

A Collective Approach to Building an Equitable and Inclusive System that Meets the Needs of Marginalized Populations in Education

Kimmmie Tang
California State University, Dominguez Hills

Ursula Estrada-Reveles
Riverside County Office of Education

There are multiple theoretical frameworks for systematic equity and leadership development, each providing a different perspective towards a systemic approach to equity and inclusive education for marginalized populations. Although we recognize that there is no single framework or solution to build equitable and inclusive education systems, we feel that there is a need to understand how a collective approach could build a more inclusive and diverse equitable education system that meets the needs of all students. Therefore, the goal of this paper is not to promote one framework over another, but to illustrate the discussion, used in one example of Glenn Singleton's framework. Our purpose is to promote an understanding as to how one might connect to such a framework in a meaningful way. As a result, this article explains the application of the Pacific Educational Groups Systemic Racial Equity Transformation Framework as an example of how such a framework can be used within educational leadership programs to promote the development of key concepts among students. We also provide a synthesis of recent articles published in our journal for the past 10 years and discuss how they apply to this model.

Keywords: systemic equity, marginalized populations, underserved, people of color

We are living in a time of an international pandemic which will have a lasting impact on the education system. Without a doubt, the education and well-being of students are being challenged by the ever-changing dynamics of at-home learning and the use of technology. Providing an equitable education for all students in California has become more challenging than ever. While the focus of this article is not on the specific disparities that are currently occurring within the pandemic, the larger question still looms. Due to the effect of COVID-19, there was no achievement testing for the 2019-2020 academic school year. Therefore, we will consider the achievement data for the 2018-2019 school year.

According to the EdSource Report on the 2019 Smarter Balanced Assessment results for California, the students' test scores rose marginally in 2018-19 for the fifth year of the tests. However, there was little to no progress in closing wide disparities among ethnic, racial and other student groups. As EdSource described the data on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) from 2015 to 2019, it was evident that race played a key role in the outcomes. Asian students started out high in 2015 and continue to outperform their white counterparts. White students followed as the second highest with 65.42% scoring proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) and 54.24% scoring proficient in math. Latinx students began at approximately 32% proficient in 2015 for ELA and attained 40.56% proficient in ELA with 21% proficient in math in 2015 and 28.5% proficient in 2019. While African-American students began in 2015 with 28% proficient in ELA and 33% proficient in 2019 and 16% proficient in math in 2015 and 20.4% proficient in 2019. This still leaves a gap of 24.86% between white and Latinx students in ELA in 2019 and a gap of 33.84% between white and African American students in 2019 in mathematics.

The report by The Civil Rights Project titled, *The Hidden Cost of California's Harsh School Discipline* (2017) describes the disproportionate suspension rates based on ethnicity. According to the Kids Data Website, for every 1,000 students:

- 60 homeless students were suspended compared to 34 non-homeless students
- 45 socioeconomically disadvantaged students were suspended compared to 19 socioeconomically advantaged students
- 66 students with disabilities were suspended compared to 30 students without disabilities
- 92 African-American students, 73 American Indian, 36 Latinx students and 30 white students were suspended

Not only are suspensions disproportionate, but according to a report by the Civil Rights Project, this impacts the graduation rates of students. For example, of the students who were suspended even once only 60% graduated, while for those who were never suspended, 83% graduated. This is significant when one closely examines who is impacted most by such suspensions. Whether one considers academic achievement, suspension rates, or graduation rates, there is a compelling need to examine the role that race plays.

In an effort to not only view the role that race plays in public schooling, but in an effort to find solutions that work for all, this article explains the Pacific Educational Groups Systemic Racial Equity Transformation Framework. We also provide a synthesis of recent articles published in our journal and discuss how they apply to this model. The goal of this paper is to explore this concept further, via a review of articles in the CAPEA Journal for the past 10 years.

In the field of psychology, Noel Burch, (1970) is credited with the development of the Conscious Competence Ladder. He proposed that one could move from a level of unconscious

incompetence, toward conscious incompetence, to conscious competence and ultimately toward unconscious competence. One strategy that can be of assistance with such matters is to utilize a framework that one can use to gauge the developing knowledge. It is our hope that the use of a model for systemic equity could promote the development from unconscious incompetence toward unconscious competence for those who aim to be leaders, if used systematically in all educational leadership programs.

Literature Review

There are multiple theoretical frameworks for equity and leadership development, each providing a different perspective towards approaches to equity and inclusive education for marginalized populations. For example, at the administrative level, Shields (2010) highlights Transformative Leadership as a way to gauge or measure the various types of leadership. The Transformative Leadership model identifies eight tenets of leaders' dispositions when working to create equitable and socially-just school settings: 1) a mandate to effect deep and equitable change; 2) a need to deconstruct and reconstruct *knowledge frameworks* that perpetuate inequality and injustice; 3) focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice, 4) a need to address the inequitable distribution of power; 5) emphasis on both private and public (individual and collective) good; 6) emphasis on interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness; 7) necessity of balancing critique and promise, and 8) the call to exhibit moral courage (Shields, 2012, 2019). Specifically, these tenets call for the practice of establishing effective relationships and a collaborative approach where the focus of the leadership is on social justice and equity (Shield, 2012). Shields describes the transformative leader as one who, "...combines careful attention to the authentic, personal leadership characteristics, a focus on more collaborative, dialogic, and democratic processes of leadership; and at the same time, attend simultaneously to goals of individual intellectual development, and goals of collective sustainability, social justice, and mutually beneficial society" (2018, p. 39).

On the other hand, if we were to examine the classroom level, Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework focuses on the role of race and racism in the educational space and its processes. Specifically, CRT postulates the following: 1) racism, both conscious and unconscious, exists and is considered to be a permanent part of daily lives (*permanence of racism*); 2) the concept of white privilege is real (*whiteness as property*); 3) there's a method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of the narrator (*counter storytelling and majoritarian narratives*); 4) any progress achieved by Black people is essentially made possible by the dominant group (interest convergence); 5) there's a critique of concepts such as color blindness, meritocracy and neutrality of the law (*critique of liberalism*); and 6) both class and gender can and do intersect with race (*intersectionality*) but that "gender and class alone cannot be fully explain the educational inequities" (p. 51). Furthermore, the CRT framework recognizes the complexity of race and racism, but challenges the dominant ideology of race and racism in both historical and contemporary contexts, drawing on various transdisciplinary perspectives. Through a sharing of lived experiences and engagement in authentic conversations, the goal of CRT is to eliminate racial oppression and to empower minority groups. Expanding on the concept of "race", Santamaria (2014) used CRT to examine how language, and sexual/gender identity influenced leadership practices.

At the community level, Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez's (1992) Funds of Knowledge (FoK) framework served to encourage educators to understand and tap into the community as a

resource to provide meaningful connections to homes and classrooms; as well as making sound decision when developing instructions in the classroom based on the funds of knowledge. It also recognized students' prior knowledge and lived experiences as fundamental to their learning and success. Moll, et al described FoK as 1) academic and personal background knowledge, 2) accumulated life experiences, 3) skills and knowledge used to navigate daily's social contacts, and 4) world views structured by broader historically and politically influences social forces. This notion of a two-way exchange between schools and their local communities is well documented in the research pertaining to classroom instruction. For example, the work of Moll, et al (1992) conducted extensive qualitative research that acknowledges the assets of Latinx families and explored how the knowledge that families already possess could be used to enhance instruction. The FoK are collections of knowledge based on cultural practices that are part of a family's inner culture, work experience, or their daily routine. It is the knowledge and expertise that students and their family members have because of their roles in their families, communities, and culture. To the detriment of those who come from what may be perceived as "disadvantaged" homes, few schools aim to connect with the community and examine Funds of Knowledge as a source of empowerment. In other words, instead of viewing what students bring to the classroom as deficits, these educators chose to view what students bring as legitimate prior knowledge.

Although these theoretical frameworks are all relevant to the conversation to promote equitable education, a systematic approach requires a more holistic view and collective approach to link all the practices together. Taken alone, each framework provides a specific lens or perspective, offering somewhat a narrow approach to addressing educational equity. In addition, when viewing each approach in isolation, it seems disconnected to other components of the system. As a result, there's a need to address equity in a holistic and systematic way. Such examples of Theoretical Frameworks that address a systemic approach to equity exist. For example, Singleton's (2015) Systemic Racial Equity Transformation Framework aims to provide a systemic approach to equity that examines all levels within a school district. Although our purpose is not to promote one framework over another, we felt it would be helpful to illustrate the discussion using one example selected from Glenn Singleton. We hope that the use of Singleton's example would help promote an understanding as to how one might connect to such a framework meaningfully to enhance and engage in a more equitable education for marginalized populations.

The Systemic Equity Framework

The Pacific Educational Group's Systemic Racial Equity Transformation Framework (Singleton, 2015) is composed of intersecting circles that each represent an important element at play in schools. In order to facilitate our understanding, a brief summary of each component is provided in the section that follows. In addition, we provide the reader with a review of how articles submitted over the past few years have successfully addressed key elements of this framework, as well as how they may have made connections more successfully (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Pacific Educational Group’s Systemic Racial Equity Transformation Framework



Notes: Taken directly from Singleton, 2015, p. 238. Presented at the Council of the Great City Schools Annual Meeting in Milwaukee, WI: Beyond the Pledge: Courage to Become My Brother’s Keeper (2014).

Tier 1: The Inside Layer—Leadership, Community, and Learning & Teaching

At the innermost point of Singleton’s (2015) framework is the “Leadership, Community, and Learning and Teaching” (see Venn Diagram on Figure 1). Here, in his book on *Courageous Conversations About Race*, Singleton emphasized that “while engaging the passion, practice, and persistence of both community and district leadership is essential to achieving equity, the principal is the key and guiding force behind equity efforts in a school” (p. 243). It goes without saying, that in order to be the driving force behind leading a movement, one must embrace the concepts and ideas of equity. Leading the movement does not necessitate knowing all that there is to know, but being willing and able to learn alongside others is an asset.

Leadership

Singleton describes a collaborative leadership model which is inclusive of administrators, teachers, parents, and those in the community each playing a specific role. He discusses the use of three key types of teams: an Equity Team, Collaborative Action Research for Equity (CARE) Teams, and Partnership for Academically Successful Students Group (PASS). The Equity Team is composed of teachers from various departments or grade levels who will bring “credibility, courage, confidence and compassion,” while working to accomplish three key goals (p. 239). Those that meet the “Equity Team” goals would 1)engage in a process of investigation to discover

how race impacts their personal and professional beliefs and behaviors; 2) lead the school or central office staff in the examination of individual and institutional culture as it relates to equity and anti-racism; and 3) establish a professional learning community in which adults can effectively develop skills and knowledge necessary to improve student performance and eliminate racial achievement disparities. Similarly, the CARE team is also composed of teachers who aim to learn at a deeper level. They meet with a focus group of students of color to better understand aspects of teaching and learning and to, “pinpoint how and when their teaching is most and least effective,” while sharing this new knowledge with others (Singleton, 2015, p. 241). The third group, Partnerships for Academically Successful Students (PASS), is composed of community-based educators from families, the local clergy, and government. The purpose is to engage in a deep and true exchange of understanding that grows and develops over time.

In order to build an equitable and inclusive education system, there is no single framework or solution. However, the application of any one framework may unintentionally perpetuate other forms of inequity. Therefore, a combination of collective approaches is critical to building a more inclusive and diverse equitable education system. The goal of this paper is to explore this concept further, via a review of articles in the CAPEA Journal for the past 10 years.

Community

The next topic that Singleton calls out pertains to community. He defines it as “a network of effective and supportive relationships shared by all throughout the system” (2015, p. 241). In essence, he notes that the initial work of building a community begins with everyone “acknowledging that the school represents a community in and of itself, and is also part of an established broader community” (p. 241). Singleton conveys the importance of really getting to know the community at large and that in addition to developing community awareness, engagement, and empowerment—“must take into account and give value to the resources that the community provides” (p. 242).

Learning and Teaching

The third circle pertains to learning and teaching. Singleton discusses the use of the Equity Teams to bridge between teachers’ “current understanding and skill level and the vision of quality instruction that they need to reach” (2015, p. 240). This is an important concept that is supported by the work of Dr. Joseph Johnson (2017) of the National Center for Urban School Transformation. In his book, *Leadership in America’s Best Schools*, Dr. Johnson discusses the notion of “Access to Challenging Curricula for All Students.” Whether students are English Language Learners, African-American, Latinx and/or Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans-gender and Queer (LGBTQ), they all have the right to a guaranteed and viable curriculum that is accessible to them. Specifically, Johnson states,

“It is important to note that educators in the high-performing schools provided all students access to challenging curricula, not just those deemed academically talented or gifted. Students who struggled with a particular objective because of a lack of grade-level ability, challenges at home, or disability were generally expected to master the same curricular goals as did other students. For English learners, whether instruction was provided in the students’ native language or in English, the learning goal was the same as the goal for

students whose first language was English” (2017, p.40).

There are many researchers who would argue similarly including Marzano 2003, Novak 2019, and a plethora of others.

Tier 2: Equity, Empowerment, Equality & Antiracism

Within the second tier of the Framework the first component pertains to the notions of Equity, Empowerment, Equality, and Antiracism and is represented by the dark ring that sits in the middle of the graphic organizer. Singleton (2015) begins by calling out systemic oppression. He states, “the most devastating factor contributing to the lowered achievement of students of color and indigenous students is systemic racism, which we recognize as the unexamined and unchallenged system of racial biases and residual white advantage that persist in our institutions of learning” (p. 44). It is important to note the words, *unexamined* and *unchallenged* used in Singleton’s statement. It makes us ponder, what chance is there to change the outcomes if things are left *unexamined* and *unchallenged*? What changes the outcomes is indeed conversations and examination as well as challenging issues of systemic oppression continually over time.

Ibram Kendi (2019) suggested that one must not leave any racist policy or practice *unexamined* and *unchallenged*. To do so is to remain complicit. Instead, one should demonstrate an antiracist mentality. What does it mean to portray an antiracist mentality? To be an antiracist means to call attention to matters of race (Kendi, 2019). In his book, *How to Be an Antiracist*, Ibram Kendi defined that a racist “is one who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea,” whereas an antiracist is, “one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea” (p.13). Supporting Kendi’s framework, Singleton emphasizes that one must be an antiracist who promotes equity when leading the movement at a school site to achieve equity.

Singleton (2015) provided and described the Six Conditions for Courageous Conversations as: 1) Getting Personal Right Here Right Now, 2) Keeping the Spotlight on Race, 3) Engaging in Multiple Racial Perspectives, 4) Keeping us All at the Table, 5) What Do You Mean By Race?, and 6) Let’s Talk About Whiteness. As one can see by the titles of the Six Conditions, it emphasizes continual, focused conversations about race and how race impacts outcomes. Singleton further described that equity is “a belief, a habit of mind that does not correspond to the beginning or end of the school day. Achieving true equity for all students must be a moral imperative” (p. 55). He states that educational equity is achieved when 1) there’s a raise in the achievement of all students while 2) the gaps between the highest and lowest performing students are narrowed, and when the 3) racial predictability and disproportionality of which student groups occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories are eliminated.

Expanding on the educational equity concept, Singleton (2015) addresses the issue of equality. He argued that giving all students equal resources is insufficient and does not acknowledge “the processes, structures and ideologies that justify inequity are not addressed and dismantled” (p. 56). He clarified that equity means that the students of greatest need should receive the greatest level of support to guarantee academic success. This is to say, that for underserved students, their underservice is compounded cumulatively over time. It is not about providing equality in resources, it is about giving the neediest students what they need to succeed. Finally, Singleton addresses the notion of *empowerment*, the relationship between marginalized groups and power dynamics. Specifically, he calls for leaders to be conscious of their position to avoid abusing

their power, and encourages leaders to use their position to eliminate power dynamics. In essence, by ensuring that everyone is valued, respected, and has an equal voice in decision-making as well as being accountable to the decision, this balance of power strengthens the practice of equitable education.

Tier 3: The Tools

The third tier of the Pacific Educational Group’s Systemic Racial Equity Transformational Framework considers the ‘*How.*’ In this section, Singleton (2015) addresses how to use the Courageous Conversation Protocol, Adaptive Leadership Principles, the Tenets of Critical Race Theory, and the Systemic Thinking Tools to move a school system toward a more equitable reality for all students. Specifically, he discussed how one can engage in authentic conversation, sustain and deepen one’s understanding of “whiteness” while interrogating their own beliefs to ensure real change. He further encapsulates the two tiers mentioned above to demonstrate how it affects and impacts the entire system.

Aligning to CAPEA Articles Discussion

To illustrate and connect Singleton’s framework in a meaningful way, we provide a synthesis of recent articles published in our journal for the past 10 years; we then discuss how they apply to the application of the Pacific Educational Groups Systemic Racial Equity Transformation Framework within the educational leadership programs to promote the development of key concepts among students. We purposefully did not address specific issues discussed in each CAPEA Journal article nor did we make individual recommendations to each article. Instead, we believe that by explaining how Singleton’s framework is utilized to promote equitable systems, one might be able to move from a level of being unconscious about issues of equity toward becoming conscious about such matters. Our aim would be for individual authors to analyze their own work and apply it. As a result, in the next section, through unconscious competence, an individual would have enough experiences and information from our Singleton example that he or she can perform it unconsciously.

In the past 10 years, the California Association of Professors of Educational Administration (CAPEA) Journal included a total of five journal articles focused on marginalized populations. Specifically, three of the six articles focused on English Language Learners, one on minorities “at-risk”, and the other article broadly discussed marginalized minorities. None of the articles employed or discussed a specific theoretical or conceptual framework. In addition, the articles were largely focused on a single ethnic or racial minority population, e.g. Hispanic and/or African American. For example, the three English Language Learners articles were specifically on Hispanic students. Likewise, when discussing academic achievement concerns, two main groups were mentioned (e.g., Hispanic and African American) but no one else. See Table 1.

Table 1*CAPEA Article Summary*

| Author (Year) | Focus area(s)/Marginalized Population(s) | Framework component(s) addressed |
|---|---|---|
| Cheung, Flores, and Sablo-Sutton (2019) | “Allyship”, minority and leadership | Tier 2 |
| Gallegos and Wise (2011) | English Language Learners | Tier 1 |
| Mirci, Loomis, and Hensley (2011) | “at-risk” and school leaders | Tier 2 |
| Smith (2005) | Students of color and school leaders | Tier 2 |
| Whitenack (2015) | English Language Learners | Tier 1 |

Articles Analysis of Tier 1: Leadership, Community, and Learning & Teaching

Two of the six articles that were written on marginalized populations addressed tier 1 of the framework. In their research, Gallegos and Wise (2011) compared scores on the California English Language Development Test to results on the English Language Arts scores on the California Standardized Test. It is important to note that one could have examined the role of the English Learner Community and their funds of knowledge. What role might the community play in this issue from an asset-based perspective? One might also consider the role of leadership, either at the school site level or district level. How might leaders align elements in the environment to engage the students and community to know and understand the elements measured in the CELDT? The article did not explore issues of equity and empowerment in the second tier of the Pacific Framework, nor did it explore the third tier.

The second article, *Equitable Education of English Learners in the Common Core Age: Implications for Principal Leadership* by Whitenack (2015) also addressed the first tier of the Pacific Framework. This article explored the role of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) in providing instruction for English Learners and promoted the educational leadership programs to focus more fully on the use of such models for English Learners. In addition, one might have considered the second tier of the Pacific Framework regarding issues of equity, empowerment, equality, and antiracism. One might have also examined the role of the third tier of the model and how one might engage in Courageous Conversations as well as use the Adaptive Leadership Principles, the Tenets of Critical Race Theory and Systems Thinking Tools to fully engage the school community at examining their practices for all students.

Article Analysis of Tier 2: Equity, Empowerment, Equality and Antiracism

Of the remaining four articles submitted, each addressed this second tier. *Tipping the Balance: Social Justice Leaders Allying with Marginalized Youth to Increase Student Voice and Activism* by Cheung, Flores and Sablo-Sutton (2019) addressed issues related to equity and empowerment. This article explored the role of developing leaders in practicing Kendall’s (2013) *allyship*, effectively defining what it means to be an ally and why it is important for educational leadership programs to teach such concepts to their students. The article describes three cases in which the school leader successfully lifted the voice of students to disrupt systemic inequities. However, to explore more fully how the leaders engaged with the community to engage in

courageous conversations, the authors could utilize adaptive leadership principles, systemic thinking tools, as well as the tenets of critical race theory could add a more fully dimension to the, “How,” to accomplish the work. Imagine the fullness of the learning if educational leadership programs taught all three tiers of a framework for systemic equity.

Similarly, the article, *School Factors that Contribute to the Underachievement of Students of Color and What Culturally Competent School Leaders Do*, by Camille Smith spoke to the elements in the second tier of the Pacific Educational Framework. The author, in discussing the relationship between the first two tiers, addressed the importance of engaging the school communities in a systematic discussion of privilege. However, to further build on this, the author could provide examples and a discussion of how one might use the tools listed in the third tier of the Framework could provide the readers with an exploration of how to lead courageous conversations, use systemic thinking tools and the adaptive leadership principles and the tenets of critical race theory.

The third article that addressed the second tier of the Pacific Framework was *Social Justice, Self-Systems, and Engagement in Learning: What Students Labeled as "At-Risk" Can Teach Us* written by Mirci, Loomis, and Hensly (2011). This article explores the relationship between the perceptions of, “At-Risk,” students and the implications for school leaders. They found that identifying a student as, “At-Risk,” was harmful to the students’ self-attribute while discussing issues of equity and empowerment. However, they did not address the third tier of the Pacific Framework.

Article Analysis of Tier 3: The Tools

As mentioned, the third tier addresses how to use the Courageous Conversation Protocol, Adaptive Leadership Principles, the Tenets of Critical Race Theory and the Systemic Thinking Tools to move a school system toward a more equitable reality for all students. As noted, each of the articles addressed the first two tiers of the framework. However, none of the articles fully addressed this tier as alluded to in Singleton’s framework. It is important to note that the use of such a framework would make explicit how to lead such work.

Conclusion

In Wallace Foundation’s most recent report in February 2021, *How Principals Affect Students and Schools*, they found that in order to meet all students’ needs, “principals must develop an equity lens, particularly as they are called on to meet the needs of growing numbers of marginalized students” (p. 92). The report goes on to note, that the research continues to grow and points to the fact that there exist frameworks that describe the interaction between, “how equity intersects with instructionally focused interactions with teachers, a productive school climate, and the other areas of practice effective leaders use to engage” (p. 92).

As we continue to examine and explore how we can further address the needs of marginalized populations, one central question comes to mind. How do educational leadership programs use frameworks similar to the Pacific Educational Group’s Systemic Racial Equity Transformation Framework, in the training of their candidates? CAPEA calls on programs to submit articles that convey how programs use such Frameworks in the development of school leaders. Additionally, we would like to invite more articles that focus on the collective needs of all students. There are some marginalized groups for which little is written, including students with

disabilities, twice exceptional, LGBTQ, foster youth, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) (www.thebipocproject.org). It is our hope that by clarifying and expanding on the call, or having a special edition that captures all marginalized populations, we might break the cycle of inequitable education.

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