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## Equity in Action: Transformative Leadership and Anti-Racist Praxis in Canadian K-12 Schools

Ayodeji Osiname

University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada, ayodeji.osiname@usask.ca

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## LEADERSHIP FOR INCLUSION

As school communities across Canada continue to grow in diversity, they are increasingly shaped by differences in race, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and socioeconomic status. While this diversity enriches the educational experience, it has also led to persistent educational inequalities, exclusion, and disparities in academic outcomes, particularly for marginalized groups. For example, Indigenous students, Black students, and those from low-income backgrounds often face lower graduation rates and higher dropout rates compared to their peers (Fleras, 2017; Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017; Shankar et al., 2020). In addition, LGBTQ+ students frequently report experiences of discrimination, bullying, and a lack of inclusivity in school environments (Kosciw et al., 2022). Similarly, students with disabilities often face barriers to inclusion, as well as instances of marginalization and exclusion within educational settings (Taylor et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2016). These inequities are reflected in both academic performance and in students' sense of belonging, safety, and overall well-being within the school system.

Historically, Canadian schools have responded to diversity in ways that have often privileged certain groups while marginalizing others. For example, the educational system has struggled to meaningfully integrate Indigenous ways of knowing and teaching, contributing to lower educational outcomes for Indigenous youth (Battiste, 2008; Battiste, 2013). Similarly, students from racialized communities may encounter systemic barriers that impede their educational success, from biased curriculum content to discriminatory practices by educators (Dei, 2000, 2001; Dei et al., 200). These disparities in educational opportunities are compounded by the intersectionality of multiple forms of marginalization, making it crucial for school leadership to actively address and dismantle these barriers.

In this context, school leadership that actively involves teachers and staff plays a critical role in addressing the long-standing trends of educational inequalities and fostering inclusive, equitable learning environments for all students. School principals are charged with creating safe and supportive environments where every student, regardless of their background, feels valued, included, and respected. This requires not only knowledge and skills but also the commitment to lead with a focus on social justice and equity. If Canadian schools are to genuinely serve the common good, school leaders must be equipped to challenge practices that perpetuate marginalization and exclusion (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015).

This paper identifies two theoretical frameworks that can guide school principals in building inclusive school cultures: *Transformative Leadership Theory* and *Anti-Racist Theory*. These two perspectives are compared to demonstrate how they can inform Canadian school leaders. *Transformative Leadership theory* begins with a commitment to justice and equality, challenging

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inequitable practices and promoting not only individual achievement but also the collective good (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022). This theory emphasizes empowerment, hope, and activism—principles that can inspire school leaders to take bold actions in support of marginalized students. *Anti-Racist theory*, on the other hand, focuses on addressing issues of race, power, and privilege, critically examining how racial hierarchies shape the experiences of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Dei, 2000; Kendi, 2023). By integrating these frameworks, Canadian school leaders can better understand and address the specific needs of marginalized student populations, promoting educational environments where diversity is celebrated, and all students are given the opportunity to succeed.

Research has shown that creating and sustaining an inclusive culture is a complex and ongoing process that requires continuous self-examination and thoughtful reflection by school leaders and all members of the organization (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015; Wasserman, et al., 2006). Theoharis and Scanlan (2015) explain that building and fostering inclusive schools that meet the diverse needs of students is a complex and difficult task. School leaders face enormous challenges in building a culture where every student, along with everyone else, feels valued, safe, respected, and included (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015). However, Wasserman et al. (2006) found that effective school principals met numerous challenges from within the school, the community, and beyond. School leaders who are committed to social justice attend not only to the dimensions of diversity, but also to multiple aspects of leadership—from student achievement to school structures, curricula, instruction, safety, behavior, culture, and community (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015).

Furthermore, the growing demographic shift in Canada necessitates school leaders who can advocate for and act as agents of cultural change, equipped with the knowledge, strategies, support, and courage to make curricula, instruction, student engagement, and family partnerships culturally responsive (Cooper, 2009; Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015). As such, school principals must approach leadership as a collective process, where collaboration is key to creating inclusive schools and communities (Ryan, 2006). Transformative leadership and anti-racist theories offer appropriate frameworks to guide school principals in building and sustaining inclusive school cultures.

### **Transformative Leadership Theory**

Transformative leadership is committed to concepts such as promise, liberation, hope, empowerment, activism, risk, social justice, courage, and revolution to bring about social transformation (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022). It starts by challenging inappropriate uses of power and privilege that create inequity and injustice (Cooper, 2009; Dantley, 2003; Shields, 2022; Quantz, et al., 1991). Caldwell et al. (2012) describe transformative leadership as

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an ethics-based leadership model that integrates a commitment to values and outcomes by optimizing the long-term interests of stakeholders and society and honoring the moral duties that organizations owe to their stakeholders. The authors state that transformative leadership integrates ethical mandates, behavioral assumptions, and standards of excellence that are important in leading successfully. Shields (2022) defines transformative leadership as a reciprocal process whereby one or more individuals engage with others in a way that leaders and followers raise one another to a higher level of motivation and morality. Shields (2022) explains that transformative leadership is a value-based endeavor and can encourage change in any social relationship. Transformative leaders afford all students in the school the opportunity to contribute and participate in a democratic learning environment. Thus, transformative leadership creates a personal connection and displays moral principles that help followers to examine their lives, fulfill their potentials, and create a better world (Caldwell et al., 2012; Cooper, 2009; Dantley, 2003; Shields, 2022).

Leadership does not reside in an individual but in the relationship between individuals (Cooper, 2009; Ryan, 2006). Transformative leadership theory is characterized by a shared vision in pursuit of a grand ideal to create personal relationships that bring about the best in others and ultimately to change the world (Shields, 2022; Quantz et al., 1991). Shields (2022) explains that leadership becomes meaningful when leaders demonstrate a genuine commitment to the welfare and growth of individuals. Transformative leadership demonstrates a commitment to the well-being of followers which makes leaders credible and trustworthy (Quantz et al., 1991). Caldwell et al. (2012) affirm this notion that transformative leaders share an authentic concern for the welfare of others and encourage their growth to create a better world. Transformative leadership is perceived as authentic and genuine because it possesses the ability to touch hearts, inspire great sacrifices, and demonstrate courage to change the world.

Transformative leadership theory places the ethical responsibility of working for the greater good within the role of the leader (Cooper, 2009; Dantley, 2003; Quantz et al., 1991). Dantley (2003) describes how transformative school leaders are moral agents with responsibilities to ground their decisions and professional behavior in deliberate reflection of their moral values. The author explains four reasons that the conduct of these leaders should be intentionally moral:

1. Schools serve as a moral socialization function in society.
2. The status of children as minors means that they have little voice in determining the quality, quantity, and content of their school experiences.
3. School leaders themselves are moral agents; their actions and decisions are grounded in deliberate reflection and actions.
4. School leaders focus on the well-being of those in the learning

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community; their moral behavior is evidenced in their sensitivity to those who are marginalized.

As such, the moral duties of transformative school leaders allow them to reject ideologies and practices steeped in blatantly biased and color-blind practice to transform the school (Cooper, 2009; Dantley, 2003).

Transformative leadership theory recognizes the need for a school leader to begin with critical reflection and analysis and to work through responsibilities with enlightened understanding and actions that ensure that every member of the school is provided, as much as possible, with a level playing field (Shields, 2022). Transformative leadership empowers the school leader to engage in self-reflection, systematically analyze the school, and confront inequities regarding race, gender, class, language, and sexual orientation (Cooper, 2009).

Transformative leaders are leaders who encourage commitment to action, convert followers to leaders, and become influential agents of change (Cooper, 2009). Ncube (2010) affirms that transformative leaders connect with followers and earn their support, trust, and commitment, bringing out the best in them. Thus, transformative leadership theory would enable school leaders to negotiate and work to effect both educational and broader social change and to create a more inclusive, equitable and deeply democratic notion of education (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022).

Exemplary leadership that can identify inequities and help to make the realities of change happen is an example of transformative leadership. Brown (2006) states that to attain excellence and to create and sustain inclusion, there must be effective school leadership present. A transformative leader is one who provides guidance, direction, and influence for others to bring about fundamental change (Brown, 2006). Shields (2022) outlines the responsibilities of transformative leaders as initiating structural transformations, organizing political spaces, and fostering dialectical rather than hierarchical relationships between leaders and those they lead. Shields (2022) explains that transformative leaders must be prepared to work from within dominant social formations to exercise effective oppositional power, and to be activist voices for change and transformation. Shields (2022) clarifies eight elements of transformative leadership. To accomplish their tasks, transformative leaders need to balance both critique and promise; to effect deep and equitable changes; to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge frameworks that generate inequity; to challenge inappropriate use of power and privilege; to emphasize both individual achievement and public good; to focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and social justice; and finally, to focus on interdependence, interconnectedness, and global issues. Adopting transformative leadership requires understanding how it would impact the historically bureaucratic structure of schools, and the traditionalist discourse used to describe them (Quantz et al., 1991). Using these

tenets, the following section provides a summary of transformative leadership in action.

### **Transformative Leadership in Action at Maple Valley Secondary School (MVSS)**

In Manitoba, Canada, Maple Valley Secondary School (MVSS) (pseudonym) faced longstanding challenges, including a significant achievement gap among students from marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous and immigrant populations. Under the leadership of Principal Kalid Kaur (pseudonym), the school adopted a transformative leadership framework to address systemic inequities and foster an inclusive educational environment. The author engaged in an extended conversation with Principal Kaur to understand how she worked to build equitable, socially just, and inclusive learning environments and experiences for all students. This engagement emerged from the author's previous study, published in the *Journal of Improving Schools* (author's name withheld for blind review), which was conducted with school administrators in Manitoba, Canada.

This case study drew insights from a selected group of school administrators focusing on their lived experiences and patterns of behavior in relation to their leadership approaches. The study employed semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions designed to explore complex issues related to building inclusive schools. The author designed an interview protocol to elicit reflective narratives around leadership practices, equity initiatives, and challenges related to students' inclusion and integration. These interviews provided a rich, detailed account of how principals interpreted and enacted different leadership approaches within their unique school contexts. This process allowed the author to critically examine how the principals' leadership practices aligned with goals of equity, inclusion, and social justice. To enhance the credibility and accuracy of the findings, follow-up interviews were conducted with each principal. These sessions served to clarify initial responses and allowed participants to reflect and comment on the researcher's interpretations and emerging themes. This process of member checking ensured that the findings authentically represented participants' perspectives.

The data were analyzed using both open coding and NVivo software, although the open coding process was the primary analytic tool. Open coding was used to segment and label data based on recurring phrases, actions, and concepts emerging from the principals' language. Interview transcripts were compiled and responses to each interview question were organized into separate documents to facilitate thematic comparison. During the coding process, the researcher used the participants' own words to preserve authenticity and ensure that meaning was grounded in their lived experience. This approach allowed for the development of key themes that reflected how the participants conceptualized and enacted their

leadership styles.

Each participant's narrative was preceded by descriptive contextual information, which provided insight into their school settings and professional backgrounds. This contextualization enriched the analysis and enabled a more nuanced understanding of how leadership practices were shaped by specific institutional and community dynamics. The findings were synthesized into a narrative discussion, organized thematically, and interwoven with relevant literature on leadership. This format allowed for a critical presentation of the principals' leadership journeys, demonstrating both challenges and promising practices in their efforts to build inclusive schools.

The following brief example of Principal Kaur's leadership illustrates transformative leadership in action and demonstrates how it can provide practical guidance for school leaders committed to fostering equitable, socially just, and inclusive learning environments in Canada and beyond. In the following vignette, the practical application and core principles of transformative leadership are evident. Although this is merely a cursory overview of the discussions that led to the school's transformation, it clearly demonstrates the power of adopting an approach guided by transformative leadership theory.

### 1. **Balancing Critique and Promise**

Principal Kaur critiqued systemic inequities without assigning blame to individual students, families, or teachers, thereby overcoming the common tendency to place responsibility for lack of success on students' circumstances rather than the school's approach. She began with a listening campaign, holding open forums with students, parents, and teachers to understand their experiences with systemic inequities. She acknowledged the historical neglect of marginalized groups in the school system while promising tangible changes rooted in collaboration and equity. Transformative leaders engage in dialogue and discussion to clarify roles and responsibilities for student success. The transformative school leader will not only critique unfairness but make changes that would bring the promise of equity and inclusion to those outside of the mainstream (Dantley, 2003; Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022).

### 2. **Effecting Deep and Equitable Changes**

Transformative school leaders need to support teachers to develop strategies that would help all students attain high academic standards. They can provide professional development and training for teachers on how to support students who are disadvantaged to meet their pressing needs (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022). MVSS conducted an equity assessment to identify disparities in resource allocation, extracurricular access, and academic performance. The school prioritized funding for support programs, including free tutoring and mental health

resources for underserved students. Implementing this mandate requires understanding yourself and your non-negotiables, as well as your community and school (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022).

3. **Deconstructing and Reconstructing Knowledge Frameworks**  
Transformative school leaders must carefully and consistently engage in the deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge frameworks (i.e., social or cultural knowledge) (Shields, 2022). They disrupt old knowledge that perpetuate deficit thinking and inequity and replace it with new frameworks of inclusion and equity (Brown, 2006; Shields, 2022). Principal Kaur led efforts to decolonize the curriculum, collaborating with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and local cultural organizations. She worked with teachers to provide new teaching materials integrated Indigenous histories, immigrant narratives, and global perspectives, creating a curriculum that reflected the diversity of the student body. Confronting inequity wherever it exists and striving to ensure the success of traditionally marginalized students are central to transformative leadership theory (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022).
4. **Challenging the Inappropriate Use of Power and Privilege**  
Transformative leaders ensure that all voices are heard, dissenting perspectives are expressed safely, and all ideas are carefully considered (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022). Principal Kaur advocated for equity in student leadership roles. She restructured the selection process for the student council to include proportional representation from marginalized groups, ensuring diverse voices in school decision-making. The advocacy changed the culture, the tone, and the morale of the school. Transformative leaders strive to redistribute power from a top-down leadership approach to a more collaborative model, ensuring that all stakeholders actively participate in decision-making (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022).
5. **Emphasizing Individual Achievement and Public Good**  
Transformative school leaders work to establish equitable, school-wide practices that promote unity rather than division among groups (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022). These leaders employ strategies such as regular school-community meetings, mentoring programs, and similar initiatives to drive school improvement and reform. They actively cultivate strong community relationships and take responsibility for involving families and the broader school community in fostering an inclusive school culture (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022). MVSS launched the Maple Mentors program, connecting students with professionals in various fields to inspire individual achievement. In addition, the school initiated a community garden project, teaching students' sustainable

practices while providing fresh produce to local food banks. This program enabled students to develop a sense of belonging within the school community and to appreciate their connections to one another and the school. This tenet recognizes the importance of individual achievement and the development of competency and self-confidence, while also emphasizing the value of activities that foster collective efficacy and a sense of community (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022).

6. **Focusing on Liberation, Democracy, Equity, and Social Justice**  
Transformative school leaders must prioritize liberation, democracy, equity, and justice (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022) by fostering an environment that welcomes and respects everyone's full participation in the school. Transformative school leaders work toward comprehensive philosophical school reforms that are focused on the principles of equity, success, and social justice (Cooper, 2009; Shields, 2022). School success is demonstrated through the parity of achievement of students across racial, ethnic, cultural, and social classes (Riehl, 2000). At MVSS, principal Kaur encouraged students to establish equity and justice committees, including an Indigenous Student Council and a Multicultural Club. These groups worked with staff to design initiatives promoting anti-racism, reconciliation, and social justice education within the school. This tenet also involves shifting from general principles related to transforming underlying structures and school-wide policies to a focus on curriculum and pedagogy (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022).
7. **Focusing on Moral Courage and Activism**  
Transformative school leaders need to acknowledge the patterns of power as they affect marginalized groups (Brown, 2006; Shields, 2022). When incidents of racial discrimination surfaced, Principal Kaur did not shy away from addressing them head-on. She implemented mandatory anti-racism training for staff and students, even in the face of resistance from individuals who questioned its necessity. She also took the risk of apologizing to parents and the community for a situation for which she was not responsible. Although transforming the school is difficult and risky (Brown, 2006), the transformative school leaders must demonstrate moral courage and a willingness to take risks and become actively engaged in the struggle of creating schools that are more equitable, inclusive, and socially just (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022).
8. **Focusing on Interdependence, Interconnectedness, and Global Issues**  
Transformative school leaders must encourage teachers and students to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for world citizenship (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022). Through a partnership with the Manitoba Global Education Network, MVSS

introduced global citizenship workshops. Students participated in projects addressing climate change and poverty, connecting their local community efforts to broader global challenges. Teachers ensure that students understand the importance of taking responsibility for the welfare of others, recognizing how events in one part of the world can impact those in other areas. Transformative school leaders assist teachers to develop pedagogical approaches that would create global understanding for all students (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022).

### **Results and Impact**

Within three years, MVSS saw remarkable improvements. Graduation rates among Indigenous and immigrant students increased by 25%, and participation in extracurricular activities doubled. The school became a hub for equity-driven education, with Principal Kaur receiving recognition for her leadership in advancing reconciliation and inclusion among her peers and in the province. This case highlights how transformative leadership principles when applied thoughtfully and collaboratively can drive systemic change and create an equitable, inclusive learning environment in schools. Although the success at MVSS demonstrates the power of transformative leadership in addressing systemic inequities, a deeper and complementary theoretical lens such as anti-racist education provides additional insights into the structures and ideologies that must be challenged to sustain equity and inclusion in schools.

### **Anti-Racist Education Theory**

Anti-racist education refers to an active resistance to the way in which knowledge, status, value, and competence have been framed to give preference to the dominant groups' interests (Dei, 2000, 2001; Kendi, 2023; Thompson, 1997; St. Denis, 2007). The anti-racist education model challenges the denial of the significance of race in teaching and learning and contests the rejection of racial differences in social practices and actions (Dei, 2001; Kendi, 2023; St. Denis, 2007). The model views schools as contested public spheres and as political sites for the reproduction of power and social inequity (St. Denis, 2007; Kendi, 2023). Questions of power and equity are at the forefront of anti-racist education (Dei, 2000). Anti-racist education poses crucial questions for educators: How can they alter the dominant structures through which knowledge is produced? How will school leaders create space for divergent and oppositional voices to exist? (Dei, 2000; St. Denis, 2007). These questions mean that effective teaching and learning demands a clear positioning of one's politics, because knowledge is never neutral—it is always contested and political (Dei, 2000; Kendi, 2023; St. Denis, 2007). Anti-racist education involves educational advocacy for social change through questioning and analyzing the structures that produce or reproduce inequity (Dei, 2000, 2001; St. Denis, 2007).

The saliency of race in anti-racist theory cannot be overemphasized. Anti-

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racist theory uses racial identity as a starting point in pursuit of a politics of change that subverts the hegemonic practices of the dominant group (Dei et al., 2000; Kendi, 2023). Dei et al. (2000) explain that anti-racist theory operates from a philosophical standpoint that the identities of individuals have both spiritual and material bases and that the distinction between personal and social identity is useful as an entry point for a transformative change. Dei (2000) further explains that anti-racist theory holds certain assumptions about the nature of human existence and the complexities of the social realities that undergird the critical understanding of identities. Anti-racist theory uses a discourse of identity that fulfills individuals' politics, desires and interests in calling for social transformation (Dei, 2000; Kendi, 2023). Dei (2000), Dei et al. (2000) and Kendi (2023) call on educators to understand racial hierarchies that shape our schools, workplaces, and other institutional settings, recognize the pervasiveness of racism in the society, and face these challenges for social change. Anti-racist education rejects oppressive political practices and discourses that seek to displace race in the school and society (Dei, 2000; Dei et al., 2000; Kendi, 2023; St. Denis, 2007).

Anti-racist pedagogies utilize the experiences and cultural knowledges of diverse students as effective resources and tools for educational change (Dei, 2000). Dei (2000) and Dei et al. (2000) affirm that anti-racist pedagogical practices reflect the diverse bodies, histories, and experiences of students in today's classrooms. Such knowledge would provide interpretations of difference and guide how curricula should reflect diverse cultures (Kendi, 2023; St. Denis, 2007). Anti-racist education sees educators as dealing with marginalization and exclusion in school contexts by, instead, centering all human experiences in the learning process (Dei, 2000, 2001; St. Denis, 2007). Dei et al. (2000) offer a framework that forms the basis of curricular, instructional, and pedagogical development for teachers and educators towards anti-racist praxis. The framework forms a critical integrative approach to inclusive education based on an anti-racist approach and includes the following:

- integration of diverse knowledges (e.g., indigenous, spiritual, cultural and/or community knowledge)
- recognition and respect for differences in backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives
- identification and action for social and educational change: equity, access and social justice
- facilitation of the important roles of parents and community

### **Integration of Diverse Knowledges**

The integration of diverse knowledge works towards the agency and empowerment of oppressed groups (Dei, 2000; Dei et al., 2000). This approach calls educators to recognize the linkage between identity, schooling, and knowledge production. The framework highlights three sources of knowledge that

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have been marginalized—indigenous, spiritual, and community knowledge—and calls for the integration of such knowledges into curricula (Dei et al., 2000). For example, Indigenous knowledges can be used to decolonize and reform conventional practices because they are rooted in and articulated through the language and cognitive abilities of minority students (Aikenhead, 2001; Battiste, 2013; Cajete, 1994; Dei, 2000; St. Denis, 2007). Indigenous knowledges enable minority groups to articulate immediate and practical concerns that arise from their experiences in the social world. They also offer a more holistic and relational understanding of how individuals and groups come to perceive and engage with the world—highlighting the interconnectedness between people and the world around them (Aikenhead, 2001; Battiste, 2013; Cajete, 1994; Dei, 2000). Educators can integrate these various ways of knowing to assist students to engage in social action that is both emancipatory and revolutionary (Battiste, 2013; Dei et al., 2000; St. Denis, 2007).

### **Recognition and Respect for Differences in Backgrounds, Experiences, and Perspectives**

This approach of recognition and respect for differences describes curricula as a medium to know oneself and others, as well as to respect one another (Dei et al., 2000). Curricula serve as both “windows” and “mirrors”: Curricula as a window allows students to see the realities of others, whereas curricula as a mirror allows for the representation of their own realities (Dei et al., 2000). Dei et al. (2000) and St. Denis (2007) explain that recognizing curricula as incorporating diverse cultural knowledges also involves understanding ourselves as racial texts—acknowledging how individuals' identities, particularly with regard to race, are constructed, interpreted, and represented in society. In this case, teaching practices will acknowledge and validate diverse identities (Dei, 2000; St. Denis, 2007). Educators will be able to recognize and understand their own positions in relation to their students, as well as uncover the beliefs, values, and assumptions they use to respond to the dimensions of diversity in the school (Dei, 2000; Dei et al., 2000, St. Denis, 2007).

### **Identification and Action for Social and Educational Change**

This approach of effecting social and educational changes—equity, access, and social justice—recognizes that all systems of oppression are connected and interlocking and that addressing one type of oppression ignores the interrelationships with other oppressions (e.g., race, gender, language, class, sexual orientation) (Dei et al., 2000; St. Denis, 2007). Dei et al. (2000) and St. Denis (2007) explain that schools must become primary arenas for anti-discrimination and human rights education that confronts issues of access and equity in society. Policies that target various forms of discrimination and unravel the relationships of power will contribute to the goal of a safe school (Dei et al., 2000; Kendi, 2023). Educators need to acknowledge existing inequities in the

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educational structures and environment, understand their roles in these structures, and actively advocate for change (Dei et al., 2000; St. Denis, 2007). Educators need to challenge the existing institutional structures that ignore the needs of minority groups by working for a more inclusive institutional climate (Dei et al., 2000; St. Denis, 2007). Educators' roles extend from the sphere of the classroom into the community and require engaging with social and political issues (Battiste, 2013; Dei, 2000; Dei et al., 2000).

### **Facilitation of the Important Roles of Parents and Community**

The local community within which schools are constituted is represented by parents, caregivers, and extended families; the neighborhood; and racial, ethnic, and/or cultural religious groups. Teaching for community empowerment stresses that school policies, practices, and curricula should be integrated to reflect the knowledge, experiences, and histories of the local community (Dei et al., 2000). Battiste (2013) and St. Denis (2007) explain that local community-based knowledge is an alternative educational program and that strategies that are based in cultural or linguistic communities can supplement education in the school system. The role of educators is to make solid linkages between local communities and the school (Dei et al., 2000; St. Denis, 2007) and thus, work towards meaningful change at a broader level.

Anti-racist education contests the renunciation of the significance of race in the process of schooling and stresses the consideration and inclusion of minority students' experiences, histories, cultures, and identities at all levels of educational practice (e.g., teaching, instruction, and curricula) (Dei et al., 2000; St. Denis, 2007). However, centering the lived experiences and personal accounts of minority students within the curricula and pedagogical practices cannot be effective without addressing notions of power, privilege, and domination (Dei, 2001; Kendi, 2023; St. Denis, 2007). The integrative anti-racist discursive practice articulates the understanding of the interlocking nature of oppression and maintains that educators must be aware of the historical contexts and institutional structures that sustain educational inequities (Dei et al., 2000). Such practices will encourage parents and community members from diverse racial, ethno-cultural, and class backgrounds to be jointly involved in both the decision-making and the delivery of education (Dei, 2000; Dei et al., 2000). The rich knowledge from the community can help in empowering minority students to achieve both academically and socially (Aikenhead, 2001; Dei et al., 2000; St. Denis, 2007). Such an approach can also act as advocacy for collective political action for the delivery of equal educational opportunities for minority students (Dei, 2000; St. Denis, 2007).

Anti-racist education challenges the power imbalances that exist among sociocultural groups in society (Dei, 2000; St. Denis, 2007). It recognizes race and other sociocultural differences as central to understanding issues of power and

equity both within schools and the broader society. At its core, an anti-racist education interrogates how these differences are constructed and maintained to uphold systemic inequities (Dei, 2000; Dei, et al., 2000; St. Denis, 2007). Dei et al. (2000) and Horsford and Clark (2015) emphasize that school leaders have a critical role in advancing inclusive practices that directly address race at personal, school, and community levels. They outline a four-stage process of developing race consciousness in leadership:

1. *Racial literacy*: the leader's ability to comprehend what race is and how it functions to sustain inequities and oppression in society.
2. *Racial realism*: the acknowledgement of the historical and ongoing significance of race and racism in shaping lived experiences and institutional structures.
3. *Racial reconstruction*: a transformative process where leaders critically reframe the meaning and implications of race to disrupt inherited assumptions, beliefs, and biases.
4. *Racial reconciliation*: an intentional effort to address and heal the deep psychological and social harm caused by racism.

Such an evolution of race consciousness manifests as awareness, disposition, skills or abilities, knowledge and understanding of the school leader empowering them to navigate and address racial dynamics within educational settings (Horsford & Clark, 2015). Many authors (i.e., Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009) have suggested tools or strategies to help leaders foster this race consciousness and cultivate anti-racist school cultures. The next section offers an example of how such strategies can be applied in practice through an anti-racist model.

### **Implementing Anti-Racist Education: Strategies for Cultivating Racial Awareness in School Community**

Creating equitable and inclusive learning environments requires more than acknowledging the existence of racism. As such, it demands intentional action from educational leaders. Implementing anti-racist education involves equipping school leaders with the tools and strategies needed to confront and disrupt systemic inequities. This section outlines practical approaches that school leaders can use to cultivate racial awareness, foster inclusive practices, and engage educators, students, and families in the ongoing work of building just and equitable schools. These approaches include (1) dialogue, (2) film/video screenings, (3) book circles, (4) multicultural curriculum transformation seminars, and (5) parental involvement outreach and programming (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). These strategies are grounded in the principles of anti-racist education and aim to support transformative leadership across all levels of the school community.

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### **Dialogue**

A school leader can use *dialogue* as a strategy or tool to build race awareness in the school and the school community (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). Horsford and Clark (2015) explain that dialogue is about “learning to walk the talk of democracy” (p. 69)—that is, living, learning, and working productively with others, even in the presence of differences. Dialogue offers opportunities for inclusive leaders to learn how to engage in dialogue themselves (personal level), and to facilitate others in dialogic interaction (school and community level) and fosters the creation of classroom-school-communities in which people of different races can come together to combat systemic racism in education (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009).

### **Film/Video Screenings**

Another tool the school leaders can use to build racially inclusive schools is *film/video screenings* (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). The school leader can use powerful videos and films on race that focus on dispelling the myths associated with race, such as videos/films on the biological construct of race or the use of race as a social construct, to justify social inequalities as the natural order of things (Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). Examples of such resources included *Race: The Power of an Illusion, 13<sup>th</sup>* (directed by Ava DuVernay), and *Coded Bias*. Powerful videos and films such as these would provide a great way for school leaders to foster their own racial literacy and that of others (Sautner, 2009). As such, when this pedagogical approach is accompanied by skillful co-facilitated dialogue, it makes it most effective. Using this unique challenging pedagogical process of race-based dialogue and the willingness to provide direct education on race invites the emergence of a new understanding of race (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). The new understanding creates the possibility for meaningful movement toward the construction of inclusive school communities in which racial equity and justice can develop and thrive.

### **Book Circles**

*Book circles* can also be used by school leaders to build race awareness (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). Inclusive school leaders can use a plethora of exceptional, hard-hitting books to provide the historical knowledge of racism (Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). Examples of such books included *The Science of Racism* by Keon West, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin DiAngelo, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* by Ibram X Kendi. This approach will offer the school leader substantive opportunities to unpack the racism of the past in relation to its ongoing influence on the present (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). For

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example, book circles can be a vehicle for engaging in racialized discourses concerning intellectual ability and educational achievement, and the importance of these discourses on curricular and educational policies (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). The school principal can use this approach to lay the foundation for a sense of agency that is necessary to push back against negative discourse and push toward positive change.

### **Multicultural Curriculum Transformation Seminars**

*Multicultural curriculum transformation seminars* are a process for ascribing new meaning to race in ways that transform existing assumptions, beliefs, and biases (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015). This approach can engage both teachers and educational leaders in revising curricula across grade levels and subject areas (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). By so doing, inclusive school leaders create opportunities to integrate content that reflects students' histories, lives, cultures, countries of origins, contributions and works of people of color (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). The curriculum revision processes are primarily focused in three areas: content (what is taught), pedagogy (how it is taught), and assessment (whether teaching and learning are effective) (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). The approach starts with a critical review of existing curricula to reveal errors, inaccuracies, unacknowledged biases, and omissions of what has been organized as knowledge in every subject area, as well as structures and relations of power, privilege, and oppression in society (Horsford & Clark, 2015; Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015). Inclusive school leaders must dedicate ample time to engage teachers in professional development seminars on the importance of curricular transformation, encourage them to participate in discussions, and provide them with opportunities for collaborative learning (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009; Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015).

### **Parental Involvement Outreach and Programming**

*Parental involvement outreach and programming* is an initiative that focuses on parental development and thus has direct impact on students' educational performance (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). Moreover, improved student performance may become more predictable when the individual development of parents' knowledge of racism is central to the work of the school (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Sautner, 2009). Although schools were historically an unwelcome place for parents of minority students due to racism, parental outreach initiatives have the potential to heal the wounds and damage resulting from racism in schools and society (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Morris & Taylor, 1998; Sautner, 2009; Scanlan & Johnson, 2015). The inclusive school leader needs to work to engage parents in their children's education and encourage participation in the democratic life of the school community (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Scanlan & Johnson,

2015). Such practices hold the promise of bringing about racial reconciliation and open the possibility for educational equity for all students (Horsford & Clark, 2015; Scanlan & Johnson, 2015). While parental involvement initiatives are critical in fostering equity and healing within school communities, it is equally important to examine the broader theoretical foundations that guide inclusive leadership practices. The following section explores the intersections and distinctions between transformative leadership and anti-racist theories providing insights into how these frameworks can inform and strengthen educational leadership for equity.

### **Comparing and Contrasting Transformative Leadership and Anti-Racist Theories**

This section explores the commonalities and differences between transformative leadership and anti-racist theories to provide a deeper understanding of how both frameworks contribute to building and sustaining inclusive school cultures. To ensure clarity, the discussion is organized into two sub-sections: similarities and differences.

#### **Similarities**

Transformative leadership and anti-racist theories can inform the work of school leaders in diverse contexts. They have common goals of providing inclusive and equitable education for all students. These theories equip school leader to identify and interrogate issues of power and privilege, advocate for social justice and social change, and enhance educational outcomes, particularly for marginalized students (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields 2022).

#### ***Inclusive and Equitable Education for All***

These theories are both committed to practices that create socially just schooling by providing inclusive school environments across multiple dimensions of diversity (Dei, 2000; Shields, 2022). They advocate equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of their race, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic status, and/or varied ability (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields 2022). They are dedicated to creating school environments that eliminate marginalization across these dimensions. The theories encourage the development of inclusive spaces based on collaboration, dialogic relationships, and respect for the contributions of all members of the school community (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields 2022). They acknowledge all children as full members of society and commit to the removal of barriers that prevent children's full participation in democratic schooling (Shields, 2022; Dei, 2000). Through the considerations of all aspects of children's experiences, these theories ensure equal educational opportunities for every student (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields 2022).

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### ***Issues of Power and Privilege***

The theories both deliberate on issues of power and privilege that create inequities and injustices for marginalized groups in the school and society (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields, 2022). They work to challenge the status quo and disrupt outdated knowledge that perpetuates deficit views, thinking, and assumptions about diversity in both the school and society (Dei, 2000; Shields, 2022). This approach enables schools to become inclusive spaces where students can engage with content that reflects rigorous academic expectations and meaningful learning outcomes (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields, 2022). The theories challenge the structures of schooling that have traditionally disadvantaged minority groups and stress that educators must alter the very structures that reinforce educational disparities (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields, 2022). They call on educators to understand and recognize the power they hold and to use it carefully in the interest of all students, particularly in the interest of disadvantaged students (Dei, 2000; Shields, 2022). The theories ask educators to be courageous, critically reflective, risk-taking, innovative, and political to interrogate the dominant power dynamics that construct and maintain social inequality in the school and community (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields, 2022). Both theories encourage educators to be prepared to work from within dominant social formations, exercise effective oppositional power to courageously resist, and become activist voices for change and transformation (Dei, 2000; Kendi, 2023; Shields, 2022).

### ***Advocacy for Social Justice and Social Change***

The theories understand the inequities in school and society, point to the necessity for change, and provide a guide for leaders to initiate change (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields 2022). They provide frameworks for changing the institutional arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, advancing, and sustaining inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions (Dei, 2000; Kendi, 2023; Shields, 2022). The theories share the principles of respect, caring, and recognition, and they share genuine concern for the welfare, growth, and unity of every individual in the school and the community, especially for marginalized populations (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields 2022). Both theories make issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions central to their advocacy, practice, and vision (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields 2022). Anti-racist and transformative leadership theories work to disrupt and subvert deep rooted structures that promote marginalization and exclusionary processes in the school and society (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields 2022). Thus, both theories work to strengthen school cultures and communities and

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foster equal educational opportunities for all students (Dei, 2000; Shields, 2022).

### ***Enhancing Student Educational Outcomes***

The main objective of both theories is raising student educational outcomes across the dimensions of diversity (Dei, 2000; Shields, 2022). The theories encourage the development of a learning environment that integrates the delivery of support services for struggling students in the classroom and prioritizes access and educational opportunities for all students over separation and exclusion (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields 2022). The theories both embrace responsibility shared by the school leader, teachers, support staff, and the community for the education of all students (Dei, 2000; Shields, 2022). They encourage capacity building to collectively and collaboratively meet each student's needs (Dei, 2000; Shields). Both theories engage families and community members in authentic partnerships for student success (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields 2022). The theories encourage the school leader to make an ethical commitment that emphasizes the elimination of structural impediments and educational inequalities for the success of marginalized students (Dei et al., 2000; Shields 2022).

Both theories complement one another by offering school leaders a unified and robust framework for addressing educational inequities and fostering inclusive school environments. In situations where students from historically marginalized backgrounds experience systemic barriers, both frameworks urge leaders to disrupt status quo practices and challenge dominant power structures (Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015; Shields, 2022). While transformative leadership emphasizes moral courage, social justice, and redistributive equity (Shields, 2022), anti-racist theory directly interrogates racism, race consciousness, and intersectionality as core to educational reform (Dei et al., 2000). The two theories will empower leaders to center the experiences of marginalized students while simultaneously transforming school cultures to reflect democratic values, inclusion, and shared responsibility (Dei, 2000; Kendi, 2023; Shields, 2022).

In addition, in practice, these theories intersect in powerful ways. For example, when addressing racial disparities in academic achievement or school discipline, school leaders can draw from anti-racist theory to identify how racial bias operates structurally, while applying transformative leadership to mobilize resources, build coalitions, and implement equitable policies. The shared commitment to social justice, critical reflection, and inclusive collaboration enables leaders to foster dialogic relationships, engage communities, and drive systemic change (Dei, 2000; Shields, 2022). This combined approach promotes equitable educational outcomes and nurtures school communities where all students, regardless of their identity, can thrive.

### **Differences**

While both theories share similar objectives, they employ distinct

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strategies and tools to achieve their goals. These differences provide valuable insights for school leaders dedicated to creating and maintaining inclusive school cultures, helping them navigate the practical application of each framework.

### ***Anti-Racist Theory***

There are two unique aspects of the anti-racist model that makes it different from the transformative leadership theory. The race consciousness of the model shows the significance of validating and affirming marginalized groups (Dei, 2000; Dei et al., 2000; Kendi, 2023). The anti-racist model of education utilizes race in all its discursive practices and challenges the denial of the importance of race in teaching and learning (Dei, 2000, Dei et al., 2000; St. Denis, 2007). The model fosters race consciousness, understanding, and knowledge through strategies such as dialogue, film/video screenings, book cycles, multicultural seminars, and parental outreach programs (Dei, 2000; Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015). Anti-racist theory interrogates and analyzes how race is used to justify inequity in the school and society (Dei, 2000; Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015).

The second aspect is the acknowledgement of intersectionality that the anti-racist model recognizes in examining oppression (Dei, 2000; Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015). Anti-racist education recognizes all systems of oppression as connected and interlocking. For example, how the intersections of race with class, gender, religion, (dis)ability, and other dimensions of identity further marginalize individuals in school and society (Dei, 2000; Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015). Anti-racist education acknowledges that addressing one type of oppression ignores the interrelationships with other oppressions (Dei, 2000; Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015). Moreover, anti-racist education utilizes the intersectional approach to reveal the complex issues experienced by those who are affected by the intersectionality of oppressions and thus are rendered invisible within institutions (Dei, 2000; Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015).

To that end, school leaders can apply an anti-racist framework when addressing racial and systemic inequities within their schools and communities. This approach is essential where students and families face marginalization rooted in race and its intersections with class, gender, (dis)ability, and religion. Anti-racist framework empowers leaders to affirm the lived experiences of racialized students, challenge deficit narratives, and confront structures that sustain inequity (Dei et al., 2000; Kendi, 2023). It supports critical, reflective, and community-based strategies such as inclusive dialogue, culturally responsive curricula, and race-conscious professional learning to disrupt exclusionary practices (Dei, 2000; Dei et al., 2000; Horsford & Clark, 2015). Through centering race and examining the intersectional identities of individuals and groups, the framework equips leaders to recognize inequities and foster inclusive, equitable school

environments.

### ***Transformative Leadership Theory***

Two key aspects of transformative leadership theory distinguish it from the anti-racist model of education. The first aspect is its emphasis on moral courage and value-based endeavors, which provide flexibility in implementing the mission of offering equitable opportunities for all students (Dantley, 2003; Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022). Transformative leadership theory empowers school leaders to confront issues of diversity, encouraging them to address these challenges rather than avoid or remain silent about them (Caldwell et al., 2012; Cooper 2009; Shields, 2022). It urges school leaders to use their position ethically in service of all students and school community members, with particular focus on advocating for those who are most marginalized (Ncube, 2010, Ryan, 2006; Shields, 2022). Through this framework, transformative school leaders can align their actions with core values, working toward closing the academic achievement gap and ensuring equal educational opportunities for marginalized students (Dantley, 2003; Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022).

The second aspect centers on the deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge frameworks, with a focus on the redistribution of resources and fostering authentic school and societal change (Caldwell et al., 2012; Cooper 2009; Shields, 2022). While recognizing inequities is the starting point, transformative leadership also stresses the importance of redistributing both fiscal and human resources to effect real change (Dantley, 2003; Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022). Transformative school leaders guide educators to develop instructional practices that respond to the challenge of diversity (Ncube, 2010, Ryan, 2006; Shields, 2022). This process involves critical awareness, reflection, and a direct response to structures of domination such as those based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and ability—both within the school system and society at large (Ncube, 2010, Ryan, 2006; Shields, 2022). These efforts are crucial for achieving high academic success for all students and dismantling the inequitable structures within the educational system that perpetuate racial and class disparities (Dantley, 2003; Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022).

To this end, school leaders can use the transformative leadership framework when addressing systemic inequities that demand moral courage, ethical decision-making, and structural change (Shields, 2022). This approach is ideal in contexts requiring the redistribution of resources, the revision of exclusionary practices, and the alignment of leadership with core values such as equity and justice (Dantley, 2003; Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022). Transformative leadership empowers leaders to confront power and privilege, engage in critical reflection, and foster inclusive, responsive pedagogy (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Shields, 2022). By challenging dominant structures and rebuilding equitable practices, the framework enables leaders to close

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achievement gaps and drive meaningful changes across schools and communities (Shields, 2022).

Table 1 summarizes the similarities and differences between transformative leadership and anti-racist theories, and Figure 1 further illustrates how school leaders can apply both frameworks to build inclusive school cultures.

**Table 1**

*Comparing and Contrasting Transformative and Anti-Racist Theories*

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Unique Features of Transformative Leadership Theory	Similarities Between the Two Theories	Unique Features of Anti-Racist Theory
Moral courage and value-based endeavors	Inclusive and equitable education for all	Race and race consciousness
Re-distribution of resources	Issues of power and privilege Advocacy for social justice and social change Enhancing student educational outcomes	Race and Intersectionality

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### **A Case for Combining the Two Theories**

Combining these theories provides a solid foundation for school leaders to engage in practices of equity, inclusivity, and social justice. The integration of the theories strengthens them, creating an effective framework to guide school leaders in driving both school and societal change. Figure 1 illustrates the vision for merging the two theories.

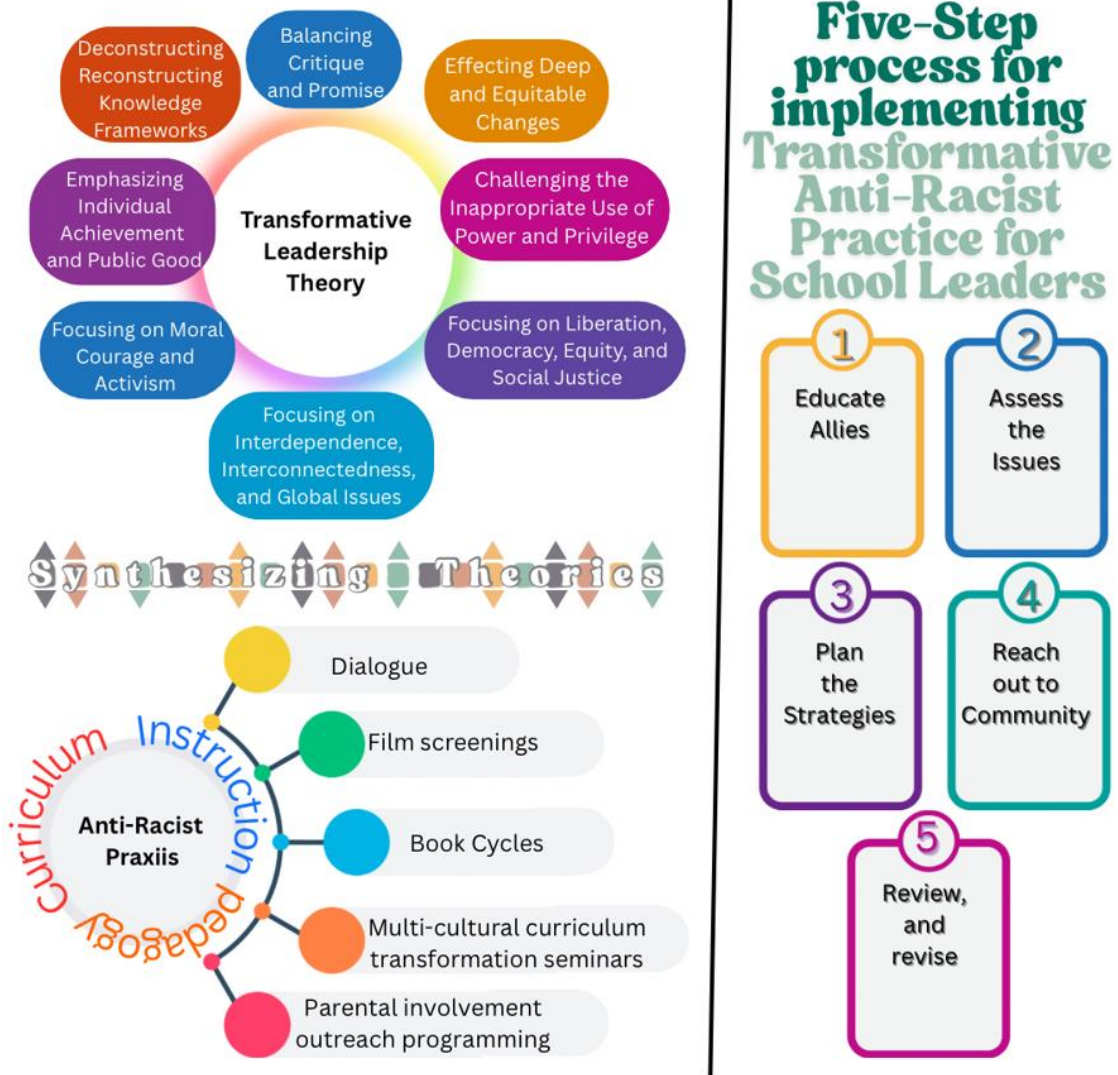
The integrated framework enables school leaders to identify and understand the factors that contribute to marginalization within the community context and propose ways to move toward reparative action. In implementing this framework, it is essential for leaders to connect with staff and the community, gaining their support, trust, and commitment. Once this foundation is established, leaders can educate stakeholders about the framework and how it can guide their work with the school community. The first step involves identifying key issues and then planning strategies to address these challenges. Together with staff (allies), the school leader will leverage the unique aspects of both theories to develop an action plan, using tools and strategies such as dialogue, film screenings, book cycles, and seminars to engage the community. The leader will

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also ensure continuous assessment of the action plan's effectiveness while striving to build a collaborative community grounded in diversity and inclusion.

**Figure 1**

*Combining Transformative Leadership and Anti-Racist Theories*



## Contextual Considerations

The frameworks of Transformative Leadership and Anti-Racist theory offer invaluable tools for fostering equity in schools, but their implementation

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may be influenced by the realities of specific contexts. While these approaches provide a robust foundation for addressing systemic inequities, they often contend with external factors such as underfunded school boards and resource-strapped communities. In marginalized communities, financial and structural constraints can limit the scope of equity-focused initiatives. As such, school principals may face resistance from their communities when advocating for transformative changes. Hostile social climates or deeply ingrained biases against equitable practices can create professional risks, potentially discouraging bold leadership efforts.

Equity-focused initiatives require sustained professional development, critical reflection, and long-term commitment, which can be difficult to prioritize in already overburdened educational settings. Many Canadian educators face high workloads, competing demands, and burnout, which can limit their capacity to fully engage with equity-centered efforts (Kirk et al., 2022). Moreover, the intersectionality of marginalization demands multifaceted and collaborative solutions that extend beyond individual schools, requiring substantial time, resources, and systemic coordination. These realities emphasize the importance of situating Transformative Leadership and Anti-Racist practices within a nuanced, context-sensitive framework. Addressing the diverse and intersecting needs of students from marginalized backgrounds cannot fall solely on school leaders; it requires coordinated support among schools, families, community organizations, and policymakers.

Despite these challenges, school leaders are not without agency. By adopting practical, adaptive, and contextually grounded strategies, they can initiate and sustain meaningful change. The following approaches offer guidance for school leaders seeking to overcome these barriers in ways that are both courageous and sustainable:

1. Start small and build incrementally. Introduce manageable equity initiatives aligned with school priorities to build momentum and secure stakeholder buy-in.
2. Leverage existing structures. Embed equity conversations into established processes such as school improvement planning, staff meetings, and professional learning communities.
3. Foster collective ownership. Engage staff, students, and families in shaping inclusive practices through participatory and collaborative decision-making, rather than top-down mandates.
4. Advocate strategically. Use disaggregated school-level data to identify disparities and make evidence-based appeals for additional support or policy changes.

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5. Form community partnerships. Collaborate with local organizations that serve racialized, Indigenous, and newcomer communities for example, to extend resources and foster trust.
6. Practice resilience and reflective leadership. Model openness, persistence, and self-awareness, especially when facing resistance or fatigue, to create a culture of continuous growth and learning.

Recognizing and navigating these challenges does not diminish the transformative potential of anti-racist and equity-focused leadership. Rather, it affirms the need for intentional, adaptive strategies that empower school leaders to address systemic barriers while advocating for sustainable, inclusive, and justice-oriented change.

### **Future Research**

Future empirical research needs to explore the effectiveness of this integrated framework that combines transformative leadership and anti-racist theories in advancing equity and inclusion in schools. Researchers should investigate how school leaders apply these frameworks in practice and assess their impact on school climate, student outcomes, and community engagement. Particular attention should be given to how leaders use the frameworks to uncover and address systemic inequities, build trust with stakeholders, and implement reparative strategies. Studies could evaluate tools such as dialogue, film screenings, and equity seminars in fostering inclusive cultures across varied educational contexts. Longitudinal and comparative research would also offer insight into the adaptability and sustainability of the frameworks when navigating practical challenges like limited resources, resistance, or competing institutional priorities. This line of inquiry would help determine how well the integrated approach supports school leaders in driving sustained, equity-focused change.

### **Conclusion**

The transformative leadership and anti-racist education concepts examined in this paper are closely connected through the shared goal of identifying and restructuring structures that generate inequity and marginalization, and work towards inclusive and equitable education for all. The integration of these theories would (a) empower school leaders to understand and challenge various forms of social oppression and structural inequities along the lines of their race, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic status, and/or varied ability, as well as their intersections; (b) enable school leaders to be responsive and advocate for social justice and social change both within the school and society; and (c) promote collaboration among stakeholders to ensure equal educational opportunities and high-quality education for all students, regardless of their background. Confronting marginalization head-on is crucial if educators want to provide inclusive educational environments. Transformative leadership and anti-racist frameworks have the potential to challenge the power imbalances

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and ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students in K-12 Canadian schools and implementing both theories simultaneously provides a more comprehensive approach for the work of school leaders.

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