Implementing Diversity Plans: Principals' Perception of Their Ability to Address Diversity in Their Schools

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Abstract

Traditionally schools in the past were mostly homogenous, but with demographic shifts, schools are becoming more ethnically diverse, disadvantaged, and multilingual. In contrast, the teaching population still reflects that outdated homogenous template: "predominantly white and female," middle-class, and unilingual. This exploratory study examined administrators' perceptions of their ability to implement a diversity plan. Principals were unable to articulate what "diversity" meant in terms of its strategic implementation; they saw no value in addressing their changing student demographics. Principals were ill prepared to lead on issues of diversity and were unable to address conflicts that often occur among diverse demographic groups. Principals had a sense of diversity awareness but lacked the efficacy to address diversity-related issues with teachers and parents.

Keywords

diversity plan, equity, leadership

Introduction

Leadership and diversity invariably are connected as schools move from a homogeneous cultural to an environment characterized by a multiethnic, multilingual, and economically

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diverse student body. In contrast, the school's staff often still reflects an outdated paradigm, with teachers who are predominantly White, female, middle-class, and unilingual (Grant, 1990). The incongruity between changing student demographics and a static teaching population raises questions about how leaders address the organizational issues of diversity (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). A leader's recognition of cultural differences requires them to see variation in communication styles, rules, shared meaning, and sociocultural heritage among their diverse school participants (Combs, 2002). Leaders must also be able to address organizational resistance that causes conflict in schools (Thomas, 2008). Hence, the intent of this study was to examine principals' perceptions of their ability to implement and administer their district's diversity plan.

The Intersection Between Leadership and Strategic Diversity Plans

For this study, two theoretical frameworks were used to describe these principals' perceptions about their ability to implement and administer their district's diversity plan: diversity self-efficacy and a planned-change approach to align diversity initiatives within organizational goals.

First, diversity self-efficacy was applicable in determining whether these principals felt confident in their ability to effectively acquire and use cognitive and other resources to facilitate appropriate responses to promote a positive climate with regard to diversity (Combs, 2002). Second, a planned strategic process allows diversity initiatives to become an integral part of the organizational culture (Agars & Kottke, 2004; Friday & Friday, 2003). While there are multiple diversity plans, we used the Cox (2001) model because of its similarity to this district's process (Agars & Kottke, 2004). Cox's (2001) model also addresses these principals' perceptions of their ability to address diversity issues.

Diversity Self-Efficacy and Leadership

Leaders are pivotal in carrying out diversity-related initiatives. However, the leadership challenge in addressing diversity issues often is complicated by the leaders' exposure to others who are different from themselves and their ability to address racial concerns (Thomas, 2008). School administrators must have the ability to create a culture of inclusion that requires them to be adaptable, flexible, and value diversity (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005; Thomas, 2008).

While diversity enriches our schools by broadening teachers' and students' perspectives, it also can produce the conflict that is often associated with diversity-related issues (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). It is well documented that a staff's negative belief about diversity often leads to diminished group cohesiveness, absenteeism, and turnover (Thomas, 2008). If principals do not address teachers' resistance in accepting their diverse students, it will results in low student expectations, unfair discipline practices, and less equity for students (Bell, 2002).

Diversity self-efficacy training provides insights on how to establish an inclusive organization (Combs, 2002). A leadership challenge in addressing diversity resistance is the administrators' confidence in their ability to address conflicts associated with diversity. Additionally, administrators must build positive relationships among demographically diverse groups (Combs, 2002). Diversity self-efficacy encompasses an element of self-awareness about one's own beliefs about diversity (Combs, 2002; Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). Leaders must have the capacity to be active diversity change agents, if they want to create an inclusive school (Thomas, 2008).

Diversity training for school leaders cannot focus solely on "awareness" about the need for diversity. Principals must regard themselves as being capable of regulating and directing their actions regarding diversity (Combs, 2002). Leaders must perceive a high level of confidence in their management capabilities to address intergroup conflicts and establish relational partnerships among demographically diverse groups (Combs, 2002; Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). It appears that a certain degree of personal confidence and determination to improve attitudes toward diversity is needed to create an inclusive environment (Thomas, 2008). Diversity initiatives such as "awareness" training do not provide leaders with skills to change the organizational structure to address the needs of demographic diverse groups (Dass & Parker, 1996).

Most diversity training focuses on understanding and valuing human differences but may not induce leaders to change their practices (Combs, 2002). The "culturally proficient" leader centers on how leaders assess their cultural knowledge, manage and adapt to the dynamics of diversity, and encourage learning about other groups (Terrell & Lindsey, 2008). This type of emphasis is "awareness training." While it tends to produce leaders who are more "aware" about cultural differences, it does not provide guidance on how to examine the existing organizational structure and systems to address inequities (Dass & Parker, 1996). Diversity (awareness) training can be described as temporary or disjointed because it does not involve a link to personnel/organizational issues (Combs, 2002). Diversity training that only stresses "awareness" about diversity does not provide the leader with the "tools" to address organizational issues of intergroup conflict and emotional tensions in the workplace (Thomas, 2008).

Diversity self-efficacy training helps leaders to minimize diversity-related conflicts that often occur in demographically diverse organizations (Madsen & Mabokela, 2009; Thomas, 2008). A leader who has diversity self-efficacy training is better able to assess diversity-related factors that affect organizational outcomes (Combs, 2002, Madsen & Mabokela, 2009; Thomas, 2008). Diversity self-efficacy training must consider the leader's comfort level, determination, and perseverance in responding to issues of diversity (Combs, 2002). This bolstering of leaders' self-efficacy and application of self-efficacy beliefs may play a critical role in insuring the transfer of skills to lead on diversity-related issues (Combs, 2002).

Research reveals that when leaders are given the skills and confidence to respond to issues of diversity, they will bridge the gap between diversity training and diversity performance (Combs, 2002). Thus, leaders will be "aware" of the challenges related to diversity, but they also will be able to address the organizational factors (Madsen &

Mabokela, 2005). School leaders need to approach diversity with a new focus on changing teachers' practices, recruiting teachers of color, and supporting the needs of students of color (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). Principals must be able to identify various types and degrees of organizational resistance (Thomas, 2008). Thus, diversity self-efficacy provides administrators the confidence to recruit and retain teachers of color, socialize teachers who are entering a demographically diverse school, and develop participatory structures to encourage heterogeneous groupings (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

Planned Strategic Diversity Approach

Research states that organizations that fail to address the needs of their demographically diverse constituency will experience emotional conflict, diminished group cohesiveness, absenteeism, and turnover (Herring, 2009; Thomas, 2008). A common response to diversity resistance is the implementation of initiatives that focus on awareness to reduce prejudice and discrimination (Thomas, 2006, 2008). While valuable, these programs are often perceived as segregated and insufficient to deal with conflicts in the workplace (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Thomas, 2008). Contemporary organizations that address their changing demographics in this way are characterized with ambiguity, uncertainty, and interdependence (Wasserman, 2005).

There are organizational strategies to address shifting demographics that have been effective in for-profit organizations. One initiative is a planned-change strategy to reduce conflict associated with diversity, improve outcomes, and diversify their workforce (Cox, 2000; Dass & Parker, 1996; Friday & Friday, 2003; Thomas, 2006). Early findings indicate that a planned-change effort meets customers' needs, enriches one's understanding of one's customers, and improves the quality of products and services offered (Cox, 2000; Thomas, 2006). Diversity programs then become an integral part of the organization's goals (Cox, 2001; Dass & Parker, 1996; Friday & Friday, 2003).

Thomas and Ely (1996) believe that an integrated organizational climate enables the incorporation of employees with different perspectives to be successful. Leaders who allow for different ways of completing organizational outcomes by allowing the rethinking of tasks and work strategies will enhance workers' motivations (Cox, 2001). Research suggests this type of climate is equally positive in an educational environment: people of color feel respected, not like the "token" in the workplace (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). This organizational shift acknowledges the integration of differences and recognizes the value in those differences (Cox, 2001; Thomas, 1991). Therefore, leaders who work with members of different ethnic backgrounds need to recognize cultural differences in their followers and understand how those differences may affect the ways in which relationships among followers are developed and negotiated (Thomas, 2008). These leadership competencies will reduce intergroup conflict (differences among different groups) and promote the cultural identity of individuals in the place of work (Cox, 2001).

When developing a strategic diversity process, leaders must have a degree of competency to develop incentives to ensure diversity practices are met and are aligned to organizational goals (Dass & Parker, 1996). While leaders in individual schools may

have an empathetic understanding of diversity issues, they may not have the preparation to regulate and direct their actions to address racial undertones in their schools (Combs, 2002; Madsen & Mabokela 2005). If school districts are to ensure the success of a diversity plan, administrators need to know how to motivate school personnel to accomplish the goals of the diversity plan (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

Currently, there is limited research about districts that have fully integrated diversity plans into their organizational goals. Although the existence of diversity in the educational setting is widely recognized, it is too often viewed only in terms of legal compliance and human right protection (Ely & Thomas, 2001). But administrators, principals, and teachers alike may benefit from a strategic plan that tackles issues of diversity. At the top level, the leader should set clear directions; the establishment of a clear vision provides a target that directs behavior and motivates people to achieve the goals outlined in the plan (Kelly & Shaw, 2009). Districts need objectives in place to identify and hire people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to work in demographically diverse schools (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). These strategic plans must include regular monitoring and evaluation cycles (Madsen &Mabokela, 2005).

Individual schools may achieve strategic advantage by targeting aspects of diversity that are most important for organizational achievement (Dass & Parker, 1996). Leaders in organizations play a pivotal role in using a diverse workforce to develop unique organizational strengths and to add value to activities (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). It is believed that demographically diverse organizations can achieve an edge in attracting and retaining a diverse workforce (Dass & Parker, 1996). Principals must cultivate the necessary conditions to establish an organizational direction for the diversity plan. They have to acknowledge how a school's image is perceived in response to its demographically diverse participants (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

However, the most important aspect of strategic diversity plan is defining the leader's role in establishing a direction for change (Cox, 2001; Thomas, 2006). The leader provides a vision that will motivate others and cultivate the necessary conditions to achieve the goals (Cox, 2001). This is a critical step due to a district's diverse background and the relationship with stakeholders. If the school community does not agree about the importance of diversity, everyone loses (Cox, 2001). A strong leader's ability to communicate vision can encourage the entire organization to embrace diversity.

Leaders must have the capacity to understand their own cultural identity and its affect on others who are ethnically different from them (Combs, 2002). This is a critical component; leaders need to create interpersonal cooperation and dense, integrated networks (Cox, 1994). In these demographically diverse contexts, the leader establishes an adaptable structure that evolves and expands as its diverse school population enters the school (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

Cox's Strategic Diversity Process

Over time, multiple models have been developed to address diversity related issues. Early planned-strategy models attempted to explain organizational reactions to changing

demographics and reactions to affirmative action (Agars & Kottke, 2004). These models address how an organization should accept and take advantage of a changing diverse workforce. The goal of these models was to move from one state to another by providing better approaches to address diversity (Agars & Kottke, 2004).

Both Thomas (1991, 2006) and Cox (2001) have worked with large corporations to develop a strategic process for addressing diversity. While these models are effective in large corporations, it is unknown if they are applicable to schools. According to Cox (2001), leaders must integrate a diversity strategy within the organization's overall mission, establish goals and action steps for managing diversity, and then place those procedures for managing diversity within the larger strategic framework. Finally, the leader must ensure that the overall strategy for implementing a diversity plan does indeed engage people in the process (Cox, 2001).

Cox's (2001) Model for Cultural Change has five components: (a) Leadership, (b) Research & Measurement, (c3) Education, (d) Alignment of Management Systems, and (e) Follow-up. Within each component there are subcomponents (see Figure 1).

These elements are essential if the plan is to be effective. These five areas address development, implementation, and monitoring of the strategic process to establish a diversity plan in one's organization.

We used the Cox (2001) Model for Cultural Change because of its emphasis on leadership during the development and formation of a diversity plan. For this study, the researchers made comparisons between Cox's model and this district's process of for implementing a strategic diversity plan. Cox states that if leaders are not actively involved in the organizational development of the diversity plan the process will not become operational (see Figure 1). We applied Cox's model to describe these principals' perceptions of their involvement with their district's plan.

Method

A case study is defined as a single entity, a unit of similar groups of people within the bounded context of a demographically diverse district that surrounds a large urban area (Merriam, 1998). Case studies are differentiated from other types of qualitative research in that they are intense descriptions and analysis of a single unit or bounded system (Smith, 1998).

Our study was conducted in a demographically diverse district that had recently undergone a strategic process to address its changing student demographics. To ensure true perceptions, a total of 34 people were interviewed; these interviews were conducted with 1 board member, 3 district administrators, 22 principals, and 8 teachers. Because principals played a critical role in administering their district's strategic plan, only their data were analyzed for this article.

This qualitative study used multiple methods for data collection (Merriam, 1998), including intensive open-ended interviews, onsite observations, document analysis of the district's diversity plan (e-mail exchanges and district memos), and reflexive journals. Our first round of interviews included all 22 principals who participated in the
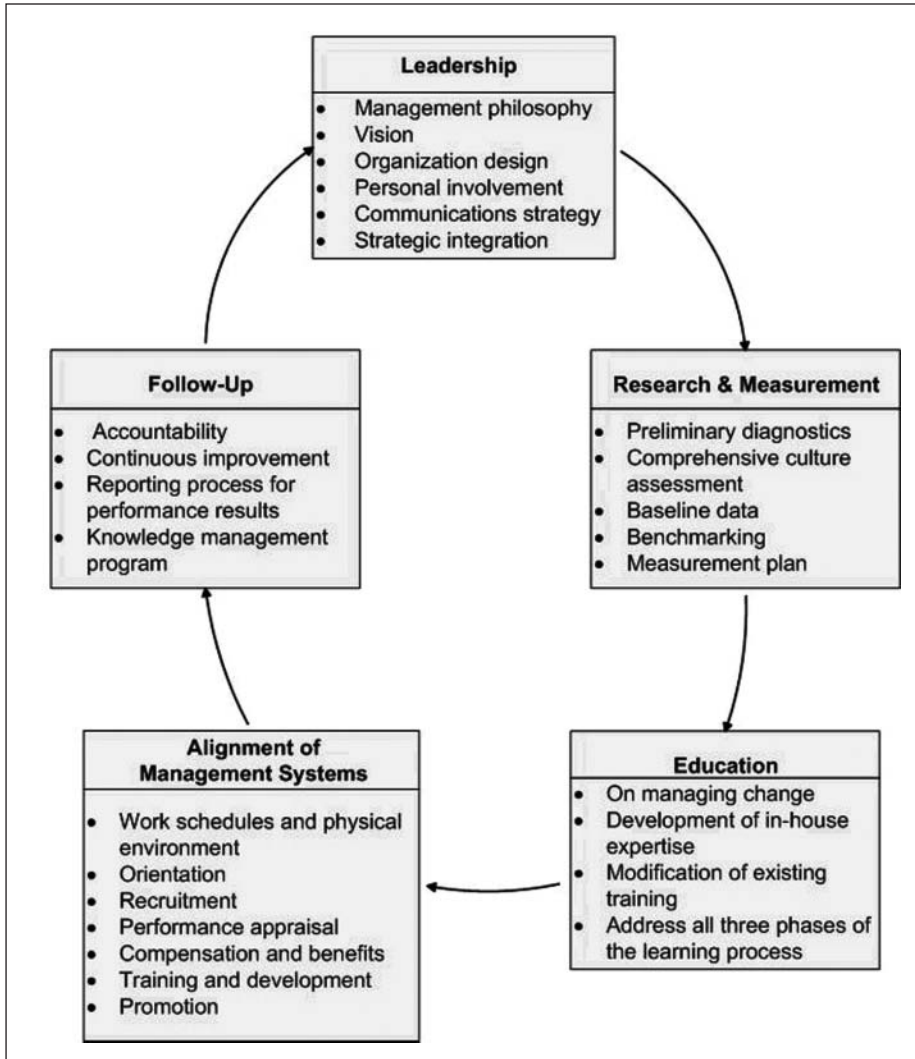
Figure 1. Cox's model for cultural change

study, divided into focus groups of 4 or 5 principals each. Once focus group interviews were completed, we selected four principals from the original group of 22; each of these principals participated individually in two additional, in-depth interviews, to ensure reliability of responses and allow participants to reflect on their roles (Seidman, 1998). These interviews were taped and later transcribed to identify recurring themes. Our analysis includes responses from both the focus group and individual interviews (see Data Sources).

Process for Selecting the Participating District

As noted in the literature review, school districts in general are not familiar with the use of a strategic process to address issues of diversity. As researchers, we were concerned whether districts in this demographically diverse state had developed any process to address issues of organizational diversity. While most corporate organizations now adhere to a broader definition of diversity, most school districts view diversity through the lens of race and gender only. Therefore, we adhered to a strict interpretation of diversity used by this district to develop its plans. Other aspects of diversity, such as physical disabilities and sexual orientation, were not considered, as most districts addressed only student racial and gender demographics.

Initially, the criteria to select a district for the study were based on the following: (a) superintendents who were recognized by the state's education agency for their leadership on diversity-related matters and (b) districts that addressed their changing student population using a strategic diversity plan. The State Education Agency was contacted to identify districts that fit these criteria. This agency then referred the researchers to the Regional Education Service Centers (support centers, located in different parts of the state that provide districts with resources and technical support).

This state comprises 1,031 school districts and 332 Charter Schools (which operate independently under education agency supervision). We were surprised to discover that only three of these school districts had "diversity plans"—evidence of at least an attempt to address an increasingly demographically diverse population—on file at the state's education agency.

We contacted these three districts and spoke with each superintendent designee, to inform these individuals about the study and seek their participation in the study. Two of the districts had plans in place; one of these was inundated with requests and chose not to participant. The third district, which we selected for our study, had completed its plan 5 years earlier and was in the implementation and monitoring phase; the district also had used a process similar to Cox's model (2001).

Profile of the Mayflower District

The selected school district, Mayflower, initially was a rural community located approximately 20 miles from a large metropolitan area. As affluent Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites left the metropolitan area they moved to this district. At the time of this study, in 2004 to 2006, Mayflower District had a population of approximately 20,000. There were 22 schools in the district. The district offered Special Education for students aged 3 to 21 years and a prekindergarten program for disadvantaged 4-year-old children. A Spanish bilingual program was in place for grades prekindergarten through fifth grade, and a Vietnamese bilingual class was available for students in Grades 1 to 4. The majority of the district's student population was African American and Hispanic. Minority students in the district made up 59% of the total student population. The number of professional teaching staff was 20% teachers of color and 80% European

American teachers. The number of district teachers with 5 or fewer years of experience was 29%. The district turnover rate was at least 11%. When student demographics began to change, parents complained to the board about discipline, expulsion rates, and dropouts. Parents also criticized the district because they believed that students of color were not receiving quality education. These concerns prompted the board to move forward with the development of a diversity plan.

Profile of Principals

Initially, 22 principals were identified for possible inclusion in this study and participated in focus group interviews. This group of principals provided insights on the implementation phase, their frustrations with the process, and concerns about their ability to address issues related to diversity. We used purposive sampling to identify four principals from the original group of 22, to participate in two one-on-one, more in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2007). The criteria for selecting these four principals included (a) race, gender, and years of experience and (b) building level (elementary, middle, and high school). It should be noted that no high school principal fit the criteria we used to identify principals for the individual interviews. Additionally, district administrators reported that these four principals had a good understanding about diversity. Each principal's two interviews focused on their ability to implement the diversity plan provided by the district. Each of these interviews lasted approximately 2 hours and was taped and later transcribed. These four principals provided all the variations of the phenomenon that allowed theoretical saturation to occur due to the heterogeneity of the group (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Profile of the Participants

The four principals who were interviewed consisted of two elementary principals, one alternative principal, and one middle school principal (see Table 1). The race and gender of each principal was as follows: one White female (elementary school), one White male (elementary school), one Hispanic male (middle school), and one White male (alternative school). Each principal had been with the district for at least 5 years, and each believed he or she had a good understanding of the term *diversity*. They expressed the belief that their attendance at district diversity sessions, their own professional knowledge, and experiences were critical to them.

Data Analysis

A qualitative thematic strategy of data analysis was used to categorize and judge the meaning of the data (Boyatzis, 1998). This inquiry process led to a single-case level of analysis where data were aggregated to incorporate a thematic approach (Boyatzis, 1998). The interviews, documents, and observations were analyzed and coded based on Cox's model—Leadership & Education (see Figures 1 and 2). The researchers used

Table 1. Data Sources of the Principals

	Ethnicity	Gender	Years with District	Position	Diversity Team
Principal 001	Hispanic	Male	20	Middle school principal	No
Principal 002	White	Male	15	Alternative principal	Yes
Principal 003	White	Male	21	Elementary school principal	No
Principal 004	White	Female	40	Elementary school principal	No

the prior-search-driven approach to identify themes and to develop a coding process (Boyatzis, 1998). In establishing the reliability for this study, the data were analyzed using what Glaser and Strauss (1967) call a "constant comparative" method. This process created a match between the interview data and the existing theory that validated the coding process. Themes were constructed by comparing data from this study with Cox's model (2001). We only used leadership and education as the prior research themes. These were the only themes that were apparent during the analysis process (see Figure 1).

In establishing the reliability for this study, we were sensitive to contamination of the data. We took the following steps to ensure the reliability of the data analysis process: (a) developed an explicit code and established a consistency of judgment, (b) used multiple diverse perspectives to examine the principals' comments, and (c) were sensitive to the themes when interpreting the data (Boyatzis, 1998). The triangulation of the data was based on the use of multiple sources of data, which included observations, interviews, and documents (Creswell, 2007). Researchers kept reflexive journals, to allow for transferability and dependability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These journals allowed researchers to expand on their insights and documented their rationale for their methodological decisions (Creswell, 2007).

Findings

Context for Mayflower's Challenges in Implementing the Plan

As a way to contextualize the findings, we provide a brief description of the district's response to the diversity plan. Mayflower's process was fraught with problems even during the formation stage. Once the responsibility was assigned to principals, it was evident the board and district had lost interest in putting the plan in place. We believe this short overview provides an understanding of why these principals' perceptions were shaped by how their district valued the plan.

Prior to the plan's inceptions, parents had voiced their concerns to board members and administrators about the way the district addressed issues of diversity. Many parents felt that due to the district's changing demographics, additional services and programs should be offered for students who were perceived to be disadvantaged. Community participants were quite vocal and demanded that Mayflower respond to parents' complaints. The Mayflower School Board president and other members expressed a sense of urgency to the superintendent. The board, believing they must provide a vision to motivate the district, seated a panel to establish a diversity plan. Thus, a diversity plan was put into place.

However, the Mayflower School Board's call to devise a plan was not a guarantee the plan would be implemented appropriately. Unfortunately, the plan itself was flawed. It did not establish a process for reporting progress in its implementation, nor did it establish accountability measures to ensure the plan was effectively addressing diversity-related issues. As a result, the community at large did not sense the plan was integrated and were not convinced that it would improve diversity-related concerns such as discipline referrals and graduation rates. Nor did the plan address existing racial tensions; this led some members of the community to fear that the plan ultimately would serve to segregate students. Furthermore, the board that had pushed for the plan had no understanding of how long the process would take to be fully implemented.

Neither the board nor district administrators communicated a compelling vision to persuade principals to take ownership for the plan. The superintendent, who fully supported the plan, left most of the responsibility for implementation to district administrators, principals, and teachers. Resistance to the plan tended to flow down from the top. None of the district administrators were prepared to implement the district's plan.

Instead, arguments about the plan resulted in conflicts between district administrators and principals over who was to carry out the plan.

When we compared the Mayflower plan's implementation with the Cox model (2001), it was evident that the district was not organizationally prepared to implement and administer the plan (see Figures 1 and 2). If Mayflower's plan had included a strategic process that emphasized leadership and education, the results might have been different. Instead, because district leadership held no one accountable for the plan, others at all levels ignored it. While the district felt they were responding to the changing student demographics, the plan caused many problems for the district. When there was a change in board members, the plan was no longer a priority for the district. Finally, after new board members were in place, there was no mention of the plan; it existed only as words on a page.

Principals' Perceptions

This study was an examination of principals' perceptions of their role in carrying out the Mayflower district's strategic diversity plan. Cox's (2001) model for developing a strategic diversity process emphasizes the leader's role in implementing an integrated

plan. As district administrators pushed the plan off on the principals, it became evident that principals were unsure about their responsibilities in carrying out their district's strategic plan. Principals stated they had no idea what resources would be available to them, why the plan was important, and what "diversity" might mean to their schools. With all the challenges these principals faced, they reported their efforts to push the plan forward. But in their push to make sense of the plan, two themes became apparent: (a) their leadership struggles during the implementation phase and (b) the need for an educational component to instruct these principals about strategic diversity plans and diversity self-efficacy training (see Figure 2).

Leadership

Cox's (2001) model for developing a diversity plan addresses multiple leadership components. If the plan is to be effective, administrators should be personally invested and not delegate the process (Cox, 2001). With issues of diversity, leaders need to be adaptive as they motivate individuals, provide direction, reduce conflicts, and shape more accepting norms (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). When building an inclusive culture, leaders need to set boundaries, frame the process, and value and pursue diversity (Wasserman, Gallegos, & Ferdman, 2008). Principals were very perceptive about their struggles in carrying out the Mayflower plan. Many felt they were given mixed messages from the board and district administrators. Because of their anxiety over their roles, most stated they just did not know how to move forward.

These principals felt the plan did not provide a structural transformation to yield sustained change when addressing issues of diversity. Their responses focused more on their capacity to communicate the importance of the plan. These principals' perceptions about their leadership in implementing the plan revealed the following subthemes: (a) confusion over the definition of "diversity," (b) organizational implications, (c) the complexities of defining "diversity" for teachers, and (d) strategic integration of diversity (see Figure 2).

Confusion over the term diversity. A requirement of leadership is to communicate the expectation, both by words and actions, that the journey to multiculturalism is a long one (Cox, 2001). For this district to "embrace diversity," they needed to make the connection that diversity would enhance the overall success of the organization (Thomas, 1991). When the principals were asked what it meant to "embrace diversity," various answers were given. Principals viewed diversity as an "awareness" regarding students of color; they did not comprehend how the plan could be used to address inequities at their schools. Mayflower's statistics indicated that students of color were more likely to drop out, be in special education programs, or be expelled or suspended—issues that a vibrant diversity plan could address.

In many ways, these four principals took a narrow view of diversity—that they were to be aware of "diversity." Most assumed they were to use the plan to acknowledge students' culture and plan social events. Some principals stated the plan meant the school was to recognize students' heritage and ethnicities; this was to be sufficient.
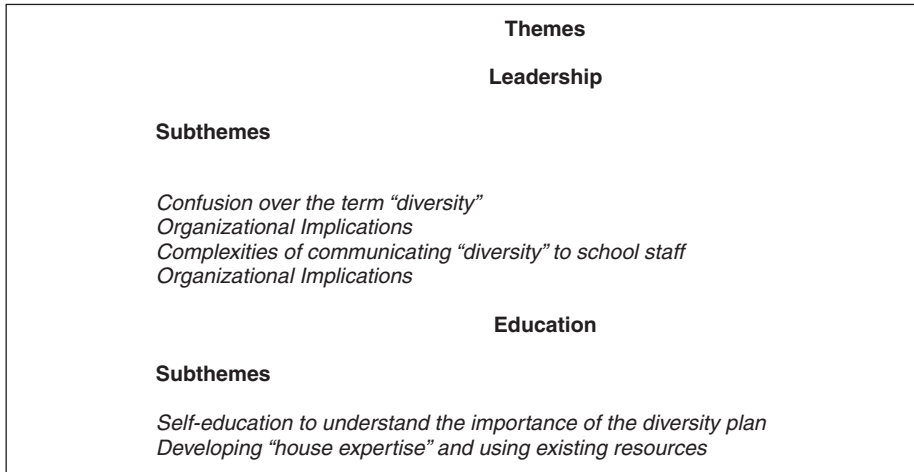
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                              Themes

                            Leadership

      Subthemes


      Confusion over the term "diversity"
      Organizational Implications
      Complexities of communicating "diversity" to school staff
      Organizational Implications

                            Education

      Subthemes


      Self-education to understand the importance of the diversity plan
      Developing "house expertise" and using existing resources
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Figure 2. Findings

One said they like acknowledging "MLK Day." But he was unwilling to go beyond just celebrating students' cultures.

As summarized from interviews, principals lacked an understanding of the district philosophy of "embracing our diversity." Some principals saw the plan as just one more initiative to deal with. Principals made no efforts to get clarification or understand what "embracing" diversity meant at the district level. As one principal noted,

> It is a philosophy that everybody has to do their part. I think the biggest thing is—especially with the kids. I look at the kids that I have to work with. There is ethnicity, but there is just the value, the background, the ideas, what they want to become. All of that is part of their diversity, too. So what you have to do is look at every individual as an individual and see what their goals are, what they want to achieve, and work together to help them meet that.

Organizational implications. The intent of Mayflower's plan was to establish a diversity change effort. However, during its development, the plan was flawed in many respects. Interviews with the principals suggested that while the intent of the plan was to address complaints by parents of color about inequitable treatment of their children, it ended up carrying minimal weight at the school level. From principals' perspectives, the diversity team (the group that created the plan) caused much of the confusion, by not clearly communicating the plan's intent or identifying who would have the authority to implement the plan. Because it lacked an enforcement component, district administrators could view it as a "flash in the pan" response to community pressure. Principals reported feeling that the district did not support the plan, and its leaders were merely giving "lip service" to the board. Many reported feeling that the diversity

plan was generic. The plan had no "teeth" and was never meant to be specific to the Mayflower District's needs.

In focus groups, principals expressed their frustrations about issues arising from the district's changing demographics. When the plan was developed, principals reported hoping it would provide resources for their demographically diverse students. Unfortunately, the plan offered few resources and provided no professional development for the principals. Before long, these principals felt the emphasis on the plan was no longer a priority.

The four principals who were interviewed were perplexed about the district's rationale for the plan and its expectations. Because of the confusion surrounding the plan, principals felt it was not important to discuss the plan with their teachers and staff. Only the Hispanic principal spoke about the importance of the plan. He noted,

> To me, our district diversity plan right now is just words and it's way too generic, because basically, it's just talk about the fact that we are going to value diversity. We are going to. Our goal is to help all children to succeed. The district needs to truly value diversity. Give more than lip service. If you do not understand it, you are not going to value it. We need to walk the walk.

This principal stated he had been excited when the school board approved the plan. He felt the plan could have a major impact on his school. While he believed it was needed, he was perplexed about the lack of support from district administrators. Being Hispanic, he knew firsthand how poverty and discrimination affected students' educational experiences. He wanted his students to believe they could overcome adversity. However, he knew it was not going to be easy. He felt teachers had little or no experience in working with students of color.

The young, energetic principal at the alternative school dealt with diversity-related issues on a weekly basis. His school served many students of color who were not succeeding in traditional school programs. He expressed a belief that the increasing number of students in his classrooms was due to teachers who, in a more traditional setting, were unwilling to change their instructional patterns to reach a more diverse population. His interview revealed his feeling that teachers could not accept demographically diverse students and needed more professional development about students' differences. This principal's view of diversity involved only the managing of the lessons for students; he said he did not believe that a diversity plan should include recruiting teachers of color, implementing a culturally responsive curriculum, and hiring principals of color. He stated the plan should only emphasize "respect" for students' diversity.

Additionally, this principal felt the plan was not a priority for his campus. At his alternative school, the philosophy was to return students back to their "home" school, armed with coping and self-regulation skills designed to help them achieve in their previous school's environment. He felt educating his students about returning to their schools was more important than a diversity plan. One comment was particularly

telling: He questioned how the district could emphasize diversity when it was facing high drop-out rates.

Complexities of communicating "diversity" to school staff. In focus groups, principals reported that when they were told to inform their staff about the plan, they had no idea what to say. The district provided no communication about the plan and did not provide a clear definition of "diversity." Information concerning diversity was not posted on the bulletin boards or in teachers' workrooms. Principals could only give "lip service" to the concept. This lack of communication from the district level indicated not only to the principals but also to teachers that diversity efforts were not important. The value of communication was expressed by a principal in a focus group:

> I try to lead by observing a lot; by talking a lot to both staff and students; by listening to parents; by finding out first-hand what the needs are so that we can determine the appropriate goals. I have a lot of discussions with different people about diversity.

The four principals we interviewed found it hard to communicate with anyone concerning diversity. They were unable to speak about the benefits of diversity. One principal expressed that, given the pressure to improve test scores, he was wasting his time on diversity. Many felt there was no reason to address teachers' instructional patterns, establish an inclusive curriculum, or examine test scores of students of color. These attitudes were problematic as they rendered the diversity plan "colorless" and no longer connected to students of color.

Principals also were frustrated with their teachers' limited exposure in teaching students of color. Many parents complained that the district was not recruiting teachers of color to the district. According to Lewis (2001), the fostering of a "color-blind" ideology allows most teachers to see themselves as racially neutral, deserving of their own success and not responsible for the exclusion of others. Consequently, the organizational culture is not responsive to its diverse student body. Principals can encourage teachers to celebrate students' diverse cultural heritage but not require teachers to address the needs of their diverse student population. As one principal noted,

Nobody has ever had to convince me of the need for diversity. I do not participate in formal educational training. I do read a lot about diversity. It is one of those goals that I do not have to write down. It is just me.

Strategic integration of diversity. The intent of a diversity plan is to fully integrate the process into the goals and objectives of the organization (Cox, 2001). Therefore, a strategic approach should be an integrated process where the diversity initiatives are not isolated, separate programs. Diversity-related issues should be integrated into peoples' jobs (Dass & Parker, 1999). Mayflower's plan was never fully developed to ensure a proactive orientation toward a diversity strategy. It was poorly conceived and did not include a continuous ongoing evaluation component. Had the district addressed core issues of race, ethnicity, and gender while simultaneously including goals to improve student outcomes the plan could have been more effective (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

The district's plan was underdeveloped, which made it more difficult for principals to lead on diversity-related issues.

Before a diversity plan is considered, leaders must have the capacity to understand their own cultural identity and its relationship to others who are ethnically different from them (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). These leaders acknowledged that while they supported issues of diversity, they did not have the self-efficacy to integrate the plan at the school level.

During in-depth interviews, the four principals reported feeling uncomfortable when addressing diversity-related issues. They spoke about conflicts that occurred at their schools over diversity issues. One principal stated he felt uncomfortable when a parent of color told him about a "racist" teacher. Another principal echoed that theme, when an African American parent called him a "racist" for suspending his son and not the "White" student. In reality, many felt they did not have the skills to solve diversity-related conflicts at their schools. One principal acknowledged diversity-related issues were getting worse at his school. While principals felt that knowledge about diverse ethnic groups was helpful, they also wanted more information about negotiating and dealing with conflict. Some felt they needed more training and preparation, or perhaps intensive workshops, to carry out the plan. One principal made the following observation:

> I want to have a relationship with my students. However, one student stated I do not understand, because I am White. I can understand that. I want to be honest. There is a barrier that I have to work with. Some kids may talk with me just because they have put me in a box and said, "This is what this guy is all about. He's just like every other administrator."

Strategic integration seeks to understand how an organization can successfully integrate diversity within the organizational strategy (Flower & Friday, 2003). Failure to lead, manage, communicate, and coordinate a diversity integration process led these principals to believe that a critical diversity plan was just the "flavor of the month," another hoop through which they must jump. They had no resources; no district support to help address the demographic diversity issues they were facing. Nor did they see any practical benefits of an emphasis on diversity: They saw no connection between the district's plan and ways to address inequities at the district and school level.

Education

Education is critical in creating a successful diversity plan. Combs (2002) stresses that diversity training alone has failed to produce any lasting impact. It is believed that only about one third of diversity training efforts are viewed as creating lasting results in an organization (Combs, 2002). The critical component in educational training stresses the relationship between diversity competency and organizational performance (Thomas, 2008). This training enables administrators to address the challenges associated with performance and personnel in a diverse environment (Madsen &

Mabokela, 2005). The second theme that was evident was the "education" of administrators to lead the district's demographically diverse student body.

Cox (2001) suggests avoiding "canned" training programs in favor of training that is customized to fit the organization and recommends tailoring topics to fit the diversity dimensions that are most evident in the organization. People may not support a diversity plan because they lack firsthand knowledge and experiences with diversity or do not know enough about other cultures to make an informed decision (Cox, 2001).

When implementing a diversity plan, education is critical in changing educators' beliefs (Cox, 2001). For this study, education regarding diversity focused on two sub-themes: (a) self-education regarding the importance of the plan and (b) the need to develop "in-house" expertise rather than rely on "outsiders" leading on diversity issues (see Figure 2).

Self-education to understand the importance of the diversity plan. The more biased and ingrained one's belief system is against cultural diversity, the greater one's perception of risk is likely to be (Cox, 2001). This may have been the case for principals in our study group who expressed frustration in dealing with their demographically diverse student population. For these principals, just being "aware" of differences did not address the organizational turmoil that occurred in their schools. Many were uncomfortable with the plan because no one knew why the plan existed. Was their discomfort with the plan due to elements of the plan itself or with their own issues in addressing diversity? As one principal noted,

> If I see that there is a need, and if that need is coming from not understanding the diversity or not valuing the diversity or not making changes, then I am going to start asking myself, "Okay, what is going on? Why is it going on? What needs to be involved? What are the steps that we need to take to get where we need to be? Who needs to be involved?" Let's get the plan rolling.

At the school level, the principals we interviewed saw managing change not as implementing something but as simply being aware of what was not taking place. While principals stated the importance of the plan, they had a narrow view of how they could implement the plan. For instance, the district plan emphasized the value of hiring teachers of color. However, principals at specific schools reported seeing little value in this aspect of the plan, questioning whether teachers of color would be a good fit on their campus. The prevailing attitude expressed by these principals was the criteria involved "to hire the right people." Principals saw no value in hiring teachers of color but focused instead on hiring White teachers who could be trained to teach students of color. Many of these principals echoed similar statements: that good teaching in and of itself would improve the test scores of students of color. As one principal observed, "I find that if you hire the right people, you go after the right people and do some training that they want to improve."

These principals acknowledged that their teachers' demographics did not reflect that of their students. They reported that they had made efforts to recruit teachers of

color but noted there were not enough "qualified" candidates in the pool from which to choose. Principals blamed the site-based team because they were not receptive about hiring qualified teachers of color; people on the team rejected most of the candidates. Principals believed if teachers of color did not "sound" or "dress" like them they would never be successful in their schools. Regarding the site-based team's criteria, one principal noted,

> My staff really is not that diverse as I would like for it to be. I really look at the needs of my students, and teachers' personalities and that kind of thing. This is just lip service, hiring someone of color means taking a chance and stepping out of the box of complacency.

Students' demographics were changing, parents were complaining, and teachers leaving, but the district essentially ignored the "negative" effects of diversity. The district continued to hire White female principals without considering leaders of color. The district's statistics indicated high numbers of female administrators employed at the elementary level. Fewer were hired at the secondary level as well. One principal speculated that since an African American female was running the school district, the perception of the district would change.

> Our new superintendent is a woman and an African American. I think there are administrators being pulled in from different ethnicities, from minority groups, but I think it could be better.

Developing "house expertise" and using existing resources. According to Cox (2001), most organizations find it advantageous to hire outside consultants to assist with training initially. However, to build district-wide commitment, the development of in-house expertise is highly recommended. When asked about "in-house" expertise, our principals could not identify any district personnel. They had no idea about existing diversity training in their district. While principals complained they needed training to deal with conflict associated with diversity, the district had never provided these sessions.

Research indicates that diversity training is more about dealing with diversity effects; it should be less about "sharing" personal stories and cross-cultural history (Combs, 2002). The district hired multiple experts who addressed racial issues but did not address dealing with the negative effects of an increasingly diverse student body. Principals felt these sessions were just repeats of previous sessions; none felt better about diversity after attending these workshops. It appeared that principals were frustrated with the district's unwillingness to listen to the challenges they faced in addressing a changing demographic among their students.

Since the board and superintendent did not hold themselves or the principals accountable to implement the diversity plan, principals did nothing. Their attitude was, "Let's not make any waves until the district provides leadership on what we are to do." "Talk the talk" was the principals' plan to avoid carrying out Mayflower's plan.

Conclusion

In conjunction with the review of literature and an analysis of the data, this study revealed that the district is not on track to meet its overall objective of "embracing" diversity district-wide. At best it will reach a marginal understand that something needs to be done in the district. Dass and Parker (1996) state that the failure of a strategic process to address issues of diversity means the organization must move beyond "awareness." If the organization provides only workshops, this sends a signal that there is little substance to the diversity initiatives. In contrast, a nurturing diversity program moves an organization to become invested in enhancing interpersonal interactions among individuals (Cox, 2001). Our findings revealed that administrators did not view their district's diversity initiatives as a priority. The implementation of the plan was hindered by the administrators' inability to apprehend what "diversity" really meant, in the nuts-and-bolts atmosphere of the local school.

Mayflower's diversity plan, while poorly implemented, still implies that such a structure does encourage people to reflect on issues of diversity. If this district had used Cox's (2001) model, we feel the results would have been different, and ultimately a great benefit to the district as a whole, to individual schools and to every student. There are multiple models that have been used over time to address diversity-related issues. Strategic plans establish a process for organizations to respond to changing demographics; they are intended to be more than just addressing affirmative action policies (Agars & Kottke, 2004). A strategic plan establishes a process by which an organization can take advantage of a changing diverse workforce (Agars & Kottke, 2004).

Newer strategic perspectives use organizational psychology and social identity theory to include concerns about an individual's social identities and possible resistance between groups in the workplace. These theories articulate why the development and implementation of diversity plans are difficult to accomplish. A plan should be fully integrated, allowing the organization to make diversity a priority, adapt existing practices, and adopt new policies to facilitate and encourage an inclusive organization (Agars & Kottke, 2004).

There may not be one "best" strategy for diversity for all organizations, but what is clear is the important role leaders play in this process (Combs, 2002). Leadership bridges the gap between the recognition that something needs to be done and the addressing of diversity-related conflicts (Combs, 2001). The challenge for leaders is to develop an explicit strategy for communicating to the organization about the developmental work to address diversity (Agars & Kottke, 2004). Administrators must have an understanding about (a) the nature of "diversity" and its related emotional issues, (b) diversity initiatives involving cultural change, and (c) the collection of data (diversity statistics) and subsequent communication to all groups, as part of an intentional process (Cox, 2001).

Given what is known about the importance of implementing a diversity plan, it is evident this district lost sight of the plan's intent. Even more problematic is how poorly prepared district administrators and principals were for this process. Mayflower's plan

was initiated in response to parents' complaints about how students of color were being taught and the high numbers of discipline referrals. Mayflower developed a plan. The development of a plan, in and of itself, did not automatically guarantee that Mayflower's principals would be empowered to lead their schools in celebrating "diversity." Nor did the development of a plan make any real difference in the lives of students of color. An espoused vision cannot achieve sustainable results without consistency of attention to the goals and objectives of diversity.

Another consideration is how leaders prepare to address diversity-related issues. Leaders must have a sense of diversity self-efficacy as they begin the strategic process (Combs, 2001). Often, leaders are hesitant to address diversity issues. They may feel inadequately prepared to deal with racial undertones. They may not understand the complexity of intergroup differences. They may have had only monocultural experiences, which may inhibit their ability to understand racial matters (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

The challenge for leaders in creating democratic schools is to facilitate a work environment that allows and encourages an appreciation for individual differences and characteristics (Madsen & Mabokela, 2009). One of the struggles that leaders face in responding to issues of intergroup conflict is how to address serious discrimination, both overt and subtle, that occurs in the workplace (Combs, 2002). Administrators need to feel confident in their ability to acquire and effectively use the skills to address whatever racial overtones they encounter.

Leadership for diversity may involve understanding the motivational needs and values of diverse work groups, the communication practices between and among ethnic groups, and the expectations regarding authority in an organization (Chemers, 1995). The leadership challenge in addressing diversity issues is often complicated by the leaders' exposure to others who are different from them and their discomfort in addressing racial concerns (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

Leaders need to implement diversity initiatives designed to motivate and encourage each individual to work effectively with others to improve organizational outcomes and effectiveness. Therefore, diversity self-efficacy becomes a mechanism to assist leaders in developing the confidence to facilitate appropriate responses to diversity issues (Combs, 2002). Training for leaders cannot focus solely on "awareness." We should prepare leaders to feel comfortable in responding to diversity-related conflicts. They also must be able to build relationships among and between demographically diverse groups (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). For leaders to be effective, they must perceive themselves as being capable of regulating and directing diverse groups of teachers (Combs, 2002).

Leaders must feel they have a high degree of diversity self-efficacy to reduce tensions in schools (Madsen Mabokela, 2009). Conflicts due to cultural and language differences among groups cause negative feelings and a lack of cohesiveness (Agars & Kottke, 2004). Administrators must be more than culturally competent. They should be given opportunities to practice leading diverse groups, with direction to identify and rectify mistakes. Such training would enhance a leader's appreciation of the implications

of group and social identities within the workplace. If we believe that administrators should develop the necessary skills to lead heterogeneous teacher groups, self-efficacy training on diversity-related matters may become an important way to improve a leader's performance (Combs, 2002). Boosting a leader's confidence to manage intergroup differences will enhance their skills and give them important strategies to negotiate diversity-related conflicts (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

Leadership for demographically diverse schools also should encourage verbal or social persuasion techniques that would bridge the gap between diverse views (Combs, 2002). In responding to racial tensions in the workplace, leaders must go beyond managing differences to exercising strategies that are task-specific, broad-based, and diffused (Combs, 2002). It is believed that if leaders can maximize their self-efficacy in addressing uncomfortable cultural differences, they can deal with the root causes of volatile intergroup differences.

Through diversity self-efficacy, leaders can self-evaluate and regulate their responses to persons from different backgrounds and create inclusive environments. In preparing leaders, we must realize the individual's comfort level, determination, and perseverance in being able to respond to cultural and racial differences. This bolstering of leaders' self-efficacy and its application to schools must transfer to create an environment of positive exchanges among demographic diverse groups.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

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Bios

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Mary Ann Young was a teacher at the Texas School for the Deaf. She was responsible for working with students as they transition from home to school. Mary Ann recently passed away, but played a critical role with writing, researching and data analysis.