The purpose of this study was to gain insight into how school boards learn their roles when dealing with issues of race and class. This study explored how school board members learned, how school board members were socialized to learn their roles, the various contexts that shaped their learning and decision making, the role that race and class played in shaping their racialized lived experiences, and how their racialized lived experiences impacted their decision making.

A qualitative case study analysis was used for this study. This study was conducted on an urban elementary school district located in the Midwest. Four Black school board members were interviewed about their role as school board members, how they learned their role, and how decision making occurred within the district. Data collection consisted of observations, interviews and a review of archival documents (e.g. school board minutes and school board policies).

Five major findings emerged in the research study. First, critical race theory is a viable tool for analyzing inequalities and inequity within school districts. Second, race and racism
continues to exist within macro-level policies and micro-level practices which serve to set the tone for the work of school boards. Third, these school board members learned across various methodologies and contexts. Fourth, these school board members were socialized within various contexts that serve to guide their decision-making. Fifth, decisions made within micro-level practices allowed these school board members to advance and achieve racial equality through a social justice agenda.
ROLE OF SCHOOL BOARDS IN PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE
A CRITICAL RACE THEORY PERSPECTIVE

BY

TIA LORESE ROBINSON
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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Dissertation Director:
LaVerne Gyant
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When I embarked upon this journey, I was not prepared for was the lessons of humility, patience and perseverance. The humility to trust and appreciate process. The patience to embrace my development as a researcher. The perseverance to overcome many challenges.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of my grandmother Shirley Davis who taught me to always trust God. Gram your strong words of wisdom, strength and protection have guided me through many trials and tribulations. Thank you for believing in me and helping me to develop into the woman that I am continuing to become. You were correct, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”.
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When I was elected as the first Black to serve on the school board in Illinois, a predominantly White suburb in the Midwest, it became obvious that not only was my election victory historic but also unprecedented. Part of the board’s responsibility was to listen to student discipline hearings. In the first one I participated in, the board was asked to rule on two recommendations from the superintendent to expel two students for a term not to exceed two years.

The first involved Marcus Alpha, a sixteen-year-old, eighth-grade Black male who had been given $70 by Ryan, a fellow student, with the understanding that Marcus would purchase some drugs for Ryan. During the hearing, school personnel (principal, counselor, teacher, social worker) all testified that Marcus was homeless with several illnesses exacerbated by his living situation. Marcus reported that he had indeed taken the money from Ryan but his intention was to use the money to provide food for his family but not drugs and that he planned to give the money back to Ryan the following week. Additionally, the school principal and discipline officer reported that Marcus did not make any attempts to provide Ryan with drugs on school property and that it was their belief that Marcus never purchased any drugs. The expulsion hearing was triggered by the intent of the potential drug transaction that resulted in a fight on school property. In this case, the board voted 6:1 to accept the administration’s recommendation for expulsion and Marcus was expelled for a period of two academic school years.
The next hearing involved Jonathon Beta, a sixteen-year-old White male who allegedly sold prescription drugs to Jessica, a female student that placed her in a drug-induced coma for several weeks. Jonathan admitted to taking his parents’ prescription drugs and selling them for $10.00 each to Jessica and several students on school property. During the hearing, school personnel (principal, counselor, teacher, social worker) and Jonathan’s parents testified on his behalf, stating that Jonathan was a good student from a good household/family with no prior disciplinary sanctions or concerns. In this case, the board voted 6:1 against the administration’s recommendation to expel Jonathan. Instead, the school board gave the administration a directive to develop an educational plan that provided Jonathan with further assistance/support throughout his academic career.

This situation made me question how the board reached the decisions in each of these cases, specifically what factors within their cultural context and outside of the information placed before us (e.g. policies, procedures, student handbook) shaped these decisions. Realizing that many components of critical race theory were present within the context of my work as a board member, specifically those components related to issues of equity and social justice, I found myself questioning if I was witnessing the use of power within the dominant culture, “color-blindness,” and “White-privilege”? Furthermore, I continued to question if I was situated in the midst of true institutional racism and, if so, what role critical race theory played in the overall decision-making process of the school board.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was enacted by Congress in 2002, in order to increase the power of assessment in education and bring clarity to the use and importance of achievement tests as a measure of academic success. Noguera (2004) posits that NCLB was designed to “radically reform public schools across the United States by raising academic standards and imposing new systems of accountability” (p. 2147); however, the role of school board members as key decision makers within U.S. public education is puzzling, misleading, and unclear. As our educational system continues to address the perils of low test scores, poor academic achievement, and a growing achievement gap, it is extremely important to understand the role of the school board in this process. Hess (2002) states that “for more than two centuries school boards have been charged with governing the education of our nation’s children” (p. 6).

Given the increased attention to educational governance and leadership due to NCLB which according to the Washington State School Districts’ Association (2012) was designed to raise student achievement levels by “focusing on four target groups ethnic/racial minorities, poverty-based students, students with limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities” (p. 6.), it is surprising that we do not know more about the bodies that govern the nation’s 14,890 school systems. Hess explains that despite the magnitude of this responsibility, our understanding of school boards and their role generally rests on anecdotes and news stories,
leaving us ill-equipped to appreciate and understand the challenges boards face and how they manage these challenges.

As the demographics of our society continues to change, the face of school boards has remained relatively unchanged at the national level, with 94% of its members being predominately White, 60% male, and 42% between the ages of 41-50, and 85% earning an income of over $60,000 per year; therefore, making it necessary to explore how school board members make decisions when dealing with issues of race and class (Rothstein, 2005). Cistone (2008) shares that school boards “tend to be white, middle-aged, male professionals, married, with children in the schools and active in the organization and associational life of the community” (p. 29).

Given that the indicators of social class are determined by income, education, and occupation, it is clear that the social class of school boards is much different than that of the individuals and communities they might represent (Rothstein, 2005). Nesbit (2006) supports Rothstein’s view on social class by explaining that class is still described in terms of “jobs, income, wealth, the lifestyle that people can buy, or the power that accrues from ownership” (p. 183). With over 50 million students currently enrolled in public schools and enrollment projected to increase over the next 10-15 years, it is important that we gain a greater understanding of the role that school boards play in addressing these societal and accountability changes long-term. More recently,

In 2002, the National School Board Association (NSBA) released a nationwide survey of school boards, titled School Boards at the Dawn of the 21st Century that looked at how school
boards understood and addressed the following: 1) national, state, and local policy concerns; 2) board service and preparation; 3) board member characteristics; and 4) elections and the political process. The study represented 2,000 school districts, with 41 % (820) of the targeted districts completing an eight-page survey. Study results revealed school board demographics as follows: 85.5 % White, 7.8 % Black, and 3.8 % Hispanic. However, in large districts, that tends to be more heterogeneous, the figures were 78.9 % White, 13.0 % Black, and 7.5 % Latino (Hess, 2002). The study also revealed demographic information related to the gender and class of participants as: 61% male and 39% female with higher incomes and better educations than typical Americans (Hess, 2002). Over half of the respondents listed their occupational background as business or professional; whereas, relatively few respondents indicated a background in education. Therefore, consistent with the shift that occurred following the educational reform movement of the early 20th century where school boards’ began to transform into smaller centralized citywide organizations. As noted by Land (2002), this shift brought about “more educated, higher income, successful professionals and business people to school boards, a change that generated concern regarding the ability of such elite members to effectively represent the concerns of local citizens” (p. 231). Whereas, Cistone (2008) later reminds us that the profile of the community has continued to change while the composition of the school board has remained constant and unchanged for the past seventy-five years or so.

Understanding the connection between the demographics of the school board and the communities they represent is essential because it speaks to the dynamics of school boards as
they manage issues of race and class. These connections can be made across four interconnect spectrums. First, it may demonstrate that the demographic dynamic of school boards has not changed at the pace that the demographics of society have changed. Second, it continues to raise questions regarding whose interests are truly being served and how decisions are made within the confines of the school board and the fabric of school districts. Next, it recognizes that their ability to address issues of race and class involves a level of learning that exists within the individual and organizational contexts. This is important in order to develop a solid understanding of how they learn their roles across various contexts. Finally, it is equally important to examine how school board members learn their roles and how these roles inform their decisions when addressing issues of race and class.

A cross sectional review of the literature suggests that it is possible that school board members learn their roles and decision-making through a process of experiential learning, learning in context, situated cognition and social learning theory. Learning from experience has been cited in the literature and discussed extensively in the work of Dewey (1925), Freire (1972), Horton (1990), and Illich (1973), who all emphasize the importance of using experience in and for learning. More recently, Miller (2000) explored learning from experience and experiential perspectives for the field of adult education by suggesting that “learners’ life experiences outside as well as inside of formal educational institutions are increasingly seen as important dimensions of learning” (p. 71). The study draws on the fact that school board members enter their roles with a reservoir of life experiences (e.g. academic, professional, and personal) that may serve to inform their view of the world as well as their decision-making. Developing an understanding of
how these experiences are used to inform their decision-making can be instrumental in our ability to understand how they address issues of race and class.

Context is another area revealed in the literature. The context in which adults learn has become an essential component of the learning process (Caffarella & Merriam, 2000). Caffarella and Merriam introduced two dimensions of the contextual approach to learning—interactive and structural noting that “the interactive dimension acknowledges that learning occurs as a product of the individual learners’ interaction within the specific context” and “the structural dimension takes into consideration social and cultural factors that affect learning such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, power, and oppression” (p. 55). This type of learning takes place within the real-world context of the individual learner’s natural or authentic environment. Additionally, the contextual perspective argues that “learning cannot be separated from the context in which the learning takes place” (p. 59). This means that the learner’s situation and context are as important to the learning process as what the individual learner brings to the situation (Caffarella & Merriam). In this case, understanding what the individual learner (school board member) brings to the situation (governance/policy) and how it is shaped within the context (interactive/structural) is essential to understanding how school boards make decisions when addressing issues of race and class.

Situated cognition provides yet another lens to explore how school board members learn their roles, learn to make decisions and the context(s) that inform this process. Situated cognition is described by Merriam and Brockett (1997) as “the role that the learners’ real-world experiences play within the context of the learning itself” (p. 155). They further note that
“situated cognition is based on the idea that what we know and the meanings we attach to what we know are socially constructed and intimately linked to the real-life situation” (p. 156). Hansman (2001) extended the social interaction of situated cognition by stating that “situated cognition emphasizes the interaction between the learner, other learners and tools in a sociocultural context” (p. 46). It is within this sociocultural context that “the nature of the interactions among the learners, the tools they use within these interactions, the activity itself, and the social context in which the activity takes place shape learning” (p. 45). Situated cognition allows us to look at how the school board members ‘real-life experiences’ inform their decision-making when interacting with other learners who possess similar or different experiences within the sociocultural context.

The literature is clear that school boards have existed since the early 1800s, that the face of school boards has remained static while the demographic of society has experienced multifaceted changes, and that our knowledge and understanding of how they make decisions is limited. With increased minority student populations shaping the landscape of our schools, the fact remains that the role and function of the school board remains relatively unclear. NCLB has placed greater accountability on public schools to improve performance on achievement tests as a measure of student success. In doing so, it is difficult to ignore the fact that the demographic of the society has changed to include a growing minority population. Therefore, the ability to understand how school boards make decisions when addressing issues of race and class may provide some insight into how they learn their roles individually, collectively and within various contexts.
Statement of Problem

The role of the school board and its ability to effectively address issues related to race and class are essential components of the future success of educational institutions. School boards are responsible for making a broad range of decisions that may ultimately have a significant impact on the students and communities that they serve. Specifically, decisions related to student academic achievement, discipline, fiscal management, facilities management, collective bargaining, policy review and development, allocation of resources, personnel decisions, and supervision of the superintendent provide a snapshot of responsibilities of the school board. Therefore, a deeper look into the roles of school board members and how they make decisions within the context of their roles may serve to provide a lens to identify how learning occurs among a group of elected officials who enter a role of governance for which they are seemingly untrained and unprepared to perform.

Although, the literature fails to address with detail the relationship between school board decision-making and their role within the context of the school district, it does not negate the fact that this requires exploration. Consequently a complete picture of school boards and how they make decisions when dealing with issues of race and class remain absent from the literature. As it stands now, the research related to school boards, the role of school boards, and how they make decisions is absent or limited to say the least. However, a small cross-section of literature exists related to the school board and superintendent relationship. Therefore, the scope of this research study seeks to uncover how school boards learn their roles and make decisions when dealing with issues of race and class.
Educational institutions are charged with the responsibility of educating students and preparing them to enter a dynamic global society. These institutions are in crisis and the students they serve are at risk. Risk is defined by McDermott, Raley, and Seyer-Ochi (2009) as “the result of children being damaged by racism and class disadvantages” (p. 101). Brown v. Board of Education (1954) changed the landscape of educational institutions by desegregating schools in an effort to achieve equitable educational opportunities and resources for minority students. This monumental decision served to give “voice to subjugation and contestation” (O’Connor, Hill & Robinson, 2009, p. 3), while giving greater attention to race, class, equity and inequality within public schools.

School boards play a critical role in addressing this crisis and minimizing risk by providing leadership in the decision-making process of school districts. The demographics of school boards remain unchanged; therefore, lacking a level of diversity that represents the communities they serve. A combination of demographic trends, numerous U.S. Supreme Court cases challenging the Voters Right Act of 1968, and research into school governance requires focus and renewed attention on an issue that continues to come to the forefront now and again regarding racial and ethnic diversity among the nation’s school board members. With such a remarkable shift in diversity already here and an even greater shift to come, there is a question whether the nation will have, to paraphrase President Clinton, “school boards that look like America”? 
Purpose of the Study

This research study is important for several reasons. First, it serves to contribute to the literature on school boards by positioning them as school leaders and viable contributors to the overall growth and development of school districts. Secondly, it brings to the forefront the reality that as society continues to evolve the challenges faced by school districts nationwide will continue to persist. Therefore, school districts will continue to face changing demographics, poor student achievement, and economic challenges that collectively serve to impact their ability to acquire educational reform and total equality for all students, making it is necessary to take a closer look at the school board and its role in the decision-making process when faced with issues of race and class. Finally, context is an essential component of the learning process that serves to provide some insight into how these decisions are made individually and collectively by examining the contextual factors that shape how school boards learn to make decisions when called upon to address issues related to race and class. Therefore, this study examines the process of learning and the factors that inform this process by providing a lens for looking at these roles by positioning school board members as leaders that play an intricate role in shaping school districts across the nation.

School board members and the role they play in making decisions within the context of school districts when addressing critical issues related to race and class has been given little to no attention in the literature. Because the demographics of school districts have changed while the demographic of the school boards has remained constant for centuries continue to raise questions regarding education reform and academic progress. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation
has resulted in an increased level of accountability at the local and state levels in an effort to shift the decline of student achievement.

As it stands now, there is limited research on school boards in general with little emphasis on their roles as leaders and how they make decisions. However, some research related to the school board and superintendent relationship emerged in the literature. A research study of relevance was conducted by Slaten (1994) surveyed 38 superintendents and 50 school board members in order to identify similarities and differences in levels of moral development and ethical reasoning processes exhibited by school board members and superintendents. The study highlights the fact that “school boards across the country have been frequently criticized as being stumbling blocks in the path of educational reform” (p. 5). Therefore, the study provides a comparison of how school board members and superintendents make ethical decisions. Slaten (1994) suggests that by identifying what factors most influence those decisions may provide insight into understanding the dynamics and multi-dimensional nature of their decision-making processes and their impact on school districts. This study informs the literature by shedding some light on the relationship between the superintendent and the school board and how this relationship drives decision-making.

Another study by Fusarelli (2006) looked at school board and superintendent relationships from a slightly different perspective. He conducted a case narrative of a school district and explored the challenges surrounding the hiring of nontraditional superintendents, the politics of local school boards, and issues with changes in school governance structures. The study revealed that “research on superintendents and school boards finds district leaders’ success in
managing and implementing change is dependent on the relationships they have established with their school board” (p. 52). Although the study focuses on the challenges that exist in the search for a superintendent, this study also raises questions about the issues surrounding school governance for it is difficult to separate the school board from this process. However, the study supports their role in this process as a basis for building a relationship that ultimately serves to inform decision-making and education reform.

More recently Evans (2007) conducted a study that looked at school leaders and how they made sense about changing demographics and racial issues. The study does not specifically identify school board members as school leaders; however, the participants included assistant superintendents, school principals, and union leadership. Faced with demographic changes due to a growing Black population, the study concluded that school leaders’ “sensemaking seemed related to the local context and organizational ideology, as well as their racial and role identities” (p. 159). This study serves to be relevant to this research study because it highlights the impact of demographic changes and the necessity of school leaders to recognize and understand these changes in order to “make sense” of them as part of their decision-making process. Here Evans (2008) explored how school leaders handled racial issues as a result of drastic demographic changes in the community and school district.
Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to find the contextual factors that impact school board decisions when dealing with issues of race and class. The study was guided by the following four research questions:

1. How are decisions influenced by the individuals’ racialized lived experiences?
2. How do school board members learn to become school board members?
3. How are school board members socialized to address issues of race and class?
4. How have school boards responded to significant issues related to race and class?

Theoretical Framework

The use of critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical tool for critical inquiry and critique for examining areas of inequality in education has been given increased attention in the literature. CRT may be used as a lens to explore socio-demographic inequalities in U.S. schools and may reveal a need to look more closely at the role of educational leaders so CRT was used to examine and analyze how school board members’ learn their roles and make decisions when addressing issues of race and class. The research shows how the tenets/themes of CRT are used to highlight inequalities in curriculum and instruction, policy, school funding, and academic assessment. This lens reveals an absence of school board leadership while raising questions related to the school boards’ role in decision-making, policy development and governance when addressing issues of race and class. Therefore, this research will used CRT as a theoretical lens while paying close attention to three themes embedded within CRT literature.
The first theme of CRT described by scholars Delgado (1995), Solorzano (1997, 1998), Yosso (2002, 2005) and Solorzano and Yosso (2001) states that race and racism is a normal component of American society and is interwoven into its fabric through systematic structures and policies. The second theme of CRT described by Saddler (2005) grounds itself in the “contextual experiences of people of color and racial oppression through the use of literary narratives and storytelling to challenge the existing social construction of race” (p. 42). The third theme of CRT challenges liberalism and the neutrality of the law to create a just and equitable society.

Lynn and Parker (2006) point out that CRT has been used as a framework for examining “persistent racial inequities in education, qualitative research methods, pedagogy and practice, the schooling experiences of marginalized students of color, and the efficacy of race-conscious education policy” (p. 257). Yosso (2002) also challenges educators to utilize CRT as a guide to “expose and challenge contemporary forms of racial inequality which are disguised as “neutral” and “objective” structures, processes, and discourses of school curriculum” (p. 93).

The use of CRT as a theoretical tool for dissecting and exploring inequality and inequity in K-12 and higher education systems has increased in the literature. Delgado-Bernal (2002) used CRT and Latina/Latino critical theory (LatCrit) to show the relationship between critical-gendered epistemologies and students of color as creators of knowledge. She also discussed how CRT and LatCrit can provide a valuable lens for qualitative research in education. From a uniquely different perspective Aleman (2007) used CRT as a framework to conduct a critical race analysis of school finance policies by using CRT and LatCrit to examine race and property
as central to the racial effects of policies. Additionally, VanDeventer-Iverson (2007) used CRT to explore university diversity policies. She used CRT to examine discourses of diversity through educational policy while challenging the realities of people of color on university campuses. Finally, Smith, Yosso, and Solorzano (2007) used CRT to explore everyday practices that create a hostile racial climate on university campuses.

CRT as a tool for analyzing and dissecting inequality and inequity within the landscape of education has increased significantly over the last 20-25 years. CRT has emerged in the literature as a tool for exploring policies, race, curriculum, diversity, etc. to identify outcomes that may lead to a socially just society. This research used CRT as a theoretical framework to explore the role of school boards when addressing issues of race and class.

Definitions

**Critical Race Theory (CRT)**: a theoretical framework used to explore the issues of race and racism within educational institutions.

**Educational Institutions**: primary and secondary institutions that encompass grades K-12.

**Educational Leadership**: school district personnel, which includes the superintendent, assistant superintendents, and principals.

**Low-Income Students**: students are considered low-income if they receive or live in households that receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF); are classified as homeless, migrant, runaway, Head Start, or foster children; or live in a household where the household income meets the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) income guidelines to receive free or reduced-price meals.

**School boards/board**: members of the board of education elected to provide leadership to the superintendent, budget development/planning, and policy governance and implementation.
Summary

School boards play a critical role in the decision-making process of school districts. Their role informs governance and policies designed to improve the overall health and function of school districts. The United States has experienced a great deal of diversity over the past 25 years and is projected to see rapid changes by 2015; however, the demographics of school boards remain unchanged. This raises the question about their ability to effectively manage change and provide meaningful leadership given the diverse nature of society and school districts across the nation.

This study used CRT as an analytical tool in order to better understand how school boards make decisions, how they learn as adult learners, the context(s) that they learn in, and how their learning serves to inform how they deal with critical issues. In doing so, an extensive review of the literatures in the following areas serve to inform and guide this study: critical race theory, adult learning (e.g. experiential learning, social learning theory, situated cognition, informal/incidental learning, and context), race and racism, social justice, and diversity.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to find the contextual factors that impact school board decisions when dealing with issues of race and class. The literature review is divided into four primary areas: school boards, critical race theory, adult learning, diversity education and social justice. The first section will provide a historical context of school boards and how their roles have evolved over time. The second section will examine how critical race theory is used as a theoretical framework within adult and higher education. The third section will provide an historical perspective of the literature and how the literature is situated within the context of adult education and adult learning theories. Finally, section four will explore the literature on diversity education and social justice.

The research was guided by a cross section of literatures within the areas of adult education, educational leadership and higher education. This was necessary to understand the relationship, scope and intersectionality of the research as well as to build an argument for the absence of literature on school boards. More importantly these literatures support the overall scope of the research study and how these literatures serve to inform one another within the scope of the research.
School Board Governance and Power

School boards are described as small political systems, reflecting the ever-present tension in a democracy stemming from the demands of a school district’s values of quality, equity, efficiency, and choice (Wirst & Kirst, 2005). The roots of this system of school governance reach back more than 200 years to Massachusetts’s representative system of local governance by selectmen [member of board or town chosen to manage public affairs] (Land, 2002). As the local government began to increase with the growth of the population, selectmen began to separate educational governance from local governance. The result of this change in governmental structure resulted in the appointment of committees within individual towns to govern education.

Timar (2004) posits that the meaning of ‘governance’ has evolved and taken different forms over the centuries. For example, in the 19th century, it meant a system of democratic localism while during the first half of the 20th century, it meant elite control by education experts. However, by the mid-1960s, good governance meant access to decision-making, particularly by previously disenfranchised minorities. Today, its meaning is again subject to redefinition as a result of changing standards-based accountability, charter schools, privatized school administration, and vouchers that seek again to reshape the landscape of education governance (Timar). Additionally, Timar notes that “governance defines the kinds of educational opportunities children have; which kinds of resources are available to them; who teaches, what is taught, what is tested; and the values the education system conveys to students,
parents, teachers, administrators, and communities. Governance very much defines the rules of the game” (p. 2063).

School board governance is intrinsically intertwined throughout every aspect of the school district. With the turn-of-the-century, education reformers tried to model and revamp school boards to parallel big corporations; in doing so they left school boards with a mandate to oversee and become involved in all areas of local school operation. With this charge, the American school board began to combine the legislative, executive, and judicial functions of government. According to Kirst (1994), this mandate expanded the role of the school board in governance which led to boards trying to do everything and ultimately accomplishing nothing. Kirst identified the responsibilities within these roles as 1) legislative, which requires the board to adopt budgets, pass regulations, and set policies; 2) executive, which exists when boards implement policy; and 3) judicial, which exists when boards participate in student suspensions, expulsions, inter-district transfers, and pupil placements; consuming an enormous amount of time. This ultimately led to the form of governance responsibilities that we see today. Resnick (1999) explains that the role of school board governance has continued to evolve in the United States. He describes a range of governance responsibilities of school boards to include the following:

1. Determine the overall vision and mission of the local school district.
2. Hire and evaluate a superintendent who, in turn, provides the executive and educational leadership to meet the educational goals, values and vision of the community.
3. Ensure the school system is held accountable and responsible to the public through its authority as an oversight body.
4. Develop and approve a budget that will reflect the educational goals and priorities of the school district and community.
5. Reach out to the community for its support, including campaigning for tax increases to implement the budget as well as pass needed bond issues.

6. Adopt specific policies that will give the broad community-based direction in such areas as the education program, community involvement in the system, employee relations, and student rules.

7. Provide the opportunity for parents and the general public to be heard; including appeals on matters they believe the professional staff was in error on or unresponsive to their concerns.

8. Provide a forum by which the school system can communicate with other publicly elected officials and public agencies, and engage the public (including the media) to provide information and build support, understanding, partnerships and involvement in the school system.

9. Provide oversight and public accountability for the education program, as well as for compliance with fiscal and legal responsibilities, including state requirements (p. 13).

The complexity of school board governance has led researchers to take a closer look at the power dynamics that exist within the governance structure of the school board. With increased state control over local educational governance, federally funded categorical programs, federal regulations, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, teachers’ unions, court issued judgments on educational issues, and special interest groups have made it increasingly difficult to identify who has the power. In its 1999 report, *Governing America’s Schools: Changing the Rules*, the National Commission for Governing America’s Schools noted that “governance arrangements establish the rules of the game. They determine through statutes, collective bargaining, legal agreements, regulations, and court rulings who is responsible and accountable for what is in the system” (ECS, 1999). The report concludes that “without good governance, good schools are the exception, not the rule” (Timar, 2004, p. 2058).

Sheared (2006) uses the term ‘center’ to describe those who control the resources—ideology, access to information, and material conditions within the institution—and the micro-politics surrounding them. Sheared (2006) further purports that the ‘center’ is defined through
the use of the term hegemony. Hegemony refers to the standards, ideas, and models of behavior that come to pervade the institutions of a society, are accepted and lived by the population, and so become the media through which the population is controlled (Merriam and Brockett, 1997). In *Making Space: Merging Theory and Practice in Adult Education*, Sheared and Sissel (2001) provided insight into the ways that hegemony has constrained our thinking about adult education and learning; influenced practice, structured learning environments; and limited the participation of some people because of their language, sexual orientation, race, gender, and class.

Relatedly, they addressed the ways in which hegemony has silenced and made invisible the voices and contributions of those who have historically been marginalized. Furthermore, Gramsci (cited in Elias and Merriam, 2005) uses the term hegemony to describe which society’s ideas, structures, and actions are dominated by a single class. He further states that although ordinary people view social conditions as preordained, in fact they are constructed and controlled by powerful elites. Schools and other educational institutions reinforce the hegemony of dominant classes therefore, perpetuating marginalization.

Central to the phenomenon of hegemony is the notion of power; specifically, who has it and how it is used to reinforce current structures of society, oppressive though they may be, so those in power can remain there (Merriam and Brockett, 1997). Additionally, Sissel and Sheared (2001) posits that the notion of power continues to be prevalent within the field of adult education by recognizing how an individual or group achieves and maintains power and control by understanding how history is examined, interpreted, and presented, how resources are distributed to certain members in society and not others, how one language acquires status and
legitimization and is appropriated in all areas of the discourse, and how some individuals/groups and not others, gain or have access to the positions of authority, whereby they control the historical, political, social, and economic base in any given society.

The structure of governance can help us understand the power structures that exist within the political context of school districts. The governance structure that is consistent among the majority of states is described by Timar (2004) as occurring at the state, regional, county and local school district levels. The state level typically represents a governance structure that is shared by the governor, legislature, state board of education, state superintendent, and the department of education. According to the constitution of most states, each county must maintain a county or regional superintendent. At the regional and county level, the role of the county superintendent is to “superintend” the schools within their counties. Additionally, the local superintendent is the chief executive officer of the board of education with school districts as the chosen means of operations of school systems.

According to Kirst (1994) and Shields (2004) school boards must continue to re-evaluate their roles within the current political and educational contexts in order to avoid losing ground. However, pinpointing where the power lies within school boards is more complex than one would expect. Perhaps by understanding the historical context and original intent of school boards, we may be able to gain increased understanding of how school governance, power and control are situated within the structure of school boards.
History of School Boards

According to Timar (2004) local school boards are the governing bodies of school districts and are responsible for maintaining and administering the schools within their district and for enforcing state laws and regulations. The first state board of education was established in Massachusetts in 1837 to give states a greater role in education. However, local school boards retained most of the control over their schools, owning at least in part to public distrust of the ability of a distant political body to satisfy local needs and preferences (Land, 2002). Land explained that the Massachusetts system of separate educational governance spread throughout the colonies and eventually became the prototype for today’s governance of public school boards. Things began to change at the turn of the century (1890-1910) when rumors of corruption began to plague local municipalities, school districts, and city offices. Allegations of political support being the primary factor in hiring teachers and management appointments were a huge concern for the community. Additionally, board members were accused of advancing their own parochial and special interests at the expense of the school district as a whole (Wirt & Kirst, 2005). As a result, the basic prerequisite for better management and school governance was thought to lie within the development of a centralization of power in a chief executive (the superintendent) to whom the board would delegate considerable authority (Land). Therefore, the school superintendent would be controlled, but only by board policy and by a school board that is respectful of his/her individual expertise.

The face and structure of the school board continued to take shape over the subsequent two centuries for many reasons. Primarily, as the economic, political, and social agendas of the
nation changed so did the role of the school board in governance. Wirst and Kirst (2005), cite several examples that depict changes in legislation at the federal, states, and/or local level that required boards to examine their structure, governance and goals. They identified the Smith Hughes Act 1917 as the first federally funded program for categorical aid for elementary and secondary schools for vocational education. This set the tone for the continued implementation of categorical programs geared toward advancing the educational needs of underrepresented populations. For example, in 1970 we witnessed an increase of educational dollars being tied to special education categorical (e.g. low income and low achievement) which increased the regulations of school boards at the state level.

Similarly, in 1994 the Improving America’s School Act linked categorical programs to Title I funding and bilingual education programs. This represents an ongoing shift to connect educational funds directly to educational programs; therefore, increasing the role of the school board at the local and state levels. Continuing along this vein, Wirt and Kirst (2005) continues to highlight this shift from the early 1920s to early 1950s where societal changes began to cause legislators to raise questions regarding accountability when three significant changes shifted the landscape of society: (1) the golden era gave superintendents full discretion to deal with the educational problems that stemmed from the Great Depression and World War II; (2) post-World War II gave rise to drastic changes in the educational curriculum due to economic expansion which resulted in an increase in enrollments, increased graduation rates; and (3) a weakening of the confidence in school boards following the 1954 Supreme Courts *Brown v Board of Education* decision outlawing statutory school segregation. This decline continued to accelerate when the
quest to reduce unequal educational opportunities was set forth in an effort to comply with the motion set forth in Brown. This ultimately led to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 which required states to comply with stricter measures of assessment, accountability, and performance.

These mandates do not reflect all of the federal, state, local, or societal mandates that have played a significant role in shaping the governance of the school board. However, they show that many of the issues that were of concern centuries ago continue to exist or remain a concern within our educational system today. Interestingly enough despite some changes, the one entity that remained unchanged is the face, structure and demographics of the school board.

**Issues Related to School Boards**

Shields (2004) posits that not only are our nation’s educational institutions in “crisis,” so are educational leaders and school boards. Some researchers relate this crisis to a lack of qualified educational leaders, including superintendents, school principals, and school board members. Maxcy (1994) believes that “the crisis has occurred because of the naïve, conservative and traditional leadership responses to increasingly complex, challenging, and postmodern educational leadership with crises in democratic government” (as cited in Shields, 2004, p. 110). The lack of leadership offered by school boards themselves (van Alfen, 1993) or the propensity of educators to adopt a series of reforms in rapid succession (Fullan, 2003) and failing to empower either teachers or administrators (Shields, 2004) has served to perpetuate this growing crisis. Whereas, Noguera (2004) notes that “inequities among school districts and the
community they serve are rampant and extreme, and local control does not make it easier for schools to address the academic needs of poor students” (p. 2150).

Surveys conducted by the National School Board Association (NSBA), Illinois School Board Association (ISBA), and Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) the face of school boards has remained the same since their inception and that school board demographics do not represent the diversity of the communities in which they serve. Land (2002) cites additional studies conducted by the American School Board Journal (ASBJ) and Virginia Polytechnic and State University in an effort to show that school board members continue to differ demographically (e.g. by race and class) from many of the individuals they serve. These surveys consistently revealed that the majority of school board members reported that they were 87% (White), 5% (Black), and 1% (Hispanic); less than half the members were women (44%). Additionally, 57% of school board members reported an annual income at or above $60,000, with 23% claiming an income of greater than $100,000 (Land).

A 2002 NSBA survey of school board members provided further insight regarding the lack of ethnic and racial diversity among the nations’ school boards. This survey found that school boards are somewhat less racially diverse than the nation as a whole, but more diverse than most state and national elected bodies; and that nearly two-thirds of boards overall were no more than 10 percent African-American and Hispanic. Additionally, Marshall and Olivia (2006) states that the percentage of black school board members ranged regionally from less than 3 percent in the West to more than 20 percent in the South. Whereas, Evans (2007) argues that “as
minority populations continue to grow suburban school systems will bear a large responsibility for educating students of color” (p. 315). She explains that rapid demographic changes may result in school districts (e.g. suburban districts) being ill-equipped to address the academic and social needs of students with color.

Additionally, their roles continue to raise questions and spark in-depth discussions about their ability to provide meaningful leadership given the diverse nature of society and school districts across the nation. In addition, to their failure to assume a proactive leading role in educational reform, school boards have endured criticism for a variety of other reasons (Land, 2002). These questions are not being raised to imply that race and/or class of school board members will improve the educational achievements of students of similar races and classes. However, it is important to consider the role of the school board, how learning occurs within this role, and how decisions are made when addressing issues of race and class. The overarching dynamic exist within the context of the relationship between a governing body (e.g. school board) that has remained unchanged despite the fluid changes that have occurred in society and how they learn to make decisions related to race and class within a somewhat foreign context.

**Demographics of School Boards**

Approximately 95,000 school board members of which 96% elected by their communities serve on 15,000 local public school boards across the United States (Resnick, 1999). Today most school boards are comprised of five to seven members, but urban school boards are
more likely to have seven or more members (Land, 2002). Scholars note that “the reform movement of the early 20th century transformed school boards into smaller, centralized, city-wide organizations that brought more educated, higher income, successful professionals and businessmen to school boards, a change that generated concern regarding the ability of such elite members’ of the community to represent the concerns of local citizens effectively” (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994). Willie and Willie (2005) state that “school boards in the United States have been and continue to be disproportionately controlled by affluent European Americans” (p. 480). Cistone (2008) later argued that when compared to the general public, school boards are disproportionately represented. He continues to explain that “they tend to be white, middle-aged, male professionals, married, with children in the schools, and active in the organizational and associational life of the community” (p. 29).

In 2008, the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) surveyed its 66 member districts which represent the nation’s largest urban school districts. The respondents were asked to respond to questions regarding school governance, board structure and organization, and board demographics. The survey revealed that school board members in urban districts reported their race and gender as: 55% female and 45% male; 52% White, 33% Blacks, 9% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 3% other. Additionally, the survey showed the average age of respondents as: 25% age 60 and older, 33% age 50-59, 30% age 40-49, 11% age 30-39, and 1% age 20-29. With the percentage of school board members holding college degrees as: 37% Bachelor’s degree, 31% Master’s degrees, and 9% Ph.D or Ed.D.
This disproportional representation of school boards across the United States is consistent with the demographic dynamic of school boards in Illinois. United States census (2010) data revealed that the Illinois population consists of 78% White, 15% Black, 16% Hispanics and 5% Asian with school board members representing less than 5% of the minority population. School board demographics were explored in 2008, by the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) who conducted an in-depth survey of school board demographics, their roles and responsibilities. Approximately 28% of school board members surveyed completed the survey and revealed the following demographic and socioeconomic data. Respondents reported their gender and race as: 42% female and 56% male; 92% White, 3.2% Black, 1.2% Hispanic, 1.2% Native American, and 1% Multiracial. Additionally, they reported their age, educational background and income as: 42% is between age 40-49 and 31% is between ages 50-59; 28.3% earned advance degrees, 29.7% earned 4 year degrees, and 30.3% have some college coursework; 35.3% earn between $70-110k, 19.7% earn between $110-150k, and 18.4% earn more than 150k per year. The ethnic racial makeup of the Illinois population and school board members demonstrates that school boards in Illinois are disproportionally represented across the state. A closer look at Illinois student enrollment data reveals a consistent increase in the number of minority students enrolled across districts by nearly 50%.

According to the 2012 and 2014 Illinois School Report Cards, student enrollment in Illinois public schools (k-12) increased steadily from 2,044,539 in 2003 to 2,077,856 in 2007, then declined to 2,064,312 in 2010 and continued to decrease from 2,074,806 in 2011 to 2,066,692 in 2012 and to 2,046,857 in 2014. Additionally, the minority student population has
continued to increase with students who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Native American, or two or more races made up 49% of the enrollment in 2012, up from 41.4% in 2003. The increase in minority percentage is accounted for mainly by increases among Hispanic students which represents 24.6% of the enrollment in 2014. Finally, the number of students identified as low-income has increased from 37.9% of the enrollment in 2003 to 49% in 2012 (ISBE, 2012) and 51.5% in 2014. Representing a 10% increase in the number of low-income students enrolled in public education. This increase in enrollment has impacted the dynamics of school districts who are now faced with addressing issues of race and class in order to meet the needs of a diverse student population that includes an increased minority student population and an increased low-socioeconomically disadvantaged population.

**Demographics of School Districts**

Eighty percent of school districts enroll fewer than 3,000 students. Most studies on school boards focus on larger, urban districts that educate a disproportionate number of children (Land, 2002). A series of reports released by the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) conducted from 2001-2012 titled the *Condition of Education* has served to shed some light on the plight of public education, the demographic and perception of school boards and school districts. While highlighting that education will continue to take a drastic shift and the school boards’ ability to address these changes are essential to the growth and sustainability of the education system.
In 2008, the NCES released its annual *Condition of Education* report that looked at participation and persistence in education, student performance and other measures of achievement, the environment for learning, and resources for education. This study revealed that, with over 50 million students currently enrolled in public schools (grades K-12), a number that is experiencing growth exponentially and projected to reach 54.1 million by 2017, it is important that we take a closer look at and gain greater understanding of the role of the school board in addressing these changes long-term. Additionally, as the number of student enrollments has increased, so has the number of minority and non-English speaking students. Minority student enrollment consisted of 43% of students, of which 20% speak a language other than English. This changes the dynamics of school districts. Additionally, although the dropout rate continues to increase for all students; however, the dropout rate for Hispanics and Blacks remains over 10% higher than that of White students. Finally, 5.6 million children under the age of seven are living in poverty, which represents one-third of the public school student population (NCES, 2008).

In a more recent *Condition of the Education* report, released by the National Center of Education Statistics in 2012, focused on participation in education, elementary and secondary education and outcomes, and postsecondary education and outcomes. This report showed a slight variance from the data reported earlier. However, it took a historical perspective of the rates of participation in education over the past 10 years. The report revealed that between 2000–01 and 2006–07, public school enrollment increased by 2.1 million students, reaching 49.3 million students in school year 2006–07, where it remained until 2008–09. Additionally, the total
public school enrollment reached 49.5 million in 2010–11. From 2010–11 to 2021–22, total public school enrollment is projected to increase by 7% to 53.1 million. From 1990 through 2010, the number of White students in U.S. public schools decreased from 29.0 million to 27.7 million, and their share of enrollment decreased from 67% to 54%. In contrast, Hispanic enrollment during this period increased from 5.1 to 12.1 million students, and the percentage of public school students who were Hispanic increased from 12% to 23%. While the total number of Black students fluctuated, their share of enrollment decreased from 17% to 15% during this time (Aud, Hussar, Johnson, Kena, Roth, Manning, Wang, & Zhang, 2012).

Shields (2004) notes that in North America regardless of how ethnicity or socioeconomic status (SES) are determined, there is no doubt that children from certain minority ethnic groups and/or from impoverished social classes generally fail to perform in school to the same levels as other children. Additionally, Shields notes that high failure and dropout rates, over identification of behavior problems, and placement in low-level academic programs are particularly prevalent among minority children. However, in the United States, many indigenous, Black, and Hispanic children find that schools, as they are currently made up, present particular challenges and often barriers for success. Concurrently, demographic factor such as “poverty and an increasingly diverse student population and social problems such as drug use, violence, and homelessness, have challenged the ability of public schools to improve students’ academic achievement, particularly in urban area” (Land, 2002, p. 234).
Role of School Boards

According to Noguera (2004) school board members are typically responsible for overseeing matters pertaining to “financial management and personnel (e.g. collective bargaining agreements), while the education professionals they hire have primary responsibility for managing the provision of education” (p. 2150). He continues to explain that this system is designed to allow those individuals with a vested interest in the schools—parents and community—the ability to monitor and participate in the condition of their schools.

The Illinois Association of School Board (IASB) provides school boards with foundational principles of effective governance. Noting that the school board is a corporate entity charged by law with governing a school district, each school board sits in trust for the entire community. The obligation to govern effectively imposes a diverse set of functions that demonstrates the depth of their decision-making. The key principle functions identified by the IASB fall into three broad areas. The first area includes the school board ability to clarify the purpose and function of the school district while connecting and engaging in the community. Clarification of the districts purpose is significant and accomplished by intentional actions on behalf of the school board that continually define, articulate and re-define the district as a whole in order to answer the question—who gets what benefits and for how much? This function is further defined within the school board ability to connect with the community “by engaging in two-way conversation with the entire community” (IASB, p. 1). These conversations allow the board to hear and understand the communities’ educational aspirations, needs and desires.
The next area includes their ability to monitor the performance of the district while taking responsibility for their actions. The IASB described this area as one that encompasses their ability to effectively monitor their “performance and progress toward district goals” (IASB, p.1) while assessing compliance within the context of written Board policies and procedures. The Boards ability to assess their performance while using data effectively is essential to the overall growth of the school district. Along this vein, is the ability to take responsibility for itself by taking individual and collective responsibility for Board activity and behavior, the work it chooses to do and how it chooses to do the work.

The final area stresses the superintendent and Board relationship. According to the IASB, the board has a responsibility to employ and delegate authority to the superintendent. This is accomplished by the school board ability to “evaluate and hold the superintendent accountable for district performance and compliance with written board policy” while “delegating authority to the superintendent to manage the district and provide leadership for the staff” (IASB, p. 1).

Similar to the IASB, the Center for Public Education (CPE) published a report titled the “Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards” which shed some light on the role of school boards in high-achieving district. Building from the 2001 groundbreaking research study, the Lighthouse Inquiry, conducted by Iowa Association of School Boards indicated that “school boards in high-achieving districts are significantly different in their knowledge and beliefs than school boards in low-achieving districts. And, this difference appears to carry through among administrators and teachers throughout the districts” (p. 4).
The goal of the Lighthouse Inquiry (2001) was to identify a link between what school boards do and how students achieve. In doing so the results of the study was designed to serve as a “lighthouse to guide other school boards in their efforts to improve student achievement and to guide state-level association” (p. 4). In 2011, the CPE highlighted the results of the Lighthouse Inquiry by identifying the following characteristics of school boards in high-achieving districts when compared to low-achieving districts. These characteristics are captured in four broader categories: student achievement, accountability, board-community relationships, and board-superintendent relationships.

**Student Achievement**

The study revealed school boards in high-achieving districts shared a commitment to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction by defining clear goals toward that vision. These school boards also made sure that these goals remained the district’s top priorities and that nothing detracts from them. They also have a strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels. In high-achieving districts, poverty, lack of parental involvement and other factors were described as challenges to be overcome, not as excuses that impact student achievement. As a result, these board members expected to see improvements in student achievement quickly as a result of their initiatives and diligent efforts.
Accountability

The study continued to describe these school boards as accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on developing policies to improve student achievement. This is inclusive of school boards that are data savvy and data-driven who embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement. This was evident in their ability to regularly seek such data and were not shy about discussing it, even if it was negative. Therefore using data to align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals.

Board-Community Relationships

Next the study revealed that these school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals. This was accomplished by their ability to provide specific examples of how they connected and listened to the community, and school board members received information from many different sources, including the superintendent, curriculum director, principals and teachers.

Board-Superintendent Relationship

Finally this study stressed that these school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust. In successful districts, boards defined an initial vision for the district and sought a superintendent
who matched this vision. This was also accomplished by the school boards desire to take part in team development and training with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts (IASB, p. 1).

Similar to the Lighthouse Inquiry, the Washington State School Directors’ Association (WSSDA) issued a set of guiding principles that highlighted the important role of school boards in ensuring that all students achieve. These principles include: setting the vision, establishing goals, developing policy, allocating resources, and assuring accountability. They suggest that “student achievement is the primary agenda for school boards” (p. 1). They continue to note that “as policymakers, school boards have a critical role in ensuring that students learn what they need to know to be prepared as productive citizens” (p.1).

Critical Race Theory: An Introduction

Critical race theory (CRT) is a growing body of legal scholarship which “challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xiii). CRT was built on the insights of two previous movements, critical legal studies and radical feminism (Delgado, 2001). The roots of critical race theory were depicted in the writings of Delgado (1995) and can be traced back to the mid-1970s with the early work of Derrick Bell (an African American) and Alan Freeman (a White), both of whom were deeply distressed over the slow pace of social reform in the United States. Bell and Delgado and their contemporaries, which included lawyers, activists, and legal scholars, observed that many
advances of the 1960’s civil rights era began to stagnate and slow with little to no progress toward reformation. Delgado (1995) posited that instead of seeing advancements, they began to see subtle forms of racism embedded in economic, political, educational, social, and judicial systems that continued to perpetuate racism. Delgado (2001) continued to describe critical race theory as an activist movement that “not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better” (p. 3).

CRT is grounded in the realities of the lived experiences of racism, largely perpetuated by Whites, which has singled out African Americans and others as worthy of suppression (Taylor, 1998). The movement has predecessors—critical legal studies, feminism, and continental social and political philosophy (Delgado, 1995). It derived its inspiration from the Civil Rights Movement, which encompassed the work and writings of Martin Luther King, W.E.B. Du Bois, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X. It has also drawn from European philosophers and theorists such as Antonio Gramsci and Jacques Derrida as well as American radical traditions exemplified by such figures as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglas, Cesar Chavez, and the Black Power movements of the sixties and early seventies (Delgado, 2001). Shuford (2001) notes that critical race theory has drawn specifically upon W.E.B Du Bois’ insights on the “problem of the color line which included his rich articulation of double consciousness and his attention to the significance of gender, class and embodiment in racialization” (p. 301).

Critical race theory received its inception from legal scholarship and began to emerge in the adult education literature in the early 1980’s after adult educators were called to action by
Gloria Landson-Billings and William Tate to use CRT as a tool for educational research. A review of CRT tenets, origin, and various perspectives on CRT validates the importance and viability of CRT as a tool for unpacking issues of inequality in education.

**Critical Race Theory Defined**

Several definitions of CRT appear in the literature. These definitions are important because they serve not only to frame the context of the literature but also to provide some insight into the voice and positionality of the various authors. Matsuda (1991) has defined critical race theory as

> the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination (p. 1331).

Furthermore, Lynn (1999) and Yosso (2005) provide uniquely different definitions of CRT. These definitions span across a six year period, which marks a continued shift in how CRT has evolved as a theoretical framework within education. Lynn (1999) defined CRT as a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of African American and Latino students.

Yosso (2005) provides yet another definition of CRT in education as a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the way race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses. Lynn and Yosso agree that CRT is a useful tool for exploring issues within the fabric of education; however, they have different views as to how this should occur.
Yosso challenges educators to address issues of race within the social construct by examining the ideology of racism that is often hidden within the rhetoric of shared normative values and neutral social scientific practices and principles.

Whereas, Lynn encourages educators to focus their attention on the cultural, interpersonal and structural dynamics of the educator that may perpetuate continued marginalization of minority students. Solórzano (2002) extends Matsuda (1991) views on CRT by arguing that CRT advances a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in education while working toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal that opposes or eliminates other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin.

**Evolving Themes/Tenets**

The literature reveals a variety of themes recognized as significant components of CRT. Delgado (1995) identifies racism, legal storytelling and interest convergence as three basic insights that CRT represents. First, Delgado notes that racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society. He further explains that because racism is ingrained in our landscape, it looks natural and ordinary to persons in the culture.

Next, he posits that CRT, challenges racial oppression and the status quo that sometimes take the form of storytelling in which writers analyze the myths, presuppositions, and receive wisdoms that make up the common culture about race that invariably render Blacks and other minorities disadvantaged. Here is where the “legal storytelling” movement urges Black and
brown writers to recount their experiences with racism and the legal system and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess law’s (Delgado, 2001).

Lastly, he introduces interest convergence developed by Bell (1980) which states that White elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for Blacks only when they also promote White self-interests. Therefore, describing how the dominant culture grants privileges and rights to Blacks when the underlying premise is in their best interest. Solórzano (1998) echoed the views of Delgado (1995); however, he specifically viewed them as tenets within the field of education that should be used to inform theory, research, pedagogy, curriculum and policy.

Unlike Delgado, Shuford (2001) believed that CRT should embrace four additional Du Bosian tenets: the “impossibility” of racial eliminativism; the worth of “races” toward liberatory culture-making; the “inescapability” of Whiteness as an ontological condition of indebtedness; and revision of “racial gifts” discourses to motivate racial redress as gifts of atonement toward mutual healing and delegitimization of racialized commodification practices” (p. 302).

Building on Delgado (1995), Delgado and Stefancic (2001), Matsuda (1995), Yosso (2002), and Solorzano and Yosso (2001), DeCuir and Dixson (2004) ascertained that CRT involved a specific set of tenets: 1) counter-storytelling, 2) the permanence of racism, 3) Whiteness as property, 4) interest convergence, and 5) the critique of liberalism. They agree that race and racism is a permanent fixture within US society; however, they argue that the acceptance of the idea of permanence of racism involves “adopting a realist view of society” (p. 27) which Bell (1995) describes as the realization of the dominant role that race and racism has played and continues to play in society; both consciously and unconsciously. They also agree
that a critique of liberalism or liberatory education is important because it serves to embrace “the
notion of colorblindness, the neutrality of the law, and incremental change” (p. 29). However,
they extended their view of CRT to include Whiteness as property (Harris, 1995), counter-
storytelling (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001), and interest convergence (Bell, 1980).

According to Harris (1993) and Dixson and Rousseau (2005), Whiteness as property is
viewed as a right rather than a property value in order to examine the property value (in terms of
rights) of Whiteness. They continue to agree that, the popular conception of property in terms of
tangible objects—a home or car—the position held by many theorists within the US society can
be applied to Whiteness as property in order to reveal how it manifest itself in education by
excluding people of color from resources. Harris proposes that “the core characteristic of
Whiteness as property is the legal legitimation of expectations of power and control that
enshrine the status quo as a neutral baseline, while masking the maintenance of White privilege
and domination” (p. 1715).

While, Gillborn (2005) and Leonardo (2002) define characteristics of Whiteness as “a
willingness to name the contours of racism, the avoidance of identifying with a racial experience
or group, and the minimization of racist legacy” (p. 488). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) argue
that counter storytelling is a valid deconstructive function used to “challenge, displace, or mock
the pernicious narratives and beliefs” that exist within society (p. 42). Bell (1980) argues that
basic rights for people of color, specifically, Blacks came only inasmuch as they converged with
the self-interests of Whites. In the same vein as Delgado (1995), Yosso (2002, 2005), and
to inform research in communities of color and the extension of CRT to education: 1) the inner centricty of race and racism; 2) the challenges to dominant ideology; 3) the commitment to social justice; 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and 5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches.

**Centrality of Race and Racism**

CRT scholars agree that CRT in education starts with the basic premise that race and racism are endemic and permanently embedded in the fabric of society. Delgado (1995), Solorzano, and Yosso (2001) extended this to include the intersectionality with other forms of subordination. Meaning that it is at the “intersection of race, gender, and class that some answers can be found to the theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical questions raised (p. 472) related to Chicana and Chicano students. However, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) continued to explain that intersectionality examines “race, sex, class, national origin, sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings” (p. 51).

**Challenge to the Dominant Ideology**

CRT in education challenges the traditional claims that educational systems and institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Therefore, critical race theories argue that “the traditional claims act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in US society” (p. 472).
The Commitment to Social Justice

CRT in education is committed to social justice and offers a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression (Martsuda, 1991). Solorzano and Yosso (2001) envisions social justice education as the “curricular and pedagogical work that leads toward: (1) the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty; and (2) the empowerment of underrepresented minority groups” (p. 473).

The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge

CRT in education recognizes that the experiential knowledge of students of color is important, legitimate, viable, appropriate, and critical to the understanding, teaching, and analysis of racial subordination within the field of education. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) posits that experiential knowledge is viewed as a strength in critical race studies because it serves to draw explicitly on the experiences of students of color by including such methods as storytelling, parables, family histories, narratives, and chronicles as a basis to unpack racial subordination.

The Transdisciplinary Perspective

According to Solorzano and Yosso (2001), “CRT in education challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses and insists on analyzing race and racism in education by placing them in both an historical and contemporary context” (p. 473). They continue to explain that, CRT in education utilizes the transdisciplinary knowledge base of other
fields such as ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history and law in order to better understand racism, sexism, and classism in education.

Yet, Jeris and McDowell (2003) draw our attention to another set of themes: 1) CRT acknowledges that race has historically been, and continues to be, a fundamental organizing principle in U.S. society; 2) critical race theorists take the position that far from being the exception, racism is “normal” or “ordinary” in that it is “the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country” (p. 188); 3) the ultimate goal of CRT is social justice; 4) people of color have a unique voice in racial matters because of their social position and experiences of oppression; and 5) CRT draws from many disciplines including history, philosophy, law, anthropology, sociology, economics, and political science to analyze the complexities of race relations and encourage change. Jeris and McDowell and Yosso recognize that the voice of people of color are absent from the social, political, and economic construct of society and that it is through a CRT lens educators can begin to explore opportunities through governance and policy to address issues of equity and inequality.

Yosso (2002) continued to support the importance of CRT in education by drawing attention to the importance of recognizing the voice of people of color. She writes that the voice of people of color is absent, limited or omitted from the research, which may serve to build a stronger support for the use of CRT as a theoretical framework in the field of education. Additionally, Yosso positioned CRT as a framework for analyzing and challenging racism in educational curriculum, processes, and discourses. In doing so, she called for a critical race theory curriculum, citing that “critical race theory can be a guide for educators to expose and
challenge contemporary forms of racial inequality, which are disguised as neutral and objective structures, processes, and discourses of school curriculum” (p. 93).

She argues that a critical race curriculum is an approach that can be used to understand the curricular structures, processes, and discourses, informed by CRT. According to Yosso (2002) a critical race curriculum would emerge from the five tenets of CRT and would serve to:

1. Acknowledge the central and intersecting roles of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination in maintaining inequality in curricular structures, processes, and discourses.
2. Challenge dominant social and cultural assumptions regarding culture and intelligence, language and capability, objectivity and meritocracy.
3. Direct the formal curriculum toward goals of social justice and the hidden curriculum toward Freirean goals of critical consciousness.
4. Develop counter-discourses through storytelling, narratives, chronicles, family histories, scenarios, biographies, and parables that draw on the lived experiences students of color bring to the classroom.
5. Utilize interdisciplinary methods of historical and contemporary analysis to articulate the linkages between educational and societal inequality (p. 98).

Critical Race Theory and the Field of Education

Today CRT has emerged as a powerful theoretical and analytical framework within educational research (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate can be credited for introducing critical race theory to education nearly 20 years ago. In 1995, Teachers College Record published an article, entitled “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education,” by Ladson-Billings and Tate. In this article the authors challenged educators to use CRT as a framework for examining the role of race and racism in education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). They also attempted to theorize race and use it as an analytical tool for understanding school inequity. Ladson-Billings and Tate based their discussion of social and school inequity on three
propositions: 1) race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States; 2) U.S. society is based on property rights; and 3) the intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and consequently, school) inequity (p. 1). It is from this publication that adult and higher education scholars began to explore education through the lens of CRT. Following this publication, Ladson-Billings (1998) used CRT in an attempt to name and highlight the function of white supremacy through five tenets. Essentially, named the CRT project in education became an attempt to:

1. Name and discuss the pervasive, daily reality of racism in US society which serves to disadvantage people of color.
2. Expose and deconstruct seemingly ‘colorblind’ or ‘race neutral’ policies and practices which entrench the disparate treatment of non-White persons.
3. Legitimize and promote the voices and narratives of people of color as sources of critique of the dominant social order which purposely devalues them,
4. Revisit civil rights laws and liberalism to address their inability to dismantle and expunge discriminatory soci-political relationships.
5. Change and improve challenges to race neutral and multicultural movements in education which made White students behavior the norm (p. 12).

From here researchers began to build discussions around issues of social justice and diversity education in order to explore how they could inform the emergence CRT projects in education.

Critical race theory was introduced into the field of adult education in the early 1990s. From this introduction education scholars have discussed how CRT can be used to unpack and reveal instances of race and racism within the context of our education system. Embedded in policies, curriculum, academic programs, and classroom the perpetuation of racism and the adverse effect it has on people of color continue to flourish throughout the literature.

Subsequently, a discussion surrounding CRT and its applicability within the field of adult education...
education can lend a great deal of value and insight into the role of school boards and
governance by exploring how this learning occurs, evolves and develops.

The field of adult education is consistently expressed through literature and conference
foci that the primary mission was/is to work toward the inclusion of all adults and the
democratization of Western society. While this charge was not framed as the intentional uplift of
ethnic and racial minorities, it was interpreted as such by factions of the fields practitioners and
leaders; and significant works and conference agendas were dedicated to examining how adults
from disenfranchised groups should be educated (Johnson-Bailey, 2001). The professional field
of adult education has developed without recognition of particular groups’ contributions and
without accounting for a large segment of practice: adult education for social action or social
change. Through conscious or benign neglect, women, racial and ethnic minorities,
homosexuals, and older individuals, have had little if any say in determining what counts as adult
education (Merriam and Brockett, 1997).

Recently, a number of scholars in the field of adult education have applied CRT analysis
to educational issues (Lynn, 1999). Both Parker (1998) and Tate (1997) challenged educators
studying CRT in schools to extend beyond determining whether or not racism exist instead to
identify the manner in which race and racism manifests itself in educational decision making for
students of color by exploring the use of storytelling/counter-storytelling and narratives. Stovall
(2006) echoes Parker (1998) and Tate (1997) view that educators must look beyond the existence
of race and racism in schools. However, Stovall (2006) suggests that educators accept this
challenge by first recognizing that CRT is a viable theoretical construct and its subsequent application to address issues of social justice in education.

In doing so, Stovall (2006) gives specific attention to the role of narratives and counter-stories as the primary vehicles for shaping CRT within an educational agenda. Stovall (2006) posit that it is through narratives and counter-stories of educational leaders (specifically those of color) that serve to legitimize and promote the voices and narratives of people of color as sources of critique of the dominant social order which purposely devalues them. Therefore, these counter-stories become the foundation by which to pose alternatives to education systems that operate to further marginalize communities of color (Stovall, 2006).

Borrowing from Solórzano and Yosso (2002), a counter-story asks leaders to ‘suspend judgment, listen for the stories points, test them against (their) own version of reality (however conceived), and use the counter-story as a theoretical conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical case study’ (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Parker and Lynn (2002) also note that CRT narratives and storytelling provide educators with the ability to challenge accounts and preconceived notions of race. They also argue that counter-stories are sometimes integral to developing cases that consist of legal narratives of racial discrimination.

**Storytelling/Counter-Storytelling**

Critical race theorists emphasize storytelling and privileging the voices of people of Color by arguing that the voice of Color people and the dominant voice differ primarily on the basis of content (Duncan, 2005). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define counter-story as a method
of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) supports the views of a long list of researchers including (Bell 1987, 1992, 1996; Berkeley, 1982; Lawrence, 1992; Delgado, 1989, 1995a, 1996; Olivas, 1990; Paredes, 1977; Deloria, 1969; R. Williams, 1997) who notes that storytelling has a rich and continuing contribution in African America, Chicana/Chicano, and Native American communities. By telling the counter-stories of Chicanas and Chicanos graduate students, Solórzano and Yosso (2001) examined the different forms of racial and gender discrimination.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) also note that counter-stories are a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Additionally, they note that counter-stories shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse of race, and further the struggle for racial reform. Parker and Lynn (2002) also note that CRT serves an important role in storytelling because it constitutes an integral part of historical and current legal evidence gathering and findings of fact in racial discrimination litigation.

On the other hand, counter-storytelling helps individuals understand what life is like for others, and invites individuals into a new and unfamiliar world. Counter-storytelling is a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes. The use of counter-stories allows for the challenging privileged discourses, the discourses of the majority, therefore, serving as the means for giving voice to marginalized groups. (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Building on the work of Delgado (1989) and Solórzano & Yosso (2001) argues that, “counter-stories can serve at least four theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical
functions: (1) they can build community among those at the margins of society by putting human and familiar face to educational theory and practice, (2) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems, (3) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position; and (4) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone” (p.475).

Lopez (2003) states that the counter-stories are those stories that are told, stories that are consciously and/or unconsciously ignored or downplayed because they do not follow socially acceptable notions of truth. Building on Delgado (2000) Parker & Lynn (2002) emphasizes Delgado (2000) assertion that, “only through listening can the conviction of seeing the world one way should be challenged and ‘one can acquire the ability to see the world through others’ eyes” (p.10). In another vein Stovall (2006) reveals the importance of counter-storytelling in order to achieve the quest for social justice. He notes that through counter-stories we are able to discover the relationships between nuanced experiences, individual responses and macro-policy.

**Narratives**

The use of narratives in CRT is also represented in the literature through the writings of Parker and Lynn (2002) who notes that, “narratives add a different dimension to the purpose of educational research by taking on a different potential dimension as an integral part of legal
testimony” (p.11). However, a review of literature revealed in Duncan (2005) indicates that the goal of narratives in CRT is to encourage an ethics in scholarship that prompts a kind of multiple consciousnesses. Duncan (2005) further notes that narratives go beyond simply entertaining one or a number of random viewpoints to one that seriously consider specific viewpoints. Matsuda (2006) as noted by Duncan (2005) that narratives as a method of inquiry into social reality included a deliberate choice to see the world from the point of view of socially subjugated groups.

In contrast to Matsuda (2006) and Duncan (2005), Murtadha and Watts (2005) notes that narratives serve as a vehicle to capture the voices of African American leaders which are limited and/or underrepresented in the literature. In doing so, Murtadha and Watts (2005) revealed the historical narratives of men and women such as Fanny Jackson Coppin, Mary McLeod Bethune, Septima Clark, and W.E.B. DuBoise to emphasize the importance of recognizing the narratives of African American leaders as a basis for moving forward with a social justice agenda that supports movements of social change. Contrary to Murtadha and Watts (2005), North (2008) challenges educators to take a critical examination of narratives that allow educators to raise their ‘critical consciousnesses in order to promote a social education agenda. In contrast, Anyon (2005) as noted in North (2008) continues to emphasize the role that critical consciousness can play in raising awareness and understanding of educators through information, readings, and discussion. However, “this does not by itself induce them to participate in transgressive politics…to activate people to create or join social movement, it is important to actually involve them in protest activity of some kind”.
Adult education is designed to open channels of learning for most marginalized groups, because its role and forms of learning are “to build learning and knowledge upon existing personal experiences (Mohasi, 2006). Mohasi (2006) also purport that because learning is based on what a person already knows while expanding on existing knowledge with the purpose of addressing life; adult education should be viewed and understood as education that has the potential to bring about change.

Race, Class and Adult Learning

Race may be America’s single most confounding problem, but the confounding problem of race is that few people seem to know what race is.

Ian F. Haney Lopez, The Social Construction of Race

In order to have a meaningful discussion about race in our society it is important to due diligence to the “social construction” of the term race. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define race as a “social construction, not a biological reality” and racism as “a means by which society allocates privilege and status” (p. 17). The social construction of race is revealed in the 1806 Virginia case of Hudgins v. Wright where three generations of enslaved women sued for freedom on the grounds that they descended from a free maternal ancestor. The law was simple…a person born to a slave is a slave; one born to a free women was free. The burden of proof of ancestry was on those attempting to prove slave status. In order to determine if the plaintiffs were indeed white the ruling Judge Tucker devised a race test, which stated that:
Nature has stamped upon the African and his descendants two characteristic marks, besides the difference of complexion, which often remains visible long after the characteristics distinction of color either disappears or become doubtful; a flat nose and woolly head of hair. The latter of these two disappears the last of all; and so strong an ingredient in the African constitution is this latter character, that it predominates uniformity where the party is in equal degree descended from parents of different complexion, whether white or Indians…. So pointed is the distinction between the natives of Africa and the aborigines of America, that a man might as easily mistake the glossy, jetty clothing of an American bear for the wool of black sheep, as hair of American Indian for that of an African or the descendants of an African (Lopez, 1994).

The fate of these women rode on the complexion of their skin, the texture of their hair, and the size/shape of their nose. Each of these characteristics has served to mark their race, which ultimately determined if they were free or enslaved (Lopez, 1994). Little has changed in society today that deviate from these characteristics being key factors that continue to drive racism among people of color. The characteristics of our hair, complexion of our skin and facial features continue to influence whether or not we are free as a people or enslaved within society.

The reality is that race dominates the lives of African-American as it manifests itself in our hair, complexion, speech, dance, neighbors, walk and food. Lopez (1994) states that, “race determines our economic prospect. The race conscious market screens and selects us for manual jobs and professional careers, red-lines financing for real-estate, green-lines are access to insurance, and even raise the price of that car we need to buy.” These examples serve to demonstrate how race and racism have been embedded in our existence for hundreds of years.

Race has always been a permanent fixture in American Society, Hudgins v. Wright emphasizes the power of race in our society and the reality that human fate (specifically the fate of people of color) still ride upon ancestry and appearance. One of the basic premises of critical
race theory is the notion of the permanence of racism in society or as Bell (1992), states, “racism is a permanent component of American life (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004). The acceptance of the idea of permanence of racism involves adopting the “realist view” of America, described by Bell (1995) as one’s ability to realize that the dominant role that racism has played and continues to play in American society; this can be both a conscious or unconscious act (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004).

Whereas, Lopez (2000) define race as “a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry” (p. 165). Whereas, Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso (2000) provide several definitions of race: Lorde (1992), as cited in Solorzano, et. al, defines racism as, “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (p. 65). While Marable (1992), as cited in Solorzano, et. al, defines racism as “a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African-Americans, Latinos. Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and white discourse to one that includes multiple faces, voices, and experiences (p.68).

Imbedded in these definitions however, are at least three important points: (1) one group believes itself to be superior (2) the superior group has the power to carry out the racist behavior, and (3) racism affects multiple racial and ethnic groups. However, Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, (2000) agree that each definition posits that racism is about institutional power, a form of power that people of color—that is, non-Whites in the United States have never possessed. Additionally, most people think of racism as intentional and overt acts between individuals.
Race and class are two of the most pressing facts in American society because they serve to reflect society as a whole and not just isolated individuals (McDermott, Raley & Seyer-Ochi, 2009). Addressing issues of race and class in educational institutions require an understanding of how these constructs are situated and embedded in society. McDermott, Raley and Seyer-Ochi (2009) provide functional definitions for race and class by defining race “as a trait given at birth and turned into trouble under unequal conditions” and class “as traits socialized into children with diminished socioeconomic opportunities” (p. 101).

Social dynamics such as race, class, and gender has a strong influence on an individuals’ development of self, their understanding of self, or their subjectivity (Cain, 2002). She posits that an important group of contextual factors such as race, class, gender, physical ability, and sexual orientation remain untheorized in adult education literature. Similar to Cain, Boris (1994) agreed that “race has been the under theorized category of the analytic trinity of gender, race, and class; it is too often taken as natural rather than socially, culturally, and politically constructed” (p. 111). However, these characteristics have a profound effect on society and adult learning.

During her research, Cain (2002) suggest that “race, class, and gender influence adult learning through four major processes: construction of subjectivity, positionality and allocation of resources, curriculum, and by affecting group dynamics and group interaction with other social actors” (p. 67). First, the construction of subjectivity is developed by the learners’ interaction with others and continues to change over time based on these interactions and settings. The social dynamics of class, gender, and race influence individuals’ development of
their understanding of self, or their subjectivity. It is important to note that this is not a passive process in which people simple receive the dominant culture’s expectations, but rather, an interactive process in which people negotiate meaning and identity (e.g., Blacks taking the term “black” as a source of pride and power; homosexuals taking the slur “queer” and redefining it as a term of pride) (Cain, 2002). This changes as individuals interact with each other and as they move through various settings over time. Understanding the importance of identity and subjectivity to the development of the adult learners is necessary because it affects how individuals perceive information and participate within various settings such as the classroom.

Second, positionality and allocation of resources looks at how the economic, political, and sociocultural dynamics are apportioned in society based on race, gender, class, and other contextual dynamics. Cain notes that “the importance of positionality and allocation of resources for learning is that a persons’ position in hierarchies of power and the resulting access to resources enable and constrain learning” (p. 68). Harding (1996) found that “the types of experiences people have as a result of their social position strongly affects the way they can know the world and what they count as knowledge” (p. 443). The importance of this for adult educators is that the research shows the effects of unequal allocation of resources work in complex and subtle ways beyond basic notions of ability to “buy” education or sharing cultural capital with educators. Also, the person’s position in hierarchies of power and access to resources enable and constrain learning.

Understanding the ways this happens might prove more useful than the vague and general ways in which adult educators have talked about the role of experience in education (Cain,
2002). An example of how this dynamic affects the adult learner can be seen in a study conducted by Brown, Cervero & Johnson-Bailey (2000), to understand how societal position of seven African American women affects their experience when teaching to adults in postsecondary institutions. The study concluded that the teachers’ positionality affected theory experience by: (1) producing a teaching philosophy that is based on a history of marginalization, (2) raising issues of credibility with students because of the teacher’s race and gender, and (3) directly affecting their classroom interactions and teaching strategies.

A third way that race, class, and gender affect adult learning is through curriculum; specifically, through the curricular materials, tools, and resources used in the teaching and learning interaction. Cain continues to note that curricular materials and meaning-making processes are affected by class, race, and gender based on the role of the leaders and participants.

Finally, race, class, and gender affect adult learning through the operation dynamics that exist within and between the organizational structures. These dynamics may include classroom interactions as well as the dynamics that exists within the way that middle-class social movement groups operate, the voices identified, and how decisions were made. Cain (2002) suggests that race, class, and gender also affect the “relative power that informal groups have to pursue their goals vis a vis corporate and governmental actors in a conflict. To the extent that power allocated based on class, gender, and race, it affects the learning that will occur among group members as they struggle” (p. 70).

The literature paints a clear picture that race and class has a dynamic level of influence and impact on adult learning. The social construct of race and racism continues to exist in
educational institutions and among society. It has become clearer through the review of these literatures that educators and scholars will be doing an injustice to society if the role of race, class and adult learning went unexplored and did not continue to permeate the research and literature.

Adult Education: Process of Adult Learning

_Human beings are unique among all living organisms in that their primary adaptive specialization lies not in some particular physical form or skill or fits in an ecological niche, but rather in identification with the process of adaptation itself—in the process of learning._

David A. Kolb, Experiential Learning

There are various definitions regarding learning and how learning is shaped, manifested, and developed in and throughout adulthood. Numerous theories and countless processes have emerged over the centuries in an effort to pinpoint and shed some insight on the theoretical framework, processes or paradigms that exist in order to describe this phenomenon. Smith (1982) states that learning can have several definitions, he asserts that learning is used to refer to the acquisition and mastery of what is already known about something, the extension and clarification of meanings of one’s experience, or an organized, intentional process if testing ideas relevant to problems. In other words, it [learning] is used to describe a product, a process, or a function. (p. 34).

Additionally, Bandura (1986) defines learning as “an information-processing activity in which information about the structure of behavior and about the environmental events is transformed into symbolic representations that serve as guides for action” (p. 51).

Wilson (1993) explains that
learning is an everyday event that is social in nature because it occurs with other people; it is ‘tool dependent’ because the setting provides mechanisms that aid and structure cognitive processes; and finally it is the interaction with the setting itself in relation to its social and tool dependent nature that determines the learning. (p. 73)

However, Kolb (1984) provides a working definition of learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). This definition places great emphasis on how learning occurs from an experiential perspective. Here Kolb introduces four critical aspects of the learning process: (1) process of adaptation and learning is emphasized as opposed to the emphasis being placed on content or outcomes; (2) knowledge is a transformative process that is continuously created and recreated and is not acquired or transmitted independently; (3) learning transforms knowledge both objectively and subjectively; and (4) “to understand learning, we must understand the nature of knowledge, and vice versa” (p.38). In short, Zepke and Leach (2002) posits that learning has been identified as a process of making meaning from all experiences—cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and social. It is within these experiences that the learner must draw from their public, professional, and private worlds.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning and learning from experience has been cited in the literature and discussed extensively in the work of Dewey (1925), Freire (1972), Horton (1990), and Illich (1973), who all emphasize the importance of using experience in and for learning. More recently, Miller (2000) explored learning from experience and experiential learning for the field
of adult education by suggesting that “learners’ life experience outside as well as inside of
formal educational institutions are increasingly seen as important dimensions of learning” (p.71).
Usher (1993) makes a distinction between learning from experience and experiential learning in
the following way: “learning from experience is something that happens as part of day-to-day
life. With experiential learning representing the discourse which has this everyday process as its
subject and which constructs it in a certain way, although it appears to merely describe the
process” (p. 169). As noted in Merriam and Brockett (1997), the idea of experiential learning is
not “merely that the accumulation of experience makes a difference; it is how learners attach
meanings to or make sense of their experience that matters” (p. 153). The significance of this
research is grounded in the work of Dewey (1938, p.27) as cited in Merriam and Caffarella
(1999), who argues that experience must exhibit the two major principles of continuity and
interaction:

the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up
something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of
those which come after. With that of interaction posits that an experience is always what
it is because of the transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time,
constitutes his environment (p.223).

In other words, learning does not occur in isolation and must connect the learners past experience
with those of the present in order to achieve meaningful implications. The second principle is
that of interaction and states that “an experience is always what it is because of a transaction
taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (p. 223).

The term experiential learning has been a subject of interest in the adult education
literature for decades. Whether or not adults learn from experience has been an ongoing
discussion in the field of adult education and dates back to the writings of David Kolb and David Boud, which build their work as an extension of the learning theories derived from Lewin, Piaget, and Dewey. Similar to learning, there is no concrete definition of experiential learning; however, several scholars have provided meaningful definitions of experiential learning. Fenwick (2000) defines experiential learning as “a process of human cognition (p. 244). She also notes that experiential learning is a process of distinguishing the ongoing meaning making that takes place in the individuals’ everyday life (e.g. workplace, community, home, family, and church). It is at this level that experiential learning becomes a tool for distinguishing this meaning from “theoretical knowledge and non-directed informal life experience from formal education” (p. 243).

In 1984, Kolb wrote *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning Development*, in an attempt to provide a set of guiding theories and principles around experiential learning. He posits that experiential learning “offers the foundation for an approach to education and learning as a lifelong process” (p.3) that is grounded in the philosophical traditions of social psychology, philosophy, and cognitive psychology. He further notes that experiential learning provides a framework for “examining and strengthening the critical linkages among education, work, and personal development (p. 4). Kolb (1984) continues to explain experiential learning theory as a set of fundamentally different views that looks at the learning process from that of the “behavioral theories of learning base on empirical epistemology or the more implicit theories of learning that underlie traditional educational methods, methods that for the most part are based in the rational idealist epistemology” (p. 20).
This perspective of learning is called experiential for several reasons. First, it has clear ties to the work of Kurt Lewin, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget on behavioral and cognitive learning. Second, it emphasizes the importance of the role of experience in the learning process. Lewin’s model of learning focused on “techniques of action research and laboratory methods where learning, change and growth are best facilitated by a process of here-and-now experience followed by collection of data and observations about that experience” (Kolb 1984, p. 21). This model of learning situates learning in a four-stage cycle with concrete experience, observations and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, and testing implications of concepts in new situation representing the components of the model.

Similar to the Lewinian’s model, Dewey’s model makes more of an explicit argument toward the “development nature of learning implied in Lewin’s conception of it as a feedback process describing how learning transforms the impulses, feelings, and desires of concrete experience into higher-order purposeful action” (Kolb 1984, p. 22). Therefore, learning becomes a dialectic process where the integration of experiences and concepts, observations and actions begin to shape the achievement of purpose.

Piaget’s model of learning and cognitive development continued to capture elements of Lewin’s and Dewey’s learning models, by stating that learning is a cyclical process that takes place between the individual and the environment. Piaget posits that “learning lies in the mutual interaction of the process of accommodation of concepts or schemas to experience in the world and the process of assimilation of events and experiences from the world into existing concepts and schemas” (Kolb 1984, p. 23).
Kolb (1984) explains that although there is a great deal of similarities between the models of learning developed by Lewin, Dewey, and Piaget, when looked at together they form a unique set of perspectives that can be characterize by the major traditions or framework of experiential learning. He characterizes these traditions as, (1) learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes, (2) learning is a continuous process grounded in experience, (3) the process of learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world, (4) learning is an holistic process of adaptation to the world, and (5) learning is a process of creating knowledge.

Moreover, Kolb (1984) building primarily on the work of Dewey, Piaget, and Lewin conceptualized that “learning from experience requires four different abilities” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 224). Kolb identifies these abilities as the process of experiential learning. He continues to describe this process a as a four-stage cycle involving four adaptive learning modes that includes, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. He further defines these adaptive learning modes as: (1) concrete experience—an openness and willingness to engage in new experiences; (2) reflective observation—observational and reflective skills that allow the learner to view the experience from a different perspective; (3) abstract conceptualization—analytical abilities that connect ideas and concepts based on the learners observations; and (4) active experimentation—decision-making and problem solving skills that allow the learner to transition new ideas and concepts into practice. Miller (2000), explains that, according to this model, “learning takes place through
a process whereby learners undergo experience, engage in reflection on that experience, and develop theory on the basis of their reflection” (p.76).

Moreover, Freire (1974) posits that the nature of learning and adaptation is embedded in his concept of praxis, which he defines as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 36). Praxis is described by Freire as one’s ability to name the world which requires both active—in the sense that naming something ultimately transforms it—and reflective—in that our choice of words gives meaning to the world around us (as cited in Kolb 2000, p. 29). Furthermore, Jordi (2011) explains that “reflection is a key concept in adult education theory and more specifically within experiential learning discourse” (p.182). Reflection is embedded in the constructivist view of experiential learning which focuses on the learners’ ability to reflect on their experience and interpret and generalize them in order form mental structures (Fenwick, 2000).

The constructivist view of experiential learning has evolved in the research to include reflection, meaning making, and cognitive reflection as key components of how adults learn from experience. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) contend that constructivist stance maintains that “learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience” (p. 261). Additionally, Zepke and Leach (2002) highlight the importance of meaning making as a significant element of the constructivist view, which holds that “learners construct meaning from their experience (p. 209). Whereas Jordi (2011), Fenwick (2001) and Illeris (2007) suggest that the constructivist approach to experiential learning includes cognitive
reflection in the process which allows the learning to extract knowledge from their concrete experiences.

Fenwick (2000) offers four additional distinct schools of thought that have emerged in the literature while challenging adult educators to move beyond the reflective constructivist view of experiential learning that has shaped the literature thus far regarding experiential learning. Instead, she argues that attention should be given to the following perspectives: inference (psychoanalytic perspective), participation (situative perspective), resistance (critical culture perspective), and co-emergence (enactive perspective). Her position is not to ignore the value and contributions of the reflective constructivist view of experiential learning where “the learner reflects on the lived experience and then interprets and generalizes this experience to form mental structures” (p. 248). Instead, she argues that there is great value in expanding the view of experiential learning in order to gauge a greater understanding of the process and how it can be transferred from theory to practice.

**Interference: A Psychoanalytic Perspective**

Psychoanalytic theory identifies ways of “approaching the realm of unconscious, our resistance to knowledge, the desire for closure and mastery that sometimes govern the educational impulse, enigmatic tensions between learner, knowledge and educator” (Fenwick 2000, p. 251). She argues that experiential learning becomes a part of the learners’ ability to “tolerate one’s own conflicting desires while recovering the selves that are repressed from their terror of achieving full self-knowledge” (p. 252).
Participation: A Situative Perspective

The situative perspective maintains that learning is rooted in the situation that the individual participates in, not by intellectual concepts produced by reflection nor as psychic conflicts produced internally (Fenwick, 2000). In this perspective, knowledge and learning are derived as part of the learners’ ability to engage in human activity in a particular community. As described by Lave and Wegner (1991) argue that the learners’ ability to understand emerges as the learner participates in a situation within the community, tolls, and activity of the situation. It is important to note that this perspective shares similar characteristics as situation cognition which maintains that learning is rooted in the situation in which a person participates and not by engaging in cognitive or reflective actions.

Resistance: A Critical Culture Perspective

Critical culture perspective positions power as a core issue. According to Fenwick (2000) “learning in a particular cultural space is shaped by the discourses and their semiotics (signs, codes, and texts) that are most visible and accorded most authority by different groups” (p. 257). Fenwick continues to argue that in order to understand human cognition, “we must from a critical culture perspective, analyze the structures of dominance that express or govern the social relationships and competing forms of communication and cultural practices within that system” (p. 256).
Co-Emergence: The Enactivist Perspective

The enactivist perspective is derived from the enactivism theory which serves to explain how the learner and setting co-emerge. Fenwick (2000) posits that this perspective of experiential learning “assumes that cognition depends on the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities embedded in a biological, psychological, cultural context” (p. 261). This perspective insists that learning can only be understood as a component of co-emergence where the learners’ understandings are connected to that of other learners, and their knowledge co-emerge with collective knowledge.

Experiential learning and learning from experience has been a consist fixture in the adult education literature. Although researchers seem to agree collectively that adults learn through experience, how this learning occurs continues to be debated and challenged in the literature. As the research continues to evolve exponentially, researchers continue to identify models to explain this phenomenon as well as identify strategies for practitioners to consider in an effort to shift theory to practice. Experiential learning takes shape within the constructivist view of learning where the learners’ ability to acquire and execute reflection, reflection and action, and dialogue by their ability to interact in and within their environment. It is equally important to give some attention other views of learning such as the behaviorist and cognitive views revealed in social learning theory.
Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory combines elements from behaviorist and cognitive orientation which posits that people learn from observations that take place in a social setting (Merriam & Caffarella 1999). Bandura (1977) posits that “social learning theory emphasizes the prominent roles played by vicarious, symbolic, and self-regulatory processes in psychological functioning” (p. 11). He explains that the psychological functioning is significant because it includes the continuous reciprocal interaction between the personal and environmental determinants. These determinants are described by Bandura as symbolic, vicarious, and self-regulatory. Staddon (1983) argues that there is a “nonarbitrary way to represent social interactions, that formal models are well able to handle internal and external factors in social interactions, and that dynamics cannot be described any other way” (p. 502). Whereas, Scanlan (2011) extends social learning theory as a key component of organizational learning. Here, he describes social learning theory as “experiences of meaning as inextricably bound up with our sense of identity (who we are and where we come from), community (where we see ourselves belonging, and practice (what we do)” (p. 331). Wenger (1998) agrees with Scanlan regarding the implications of social learning theory for organizations. He explains that social learning theory for organizations means that “learning is an issue of sustaining the interconnected communities of practice through which organizations knows what it knows and thus becomes effective and valuable as an organization” (p. 8). As noted by Merriam and Caffarella (1999), Bandura’s theory of social learning has relevance to adult learning because it accounts for both the learner and the environment in which they operate.
According to social learning theory, “modeling influences produce learning principally through their informative functioning” (Bandura 1977, p. 22). He continues to suggest that most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling by others and forming ideas on how new behaviors are performed. This information is used later and serves as a guide for future action. Bandura (1977, 1986) notes that observational learning is governed by four constituent processes: attentional processes, retention processes, motor production processes, and motivational processes. While modeling is classified by five phenomena: observational learning, inhibitory and disinhibitory effects, response facilitation effects, environmental enhancement effects, and arousal effects. Bandura (1986) expanded his position on observational learning by emphasizing that learning by “observation enables people to expand their knowledge and skills on the basis of information exhibited and authored by others” and that “social learning is fostered by observing the actual performances of others and the consequences of them” (p.47).

**Attentional Processes**

The first component is attentional processes determine what is “selectively observed in the profusion of modeling influences to which one is exposed and what is extracted from such exposures” (Bandura 1977, p. 24). Meaning that people cannot learn by observation unless they actually attend to and perceive the behavior being modeled and observed. He continues to describe in detail a number of factors that influence the exploration and perception of what is modeled in the social environment and how that information is transmitted into action for future use. These factors include: properties of modeling activities, observer determinants, functional
value, sway of attraction, enhancing modeling by attentional means, and structural arrangements and observability of behavior patterns (Bandura 1986, p. 51).

**Retention Processes**

The second component of observational learning is retention processes is concerned with “retention of activities that have been modeled at one time or the other” (Bandura 1977, p. 25). Here Bandura notes that people are unable to benefit from observation of modeling if they do not remember the behavior. In this process, the learners’ ability to achieve retention by symbolic transformations, representational systems which include imaginal and verbal constructs, rehearsal retention, and cognitive rehearsal. Basically, Bandura (1986) explains that the behavior observed must be transmitted symbolically, processed in the learners’ imagination, transmitted into a verbal construct, rehearsed in order to achieve retention, and visualized cognitively by the learner in order to increase the proficiency of the activity.

**Motor Reproduction Processes**

The third component is motor reproduction processes which involve “converting symbolic representations into appropriate actions” (Bandura 1977, p. 27). Bandura (1986) suggest that “behavioral production is achieved by organizing responses spatially and temporally in accordance with the conception of the activity” (p. 63). This process includes the following conceptual-motor conceptions: locus of response integration, conception-matching, faulty
conception and response production, conception matching and motor deficits, conception matching and feedback information, and making the unobservable observable.

Motivation Processes

The final component is motivational theory which “distinguishes between acquisition and performance” (Bandura 1986, p. 68) because people do not enact everything they learn. Bandura explains that people will more likely adopt modeling behavior if the outcome is favorable and results in value and rewards. He continues to highlight that the learners’ observational learning behavior is influenced by three sources—direct, vicarious, and self-produced.

Staddon (1983) disagreed with Bandura’s position that formal models were necessary for the analysis of social interactions. He argued that

(a) Bandura’s attempt at formal models of patterns of causation is vague and misleading; (b) internal variables, such as expectation and self-monitoring can easily be handled by formal models; (c) simple deterministic models can behave in unexpectedly complex ways, so cannot be rules out in principle as explanations for social interaction; and (d) unaided verbal reasoning cannot hope to come to grips with the dynamics of even simple interacting system” (p. 502).

In 1986, Bandura expanded, revised and updated his earlier work on social learning theory and introduced social cognitive theory as a details interpretation of this work. Unlike social learning theory where learning occurs vicariously through observations and models and the learner uses symbols and self-regulation in order to gain value from the situation. Social cognitive learning theory is explained in terms of a ‘model of triadic reciprocality in which behavior, cognitive, and other personal factors, and other environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of
each other” (Bandura 1984, p. 18). He posits that the nature of a persons’ interactions exist within six basic capabilities: symbolizing capability, forethought capability, vicarious capability, self-regulatory capability, self-reflective capability, and the nature of human nature.

Symbolizing Capability

Symbolizing capabilities focuses on the learners’ ability to use symbols as a means to alter and adapt their environment. Bandura (1986) posits that “through symbols people process and transform transient experiences into internal modes that serve as guides for future action” (p. 18). He continues to explain that through symbols the learner is able to attach meaning, form and process the experience in such a way that it serves as a guide for future action.

Forethought Capacity

Forethought capacity considers learners’ purposive behavior and how future thought is regulated. This capacity is connected to symbolic activity because it allows the learner to engage in purposeful and intentional action by making cognitive representations that have an impact on present action (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1986) posits that forethought allows “people anticipate the likely consequences of their prospective actions, they set goals for themselves, and they otherwise plan courses of action for cognized futures” (p. 19). He continues to point out that for many people this process is infective; therefore, exercising forethought allows learners’ to motivate and guide their anticipatory actions and thoughts.
Vicarious Capacity

Vicarious capacity highlights the role of observational learning as a vital element of development and survival. Bandura (1986) reminds us that “psychological theories have traditionally assumed that learning can occur only by performing responses and experiencing their effects” (p. 19). He explains that all learning resulting from direct experience can occur vicariously by observing the behaviors of others and the consequence of the behavior. Moreover, he stresses the importance of modeling as an integral aspect of capacity by stating that the behaviors observed must be modeled in order to achieve mastery. Bandura postulates that it is difficult to envision a social transmission system in which “language, lifestyles, and institutional practices of the culture are taught to each new member just by selective reinforcement of fortuitous behaviors, without the benefit of models to exemplify the cultural patterns” (p. 20).

Self-Regulatory Capacity

Self-regulatory capacity considers the role of self-directedness in the learners’ ability to influence their external environment in order to utilize self-regulatory action. Bandura (1986) implies that “people do not behave just to suit the references of others” (p. 20). Instead, their behaviors are motivated and regulated by internal standards and their reaction to self-evaluative actions.
Self-Reflective Capacity

Self-reflective capacity is characterized by the learners’ capacity for reflective self-consciousness as a component of their ability to analyze their experiences and thought processes. Bandura (1986) states that self-reflective means, that learners’ “monitor their ideas, act on them or predict occurrences from them, judge the adequacy of their thoughts from the results, and change them accordingly” (p. 21). He continues to stress that in addition to gaining understanding through reflection, learners also evaluate and alter their thinking based on the reflection.

The Nature of Human Nature

Bandura (1986) indicates that in the social cognitive perspective, “human nature is characterized by a vast potentially that can be fashioned by direct and observational experiences into a variety of forms within biological limits” (p. 21). He submits that human behavior are organized by experiences and retained in codes. Therefore, “human thought and conduct may be fashioned largely through experience, innately determined factors enter into every form of behavior to some degree” (p. 22). He notes that both experiential and psychological factors must interact in an intricate way in order to determine the behavior of the learner.

Bandura (1977, 1986) set the foundation for considering social learning theory and later coined social cognitive theory as a viable construct for how adults may learn in various settings or contexts. The literature is clear that adult learning is a dynamic process that is best achieved through the engagement and interaction of others. Bandura’s position is clearly stated and
expanding in the literature related to the role and additional value that observational learning and modeling has in the construction of learning and acquisition of knowledge. Equally important is the ideal of context and how learning occurs in and among various contexts.

Learning in Context

The context in which adults learn has become an essential component of the learning process (Caffarella & Merriam, 2000). McLellen (1996) suggests that “contexts can be the actual work setting, a realistic surrogate setting, or real world anchors, which could include real world situations” (p.12). While Choules (2007) takes a broader interpretation of context to include

socioeconomic, cultural, and political situation of the country, the country’s position relative to the rest of the world, the particular location of the educational initiative, the (lack of) institutional support for the educational initiative, and the positioning of the facilitator and students in terms of factors such as race, class, wealth, gender, sexuality, language, education levels, and (dis)ability (p. 160).

Similarly, Hansman (2001) notes that “learning in context is paying attention to the interaction and intersection among people, tools, and context within a learning situation” (p. 44). By the same token, Hansman and Wilson (2002) extend this view by emphasizing the importance of paying attention to “context, activity, and tools allows us to understand how adult learners discover, shape, and make explicit their own knowledge, thus furthering ongoing discussions as to what counts for knowledge and learning in adulthood” (p. 145).

Caffarella and Merriam (2000) introduced two dimensions of the contextual approach to learning—“interactive” and “structural. They define, “the interactive dimension as one that
acknowledges that learning occurs as a product of the individual learners’ interaction within the specific context” and “the structural dimension as a component of the social and cultural factors that affect learning such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, power, and oppression” (p.55). This type of learning takes place within the real-world context of the individual learner natural or authentic environment. Additionally, the contextual perspective argues that “learning cannot be separated from the context in which the learning takes place” (p.59). This means that the learner’s situation and context in which learning takes place are as important to the learning process as what the individual learner brings to the situation (Caffarella & Merriam).

The context in which adults learn has been given a significant amount of attention in the literature. The presence of learning within a specific context may be present within either of the dimensions described by Caffarella and Merriam. However, the dynamics of learning is not limited to these dimensions in relationship to context and contextual factors. Instead, leaning can continue to evolve through incidental learning and informal learning which may further provide some insight into the learning process that occurs within these dimensions.

Informal Learning

Marsick and Watkins (2001) explain that informal and incidental learning is “at the heart of adult education because of its learner-centered focus and the lesson that can be learned from life experiences” (p. 25). They provide solid definitions of informal and incidental learning by contrasting them with formal learning. In doing so, they wrote that

Formal learning is typically institutionally sponsored, classroom-based, and highly structured. Informal learning, a category that includes incidental learning,
may occur in institutions, but it is not typically classroom based or highly structured, and control of the learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner. Incidental learning is defined as a byproduct of some other activity, such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organizational culture, trial-and-error experimentation, or even formal learning. Informal learning can be deliberately encouraged by an organization or it can take place despite an environment not highly conducive to learning. Incidental learning, on the other hand, almost always takes place although people are not always conscious of it (Marsick, 1990, p.12; Marsick and Watkins, 2001, p. 25).

Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) define informal learning as “learning that is usually self-directed, independently pursued, and unregulated, often for the purpose of solving problems” (p. 26). They continue to explain that books, technology, and the Internet are forms of learning acquisition that allow for learning to occur in the workplace as well as for fostering self-sufficiency and civic contributions. Informal learning is learning that is usually self-directed, independent and self-regulated for the purpose of solving a problem. Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) stress that “this type of learning is very important to adults as a form of knowledge acquisition that provides for learning in the workplace as well as for self-sufficiency and civic contribution” (p. 26).

Ellinger (2005) explored the contextual factors that may influence informal learning in the workplace. Here she utilized Marsick and Watkins (1990, 1992, 2001) model of informal and incidental learning as well as Dewey’s theory of learning from experience and Lewin’s approach to the interaction of individuals and their environment to inform her research. She explains that the informal and incidental model learning is “influenced by how people frame a situation as a problem that is typically non-routine” (p. 394). She continues to note that as the learner’ frame the problem within their context
according to their beliefs and assumptions, which are often unconscious, they consider strategies for solving the problem. The learner also uses the process of action and reflection to frame, understand and solve the problem. Additionally, Garrick (1998) note that informal learning is “often thought of as an invisible or intangible form of learning, that is hard to define, hard to quantify” (p. 129) and often leftover.

**Social Justice and Diversity Education**

Equity, equality, equal opportunity, and democracy are some of the terms that resonate throughout the social justice literature. According to Normore and Blanco (2008) discussions about social justice in the field of education have “typically framed the concept of social justice around issues including race, diversity, poverty, marginalization, gender, and spirituality (p. 223). Kohl (1999) note that issues of equity and social justice has always played a part in the formation of the public school. Marks and Tonson (2002) identified conversations about equal educational opportunity as a means to pursue social justice and democracy in America’s public schools.

There is no one exact definition of social justice. Instead, various meanings and definitions emerged in the literature. In its simplest form, Lindsey, Lindsey and Terrell (2011) defined social justice as “doing what is right our students” (p. 29). Marshall and Olivia (2006) assert that social justice theorist and activist should focus their inquiry on how institutional norms, theories and practices in schools and in society lead to social, political economic, and educational inequities. While, Williamson, Rhodes, and Duncan (2007) provide two distinct
definitions of social justice. First, social justice is defined as the promise of equity and mobility through assimilation and the belief that such an agenda will return schools to a time in which they foster togetherness under the banner of Americanization. Secondly, social justice is defined and reflected in a curriculum and school personnel who honor students’ languages and cultures, fosters appreciation of difference, and engages in a moral use of power that resists discrimination and inequity. Furman and Shields (2005) argue the “need for social justice to encompass education that is not only just, democratic, empathic, and optimistic, but also academically excellent” (as cited in Normore and Blanco, 2008, p. 224). Similarly, Lee and McKerrow (2005) define social justice as “not only by what it is but also by what it is not, namely injustice. By seeking justice, we anticipate the ideal. By questioning injustice, we approach it. Integrating both, we achieve it” (p.1).

In contrast to Williamson, Rhodes, and Duncan (2007), Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2000) divide social justice into two categories: 1) the social justice outlook states there is indeed a right and moral position that should direct society and 2) the social justice movement is not only to state the right and moral imperative of what should occur but also to be about the education and empowerment of all students. Williamson et al. (2007) and Johnson-Bailey and Cervero provide educators with several uniquely different definitions that serve our understanding of social justice. However, the common thread within these definitions is the fact they represent how social justice should be captured and addressed within the field of education. Additionally, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero challenge educators not only to address the
differences that exist between groups but also to highlight how power is exercised in favor of one group and to detriment of another.

Williamson et al. (2007) encourage educators to examine the voices of historical actors and historians to inform current issues and debates regarding how social justice should be defined and delivered. In their article, “A Selected History of Social Justice in Education,” Williamson et al. raise the question, “can social justice be achieved through an education that promotes assimilation, or must it be an education for cultural maintenance (or something in between)?” It is the examination of social justice in education that not only illuminates what transpired but also provides a portrait of how, why, and the end to which the history of education is managed.

Additionally, Williamson et al. (2007) and Shields (2004) suggest that “transformative educational leaders may foster the academic success of all children through engaging in moral dialogue that facilitates the development of strong relationships, supplants pathologizing silences, challenges existing beliefs and practices, and grounds educational leadership in some criteria for social justice” (p. 109). Shields present a framework for addressing social justice goals that may serve to help educational leaders to position their practice in moral action and, in fact, will provide some guidance through the labyrinth of demands placed on them.

In another vein, North (2008) presents a “conceptual framework of social justice education that emphasizes the tensions and contradictions among various perspectives and, in turn, evaluates those perspectives” (p. 1184). North’s conceptual framework includes three components:
1. Competing claims for recognition and redistribution in education—describes the “frequent conflict in social justice debates between cultural groups’ claims for respect and dignity (recognition) and socioeconomic classes’ demands for a more equitable sharing of wealth and power (redistribution)” (p. 1185).

2. Macro-and micro-level distinctions—two distinct levels at which “equality of power is an issue in education. The macro level concerns the institutionalized procedures for making decisions about school management, educational and curriculum planning, and policy development and implementation. The micro level concerns the internal life of schools and colleges, in terms of relations between staff and students and among the staff themselves” (p. 1189-1190).

3. Knowledge and action debates in education for social justice—which asserts that “education for social change requires students and teachers actively transform social injustices, not just study them. An emphasis on action in social justice education, then, challenges the notion that education is limited to developing knowledge, academic or otherwise.” (p. 1194)

Whereas, Stovall (2006) argue that CRT is a “viable theoretical construct to address issues of social justice in education” (p. 243). Stovall challenges educators to consider a CRT project in education that will attempt to address the following:

1. Name and discuss the pervasive, daily reality of racism in U.S. society which serves to disadvantage people of color.
2. Expose and destruct seemingly ‘colorblind’ or ‘race neutral’ policies and practices which entrench disparate treatment of people of non-White persons.
3. Legitimize and promote the voices and narratives of people of color as sources of critique of the dominant social order which purposely devalues them.
4. Revisit civil rights law and liberalism to address their inability to dismantle and expunge discriminatory soci-political relationships.
5. Change and improve challenges to race neutral and multicultural movements in education which have made White students behavior the norm. (p. 243)

Stovall argues that the success of a social justice project in education will “require the recognition of the interplay of race and class to assess political, social, racial, and economic dynamics” (p. 257). Additionally, it will require those on the side of CRT to recognize there may be intra-racial issues that need class analysis while not separating them from the larger construct of White Supremacy. Similar to CRT, adult educators have been charged with viewing
learning through a social justice lens. The research presented has identified a number of conceptual frameworks developed to analyze and facilitate a social justice agenda and it further suggest that this agenda may be captured by taking a closer look at the diversity of education.

**Diversity Education**

Changes in the racial, ethnic, and language groups that make up the nation’s population have presented educators with many opportunities and challenges, therefore making it imperative for educators to respond to diversity (Banks, 2006). Additionally, Banks notes that racial, cultural, ethnic, language and religious diversity is also in schools throughout the Western worlds, including the United States. Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2008) provide definitions of diversity and multiculturalism, noting that each term is often used in tandem. However, it is difficult to discuss one without clarifying the meaning of the other. They define diversity as an intersection of race, gender, age, and sexual orientation and multiculturalism as the examination of how diversity manifests itself within the context of education in classrooms, curriculum, research and literature, Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey raise our awareness of diversity and multiculturalism while exploring how emotions can influence dialogues, curriculum, and classroom experiences.

Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2008) explore diversity and multiculturalism through an adult and higher education lens; however, the recommendations and strategies suggested by the authors may be useful for primary and secondary educators seeking to develop and facilitate a multicultural curriculum. The U.S. census projects ethnic groups of color, or ethnic minorities,
will increase from 28% of the nation’s population to 50% in 2050 (Banks, 2006; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Moreover, in 2002 more than 40% of students enrolled in U.S. schools were students of color, and in some of the nation’s largest cities, such as Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, New York, and San Francisco, half or more of the public school students are students of color (Banks). Therefore, constructively managing the emotions of students as described by Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey can serve to shape and foster diversity at the level of the learning process where many of these notions of race and racism are shaped and vilified.

This may also complement the five dimensions of multicultural education identified by Banks (2006) as content integration, the knowledge construction process, an equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and empowering school culture and social structure. Banks details these five dimensions as 1) content integration as the extent to which teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject area or discipline; 2) the knowledge construction process describes the extent to which teachers help students understand, investigate, and determine how the cultural assumptions, frames of references, perspectives, and biases in a discipline influences the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it; 3) an equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse groups; 4) prejudice reduction focuses on the characteristics of students’ racial attitudes and how teaching methods and materials can change them; and 5) empowering school culture is used to describe the process of restructuring the
culture and organization of the school so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, language, and social-class groups will experience educational equality and cultural empowerment.

Banks (2006) provides educators with a practical view of multicultural education; however, Grant (2006) reminds us that as much as multiculturalism is celebrated, it is also resisted. Racist duality is the term used by Grant to describe the deep rooted resistance of multiculturalism from a historical perspective. Ringer (1983), as noted in Grant, describes racist “duality” as being deeply rooted in America’s past, as this duality is built into its structural and historical origins. Grant highlights the Dred Scott case in 1857, when the U.S. Supreme Court denied citizenship rights to Blacks and decreed that enslaved people do not become free when taken into free territory; the Plessy v. Ferguson decision in 1896 that upheld the doctrine of “separate but equal”; Rosa Parks’s refusal to give up her seat to a White man in 1954; and when Ruby Bridges and other Blacks began to integrate the schools in the South in the 1960s as examples of how engrained resistance to multicultural has been situated within the context of society.

In contrast, Day (1999) recognizes that the importance of multicultural education in the United States is to educate citizens who participate in the workforce and take action in the civic community to help the nation actualize its democratic ideals. In contrast, Banks (2006) challenges educators to educate for global citizenship. Banks argues that given that multicultural societies are faced with the problem of constructing nation-states that reflect and incorporate the diversity of their citizens and yet have an overarching set of shared values, ideals, and goals to which all its citizens are committed. Therefore, Banks challenges educators to recognize that
multicultural education may serve to unify the nation-states around a set of democratic values such as justice and equality to protect the rights of cultural, ethnic, and language groups by enabling them to experience cultural democracy and freedom.

Recently, a number of scholars in the field of adult and higher education have applied CRT analysis to educational issues (Lynn, 1999). Both Parker (1998) and Tate (1997) challenged educators studying CRT in schools to extend beyond determining whether or not racism exists to instead identifying the manner in which race/racism manifests itself in educational decision-making for students of color by exploring the use of storytelling/counter-storytelling and narratives. According to Lynn and Parker (2006), CRT has been used as a “framework for examining: persistent racial inequalities in education, qualitative research methods, pedagogy and practice, the schooling experiences of marginalized students of color, and the efficacy of race-conscious education policy” (p. 257). Stovall (2006) echoes Parker’s (1998) and Tate’s view that educators must look beyond the existence of race and racism in schools. However, Stovall suggests educators accept this challenge by first recognizing CRT as a viable theoretical construct and its subsequent application as a means to address issues of social justice in education. They argue that studies that have framed CRT and its relevance to education have:

1. Drawn important historical links between the work of critical legal scholars and education scholars concerned about racism in education.
2. Helped illuminate CRT’s role as a “scholarship of people” that was by and for people of color.
3. Drawn links between CRT and other “race-based epistemologies” and shown how CRT can add to current debates over the links between schooling and inequality.
4. Pushed critical race scholars in education to view CRT and education scholarship as both as a form of academic scholarship as well as a form of activism. (p. 270).
In doing so, Stovall (2006) gives specific attention to the role of narratives and counter-stories as the primary vehicles for shaping CRT within an educational agenda. Stovall posits that it is narratives and counter-stories of educational leaders (specifically those of color) that serve to legitimize and promote the voices and narratives of people of color as sources of critique of the dominant social order that purposely devalues them. Therefore, these counter-stories become the foundation by which to pose alternatives to education systems that operate to further marginalize communities of color.

Borrowing from Solórzano and Yosso (2002), a counter-story asks leaders to “suspend judgment, listen for the stories points, test them against (their) own version of reality (however conceived), and use the counter-story as a theoretical conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical case study” (p. 32). Parker and Lynn (2002) also note that CRT narratives and storytelling provide educators with the ability to challenge accounts and preconceived notions of race. They also argue that counter-stories are sometimes integral to developing cases that consist of legal narratives of racial discrimination.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature related to school boards, critical race theory, adult learning, diversity education and social justice. Critical race theory was discussed in order to provide a framework for using critical race theory as a relevant framework for unmasking and addressing issues of race and class in education. Adult learning although broadly stated included research in experiential learning, social learning theory, and informal learning as
a basis for identifying how the participants in this study learned their roles within the rich contexts they experienced. The literature on school boards was significant in setting up the historical implications and role of school boards both nationally and locally. Understanding the history of school boards, more importantly, how school boards have remained unchanged for centuries provide yet another lens to shed light on how school boards decisions are shaped collectively. Finally, literatures on social justice and diversity was highlighted in order to highlight the importance of looking at education and the role of school boards as a governing body they are acting unjustly to ignore the fact that they play a role in promoting social justice and encouraging diversity throughout educational institutions.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to find the contextual factors that impact school board decisions when dealing with issues of race and class. The study was guided by the following four research questions:

1. How are decisions influenced by the individuals’ racialized lived experiences?
2. How do school board members learn to become school board members?
3. How are school board members socialized to address issues of race and class?
4. How have school boards responded to significant issues related to race and class?

The lack of research regarding the role of school boards as leaders and how they make decisions when faced with issues of race and class is apparent with a review of the literature. Studies have been limited regarding how school board members make decisions when addressing issues related to race and class. Even fewer studies have focused on the role of school boards as leaders within a school district. This chapter discusses the methodology used to investigate the contextual factors that impact school board decisions when dealing with issues of race and class. As a result, this study attempts to combine these areas by investigating the role of school boards and how they make decisions when dealing with issues of race and class.

The chapter is divided into the following sections and addresses the following: Design of the Study, Case Study Analysis, Sample Selection, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Validity and Reliability, Researcher Orientation/Biases and Summary.
Design of the Study

A qualitative research design was used for this study because characteristics of the qualitative research paradigm are well suited to investigate the complexities of how school board members make decisions when faced with issues of race and class. Specifically, the qualitative research design allowed further investigation into how these decisions were shaped or influenced by the individuals’ race when situated within the context of critical race theory. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) identified five features of qualitative research: “1) qualitative research has actual settings as the direct source if data and the researcher are the key instruments, 2) qualitative research is descriptive, 3) qualitative research is concerned with process, 4) qualitative research is inductive, and 5) qualitative research is concerned with meaning” (p. 5).

The qualitative research paradigm is “naturalistic” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 4) meaning that the actual setting becomes the primary source of data and the researcher is the primary instrument in collecting the data. For example, I have the ability to enter and spend a considerable amount of time within the context of the school district. This places the school district as the primary source and the researcher as the primary instrument. Considering that qualitative researchers are primarily concerned with context, the researcher goes to the particular setting because they want to know where, how, and under what circumstances they came into being (Bogdan & Biklen). This allowed me to attend and observe the behavior of school board members during school board meetings, community forums, and town hall meetings, which allowed me the opportunity to gain insight into the contextual factors that shaped their decisions. Therefore, the natural setting becomes a rich avenue for identifying the natural context.
Second, the qualitative research paradigm is “descriptive” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 5), meaning that it takes the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. This allowed me to approach the world in a detailed way while demanding that “the world be examined with the assumptions that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is to be studied” (p. 5). For example, by examining school board minutes, interview transcripts, newspaper articles, photographs, memos and other official records, revealed information that may identify how decisions are being made in relationship to race and class.

Third, the qualitative research paradigm is concerned with “process rather than simply with outcomes or product” (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007, p. 6). This further allowed me to question how meaning is negotiated, how certain terms and labels come to be applied, how particular notions come to be taken for common sense, and what the natural history of events or activities under study is (Bodgan & Biklen). These questions allowed me to further understand the decision-making process of school board members by exploring these questions and many others that lend themselves to the process of decision-making and not to outcome or product.

Fourth, the qualitative research paradigm is inductive, meaning theories emerge and develop throughout the process (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). There are no pre-existing hypotheses guiding this study; however, I was seeking to identify concepts and hypotheses that may emerge from the data. In qualitative research, the ability to develop and identify theory that may emerge from the research after the collection and analysis of the data is essential to the research process. Given that “this type of research builds upon abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories
rather than testing existing theories” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7), entering the research study with pre-existing hypotheses would affect the overall validity of the research study.

Finally, “meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative research approach” (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007, p. 7). This allowed me to question the assumptions that individuals made about their lives—called participant perspectives. Sherman and Webb (as cited in Merriam, 1998) states that “qualitative research implies a direct concern with experience as it is lived, felt, or undergone” (p. 6).

In summary, a qualitative research design was best suited for this study because qualitative research allowed me to explore process and how participants made sense of that process within the context of their world (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998). Second, the qualitative research paradigm allowed me to conduct an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon (school boards’ decision-making) that has been given little to no attention in the literature. Third, since little theory exists regarding the decision-making process of school boards and how race serves as a platform to promote equity and social justice within educational institutions, a qualitative research design allowed me to build abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories as they emerged. Finally, I was unable to locate a study that examined this component of school board members’ leadership/roles; therefore, this study will make a significant contribution to the literature on critical race theory and school boards.
Case Study Analysis

A case study analysis was chosen as a particular qualitative methodology because I was seeking to gain an in-depth understanding of the process and contextual factors that shape school board members’ decision-making when dealing with issues of race and class. By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (“the case”), this approach sought to “uncover the interplay of significant factors that are characteristic of the phenomenon” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 108). Merriam (1998) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries are between phenomenon and context is not clearly evident” (p. 27). Additionally, Merriam comments that “a case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (p. 19). Merriam also notes that the premise of a case study is to identify process, context and discovery, whether than, outcomes, variables, and confirmation. Lastly, Sanders states, “case studies help us to understand processes of events, projects, and programs and to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or object” (as cited in Merriam, p. 33).

Second, the case study is a basic design that can accommodate a variety of disciplinary perspectives (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Characteristics of the case study make it adaptable to different research problems in many fields (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Simpson). Merriam identifies three distinct properties of a qualitative case study as particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. A particularistic approach “focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon” (p. 29). This makes it a good design for practical
problems—for questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practices, whereas a descriptive approach is “the end product of a case that provides a ‘rich’ description of the phenomenon under study or investigation” (p. 29). Finally, heuristic approaches “illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (p. 30) by bringing about the discovery of new meaning, extending the reader’s experience, or confirming what is already known (Merriam).

In sum, a case study can reveal knowledge about a phenomenon that we would not otherwise have access to (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), case studies also offer a large amount of rich, detailed information about the unity or phenomenon; it is useful as supporting information for planning major investigations in that it often reveals important variables or hypotheses that help structure further research while allowing the researcher the flexibility to understand and even to answer questions about educational processes and problems. (p. 111)

Sample Selection

The purpose of this study was to find the contextual factors that impact school board decisions when dealing with issues of race and class. The sample selection occurred within two levels of sampling necessary in qualitative case studies: the case and sampling within the case (Merriam, 1998). In order to identify school districts most suitable for the case study 875 school districts located in the Midwest were analyze using the following criteria: (1) increased minority student enrollment, high low-socioeconomic population, (2) increased community growth and (3) a shift in community demographics.
Of the school districts analyzed, 170 school districts met one or more of the abovementioned criteria. Of the remaining 170 school districts, ten suburban school districts were invited to participate in the study in an effort to get a rich sampling of diverse participants. However, one of the ten agreed to participate in the research study. It is important to note that the nine school districts that declined to participate in the study represented majority White school board members. The demographic of school board that agree to participate in the study represented a relatively diverse school board with 4 Black, 3 White and 2 Hispanic school board members. However, among the 9 school board members identified, the four Black school board members agreed to participate in the study. It was reported to the researcher that the 2 Hispanic school board members declined because they did not believe that they had enough service on the school board to add value to the discussion while the 3 White school board members communicated that they were not ready to have a discussion about race. Therefore, this study represented a majority Black school board.

The “case” to be studied in this research is an elementary school district located in the southern region near a major metropolitan area in the Midwest. The district is comprised of four communities (cities) serving students from kindergarten through eighth grade. At the time of the study, the district was serving 3,250 students and had experienced continual growth over the past twelve years (2000-2012), moving from 2,597 in 2000. Today the student population has declined to 3,076; however, its minority and low-socioeconomic populations have continued to increase.
The district has seven educational facilities (schools) centrally located throughout the communities. The grade configuration for each school is uniquely different, with two kindergarten through fourth grade buildings, two fourth through sixth grade buildings, one pre-kindergarten through kindergarten building, one seventh through eighth grade building and one pre-kindergarten through eighth grade building. Additionally, the district maintains relatively modest class sizes ranging from 17 to 23 students. The district reports that the average class size for kindergarten is 17 students, first grade is 20 students, third grade is 21 students, grade six is 23 students, and eighth grade is 18. These class sizes are below those reported by the state with the exception of sixth grade where the average class size is 22 students.

The district was selected for this study because it has experienced a shift in its demographics over the past ten years, resulting in an increase in its minority population, an increase in its socioeconomic status, and a decline in student achievement.

**School District Demographics**

**Community Profiles**

A review of information provided by the village and/or township\(^1\) of each community revealed information regarding the demographics of each community. According to the 4,988 residents and is comprised of 70% Black, 25% White, 3% Hispanic, and 2% Asian residents with a median income of $85,900 annually. According to 2010 U.S. Census data, the community has

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\(^1\) To maintain the confidentiality of the participants and the school district exact village and township information cannot be revealed.
information provided on the township\textsuperscript{2} website, community one has the smallest population with experienced a 5\% increase in population since 2000, when the population was 4,732 residents. More recently, 2013 U.S. Census data shows that the community has experienced minimal growth resulting in a total population of 5044 residents. The community has a high concentration of families, with 81\% of its families representing non-single residents. The community has one school serving students attending kindergarten through fourth grade and is comprised of 89\% Black, 4\% White, 5\% Hispanic, 2\% Asian, and .7\% Multi Racial students.

A review of demographic data located on the township\textsuperscript{3} website revealed a much larger population for community two with a population of 21,970 residents and is comprised of 38\% Black, 54\% White, 8\% Hispanic, and 1\% Asian with a median income of $90,100 annually. According to 2010 U.S. Census data, the community has experienced a 6\% decrease in its population since 2000, when the population was 23,462 residents. More recently, 2013 U.S. Census data shows that the community has experienced some growth resulting in a total population of 22,056 residents. The community has a modest concentration of families, with 68\% of its families representing non-single residents. This community has two schools serving students grades pre-kindergarten through eighth grades and fourth through sixth grades. The pre-kindergarten through eighth grade school is comprised of 83\% Black, 8\% White, 7\% Hispanic, 2\% Asian, and .4\% Multiracial students, whereas, fourth through sixth grade school is comprised of 92\% Black, 4\% White, 3\% Hispanic, 1\% Asian, and .2\% Multiracial students.

\textsuperscript{2} To maintain the confidentiality of the participants and the school district exact village and township information cannot be revealed.

\textsuperscript{3} To maintain the confidentiality of the participants and the school district exact village and township information cannot be revealed.
Next, information obtained from township\textsuperscript{4} historical records revealed that community three has a population of 19,000 residents and is comprised of 79\% Black, 16\% White, 4\% Hispanic, and 1\% Asian with a median income of $70,000 annually. According to 2010 U.S. Census data, the community has experienced a 47\% increase in the population since 2000, when the population was 12,928 residents. More recently, 2013 U.S. Census data shows that the community has experienced slow growth resulting in a total population of 19,150 residents. The community has a high concentration of families, with 78\% of its families representing non-single residents. This community has two schools serving grades kindergarten through fourth grades and seventh through eighth grades. The kindergarten through fourth grade school is comprised of 87\% Black, 6\% White, 3\% Hispanic, 1\% Asian, .9\% Native American, and 2\% Multiracial students, whereas, the seventh through eighth grade school is comprised of 93\% Black, 4\% White, 3\% Hispanic, and .9\% Asian students.

Finally, data collected from township\textsuperscript{5} records revealed that community four has a population of 13,646 residents, comprised of 82\% black, 13\% White, and 4\% Hispanic earning a median income of $52,380 annually. According to 2010 U.S. Census data, the community has experienced a 9\% increase in its population since 2000, when the population was 12,533 residents. More recently, 2013 U.S. Census data shows that the community has experienced minimal growth resulting in 13,765 residents. The community has a modest concentration of families with 70\% of its families representing non-single residents. This community has two

\textsuperscript{4} To maintain the confidentiality of the participants and the school district exact village and township information cannot be revealed.

\textsuperscript{5} To maintain the confidentiality of the participants and the school district exact village and township information cannot be revealed.
schools serving students grades pre-kindergarten through kindergarten and fourth through sixth. The pre-kindergarten through kindergarten school has 76% Black, 14% White, 6% Hispanic, and 3% Multiracial students, whereas, the fourth through sixth grade school has 90% Black, 6% White, 2% Hispanic, .2% Native American, and .7% Multiracial students.

Student Demographics

A review of the district school report cards and demographic information from 2002-2011 revealed that the student demographics consisted of 5% White, 89% Black, 4% Hispanic, 1% Asian, .2% Native American, and .7% Multiracial. These demographics have changed drastically over the past ten years. The district experienced a significant decline in White students between the years of 2002 to 2011, moving from 23% to 5%. Simultaneously, the district experienced a significant increase in Black students, moving from 73% to 89% and remained fairly constant within the other groups.

For the purposes of this study it is important to note that prior to 2002, specifically between 1999-2001, the district experienced a 10% decline in its White population, moving from 33% to 23%, and an 11% increase in the Black population, moving from 62% to 73%. Additionally, the district serves a relatively high low-income population of 56%, which is a significant increase from 11% in 2002. The mobility rate has remained the same at 26%. However, the number of students with limited English proficiency (LEP) and Individual Education Plans (IEP) has remained relatively constant at .4 % and 13%, respectively. The IEP

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6 To maintain the confidentiality of the participants and school district exact information of the state report cards cannot be revealed.
percentage was only reported for 2010, with no other information available for this subgroup in any other year. Despite the changing demographics, the district has maintained a 100% parental involvement rate and a 95% attendance rate.

Teacher Demographics

The district employs 227 teachers earning an average salary of $52,411 annually with an average of eleven years of teaching experience. All classes throughout the district are taught by highly qualified teachers; approximately 40% of teachers hold a master’s degree and 60% hold a bachelor’s degree. A review of the district school report cards and demographic information from 2002-2011 revealed that the teacher demographics consist of 73% White, 24% Black, 2% Hispanic, and .4% Asian, with 14% males and 86% females. This demographic has changed drastically over the past ten years. The district has experienced a decline in White and Asian teachers between 2002-2011 from 83% to 73% White and .6% to .4% Asian. On the other hand, the number of Black teachers increased during this time period from 14% to 24%, whereas the number of Hispanic teachers remained fairly constant at 2%.

Student Achievement

Overall the district has achieved a great deal of success in this area from 2002-2011. With seven consecutive years of academic achievement, the district moved from 55% of students meeting or exceeding state standards to 82% of students meeting or exceeding state standards in reading. A detailed analysis of achievement data obtained from the Illinois School Report Cards
shows this growth across three grade levels: third grade, fifth grade, and eighth grade. Specifically, third grade students’ reading scores moved from 53% meet or exceeds to 85% meet or exceeds, fifth grade students moved from 58% meet or exceeds to 73% meet or exceeds, and eighth grade students moved from 65% meet or exceeds to 80%. Additionally, third grade mathematic scores moved from 65% meet or exceeds to 85% meet or exceeds, fifth grade students moved from 58% meet or exceeds to 73% meet or exceeds, and eighth grade students moved from 65% meet or exceeds to 80% meet and exceeds. (See Table 1)

Table 1:

Student Achievement Data: Academic Years 2002 and 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Levels Reported</th>
<th>Reading Scores</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Grade</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Grade</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth Grade</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: From Illinois State Board of Education Interactive School Report Card (2014)

The district has exceeded the adequate year progress (AYP) minimum targets of 77.5% identified by the state in both reading and mathematics for most subgroups. According to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the district is not making AYP in reading in one of the five reported
subgroups. Data are reported on the following subgroups: White, Black, Hispanic, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged. The following subgroups are not included in the data because they represent less than 45 students; therefore, the state does not require the district to report this information: Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, Multiracial/Ethnic, and Limited English Proficiency. The data revealed that the district is not making AYP in reading among students with disabilities, falling slightly below the safe harbor target of 51.6%. However, the district is making AYP across all subgroups in mathematics.

Data Collection

The “sampling” within the case was purposeful sampling, which permitted me to select a sample that allowed the most to be learned about the decision-making process of school board members when addressing issues of class and race. Specifically, data were collected from school board members with at least two years of service or one term of board service. In addition, archival documents from 2002-2011 were also examined. The following criteria were used to guide this study:

1. School board members with two years of service or serving at least one terms either elected or appointed. The length of service is significant to this study because it is assumed that board members with longer tenures would have participated in a broad scope of decisions. Therefore, exhibiting an increased insight into how these issues evolved over time and how they were addressed.
2. School board members who serve on at least one district committee because this places the school board member within the context of the community, parents, and other elected officials. This information is essential to understanding the context that may shape their decision-making process.

3. School board meeting minutes from 2002-2011 which represented the time period the district experienced an explosion of growth and diversity. This information was important because it provided a timeline for developing and understanding the scope of the type of decisions made by the school board.

In sum, the case for the case study was selected due to the level of growth and diversity that occurred in a short amount of time—approximately 8-10 years. Additionally, the “sampling” within the case allowed me to collect data from a variety of sources, including past and present school board members, parents, teachers, and community members. Collectively, this allowed me to seek the emergence of meaning, process, and knowledge that led to the primary factors that shaped decision-making of school board members when addressing issues of class and race.

Data refer to the “rough materials researchers collect from the world they are studying; data are the particulars that form the basis of analysis” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 117). Creswell (2007) describes qualitative observations, qualitative interviews, qualitative document analysis, and qualitative audio-visual material as the four types of data collection. Three of the four types of data collection were used to enhance internal validity and confirm the emergence of the findings through triangulation. Interviews and archival data revealed the specific programs, policies, and practices that participants discussed, adapted, adopted, and/or modified...
in order to respond to the community and make decisions related to programs, policies, and practices across the school district.

Four school board members participated in in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews between one and one half hours and two and two half hours in length. To maintain confidentiality, only the first name of the participants is used throughout the document. In addition to the interviews, a number of documents were collected from the district or viewed via the district website and local newspaper periodicals. The documents included public records such as school board minutes, school board agendas, district policy manuals, district highlights and photographs, and newspaper articles from 2002-2011. Additional documents reviewed by the researcher included state-issued district school report cards and individual school report cards from 2002-2011. To maintain the confidentiality of the school district, identifiable references to documents and archival data have been removed. The compilation of collected documents resulted in the interviewer reviewing over 3,800 pages of written publication.

Qualitative interviews were conducted face-to-face. Four school board members were interviewed between February 15 and May 25, 2011. However, several follow-up interviews were conducted by telephone with all participants between July 19 and January 15, 2012. Follow-up telephone calls were made to clarify information collected or to ask additional questions and probe in other area. Participants were provided the transcripts of their interviews. They were asked to make any comments and either return the transcripts to me or contact me to discuss any concerns or changes they wanted. None of them contacted me. After
the dissertation is complete a final summary of the findings and implications will be provided to the participants.

The interviews lasted between one and one half hours to two and one half hours. Participants ranged in age from approximately 45-70. Two are female and two are male. The participants’ education included undergraduate and advanced degrees. One has a bachelor’s, two have a master’s, and one has a Juris Doctorate. All participants are Black. Two participants were originally elected, and two were originally appointed and had since been elected. Individual demographic information including name, sex, race, educational background professional career, employment status and years of service on the school board was collected during the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow me to use a combination of mixed and less-structured questions. Also the semi-structured interview allowed me to understand in considerable detail the participants’ thought processes and how they came to develop those perspectives. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with four participants in various locations. Two members chose to meet at the school district administrative office while the others requested to meet at their place of employment. The interview questions were predetermined and open-ended to allow me the opportunity ask additional follow-up questions and probe deeper during the conversation. The interview questions were designed around five themes: board service, educational background, motivation/decision-making, career/professional background, and community perceptions.
Prior to the interview, participants were provided with a consent form. Each participant signed an informed consent form that highlighted the purpose of the research, the parameters in which the interview would be conducted, confidentiality issues, and their rights as the participant. The informed consent form also provided a statement requesting permission to audiotape the session, dissertation director contact information, and a confidentiality provision. The consent form also gave an explanation as to how and when the tapes were to be disposed of.

The interviews took place in various locations based on the preference of the participant. For example, Alice and Fred chose to conduct their interviews at their workplace; whereas, Rob and Eva chose to conduct their interviews at the school district administrative office. The length of the interviews ranged from 90-120 minutes and included 21 open-ended questions. I taped and transcribed each interview. The transcripts were transcribed verbatim in order to preserve the completeness and integrity of the interview. This was my attempt to preserve the exact words, stories, and examples used and shared by the participants.

Qualitative observations occurred at the research site. Data gathered through qualitative observations allowed me to gain a “firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account obtained in an interview” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 13). I also observed school board members in a variety of settings, including school board meetings and board committee meetings, which allowed me to record information as it occurred, explore topics that may be uncomfortable for participants to discuss, and identify unusual aspects that may occur (Creswell, 2007). I observed three school board meetings between January 15, 2012 and April 1, 2012. Each school board meeting was a public school
board meeting and was two-three hours in length. All school board members (including the participants), the superintendent and members of the superintendents’ cabinet were present in the meeting. Principals and parents from across the district were also present at the school board meeting.

Qualitative documents are public or private documents that may include newspapers, minutes from meetings, official records, letters, and emails (Creswell, 2007). I reviewed a variety of documents (e.g., newspaper articles, school report cards, public records, and school board meeting minutes) and audio-visual materials (made available via the district website) as secondary sources to gain the most information from the research as well as to identify the role the community, parents, and teachers play in shaping the overall direction of the school district. I spent a total of ten days at the school district administrative office between October 1, 2010 and January 30, 2011. The school district granted me full access to school board minutes, school board policies, and electronic media resulting in a compilation of over 3500 pages of documents from 2002-2011. This information spoke to the governance and how policies were shaped as well as to how issues made it to the school board level.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process that extends beyond simply breaking data into small parts and reassembling it into meaningful units of information. Instead it involves the interpretation of data (Bogdan & Bilkin, 2007). According to Merriam (1998) data analysis is “the process of making sense out of data” by consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and
what the researcher has seen and read; it is the process of making meaning (p. 178). Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Merriam (1998, 2009) outline a process of data analysis known as constant comparative method that is especially applicable to this basic qualitative research study. Merriam summarizes this process by noting that data analysis is “a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete pieces of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, and between description and interpretation” (p. 178). The goal was to address the research questions of the study.

Constant comparative data analysis method, which is derived from grounded theory was used to analyze the interview transcripts, school board minutes and field notes. Grounded theory research emphasizes “discovery” and is best suited to investigate problems for which little theory has been developed (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Strauss and Corbin (1998) take grounded theory to mean “the theory derived from the data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process” (p. 12). Similar to other research methodologies, the primary instrument of data collection and analysis is the investigator who assumes an inductive stance and attempts to derive meaning from data (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). However, the constant comparative method allowed me to compare various segments of the data to identify patterns and determine similarities and differences (Merriam).

Open coding and axial coding was used to analyze the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, school board minutes and school board policies. This allowed me to identify descriptive accounts, themes or categories that cut across data or models and theories that could further explain the data. Open coding is a method by which notations are made about
the data that may be potentially relevant to the research questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These descriptive accounts allowed me to think through the information included in the thousands of pages of archival data (e.g. school board minutes and school board policies) collected. I specifically examined data (e.g. interview transcripts, field notes, artifacts, board minutes) to identify how meaning was conveyed in order to examine the phenomenon. From here, I constructed categories or themes in an effort to capture themes or categories that might cut across the data.

Next, the construction of categories emerged using a constant comparative method of data analysis. This is referred to as axial coding or analytical coding and involves the interpretation and reflection about the meaning of the codes within the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The purpose of axial coding is to reassemble data that were fractured during open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Additionally, Merriam (1998) explains that “category construction begins with reading the first interview transcript, the first set of field notes, and the first document collected in the study” (p. 181). This process allowed me to name the categories that emerged from the research, the participants, and the literature. This process of moving from codes and naming the categories demonstrates increasing levels of abstraction (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Merriam provides several important guidelines for determining the efficacy of categories derived from the constant comparative method of data analysis, which involves “comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences” (p. 18). Merriam (2008) further identifies the following guidelines as significant to shaping the efficacy of the categories
derived from constant comparative method of data analysis: “1) categories should reflect the purpose of the research, 2) categories should be exhaustive by placing data into all relevant categories, 3) categories should be mutually exclusive meaning that data should fit into only one category, 4) categories should be sensitizing to what emerges in the data, and 5) categories should be conceptually congruent, meaning that the same level of abstraction should categorize all categories at the same level” (p. 184).

In sum, a constant comparative analysis method was used to analyze the data collected during semi-structured interviews and archival document analysis. This system of coding data was carries out for each interview transcript, as well as, the review of board minutes and school board policies. This allowed for the emergence of codes and categories, models and themes that cut across the data to emerge. The themes were supported by data collected from the participants and archival documents. Additionally, the review of the language and words used by participants allowed the researcher to communicate and reveal examples found within the study. Therefore, serving to develop validity and reliability by gaining an understanding of the participants’ reality and worldview.

Validity and Reliability

Stake (as cited in Merriam & Associates, 2002) notes, “knowledge gained in an investigation face hazardous passage from the writer to reader. The writer needs ways of safeguarding the trip (p. 24).” These safeguards are accomplished by the researcher’s ability to identify and address issues of internal validity, external validity, reliability or generalizability.
Merriam (1998) states that “internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reliability and how congruent are one’s findings with reality” (p. 201). Qualitative researchers believe a person’s reality is the perception of his/her reality and worldview. Thus, in qualitative research “the understanding of reality is really the researcher’s interpretation of someone else’s interpretation” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 101). Since the researcher is the primary researcher and the instrument of data collection for this study, my sensitivities, biases, and ability to ask additional questions and to listen to the participants’ responses may have affected what data were collected and how the data were interpreted.

To address the limitations in qualitative research and to strengthen internal validity, I used triangulation and member checks. Triangulation involved using “multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emergence of findings” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 102). Therefore, I used multiple sources of data which included school board minutes, school board policies and newspaper inquiries in order to validate the information gathered through observations and semi-structured interviews. Additionally, I observed school board meetings in order to determine if the structure and function of the school board was consistent with the information reported during the semi-structured interviews and analyzed during the review of the school board minutes. Member checks entailed “taking the data gathered back to the people from whom the information was obtained in order to determine if the results were reasonable” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 102). Next, I discussed the initial findings with several participants to see if they agreed with the findings and if the findings seemed plausible. I did not send the findings to the participants because this is a sensitive issue.
However, throughout the interview process, I asked participants if the researcher’s perceptions and interpretations of their responses represented an area of truth for them. Finally, using peer/collaborator examinations, I had a fellow doctoral student and district administrator examine the data to see whether the findings and interpretations seemed credible.

External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied (or generalized) to other situations by asking the question “can these findings be applied outside this setting?” (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). To strengthen the generalizability of the study, I used thick descriptions, which “involve providing enough information/description so that the reader is able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation and if the information gathered is transferable” (Merriam & Simpson, p. 103). In addition, the researcher examined other literature in the area of educational leadership and higher education to see if some of the findings were corroborated in previous research.

The research was conducted using a small number of participants (e.g., four). In addition, although based on the literature, I predicted that Latino and Blacks would most likely not be represented in the sample because the research in the field revealed that less than 10% of the nations’ school boards reflect members of Hispanic and Black decent. However, all of the participants in this study were indeed Black. The sample came from a suburban community located outside of the Chicago metropolitan area, which does reflect the socioeconomic indicators consistent within the literature.

Although the small sample size poses a limitation to the research study, it is equally important to note that statistical generalizability (from a sample to a population) is not the goal of
qualitative research (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Instead qualitative research recognizes there are multiple realities with no single truth (Merriam, 1998). Reliability refers to the “extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam & Associates 2002, p. 27). In other words, if the study is repeated, will it yield the same results? Merriam says that for qualitative studies replication is not the issue because human behavior is difficult to control and replicate. Instead she says that it is important to note “whether the results of the study are consistent with the data collected” (p. 205). Therefore, triangulation was used in this study to address issues of reliability.

In summary, internal validity asks, how congruent are one’s findings with reality? (Merriam, 1998). External validity is concerned about the generalizability of the findings to other settings. Reliability considers whether there is consistency between the study’s results and the data collected. To strengthen validity and reliability, the researcher made her biases known. In addition, the researcher used triangulation, member’s checks and peer reviews to increase reliability.

Researcher Orientation/Biases

This section focuses on my subjectivities. First, I will discuss assumptions that I brought to the research study. Next, I will present my educational experiences and past/present experiences as an elected school board member that may have shaped the analysis of the data.

The following assumptions of the researcher influenced this study: 1) school board members’ decision-making is shaped by the members’ race, gender, sexual orientation,
socioeconomic status, and class; 2) the school board members participating in the study would be White; 3) school board members are ill-equipped to govern through policy when addressing issues of race and class; and 4) case study analysis would reveal how policies continue to perpetuate ongoing issues of race and class.

In addition, my role as an elected (for two terms/serving eight years) school board member and as the first Black woman elected to a predominately White school board situated within a predominately White community shaped these assumptions. Also my educational level, gender, race, sexual orientation, and role as a school board member shaped my worldview. My theoretical orientation is in business management, with earned advanced degrees in business administration (MBA) and managerial leadership (Master of Science). I was particularly interested in the role of the school board in promoting social justice and educational reform.

Summary

This chapter presented the design of the study, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, and researcher’s biases. The methodology used in this study examined how school board members make decisions and provides a framework for further research and training. Data analysis methods that represented grounded theory and constant comparative analysis were used to analyze the interviews and school board minutes in order to identify themes, categories and the emergence of theories.

Overall, four school board members participated in semi-structured interviews that ranged from one and a half hours to two and a half hours in length. The data were collected
using qualitative observations, qualitative interviews, and qualitative document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with current school board members with two years of service or serving at least one elected or appointed term and were conducted within various settings selected by the individual participant. Open coding and axial coding were used to identify general themes and to interpret meaning from the data. Next, school board members were observed during three public school board meetings to gain a sense of the power dynamics and roles of board members in general. These observation occurred over a three month period and took place in the natural setting of the board room during public board meetings. Last, archival documents such as newspapers, public records, board minutes, and newsletters were reviewed and analyzed to gauge a historical view of the community, the district and the decisions made by the school board.

Chapter 4 includes demographic profiles of the school district used in the case study as well as each participant’s profile. The demographic profiles include a description of the participants, the interview setting, the observation setting, the length of time serving as a board member, the historical timeline of the data collected. Chapter 5 discusses the themes found in the case study analysis. Finally, chapter 6 provided the recommendations and implications for future research.
CHAPTER 4
PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The purpose of this study was to find the contextual factors that impact school board decisions when dealing with issues of race and class. This chapter presents the participant profiles and demographic data discovered during investigation of the contextual factors that impact school board decisions when dealing with issues of race and class. A qualitative design, case study analysis was chosen for this study because characteristics of the qualitative research paradigm were well suited to investigate the complexities of how school board members make decisions when faced with issues of race and class. Therefore, by concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (“the case”), this approach sought to “uncover the interplay of significant factors that are characteristic of the phenomenon” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 108).

The “case” was a growing school district located near a major metropolitan city in the Midwest. The district is comprised of four communities with seven schools serving students from kindergarten through eighth grade. The district was selected because it has experienced a shift in its demographics over the past ten years, resulting in an increase in its minority population and socioeconomic status and a decline in student achievement. It also serves a relatively large low-income population with 56% of the district’s population identified as low-income. Four school board members participated in in-depth, open ended, semi-structured interviews. Additionally, this chapter presents each participants’ views of his/her experience as a school board member across five categories: demographic profile, educational background,
motivation and decision-making, career and professional background, and community perception.

Participant Interviews

Four school board members were interviewed between February 15 and May 25, 2011. The interviews lasted between one and one half hours to two and one half hours. Participants ranged in age from approximately 45-70. Two are female and two are male. The participants’ education included undergraduate and advanced degrees. One has a bachelor’s, two have a master’s, and one has a Juris Doctorate. All participants are Black. Two participants were originally elected and two were originally appointed and had since been elected. Individual demographic information including name, sex, race, and educational background are presented in Table 2; whereas information regarding career, employment and years of service is presented in Table 3.

Table 2:

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Juris Doctorate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Participants reported sex, race and education demographics during semi-structured interviews.
Table 3:
Participant Career and Years of Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>1st Career</th>
<th>2nd Career</th>
<th>Retired</th>
<th>Years of Service</th>
<th>Appointed</th>
<th>Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Participants reported career and school board service data during semi-structured interviews.

Alice

Demographic Profile

Alice is a Black female. She reported that she was between 50-60 years of age and had served on the school board for 11 years. She is currently serving in her third elected term. Alice earned her undergraduate degree in English from a state institution and went on to pursue a successful career with the Federal Reserve. She worked as a talent development and retention specialist until her retirement in 2005. She was currently working as the Director of the Institute of Leadership at a well-known state university, where she had worked for six years. At the time of this interview, Alice was running unopposed for her fourth four-year term. Alice had served as school board president since 2002. She did not serve on any district committees because the board functions as a “committee of the whole.” She noted that this model supported “board cohesiveness, communication and builds trust by allowing all board members to hear all information at the same time” (Alice).
When elected in 1997, Alice did not have any children enrolled in the district nor does she have any children currently enrolled in the district. Alice was not involved in any school district committees or initiatives prior to her election. However, prior to being elected to the school board, she had served as the village trustee, was a member of the local and national chapters of the YWCA board, and was president of the affordable housing organization.

Educational Profile

Alice attended Catholic school during her entire K-12 educational experience. Alice explained that her kindergarten experience was different than what it is today because she attended a half-day kindergarten program, whereas today full-day kindergarten is more popular. Alice loved that her K-12 educational experience was heavily grounded in the arts. She was introduced to tap and modern dance. She also noted that the curriculum included lots of mathematics, science and French. She explained that geography was very limited, noting this as a shortcoming for her in her adult life. For example, “figuring out where Wyoming is located was a challenge” (Alice).

Alice mentioned that her K-12 education experience prepared her well for college and her chosen professions. She mentioned that Catholic school afforded her the opportunity to be educated in very small classes. Noting a graduating class of only 125 students, Alice mentioned that this prepared her well for college. She also mentioned that she entered college with very strong study skills and the ability to research information. Additionally, she noted that Catholic school focused a lot on soft skills such as manners and obedience, making it difficult for her to
adjust to working in the public school system (where she worked as a substitute teacher) because disobedience and challenging adults appeared to be the norm. She also credited her success to her mother (a teacher college graduate), who diligently reinforced the values and educational expectations of the school.

**Motivation and Decision-Making**

Alice took an interest in running for the school board following an invitation by the superintendent (who she described as “a feisty little redhead”) to consider running in the upcoming election. It was from here that Alice spent the next six to eight months attending school board meetings. She was very impressed by the business piece of the board as well as the strong leadership from the superintendent and decided to run for the board in the next election. When asked how she learned to be a school board member, she credited her knowledge to her previous experience with governing boards and her role on the YWCA board.

Alice said she did not find much value in attending training offered through professional associations (e.g., Illinois School Board of Education and National School Board Association); therefore, the board did not attend these training sessions. Additionally, she saw it as a way to maintain fiscal responsibility by not spending taxpayer dollars unnecessarily. Instead, board training was in-district with the superintendent and/or a representative appointed by the superintendent (e.g., assistant superintendent of finance, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, deputy superintendent, etc.). However, Alice does find value in attending local board member networking meetings because “many boards work in isolation and these meetings
allow board members to network and collaborate.” These meetings bring board members from across the region together to discuss key issues and challenges that all boards are facing.

As the board president, Alice described the process of training new board members as one that is very hands-on and driven by the board. Referring to an old political phrase, “Don’t send me somebody [that] nobody sent” is how Alice described the recruitment process of new board members. She also mentioned that when an open seat is available on the school board, “members put their heads together to identify individuals to fill the open seat.” Alice described herself as a “leader who runs her board.” In doing so, she seeks to recruit board members with a specific set of qualifications. Board members must “reflect the diversity of the board,” “must not be a stranger to the board or the community,” “must have a skill-set that they can bring to the board,” and “if recruited for an open seat, they must agree to run for re-election.” Alice also discussed that these qualifications have allowed her to maintain a high level of stability and avoid surprises on the board, “for surprises don’t work for the effectiveness of the board.”

Alice’s prior governance background and in-district training have assisted her in understanding the various roles of the board. She talked of these roles as moral, fiduciary, strategic, and generative. She believes that 1) “moral roles represent the ethical values of the board,” 2) “fiduciary roles represent one’s obedience to the laws of the state,” 3) “strategic roles are the direction of the organization and focus on the core business,” and 4) “generative roles are where good relationships between the community, business communities and the board are formed to show that they are the conduits of information.”
She described herself as being transparent and focused on the core business of the district. The factors that contribute to Alice’s overall and final decisions are grounded in what is best for the children. Alice is noted in November 15, 2005, school board minutes as saying “it is amazing how far we have come in three years. Everyone has pulled together on behalf of the children. We have strong support in the community and superintendent leadership has made a difference” (p. 5).

In terms of how policies are developed and amended, Alice noted that this is the primary responsibility of the superintendent and her administration. She also asserts that communication between the board and administrators does not exist because the only individual the board communicates with is the superintendent. On rare occasions, the superintendent may direct her administration to speak with a board member seeking additional clarification on a specific issue or challenge; however, primary communication occurs during executive sessions where the superintendent and the board dialogue openly about issues “coming down the pipeline” and discuss how the board can offer support to the superintendent.

Alice described the amount of parental involvement in the district as “great,” noting that the parents and community are very involved in the district. She discussed several examples, such as “Men Days and Dads Days” where the majority of the participants are retired men in the community. Alice notes that 80% of the taxpayers do not have children in the district, and yet hundreds of men from around the district fill the auditorium of each school and participate in mentor programs and community events to support the children of the district.
When asked how the board uses data to inform decisions, Alice noted that the board is informed about the data and that they look at all of the schools and how they have done over the years. This is the basis for the superintendent telling the board how she plans to reorganize, promote or demote across the district; however, the board, does not make data-based decisions because “we’re not authorized to make those decisions.” Alice stated that “although we have to sign off on contracts, employees are not entering into an agreement with the board. They are entering into an agreement with the superintendent through the terms of the contract.”

Career and Professional Background

Alice credited contributions from her career and professional background as instrumental in her leadership on the board because it is these past/present experiences that have allowed her to be comfortable “having an [Black] executive.” Alice was very comfortable having strong effective leadership and recognizing that changes need to be made when that leadership no longer exists. She noted that during her tenure, they had made a leadership change two years into the appointment of a new superintendent. Alice described this experience as being very comfortable for her. She did not fear making the change because she understood the core business of the district was its children. She also discussed that (in this case) the leadership was referring to the children and parents of the district as “those people” and that “it was not acceptable for district leadership to communicate negatively with or toward any members of the community, parents, children or employees of the district.”
Alice is an adult educator responsible for running an educational program at a major state university. In this role, Alice manages a $7.1 million grant designed to provide leadership and management training to superintendents, principals and board members to assist them in identifying strategies to close the achievement gap. Alice indicated that her role as a corporate talent developer at the Federal Reserve prepared her well for her current profession and for her work on the school board. This is in part due to her having spent the majority of her professional career developing leadership and management talent within the banking industry.

Community Perception Profile

Alice indicated board members become aware of issues that concern the community by keeping their eyes and ears open. She explained that at least one board member resides in each of the four communities the district serves. Therefore, it is his/her responsibility to keep the superintendent informed about issues and concerns of the community. For example, the community raised concern about the test scores not reflecting the progress students were making in the classroom. In response to this, the board approved a “Grade Scale Policy” that raised the grading scale in order to create and promote high academic standards. (See Table 4) Alice explained that the community was not pleased with the response to their concerns because many parents believed the change was too drastic and that it would ultimately result in the students failing and a greater decline in the test scores.
Table 4:
Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Grading Scale</th>
<th>New Grading Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A=100-90%</td>
<td>A=100-93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B=89-80%</td>
<td>B=92-87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C=79-70%</td>
<td>C=86-78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D=69-60%</td>
<td>D=77-70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F=below 59%</td>
<td>F=below 70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: From district school board policies*

Alice described another incident related to the low test scores of the feeder high school being a concern for the community. In response to their concerns, the board applied for and was given approval to open its own charter high school, offering an additional choice for district students. Alice believed that the community perceives the school board as “an island of excellence,” which she described as “the board representing an island striving to do what is best for children despite the chaos and turmoil that goes on all around them.”

Eva

Demographic Profile

Eva reported that she is a 40-50 year old, Black woman who had served on the school board for six years. She was in the second year of her second elected term. Eva had graduated with an undergraduate degree in English from an historically black college (HBCU). She has
begun her professional career at Johnson Products Company and Encyclopedia Britannica as a writer. She had been a stay-at-home mom for 18 years.

Eva had served as chairperson of the property, finance, and policy committees for six years. She noted that she does not meet in committees and that the board does not have a lot of board meetings. Instead the board functions as a “committee of the whole” where the entire board is at the table at all times, with one board member chairing the meeting or committee. She noted that this type of model is effective because the board has confidence in the superintendent and her staff. Eva does not hold any offices on the board. When elected to the board, Eva had a third grader in the district; however, all of Eva’s children have since graduated from the district and now attend the feeder high school.

Prior to running for the school board, Eva was involved in several district/school initiatives and/or committees. This involvement included the 150 year sesquicentennial celebration, PTO President, Parent Resources Committee, Parent Involvement Coordinator (PIC), and Library Board President as well as a member of the superintendent search representing the parent group.

Educational Profile

Eva spent the majority of her K-12 experience very mobile, moving among multiple districts within various states. Her elementary school experience included several elementary schools within a Midwestern urban area and its surrounding suburbs and her middle school experience (6-8 grades) occurred in the southwest suburbs. Her high school experience (9-12
grade) took her to a small southern town. Eva credited this level of mobility for her ability to “jump in and get involved.” She noted that this had shaped her ability to understand and realize that “people are just people.” Eva reported that her K-12 experience prepared her well for college and that she would not change anything about this experience. Although she became somewhat stagnant (performing at less than her usual ability) in high school, she was able to earn an academic scholarship to a Historically Black College. She also indicated that her experience prepared her to deal with diverse people because although she attended school in predominately Black communities with the exception of middle school, she was shaped by the diversity that existed within these various populations. This experience allowed Eva to become comfortable working within both predominately Black and predominately White environments and organizations.

**Motivation and Decision-making**

Eva became interested in running for the school board because she was excited about the superintendent’s vision. As a member of the parent committee formed to participate in the superintendent search, she became invested in making sure that a strong leader was selected. Eva reported that she was not necessarily interested in running for the school board; she just wanted to ensure that good people were on the board. In a time when the community was experiencing “White-flight” (including board members), the thought of an Black woman superintendent raised a lot of questions about the superintendent’s ability to lead the district.
At that time “we were a majority White community, and the thing that motivated me to run was that no one would step up to run.” More importantly, Eva felt like someone needed to step up to support the new superintendent. Eva described this as her motivation to make sure the open position was filled by someone who understood the superintendent’s vision. Eva noted that “today everyone runs for the children and the big thing is ‘I’ll do it for the children’ in order to cover up their own personal agendas.” Unlike other candidates, she was not necessarily thinking about running for the children because she already understood these challenges. Eva explained that she was already attending school board meetings (complaining about something); therefore, she was very much aware that Black children in the community were coming from the inner-city and were not prepared. Eva further explained that she was aware that test scores were dropping, and she was one of those parents who said, “Our children are smart so why are our scores dropping?” Eva also described the community as experiencing a great deal of mobility and noted that the previous superintendent often used the high mobility rate as an excuse for the continued decline in test scores. Eva described the community as afraid and believed it was crucial to get the leadership in place. The superintendent needed some people who were not going to fight her but would support her. Therefore, Eva’s motivation for running was different than others who run for the board.

When asked about how she learned how to be a school board member, Eva noted that “I don’t know if I am a good school board member or not, so I don’t know if I’ve learned it.” She asserts that
we as school board members have to realize that so much of what we do is superintendent based, and if you are going to have a good or bad district that as a school board member, you have to be able to not be afraid to give your superintendent the lead and be okay with them leading the district. Because if they lead and lead well, then that is a good partnership.

Eva recalled attending new school board member training at the Triple I Conference sponsored by the Illinois School Board Association (ISBA). She also mentioned that the board has since opted out of participating in this conference because it is not very helpful and did not add any value to what she needed to know. She noted that she has gained more knowledge and understanding by talking to key leaders (e.g., assistant superintendent of finance) in the district. She also noted that she has a great resource in the board president and district leadership in general. Eva described her relationship with the board president as one of mentorship as far as how to keep the professionalism on the board and how we want to be perceived in the public. Eva noted that the perception of the community is very important to the board president to allow the community to have confidence in the people they elect. Therefore, the board president has taught Eva how the superintendent and board can work together. She constantly teaches them “how the superintendent is the lead person and that her role as the board president is that we understand where we have to go for information and how we have to conduct ourselves so that we are functional.”

Eva noted that the factors that contribute to her overall decision-making (e.g., policies, administrative reports, data, etc.) are all filtered to the board from the superintendent. Eva explained that the superintendent walks the board through every piece of information so they never have to go looking for information. Eva has confidence that she receives accurate
information to make informed decisions. She described the process of developing and amending policy as a process that is driven by the superintendent. Eva stated that the superintendent brings the policies forward and explains her rationale for developing, changing or amending policies. This process is primarily driven by the superintendent and supported by the school board.

Additionally, Eva described the communication process between the board and administrators as very minimal because we understand how we are looked upon by district employees and we work to avoid the perception that we “wield” any kind of power. Eva also explained that the board never contacts assistant superintendents directly and that all communication goes through the superintendent first.

When asked to discuss the amount of parental involvement in the district, Eva described the parental involvement as “great,” noting that the Parent Resources Center is the vehicle credited with the amount of parental involvement. Eva noted that providing parents with a central location, such as the Parent Resources Center (a trailer located at one of the schools) where parents with questions and seeking volunteer opportunities can go and request information, has increased the amount of parental involvement throughout the district. Eva also credited the Parent Resources Center for the district’s ability to embrace and encourage parental involvement. When asked to discuss factors that may discourage parents from becoming involved in the schools, Eva indicated that parents may become discouraged due to personal issues with the principal or teacher, such as discipline decisions or student progress. Additionally, parents’ work schedules may hinder their ability to get involved.
Eva also noted that students are assessed regularly throughout the school year and this information is looked at by the superintendent with the principals to make informed decisions. When the superintendent has to make changes based on the data, it is understood that the superintendent knows the curriculum, the goals of each administrator, and the agenda/vision for the district. Therefore, the superintendent has the ability to make decisions based on the data, and these decisions are not questioned by the board.

**Career and Professional**

Eva stated that her professional career has contributed to her service on the school board because it has taught her how to deal with diverse people. She began her professional career with a predominately Black company at which she was very comfortable and successful. It was not until she changed jobs, moving her to a predominately White company, where she realized that the mobility and diversity that she experienced during grades K-12 prepared her to deal with diversity. Eva explained that “she welcomed diversity and was not intimidated by being the minority.” These experiences gave Eva the “courage and ambition to do whatever she needed to be successful in her professional endeavors.”

As a professional stay-at-home mom for 18 years, Eva continued to serve as president of the library board. She also represented the school board by providing leadership to the Parent Involvement Coordinator (PIC) at each building. As an extension of the Parent Resources Center, the PIC is a parent at each building responsible for promoting parental involvement and
providing information to parents interested in volunteering. Eva noted that the PIC was formed when the board voted to close the Parent Resources Center as a cost savings. The PIC allows the board to provide the same service at minimal cost to the taxpayer.

**Community Perception**

Eva recalled the opening of the new charter high school as an issue that concerned the community. She stated that the board received a great deal of “push back” from other communities that ultimately resulted in a neighboring community filing a lawsuit against the school district. However, negativity was never brought into the board room. Eva explained that the development of the charter high school was the result of the communities’ concerns regarding the declining test scores of the high school district. The parents wanted more for their children. Eva described the parents as proud, educated, and possessing high expectations, so to offer a solution to the concerns raised by the community, the board decided to open the district’s own charter high school.

**Participant View**

When asked if she would like to add anything or if she had any final questions or comments, Eva said:

I think it is so important for your research that people realize it is not just on the school board and that it is so important to support and elect people who understand that it’s the school board, superintendent, and the community. It’s those three entities working together. Our job is to make sure that the greater community knows that we have things in place to help parents and that our decisions are made to help the great majority not just a specific individual. Therefore, our decisions as a board are to help the great majority
while communicating that there are resources to help individuals. To me that’s the great message, and if you can get people to understand that, our job would be a lot easier because we are not trying to hurt or recognize any particular group.

Rob

Demographic Profile

Rob reported that he is an Black male, between the ages of 60-70, who has served on the school board for 17 years and was serving in his fourth elected term. Rob was originally appointed to the board in 1994 to fill a vacancy and later ran for re-election in 1995. More recently he had run unopposed and was re-elected in April 2011 for his fifth consecutive term. During his tenure, Rob had served with three superintendents. Rob earned his undergraduate degree in political science from a prestigious university and a Juris Doctorate from a well-known urban university. Rob recently retired from his position as a lawyer for a managing state financing agency. He has a strong background in banking and finance and continues to sit as a member of the board of directors for a local bank, where he had functioned in this role for 15 years.

Rob noted that the district functions under a “community of the whole” model; therefore, board members do not function on committees. Rob described that the success of this model is clearly a reflection of the strength and leadership of the superintendent. However, within the context of the “committee of the whole” model, he did chair the finance committee when special finance and bonding issues arose, was president of the charter high school, and was the board
representative for the Special Education Cooperative (SPEED) board. Rob had served as the vice-president of the board for 12 years. Rob did not currently have any children in the district; however, he did have grandchildren in the district. Rob mentioned that he had been asked to run and had considered running several times prior to 1994; however, he wanted to wait for his children to graduate from the district before becoming a part of the board.

Prior to becoming a member of the board, Rob worked collaboratively on several district initiatives/committees designed to look at ways to reduce district costs in transportation, janitorial services, and food service. Additionally, Rob was very active in the community as village president, chair of the Access to Care board, member of the board of trustees at a state university, member of the Community and Economic Development Association board, executive director of a state finance authority, executive director of a regional leadership center (January 16, 2007, p. 5), and president of the national policing and controlled bonding authority.

Educational Profile

Rob described his K-12 experience as different than what we see today. Although he was educated in a K-12 model within the context of a large inner-city, he described a system called the “A/B system.” In this model, the school year started twice a year, with January being session 1A and September being session 1B. Rob noted that his K-12 educational experience prepared him for college by laying a good foundation that taught him how to read and write well. Rob mentioned that education was greatly enforced in his community when he was growing up
because it was viewed as the mechanism to “pull you up.” Rob reflected on this experience by discussing the connection between the schools and the community and that it was reinforced by teachers living in the community. He described this time as one in which education was viewed as the mechanism whereby Blacks, as long as they were teachers, nurses and secretaries, could be whatever they wanted to be. Therefore, you had the best and the brightest coming into teaching and education. Rob described several problems with the educational system today. “Having 50% of the graduating classes in law, medicine, business and are predominately women, all of whom have several choices for professions, is a huge shift because in the past women had limited choices; therefore, the educational institution was protected and could grow.” He adds that “Colleges of Education are no longer the strongest college on college campuses and it is having a rippling effect on society. Instead of attracting the best and the brightest into education, students are selecting other professions.” Finally, he noted that “society does not see education as a global priority; therefore, it reflects institutions that do not view education as a global priority.”

Motivation and Decision-making

Rob was motivated to run for the board because he believed that he has a responsibility to pay back and work for the institution that he credits for his success. Rob noted that he had five children graduate from the district and that they all received good educations because of the people serving on the board at the time his children were enrolled. Therefore, this is his opportunity to give back.
When asked how he learned to be a school board member, Rob indicated that he does not see his role on the school board as any different from how he functions on other boards. Rob noted that he “learned volunteerism and service on other boards” and that it assisted him in “learning policy making and the responsibilities of the board and superintendent.” Rob explained that he did not attend any training when he was elected to the board because the only difference between his services on the school board versus other boards was that the subject matter was different. Otherwise the process remained the same. He said “questions are the same [they are] legal, financial, or process.” He continued to say that some of the verbiage or terminology is different, but he has all of the resources through the superintendent to “get the job done.”

Rob isolated three factors that address the broader question of why and how some school districts succeed and others do not as “1) the function and sophistication of the board, 2) the notion of how many systems are broken, and 3) experiences and resources of the superintendent.” Rob explained that “a board that functions with sophistication is one that does not look to the superintendent for their care and feeding.” This means that board members should come to the board with their primary responsibility and issue being what is good for children. They should not be interested in those things that distract the superintendent from his/her job, such as going to conferences, who gets the job as janitor, laptops or cellular phones for board members, and what kind of trips they can attend. If not, more time is spent managing the needs of the board than focusing on children.
Rob identified two characteristics of a successful board member. First, board members should be “successful in other areas of their life other than being on the board” because it gives them “credibility and stature when talking with the community,” meaning that “being on the board should not be their highest accomplishment and that they should come to the board with other successes.” This sense of success translates into what they bring to the board and what they expect from the board. Rob recalled his past experience on boards in which the members’ highest accomplishment in their life was being elected to that board, and it was very disruptive. The person needed too much reinforcement from the board itself. In this instance, Rob explained he/she lacked the ability to work collaboratively on other boards and in management settings; therefore, he/she did not know how to be effective. He/she did not know “how to articulate or fight for their position in a healthy way,” which is very important to the board.

He further explained that board members must realize that “being on the board is important but it’s not as significant as people make it out to be.” Rob noted that “it is important but you need to keep it in perspective because often board members get an inflated sense of “who they are and what they are doing and it gets in the way of getting the job done.”

Second, board members should “bring to the board and not take from the board.” In other words, a board member who needs jobs and other resources and looks to the board as a way of getting or accomplishing those things gets in way of the board and becomes distracting to the superintendent. Therefore, if the superintendent has to see to the care and feeding of board members, it distracts from the job of running the district. Rob further explained that “this speaks to the extent that the superintendent provides a level of care and comfort to the board, which
ultimately negates the ability of the board to manage the superintendent because the superintendent has actually bought the school board members.” He said that in looking at our board “we don’t have that.” There is not that concern about “whether or not my cousin can get the job as janitor or what kind of contracts we are granting; we simply don’t have these distractions.”

Rob described the notion of broken systems as a school districts’ ability to operate in an atmosphere in which the school is the only entity (or system) that needs to be fixed. Rob explained that when the community, government, and individuals within the community are functioning, you have systems that are working. For example, you have non-for profits, sports programs, Lions Clubs, Rotary, and a number of different systems working to support each other. If the only system you need to work on is the school system, then you have a chance to be successful.

On the other hand, Rob stated, “When you are in a situation where all the systems or many of the systems are dysfunctional, it is difficult, if not impossible, for one system [the school district] in isolation to function because all these systems (community, government, non-profit, etc.) are interdependent and must function as such in order to make communities more successful.” Rob explained that if all the systems are dysfunctional, it is difficult to isolate just one system and expect that one system to work. Therefore, it is important to realize that “we [his district] exist in a series of communities where the government functions fairly well and parents are able to care for themselves; therefore, they are not looking to the school system to fill all of those vacuums allowing the school district to focus on teaching kids.” That is what “we are able
to do here, we are able to function and what we can focus on is kids.” Rob adds that “when you have parents that are involved and working to reinforce what’s happening in the schools, the system also works well together.” Rob continued,

When kids see one thing in the school and another message is being delivered in the community, the message from the school is going to get drowned out. So in order for schools to be successful the message must be reinforced throughout all systems including the business community, the home and all the relationships that connect with the home. Rob noted that it is not to say that when you do not have the reinforcement you must abandon the kids, it is just that it is more difficult to focus on the work of the school district.

Rob further explained that “when you see schools that are successful, you’re going to see that the message that’s being taught and emphasized in the school is being reinforced in the community.” For example, “if you look at choice schools and schools you have to test in order to attend, all those kids come from families where the family is reinforcing what is happening in that school; therefore, creating an atmosphere that represents several systems working interdependently together to teach kids.”

Rob asserted that it is important to identify a superintendent who brings enough resources and experience to the school district to accomplish the goals of the district. Rob explained that a superintendent who has thought about all of the challenges and brings enough experience and resources to the district represents the qualities of a superintendent who is able to get the job done. In regard to our superintendent, “she knows where to find competent staff, she understands systems, and she had an opportunity in her training to see what distracts her from her job and what works well.” As a board, we give her the opportunity to do all of that and the board lets her do that.
Rob contended that the board really needs to understand its core business and that part of its business is making sure that “you have clear, identifiable, articulated policies; that you give the superintendent the authority and resources to implement those policies; and that you hold the superintendent accountable in a measurable way.” Rob noted that it is very important that boards “set up rubrics that are measureable so that you can easily measure the superintendents’ success and progress.”

When asked about the factors that contribute to his overall and final decision-making, Rob explained that the superintendent provides all the core information and supporting information necessary for the board to make informed decisions. “We discuss matters privately to address concerns or issues, but overall, the superintendent makes certain that we receive a sufficient amount of information and that we have ample time for discussion in order to reach a consensus.” Rob stated that this speaks to the superintendent being a “change agent” by crediting her ability to move the district test scores from 55% meets and exceeds state standards in 2002 to 82% meets and exceeds state standards ten years later. Rob explained that for other boards to replicate what this district has accomplished, they should “hire smarter superintendents and get out of the way of the superintendent and let the superintendent run the district.” He added that they should “remember that the board’s job is to measure the goals of the superintendent and make sure that she has the necessary resources to do his/her job effectively while refrain from micromanaging and give the superintendent the autonomy to select a staff that he/she can work with.”
Rob articulated that the communication process is “between the board and superintendent [period]” and that “no communication should take place between the school board and other members of the administration.” Rob explained that communication between the school board and teachers, principals, or administrators only serves to prevent them from feeling supported by the school board. “School boards should not go around the superintendent and give them directions—they should not tell them what to do.” Additionally, Rob noted that the school board should take any problems directly to the superintendent and that it is the superintendent’s responsibility to respond to and address the situation.

Rob described the amount of parental involvement in the district as “moderate to good” based on the number of people who attend various events throughout the school district. He further explained that “parental involvement is contingent upon how open and inclusive the building principal is; therefore, it varies across the district.” Rob contended that parents may become discouraged if the educator looks down upon them and treats them disrespectfully, “parents aren’t made welcome.” Overall, he believes that principals do a good job in this area. They are open and accepting because it is one of their annual goals. He also noted that the district has had little turnover in leadership and that having long-term principals in the buildings assists with creating a positive atmosphere.

When asked how data are used across the district, Rob noted that students are tested at the start and end of each school year. He also noted that assessments are used to develop an educational plan for each school to determine if the students are meeting the goals. This plan also allows the school board to see the growth of the district, to review individual goals for each
school, and to identify where the district is in general for each school. Rob also mentioned that any decisions or changes based on the data would come to the board from the superintendent.

Rob described the amount of community involvement as “high,” noting that it is reflected through the development of an education commission within one of the district communities. He talked of that the mayors of each community and how they are extremely supportive of the school board as are other organizations such as the Rotary Club, Lions Club, etc., who all reach out to support the schools.

**Career and Professional**

Rob described that his professional career has “greatly” contributed to his service on the school board because he has had the opportunity to work professionally in the fields of law, finance, and government. Rob retired from practicing law in 2009; however, prior to retirement, Rob served as the executive director of a statewide bonding and finance agency for 15 years, where he managed approximately 40 employees with offices across the state. In this role, Rob had the opportunity to work with state leadership on several projects in Washington, D.C.

Additionally, Rob has had an extensive amount of experience working on boards. Rob noted that in addition to his role on the school board, he continues to serve on six or seven committees while maintaining professional relationships with those boards on which he no longer serves. Rob currently serves as chair of the Access to Care board (10 years), member of the foundation board for a state university (25 years), village president (12 years); president of the national policing and controlled bonding authority (15 years), member of the Council of the
Economic Development agencies (15 years) and vice-chairman of a local bank board. Rob articulated that his past and present board experience have given him an opportunity to see and understand how boards work. Additionally, this has allowed him to “work with committees and understand the relationship among boards, staff, and how a board functions well or does not function well depending on how you interact with staff.” Rob explained that he has “served on high functioning boards and dysfunctional boards.”

Rob credited this experience to his ability to understand the roles of the board and superintendent. Rob explained that “when you keep this separate and you support the superintendent in terms of what their role is, this response flows downhill.” Meaning that when the superintendent feels supported by the board, the principals will feel supported by the superintendent, the teachers will feel supported by the principals, and therefore, teachers are empowered to teach and focus on the students. Rob contended that “this process prevents any major issues from occurring because people are comfortable doing their jobs and they will do their jobs without worrying about if they are going to have the props cut out from underneath them.”

**Community Perception**

Rob noted that the school board is viewed “positively” by the community. He highlighted that three board members ran unopposed and the countless awards that the superintendent has received are testaments to the community’s perception of the board. Rob did
note some resentment from a neighboring school district over the establishment of a charter high school, but overall he believed the community is supportive.

Rob explained that the district handles significant issues quickly and directly. For example, when it was discovered that an employee had cheated on the state examination, the individual was terminated by the superintendent with full support of the school board. Additionally, Rob recalled the decision to open a charter high school as an example of the board’s commitment to address the concerns of the community. Rob explained that the community raised concerns about the low performance of the feeder high school. In response to the community’s concerns, the board held several meetings to discuss the issue and ultimately gave the superintendent full approval to move forward with the application process to open the charter high school. This decision was met with some resistance from the current high school district, which filed a lawsuit in an effort to stop this action. Rob indicated that the case was currently pending a decision by the appellate court.

Rob contended that the community has a good perception of the board. He credited the systemic approach modeled by the board, which demonstrates an appreciation and recognition of the role that the community plays in the success of the school district. He also noted that “the community recognizes the role that education plays in a successful community.”

**Participant View**

When asked if he would like to add anything or if he had any final comments or contributions, Rob shared that “successful schools don’t function in isolation and they are part of
successful communities, organizations, and other entities because it’s hard to separate one from the other.” He continued, “successful schools should support unions and understand that unions should be seen as part of the solution and not the problem.”

Fred

Demographic Profile

Fred is a Black male between the ages of 50-60, who is currently serving his first four-year term on the school board. Fred was originally appointed to the board for a seven-month appointment and later successfully ran for re-election. Fred earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees from state institutions in the areas of law enforcement administration and criminal justice and corrections. He worked for the state police for 25 years until his retirement in 2010. He was working with the state workman’s compensation fraud unit where he investigated workers compensation claims for individuals and businesses. He was also an adjunct professor at a local college where he taught in the area of criminal justice.

Fred did not serve on any district committees or hold any offices on the board. He noted that the board functions as a “committee of the whole” model, which allowed the board to listen to all issues together as a “whole” board, take care of business before they went the public, and agree as a “whole” to support the majority vote.

Fred did not currently have children enrolled in the school district. However, he had three children graduate from the school district prior to his appointment to the board. He noted that his children attended private school until they reached the third grade, at which time they
were transferred into public school. Fred also explained that he was a very active parent in the district during his children’s attendance and prior to becoming a board member. He described himself as a “PTA dad” who participated in field trips and accompanied students on the annual Washington, D.C and Springfield trips. He also noted that he was part of the parent discussion forum during the superintendent search. He recalled being concerned about parental communication and welcomed the opportunity to ask the candidates about their vision, plans to achieve open communication, and transparency.

Fred explained that he believed that parental involvement is very important. He described his philosophy as “The Trinity of Success” (see Figure 1), which Fred described as a triangle representing the parent, child, and school at each point, encased in a circle that represents the community. Fred explained that the “trinity of success” was his representation of what should occur when each component is working together; the parent and school should build a foundation for the child that ultimately leads to the child’s success. Fred also explained that the parent and school relationship should include open communication and that each should be receptive to one another. Fred further explained that “if we lay the right foundation, anyone can build up the child. Otherwise you will constantly be going through the process of shoring up the child within that structure, which we can do.” Fred continued to describe the importance of the parent and school engaging in open communication and open dialogue, meaning that the teachers are receptive to parents’ concerns, parents are receptive to teachers’ concerns, and the child is in the middle listening and being receptive to both sides. Fred contended that “this teaches the
child respect.” Fred asserted that overall “it’s up to the parent to raise the child, not the school, and to make sure that the child is adhering to the rules. You will build a better student.”

Fred also explained that “with this model working and an investment in the infrastructure, the model can be taken into any other district because it feeds the needs of students and ensures that parents are deeply involved.” For example, if a child earns a grade of “D,” it should not be a surprise to the parents because they would be informed immediately. Fred further explained that
if the communication between the teacher and parent does not break down, the child does not slip through the cracks. However, if communication breaks down, the model allows you to go back and shore up or lay more foundation as needed to make certain that the child is successful. Fred also noted that as the child advanced, you should continue to build that child up, for there is no “going backwards or remediation.”

**Educational Profile**

Fred characterized his K-12 educational experience as one “without a clue and foggy.” He explained that he was raised by a single mother and resided in low income section eight housing within the inner-city of a large metropolitan city. They later relocated to a surrounding suburb to keep him out of gangs. Although beneficial in that regard, Fred shows how he remained very uninterested in school, which resulted in him repeating the third grade. Fred recalled that he was always told that he was smart, but he simply did not buy into it. On the other hand, he was told by White male counselors that “he was not going to college” as he was directed to “just take” the ACT. With little to no guidance, Fred found himself “athletically sound but academically deficient.” After placing in the top seven athletes in the state, Fred was headed to a community college located in the southern region of the state. After taking lots of remedial courses while attending junior college, Fred began to realize his potential in his third year of college. It was here that Fred made the decision to “make up for the deficiencies from K-12.” Fred described this process as one that moved him from “impossibilities [to] possibilities [to] achievement.”
Fred noted that if he could change anything about his K-12 education, it would be “enlightenment and [a] clue.” Fred mentioned that he would want someone to give him a clear understanding of school and what school meant to your overall success. Additionally, Fred indicated that his K-12 educational experience did not prepare him well for college. He quoted Paul the Baptist by saying that “stir up the gifts and everyone can learn. Unfortunately, no one is stirring the poor Black and Latinos; no one is stirring up anything in them.” Comparing this to a soft drink, Fred explains that “like a soft drink that sits for an extended period of time, the residue will eventually settle and fall to the bottom. If it is not stirred it will dull and become a tasteless drink; therefore, you need to stir-up the drink. Just like we need someone to stir up the gifts in our children”. This is the principle that Fred follows in raising his children, as he stated, “I refuse to allow my children to have the same experiences that I had.”

Furthermore, he indicated that his K-12 educational experience taught him how to be street savvy and use common sense. He was taught how to be wise enough to get through whatever situation he found himself in, but this did not necessarily support his career choice(s).

Fred described Blacks as “stuck at the door and in transition” as he shared another model and possible book he plans to write. Fred explained that “stuck at the door” is a depiction of why Blacks have not made it into mainstream America. Fred further explained that “we have not amassed the tools (poor credit, lack of family values, academic success) necessary to step through the door; therefore, it stops us at the door.” Fred contended that those who amass these tools are typically the ones who “step through the door.” Fred noted that he and his wife
accomplished these things so their kids could be in a better position to be pushed through the door.

Fred recalled three families who represented this ideal of stepping through the door. He explained that these “families planted something in me that through God allowed me to see a vision of stepping through that door. Every step of the way bits and pieces of these individuals started to rub off on me.” In thinking about Black children, “how many of them (like me) are told that they would never be anything and wasn’t given an opportunity?” Fred explained that this is how he approaches his children and that is how he approaches what happened to him K-12. Fred contended that “if you can get a kid to the third grade and performing above level at this point they can do anything.”

Motivation and Decision-making

Fred mentioned that he became interested in running for the school board after being asked by Alice and Rob (board president and vice-president) to fill an open seat. He noted that he was already attending board meetings and had already established support for the superintendent through the successful passing of a referendum. Fred noted that he learned how to be a board member by watching other board members, such as Rob, Alice, and Eva. He indicated that he received a great deal of literature from Alice and Rob related to his role as a board member. He also explained that he watched surrounding districts and thought they appeared to function very dysfunctionally; therefore, he used them as examples of what not to do.
In terms of training, Fred has not attended any training with the Illinois School Board Association (ISBA) or National School Board Association (NSBA); however, he receives a great deal of in-district training. For example, “Rob has helped me understand day-to-day operations, the role of the school board, rules, and policies.” He also noted that through the board leadership (president and vice-president) and superintendent he has received a great deal of training.

Fred indicated that the factors that contribute to his overall decision-making are grounded in his ability to hear all of the facts. Fred noted that “all of the facts contribute to my overall final decision coupled with clear and open dialogue with the board in order to determine what evidence or concrete information is necessary to make the decision.” Fred contended that “all decisions must be justified and that these decisions are not personal; they must simply be based on totality of the circumstances surrounding the issue.” Fred described the process of developing and amending policy as one that is led by the superintendent based on state mandates. He explained that policies are reviewed by the board and then sent to legal counsel. Following legal review the policies are amended or implemented, but it all starts with the superintendent.

Fred described the communication process as one that is exclusively between the superintendent and the board. He indicated that he does not intervene or circumvent the superintendent. As a matter of fact, he avoids being in the middle of the superintendent and her team at all costs. He does support the superintendent and the chain of command, which serves to remind the board that they must hold the superintendent accountable for she is their only employee. Finally, Fred reiterated that he would never “undermine the authority of the superintendent.”
When asked to describe the amount of parental involvement across the district, Fred noted that a minimum of 50-60% of the parents in the district are actively involved. He also mentioned that it is the responsibility of each school to foster an environment that supports and encourages parent involvement. However, the district fosters parental involvement by giving parents a comfort level to have “open dialogue of the totality or circumstance.” Fred also mentioned that the community is also involved in the school district and noted the recent (standing room only) perfect attendance and honor roll recognitions.

Fred explained that a number of factors may cause parents to become discouraged and prevent them from being involved, such as “Parents feeling like they are not heard,” “Backbiting between parents and teachers,” “Administrators taking the teachers side,” “Parents challenging the teachers decisions and authority,” and “The district failing to support teachers for doing a good job.”

When asked to discuss how the district uses data to inform decisions, Fred mentioned that the district uses a number of assessments throughout the year to measure student achievement and performance. He specifically mentioned the use of the education line, a tool used to foster communication between the parent and teacher. He also discussed the study island, a tool that continually assesses student progress and provides academic preparation and support. Fred noted that the overall success of the district is its high academic standards. He described the “grading scale policy” (see Table 4) as a representation of how the district strives for high standards. He also explained that he trusts the superintendent with the curriculum because she has a pulse on what her team can do to achieve academic excellence.
Career and Professional Background

Fred reported that his professional career has contributed to his service on the school board. Fred was working as an adjunct professor at a community college, where he had taught for 11 years. Recently entering his second career, Fred enjoyed working along the same vein as an investigator with the department of insurance because it allowed him to use many of the skills he developed with the state police. Working as a special agent for the state police until his retirement in 2010, he indicated that he models his school board service after the model of the state police, which is integrity, service, and pride. He also explained that he lives his life by this model not only as a school board member but as a minister.

Community Perception

When asked how he became aware of issues that concern the community, Fred indicated that the community tells the board and the board informs the superintendent of issues brought to board members. He also stated that the board addresses all issues that come before the collective board or individual board members.

He perceived the community as being good and diverse with a good mix of high/low income and middle/upper class individuals who “all get along.” He also explained that the community comes out to support numerous events and participate in the schools all the time. In doing so, Fred explained that decisions are greatly affected by the community because if the community did not support the board, the board member would not be re-elected. He noted that if the concerns are collective, they must be addressed.
Participant View

When asked if he would like to add anything or if he had any final comments or contributions, Fred shared that we need to continue to find ways to foster 90-100% of total community involvement. In doing so, we should hold parents, schools, and teachers accountable to foster successful communication. Additionally, governmental entities should make an investment in new development and housing in order to provide a good product for your education. We should always ask the question, “are kids getting a good education in your district?” because this should always be the goal. In the end, we must have financial resources connected to the building and fostering of communication.

Summary

Four school board members participated in in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews to determine the contextual factors that impact school board members’ decisions when dealing with issues of race and class. This chapter presented each participant’s views of his/her experience as school board members in five parts: demographic profile, educational profile, motivation and decision-making, career and professional background profile, and community perception profile. Additionally, subgroup data, class size data, and student achievement data derived from school report cards, state standardized assessment reports, and school board minutes were also discussed.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to find the contextual factors that impact school board decisions when dealing with issues of race and class. The study was guided by the following four research questions:

1. How are decisions influenced by the individuals’ racialized lived experiences?
2. How do school board members learn to become school board members?
3. How are school board members socialized to address issues of race and class?
4. How have school boards responded to significant issues related to race and class?

This chapter provides an analysis of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a viable tool for unpacking and identifying race and racism in education. This chapter also includes a discussion related to various ways that school boards learn their roles as well as how they make critical decisions regarding issues of race and class. This research revealed four emerging themes related to the research questions: 1) critical race theory is a viable tool to unpack issues of race and class; 2) experiential learning, learning in context, social learning and situated cognition have all been identified as predominante learning methodologies and serve as a framework for how school boards learn their roles as school board members; 3) school board members are socialized implicitly and explicitly to address issues of race and class within the context of the
school board; and 4) contextual factors shape how school boards respond to issues of race and class.

Four school board members participated in in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews between one and one half hours and two and two half hours in length. To maintain confidentiality, only the first name of the participants is used throughout the document. In addition to the interviews, a number of documents were collected from the district or viewed via the district website and local newspaper periodicals. The documents included public records such as school board minutes, school board agendas, district policy manuals, district highlights and photographs, and newspaper articles from 2002-2011. Additional documents reviewed by the researcher included state-issued district school report cards and individual school report cards from 2002-2011. To maintain the confidentiality of the school district, identifiable references to documents and archival data have been removed. The compilation of collected documents resulted in the interviewer reviewing over 3,800 pages of written publication.

Question 1

How are decisions influenced by the individuals’ racialized lived experiences?

This research revealed that decisions were influenced by the individuals’ racialized lived experiences. This research supported the literature by identifying Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a viable method to analyze, identify and discuss areas of inequality and inequity in education. Situated within the belief that race and racism are normal, these participants were able to develop
a commitment to social justice through experiential knowledge, narratives, storytelling, intersectionality and interest convergence.

**Critical Race Theory**

For the purposes of this research, CRT was used as an analytical tool to understand inequalities that exist within the school district and how these school board members’ decision-making were influenced by their racialized lived experiences which allowed them to move the district forward when addressing issues of race and class. Critical race theory emerged in the late 1970s when a group of legal scholars began to question the validity of critical legal scholarship and radical feminism within the judicial system. Described by Taylor (1998) as a movement shaped by the scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power, its core premise is that racism is an “endemic, institutional, systemic, regenerative, and overarching force that maintains all social constructs” (Aleman & Aleman, 2010, p. 3). Critical race theory has been a viable component of educational research as a tool for analyzing social inequality within the educational system for over 15 years. Therefore, a number of interpretations emerged that described its meaning as well as how it should be used.

The following assumptions/tenets of critical race theory guided the research and informed the findings: 1) race and racism are normal, not aberrant, in American society (Delgado, 1995) and are deeply ingrained in American Life (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995); 2) they challenge liberal ideologies (Aleman & Aleman, 2010); 3) have a commitment to social justice (Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009); 4) are central to experiential knowledge (Witherspoon &
Mitchell, 2009); 5) are preeminent to intersectionality (Aleman & Aleman, 2010) that shows how race intersects with class, gender, and/or sexual orientation, creating more specified racial dynamics resulting in a delay in change and racial equality (Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011); 6) include the notion of interest convergence that explains why change is often ineffective because equality for Blacks can only occur when it converges with the interests of Whites; and (7) are the unique voice of color (Su, 2007).

Of these seven assumptions/tenets, six of them emerged in the findings for this study: 1) race and racism are normal, 2) commitment to social justice, 3) central to experiential knowledge, 4) intersectionality, and 5) interest convergence.

**Race and Racism is Normal**

This research revealed that race and racism are ingrained within the educational structures of the school district through macro-level policies and micro-level practices. Race and racism is a normal, not aberrant or rare, fact of daily life in the U.S. society, and the assumptions of White superiority are so ingrained in political, legal, and educational structures that they are almost unrecognizable (Delgado, 1995; Taylor, 2006). Research describes race and racism as silent yet embedded in the fiber of the institution and systemically embedded in policies and legislation. Yosso (2002) posits that “racism and its intersections with discrimination based on gender, class, language, and immigration status informs curriculum in both macro and micro ways” (p. 93).
Two landmark pieces of legal legislation informed the relationship between the normalcy of race and racism and how racial inequality persists within the framework of legal policies and legislation. As these findings revealed, the participants served in a capacity that required them to adhere to and comply with federal legislative polices such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB).

**Brown v. Board of Education**

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed legal racial segregation in public education in what is best known as *Brown v. Board of Education*, a decision that promised racial equality and social justice. Zamudio, et al. (2011) posited that “prior to Brown many schools across the country were marked by legally sanctioned segregation, particularly in the south where 100 % of Black students went to intensely segregated schools, schools where 90-100 % of the student population was non-White” (p. 44). According to Orfield (2009), today Black and Latino students attend schools that are three-fourths minority, and 40 % are attending highly segregated schools. This study revealed consistent findings with both Orfield and Zamudio, et al. when looking at the demographics of the student population. Overall, the district had a student population consisting of majority non-White students. Demographic data derived from 2010 district school report cards revealed that among the four communities, three communities (e.g., community one, community two and community four) that 90-95 percent of the student population represents non-White (minority) students. It is important to note that community

7 To maintain the confidentiality of the participants and school district exact information of the state report cards cannot be revealed.
two, which represents the highest percentage (95 percent) of non-White students, is the one community with the highest concentration of White (54 percent) residents; however, the schools demographic is comprised of 4 percent White students.

Taylor (2006) notes “White flight from public schools into suburban and private schools has created a two-tier system in many cities” (p. 76). Within this system Orfield et al. (2004 as cited in Taylor) posits that “most children of color currently attend schools with relatively few Whites” (p. 76). Eva described the shift in demographics very candidly when asked about her motivation for running for the school board. She reported,

    We were a majority White community and the thing that motivated me to run was that no one would step up to run. In a time when the community was experiencing “White-flight” (including board members), the thought of a Black woman superintendent raised a lot of questions about the superintendent’s ability to lead the district.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act was enacted, which required states to comply with stricter measures of assessment, accountability, and performance. According to Taylor (2006), NCLB was designed to “address the issue of racial achievement gap by expanding federal control of schools holding public schools responsible for eliminating achievement disparities” (p. 76). According to Taylor, “CRT scholars assert that such test scores are a measure of racism, not race” (p. 76) and argues that NCLB “centralizes minority, not majority, test results as the primary root of the achievement gap problem, it continues to assert the dominant culture’s superiority by placing pressure on high-poverty, underperforming schools” (p. 79).
Commitment to Social Justice

This research revealed that these participants maintained a commitment to social justice. Martsuda (1991) explains that when committed to social justice the process becomes a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression. Whereas, Solorzano and Yosso (2001) envisions social justice education as a process that may lead toward the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty; and serve to empowerment underrepresented minority groups.

Despite the arguments regarding NCLB serving to promote social inequality while covertly promoting the self-interest of Whites in the literature, this research revealed that the district accomplished the goals of NCLB by achieving academic success through three strategies that demonstrated a commitment to a social justice agenda. This was evident in the following actions: 1) hiring a superintendent who was visionary and committed to the vision of the district, 2) setting high academic goals and standards for all students, and 3) implementing regular and consistent measures of accountability and benchmarks.

Visionary Leadership

In 2002, the school district underwent the difficult task of releasing the existing superintendent from his contract. Alice provided insight into this situation when asked to describe some of the decisions she has made during her tenure. She explained, “We made a leadership change two years into the appointment of a new superintendent because he was referring to the children and parents of the district as ‘those people.’” She added that “it was not
acceptable for district leadership to communicate negatively with or toward any members of the community, parents, children or employees of the district.”

**High Standards and Accountability**

Following this decision, the current superintendent was hired in 2002 during the inception of NCLB. Less than a month into her tenure, the superintendent made significant recommendations to the school board that demonstrated her ability to function as a visionary and set high expectations to achieve the goals of NCLB. These initiatives included “A Blueprint for Excellence,” which highlighted her plan for raising test scores, and the implementation of a “Grading Scale” policy designed to raise the bar of excellence across the district. In August 2002, the superintendent revealed that the focus would be on improving reading and math goals to reach the 90% level for all students. Additionally, in December 2002, the superintendent recommended implementation of a grading scale policy to the board of education. The participants described implementation of the grading scale policy as another example of addressing diversity by responding to a concern from the community related to student achievement.

Alice noted that “the community raised concerns about the test scores not reflecting the progress students were making in the class.” Therefore, in response to this, the board approved the Grade Scale Policy that raised the grading scale to create and promote high academic standards. (See Table 4) Fred also discussed that “the overall success of the district is its high standards.

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8 To maintain confidentiality of the school district, exact school board minute notations cannot be revealed.

9 To maintain confidentiality of the school district, exact school board minute notations cannot be revealed.
academic standards” and described the “grading scale policy as a representation of how the
district strives for high standards.”

In addition to the participants’ reports, school board minutes identify a strong
commitment to addressing student achievement. According to board of education minutes\textsuperscript{10} for
December 2002, the superintendent recommended a change in curriculum and instruction policy
related to the grading scale. The superintendent noted the Illinois State Achievement Test
(ISAT) for 2001-02 indicated that 52.3\% of third grade students in the district three years or
more met or exceeded reading standards. At the fifth grade level, 65.2\% of students in the
district three years or more met or exceeded reading standards, and of the students at the eighth
grade level, 69.4\% of students in the district three years or more met or exceeded reading
standards. Based on this data, the minutes also show the superintendent explained that high
standards and high expectations were essential to the process of raising the achievement levels of
students across the district and added that “the scale assumes that a student would have to master
at least 70\% of the material presented in order to pass the course.” Therefore, the superintendent
made a recommendation that the school board adopt the new grading scale effective August
2003.


It is at the micro-level where the practice of governance and change occurs through
policies and initiatives designed to impact change across the school district at the classroom,

\textsuperscript{10} To maintain confidentiality, specific board of education minutes cannot be revealed.
building, and community levels. Scheurich and Young (1997) assert that there are four levels of analysis when considering racism: “individual, institutional, societal, and epistemological” (as cited in Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 99). The various levels are defined by Zamundio, et al. as the following: 1) individual level looks at interpersonal relationships between people. This is the place within the analysis where people often look to determine if evidence of racism exists within individuals; 2) institutional level looks at the institutional structures that allow, permit, and possibly encourage racist behavior. This is the level of the analysis where one would consider evidence of policies and procedures that promote racism across the institution and within the curriculum; 3) societal level looks at the ethos, which includes the character, period of time, and social context that express the attitudes and belief of the nation; and 4) epistemological level is the study of the nature and production of one’s knowledge.

This research revealed that evidence of the individual level and institutional level did not exist as significant components of how these participants’ decisions were shaped and formed within the context of critical race theory. However, this research did reveal that the epistemological and societal levels of micro-level practices that continued to inform how decisions were shaped and influenced within the context of critical race theory existed within the school board.

**Epistemological Level**

This research revealed that the participants’ epistemology was developed during their participation in formal education (e.g. K-12, higher education) and childhood experiences,
informing how they functioned on the epistemological level. Epistemology is the production of one’s knowledge and how this knowledge serves to shape an individuals’ view of the world. Zamudio, et al. (2011) defined epistemology as a “system of knowing” while stressing the fact that epistemology is more than just a way of knowing but instead is a system of knowing (p. 99). Importantly, Ladson-Billings (2000) captures epistemology from a slightly different lens that she has coined as an “epistemological orientation which emphasizes the fact that an individuals’ worldview is developed and shaped based on the places that they live and learn, as well as their racial, gender, and class backgrounds” (p. 258).

These participants’ worldview about education was developed based on the places they lived and learned in as well as their racial and class background. Each participant reported that he/she was raised in the inner city of a major Midwestern city and attended school within an inner city urban public school system; with the exception of Alice who attended Catholic school. Alice indicated that she loved that her K-12 educational experience was heavily grounded in the arts, which introduced to tap and modern dance. She also noted that the curriculum included lots of mathematics, science and French. She explained that geography was very limited, noting this as a shortcoming for her in her adult life and lamenting that “figuring out where Wyoming is locating was a challenge” (Alice).

Alice explained that her K-12 education experience prepared her well for college and her chosen professions. She also noted that she entered college with very strong study skills and the ability to research information. Additionally, she noted that Catholic school focused a lot on soft skills such as manners and obedience. Therefore, making it difficult for her to adjust to working
in the public school system (where she worked as a substitute teacher) because disobedience and challenging adults appeared to be the norm. She also credited her success to her mother (a teacher college graduate) who diligently reinforced the values and educational expectations of the school. Alice credited contributions from her career and professional background as instrumental in her leadership on the board because it was those past/present experiences that allowed her to be comfortable “having an [Black] executive.”

Eva spent the majority of her K-12 experience very mobile, moving from multiple districts within various states. Her elementary school experience included several elementary schools within a Midwestern urban area and its surrounding suburbs, her middle school experience (6-8 grades) occurred in the southwest suburbs, whereas her high school experience (9-12 grade) took her to a small southern town. Eva credits this level of mobility for her ability to “jump in and get involved.” She noted that this has also shaped her ability to understand and realize that “people are just people.” Eva reported that her K-12 experience prepared her well for college and she would not change anything about this experience. Although she became somewhat stagnant (performing at less than her usual ability) in high school, she was able to earn an academic scholarship to a historically black college. She also noted that her experience prepared her to deal with diverse people because although she attended school in predominately Black communities with the exception of middle school, she was shaped by the diversity that existed within these various populations.

Eva also stated that her professional career contributed to her service on the school board because it taught her how to deal with diverse people. She began her professional career with a
predominately Black company at which she was very comfortable and successful. It was not until she changed jobs and moved her to a predominately White company that she realized that the mobility and diversity she experienced during grades K-12 prepared her to deal with diversity. Eva explained that “she welcomed diversity and was not intimidated by being the minority.” These experiences gave Eva the “courage and ambition to do whatever she needed to be successful in her professional endeavors.”

Rob noted that his K-12 educational experience prepared him for college by laying a good foundation that taught him how to read and write well. Rob mentioned that education was greatly enforced in his community when he was growing up because it was viewed as the mechanism to “pull you up.” Rob reflected on this experience by discussing the connection between the schools and the community and that it was reinforced by teachers living in the community. He described this time as one where education was viewed as the mechanism whereby Blacks as long as they were teachers, nurses and secretaries could be whatever they wanted to be. Finally, he noted that “society does not see education as a global priority; therefore, it reflects institutions that do not view education as a global priority.”

Fred described his K-12 educational experience as one “without a clue and foggy.” He explained that he was raised by a single mother and resided in low income section eight housing within the inner-city of a large metropolitan city. In an effort to prevent him from being recruited by local gangs, they later relocated to a surrounding suburb. Although beneficial in that regard, Fred noted that he continued to be uninterested in school, which ultimately resulted
in him repeating the third grade. Fred also recalled being told that “he was smart but he simply did not buy into it.” On the other hand, he remembered being told the opposite from a White male counselors who told him that “he was not going to college” as he was directed to “just take” the ACT test.

Fred noted that if he could change anything about his K-12 education, it would be “enlightenment and [a] clue.” Fred mentioned that “he would want someone to give him a clear understanding of school and what school meant to your overall success.” Unlike the other participants, Fred reported that “his K-12 educational experience did not prepare him well for college.” Furthermore, he adamantly reported that “his K-12 educational experience taught him how to be street savvy and use common sense.” He was taught a level of wisdom that allowed him “to be wise enough to get through whatever situation he found himself in and this did not necessarily support his career choice(s).” Additionally, Fred described Blacks as “stuck at the door and in transition”.

Societal Level

This research revealed that the societal level was shaped partly by the school board’s ability to connect and interact with the community to determine the attitudes, beliefs and actions related to issues of race and class. Nestled within the fabric of the epistemological level (e.g., system of knowing) is the societal level that looks at the “prevailing ethos (e.g. character, period of time, and social context leading to expressed attitudes and actions) of the nation” (Zamudio,
et. al., 2011, p. 99). According to November 2003\textsuperscript{11} school board minutes, the school board joined the superintendent, district administrators, teachers, parents, and community in an open discussion about race based on the book, \textit{Black American Students in and Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement} by John Ogbu.

The superintendent noted that “it is an important discussion and that the community should have a collective identity and mind-set that creates an environment that does not allow dysfunctional attitudes to exist” (p. 2). Whereas Rob highlighted the importance of the school boards goals of “80-90% of students achieving at grade level will not be reached if the Black students do not meet standards” (p.2).

The following issues were raised during the group discussion: academic disengagement (e.g. parents and students), low expectations (e.g. staff, parents, and students), immigrant minority versus non-immigrant, perceptions’ of the Black versus non-Black community, lack of foundation for Blacks, cultural territory, and cultural values. Specific comments from participants include the following excerpts. A teacher said:

There are a lot of White students who do not achieve as well as Black students. What is the difference? Many immigrant issues are forced versus voluntary because many immigrants escaped to the United States under stressful conditions.

Parent #1 said:

The March 11\textsuperscript{th} meeting brought angry White and Black parents together and was a wake-up call for the Black community. Heads were nodding in agreement showing that everyone wants the same thing for their children. Trust must be earned.

Parent #2 said:

\textsuperscript{11} In order to maintain confidentiality specific board of education minutes cannot be revealed.
The average immigrant transcended for a better life. Blacks had forced immigration and mentality set at how we got here and what are we doing here. Blacks do not have a strong base/platform to change mentality.

Additionally, these participants reported that the school board is made aware of issues by engaging and staying connected to the community. They are also residents of the communities and which they serve which allows the community to have access to them on a regular basis. Alice indicated that board members become aware of issues that concern the community by keeping their eyes and ears open. She explained that at least one board member resides in each of the four communities the district serves. Therefore, it is his/her responsibility to keep the superintendent informed about issues and concerns of the community.

Eva explained that the development of the charter high school was the result of the communities’ concerns regarding the declining test scores of the high school district. The parents wanted more for their children. Rob contended that the community has a good perception of the board. He credited the systemic approach modeled by the board, which demonstrates an appreciation and recognition of the role that the community plays in the success of the school district. He also noted that “the community recognizes the role that education plays in a successful community.”

Rob explained that the district handles significant issues quickly and directly. For example, when it was discovered that an employee had cheated on the state examination, the individual was terminated by the superintendent with full support of the school board. Additionally, Rob recalled the decision to open a charter high school as an example of the board’s commitment to address the concerns of the community. Here, Rob explained that the community raised concerns about the low performance of the feeder high school. In response to the community’s concerns, the board held several meetings to discuss the issue and ultimately gave the superintendent full approval to move forward with the application process to open the
Fred indicated that the community tells the board and the board informs the superintendent of issues brought to board members. He also stated that the board addresses all issues that come before the collective board or individual board members. This research revealed that the epistemological and societal levels served to shape how knowledge was acquired (epistemology) and how the participants interacted and communicated with the community (societal) in order to identify their (community) beliefs and attitudes.

**Experiential Knowledge: Narrative and Storytelling**

This research revealed that experiential knowledge acquired through narratives and storytelling played a role in how these participants decisions were influenced by their racialized lived experiences. Although the literature highlights the experiential knowledge of students of color as important, legitimate, viable, appropriate, and critical to the understanding, teaching, and analysis of racial subordination within the field of education. While, Solorzano and Yosso (2001) posits that experiential knowledge serves to draw explicitly on the experiences of students of color by including such methods as storytelling, parables, family histories, narratives, and chronicles as a basis to unpack racial subordination. This research showed that it was the experiential knowledge of the participants that emerge through narratives and storytelling that served to connect how decisions were shaped through their lived racialized experiences. This allowed the participants to have a clear voice in racial matters which draws from Jeris and McDowell (2003) insertion that due to the social position and experiences of oppression of people of color their voice is unique when dealing with racial matters.
Storytelling and privileging the voices of people of Color by arguing that the voice of Color people and the dominant voice differ primarily on the basis of content (Duncan, 2005). North (2008) challenges educators to take a critical examination of narratives that allow educators to raise their ‘critical consciousness’ in order to promote a social education agenda. In contrast, Anyon (2005) as noted in North (2008) continues to emphasize the role that critical consciousness can play in raising awareness and understanding of educators through information, readings, and discussion.

Interest Convergence

This research revealed that interest convergence existed; however, it presented itself from a slightly different lens than that suggested in the literature. For example, the literature is clear that interest convergence occurs when racial equality serves to benefit Whites more than Blacks. Given the fact that the participants in this study are all Black, racial equality occurred to advance the school district as a whole and not necessarily due to injustice or subjugation of the marginalized minority because the majority of the school district is predominantly Black, establishing a case for the participants’ ability to effectively work within the macro-level policies and micro-level practices established at the federal and state levels. These participants took practices and policies otherwise designed to advance a White supremacy agenda and used them to advance racial equality, allowing them to move forward with driving a social justice agenda that benefited the marginalized minority, which in this study happens to be Blacks.
Interest convergence is one of the tenets of critical race theory that describes the ability of Blacks to gain racial equality only when these interests converge or serve to benefit the interest of Whites. Taylor (2006) defined interest convergence as “the interest of Blacks in gaining racial equality has been accommodates only when they have converged with the interests of powerful Whites” (p. 75). From a historical perspective, this research revealed that two significant pieces of federal legislation continue to permeate within the macro-level policies that the school board must govern from. As previously discussed, the research showed how Brown v. Board of Education and No Child Left Behind legislation, as examples of how these policies, manifested under the umbrella of racial equality when in fact they served the greater interests of Whites.

Additionally, interest convergence emerged and is possibly more prevalent within the micro-level practices of the school board. Evidence of intersectionality and interest convergence also began to emerge throughout components of the research, primarily due to the policies developed at the federal and legislative levels and their implementation at the local level of the school district.

Intersectionality

This research revealed that intersectionality existed within the context of the participants’ backgrounds and the demographics of the school district. According to Ortiz and Jani (2010), “intersectionality recognizes that gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, educational achievements, resident status, ethnic regionalism, and other subordinating variables contribute substantially to the social life and shape identity, behavior, opportunities, and access
to resources within and between societies” (p. 187). Similarly, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) defined intersectionality as “the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings” (p. 51).

The participants in this study self-identified themselves as Blacks between the ages of 40-65. They also hold advanced degrees in various fields such as English, criminal justice, and law. Additionally, they revealed that they reside within the communities in which they serve. In its simplest form, intersectionality looks at how race, sexual orientation, class, gender, and religion intersect and contribute to the behaviors and identity of the individual. This research revealed a clear intersection of race, gender, class, and resident status among the participants. It was within this concept of intersectionality they made decisions about race and class. The literature suggests that intersectionality must be recognized from the position of the dominant White culture. However, this research shows that it is the connection that the participants maintained as it related to this “intersecting” that allowed them to make decisions regarding race and class from a position of objectivity. According to the district’s 2010 state school report cards, the district demographics consists of 5% White, 89% Black, 4% Latino, 1% Asian, .2% Native American, and .7% Multiracial. This represents a high minority population of approximately 95%, which supports the research that suggests school districts with high minority populations also face a higher low income population.

In summary, this research revealed that decisions are shaped and influenced by the individuals’ racialized lived experiences and when situated within a context of critical race

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12 To maintain the confidentiality of the participants and school district exact information of the state report cards cannot be revealed.
theory how this occurs is made clearer. A number of critical race theory tenets were analyzed in this research: race and racism are normal and intersectionality and interest convergence were key in understanding the participants’ commitment to social justice and racial equality. This research supported the literature on critical race theory regarding race and racism. Race and racism are permanent and deeply ingrained components of society today and continue to be situated within the educational system through the development and implementation of macro-level policies and micro-level practices. It is within the micro-level practices that the participants’ epistemological and societal views began to emerge and take shape. The exploration of how these participants’ were formed through their epistemology and societal views became key factors that informed their values, beliefs and attitudes about race and, therefore, had an impact on how they made decisions and interacted with the community.

Question 2

How do school board members learn to become school board members?

This research revealed evidence of experiential learning, social learning theory as described by Bandura and situated cognition. This research revealed that these school board members learned to become school board members through various learning methodologies. Learning began to emerge for these participants through experiential learning (which includes components of informal learning and self-directed learning), as well as components of social (cognitive) learning theory, and situated cognition.
Kolb (1984) explained that experiential learning provides a foundational approach to education and learning that represents a process of lifelong learning. He continues to say that experiential learning provides a framework for examining and strengthening key linkages between the learners work, learners’ education and the learners’ personal (professional) development. Miller (2000) explored learning from experience and experiential learning for the field of adult education by suggesting that “learners’ life experience outside as well as inside of formal educational institutions are increasingly seen as important dimensions of learning” (p.71).

Merriam and Caffarella (1999), who argues that experience must exhibit the two major principles of continuity and interaction:

“the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after. With that of interaction posits that an experience is always what it is because of the transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (p.223).

In other words, learning does not occur in isolation and must connect the learners past experience with those of the present in order to achieve meaningful implications. The second principle is that of interaction and states that “an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (p. 223).

Fenwick (2000) offers four additional distinct schools of thought that have emerged recently in the literature while challenging adult educators to move beyond the reflective constructivist view of experiential learning that has shaped the literature thus far regarding experiential learning. The
constructivist view of experiential learning has evolved in the research to include reflection, meaning making, and cognitive reflection as key components of how adults learn from experience. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) contend that constructivist stance maintains that “learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience” (p. 261).

**Learning through Life Experience**

The research revealed that the learners’ experiences outside of the formal educational setting served as a dynamic lens to view learning. For example, participants cited learning from their current and prior work experiences as well as their participation in community service within and outside of the school board as significant components of their learning and development from experience.

Alice also credited her career and professional background as a significant component of her prior experience that contributed to how she learned to become a school board member; it had been “instrumental in her leadership on the board because it is these past/present experiences that have allowed her to be comfortable ‘having an [Black] executive.” As an adult educator, Alice was responsible for running an educational program at a major state university and managed a $7.1 million grant designed to provide leadership and management training to superintendents, principals and board members to help them identify strategies to close the achievement gap. This experience was significant because it mirrors the responsibilities of school boards while providing a foundation for fiscal responsibility. In her professional role, this
component of Alice’s learning because in this capacity she was instrumental in teaching and training school board members across the state. Therefore, her learning was heightened within the context of her interaction with the real-world environment and this context and interaction shaped her understanding of her learning.

Merriam and Brockett (1997) reminds us that experiential learning is more than just the learners ability to accumulate their experience but how they attach meaning to the learning that allows experiential learning to emerge and flourish. These participants’ revealed evidence of experiential learning. They discussed in some detail how they attached meaning to their experiences. Alice indicated that “she learned to be a school board member through her previous knowledge and experience with governing boards.” She specifically referenced her role on the YWCA board and her previously held position of village trustee for one of communities served within the school district. Alice further explained that her prior governance background had assisted her in understanding the various roles of the board governance.

Similar to Alice, Rob acquired a significant amount of experience within the context of community organizations and professional boards. Rob reported that he has had an extensive amount of experience working on boards. Rob also noted that in addition to his role on the school board, he continues to serve on six or seven committees while maintaining professional relationships with those boards on which he no longer serves.

Additionally Fred attached meaning to his learning through his childhood experiences by sharing his depiction of the parent, school and community dynamic that exist in what he described as the “Trinity of Success”. Here Fred highlights that the trinity of success represents
the parent, child, and school at each point, encased in a circle that represents the community. Fred explained that the “trinity of success” was his representation of what should occur when each component is working together; the parent and school should build a foundation for the child that ultimately leads to the child’s success.

**Experiential Learning—Interaction**

However, Alice does find value in attending local board member networking meetings because “many boards work in isolation and these meetings allow board members to network and collaborate.” These meetings bring board members from across the region together to discuss key issues and challenges that all boards are facing.

**Meaning Making and Knowledge Acquisition**

Through experiential learning these participants were able to attach meaning and acquire knowledge to and from their experience through reflective constructivism. According to Fenwick (2000) reflective constructivism view of experiential learning allows the learner to reflect in the experience, interpret the experience, and generalize the experience to form mental structures. Several participants’ used reflective constructivism views to reflect, interpret and generalize their past experiences. Within this context, they identified mental structures that allowed them to shape and guide how this past experience has shaped their current governance. For example, Alice’s prior governance background and in-district training have assisted her in understanding the various roles of the board. She explained that she conceptualized these roles
as moral, fiduciary, strategic, and generative. She believes that 1) “moral roles represent the ethical values of the board,” 2) “fiduciary roles represent one’s obedience to the laws of the state,” 3) “strategic roles are the direction of the organization and focus on the core business,” and 4) “generative roles are where good relationships between the community, business communities and the board are formed to show that they are the conduits of information.”

Similar to Alice, Rob isolated three factors that address the broader question of why and how some school districts succeed and others do not as “1) the function and sophistication of the board, 2) the notion of how many systems are broken, and 3) experiences and resources of the superintendent.” Here Rob shares how his prior experience on boards has positioned him to identify characteristics of successful boards. These characteristics are at the foundation of how Rob functions as a school board member.

Experiential Learning—Prior Knowledge

When specifically asked how he learned to be a school board member, Rob indicated that he did not see his role on the school board as any different as how he functioned on other boards. Rob explained, “my past and present board experience has given me an opportunity to see and understand how boards work.”

Rob noted that he “learned volunteerism and service on other boards” and that it assisted him in “learning policy making and the responsibilities of the board and superintendent.” For example, Rob noted that “in addition to his role on the school board, he continues to serve on six or seven committees while maintaining professional relationships with those boards that he no
longer serves on.” These boards include the Access to Care board (10 years), member of the foundation board for a state university (25 years), village president (12 years), president of the national policing and controlled bonding authority (15 years), member of the Council of the Economic Development agencies (15 years), and vice-chairman of a local bank board.”

Rob indicated that his professional career had “greatly” contributed to his service on the school board because he had the opportunity to work professionally in a variety of fields. Rob had retired from a successful career practicing law in 2009; however, prior to retirement, Rob served as the executive director of a statewide bonding and finance agency for 15 years, where he managed approximately 40 employees with offices across the state.

Learning from Experience

This research is consistent in the fact that learning does not occur in a silo or in isolation of the real-world contexts in which learners experience each day. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) posit that “learning is cumulative in nature—nothing has meaning or is learned in isolation from prior experience” (p. 206). They note that “exploring the role of prior knowledge and experience in learning, two ideas are important: the amount of prior knowledge and experience and its nature” (p. 206).

Learning from experiences has been cited in the literature and discussed extensively in the work of Dewey (1925), Freire (1972), Horton (1990), and Illich (1973), who all emphasize the importance of using experience in and for learning. More recently, Miller (2000) explored learning from experience and experiential learning for the field of adult education by suggesting
that “learners’ life experience outside as well as inside of formal educational institutions are increasingly seen as important dimensions of learning” (p. 71).

**Informal Learning**

This research revealed that the participants possessed a rich reservoir of prior knowledge and experience present within the context of the participants’ informal adult learning experiences. Merriam and Brockett (1997) describe formal adult education as that “which is institutionalized, usually as part of an existing system” (p. 169), whereas Merriam and Caffarella (1999) extended this description to include adult learning that occurs within “adult education organizations, educational institutions, quasi-educational organizations, and non-educational organizations” (pp. 26-28). Evidence of informal learning began to emerge when the participants were asked to describe their educational and professional backgrounds and how these backgrounds prepared them for their roles as school board members.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) explain that informal learning “refers to the experiences of everyday living from which we learn something” (p. 21). Informal learning can be incidental, self-directed, and/or experiential. During the interviews the participants reported they possessed an extensive amount of experience that was evident in various areas of informal learning prior to becoming a member of the school board. Specifically, informal learning included their participation in community organizations and governmental organizations within the community as well as committees within the school district itself.
Eva reported that she was a stay at home mother and that a huge component of her daily regimen included volunteerism and community service. As discussed in earlier chapters, informal learning is unique within itself because it does not occur in isolation of the learners’ natural environment. Instead it is learning that occurs as part of the learners’ daily living. Both Eva and Rob learned informally through their participation with the school board and within the community prior to becoming a school board member. Eva explained that prior to running for the school board she was involved in several district/school initiatives and/or committees. This involvement included the 150 year sesquicentennial celebration, PTO President, Parent Resources Committee, Parent Involvement Coordinator (PIC), and Library Board President as well as a member of the superintendent search representing the parent group. This level of involvement made Eva comfortable with extending this service into her role when she became a school board member. She began to learn how to become a board member prior to running for the school board, explaining that prior to running for the school board she “was involved in several district/school initiatives and/or committees.” When asked about how she learned how to be a school board member, Eva stated, “I don’t know if I am a good school board member or not, so I don’t know if I’ve learned it.” She described what she has learned as a school board member is “that so much of what we [school boards] do is superintendent based, and if you are going to have a good or bad district, [the] school board member must not be afraid to give the superintendent the lead and have a comfort level with him/her leading the district.”

Rob noted he began to learn how to become a school board member prior to becoming a member of the board. He proceeded to explain that he “worked collaboratively on several
district initiatives/committees designed to look at ways to reduce district costs in transportation, janitorial services, and food service.” It was within the context of serving in a function similar to a consultant within the school district that Rob began to learn his role as a school board member as he interacted within the real-world context of the school district.

Rob was also very active in the community as village president, chair of the Access to Care board, member of the board of trustees at a state university, member of the Community and Economic Development Association board, executive director of a state finance authority, executive director of a regional leadership center (January 16, 2007, p. 5), and president of the national policing and controlled bonding authority. It was within this context that Rob began to further shape how he learned to become a school board member through his interaction with the community and his service on other governing boards.

**Incidental Learning**

Incidental learning was revealed among several participants as they continued to discuss components of their professional backgrounds that may have contributed to how they learned to become school board members. Marsick and Watkins (2001) defined incidental learning as learning that occurs as a result of another activity, task, interpersonal interaction, trial-and-error, experimentation or formal learning. They continue to contend that incidental learning takes place without the learner being conscious of its occurrence.

Alice experienced incidental learning as she discussed how her past career at the Federal Reserve has prepared her to deal with diversity and as an Black woman, she was not
intimidated by strong leaders male or female. She explained that Alice her career and professional background was instrumental in her leadership on the board because it is these past/present experiences that have allowed her to be comfortable “having an [Black] executive.”

Similar to Alice, Eva noted that her K-12 educational experience and professional background contributed to her a comfort level for working within diverse populations. She continued to explain that these experiences prepared her to deal with diverse people because although she attended school in predominately Black communities with the exception of middle school, she was shaped by the diversity that existed within these various populations. This experience allowed Eva to become comfortable working within both predominately Black and predominately White environments and organizations.

Eva also stated that her professional career has contributed to her service on the school board because “it has taught her how to deal with diverse people.” She explained that she began her professional career with a predominately Black company at which she was very comfortable and successful. It was not until she changed jobs, moving her to a predominately White company, where she realized that she was equally comfortable working within this environment. Eva posited that her ability to function comfortably with both predominately Black and White work environments was greatly attributed to “the mobility and diversity that she experienced during grades K-12,” which exposed her to a high level of diversity. Therefore, this context allowed Eva to “welcome diversity and not be intimidated by being the minority.” It also allowed her to have the “courage and ambition to take the necessary steps to be successful in her professional endeavors.”
Lastly, Rob and Fred identified their interaction within their professional career as significant components of how they learned through incidental learning. For example, Rob described his professional career has “greatly” contributed to his service on the school board because he has had the opportunity to work professionally in the fields of law, finance, and government. Whereas, Fred noted that “his professional career contributed to his service on the school board because he models his school board service after the model of the state police, which is, integrity, service, and pride.” He also explained that “he lives his life by this model not only as a school board member but as a minister.”

**Self-directed Learning**

Langenbach (1988) describes Self-directed learning (SDL) as “a process in which individuals take the initiative in the learning process by diagnosing their learning needs, developing learning goals, identifying necessary resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes” (p.69). While Merriam and Caffarella (1999) grouped self-directed learning goals into three distinct categories: (1) to enhance the ability of adult learners to be self-directed in their learning, (2) to foster transformational learning as central to self-directed learning, and (3) to promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning.

Although, Langenbach (1988) and Merriam and Caffarella (1999) view self-directed learning from two slightly different perspectives as it relates to the process and goal development of individuals engaged in self-directed learning. They both recognize the role of the individual
learner in engaging in the self-directed learning process. She noted that she has gained more knowledge and understanding by talking to key leaders (e.g., assistant superintendent of finance) in the district.

Eva recalled attending new school board member training at the Triple I Conference sponsored by the Illinois School Board Association (ISBA) when she was first elected to the school board. However, she no longer attends this conference because she finds the “hands-on driven training by the board” more valuable. She continued that “she has gained more knowledge and understanding of her role as a school board member by talking to key leaders (e.g., assistant superintendent of finance) in the district.” Eva described her relationship with the board president as “one of mentorship” and explained “the board president has taught her how the superintendent and board can work together.”

Fred provides an example of self-directed learning when he describes how he interacted within the district prior to becoming a member of the school board. He explained that he had begun to interact within the context of the school district as a “PTO dad that attended field trips, volunteered in the classroom, and participated in the search for a new superintendent.” He further explained that “he received a great deal of literature from Alice (board president) and Rob (board vice-president) related to his role as a board member” and added they provided him with ongoing mentorship that assisted him with understanding policy and governance. Fred also mentioned that he became interested in running for the school board after being asked by Alice and Rob (board president and vice-president) to fill an open seat. He noted that he was already attending
board meetings and had already established support for the superintendent through the successful passing of a referendum.

Social (Cognitive) Learning Theory

Bandura (1977, 1986) social learning theory and later coined social cognitive theory as a viable construct for how adults may learn in various settings. Bandura (1977) posits that “social learning theory emphasizes the prominent roles played by vicarious, symbolic, and self-regulatory processes in psychological functioning” (p. 11). As noted by Merriam and Caffarella (1999), Bandura’s theory of social learning has relevance to adult learning because it accounts for both the learner and the environment in which the learner operate.

Observational learning and modeling are key components of social (cognitive) learning theory. According to Bandura (1977) social learning theory, “modeling influences and produce learning principally through their informative functioning” (p. 22). He continues to suggest that most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling by others and forming ideas on how new behaviors are performed.

Observational Learning

Bandura (1986) explains that all learning resulting from direct experience can occur vicariously by observing the behaviors of others and the consequence of the behavior. Bandura (1977, 1986) notes that observational learning is governed by four constituent processes: attentional processes, retention processes, motor production processes, and motivational
processes. He continues to highlight that the learners’ observational learning behavior is influenced by three sources—direct, vicarious, and self-produced.

This research revealed that these participants learned through observation at various times throughout their service on the school board. Alice reported that she was invited to consider joining the school board following an unsuccessful campaign for another elected position. A significant part of Alice’s decision was grounded in observing the existing school board members. It was from here that Alice spent the next six to eight months attending school board meetings. By observing the work of the school board as well as the positive outcomes and behaviors, Alice solidified her decision to run for the school board. Alice explained that through her observation, “she was very impressed by the business piece of the board as well as the strong leadership from the superintendent and decided to run for the board in the next election”.

On the other hand, Eva reported that she observed the function of the school board; specifically, the board president. She also explained that she has a great resource in the board president and district leadership in general. Eva described her relationship with the board president as “one of mentorship as far as how to keep the professionalism on the board and how we want to be perceived in the public”. Eva also noted that the perception of the community is very important to the board president to allow the community to have confidence in the people they elect. Therefore, the board president has taught Eva how the superintendent and board can work together. She constantly teaches them “how the superintendent is the lead person and that her role as the board president is that we understand where we have to go for information and how we have to conduct ourselves so that we are functional.”
Next, Rob communicated that his past and present board experience have given him an opportunity to see and understand how boards work. Additionally, this has allowed him to “work with committees and understand the relationship among boards, staff, and how a board functions well or does not function well depending on how you interact with staff.” Rob explained that he has “served on high functioning boards and dysfunctional boards.”

Lastly, Fred noted that upon becoming a school board member, he learned how to function in this role “by watching other board members, such as Rob, Alice, and Eva.” He also reported that that “he watched surrounding school boards who appeared to function very dysfunctionally; therefore, he used them as an example of what not to do.”

Situated Cognition

Situated cognition is described by Merriam and Brockett (1997) as “the role that the learners’ real-world experiences play within the context of the learning itself” (p. 155). They further note that “situated cognition is based on the idea that what we know and the meanings we attach to what we know are socially constructed and intimately linked to the real-life situation” (p. 156). Hansman (2001) extended the social interaction of situated cognition by stating that “situation cognition emphasizes the interaction between the learner and other learners and tools in a sociocultural context” (p. 46).

Evidence of situated cognition began to emerge as these participants discussed how they function as a school board and interact within the school board as well as how communication existed among the school board and superintendent. Building on the earlier definitions of
situated cognition, this research provides a clear description of the interaction among learners (participants), the tools they used within these interactions, the activities used to promote rich interactions and dialogue, and the context in which the activity began to shape learning. To clearly position situated cognition as a significant component of learning that supports how learning occurs within the context of the school board, this researcher will discuss how situated cognition existed within the following areas: interaction among the school board, tools used to advance the interaction, activities that guided the interaction through dialogue and reflection, and interaction within the setting.

Learning through Interaction

This research revealed that the school board functions in what each participant coined as a “committee of the whole” structure. This structure created an opportunity for the school board members to interact with each other as learners, as suggested by Hansman (2001, 2002), to make decisions regarding significant issues. According to school board minutes, the superintendent reported that “she would like to begin a series of committee of the whole meetings to review several issues” (December, 20, 2005). This structure served as a basis of learning and interacting among other learners as a community of learners, which was described and supported by each participant. Alice noted that the “committee of the whole” model supported “board cohesiveness [and] communication and built trust by allowing all board members to hear all information at the same time.” Eva explained that the board functioned as a “committee of the whole where the entire board is at the table at all times.” Rob provided a detailed account of the committee of the
whole structure and the interaction of the school board within the context of the meeting when he described that within that context, he serves as chair of the finance committee when special finance and bonding issues arise, is president of the charter high school, and is the board representative for the Special Education Cooperative board. Finally, Fred concurred that the board functions as a “committee of the whole” model, which allowed the board to listen to all issues together as a “whole” board.

Learning Tools

The participants also identified that the superintendent provided them with a wealth of information and resources to help them make an informed decision. Examples of the information included achievement data, demographic information, external reports and research, and internal presentations from assistant superintendents. It is also important to note that an extension of these tools is indirectly connected to their understanding of the demographic contexts discussed earlier, such as the district, community, student, and teacher contexts.

When asked to share the factors that contribute to their overall decision-making, each participant related his/her response in various ways back to the information provided by the superintendent. The evidence shows that the information provided by the superintendent serves as the “tools” necessary for the school board members to make decisions. Considering that learning does not occur in isolation, the tools provided within the learning environment are essential to the overall learning process. Here the research posits that the school board members’
ability to successfully interact with each other as a body of learners, understand the tools, and interact with those tools are essential to their ability to make decisions and acquire knowledge.

Eva noted the factors that contribute to her overall decision-making (e.g., policies, administrative reports, data, etc.) are all filtered to the board from the superintendent. She explained that the superintendent walks the board through every piece of information, so they never have to go looking for information. Rob concurred that the superintendent provides all the information necessary for the board to make informed decisions. “We discuss matters privately to address concerns or issues, but overall, the superintendent makes certain that we receive a sufficient amount of information and that we have ample time for discussion in order to reach a consensus.”

**Learning through Dialogue**

Another component of situated cognition is the activity associated with the learning process. As mentioned by Eva, “the superintendent walks them through every piece of information.” It is important to note that a key component of this process is the dialogue that took place between the superintendent and school board, which represented yet another example of how learning occurred through their interaction with other learners. In addition to Eva, Fred discussed the importance of dialogue as a significant component of his learning and contended it ultimately drove how he made decisions. Freire (1970, 1993) describes dialogue as the encounter through which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world that is to be transformed and humanized; the dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one
person ‘depositing’ ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’ by the discussants” (p. 88). However, Freire also purports that

true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns and indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action. (p. 92)

Fred noted that “all of the facts contribute to my overall final decision coupled with clear and open dialogue with the board to determine what evidence or concrete information is necessary to make the decision.” He contended that “all decisions must be justified and that these decisions are not personal; they must simply be based on totality of the circumstances surrounding the issue.”

**Learning within the Sociocultural Context**

A review of the documents including school board meeting and school board agendas revealed that the committee of the whole meetings are held in a public forum, which allows the community members to ask questions, provide input, and engage in dialogue with the school board. This opportunity supports the social context component that shapes learning as described by Hansman (2001) because it shows how these participants interacted among the community and how their interactions developed another layer of interaction within the real-world context.

Documents revealed that community interaction and dialogue were welcomed from the community through the inclusion of “community comments and concerns” as a regular agenda item. This research showed community members frequently took advantage of the opportunity...
to interact with the school board. Additionally, school board minutes revealed that the school board dedicated a series of open meetings geared toward discussing several textbooks and that the community was invited to join and participate in the discussion. The structure also allowed the school board members to receive the necessary resources and information (tools) to make an effective decision and engage in dialogue and reflection (activity) among other learners in public meetings before the community (social context where the learning takes place).

Question 3

How are school board members socialized to address issues of race and class?

Cistone (1976) described socialization as “the process by which individuals selectively acquire the values and attitude, interests and dispositions, skills and knowledge [the culture] which is current in the group of which they are member” (p. 3). More recently Pincus and Olson (1997) described socialization as “the process of interaction through which an individual (a novice) acquires the norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and language characteristics of his or her group” (p. 306). While, Ickovics, Thayaparan, and Ethier (2001) describe socialization as a “process that gives individuals the knowledge, motivation, and skills to participate in their particular community” (p. 818). Considering these definitions as a foundation for identifying how school board members were socialized to address issues of diversity, this research suggests that the socialization process occurred through the school board members’ ability to understand and accept the norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes of the school board. The understanding of the norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes that come together to support the socialization process does
not stop within the context of the school board itself, for it is equally important to give attention to how these components exist within the individual board member. Therefore, viewing the socialization process through an extended lens that identifies the socialization of the organization (the school district) and the socialization of the individual (the school board member) collectively is equally important to the research.

The research revealed that these school board members began the socialization process prior to joining the school board and that this socialization had continued throughout their service on the school board. It is within this socialization process that these school board members began to learn and understand the norms, values, and beliefs of the school district, allowing them to address issues of diversity.

This research revealed three components essential to how school board members are socialized to address issues of diversity. These components include 1) school board members must have the ability to understand the diversity of the school district; 2) school board members must understand and embrace the norms, values, and beliefs of the school district as established by the school board; and 3) the socialization process occurs through an intersection of organizational socialization norms (e.g. race, gender, class, age) and individual socialization (e.g. norms, values, beliefs).
Learning in Context

This research showed that training was an essential part of the participants’ learning process and that this training took place within various contexts that played a significant part in how they learned their roles and how they functioned as a school board members. It is clear in this research that these participants learned to become school board members by interacting within various contexts: the context of the school board dynamic, the community context, the historical context, and the political context.

Context of the School Board Dynamic

The participants in this research refrained from participating in formal training provided through the state and national associations. Alice adamantly stated that “she does not find much value in attending training offered through professional associations (e.g., Illinois School Board of Education and National School Board Association).” Instead of attending formal training, Alice explained that “board training focused on in-district training with the superintendent and/or a representative appointed by the superintendent (e.g., assistant superintendent of finance, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, deputy superintendent, etc.).” Alice explained that the training of school board members began the moment it was discovered there was a potential vacancy on the school board. At this point, Alice sought to recruit board members with a specific set of qualifications, such as “members who reflect the diversity of the board, members who are not a stranger to the board or the community, members with a skill-set that they can bring to the board, and members willing to run for re-election.”
Both Rob and Fred indicated “they did not attend any training when they were elected to the board.” Rob explained he did not attend training because the “only difference between his services on the school board versus his service on other boards was that the subject matter was different.” He contended that “the process of board governance remained the same” and added the “questions are the same; [they are] legal, financial, or process.” On the other hand, Fred stated that he has not attended any training because “he receives a great deal of in-district training.” For example, Fred explained, “Rob has helped him understand day-to-day operations, the role of the school board, rules, and policies” and noted that “between the board leadership (president and vice-president) and superintendent he has received a great deal of training.”

Community Context

The real-world or authentic environment that served to shape the relationship between the participants and the interactive dimension began to emerge early in the interviews as participants responded to a series of questions regarding the community perception, motivation, and parental involvement. Four communities comprised of approximately 60,000 residents, respectively, are served by the school district; however, during the interviews, the board members consistently described the community as one that “likes stability and [that] most of our community does not have kids in the district” (Alice). She also explained that the district “is no longer comprised of farmers and is now consisting of middle class Blacks.” She also explained that “we have diverse populations with some Asians and Whites.”
Historical Context

Alice emphasized that this ideal of stability is embraced by the school board and is evident in the fact that the district has employed only three superintendents in the past 25 years. She stressed that “one superintendent retired after thirteen years of service, the current superintendent has been in place for ten years, and they had a superintendent in place for two years prior to the appointment of the current superintendent.” She also indicated that the “community has approximately 80% of its taxpayers who do not have children enrolled in the school district” and yet “hundreds of men from around the district fill the auditorium of each school and participate in mentor programs and community events to support the children of the district.”

Eva provided a historical perspective of the community by mentioning that “the community demographic had shifted greatly over the past ten years from a majority White community to a middle class Black community.” During this time of transition, Eva described the community as “afraid due to a great deal of mobility”; however, she depicted the community of today as “proud and educated with high expectations of their children.”

Political Context

Rob was instrumental in capturing the various governing bodies within the community, noting that “the systems that exist across the district are significant in understanding and building a sense of community.” Rob reported the community as one that represents a “high level of involvement,” identifying that their involvement is reflected through the development of an
education commission within one of the district communities as well as community support and community participation in district events and programs. Rob described the community as a set of interdependent systems comprised of governmental entities, non-profits and community agencies that work together to support the district. He explained that “when the community, government, and individuals within the community are functioning, you have systems that are working” and provided the following examples of how these systems look within the context of the communities: “You have non-for-profits, sports programs, Lions Clubs, Rotary and a number of different systems working to support each other.” He added that when these systems work together and the “only system you need to work on is the school system, then you have a chance to be successful.” He contended that this is what the school board has accomplished and continues to cultivate across the various communities.

Fred characterized the community as a group of “proud, smart, educated, involved parents with high expectations.” Fred perceived the community as being good and diverse with a good mix of high/low income and middle/upper class individuals that “all get along.” This is reflected in the district’s demographic data that identify the average income across the communities as $50,000-99,000 annually. Fred also mentioned that “the community is very involved in the activities of the school district,” noting the recent standing room only perfect attendance and honor roll recognition ceremonies as examples of the level of community involvement and interest. The participants did not reveal a great deal of information about the teacher context, which provides the school board with a lens to understand the demographics and expertise of the teachers working within the district. Therefore, the researcher was unable to
determine with certainty that the lack of data in this area demonstrates the school board is unaware of the skills and credentials of the teachers employed by the district. However, Rob contended “the district employs competent teachers that are invested in the district, community and students.”

This research also revealed that socialization occurred within the context of the school board members’ experience within the school district prior to joining the school board. Each participant shared a component of his/her experience that included a relationship with the school district at least six months prior to running for the board: Alice attended school board meetings, Eva was an active part of the PTO and the Parent Resource Center, Rob participated on a number of committees to address fiscal responsibility, and Fred was a PTO dad who chaperoned several field trips. This research also revealed that the socialization process continued after the participants were elected to the school board through their interaction with the existing members of the school board (e.g. school board president and school board vice-president). Eva reported she had a great resource in the board president and that this relationship was one of professionalism and mentorship. Additionally, Fred indicated he received a great deal of support from the board president and vice-president who provided him with a great deal of literature regarding his role as a school board member.

Question 4

How have school boards responded to significant issues related to race and class?
Three critical incidents provided evidence as to how school board members are socialized to address issues of diversity. The critical incidents identified in the research failed to represent traditional components of diversity. Meaning that, most definitions of diversity emphasize a level of sensitivity to race, class, gender, class, and sexual orientation. It is through this sensitivity that individuals begin to accept or celebrate diversity. Many researchers identify diversity within the context of understanding the dynamics of race, class, gender, socioeconomics, and sexual orientation. Revealed in Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey (2008) definitions of diversity and multiculturalism “as an intersection of race, gender, age, and sexual orientation” and “multiculturalism as the examination of how diversity manifests itself within the context of education in classrooms, curriculum, research and literature.”

The critical incidents revealed in the research include, the charter high school, the grading scale policy, and a mentorship program. It is important to note that the researcher views these critical incidents as examples of diversity because their development and implementation emerged within the context of addressing concerns related to student achievement and disciple. The research shows that there is a direct correlation between the student achievement and student discipline concerns among districts that represent changing demographics such as an increased minority population and a high low income population. Therefore, the socialization of how school board members address issues of diversity is revealed within the context of the critical incidents. All of which address community concerns related to student achievement (declining test scores) and student discipline.
The college preparatory charter high school opened its doors to 125 students (36 boys and 89 girls) in August 2010. The charter high school is the first of its kind and is the only free charter high school located outside of the inner-city. After hearing concerns from the community regarding the declining test scores of the feeder high school, the school board supported the superintendent’s recommendation to open a charter high school designed to prepare students to attend and graduate from college. The district selected a freshman class of 125 students from a lottery pool of 185 applicants. The charter high school planned to admit 125 students per year for the next four years until they reached the target enrollment of 500 students. During his interview Rob stated that “pre-tests revealed that students attending the charter high school have reading levels from sixth to twelfth grade.”

The high school has a uniquely aggressive curriculum that requires students to take four years of English, mathematics, science, social science, world language, technology, fine arts, and physical education to graduate. In addition, the school day is nine hours in length, mirroring the European and Asian school systems. Additionally, the high school offers a “Last Class” program at the end of each school day where students meet for an hour and a half for fine arts, clubs, activities, athletics, tutoring, and/or academic advising. All students attending the charter high school are expected to apply to and be admitted to one or more colleges or universities. Once there, the district expects each and every one of their students to graduate.

The opening of a charter high school was not welcomed by the original high school feeder district. The feeder high school has since filed a lawsuit against the school district and the
board of education citing that the charter high school will bankrupt the district within two years due to a reduction in state funding.

**Grading Scale Policy**

The participants’ described the implementation of the grading scale policy as another example of addressing diversity by responding to a concern from the community related to student achievement. Alice notes that “the community raised concern about the test scores not reflecting the progress students were making in the class.” Therefore, in response to this, the board approved a “Grade Scale Policy” that raised the grading scale in order to create and promote high academic standards. (See Table 4) Alice. Fred also discussed that “the overall success of the district is its high academic standards” as he described the “grading scale policy (see Table 4) as a representation of how the district strives for high standards.”

According to board of education minutes\textsuperscript{13} for December 2002, the superintendent recommended a change in curriculum and instruction policy related to the grading scale. The superintendent noted that the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) for 2001-02 indicated that 52.3\% of 3\textsuperscript{rd} grade students in the district three years or more met or exceeded reading standards. At the 5\textsuperscript{th} grade level, 65.2\% of students in the district three years or more, met or exceeded reading standards, and students at the 8\textsuperscript{th} grade level, 69.4\% of students in the district three years or more, met or exceeded reading standards. Based on this data, the superintendent further noted that high standards and high expectations were essential to the process of raising the achievement

\textsuperscript{13} In order to maintain confidentiality specific board of education minutes cannot be revealed.
levels of students across the district. Therefore, the superintendent recommended to the board that they adopt a new grading scale effective August 2003. The superintendent further explained that “the scale assumes that a student would have to master at least 70% of the material presented in order to pass the course.”

**Men of Honor**

The participants described community and parental involvement as significant components of addressing diversity within the context of student discipline. Alice mentioned that “80% of the taxpayers do not have children in the district and yet hundreds of men from around the district fill the auditorium of each school and participate in mentor programs and community events to support the children of the district.”

According to board of education minutes for March 2003, the superintendent discussed concerns at its seventh through eighth grades building. Specifically, these concerns were related to student discipline and fighting among student students off of school grounds. Following this discussion, she provided information regarding a new program, “Men of Honor,” that included male volunteers from across the community and male students meeting during and after school. Due to the behavior of some male students at the school, the implementation of this program provided strong role modeling to male students. The program focuses on good decision-making and implements the Character Education program as a tool to supplement the work of the role models and mentors.
The research revealed that Kolb’s (1984) model of learning from experience is a useful tool for looking at how these school board member’s experiences shaped their learning and decision-making when addressing issues of race and class. The model suggests that concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation collectively for the process of learning from experience. Several critical issues began to emerge during the interviews and were supported in a review of the documents to suggest the emergence and existence of Kolb’s model of learning from experience. These issues include the charter high school, mentorship program, and the grading scale policy. In order to demonstrate how Kolb’s model of learning from experience was revealed and served to exist as a tool for these school board members to make decisions about race and class, the following analogies reveal how the model was used as these school board members addressed issues of race and class.

**Concrete Experience**

As mentioned earlier, concrete experience (an event) is the learners’ openness and willingness to engage in new experiences. The concrete experience that these school board members demonstrated an openness and willingness to engage in was dialogue regarding the development of the charter school. It is important to mention that the dialogue did not initially begin with these school board members deciding that the charter school was the best option or solution. However, it began through their interaction with the community and the concerns that they brought before the school board related to academic achievement and poor performance.
Reflective Observation

Reflective observation is the observational and reflective skills so that allow the learner to view the experience from a different perspective. In this regard, these school board members began to observe (based on the data) a decline in test scores and performance of their students upon graduating from the district and attending the feeder high school. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) note that “reflective practice allows one to make judgments in complex and murky situations—judgments based on experience and prior knowledge” (p.232). They continue to state that “reflective practice involves using data in some form, which almost always include our past and current experiences” (p.232). Merriam and Caffarella also purports the importance of tacit knowledge as a component of reflective practice by noting that tacit knowledge is “knowledge that we use every day, almost without thinking about it, is an important part of these data” (p.232). The research suggests that it is within reflective observation that these school board members begin to move into reflective practice which allowed them to connect data regarding the (concrete experience) with their past experience, present experience, and tacit knowledge in order to understand the concrete experience prior to making a decision.

The participants’ consistently communicated that the opening of the charter high school was a direct response to the community concerns regarding the declining test scores and the low performance of students attending the current feeder high school. Alice described this incident as being directly “related to the low test scores of the feeder high school being a concern for the community.” Eva explained that the development of the charter high school was the result of the communities’ concerns regarding the declining test scores at the high school district. Rob
recalled the decision to open a charter high school as an example of the board’s commitment to address the concerns of the community.

**Abstract Conceptualization**

Abstract conceptualization is the process that allows the learner to build upon their analytical abilities in order to connect ideas and concepts based on the learners observations. This is the point in the model where the learner is seeking to identify what was learned and the future implications gauged from the learning process. In this research, these school board members began to engage in the abstract conceptualization process when they begin to dialogue with the superintendent and other school board members regarding possible solution to address the concerns of the community related to academic achievement and performance.

**Active Experimentation**

Active experimentation is the decision-making and problem solving skills that allow the learner to transition new ideas and concepts into practice. Here the decision-making and problem solving skills occurred within reflective observation and abstract conceptualization because these components served as the catalyst by which these school board members engaged in the learning process through observation, reflective practice, and their interaction with other learners and the community. In response to the concerns of the community, the school board applied for and was given approval to open its own charter high school; designed to prepare students to attend and graduate from college.
Summary

This chapter presents the findings from the investigation of the contextual factors that impacted school board decisions when the school board dealt with issues of race. Analysis of the data revealed four emerging themes related to the research questions: 1) critical race theory is a viable tool to unpack issues of race and class; 2) contextual factors that shape how school boards respond to issues of race and class; 3) experiential learning, learning in context, and situated cognition serves as a framework for how school boards learn their roles as school board members; and 4) school board members are socialized by implicitly and explicitly to address issues of race and class.

This research revealed critical race theory is a viable component of the educational research as a tool for analyzing social inequality within the public education system. More importantly, it revealed that although race and racism are normal components of society, it is possible to achieve academic success despite the barriers and factors that may serve to perpetuate race and racism and ultimately promote social inequality. The research also revealed the contextual factors that shaped the way school boards respond to issues of race (diversity) are grounded within the community, historical, political, and interpersonal contexts. It was within these contexts that these school board members began to learn their roles and make decisions when addressing issues of race and class. The school board members understood the various contexts that existed within the fabric of the school board itself, specifically the role of the school board, suggesting this context is essential to how school boards learn their roles as board members because it is directly related to how they ultimately make decisions. The research
clearly showed the participants had a clear grasp and understanding of their roles as school board members when making decisions related to race and class. Additionally, this research revealed that how the school board functioned as a school board was significant to its ability to make decisions. Here the school board functioned within a “committee of the whole” structure, which is somewhat unique to most school boards. However, these participants indicated they find a greater level of effectiveness revealed in the context of the “committee of the whole” structure versus the popular structure of extensive individual school board committees.

Next, the research revealed that these school board members learned to become school board members through experiential learning, which began to emerge within a number of contexts and contextual factors that served the shape their learning. The contexts in which they learned included the board members’ professional experience/background, the board members’ experiences and interaction within the community, and the board members’ interaction within the school district. The research also showed that experiential learning occurred through situated cognition prior to school board members joining the school board and was shaped by their interaction within the contexts in which they existed. The emergence of situated cognition began to occur as the participants discussed how their professional and career backgrounds served to shape how they learned to become school board members.

Finally, the research revealed that these school board members began the socialization process prior to joining the school board and continued throughout their service on the school board. It was within this socialization process that they began to learn and understand the norms, values, and beliefs of the school district, allowing them to address issues of diversity. Three
critical incidents provided evidence as to how they were socialized to address issues of diversity; however, the critical incidents identified in this research failed to represent traditional components of diversity
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to find the contextual factors that impact school board decisions when dealing with issues of race and class. A qualitative design was chosen for this study because characteristics of the qualitative research paradigm are well suited to investigate the complexities of how board members make decisions. Four school board members participated in in-depth, open ended, structured interviews.

A qualitative research design was used for this study because characteristics of the qualitative research paradigm are well suited to investigate the complexities of how school board members make decisions when faced with issues of race and class. I used a qualitative research design because it allowed me to investigate how decisions were shaped or influenced by the individuals’ race when situated within the context of critical race theory. Additionally, a case study analysis was chosen as a particular qualitative methodology because I was seeking to gain an in-depth understanding of the process and contextual factors that shape school board members’ decision-making when dealing with issues of race and class. Data collection occurred between May 2010 and May 2012. During this time, four school board members participated in semi-structured interviews, archival documents was reviewed and observations were conducted.

This chapter revisits the research questions and answers them through analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from the participants. It should be noted that these participants volunteered their time and did not receive any compensation for their participation.
They met the minimum requirements of the research study by obtaining 2 years of elected or appointed service on the school board; therefore, it can be assumed that their experience can be generalized with other school board members.

This research exposed that following findings: 1) critical race theory is a viable tool for analyzing inequalities and inequity within school districts, 2) race and racism exists within macro-level policies and micro-level practices, 3) school board members learn across various methodologies (e.g. experiential, informal, social (cognitive) theory) and contexts, 4) socialization within various contexts serve to guide decision-making, and 5) and individual decisions on micro-level practices allowed these board members to advance racial equality. The chapter is divided into the following areas: conclusion, discussion, implication for the field of adult and higher education, limitations of the study, and recommendations.

Discussions

Race and Racism

What was learned from the study is that evidence of race and racism exists within the construction of public policies and legislation (e.g. micro-level and macro-level) which sets the tone for school board governance. The literature is clear that race and racism is a social construct that is deeply embedded in the fabric of society. One of the primary tenets of critical race theory states that “racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society. Therefore, because racism is ingrained in the landscape of society, it looks natural and ordinary to persons in the
culture. This tenet or view of the existence of race in society has changed very little since being introduced by Bell and Freeman in the mid-1970s.

Scheurich and Young (1997) assert that there are four levels of analysis when considering racism: “individual, institutional, societal, and epistemological” (as cited in Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 99). The various levels are defined by Zamundio, et al. as the following: 1) individual level looks at interpersonal relationships between people; 2) institutional level looks at the institutional structures that allow, permit, and possibly encourage racist behavior; 3) societal level looks at the ethos, which includes the character, period of time, and social context that express the attitudes and belief of the nation; and 4) epistemological level is the study of the nature and production of one’s knowledge. A closer look at these levels of analyzing race and racism as described by Scheurich and Young (1997) and Zamudio et al., (2011) revealed evidence that the recognition of race and racism occurred at the epistemological and societal levels and were embedded within the context of micro-level practices. The research revealed that this school board developed a strong sense of their worldview as participants of public education and through their engagement with the community. Each participate reported that their k-12 experience shaped how they viewed education; therefore, informing the “why” they serve on the school board.

For example, Alice indicated that she loved that her K-12 educational experience was heavily grounded in the arts, which introduced to tap and modern dance with a rich curriculum that included lots of mathematics, science and French. Eva also reported that her K-12 experience prepared her well for college and prepared her to deal with diverse people because although she attended school in predominately Black communities she was shaped by the
diversity that existed within these various populations. Similarly, Rob noted that his K-12 educational experience prepared him for college by laying a good foundation and that education was greatly enforced in his community when he was growing up because it was viewed as the mechanism to “pull you up.” Whereas, Fred described his K-12 educational experience as one “without a clue and foggy” as he reflected on his experiences as an Black male being raised by a single mother and resided in low income section eight housing within the inner-city of a large metropolitan city. The uniqueness of their K-12 experience served to shape their worldview and provided a lens for these school board ability to see themselves as vehicles to change a system that served them or failed them through the development of policies and procedures that shape and cultivate a social justice agenda. Although a commitment to a social justice agenda did not emerge during the interviews, it was prevalent in the review of archival data which revealed that this school board spent a great deal of time developing policies related to areas that may be tied back to race and class, such as, student discipline, student achievement, parental involvement and community partnerships.

This research also revealed that the construction of race and racism shaped macro-level policies and micro-level practices within the work of the school board. Race and racism is a normal, not aberrant or rare, fact of daily life in the U.S. society, and the assumptions of White superiority are so ingrained in political, legal, and educational structures that they are almost unrecognizable (Delgado, 1995; Taylor, 2006). Their research described race and racism as silent yet embedded in the fiber of the institution and systemically embedded in policies and legislation. However, Yosso (2002) posits that “racism and its intersections with discrimination
based on gender, class, language, and immigration status informs curriculum in both macro and micro ways” (p. 93).

This research revealed that race and racism are ingrained within the educational structures of the school district through macro-level policies and micro-level practices. (Zamudio et al., 2011) describe macro-level policies as, “legal and legislative policies that are adopted and enacted that have a direct impact on schooling,” and micro-level practices as, “the ongoing practices of teaching and learning shaped by the school, district, state, and federal policies and politics” (p. 41) that are macro-level policies. Brown v. Board of Education and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) are two landmark pieces of legal legislation that served to inform the relationship between the normalcy of race and racism and how racial inequality persists within the framework of legal policies and legislation. As these findings revealed, the participants served in a capacity that required them to adhere to and comply with these federal legislative polices and mandates. However, it was through an understanding that race and racism is normal and embedded in federal policies and mandates that are not controlled at the school board and a clear understanding of one’s worldview and how this worldview may shape and inform decision-making that allow school board members and other leaders to develop policies that promote social justice, equity and equality.

Although, the discussion regarding the social construction of race and racism and how it is revealed through public policy was evident in this study and an important conversation to continue. Equally as important is the notion of “whiteness” and white-privilege” and how they intersect with ‘race” and “racism”. Colin and Lund (2014) note that “white privilege and racism
are interconnected and cannot be separated when you are discussing the individual, institutional, and structural nature of racism” (p. 91). The reality is that ‘race matters’ and it is important to understand how school board members view themselves in this process. Theoharis and Haddix (2012) examined how White school leaders understood their racial identify and the implications of their White privilege and how it affected their ways they lead. This research serves as a catalyst to a bigger conversation around race and White privilege and its implication on school leaders; specifically, school boards role in addressing issues of race and class.

**Learning Methodologies**

This research revealed that these school board members learned to become school board members through various learning methodologies. Learning began to emerge for these participants through experiential learning, informal learning, components of social (cognitive) learning theory, and situated cognition. Learning is a dynamic and fluid process that occurred in various forms. Learning was not limited to a specific type of learning or methodology instead learning occurred through experiential learning, informal learning, and observational (modeling) learning. Wilson (1993) explains that learning is an everyday event that is social in nature, dependent upon the interaction with the setting itself and its social and tool dependent nature that determines the learning.

Kolb (1984) explained that experiential learning provides a foundational approach to education and learning that represents a process of lifelong learning. He continues to say that experiential learning provides a framework for examining and strengthening key linkages
between the learners work, learners’ education and the learners’ personal (professional) development. Merriam and Brockett (1997) reminds us that experiential learning is more than just the learners ability to accumulate their experience but how they attach meaning to the learning that allows experiential learning to emerge and flourish. These participants’ revealed evidence of experiential learning. They discussed in some detail how they attached meaning to their experiences. For example, Alice mentioned that “she learned to be a school board member through her previous knowledge and experience with governing boards.” She specifically referenced her role on the YWCA board and her previously held position of village trustee for one of communities served within the school district. While Similar to Alice, Rob explained that he acquired a significant amount of experience within the context of community organizations and professional boards in addition to his role on the school board. It was through their work on other boards and within the community prior to joining the school board that allowed them to attach meaning and gain knowledge as lifelong learners.

Additional the experiential knowledge that these participants developed is also connected to the role of prior knowledge and the experience gained from learning. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) posit that “learning is cumulative in nature—nothing has meaning or is learned in isolation from prior experience” (p. 206). They note that “exploring the role of prior knowledge and experience in learning, two ideas are important: the amount of prior knowledge and experience and its nature” (p. 206). Learning from experiences has been cited in the literature and discussed extensively in the work of Dewey (1925), Freire (1972), Horton (1990), and Illich (1973), who all emphasize the importance of using experience in and for learning. More
recently, Miller (2000) explored learning from experience and experiential learning for the field of adult education by suggesting that “learners’ life experience outside as well as inside of formal educational institutions are increasingly seen as important dimensions of learning” (p. 71).

Next, informal learning is a significant component of how learning was acquired within the context of the school board. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) explain that informal learning “refers to the experiences of everyday living from which we learn something” (p. 21). Informal learning can be incidental, self-directed, and/or experiential. Whereas, Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2010) define informal learning as “learning that is usually self-directed, independently pursued, and unregulated, often for the purpose of solving problems” (p. 26).

During the interviews the participants reported they possessed an extensive amount of experience that was evident in various areas of informal learning prior to becoming a member of the school board. Specifically, informal learning included their participation in community organizations and governmental organizations within the community as well as committees within the school district itself. The best example of this interaction was revealed as Rob shared his extensive experience on governing boards. Rob noted that “in addition to his role on the school board, he continues to serve on six or seven committees while maintaining professional relationships with those boards that he no longer serves on.” These boards include the Access to Care board (10 years), member of the foundation board for a state university (25 years), village president (12 years), president of the national policing and controlled bonding authority (15
years), member of the Council of the Economic Development agencies (15 years), and vice-
chairman of a local bank board.”

Bandura (1977, 1986) social learning theory and later coined social cognitive theory as a
viable construct for how adults may learn in various settings. Bandura (1977) posits that “social
learning theory emphasizes the prominent roles played by vicarious, symbolic, and self-
regulatory processes in psychological functioning” (p. 11). As noted by Merriam and Caffarella
(1999), Bandura’s theory of social learning has relevance to adult learning because it accounts
for both the learner and the environment in which the learner operate.

Observational learning and modeling are key components of social (cognitive) learning
theory. According to Bandura (1977) social learning theory, “modeling influences and produce
learning principally through their informative functioning” (p. 22). He continues to suggest that
most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling by others and forming ideas
on how new behaviors are performed. Evidence of observational learning was reported by
several participants. Alice explained that through her observations, “she was very impressed by
the business piece of the board as well as the strong leadership from the superintendent and
decided to run for the board in the next election”. On the other hand, Eva reported that she
observed the function of the school board; specifically, the board president (e.g. Alice).
Additionally, Fred noted that upon becoming a school board member, he learned how to function
in this role “by watching other board members, such as Rob, Alice, and Eva.” He also reported
that that “he watched surrounding school boards who appeared to function very dysfunctionally;
therefore, he used them as an example of what not to do.”
Situated cognition is described by Merriam and Brockett (1997) as “the role that the learners’ real-world experiences play within the context of the learning itself” (p. 155). They further note that “situated cognition is based on the idea that what we know and the meanings we attach to what we know are socially constructed and intimately linked to the real-life situation” (p. 156). Hansman (2001) extended the social interaction of situated cognition by stating that “situation cognition emphasizes the interaction between the learner and other learners and tools in a sociocultural context” (p. 46).

Socialization

Several definitions serve the shape our understanding and the significant of socialization in the learning process of these participants. Cistone (1976) described socialization as “the process by which individuals selectively acquire the values and attitude, interests and dispositions, skills and knowledge [the culture] which is current in the group of which they are member” (p. 3). More recently Pincus and Olson (1997) described socialization as “the process of interaction through which an individual (a novice) acquires the norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and language characteristics of his or her group” (p. 306). While, Ickovics, Thayaparan, and Ethier (2001) describe socialization as a “process that gives individuals the knowledge, motivation, and skills to participate in their particular community” (p. 818).

This research showed that theses school board members were socialized through their interaction within various contexts which lead to their decision-making. These contexts include school board context, political context, historical context, and sociocultural context. It is within
this socialization process that school board members began to learn and understand the norms, values, and beliefs of the school district, allowing them to address issues of diversity. Therefore, it was their socialization within these contexts that served to shape how they learned to become board members within the various contexts and contextual factors. This research revealed that the contextual factors that shaped the way school boards respond to issues of race (diversity) is grounded within the community context, district context, student context, and teacher context. It is within these contexts that these school board members began to learn their roles and make decisions when addressing issues of race and class. It is important to note that the school board ability to have a clear understanding of the demographics of the district and communities they served were significant factors that assisted them in learning their roles.

It is equally important to discuss that the school board members understood various contexts that exist within the fabric of the school board itself, specifically the role of the school board. This research clearly showed that the participants had a clear grasp and understanding of their role as school board members; therefore, making decisions related to race and class was a fairly easy component of the process.

Lastly, this research revealed that how the school board functioned as a school board was significant to the boards’ ability to make decisions. In this case the school board functioned within a “committee of the whole” structure that was somewhat unique to most school boards. However, these participants indicated that they found a greater level of effectiveness revealed in the context of the “committee of the whole” structure versus the popular structure of extensive individual school board committees.
Policy Development

This research revealed that school board members embraced macro-level policies while making individual decisions on micro-level practices in order to advance racial equality across the school district. Furthermore, it is important to understand how their worldview serves to shape their role as policy-makers within the context of their lived experiences. Although, the interviews did not explicitly reveal connections to the school boards role as policy makers, this conversation cannot be ignored. One of the primary roles of school board members is to inform and approve policy. It is through this lens that school boards are responsible for the governance and the management of many components within the district including their ability to inform governance and policies. This is important to unpack because it is at this point that they ultimately serve to improve the overall health of the school district by guiding decisions such as, student achievement, discipline, fiscal management, human resources, and policy development.

A review of school board minutes from 2002-2005 revealed that the school board openly engaged in narratives around either the issue or race or how issues of race impacted the progress of minority students. Specific narratives related to race identified in school board minutes include the following excerpts:

Superintendent said:

In order to address the issues facing minority children in our district, the development of an action plan is necessary to target the needs of minority students (October 2002).

Rob said:
In order to understand the challenges faced by minority students we must dissect the challenges that has resulted in a huge achievement gap for students in our district (August 2003).

Rob said:

It is important to continue the conversation and communication that the Board wants to engage in good open discussions around student achievement (September 2003).

Superintendent reports:

The discussion with parents, the Board and the community regarding student achievement and cultural climate was successful and the book Black Americans students in an affluent suburb: A study of academic disengagement served as a great tool for unpacking and discussing the challenges that we face (November 2003).

Rob said:

It is important that the Board continue to have discussions around topics related to race (November 2003).

Ron said:

Academic disengagement occurs because of parents disengagement (March 2004)

Rob discussed:

Two articles that appeared in the local newspaper related to student achievement and shared his disappointment with the fact that only one Black student appeared on the list of students identified in the article (June 2004).

Superintendent states:

The cultural climate of the district has changed and in order to move forward we must have a serious conversation around the changing climate (May 2004).

These narratives around race demonstrate this school boards commitment to addressing issues of race and class. Included in these conversations is their ability to position themselves within the various contexts that existed while allowing them to impact change as an agent of
policy development. These narratives ultimately served to set the foundation for the
development of policies that allowed the school board to move forward in their quest to improve
student achievement. The review of the school board minutes revealed that from 2005-2009, the
school board approved approximately forty new policies. Although some of these policies were
state and federal mandates which supported the macro-policies discussed earlier. Many of them
were not and included the following themes which resonated with the narratives of the school
board round race, class and cultural climate. These themes included: programming for students
with disabilities, discipline policy, bullying policy, aggressive behavior policy, student
achievement policy, school climate policy, diversity policy and wellness policy.

This research revealed that school board members function within a variety of contexts
(e.g. historical, cultural, community, etc.) that inform their view of the world and how they deal
with issues of race and class. The archival data and review of school board minutes was
significant in shaping this area of research because it demonstrated that a high level of focus was
given to the development of policy. What was absent was the fact that the policies were
informed by legislative changes, economic challenges and community unrest. Understanding
how the school board situated themselves within these contexts will continue to inform the
literature. The findings of this research have revealed that minority students are being
increasingly marginalized in the educational pipeline. The critical juncture here is to connect
this issue to policy development and policy implementation. Therefore, allowing school board
members the opportunity to be intentional, strategic and purposeful in their efforts to develop
policy while being mindful of the contexts that shape their worldview and inform their racialized lived experiences.

Critical Race Theory

This research revealed that critical race theory is a viable tool for analyzing inequality and inequities within the work of school boards. Critical race theory begin to emerge in the mid-1970 due to the concerns of a group of legal scholars and activist who were disturbed by the level of discrimination and inequality toward individuals of color in the criminal justice system. In the mid-1995, two educational scholars, Ladson-Billings and Tate challenged educators to use critical race theory as a tool to address educational concerns regarding race, inequality, school reform, and student achievement. It was from here that educators begin to use critical race theory as an analytical tool to address issues and challenges of Blacks and Hispanics participating at various levels of educational institutions.

Critical race theory has been a viable component of educational research as a tool for analyzing social inequality within the educational system for over 15 years. Of these seven assumptions/tenets, six of them emerged in the findings for this study: 1) race and racism are normal, 2) commitment to social justice, 3) central to experiential knowledge, 4) intersectionality, and 5) interest convergence. Race and racism is seen as silent yet embedded in the fiber of the institution and systemically embedded in policies and legislation. Yosso (2002) posits that “racism and its intersections with discrimination based on gender, class, language, and
immigration status informs curriculum in both macro and micro ways” (p. 93). A number of educational scholars begin to use CRT in various ways in education.

Coined the CRT education project, CRT begin to emerge as an analytical tool that looked at issues of inequity and inequality in education by Ladson-Billings (1998) in an attempt to name and highlight the function of white supremacy through the following five tent: 1) Name and discuss the pervasive, daily reality of racism in US society which serves to disadvantage people of color; 2) Expose and deconstruct seemingly ‘colorblind’ or ‘race neutral’ policies and practices which entrench the disparate treatment of non-White persons; 3) Legitimize and promote the voices and narratives of people of color as sources of critique of the dominant social order which purposely devalues them; 4) Revisit civil rights laws and liberalism to address their inability to dismantle and expunge discriminatory soci-political relationships; and 5) Change and improve challenges to race neutral and multicultural movements in education which made White students behavior the norm (p. 12).

This work was continued by several scholars such as, Parker (1998) and Tate (1997) who challenged to extend beyond determining whether or not racism exists to instead identifying the manner in which race/racism manifests itself in educational decision-making for students of color by exploring the use of storytelling/counter-storytelling and narratives. Additionally, Lynn and Parker (2006), began to use CRT as a “framework for examining: persistent racial inequalities in education, qualitative research methods, pedagogy and practice, the schooling experiences of marginalized students of color, and the efficacy of race-conscious education policy” (p. 257). With Stovall (2006), Parker (1998) and Tate (1997) challenging educators to
look beyond the existence of race and racism in schools in order to determine how decisions are made and manifested.

Specifically, Stovall suggested that educators recognize CRT as a viable theoretical construct and its subsequent application as a means to address issues of social justice in education. They argue that studies and research should continue to frame CRT and its relevance to education by 1) drawing important historical links between the work of critical legal scholars and education scholars concerned about racism in education; 2) helping illuminate CRT’s role as a “scholarship of people” that was by and for people of color; 3) drawing links between CRT and other “race-based epistemologies” and shown how CRT can add to current debates over the links between schooling and inequality; and 4) pushing critical race scholars in education to view CRT and education scholarship as both as a form of academic scholarship as well as a form of activism. (p. 270).

Lastly, Stovall (2006), Solorzano and Yosso (2002), and Parker and Lynn (2002) positioned educational leaders in the process by encouraging them to become a part of the process through their participation and intersection with several CRT tenets: narratives, counter-stories, and storytelling. In doing so, Stovall (2006) gives specific attention to the role of narratives and counter-stories as the primary vehicles for shaping CRT within an educational agenda. Stovall posits that it is narratives and counter-stories of educational leaders (specifically those of color) that serve to legitimize and promote the voices and narratives of people of color as sources of critique of the dominant social order that purposely devalues them. Borrowing from Solórzano and Yosso (2002), a counter-story asks leaders to “suspend judgment, listen for
the stories points, test them against (their) own version of reality (however conceived), and use the counter-story as a theoretical conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical case study” (p. 32). With Parker and Lynn (2002) also noting that CRT narratives and storytelling provide educators with the ability to challenge accounts and preconceived notions of race.

Conclusions

Five conclusions were derived from the findings. This section identifies those conclusions and provides a discussion based on critical race theory and other applicable concepts and theories from the literature. The conclusions are

1. Race and racism exists within macro-level policies and micro-level practices.

2. School board members learn across various learning methodologies (e.g. experiential, informal, social (cognitive) theory) and contexts.

3. Socialization within various contexts served to guide decision-making.

4. Individual decisions on micro-level practices allowed these board members to advance racial equality through policy development.

5. Critical race theory is a viable tool for analyzing inequalities and inequity within school districts.
Implications for the Field of Adult Higher Education

Today’s educational institutions at all levels are faced with similar challenges. The commonality of these challenges include dealing with diverse student populations, high dropout rates/low graduation rates, poor student achievement/student success in the midst of budget cuts and limited federal funding. With similar demographics as school boards, boards of trustees are dominated by White middle-class men. According to a study conducted by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (2010), board of trustees is comprised of 74% Whites, 16% Blacks, 4% Hispanic and 4% Asian, American Indians and other races. Therefore, it is equally important for boards of trustees which exist within higher education institutions to understand how they make decisions when dealing with issues of race and class.

This research revealed that critical race theory is a viable tool for analyzing inequalities and inequity within school districts, race and racism exists within macro-level policies and micro-level practices, learning occurs across various methodologies, an understanding and interaction within various contexts serve to guide decision-making, and the ability to understand how the learner is situated within the various contexts guide their ability to address and respond to critical incidents. Recently, issues of race and class are permeating rapidly across colleges and universities nationwide. A search of the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education revealed over 35 critical racial incidents in the media within the past 12 months. Issues range from racial slurs, videos of students singing racial songs, racist graffiti and students dressing as members of Ku Klux Klan. It is important that board of trustees and other institutional leaders understand such
The research makes a solid case for the fact that learning is situated within a particular context; however, examining how learning is shaped within the context of race, class, gender, power, and oppression is limited. Therefore, future research to explore how learning occurs when situated within the context of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, power and oppression can serve to contribute to social justice literature and research.

An extension of the research on situated cognition is important to build an argument for the knowledge acquisition and learning through knowledge as a significant component of the research. The literature on situated cognition is clear that the social context within learning takes place is essential in shaping the learners’ ability to learn and know. However, the research on how the knowledge is acquired and shaped within this viewpoint is limited.

Communities of practice and cognitive apprenticeships emerged frequently in the literature related to situated cognition and learning in context. Research focusing on the school board as a community of practice and how they may exist within the cognitive apprenticeship paradigm may reveal how decision-making is developed within the context of these models.

Although the work of Freire (1970, 1974, 1993) does not focus on learning from the perspective of school boards and how they make decisions about race and class, what is important to take away from Freire and the relationship with this study is connected to how Freire (1974) viewed dialogue as a component of critical thinking and consciousness raising for democratic change. The evidence shows that the process of dialogue among the participants as they interacted with each other as a community of learners strengthened their ability to make decisions based on their interaction and understanding of the tools through dialogue.
Limitations of the Study

Despite the richness of data collected for this study, there are some limitations associated with the research. It is important to note that the findings from qualitative case study research are not intended to be generalizable to specific populations or universes. Instead it is designed to develop a deeper sense of the phenomena being studied.

One of the greatest limitations of the study is grounded in the fact that only four school board members agreed to participate in the study. Subsequently, all of these participates were Black; therefore, leaving a void in the voice of the Hispanic and White school board members. These school board members cited lack of experience, sensitivity to the subject and lack of interest as reasons for declining participation. Considering that the research study is inclusive of the voice of Black school board members, this study failed to show how school boards that represent the national demographic (e.g. majority White male middle-class) make decisions when dealing with issues of race and class. Instead it showed how Black school board members made decisions when dealing with issues of race and class.

Third, the use of self-reported data and an attempt to recall and reconstruct the details surrounding critical incidents on learning and decision-making serve as other limitations. Furthermore, the number of critical incidents was relatively small but sufficient for an exploratory study. Fourth, the findings are reflective of the participants’ perspectives. However, the integration of multiple sources of data collection (e.g. interviews, observations, archival data analysis) was an attempt to allow for triangulation of findings.
Finally, although the literature encourages the use of critical race theory as an analytical tool to unmask inequality and inequity among people of color, it lacks a connection with real-world practices and applications. Therefore, moving CRT from an analytical tool in theory to one in practicality would serve to develop a social justice agenda. The study failed to show how CRT is used at the epistemological or methodological levels of analysis. However, it is anticipated that the findings may be useful to others scholars and practitioners’ who would like to understand how critical race theory can be used as a theoretical tool to identify how school board members learn and how they make decisions.

Recommendations

This research revealed that critical race theory is a viable tool for analyzing inequalities and inequity within school districts, race and racism exists within macro-level policies and micro-level practices, learning occurs across various methodologies, an understanding and interaction within various contexts serve to guide decision-making, and the ability to understand how the learner is situated within the various contexts guide their ability to address and respond to critical incidents. Based on these research findings, the following recommendations provide a framework for best practices for adult and higher education practitioners seeking to explore and understand school board members and how their role can impact the progress of school systems.

First, critical race theory should be used as an analytical tool reveal and unmask inequality and inequity within macro-level policies and micro-level practices that may exist across the school district in general. An increased focus of CRT should be on micro-level
practices in an effort to identify specific areas of inequality within micro-level policies which are controlled and implemented at the local level; therefore, the greatest impact may be achieved. The focus of CRT should be extended to explore the value and use of other CRT tenets such as colorblindness and narratives and their ability to allow a voice for minorities within the core components of the school district. Additionally, CRT should not be limited to analyzing social inequity in K-12 institutions but should extend to include higher education institutions as well. In doing so, CRT should be used as an analytical tool within higher education in order to identify areas of inequality and diversity among college students in the areas of both academic affairs and student affairs.

Second, school board members should have a clear understanding of the various contexts that exist within the community (e.g. historical, cultural, and social) and district (e.g. policies, organizational culture) and extend their learning to include and function productively within these contexts. School board members should recognize how an understanding of contexts shaped through their personal/professional background as a basis for shaping their decision-making and learning.

Third, school districts should consider implementing a “committee of the whole” structure. This type of structure was successful for the participants’ in this study and was proven to be a successful model to guide the school boards’ ability to function as a productive school board. It also allowed them to connect within the context of the community, engage with the community, and facilitate a process of open communication with internal and external stakeholders while building a forum of connectivity and communication.
Fourth, school board members should have a clear understanding and respect for the chain of communication that exists within the district (organizational) context. This may strengthen and encourage a positive working relationship with the superintendent while demonstrating a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities. This will allow school board members to develop a strong relationship with the superintendent that is grounded in trust and respect. Building this relationship is essential to the functioning and progress of the school district. Also, school board members’ ability to have a clear understanding on their role and understand their core business may allow them to function as a cohesive unit.

Lastly, school boards should develop a critical race curriculum (CRC) that is designed to address issues of inequality and inequity within the fabric of the school district curriculum, policies, and practices. A critical race curriculum serves to shed some light on the existence of racial inequality while providing a framework to improve inequality while promoting and encouraging a social justice agenda.

This research has clearly shown that CRT is a viable tool for analyzing issues of race and class in education, that learning occurs within contextual factors that are realized through various learning theories, and that socialization is important to how school board members learn their role. These are important to the literature and future research because if one believes that race and racism are ingrained in the fabric of society and is conveniently situated within the macro-level and micro-level policies and practices at the federal, state and local levels then it is necessary to have a mechanism in that place that allows individuals; in this case, school board members a forum and framework to begin the dialogue. The fact that ten school districts were
invited to participate in this research study and nine districts comprised of predominately White members declined while the one school district comprised of predominately Black members accepted the invitation indicates that school districts are resistant to engage in a conversation about race and racism. They are reluctant to begin the process of recognizing and understanding the contexts, experiences, backgrounds and knowledge that serve to not only guide their worldview about issues of race and class but influence their decision-making.

The literature is clear that the face of the school board continues to be predominately White upper-middle class males while society continues to expand globally and represent a diverse population. Therefore, CRT creates an opportunity to raise the consciousness of individuals by raising awareness of how they not only view the world from a race perspective but how they see themselves within a much larger picture as a conduit for change. Therefore, raising critical consciousness may allow school board members the opportunity to make decisions, develop policies, improve student achievement and address issues of race and class that impact marginalized students from a fair and equitable position. By understanding one’s racial realities and that they exist, you can make decisions from a place of neutrality instead of one of defense.

Looking back on the example in the preface, the school board was faced with two similar issues where the only factor that differentiated the teens was race. Here a predominately White school board voted in favor of the White student and unfavorably toward the Black student. It is important to note that this research suggests that if the school board understood their racial reality, engaged in dialogue to raise critical consciousness and how these components shaped their worldview, they would have been able to remove the ideological idiosyncrasies that shaped
their decisions. Instead, they would have made a decision that was fair and equitable based on
the facts presented by the administration and not the conjecture formed and shaped within the
context of their lived experiences.

As revealed in this research, the participants were able to move beyond the racial barriers
with the school district in order to create a culture that created equitable opportunities for all
students of color. This was largely due to the role that their experiences and backgrounds as
Blacks shaped their worldview and racial realities. Therefore, it is at this point that school
boards begin to make decisions related to race that can serve to focus on equity and inequality
for marginalized students by encompassing a social justice agenda, improving student
achievement, developing policies that support diversity through curriculum, while moving to
reform our educational institutions.

Future Research

This research provided a lens for adult education practitioners to analyze educational
inequality and inequity through a critical race theory lens. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1997)
challenged adult educators to consider CRT as a theoretical tool to analyze and unpack issues of
inequality and injustice in and across school districts. Although their focus was primarily in the
area of educational administration and focused primarily on teaching and learning it is equally
important to consider how school board members fit into this process. Therefore, future research
may focus on the role of school board as part of school leadership and the impact of their role on
decision-making may complement the existing literature. The current research is unclear on how
school boards make decisions and function within the context of the school board itself and the school district as a whole. Therefore, it is equally important to note that the existing research on school boards is limited. This researcher was unsuccessful in locating published research on school boards written within the last 15-20 years.

Additionally, research using CRT as a tool for analyzing inequality and inequity within higher education and the role that higher educators administrators and board of trustees play in the development, support and implementation of a social justice agenda may serve to reveal how minority students can be better served within predominately White institutions. Additionally, CRT may be used as a vehicle to provide insight as to why White school boards are hesitant to engage in dialogue around the issue of race and racism in an effort to move toward a race-conscious and race-neutral ideology that may ultimate serve to move the needle of educational reform.

The research on socialization theory, organizational socialization, and individual socialization is saturated within the literature, however, there is limited empirical research on the socialization process of school board members, so future research could include identifying how school board members become socialized not only to become a school board member but across the school district. Identifying an understanding and framework for how the process of socialization occurs and the impact that it has on how school board members govern is critical to the research for without it educational reform efforts will remain stagnant.

The research on socialization theory began to raise questions regarding how school board members fit into the overall structure of the organization; therefore, research in the area of
human resources development which focused on knowledge management and communities of practice may serve to position school boards within the context of the organization as agents of change in order to move school districts toward achieving a social justice agenda.

The archival data (e.g. school board minutes) revealed that the school board spent a great deal of time developing policies that reflected their commitment to social justice. Policies related to student discipline, student achievement, truancy and mobility are all areas that impact the overall success of minority students. Therefore, a research study designed to look at the impact of a school board members racialized experiences and worldview on policy making and policy development may serve to reveal the importance of engaging in conversations about race and racism while analyzing the conscious or unconscious development of policies that create barriers to achieving diversity and student success.
REFERENCES


van Alfen, C. (1993). *School board policy as an instrument of empowering leadership in America.* Paper presented as the annual conference on Creating Quality Schools, Oklahoma City, OK.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
Good Day,

Please allow me to thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to conduct my research for my dissertation within your school district. I spoke with the Deputy Superintendent, and he suggested that I contact you to provide a brief synopsis of my dissertation and my plan for communicating with your board of education.

As I shared with you in April, I am conducting a confidential qualitative case study analysis using Matteson ESD 162 as my ‘case’. The purpose of my study is to explore how context impacts school board decisions when dealing with issues of diversity. In a nutshell, I am examining how school board members make decisions. The methodology that I intend to utilize in conducting the analysis includes a review of archival data (i.e. board meeting meetings, board/district policies, school report cards, newspaper articles, etc.) as well as semi-structured interviews with members of the board of education and administration. The interviews will be conducted face-to-face and should last no more than 90 minutes. I will cover 100% of any costs that may occur as well as accommodate the schedules of your board and administration. Additionally, the research has received approval from the Northern Illinois University-Institutional Research Board (IRB).

I have attached a copy of the letter that I plan to forward to the members of the Board of Education. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact me.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tia Robinson, MBA, M.A.
Northern Illinois University
Doctoral Candidate
APPENDIX B

LETTER TO SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS
Dear Administrator,

My name is Tia Robinson and I am a doctoral student at Northern Illinois University and member of the Board of Education-Dist. #428. I am contacting you today on behalf of the Deputy Superintendent and one or more members of your school board, who suggested that I contact you to obtain information related student achievement, charter high school, and student enrollment.

The purpose of my research is to explore how school board members make decisions when dealing with issues of diversity. As you know, with our changing demographics, school boards are faced with a number of challenges. The role of the school board is very complex and encompasses a number of components. Your district has faced and overcome many challenges over the last 10-15 years, and I am interested in gaining further information related to how this was accomplished.

A significant amount of my research will occur through reviewing public archival data, such as school board minutes, board/district policies, newspaper articles, community demographics, and other public records. The other component of my research is to conduct semi-structured interviews (30 minutes in length) in order to gain a clear understanding of your student achievement data, selection process of the charter high school, and student enrollment projections.

I would like to request your participation in my research. It is my goal to conduct interviews during the weeks of October 1-10, 2011. If you would be so kind as to provide me with several dates/times that would work for you that will be greatly appreciated.

Please feel free to contact me via email or telephone, whichever is convenient. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tia Robinson, MBA, M.A.
Northern Illinois University
Doctoral Candidate
APPENDIX C

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT
I agree to participate in the research project titled, “The Role of School Boards in Promoting Social Justice: A Critical Race Theory Perspective” being conducted by Tia Robinson a graduate student at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of the study is to identify what factors contribute to the how board members make decisions when addressing issues of diversity.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I will be asked to do the following: 1. Answer a series of questions related to my role on the school board.

I am aware that my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice, and that if I have any additional questions concerning this study, I may contact Tia Robinson at XXX-XXX-XXXX and/or Dr. Lisa Baumgartner (Dissertation Director) at XXX-XXX-XXXX. I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

I understand that the intended benefits of this study include (explain benefits the subject may personally incur as well as benefits to a body of knowledge).

I have been informed that there are no potential risks and/or discomforts I could experience during this study. I understand that all information gathered during this research study will be kept confidential by keeping all information related to the projects (name of district, location of district, participant names) will be kept confidential.

I understand that my consent to participate in this project does not constitute a waiver of any legal rights or redress I might have as a result of my participation, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

_________________________________________  ______________
Signature of Subject                        Date

I consent to have the interview audio taped.

_________________________________________  ______________
Signature of Subject                        Date
APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Demographic Questions

1. What is your position within the district?

2. How long have you served in this role?

3. How long have you been employed by the district?

Student Achievement

1. In looking at the 2002-2010 achievement data, what academic trends have you discovered?

2. How does the district use this data to make decisions about academic programs?

3. How has the changing demographic affected the data during this time period?

4. Between 2002 and 2003, the district experienced a decline in test scores; can you share your thoughts on what contributed to this decline?

Charter School Questions

1. Describe the selection process for the Charter School?

2. Given that the school has completed its first year, what are some of the strengths and weaknesses of the program that you have recognized thus far?

3. What assessment tools are you currently using to determine student progress?