized, okay, there are some gaps here and we're not just going to meet and keep talking about it, we're going to do something about it. I felt like that was definitely an opportunity that the school seized upon to be self-reflective.

Overall, Nala shared examples of her own self-reflection practices related to issues of race at the school and how that self-reflection allowed her to bring up areas of improvement related to the curriculum. The importance of seeing reflection in action in the curriculum is evident, but this is an example of the school being responsive (which is wonderful), but not proactive.

Nikita. Similar to Nala, Nikita had been a parent at the school for 8 years. She had two children in seventh and third grades during the time of the study and had been the school's parent group president for 3 years, and during the time of the study had been appointed to our board of trustees. Her work in the DEI initiative had been active; she not only had been attending the meetings and workshops but had been a vocal proponent for growing the attendance. Nikita's partnership and collaboration in DEI events had drawn many kinds of caregivers from the community, really helping the mission of the work. As she shared, "We want you to be exactly who you are, and that has made all the difference in the world." In terms of self-reflection, Nikita indicated:

> I've been able to take on "leadership" capacity at [the school] as parent group president and has opened my eyes to so much of who I personally am and how I thought I needed to represent myself at the school. . . . I've been able to be very vocal about my personal beliefs, about things that I encounter in terms of racism, in terms of sexism, inequities

that exist. And I have been supported by senior staff who have said, we want you to be exactly who you are, and that has made all the difference in the world. In terms of how I see myself at [the school], it's really helped to shape the authentic representation.

Nikita's connection and acceptance with the school staff enhanced and validated her experiences and allowed her to see her place in the school community and to be reflective about who she is and how she hopes to be perceived in the school.

Cherie. Cherie had been a parent at the school for 9 years and had been a staff member for 3 years in the admission department at the time of the study. She was a Black woman who was very reflective of her role in the school as a parent and recently hired staff member at the time of the study. She had been an integral part of the early learning 8 years ago and collaborator and partner among parents to help create change in the institution. Cherie described herself as a parent who was "very culturally aware of race and race dynamics and at the same time still kind of open, not, with a fixed mindset, but having a growth mindset about diversity, equity and inclusion." In our interview, she discussed growing up in a predominantly White neighborhood in which her family was "the only Black family on the block." She benefitted from her parents' efforts to ensure she had "cultural connections" to enhance her education and credits her parents' influence on her choice of schools for her own kids. She said, "I didn't necessarily want my children to be the one in the class, because I'd been through that."

Cherie's understanding of a growth mindset in a reflective space was important in understanding one's own identity in relationship to others in the school. Cherie recognized the work was already beginning to happen as she joined the community, but that there was still so

much more to do, and she became one of the handful of parents who was a catalyst for change. She said:

> This school, it's a dynamic institution, it's a learning institution. So, when we, as mothers and it was already happening, the beautiful thing is that the administration was always already aware that we're not doing enough. So, at the same time it was a beautiful explosion of energy and passion around the topic where it was just the right time to get together. The administration could take it to another level, which is where we are. And so in reflecting on my place . . . the school provided the underpinnings for who they are and the conversations around race . . . And so, the school being confident in who they are and that identity work that they've certainly done for so long in time, supports that as well.

Cherie's ability to be self-reflected was a commitment to her sons and to the larger community as well. She valued the importance of the connections through self-reflection.

Maggie. Maggie was a White mom of three who grew up in an all-White neighborhood. She is one of 10 two-mom households in the school, providing her minimal experience as "other." She had been a parent at the school for 9 years and she was in a class with many of the Black moms who collaborated with the White moms to make sure the community at large knew and understood one another. This White mom was very active in the DEI initiative through the years and is a parent DEI co-representative on the parent board. Starting from a space of lack of understanding of all the issues, she held an openness and hopefulness in her learning as an advocate and partner. She acknowledged the school has an expectation of involvement that helped her being to partner:

> I don't know if I even knew how to be self-reflective. I didn't know that was a thing, really. I am always thinking about the community I am in, but actually doing the work that my kids are doing, it was hard and it was good. I learned early on from the Black moms that I better get in the game and learn what my kids were learning and get engaged in some deeper conversations. That learning came from the parents. The school was working at it as well, but that is what it means to be part of a community. To look at yourself, reflect, and get engaged. There are so many opportunities to engage in so many different ways and there is an expectation that we all will engage and do the work, so we do.

Through her children and their learning about how to reflect on who they are and how they learn the school's pillar of community, Maggie understood it was an expectation to commit to self-reflection through communion with others.

Anita. Anita has been a parent at the school for 6 years. She was Black and considers herself a survivor having experienced a rough childhood where her mother got sick, and her dad was not available due to having issues around addiction. She found herself walking through her life and watching her mother beat cancer three times, she realized she was grateful, and she was a survivor, she was a fighter, and she knew her role was to give back to the community. Anita had seen herself as a partner and held herself accountable. Her "sense of reflection is on where I came from" knowing that as a Black woman with her experiences; she saw the world differently "a front seat to some beautiful things and a lot of love, but then also some really dark parts of society in the world." Anita went on to describe her experience of the school's self-reflective journey:

> The school transitioned from being diverse to being inclusive, inclusive, and then having the equity. So now I feel like we got it, like we got the D the E and the I we're walking in, we're talking in, we just have to continue on and just make sure that along the journey, every spoke in the wheel is involved. Whether it's the trustees or the parents or parents, faculty, everybody just needs to be on the journey. And there needs to be some accountability, like we were saying, you can't sit this out and we're not saying we have to think alike, but you need to engage in the conversation and in the work. And we're on this journey and some people are further along than others and that's okay.

Anita's life experiences shaped who she was as a member of the community. She held herself accountable to helping make and create the needed change and she also held the community to that accountability. Anita understood "to serve and to help" was part of her life and she connected that to the school as well, serving as a parent DEI representative for a few years.

Lindsay. Lindsay was a White mother of two young children in the school at the time of the study. She recognized her family dynamic is different as she works a "big job," and her husband was the primary caregiver. Lindsay reported they have "a different family dynamic while we have, we have a mom and a dad, we have very opposite role reversals in our family where I work and my husband decided not to work, so he's a stay-at-home dad." Different family structures in the school were an area of diversity as the school does have many same sex parents and this untraditional family structure to Lindsay is important, "a passion of mine is gender diversity and supporting women in our industry because we are a minority."

Lindsay reflected on an incredibly challenging moment in a parent/caregiver workshop where she really needed to take some time to heal herself as she felt unseen and misunderstood when engaging in some challenging work the school provided. Lindsay shared:

> I put myself out there, to start a conversation and saying that what I was trying to say my kids don't choose their friends by their skin color, they've been taught that everyone is a person and an individual. That's just your skin. Saying that my kids don't see color, didn't come out correctly. And for someone who doesn't know me that could have been interpreted a certain way and the person who there's a couple moms who reacted to that and . . . gave me a little bit of a talking to and said, that sounds like White supremacy. . . . I've never, ever heard that before. And I was really upset by that extremely upset.

Lindsay was very upset but allowed herself to take in the feedback she was given and be reflective about the incident. She continued to discuss her reflection on how the school might have engaged differently during the session when the incident occurred, sharing:

> In retrospect, like I wish there was maybe a little bit more moderating of that session and that's where I feel like there could be improvement there because I think [director of DEI] was still so new and kind of learning because I felt personally attacked. And I still do, when I bring this up, it still brings up a lot of emotions. I mean that was a hard one and yes, it still brings up emotions.

This is one of the teaching points in the curriculum, intent versus impact. Lindsay then discussed her own reflection about the way forward:

> The whole thing definitely caught me a little bit on my heels, through that experience. And I realized the social, emotional learning is so advanced at the school and the diversity equity and inclusion, that is taking shape. . . . I've put myself out there to say, what is the language? What are the words? And that hasn't really been dialed in yet for DEI. And that was definitely a learning experience for me as well. It forced me to be a little reflective. I've been on my own journey since then, but that was definitely an experience that caused me to reflect and look inward a little bit as well.

She concluded by reflecting about how such incidents are opportunities for her family to practice and learn how to communicate as she used what she learned as a lesson to her children, "if you tell me what I need to do that will help me communicate with my kids, I do it. And I think that's excellent. And it is helping us communicate better as a family, it's been terrific. And the girls teach us things and we teach them as well."

She continued to discuss how reading books has contributed to her growth:

> The book . . . was just so eye-opening and provided perspective. And then you start reading more. You're like, Oh my gosh, how could I have said something like that, especially in this type of group. So it's been a journey, but it definitely has taken a while . . . And again, it's the White fragility, and that's not me because I do all this, but saying you have a Black best friend and what have you, that doesn't make you anti-racist. And, it drudged up a lot. I think I'm past that now. And I've been doing a lot more like self-reflection and some other stuff too, and reading on it.

A fascinating aspect of the learning is that each is on their own journey and although Lindsay felt called out and felt horrible about it, she began working through some of her

own ideas about herself and her community that she needed to see. Her ability to look back at a really challenging situation highlights the openness with which even the white parents will present, but also brings to the fore the desperate need for more engagement and conversation and partnership on issues of race.

Dara. Dara was an administrator at the school for 10 years and recently moved to the board of trustees. Dara was a Black woman who had been a part of the DEI team 10 years ago at the grassroots level, having started the conversation and having creating the goals for more visible diversity in the classrooms and on the faculty and staff. She knew she had a partner in the leadership of the school, but it took time, "I think it took a while to get the head of school to understand and that's the person who really makes the decisions." The work has been part of her life since she started working at the school and Dara understands that is it a process, but there was an urgency about change:

> I think the thing that I appreciate about him is that he's very reflective. You can tell him something and he might reject it initially, but then he goes back and thinks about it, then he comes back to you . . . years and years and years of reflecting and he started to understand more and more, and he started to really be able to hear me . . . and once you have so many people, once you're able to hear first, then you see that all those messages that one person has been telling you all this times, and you get examples from everywhere. And that was really awesome that he was able to hear it and we were able to start making progress.

Dara's voice was not heard until a White administrator joined her voice. Dara's commitment to each voice being heard was what propelled much of the early work at the school.

She understood that without reflection and critique of the self and the system, things would not change. She demanded that with allies, and change began to happen.

Karen. In addition to the narratives from individual interviews with all parents, I invited seven Black parents to attend a focus group to discuss the DEI initiative at the school. Parents similarly discussed reflection as a key component of this work and Karen's insistence that vulnerability is necessary for people to meet where they are and come together, "there's a vulnerability from faculty, from staff, from other parents and just this willingness to lean into it." Karen summarized how reflection has become a part of raising money and creating partnerships which has led to change:

> And it's development for the entire community. It's not just isolated to faculty and staff. I think just the overall development and really leaning into DEI from a development standpoint has been very meaningful, and I saw a surge maybe year one, not so much, but like year two, year three, like we built up, we built up and now, we're walking the talk in terms of it being a part of what we do in a priority, more of a priority of our community.

Also noted, Karen shared the recognition that this work is developmental in nature and that it can take time but reflected here is a desire for more parents to "lean into" the DEI initiatives at the school to prioritize this work. The power of multiple voices together in this focus group grew and was incredible as a researcher.

Understanding that there is a journey for schools to change and transform the systems and the people in the system was a concept that several participants touched on. Recognizing that everyone is somewhere on the path to transformation was an important topic in the focus group:

> In comparison, I was almost shocked at how little other schools had done. And I know that depending on where you are on your path or your journey, there you are. I remember where we were when we first started [the school] and it was very diverse for us and that's why we picked it. But since then, I feel like the growth has been tremendous and it's not just, "Oh, we got some more kids of color and we're going to stop." I do feel like there has been effort put in to continuing to grow and continuing to learn about the different groups in our school.

Self-Reflection Conclusion

Overall, the narratives shared by the parents demonstrated their willingness to engage with the school community and with me during this research process. Parents were open about their personal backgrounds, upbringing, and childhood, which influenced their experiences as parents in this school. Parents also shared their own learning by being part of a greater community of parents and staff who cared enough to want to change the system, so the system would meet the needs of all the students. The focus group parents further spoke to how reflection led to changes in the school over time, noting the developmental nature of the work.

Given the depth of reflection presented in the narratives by parents, it is evident that the learning process takes time. In my own reflections after interviews, I remember sitting with Nala, Cherie, and a few other parents 9 years ago; she and other parents were asking for a sense of enlightenment from the school related to race. As I reflect on what was shared in this study, I am also drawn to my own self-reflection and notice I could begin to create change and systems of change by simply listening and being open, willing, and able to talk as a parent, but also as a person of power and privilege about race with other caregivers in my class and community. DEI

work at the school has changed and it feels better than it did 9 years ago. I remember sitting in my home with four Black moms in our class asking what they wanted my children who are being raised with their children to know about their lives and stories and experiences. This eye-opening moment was pivotal for the work I wanted to do. I got the opportunity to open lines of communication that people just were not opening at the school that people were afraid to open. It is now more ingrained in this community that people should lean into dialogue on issues of race. This was the impetus for "Fireside Chats" in 2013, held three times a year focusing on simply having the conversations. In 2016, Fireside Chats turned into "Courageous Conversations" semantically making these deeper and more meaningful. This push to understand myself and who I am in this community, in this school, in this space that is shared, co-lived, co-experienced is self-reflection and was the beginning of meaningful partnerships in the making.

Saying "I was wrong" is an important piece of the cultural humility framework, understanding that we always will not know what is best and being able to be humble in learning about ourselves. Reflection. Self-reflection. Critical self-reflection. What might it look like in a school community, not simply built in the structures, but how is it highlighted as a value and something to value in a community? There was a lot of work with the kids and teachers understanding what it means to be uncomfortable and to embrace that feeling. As a community, there was not a shying away from being in situations that are hard and uncomfortable as those are the moments that will help the community grow and help all understand that sometimes others are very uncomfortable and live in that space, and that if we are uncomfortable in a conversation here and there, that we need to endure that.

Mitigating Power Dynamics

According to the framework of cultural humility, in moving from mastery to accountability, there are ever-present and interconnected individual and structural power imbalances that impact organizational change (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014). The importance of organizational-level change strategies must address issues of power and privilege; therefore, mitigating power dynamics is a tenet that describes a practitioner's humility of relinquishing control and power, of giving up being an expert to listen to others as a full partner in alliance. There are dominant and subordinate power relations that exist in institutions such as schools and there is a social stratification in the institutions (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Culture does not function in a vacuum, but rather is a system that reproduces conditions of social practices and stratum that maintain oppressive conditions to serve the interests of the dominant groups (Darder, 2012). Participants reflected on power dynamics and how oppressive structures exist, and how they are beginning to be dismantled.

Nala. Nala sees herself as an advocate for change, for changing and questioning the system. As an African American and a mom, she finds the importance of having those in power convey the messages, which will shift the voices supporting change and transformation. This shift in messaging is a shift in power. The staff must be trained to deal with issues that arise in a fair and balanced way. Nala sees that power structures remain, but brought up issues of the past that are not always the case today:

> An issue that comes up regularly [is] where parents are often watching and staff may not see that they're watching and they will say, well, this child did this, but the Black child was the one who was reprimanded, and the other child got apologized to and

didn't have to reciprocate.

Nala's experience reflected on the power dynamic playing out in terms of discipline at the school among students. She continued to share the responsibility of educating children now by commenting on their future:

> These kids are going to be CEOs. They're going to run the world, but between now and the time that they take over for the world, we have to get them through every single day. And certainly, in that area, it's not going away.

This comment recognizes these privileged students from an independent school will be in positions of power in the future, which maintains a power dynamic structure. There is a critical need to educate students now through the lens of DEI with that future power in mind.

Nikita. Nikita also brought up the ease with which the school can discuss White supremacy, noting growth and acceptance of narratives that are often unspoken in other independent schools. She found the willingness to step outside the comfort zone of many, and "that just recently there has been a demand for everyone to do the work that needed to be done was being done by a select few who were willing to engage and others were able to sort of miss that calling get on board." Nikita found:

> The work that we've been doing DEI-wise and our DEI, family events, we've been having really courageous conversations and they've been very intellectual, which I think is a great way to approach the conversation because I think when you're dealing with, such an emotional topic, I think people can kind of rely on the emotions rather than having to really step back and think intellectually about why they are responding a certain way or why they feel a certain way or we're unaware of. I think

> when we're all in the room together and we're talking about White supremacy it allows us to really frame our opinions around concrete ideas and notions that can, I think basically get the room more comfortable in conversation I think that [the school] is at a precipice.

Nikita found the power imbalance is shifting by simply talking about the issues when they arise instead of moving along with issues around race being unspoken. She felt the school is "at a precipice" as the balance of power is shifting and more and more members of the community are communicating the message that a shift needs to occur. She continued to highlight the power dynamics, sharing:

> I think the mitigation of the power imbalance is that those who felt discrimination wanted to talk about it, and those who were fearful of it could ignore it. And now that cannot happen. And this is going to be very telling this year going forward, because there is a requirement for everyone to engage. That's going to make a huge difference. The power shift of those who have been living in fantasyland and enjoying the diversity now have to get their feet wet. And I think that's going to really level conversation where it should be.

Cherie. Cherie shared her experiences as a Black woman around the school's commitment to having the conversation around power and White privilege. She noticed the school does provide agency to those who traditionally are in the minority occupying the space in White institutions. By upsetting the traditional power dynamic, many have a voice, which provides a bit of autonomy for individuals typically in oppressed groups. Cherie focuses on a diversity of opportunities for involvement that helps dismantle some of the space's traditional whiteness:

> Because of opportunities with DEI and the parent committees and the books and the speakers, that shows and says that the school cares enough to have those conversations. And so in that way, programmatically, there are triggers. There's enough of a wokeness as the [Head of School] would say, but there's, enough of a care and concern, or even with Black history month, or that the door is open and then it's up to us to make of it what we want, if we want more, so at least the school comes to the table as far as my identity concern is concerned.

Cherie indicated there is a level of care that is present at the school to disrupt the traditional power dynamic.

Anita. Anita discussed a sense of awareness and openness among the school staff in terms of knowing what is happening and being open to feedback. The school leaders acknowledging that they might not know everything has had an impact on the parent body, contributing to a mutual trust, from those who hold the power to those members of the community who are trying to get their voices heard. Anita shared:

> So, one of the other things that I love about our school is I think staff and faculty do a wonderful job of reiterating, how much we should trust you. This is not your first rodeo here at educating kids and working through some really complicated issues. And you balance that with the fact that you are always so open to feedback. I think that's where the perfect balance is reached. Even if y'all might feel that you've never come off that way, you've demonstrated your experience, your proficiency, your learnings, and why XYZ is the way that it is. And that in and of itself has given us great confidence to trust you. But at the same time, you all are so humble to say, listen, like we might not know everything, if you have other recommendations or

something, please let us know. And I think that you guys balanced that really, really nicely, honestly, that I've never felt a significant imbalance in those two things.

Lindsay. Lindsay, who was minimally active in the DEI initiative recognized her whiteness was at issue during an event, which she turned into a learning moment. From a position of traditional power and whiteness, she really had a hard time connecting her experience to how the school cares for parents when they find themselves in a learning moment:

> I've tried to make some of the DEI sessions, but I haven't been able to make them. And so, it's not that I don't want to do them, but it was really hard. Like I had a lot of tears, I had health issues after that [incident]. Like it sparked some health stuff with me too, which really sucked. So, I kind of went down the spiral and I'm going to talk to another mom at [the school], who I'm very close with, who is Black. And she, she was upset by it because she knows who I am and she knows, I didn't mean to say that. And so, like talking to her and crying to her, made me feel a lot more comforted and then, that made me feel a little bit better, but it, it took a while for the sting to go away.

Dena. Dena described an experience where she needed to meet with the school leaders, which revealed her desire and appreciation for partnership with parents, but she sees the power dynamic as a systemic issue that inhibits some parents from participating:

> In the lower school, when I've had to meet with the assistant head, I think that the interactions didn't come across as punitive or authoritative, it was more partnership and sharing . . . it felt like we have certain things that if they happen to just come to me because I want to make sure that they're handled appropriately. So while I was appreciative of that, I felt that there were some things that teachers need to be able to

handle in their own classrooms and not bring to the administration. I understand having been a teacher, teachers are human beings and we all have mostly good days and sometimes we don't know how to handle a sensitive situation and then it goes to the more powerful person on campus instead of just dealing with it yourself.

Dena held some power in knowledge of the DEI field but at the time of the study, did not feel like she held power in other social ways. Dena had felt exclusion and not always part of the process and this was evident. She did not feel a sense of collaboration and partnership with the school holistically. Dena recognized the social-emotional learning at the school plays a big part of how the school addressed student identity and socialization and conflict resolution but did not see it as valuable to all students. She shared:

> There is a huge focus on social, emotional learning, too huge for me. I think that those opportunities are available through his coursework where it's embedded in everything. I think their presentations that the kids give during the community meeting, community gathering to the whole school show that. There were some focus there. I think the teachers are trained to try to help the kids navigate normal, flareups through that type of a coming together and kind of reasoning out things. So absolutely it's there. Absolutely. What I noticed is that works really well, I think for very sensitive kids and there's an overcompensation on one side and not on the other side.

Karen. Karen found value in transparency and acknowledging mistakes. She found importance in making sure those in power acknowledge that they might not have all the knowledge:

> I think that especially in all of these 50,000 Zoom calls that we've had from March until present, the transparency and the humanity that the administration has had to show in terms of, 'I am learning as well,' and that's huge. And I think it's gone a long way when you can be true. I think that that's the cultural humility part, maybe because I'm not as, as adept in understanding the lingo, but just in terms of being able to say, number one, either I was wrong, or I didn't know, or I'm really trying to understand it.

Focus Group. The focus group input on power dynamics was congruent with other opinions of the importance of being humble and being open to acknowledging that others may also have the answers.

Tina. Tina was a parent with younger students who is outspoken and moderately engaged in the DEI work at school. She participated in the focus group and like Karen, she expressed comfort in the school admitting they might not have all the answers:

> One thing I feel like I have taken away from the experience of being at the school is that the organizations I work with, in my job, and in all of my work have been flattened a bit from what I have learned from this school. No one is above learning and being humble and understanding that they won't always know the answer, but they can respond to those who have questions. Not knowing the answer never poses a problem as they can find the answer and have resources to find answers.

The same focus group participants continued to discuss how power dynamics affect the messages for the whole school community, noting that the concerted messages coming from the board and the head of school about Black Lives Matter, helped to make it clear to everyone in the community the need to unite. The focus group conversation was rich with thought around

power being a key component of this work. Many shared how shifts in power led to change by hearing more voices.

Tina continued to discuss antiracism being an action where those in power in this instance need to stand up for those without power. Her children are in the early elementary years where students act with less agency. She said:

> Are we dealing with anti-racism or DEI? I feel like [the school] is strong is knowing what's diversity, equity, inclusion in terms of the teachers and the students and the offering of diverse literature and the celebrating various cultures. But, I don't know that the students are empowered to be anti-racist. Appreciating other cultures is one thing, but for me anyway, anti-racism is like an action. It is opposing racism. It's not simply accepting or tolerating difference. And I don't know if the children at are actually empowered to be allies. My kids are younger, so maybe the older kids do more, but I don't know that they know how to identify the harm that whiteness has caused people of color, with Black people. I don't think there's enough conversation around what is an ally? What is allyship and how do you support your, your friends who are, you know, how do you identify comments that are harmful, microaggressions? What is that, what does that look like? And what do you do as an ally? What does that for you at various stages in your life as small children? Um, so yeah, although I definitely appreciate where [the school] is, and I definitely agree that it's far and above most spaces, I think we still have work to do to truly be antiracist.

Amal chimed in on privilege and power in the school and recognized that there were still many people in the community who chose to send their kids to a diverse institution, but were not interested in doing the work, noting:

> I think you bring up really good points, first of all, diversity, like [parent] said is not the same as antiracism. So it's really easy to performatively say, my kid goes to a really diverse school. But all diversity means is a whole bunch of different types of whatever people, clothes. It just means many different types. But, when you're talking about the work of antiracism, [there] is a misalignment that a lot of people have . . . a lot of people want things to look a certain way, but then they don't want to do the work that it takes.

The conversation continued to discuss differences between DEI and antiracism and the role of power and privilege among some parents who continue to be uncomfortable with the work it takes to dismantle power. Amal continued to share how "privilege and advantage . . . blinds you to the ability to see that there might be another experience that somebody else might be having."

This rich discussion about power dynamics emerged in the focus group among Black parents and acknowledged the work that is still needed to continue to mitigate power relationships. Additionally, Dara spoke to continued need to dismantle power from in the school structure.

Dara. Speaking from her role on the board of directors, Dara began to chip away at the power structure from in by pushing the boundaries of what DEI really means, saying:

> I feel like you don't ask me to be the director of board for diversity, equity and inclusion, and then tell me I can't add socioeconomic diversity to the board. And I'll say that that's my current battle that I will not back down from. That's just kind of an example of, of

> how they'll listen. They do listen to me for some things, but often I can see them . . . reverting back to kind of the 'old boys club' that they're so used to. And then when you look at things like finance and all of that is just like all men, all White men for the most part . . . I have to like shake them up a little bit like, hey, hey, hey, wait, you guys, what about this? And so I am not afraid to speak up. Sometimes it takes me a few minutes to take a deep breath, but I do it.

In this experience, Dara discussed the power dynamic at the school tied to finances and governance. Her experience touched upon power dynamics related to socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity, she referenced how common it is to slip into an "old boys club" when those on the board are majority White men.

Power Dynamics Summary

Data from the parents very clearly indicated the school is consistently attempting to include more leadership for social justice by building capacity for reflection and partnership among stakeholders. The school acknowledges that dominant ideologies are present and are steeped in trying to identify moments and practices to dismantle that power.

Yet, work is still needed both among parent relationships and in the school structures. According to Foucault (1980), power is everywhere as it is the interconnectedness of complex situations in power systems as:

> The multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization . . . which, through ceaseless struggle and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or even reverses them; as the support which these

> force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another. (p. 92)

Schools must work to mitigate the imbalance so not only dominant culture prevails, but so different voices are lifted up as knowledge and truth. Finding more voices will provide new narratives of experience and challenge the status quo. Systemic changes must take shape around power and privilege in schools. Therefore, an approach to seeing everyone in the community as a unique member with their host of relationships and lived experiences becomes the important foundation with which to build equity and just spaces for all.

Creating Meaningful Partnerships

The third tenet of cultural humility focuses on creating meaningful partnerships. Senge (1995) found, "Sustainable communities hold a long-term perspective and thus understand their interdependence" (p. 465). The tenet of creating meaningful partnerships focuses on supportive interactions among intersections of existence with individuals that result in human exchanges that are positive and meaningful. Positive and meaningful interactions as an other-oriented stance of respect and openness to another's cultural background and viewpoints, is a mutual partnership that creates positive contact and collaboration (Hook et al., 2016). The parents as participants understand this more than anyone.

Nala. Partnership to Nala also included notions of hiring people that look like her children so her children get to see themselves in their teachers, and so all children look up to Black (or male) teachers as they would other White (female) teachers. Hiring a diverse faculty and staff to match the student body has been a focus for the school for the last 4 years. This is a meaningful partnership that validated how Nala, as an African American

parent, finds her place in the school. She also found that because there had been a commitment to state what the school stands for, she feels seen. Nala reported:

> In looking at the men who were being hired, we seem to be consistently getting more men who are coming in, who are remaining because all children need to have a male teacher, a Black male teacher, especially in the lower grades. So that's wonderful also. I mean the Board level commitment to Black Lives Matter is important as the partnership starts at the top. Certainly, [the school leader's] very verbal commitment to equity. I feel like the school is very open about becoming and being a lifelong learner about ways for not just racial justice. And just seeing so many spaces where we had holes before, or a band aid here, a band aid there really, a lot of thought has gone into these things and I'm looking forward to growing right along with you guys.

Nikita. Nikita sees partnerships as the cornerstone of what matters. If the school does not partner with the parents on this important and courageous shift, then the school is isolated in its power and privilege around change. Nikita shared:

> I think that it's one thing to have a school that is diverse and that wants to engage. I think with that, you get a limited number of people who are not afraid to engage and who are willing to participate. Once you have a head of school, step up and say, this is who we are, and this is who we're going to be. And if you were uncomfortable, this is not the place we're going to step in this and we're going to be uncomfortable and we're going to grow makes all of the difference. I think there are so many schools that are saying, this is who we want to be, and there's no leader saying, this is who we are. This is who we are, and this is who we're striving to be. I think that makes all of the difference in the world.

> Administrator wrapping her arms around anybody different that walks through those doors. Making people feel seen. I think we've got some administrators and some teachers who immediately identify folks and make them feel seen. And I think I have seen more of that in probably the last 3 or 4 years than in my 8 years. I think a lot of it has to do with a lot of the diverse hiring and staffing that [the school] has had. I think seeing Black teachers on the campus makes an enormous deal, Black males, teaching teachers of color, young teachers, teachers that identify throughout the spectrum amazing would be even better to have more. In terms of how I see myself at [the school], it's really helped to shape the authentic representation that I always really wanted to show.

The efforts by the school to publicly claim DEI efforts and hire for diversity are translated by parents as having been "seen" which indicates a real partnership in the work to change the school.

Cherie. Cherie's history with the DEI initiative started 9 years ago and the emphasis on having the conversation being the important piece to creating a sense of community. Cherie discussed one of the four pillars of the school mission. The pillar of DEI has "always been active and alive at the school and the numbers have always been there, but just the conversation around what are we doing around it that really started to grow." She added:

> I'm a community minded person and wanting to be engaged in that community and how the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion is that you can't just hang out with your own people. It doesn't work that way to really actually have those courageous conversations alone . . . it's been amazing to partner with families, to continue to have those conversations and be open to learning, because that's the other thing, you

> don't know until you've walked in someone's shoes, and sometimes, even as a Black mother of color, whether that's a Black mother of boys, I still have baggage from how I might perceive somebody else . . . so I think, again, it's really having the ability to have conversations and really break down those stereotypes and things that I've carried with me, it is important to challenge each other.

Maggie. Maggie's expectations of the partnership between home and school community were felt as more of a resource to be used by each and a resource for the community at large. Partnership to Maggie includes the environment the school lives in:

> Meaning partnership to me is more than partnering with the parents, it is a larger community effort, that changes more than the immediate. There was a moment not in the school walls, can I talk about that? The relocation of the homeless encampments that it took every part of the school community and beyond, homeless organizations, parents with connections to resources helping, the police department, it was comprehensive and was a call to arms with every partnership to do it in a humanitarian way and a human way that was quick and thorough and educational as the entire school community was driving down a street in order to wait in line to get dropped off. And that in I don't know sixth grade or so, the topic my daughter chose to research and help solve was home insecurity, is important. They learn to see something that doesn't feel right and learn about it and see if they can work with different partners to solve it.

In this comment, partnerships were described via the issues the school grappled with in partnership with parents, which extended to the community surrounding the school and even impacted student learning.

Anita. Finding one's place as a parent/caregiver in the community and the understanding that each person's place is distinct and unique, and it allows for multiple forms of involvement for all constituents. Anita emphasized that there were many ways to partner and insert oneself into the community and this connection has the potential to bring a sense of belonging and ownership to the school community at large, "This was a place that was about inclusion and that was about, listen, everybody's got a gift or a talent or time or whatever we're community, and let's all dig in." Anita understands that belonging does not happen everywhere and there is something unique about this school when it comes to inclusion and connection, saying:

> And so, I felt like it was a perfect match for my family. You want your child to be in an environment where there is inclusion and kindness and sense of community and a sense of welcoming and belonging. I knew that if I felt, that I knew she would feel that good. So, I think we do a really good job of bringing people along on the journey of diversity and equity inclusion. I was up in there, initially I'm like, yeah, I get it. I get it, I'm Black. I get it. You know, that wasn't my attitude, but in my mind, I think subconsciously, I felt like, but I'm telling you all of the material that we've either read together, the workshops, the meetings, the speaker series, heck it even extends to communications, right? [The Head of School] emails that he has sent that just ooze of justice and equality and compassion. It always serves to reground you. You think you know it because you are in the marginalized group, but it has been so refreshing to continue to learn. None of us has a Black belt in the "I" none of us care how diverse you are. There's always more to learn in terms of how to just continue on this journey together. I think the development and how that's not just for staff and

> faculty, how [the school] has brought everybody into that, the kids and the parents, and that has been amazing. That is so good.

Lindsay. Lindsay shared an understanding that the school is led by many and decisions are not made in isolation, but as part of a team Lindsay understands there could be a power dynamic, and that the head of school could lead alone, but she understands the value of having a team and a community that shares in the burden. She said:

> The staff is working incredibly hard and I think that having the board is good as a sounding board. I know there's a lot of people who do incredibly hard work on and that's what I like is [the Head of School] is not deciding things in a vacuum and he's always talking about the trustees, he's talking about the staff and everything is a very collective effort. And the way the community expresses that, so when you come into the school, it's not like everyone bows to [the head of school], he is part of the team, same with you, for the younger ones, and you are, you're one of us. Right. It's really important to have that feedback loop both with the staff and parents and also with the board too.

Lindsay's comment shows how the collaborative leadership approach conveys a sense of partnership with parents.

Dena. Dena described her connection to the school as fragmented. She understands the necessity for connection but has not always felt it. When sharing her experiences with meaningful partnerships, she described her social connection to others in the community, or lack of connection to the community, thus creating a rift between her and the community:

> The school has tried to do a big push for training and supporting and providing PD for teachers, continually and ongoing in many areas. The social, emotional. Yes.

> Antibias. Yes. DEI. Yes. I think it's done a good job to try to get teachers to actualize and realize how to improve interactions with parents and students, and probably more self-reflective or to look at themselves and how they show up in their classrooms. I haven't seen those trainings per se, but I do feel that there's a big push for that. I have a lot of experience supporting teachers in my profession. I was a grade level ambassador one year.

Dara. Partnership for Dara was more than her role as director of admission and more than her role on the board of trustees. It was about listening and acting, it was about lifting all the voices in the community. Dara saw growth from the school in the addition of a board committee that she would chair, as she shared how:

> They encouraged me by adding me to the board of trustees and giving me the assignment to start the diversity, equity and inclusion advisory committee for the board. That was telling me that we want to hear your voice. And so that was a way of welcoming me, I and saying, okay, we want to hear your voice. And so I started letting them hear my voice loud and clear. And although they're not always happy with what I have to say, I remind them that this is why I'm here. I'm not here to validate their voices. I don't get a paycheck anymore. I'm a volunteer being a board member and I speak for others.

The focus group continued to engage on notions of partnership and how partnership has the potential to create a sense of balance to the power dynamic. A network of social interchange among members of a community accumulates bodies of knowledge and skills essential for functioning and well-being partnership in a system (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014).

Partnership is tricky to the parents though as it is not always easy when it comes to race. For example, Tina shared:

> I think with parents really in particular, that antiracist conversation is an uncomfortable one for a lot of White parents, because I think, sorry, right now, to sit in a space, and acknowledge that they come from a people that have perpetrated all of these to people of color, Black people, people they might consider, you know, their children's friends, family, whatever is a very challenging space to go. I think, I mean, I think we saw it a tiny bit with families in those early conversations back in June. Um, there were White parents that were pretty resistant to acknowledging the place that they stand in. And it feels like it's a big conversation. It's about part of empowering our kids means that parents are also having to have that conversation because parents are pushing back on the idea that racism is the foundation of our country.

Referenced in this quote were the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor by police in June 2020, which kickstarted a racial movement in society and the school responded with several events and conversations. Although this conveyed a sense of partnership, it also meant that not all parents were comfortable, particularly White parents who needed to acknowledge their privilege. Tani continued:

> I think [DEI has] gone a long way with people finding affinity and leaning into very hard conversations. I was talking with one of the mothers a couple of years ago, she's a mom from our class, a White mother who said that some of the people who have been hesitant to attend . . . need to be invited, which, you know, on the one hand is kind of like ridiculous. You intentionally found a school that is diverse and while no

> one knew what was going to come with that experience, you know, so now you don't want to lean in because it's hard. And so I said to her why I thought that was very interesting, that she felt that some of the white parents needed to be invited into the conversation. But to that end, I think the school invites people to come . . . scheduling things in the morning, there's things in the evenings, there are the speaker series . . . [they] have been amazing. And so there are lots of entry points for people at different levels of their racial understanding and the racial sensibilities. I also think the school has been very open with, okay, tell us, there's definitely things they don't know. And how do we fix what we don't know? And I feel that a real effort has been made to get closer to what feels more equitable for the children of color who are at the school.

The partnership had been challenging for many parents but rewarding. Participation in the first few years of the DEI program was limited and people were not always sure the work was intended for them. This changed dramatically the last 4 years of the committee work.

Meaningful Partnerships Summary

Data from parents indicated meaningful partnerships were imperative. The commitment to systematically advocate for others is a tenet of cultural humility, one that supports meaningful partnerships. Data from parents very clearly indicated meaningful partnerships were integral to their own experiences in the school. Parents felt more and more that their voices were being heard at the school. One parent did not feel this way and felt although they had expertise in areas of education and race, they still were not tapped as a partner in the school. Her voice was the outlier as others felt the transformation from years ago when nothing was ever talked about.

When communities come together and all stakeholders act as "funds of knowledge," daily routines maintain family and community well-being. The functioning of a community dedicated to meaningful partnership can access a critical home-school interconnection that becomes urgent. An asset-based dynamic where each side understands and feels their worth and agency is optimal (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). School leadership must engage and advocate for its community interests by creating structures that accommodate the lives of caregivers and creating school spaces for marginalized students or parents speak to the community aspect of a school system (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Emergent Theme: Navigating Spaces

In addition to the three tenets of cultural humility, an additional theme emerged from the interviews and focus group. The concept of Navigating Spaces was a common experience among parents and describes the sentiment showing a switch between cultural spaces and social situations to make others feel more comfortable distinctively denying their own culture and history.

Nala. Learning to navigate White spaces for a Nala was an important part of her growing up attending integrated schools. She found herself in mixed spaces and knew she needed to act according to the mores and rules for Black girls. Her ability to navigate different spaces is a direct antecedent to how she parents her children. She said:

> That I grew up, very clear that I belonged, and I always felt equal to my counterparts. And so I always felt like I could navigate spaces pretty well. I never worry about being the only Black person in the room. And that has happened on a multitude of occasions. It's not intimidating or anything like that. I just, I think I learned to sort of

see people for who they are with regard to their character, how they conducted themselves or these people who did what they said they were going to do. And I think race has always been sort of underlying, I didn't necessarily lead with, Oh, there is a White person and therefore this experience will be this way. It wasn't that. And I think that's largely because of going to integrated schools.

Nikita. Nikita's upbringing informed her presence in two worlds. Her ability to code-switch was due to her ability to navigate White spaces easily. She said:

I grew up in a very multicultural [community] and so I think that's informed me quite a bit as to how I walk and move through spaces through an educational lens. My background has been predominantly White spaces, and so that's informed me as to how I code switch, how I pay attention to the temperature in a room. And just how far I push the button in terms of my opinions. My points of view, how I think people will accept or relate to those, knowing that people are on different levels of cultural humility, diversity equity, inclusion, that, that growth path for me at [the school]. I think it really, really gives me my background gives me the patience and the understanding to know that we have a community that is willing to engage and therefore I feel safer, um, not having to code switch. I feel safer being able to push and say what I want to say, probably more so in this environment at [the school] than in my professional career and in any of my own personal educational environments, which I think speaks volumes to the work that [the school] has done and the safe space that [the school] is creating for our families.

Cherie. Growing up in predominantly White spaces, Cherie learned early about creating cultural connections to other Black families and understanding living in white spaces. She stated:

> That's also the world and I would say the same thing on the faculty staff side, going through the different programmatic things that have been provided in DEI again allows us to have conversations and it can be frustrating because you really are not ready or it's I'm uncomfortable, good, this is good. And I'm uncomfortable too, but this is, this is the only way that we're going to change. So, I think again, in that aspect of providing situations, programs, speakers, videos, books, that the school is certainly made steps and strides in that direction, but the reality is, this world is just not that world and we can't shield it from them. It has to be appropriate, but I think for my eighth grader, it's really more about providing affinity groups and providing spaces and because [the school] and because of the village that we have, there's stuff that we've taken outside of school just to continue to fortify that, but it wouldn't have happened if the school didn't provide the underpinnings for who they are and having conversations, obviously family life has a lot to do with it too.

The acute recognition and understanding that the work is challenging and courageous at the same time is what allows for the growth. Discomfort became a journey to understanding and connection and only then can the real antibias work begin. Cherie grasped that concept.

Maggie. Maggie recognized the need for affinity spaces for parents and saw the value for all parents:

> I am constantly intrigued by the separation of the moms in our class. On the one hand we have this beautiful relationship with the Black moms, and we adore each other and have grown together as a cohort, yet, I am an outsider. A respectful outsider watching from the outside what I can't be part of. It is beautiful and what makes [the school] so special.

This spoke to Maggie's understanding and respect for different spaces created to support different members of the community.

Anita. Anita's ability to walk in different spaces helped define her life. She knew she could navigate multiple spaces and recognized that as a gift. She said:

> I grew up in schools where I was the only Black kid, so I know what it feels like to be the only, so imagine being like the only in, in a school, and then you got all this other family stuff going on that you're pretty sure your friends don't have going on too.

Dena. Dena's perspective was interesting as she was educated in the world of independent schools and felt like people made assumptions of her as a Black woman and she struggled with her place through those assumptions. She said:

> I walk in the room, I present as Black, and then people make assumptions about that. I'm always having to debunk those, like, no, I'm not first-generation college. I'm actually third generation college and it's just a never-ending cycle that is exhausting.

This sense of exhaustion was not unique to the parents interviewed. Their sense of continually working to make things better was at the core of their partnership:

> I see [the school] is a little bit more diverse than kind of a lot of independent schools in Los Angeles that I'm familiar with. I think it places the school in a good position in terms of positionality and understanding how social cultural constructs can be manifested in schools. I also think it places me particularly at a disadvantage because I find more dissatisfaction and things that happen in satisfaction because I'm always looking for things to be better. And I'm always looking at things from a research standpoint. So, for me, it's kind of like a double-edged sword and then I also think I

bring a background of the lived experiences of a Black person who has battled that kind of bifurcated life, meaning you look at me and you see I'm Black.

Dara. Dara went to public schools in the 1970s and found herself unprepared for college because her public high school experience could not compare to that of other students who attended private high schools and better public high schools. She shared how this had such a great impact on her culture shock in her first years of college, saying:

> So how does my background basically influence how I interpret my place in the school? I think my background, I went to a public school, not a well-funded public school, then I went to college. I went to a public school in an all-Black city and basically I went to an all-white college. So, I had major culture shock when going to college. I was the typical teen thinking, this is just not fair, you know, my experience because I would compare it to some of the other students, I would ask other students about their experience. And they were like, Oh yeah, we had this, we had that in our high school. I was like, this work seems so easy to you. They're like, yeah, we had this book in high school and, and we covered, I remember I had German and we covered everything I had learned in German in my first week at college. I was at a great disadvantage, but I learned to move around the space. And I had like 3 years of German in high school. We covered it all in my 1st week of college. And so, um, I, so at that point I could really see the injustices at an early age which kind of turned me into an advocate, a social justice advocate. So I volunteered, volunteered, volunteered in all different kinds of programs. I was, I was a big sister and a mentor and a tutor. I was always that person who I just felt like it was my job to provide support for the people who, uh, you know, like for, for all of the inequities that were

going on and making sure all the people coming into the school, um, most, I mean, specifically people of color, but just everyone.

During the focus group, the idea of learning how to navigate different spaces emerged as each participant shared about their own childhood and how being Black in predominantly white spaces affected them.

Tani. Tani's experience with her grade level was different than that of the other parents. She found many of the parents, who were happy to say they send their kids to a private school that is very diverse, really did not embrace the challenge of what everyone must do in the school to move forward. She was very disillusioned by some of the parents she is in class with, saying:

> It was shocking to really see that there is within this community that I'm so proud of, that there were families that really did not understand what it meant to be anti-racist or what it meant to be colorblind, but even a step further. So, it made me feel like there was some kind of misalignment between them choosing this school with not understanding kind of where the leadership is, because for them to have said that [the head of school's] emails regarding Breonna Taylor or, you know, a student's, um, [gender] transition were too political, there was some kind of misalignment in their choice of school. And I don't . . . understand how they, if they're not supportive of that, how they could choose a school for their children that is taking these strong stances as, as appropriate.

Navigating Spaces Summary

In addition to the three tenets of cultural humility, the theme of navigating spaces emerged from the data. A commonality Black parents shared was the challenges they had when

they were younger about learning to navigate white spaces and learning to navigate their own feelings around their own identity in those spaces. Nikita shared how she felt at this school:

> I personally am and how I thought I needed to represent myself at the school versus how I'm able to represent myself at the school. I was a little concerned about being someone that was very neutral that did not make any strong proclamations as to who we are as a school or who I am personally. I thought I needed to just be a good neutral representation.

Anita clarified how challenging navigating the spaces as the only Black kid in her schools was for her:

> I know what it's like to sort of be the underdog. I grew up in schools where I was the only Black kid, so I know what it feels like to be the only, so imagine being like the only in a school, and then you got all this other family stuff going on that you're pretty sure your friends don't have going on too. I think all of that piled into one big ball of me is just about inclusion and kindness and service and flat out just trying to make things better on a macro level. And it could be totally insignificant. I don't need the limelight, I don't need the shine, but if you can just help someone through whatever means, whether it could be a hug, like, you know what I mean?

In terms of my own role as an administrator, the findings presented here inspired me to ask: What is it to navigate a space as a white woman with privilege and power? Whose space do I take up? The space is what we create together, how can I inspire spaces that are just and caring and open? It means I must be an ally, a coconspirator. It means I must challenge the ways that we have done things in the school that may perpetuate a dominant historical narrative. I must consistently ask myself and my colleagues to make sure what and how the school engages is just

and equitable and serves the needs of all the students. It means making decisions that might not be popular. It means creating connections and spaces that are safe and trusted for all. The initiative began as a space created to come together to have hard conversations 8 years ago and it has grown into so much more. With true celebrations of being, of culture, of livelihood, of taking care of one another, of loving each other's children like our own, of standing on a corner with second grade Black boys to support their vision for the world, of creating change-makers whose voice is heard, to raise up the voices of all our students.

Summary of Findings

Each participant experienced the world differently. Noddings (1986) emphasized the collaborative nature of research as a process is one in which all participants see themselves as participants in the community, which has value for both researcher, practitioner, and community member. These experiences were vastly diverse. Capturing the complexity of their relationships to the school and the initiatives of the DEI work at the school is challenging. Making coherent meaning of a diversity of experience, looking critically at the system they all shared, was why listening to the voices of the participants in the setting was so important. Listening to participant voices in the community has an impact on the ways I lead, on the ways the school runs, mindful of community members' feelings of belonging or otherness or complicity or allyship. Past events were interpreted, creating new meanings around newer events. The narrative research and dialogical aspect of telling stories was not only about gathering and reporting their stories, but about the researcher and the participants engaging in a meaning-making collaborative process of

storytelling and restorying (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). By listening to their stories, I have a better understanding of the DEI initiative at this private, independent K–8 school.

Cocreating the knowledge production was distinct to the school and the social hierarchies are chipped away at bit by bit. Connection and agency are what allows the community to understand the interconnectedness of the system. Nikita united and connected people to the spaces. This skill was nourished at the school site. As Nikita has not been in my immediate circle of caregivers, I have used her so much as a sounding board, as a temperature check of where parents are with what we are doing. She was honest and real and would not tell me what I hoped to hear, but what I needed to hear. I was caught in the listening and writing of this work of my own positionality in the system perpetuating some instances of linear white supremacy culture as a point of power in the school site and writing from a position of parent and administrator. Recalling the moment, I had to enlist her perspective when it perhaps was her own voice I might be quieting. Nikita was interviewed by two eighth-grade boys about her knowledge of and experiences with the Black Panthers. This was a community gathering video for the entire school. As an administrator of younger students as well, I questioned how valuable this would be for kindergarten through second grade students. I went directly to Nikita to ask her thoughts and feelings about perhaps having the teachers preview the interview before showing it for a community gathering and picking pieces of it out. I needed her honest opinion of what should be done. I needed to know if she felt this was a power move and a denial of Black history. This parent is a partner for us as a school, but more importantly a partner for me. Coming from my position of power and privilege in the school, I needed her guidance and her blessing.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to uncover how the school engaged the whole community in a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiative that could successfully bring about change. Through the analysis of school documents, one-on-one narrative interviews, and a longer focus group of Black parents, I was able to gather a diverse wealth of stories and experiences that were meaningful and educational to address the research questions:

1. What does the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiative look like in a preschool to eighth-grade independent school?
2. What personal self-reflective lessons can be learned during the journey toward the empowerment and advancement of all stakeholders in a diverse community focused on cocreating change?
3. What are the possibilities for creating institutional mindfulness around documenting the social justice dimensions of a collaborative community?

In this chapter, I discuss the findings and provide responses to the research questions more explicitly, to focus on how to cocreate change and institutional mindfulness around equity. I also share implications of the research, implications for future research, and recommendations for praxis.

Discussion of Findings

The relevance of this research was to assist transformation in schools. Schools hold the next generation of democratic citizens who must think and act responsibly and educators are tasked with the mission of educating critical thinkers and providing experiences that value

students and their families by acknowledging that culture shapes experiences and perspectives. Characteristics imperative to having a school setting that is transformational include: critical self-awareness, care, respect, cultural awareness, lifelong learning, institutional and personal accountability, advocacy for equity and social justice, and supportive interaction. These characteristics must exist to have humility.

DEI Initiative

To answer the first research question, the study clearly documented the DEI efforts at the school. The DEI efforts included all stakeholder groups in the school (i.e., students, faculty/staff, and parent/caregiver). Students were engaged weekly in social justice content and curriculum with an effort to help students explore identity. There was a social emotional curriculum based on understanding identity from kindergarten through the eighth grade. Faculty and staff began the year with deep introspective work on the self and continue during the year to have professional development experiences monthly for continued learning and work around DEI for themselves and their students. Caregivers were offered workshops at least once a month on topics that help support conversations in the home around justice and equity. The board of trustees has had workshops addressing bias and equity and has had a committee dedicated to maintaining DEI efforts across the school. The structure of the leadership committee for many years incorporated faculty and staff and parent participants who worked together to create programming and experiences for all members of the community. The DEI leadership team, composed of 10–15 faculty and staff members each year, established and maintained an environment of trust and connected and intentional professional development for the entire community. In the 2020–2021 school year, the role of first ever director of DEI was filled, and

the work became institutionalized in a different capacity that validated preexisting work on the issues of race and justice and equity in the school, which had been an initiative the DEI Leadership Team had been working and urging for years. It is a team that is proactive and culturally responsive in the work and when issues arise.

Care and Cultural Humility

> The primary aim of every educational institution and of every educational effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring. It functions as end, means, and criterion for judging suggested means. It establishes the climate, a first approximation to the range of acceptable practices, and a lens through which all practices and possible practices are examined. (Noddings, 2003, p. 172)

Based on the parents' narratives and focus group responses, it was clear the school attempted to care for all members of the community. The primary aim of the institution was to make sure each stakeholder was cared for and pushed to grow. The tenets of cultural humility, including self-critique, dismantling the power dynamic, and creating lasting partnerships endeavors to create true opportunities for involvement and collaboration around these tenets. Even with all positive intentions, the space of independent schools is traditionally a white space and traditionally in independent schools is a dominant school culture that functions to support the values of the dominant culture, unintentionally marginalizing experiences that are common to oppressed groups (Darder, 2002; Nieto, 2007). But, in the stories told, it was also evident the DEI initiatives across the school were beginning to create an institutional mindfulness around creating partnerships that empower voice and action from all stakeholders to create change. The school has been dedicated to living a sense of diversity in family, staff, and community as visible and

philosophical practices. The institution has been committed to engaging in courageous, deep, and challenging work. The work the school has built over the years has been focused on the social justice dimensions of a collaborative community by addressing barriers and social injustices at individual and institutional levels (Foronda et al., 2016).

Participants concurred creating a way for all stakeholders to be self-reflective and to critically evaluate their institution has enhanced the work the school has done. There was agreement their children, the students in the school, have done this work, and the adults have learned how to be more self-reflective from them. Being self-reflective in this self-reflection enhances an understanding of the importance of connectivity and community. Social capital creates ties and bonds increasing social adhesion to groups of people that brings people together (Narayan, 1999). Those with whom we have social capital are important assets in our success and creates a web of connectivity to others that can support and enliven. Those who engage in true, deep, critical self-reflection can connect to others and create social ties and social capital. By understanding the fluid nature of culture and challenging individuals and institutions to be self-evaluative enhances the connection process (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

The second aspect of cultural humility interrogated was the commitment to redress power imbalances. Redressing the power imbalance in institutions acknowledges power differentials exist and it urges the opportunity to question and commit to institutional accountability (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014). Institutional accountability encourages practitioners and institutions to ask and understand what structural forces come into play when addressing issues. A commitment to holding the institution to a standard that questions its own effectiveness, professional training, and strategic planning in imperative for aiming to grow and transform as an institution (Fisher-

Borne et al., 2014). The outcome of listening to voices of the community was an act of mitigating power dynamics. Nikita stated:

> there is a requirement for everyone to engage. That's going to make a huge difference. The power shift of those who have been living in fantasyland and enjoying the diversity now must get their feet wet. And I think that's going to really level conversation where it should be.

This is a direct shift to the traditional structure of schools where few have the power. Here there was an understanding the dynamic must shift. This experience did not locate one person or entity at the center of transactions, but it enriched and enabled all stakeholders to create a more just and caring environment for each other (Banks & Banks, 1995).

Having a mutual understanding, involvement and awareness challenges the members of a community to build upon the assets and strengths of the community (Fullan, 2005). Creating mutually beneficial partnerships resonated with each participant as they felt connected to the school community as they recognized that each member brings their own lens and identity. The dominant culture typically possesses a power that allows it to set the agenda others will follow (Porter & Samovar, 1991), but understanding engagement and partnership creates something different in schools to challenge and necessitate shift. Instead of approaching the research as other-oriented, a collaborative effort with community members have represented themselves, their experiences, their words as the life of the school. Fine (2016) noted, "We consider now how the production of knowledge is transformed when those who have been objectified by scholarship shape the inquiry" (p. 55).

Lessons Learned

Schools, as learning communities, must be places where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they desire and where people continually learn how to learn from one another (Senge, 1995). As the world becomes more interconnected and complex and dynamic, schools must tap into people's commitment, capacity, and desire to learn and collaborate placing great emphasis on relationships, shared ideals, and building a strong culture of care. The qualities of cultural humility that create spaces in schools for interconnected existence are openness, self-awareness, egoless, supportive interaction, and self-critique (Foronda et al., 2016). Schools must find ways to embody these qualities to move forward in their transformation.

Institutional Mindfulness

Written into the school equity and inclusion goals in the 2018–2019 school year was the goal to "build a strong community of accomplices and allies with institutional mindfulness." Institutional mindfulness refers to an entire community's awareness of the initiative. Making clear communication and goals for sustaining an environment that validates and raises up all voices, especially those voices typically marginalized, becomes a mission. Trust, compassion, love, and commitment are the foundation for the work and a shared vision of the interconnected nature of all stakeholders and their experiences is imperative. Institutional mindfulness incorporates promoting understanding and addressing issues when they arise, identifying and honor justice, and respecting multiple perspectives and contributions. These goals of the work truly value the dignity of all.

As the primary aspect of cultural humility embrace a deep critical self-reflection, personal lessons were learned during the journey toward the empowerment and advancement of all stakeholders. One is that you need to ask the hard and important questions. If schools are not centering the voices of those on the margin and listening with an openness, then the structures and ideologies of only the dominant narrative that sustain privilege are going to be sought. Engaging in critical dialogue in the community. Two is that cocreating change means other voices are present in a diverse community. Some of the lessons learned center on listening and openness.

Does the institutional ethos support inclusion and respectful substantive discussions of implications of difference? What institutional processes contradict or impede or obstruct the lessons taught and learned? What's next for our school community? What's next for me falling away from the parent role and maintaining only a leadership role?

Limitations

True to all research, findings must be interpreted with the limitations of the study in mind. A key limitation to this study was my dual role as both administrator and parent. As I interviewed the participants, I was always keenly aware of my own positionality and was in an ongoing process of identity negotiation to reduce power differentials between participants and myself as researcher. My own inability to successfully participate in the interviews as a dialogical partner in story sharing of my own account was a miss. My post interview reflections captured much of my sentiments, but the conversation in the interviews and focus group was missing. That said, my previous and ongoing relationships with the participants may have also led to more open conversation about the systems of the school. To truly engage in the topic of

culture humility, the entire community, including my own dual roles as administrator and parent, must be included for an authentic exchange of experiences to occur and to lead to change and transformation.

Recommendations for Future Praxis

This research might be relevant to administrators and school leaders. Although the findings are unique to one school site, it is possible that the experiences shared transfer to others and offer insights on how schools might build DEI work through a collaborative and culturally humble framework. The understanding that building capacity in an entire school community is how schools should start. Everyone must be on board to transformation. Schools must put social justice at the top of their vision for educating lifelong learners. Looking forward, cultural humility, found mostly in the medical field and psychology, would be an important addition to cultural competency theory for new teachers and administrators. Although more research on cultural humility in educational spaces is needed, participating in this research experience convinces me as a school leader to include cultural humility as a central component of teacher and leader training. As such, preparation programs for educators are encouraged to embed cultural humility in their programs. In thinking about organizational change, cultural humility as a framework for leadership has the possibility to create inclusive environments that can bring about sustainable change.

Schools should meaningfully engage the parents/caregivers in the community to talk to diverse group of parents and build relationships among the stakeholders. Building relationships among stakeholders would help the school learn about the families and students and create true connection and partnership. By including families in the conversation and simply listening to

people's stories is powerful. There was an intense gratitude parents felt participating in the journey to understanding and movement in the DEI mission, even the parents who did not have all positive experiences in the school.

Conclusion

Schools must create environments where the community can engage in open and real conversations about race and bias and the dialogue must be commonplace (Fisher, 2020). There must be intentional and scheduled time for participation in work around building cultural humility. The participants shared their lived experiences in a school that has tried to dedicate itself to meeting the community needs. It is evident that the school has made a real and lasting effort to transform the community to incorporate antiracist and culturally humble practices. As part of cultural humility, the work is never done, but it is a dedication to lifelong growth and change at its core. Participants discussed their ability to self-reflect and to be a partner in the journey with the school. Participants' desire to disrupt power dynamics and the participants ability to navigate different spaces was also at the fore. I conclude this dissertation with my own positionality and experiences in the independent school, which partially led to the creation of the DEI initiative 10 years ago.

I am a White, gay, parent and senior administrator at an independent school. I am a decision maker and I have power and privilege in the institution. The school is a diverse, private, independent school that is progressive and forward thinking. By its very nature of being a school, there are structures and hierarchies that create an imbalance. The school is extremely diverse for a private school in west Los Angeles, the school has 57% of students identifying as students of color and 35% of families are on financial assistance. As an intentional effort, more than 50% of

the school staff identify as people of color. The school is known for the work of equity and inclusion as foundational, visible, and prominent attributes of the school.

My positionality is reflected in my praxis in the ways that I connect, listen, react, and encourage thought and change around social justice and equity-oriented teaching, leadership, and community building. Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy, critiquing inequitable practices. Education and educational leadership are bound to one another with the wider social context as potential in practice (Shields, 2010). I am assistant head of school, I am a coach, first grade and kindergarten reading group teacher, a chess teacher, the faculty representative for the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer Plus) student group, a middle school advisor, a coach, and I have overseen (2013–2019) the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leadership Team. I am a parent of two middle school students at the school, and an alumna. I am the eyes and ears of the community as a constituent of all those categories. In my role, I hear from students, from teachers, from parents, from board members, from alumnae and in my positionality, I am a member of all these stakeholder categories so my connection to the thoughts and fears and hopes of all become my life's work.

I am in a position of privilege and power in my leadership role. It is my intent to be a culturally responsive leader by being proactive and responsive and remain connected to what is relevant in all aspects of school culture and climate from hiring to classroom pedagogy to maintaining partnerships with the community. I keep the conversation alive in all these spaces. I sit in my seat as a White, gay woman in a leadership role. I make many decisions and I have the ear of those in power when I need it. I try to use my power to unravel much of the privilege that is inherent in independent schools, yet in doing so still assert my own sense of privilege and

power. It is the job of a school leader to continually question and evaluate if decisions are being made with justice, care, critique, and community in mind. The sense of institutional self-critique and reflection is the first step. Who feels marginalized? When you have a predominantly White administration, whose experiences are being listening to? I do try to create different forums for sharing thoughts, feelings and hopes for the school from students, teachers, and the community. Culturally responsive leadership practices recognize the importance of knowing the school climate for minoritized students, particularly those who are typically marginalized (Khalifa et al., 2016). Culturally responsive leaders influence school climate, structure, teacher efficacy, and student outcomes. I am acutely attuned to the school climate, perhaps mostly through my lens as a White woman, but connected to experiences of many other constituents.

There is an intersection of interests always at play in making decisions for all students. The intersection of all constituents, the interlocking systems of oppression in a school culture is very complex and the resulting conclusions, recommendations, and change strategies are necessary (DeMatthews et al., 2017). People have multiple identities and people live, work, and experience life in multiple, intersecting, and concurrent positions of privilege and oppression. In reflecting on my own praxis, I try to situate myself and allow the voices of the community to emerge. I listen to the experiences so I can begin to try to understand, accommodate, and respond to the educational, social, political, and cultural needs of the students, teachers, and parents (Khalifa et al., 2016). In all my roles, I aim to be critically self-aware and self-conscious and incorporate a self-awareness of values, beliefs or dispositions, a critical consciousness when they lead and make decisions (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Why is this work important to me? When my children entered kindergarten in the school 9 years ago, there was a moment that impacted the direction my leadership would take. The kindergarten teachers in a flurry called my office and said that the parent who was to read to the kindergarten students did not show up, could I come read a book to the kids. I hurried down the hall to the classroom and sat in the rocking chair in front of 20 kindergarteners and asked the teachers what book I should read. They shared that I was supposed to bring a book. I asked them to give me any book and they threw me *And Tango Makes Three*. I was happy to see that they had the books that I had bought for all the early elementary classrooms about diverse families, and this was one. I read the book, about two male penguins parenting a hatchling that had no parents in the New York City Zoo, the sweet story essentially about same-sex adoptive parents is a sweet and beautiful story. It also ignited comments and questions from 5- to 6-year-olds. From the mouths of babes:

"Wait, two boy penguins can't be together."

"Two boy penguins can't take care of the baby penguin."

"Of course two boy penguins can be together, look at Mason and Georgia, they have two moms."

"Well, there is a dad somewhere."

"There doesn't have to be a dad."

"No, I don't have a dad, I just have my two moms."

I finished the book, allowing the students to continue pondering their own connections to the text. I did not really answer their questions, simply allowed the conversation to exist. I realized I had opened a topic that might (although it should not) have more questions than

answers for the students. I met with the kindergarten teachers after school to address all the questions. In retrospect, I would have just sent a note to all the kindergarten families immediately letting them know that in kindergarten we were discussing diverse family structures and tell them about the book that was read to the class. But I waited to check in with kindergarten teachers and in the next few hours, there were queries from parents if we had taught their kids that it was okay to have same-sex parents and that the parents would have liked to have been the ones to tell their kids or even worse, yet only a few cases of "those values do not align with the faith in our home." As an openly gay and out educator for my entire career, in this school I would be no different. This was my second year in the school and there was no hiding my sexuality or my family make-up with three children in the school and my partner as a grade-level ambassador. We were parent partners with this cohort and already quite close to many families, some of whose children spent many hours in our home. This connection still did not halt the questions and concern over what the children were exposed to.

The issue rose to senior staff leadership, of which I am a part. In the meeting, I believe I assumed everyone at the table (eight members) would be as outraged as I was. A few of them were not as they understood the questions of the parents. I left the room for the group to discuss openly without having to worry about my feelings and I called my partner and discussed that maybe this was not the right home for our family. In about 20 minutes, the head of school came in to tell me how valued we are here and that he will support anything I felt we needed to do. This was the beginning of the next 8 years of DEI work that would move the institution forward with a social justice lens that it only subtly had, but so desperately needed to create.

One member of the senior staff team approached me, the director of admission, a likeminded African American woman, and said, “This is just the beginning of our work together, Stacey. Let’s talk.” She and I sat down for hours, and I listened. I listened to her stories, to her struggle to be heard, and to her hope to be part of the story. Together we began to create a way to engage in the dialogue and together we created what is the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leadership Team that is now a pillar in the mission of the school. Through this critical narrative case study examining the stories of its members and the work at this independent school, I have a renewed sense of gratitude for the people committed to the work. I look forward to the work with a focus of the tents of cultural humility that engage critical self-reflection, institutionally and personally, to mitigating the power dynamics embedded in the school system, and to creating meaningful and lasting partnerships. The school belongs to the people enveloped in, it is all of ours and I honor those who choose to be a part of the community as “the act of remembrance is a conscious gesture honoring their struggle, their effort to keep something for their own” (hooks, 1994, p. 43).

Next Steps for Schools Beyond Cultural Competence

Concurrent work with the faculty and staff, the students, and the parent/caregiver communities is essential. For the parent/caregiver community, engage the school members with workshops, surveying the climate, and begin the work on critical self-reflection as an institution and for each individual. Begin to create a space to listen to the parent/caregiver stories and experiences. For the faculty and staff, begin to name the goals for transformation around cultural identity, and share the goals of care and humility. Make sure the faculty, staff, and leadership represent and reflect the community. Encourage the community to ask questions so all members

of the community understand their value and connection to the work. Encourage respectful and substantive discussions about difference. Learn how to engage in difficult conversations. Build meaningful relationships with the parent/caregiver community for the student community, listen to their experiences, create spaces where the can feel safe, begin the work on critical self-reflection, embed cultural humility into the curriculum daily. Ask questions and teach students to ask questions. This work is student-centered and is responsive to the needs of the students and the work all the other stakeholders do, is simply to support the growth and transformation of the students so in the school community they are held and cared for so they may go out and help create a world that is more just and caring and more culturally humble.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The three interviews will be conducted during 60 minutes with questions to guide reflection and incorporate an open-ended environment. The interview questions are suggestions for content; the researcher will follow the stories and narratives of the participants to create themes and gathering personal reflections to re-story narratives (Creswell, 2009).

1. How do you think your background and life experiences (family history, culture, educational influences, political understandings, generational context, gender, sexual orientation) influence how you interpret your place in the school?
2. What experiences in the school community have shaped how you see yourself in the areas of the school?
3. In what ways does the school encourage critical self-awareness and reflection?
4. In what ways has there been a commitment to mitigate power imbalances?
5. In what ways does the school have a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique?
6. In what ways does the school try to develop mutually beneficial partnerships in the community?

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

1. How does the DEI Team at school help create an environment for an antiracist education?
2. The cultural humility framework includes lifelong critical reflection and learning (institutional and individual), mitigating power imbalances, and developing mutually beneficial partnerships. How does the DEI efforts relate to the cultural humility framework?
3. What is next for the DEI work? What is needed?
4. If the focus of creating an antiracist community is a goal, what has the school done to move toward that goal? What more can the school do?

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