Reimagining School Leadership for Equity: A Study of Transformational Leadership Practices in Underserved Urban and Rural Schools in the United States

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This study investigated reengineering of transformational leadership for equity in low resourced schools in two urban and two rural regions of the United States. Grounded in transformational leadership theory and conceptualizations of equity leadership, the study used a multiple-case qualitative approach of four schools with high populations of low-income and historically marginalized students. Data was collected from semi-structured interviews with teacher leaders, principals, and local community partners, as well as fieldnotes from policy documents and school practice. Findings are clustered in four cross-cutting themes across cases: Vision-to-System Alignment practices of leaders connected equity vision to intentional organizational practices including equity audits and inclusive data loops; Distributed Leadership for Equity teachers, counsellors, and family liaisons distributed leadership with principals and other leaders to extend impact; Community Capital as a Lever urban school leaders leveraged institutional partners and rural school leaders leveraged broad local community networks to bridge resource constraints; and Innovative Workarounds leaders created new timetables, staffing arrangements, and resources to circumvent structural challenges. This study demonstrates that if transformational leadership is intentionally reengineered to be equity-centred, it can not only drive change but also build processes into the system to continue producing equitable outcomes. Practical implications are that we need context-specific equity action plans embedded in leadership preparation, and policymakers need to support models of resource allocation that build capacity to tailor and build local solutions.

Keywords: *Transformational Leadership, Equity Leadership, Reengineering Leadership, Low-Resourced Schools, Urban and Rural Education, Low-Income Students, Distributed Leadership, Community Capital, Innovative Workarounds, Equity-Centred Leadership, Equitable Outcomes, Equity Action Plans.*

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1. Problem of Practice

Leftover inequities in wealth, personal influence, resources, and opportunities have long been a trademark of the education experience and achievement of low-income rural and urban students in the United States, even after many decades of reform. Empirical data show that students in these environments have a greater probability of experiencing lower per-pupil spending, lower-quality buildings, fewer higher-level courses, and greater teacher turnover than children who go to suburban schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023). In urban schools, there will be overpopulated classrooms, old schools, and student-teacher ratios (Khalifa, 2020), whereas rural schools are suffering from one-rural isolation, less curriculum diversity in a class, and regular staffing shortages (McHenry-Sorber, 2019). These inequities may lead to low-income students, students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities and are prone to underachievement and exclusion patterns (Hayes & Hooper, 2022).

The well-known issue of inequity in school performance between those who attend high-poverty schools, and their more advantaged classmates has been thoroughly documented. For example, Hinze-Pifer and Guz, (2024) suggest that funding disparities brought on by systemic variables are still resulting in achievement gaps during middle school years of one or more complete grade levels, considering the socioeconomic condition. To put a stop to both problems, it is necessary to have leadership ideas for schools that can be employed in cities as well as rural counties.

1.2. Why Leadership Matters To Build Equitable Outcomes

The most significant school-based predictor of student success, after instructional quality, is school leadership (Leithwood et al., 2019). Transformational leadership has also been shown in and of itself to build equitable school climates, community and professional capacity, and better instructional quality in difficult conditions (Hallinger & Walker, 2015). Transformational leadership, as is suggested by the ability to develop a motivational vision, inspire staff, build innovation, and react to people's individual needs, is proven to have a favorable influence on teacher performance and children.

Transformational leadership can be an effective approach to addressing the requirements of at-risk students when equity is the driving force. Equity leaders discard deficit stories regardless, disaggregate data to recognize and eliminate opportunity gaps, and hold policy and practice accountable to culturally responsive guiding ideas (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2021). In inner-city neighborhoods operating at a higher level of demand, this type of leadership may necessitate building neighborhood-level coalitions to extend resources (Ishimaru, 2020), but in rural places, it may require the development of robust networks in a community to fill the holes that institutional capacity gaps leave (Budge, 2020). Both contexts need adaptive, context-specific leadership and the capacity to communicate equity ideals into concrete, functional systems.

1.3. Study Purpose and Contribution

The overall aim of the current study is to bridge a vital knowledge gap in existing literature by shedding light on the process of transformational equity leadership in urban and rural under-resourced schools. Although some studies have been conducted about transformational leadership in urban (Khalifa, 2020) or rural settings (Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2020), to date little research that provides universal and context-specific evidence has been reported. Comparative data will help us in being able to recognize how similar leadership principles are being implemented under different structural, cultural, and resource conditions.

The novelty of the study lies in a two-pronged contribution. On a theoretical level, it will advance transformational leadership theory by conceptualizing equity-oriented leadership models and showing how leadership styles can be used to overturn structural inequities. On a practical level, it will provide evidence-based recommendations for school reform, school leadership development, and policy initiatives for building equity in under-resourced, multiculturally diverse communities.

1.4. Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

➢ How do principals apply transformational leadership in historically under-resourced rural and urban schools?

➢ What practices most clearly support equity for historically marginalised students?

➢ What contextual conditions facilitate or hinder these practices across settings?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Transformational Leadership in K–12 Education

Transformational leadership (TL) has dominated education influence theories for the last 30 plus years. TL was developed by Burns (1978) and later Bass (1990), which describes how leaders rise above transactional exchanges to engage followers in higher motivation, ethics, and performance. **Bass and Avolio (1994)** operationalized four of the TL dimensions as idealized influence (trust and modelling), inspirational motivation (vision), intellectual stimulation (analysis and innovation), and individualized consideration (individual attention). These have been applied in K–12 education context, and principals have been identified as transformational change drivers to motivate teachers and communities **(Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020)**.

Research indicates its suitability to implement in overcrowded schools and regions in which these underserved populations are. **Hallinger (2021)** found that transformational principals were more successful in cultivating a common high-expectation problem-solving culture that also undergrounded more effective teaching. **Ng (2022)**, whose study was also conducted in US and Hong Kong schools, showed how TL had a direct impact on teachers' professional development and learning that mediated student achievement gains. **Leithwood and Sun (2021)** also showed how TL fosters adaptive teaching practice based on innovation and reflective questioning, which is most crucial during situations of scarcity.

In which teachers are under pressure and without support at these low-resource schools, TL has been associated with greater morale, less turnover, and more change sensitivity **(Day et al., 2020)**. Transformational leaders foster a culture of collaboration and trust by ensuring that the teachers feel valued and motivated even under stressful working conditions. This becomes of paramount importance in the current urban and suburban teacher shortage **(Johnson & Showalter, 2022)**.

Wholesale adoption of TL has been discouraged though. **Shields (2020)** purports that TL comes at the cost of charismatic leadership and more significant structural inequities. **Anderson and Sun (2020)** point out that TL needs to be supplemented by distributive and equity-based theories; otherwise, it will amplify power dynamics. Therefore, while TL remains a wonderful theoretical base for leadership influence understanding, its intersection with equity-angled theory is most critical in dealing with these intractable education inequities.

2.2. Equity-Oriented School Leadership

Transformational leadership (TL) has dominated theories of educational influence for more than 30 years. Developed by **Burns (1978) and Bass (1990)**, TL is defined as leadership that moves beyond transactional exchanges to involve followers to become more highly motivated, ethical, and performing. **Bass and Avolio (1994)** then developed four of TL's dimensions: idealised influence (characterised by trust and modelling), inspirational motivation (vision), intellectual stimulation (analysis and innovation), and individualised consideration (individual attention). These have been applied in K–12 educational research, with principals found to be the change agents that make teachers and communities transformative **(Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020)**.

Research has empirically established their applicability in disadvantaged, overcrowded schools. For example, **Hallinger (2021)** found that transformational principles were better at creating a shared high-expectation problem-solving culture that also reinforced more effective teaching. **Ng (2022)** showed, in research conducted in US and Hong Kong schools, how TL was directly influential on the professional development of teachers which, in turn, mediated the achievement gains of their students. **Leithwood and Sun (2021)** also showed how TL underpinned adaptive teaching practices that were dependent on innovation and reflective

questioning, the most important being in conditions of resource scarcity.

In such circumstances, where teachers feel pressured and unsupported in low-resource schools, TL has been associated with higher morale, reduced attrition, and more sensitivity to change **(Day et al., 2020)**. Transformational leaders create a climate of collaboration and trust by making teachers feel valued and motivated even in a stressful work environment. This becomes particularly important given the current shortage of urban and suburban schoolteachers **(Johnson & Showalter, 2022)**.

Wholesale adoption of TL, however, has been cautioned against. **Shields (2020)** argues that TL results in a loss of charismatic leadership and much more significant structural imbalances. **Anderson and Sun (2020)** assert that TL should be complemented by distributive and equity theories, or it will just reinforce existing power dynamics. In other words, while TL is a wonderful theory on which to build educational leadership influence understanding, its intersection with equity-focused theory is most important for the mitigation of deeply embedded educational inequities.

2.3. Underserved Urban and Rural Schooling Contexts

Urban schools are chronically suffering from certain types of inequities. American schools from very poor districts experience system under-funding, over-crowding, and accountability pressures with their down-stream effect of curricular narrowness **(Darling-Hammond, Schachner, & Edgerton, 2021)**. They also host a highly diverse student population of color and English language learners whose needs are often left unserved due to both structural racism and language difference **(Ladson-Billings, 2021)**. However, urban schools are embedded near university systems, non-profit organizations, and advocacy groups that could provide the schools with their assistance when being used **(Ishimaru, 2020)**.

Rural schools, on the other hand, have their own challenges that are in the form of geographic and student isolation and also chronic teacher shortages. **Johnson and Showalter (2022)** stated that rural schools generally do not have current

science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and foreign languages and other specialty subjects due to teacher shortages. Recruiting and retaining staff is a particular issue, the most glaring challenges being the local lower salary and the lack of opportunities for professional development **(Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2020)**. Remote communities are also hard to reach by social services, with school therefore the point of delivery of health, nutrition, and guidance services.

But rural schools have their own strengths as well. A strong interpersonal community, a high degree of relationality, and a shared sense of identification can confer agency on leaders for the purposes of building coalitions and mobilizing local assets **(Budge, 2020)**. Relational capital also becomes a driver of equity when leaders can work with family and community organizations in order to help with managing deficits in learning.

Comparative research has also been conducted among the under-resourced urban and rural schools. They share non-traditional forms of funding, higher levels of poverty, and a greater mobility of teaching staff **(Reardon & Hinze-Pifer, 2023)**. Access to leadership also takes place in a highly varied manner in both urban and rural settings. Urban leaders gain outside resources through their institutional networks, and rural school leaders reach out to both communal activities on a large scale and cross-agency resource-sharing **(Biddle & Azano, 2019)**. This background context is required for practice leadership to be built that is strong and resistant.

2.4. Literature Gaps

Despite extensive literature on TL and equity leadership, three significant gaps remain. First, is the lack of integrated frameworks. The two concepts of trans and equity leadership are most often treated as separate in the literature. TL scholarship covers a broad range of topics such as vision and motivation, while equity leadership literature addresses issues of justice, culture, and transformation of systems **(Langdon et al., 2022)**. Very few scholars have formally combined the two, and little has been written on how to operationalize transformational leadership practice in the direction of more equity **(Shields, 2020)**.

Second, cross-contextual comparisons. There is a large body of literature on urban school leadership (Khalifa, 2020; Ishimaru, 2020), but also rural leadership research, less represented but steadily growing (Preston et al., 2020; Budge, 2020). Yet studies that compare urban and rural leadership are much rarer (Johnson & Showalter, 2022) despite both contexts experiencing systemic inequities. This results in a lack of knowledge of how the same principles of leadership are differently implemented across contexts.

Third, the lack of specificity in exercise. Most works problematize ideals of leadership (e.g., "building vision," "enacting collaboration") but not realist routinizes and processes by which such ideals are actually carried out. To bridge the chasm between theory and practice, one has to, according to Brooks et al. (2022), map out specific practices such as equity audits, inclusive scheduling, or restorative conferencing.

In this study, I address these three lacuna areas by examining how principals in low-resourced urban and rural schools embody TL, with a specific focus on efforts to actualize equity. I am seeking to both spotlight practices most directly related to actual equitable effects and explore the contextual enablers and constraints which shape leadership styles across contexts.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study's theoretical premise is two intersecting theories of leadership: Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) and Equity-Oriented Leadership Theory (EOLT).

Cumulatively, the two theories offer a dual analytical lens for understanding how low-income urban and rural school leaders practice leadership to achieve educational equity. On the one hand, transformational leadership theory is concerned with vision, motivation, and inspiration in leadership practice. On the other hand, equity-oriented leadership attends to the political, moral, and social justice rationales that orient educational leadership in the politics of inequality. The two theories, when considered together, also provide an explanatory and normative basis for the study.

3.1. Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory was first conceptualized by James MacGregor Burns in his seminal text Leadership (1978). Burns distinguish between transformational leadership and transactional leadership. Transactional leadership began in transactions where rewards and punishment loomed as a function of performance. Transformational leadership, conversely, never even attempted to elicit inspiration and motivation in order to get the followers beyond self-interest and feel a sense of responsibility for the common good. Building Burns's work, Bernard Bass (1985) then built on the theory. He called the four "I's" of transformational leadership: idealised influence, i.e. leaders acting as role models with integrity, inspirational motivation, leaders providing a compelling and understandable vision, intellectual stimulation, i.e. fostering creativity and problem-solving, and individualized consideration i.e. attending to the individual needs of followers. They are at the Centre of transformational leadership and at the centre of the argument that leadership is more than just commanding but is about changing organisational values and culture at a basic level.

Transformational leadership has been practiced and researched heavily in education. Researchers (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2020; Hallinger, 2021) have argued that transformational leadership is especially needed in schools, where school leaders have to get teachers, students, and communities to engage in common behaviors to create better teaching and learning. The theory is thus premised on the assumption that school leaders can generate inspiration and empowerment among their staff and communities, and this is what generates commitment and motivation rather than compliance and transactional relationships. Principals and administrators must create shared responsibility for school reform even in difficult circumstances such as poor urban and rural schools, in pursuit of a shared vision of equity and excellence.

The strongest point of Transformational Leadership Theory is that it is applicable at a large level and showed positive effects on schools. Transformational leadership is related to teachers' job satisfaction, instructional effectiveness at the team level, more professional interaction, and student achievement (Sun & Leithwood, 2020; Ng, 2022). Its concentration on vision and empowerment make it especially suitable for

environments where hope and resilience have to be built up by leaders, such as low-income rural schools or low-income and diverse urban schools. And its focus on mental stimulation coincides with the call for creativity in finding solutions to equity issues, and its responsiveness to the special needs of students and teachers makes it easy for leaders to respond to the special challenges of multicultural environments. The theory, however, has not been without its detractors. Transformational Leadership Theory has been criticized for putting an excessive emphasis on charisma and leader vision, at the expense of the building up of a leader-based over-charismatic solution disenfranchising distributed or shared leadership (Tourish, 2020). By putting the leader in a heroic position and promoting them to heroic status, the model can also ignore the involvement of other stakeholders in school change facilitation, for example, teachers, parents, and students. Also, transformational leadership has been attacked for being too idealistic and blind to the structural and political limitations that confine school leaders (Eacott, 2021). Principals, for instance, may be able to inspire teachers with visions of equity, but unless this is supported by the budget, subsidized through policy or systemically reformed, the vision will be difficult to make real.

Methodologically, scholars such as Antonakis and Day (2018) have also argued that transformational leadership research has relied on self-report measures, including the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), that are not capable of measuring the finer points of equity-based school practices. Furthermore, it has been argued that theory has been built up on Western societies, and hence issues of cultural transferability of the theory have ensued (Ng, 2022). Critics contend that constructs of charisma, motivation, and vision may be different in socio-political and cultural contexts and hence do not fully comprehend the African contexts of school leadership. Despite all the criticisms, Transformational Leadership Theory can be very applicable to this study. Transformational Leadership Theory, therefore, offers a theoretical framework with which to think about how to engage school leaders in terms of supporting and mobilizing agents towards the achievement of equitable educational goals. Principals who work in the rural school contexts can achieve transformational leadership by engaging teachers

and communities in resilience and autonomy in contexts of limited resources. In urban schools, transformational practice can make possible trust and harmony between culturally diverse employees and cultural diversity and low-income communities. Transformational Leadership Theory answers the first research question of this research, explicitly. How do principals enact transformational leadership in under-resourced urban and rural schools? It will allow us to explore leaders' capacity to build visions, to inspire, and to establish cultures of commitment to equity.

3.2. Equity-Oriented Leadership Theory

Nonetheless, transformative leadership does not confidently contend with institutional injustices although it educates some to lead through inspiration and motivation. This limitation is addressed by Equity-Oriented Leadership Theory (EOLT) constructed by borrowing from transformative leadership theory (Shields, 2010, 2018) and culturally responsive school leadership theories (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; 2021). While organisational change through shared vision and motivation is the agenda in TLT, in EOLT what is observed is that leadership must be grounded on a moral and political responsibility towards social justice.

Transformative or equity-awakened leadership to use Shields' (2010, 2018) phraseology, understands that educational inequities are not random but structural, based in historical and structural oppression and articulated through such axes of race, class, gender, and geography. They are not just instructional leaders but also agents of social change and activists who challenge deficit ideologies, power relations, and constructs inclusive schools. Similarly, Khalifa et al. (2016; 2021) posits that culturally responsive school leadership involves the principals affirming students' identities, empowering parents and families, and challenging inequitable policies and practices in the interest of marginalised communities. The EOLT presupposes that learning is political, and that leaders must be proactive in dismantling barriers to justice and equity.

Normative explicitness and pragmatic implications are the strengths of the Equity-Oriented Leadership Theory. On the one hand, foregrounding justice and equity, the theory provides school leaders with a moral compass and

urges them to pay attention to students that have previously been marginalized **(Ishimaru, 2020)**. EOLT also provides pragmatic alternatives such as equity audits, culturally responsive instruction, and inclusive policy advocacy that empower leaders to move from rhetoric to action. On the other hand, the theory locates school leadership in the global struggles for democracy and human rights and thus is socially and politically relevant, especially in areas of Africa where educational inequalities are deplorable.

Nonetheless, EOLT is not without problems. Equity-rooted leadership practice is publicizable, and principals can be rebuffed by policymakers, parents, teachers, or citizens when they start outflanking established norms or speaking for the voiceless **(Gooden & Dantley, 2019)**. Equity leadership also puts the principals in awkward positions when they have already got their hands full of frontline administration and systems advocacy. This leads to role-strain and burnout, most of all during hard times in resource curtailment when the leaders themselves are maximally employed.

Its methodological deficiency has also been hinted by the EOLT critics. As commendable as the theory is at the norm level, it will in most instances not have standardized measures of quantifying how effective the theory is, and thus empirical data runs amuck **(Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2020)**. Secondly, other critics point out that EOLT downward corrects for political pressure, state policies bound, or chronic underfunding that will discourage leaders from enacting equity-focused reform **(Shields, 2020)**. Advocacy and activism are the core themes of theory, and other critics also argue that such roles have the potential of propelling school officials beyond the professional line and place them in crosshairs from the political spectrum **(Khalifa et al., 2021)**.

Despite, EOLT has much to offer to this study. It provides a model for assessing not only how leaders inspire and motivate but how they respond to systematic inequalities in poor urban cities and schools in the countryside. In urban schools, EOLT uncovers strategies used by principals to narrow structural and cultural gaps as a means of loving and valuing diverse student populations. In rural schools, EOLT illuminates on ways in which leaders respond to geographic isolation, resource imbalance, and structural abandonment. By harnessing EOLT, the research is able to respond to its second and third study questions: Which practices most directly foster equity for historically marginalised students? Transformational and Equity-Oriented Leadership: Integration and Synthesis

The confluence of Transformational Leadership Theory and Equity-Oriented Leadership Theory begets the most inclusive and totalized explanation for this research. Transformational leadership on the one hand, describes the process by which leaders inspire and mobilize their stakeholders through vision, inspiration, and facilitation, while equity-oriented leadership, on the other hand, describes how such processes seek justice, equity, and inclusion. The marriage of the two theories bridges the gap between motivation and political and moral responsibility.

For urban schools, this confluence would require principals to embrace transformational practices of increasing morale and motivation of the staff while at the same time taking up equity-oriented approaches to dealing with racial gaps, poverty gaps, and cultural gaps. At rural schools, transformational leadership can create collective commitment and resilience, whereas equity leadership is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that such activities are designed to reverse structural injustices along the lines of geographic isolation and resource deprivation. The dual model thus addresses both motivational and justice-centered aspects of leadership and thus is well suited to a study of principals in poor urban and rural settings considering that school leadership for equity's sake. By bringing the two theories together, the study locates school leadership at one level as a mobilization of human energies and as a promise and at another as a moral commitment to deconstruction and to struggle against inequality. Synthesis gets the richness of educational leadership in times of adversity and provides a good theoretical basis for examining how principals react to adversity and act for equity.

4. METHODS

This chapter presents the methodological options for the research and explains how the data were constructed, analyzed and interpreted.

Broadly, the research was designed to discover how transformational leadership (TL) and equity-oriented leadership (EOL) were/are enacted in low socioeconomic urban and rural schools. The research design options for providing depth and comparison, so that leadership practice could be situated within the day-to-day experience of schools, is explained in detail in this chapter. The research design, the selection of participants and sites, the sampling strategy, the data sources, the data analysis procedures and instruments, and the ethical issues and considerations that underpinned the research are then described.

4.1. Research Design

The research design was a comparative case qualitative multiple-case design. The use of case study design was appropriate to the extent that it provides contextualized and rich information on complex social processes, such as the practice of leadership **(Yin, 2018)**. A multi-case design was preferable to a single-case design, in the sense that the former provides a stronger platform for analytic generalization to the extent that the researcher is in a position to trace patterns between settings **(Stake, 2006)**. The comparative design used its logic, most suitable to the research since it made it possible to put side-by-side, at a single point in time, the practices of urban and rural schools, thus highlighting the impact of the context for carrying out equity-oriented leadership. The emphasis on sameness and difference in the design triggered, a more explanatory comprehension of the conditions under which TL and EOL thrive **(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)**.

4.2. Sites and Participants

The schools where this research took place were 4 total, 2 urban and 2 rural, that had student bodies of low-income status. The purpose in choosing the sites in this manner was to purposefully select based on history of performance, representation of different demographics and contexts, and community to reach maximum variation between the cases. The main purpose of this was to allow for the sample to "be a set of conditions under which the 'program', process, or activity is used" **(Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 160)** in this case, the leadership for equity is carried out. As such, research participants at each school included principals,

assistant principals, teacher leaders, counselors, and in situations where this was possible, students and family/community partners. The purpose of this multi-actor problem is that it not only allowed for the possibility of studying leadership not only from the perspective of traditional power holders but also in the daily practice of students', teachers', and stakeholders' **(Creswell & Poth, 2018)**. Sampling participants at multiple levels of the organization also provided triangulation of perception, thus increasing the validity and depth of findings **(Maxwell, 2013)**.

4.3. Sampling Strategy

Maximum variation focus purposive sampling was used. Purposive was needed in the sense that equity-focused leadership is not an even coverage phenomenon in schools **(Patton, 2015)**. Maximum variability was accomplished by sampling schools with different levels of poverty, performance trends, and demographic make-up. For example, one of the city sites was chosen for its racial and linguistic diversity, and one of the rural sites was chosen for its good school-community relations in the context of limited resources. This sample diversity in addition further enhanced the transferability of the results because it showed how equity-based leadership works under varied but normal contexts **(Lincoln & Guba, 1985)**.

4.4. Data Sources

Three primary data sources (documentary, observation and interview) were triangulated with isolated quantitative artefacts. Semi-structured interviews yielded detailed descriptions of the practice, problems, and solutions of leadership. Interview participants were assistant principals, principals, teacher leaders, and community partners. Semi-structured interviews were used because they encourage participants to express meaning in their own terms, allowing for some room for the researcher to clarify **(Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015)**. Class observations, parent-community meetings and staff meetings were used to capture the practice of leadership as enacted, not just as presented **(Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011)**. Document analysis was then used to support the data sources using school improvement plans, equity audits, and professional development materials to capture the formal articulation of the leadership practices and

institutional commitments. Quantitative data in the form of attendance records, discipline and student achievement records were also used to provide the qualitative findings with a backdrop of broader trends in performance. Multiple sources of data that could be drawn on for the study were used to enable methodological triangulation, a method which has been widely suggested as useful for improving the credibility of qualitative studies **(Flick, 2018)**.

4.5. Instruments

While seeking steering data, the study used protocols that were more obviously mapped onto the concepts within transformational and equity-oriented leadership. The interview protocol included questions like: "How do you communicate a vision for equity and inclusion in your school? "; "Describe a recent student equity concern and how you worked on it? "; "How do you include teachers, students, and families in decision-making? "; and "How do you support teachers to become equity advocates within the classroom?". These questions allowed for alignment with the study's conceptual framework while also allowing for participants to offer context-specific stories **(Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018)**. The observation protocol requested examples of inspirational-motivation or shared-vision leader communication **(Bass & Riggio, 2006)**, examples of inclusive decision-making during staff meetings **(Shields, 2010)**, culturally responsive teaching in the classroom **(Gay, 2018)**, and leader-staff-community member interactions that displayed commitments to equity. The interview and observation schedules were pilot tested with two teachers outside of the study sample, and the process was helpful in streamlining and clarifying the degree to which items measured the research constructs **(Cohen et al., 2018)**.

4.6. Data Analysis

Thematic coding was used to analyze the data **(Braun & Clarke, 2021)**. Inductive and deductive approaches were combined in this. Deductive codes applied preconceived TL and EOL frameworks to encapsulate theory, whereas inductive codes allowed for those themes to be generated from the data. Phased coding began with initial coding, which was then followed by focused coding and, ultimately, the development of broad themes. The transcripts, fieldnotes, and documents were coded and organized in NVivo, a computer program, in a systematic way. To facilitate cross-case analysis, case matrices were used to compare leadership practice patterns across the four schools, which was then used to make sense of contrasts between urban and rural contexts **(Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2019)**. Triangulation between documents, interviews, and observations also added analytic rigor to the process. Member checking offered a way to confirm that the interpretation of the data was consistent with the participants' experience **(Birt et al., 2016)**. Reflexive memos were also kept during the analysis process to account for the positionality of the researcher and to document analytic decisions, therefore, making the interpretation more transparent.

4.7. Trustworthiness and Ethical Issues

Trustworthiness in qualitative research, i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were maintained **(Lincoln & Guba, 1985)**. Prolonged engagement in the field, shared insider knowledge of each setting helped to facilitate credibility. Source triangulation and member checking were used to improve credibility. Complete, thick, contextualized description of each setting was provided in the write-up to enable readers to make their own decisions about transferability to other settings. Production of an audit trail of methodological decisions, reflexive journaling, and peer-debriefing were used to ensure dependability and confirmability. Ethical issues were considered important to the research. We obtained IRB approval before data collection, to be certain that professional and institutional standards were being maintained. We obtained informed consent from all our participants, and we assured them of confidentiality and voluntariness. We applied pseudonyms to schools and individuals for the purposes of protecting identities. A written statement of positionality was completed to warn of the researcher's history and potential biases **(Berger, 2015)**. These efforts assure readers that the research was conducted with integrity, rigor, and respect for the trust of the participants.

Table-1: Sample Characteristics of Study Schools

Case	Region/State	Enrollment	% FRPL (Free/Reduced Lunch)	Student Demographics (approx.)	Performance Trends (Past 3 Years)
Urban 1	New York City, NY	1,450	88%	55% Black, 35% Latino, 7% Asian, 3% White	Persistent achievement gaps; English Language Arts scores improving; chronic absenteeism high
Urban 2	Chicago, IL	1,200	82%	60% Latino, 25% Black, 10% White, 5% Other	Rising graduation rates; math proficiency stagnant; high student mobility
Rural 1	Mississippi Delta, MS	540	92%	70% Black, 25% White, 5% Other	Consistently low literacy levels; incremental improvement in attendance, teacher shortages are severe
Rural 2	Appalachia, KY	480	85%	85% White, 10% Black, 5% Other	Declining math performance, moderate gains in science; dropout risk due to economic pressures

The four schools were selected to be intentionally representative of the range of issues and factors unique to leading under-resourced schools in the United States. The two city schools, located in New York City and Chicago, are large, high-poverty schools serving racially and ethnically diverse students. The schools are both urban contexts, struggling with common issues including absenteeism, student mobility rates, and historic racial achievement gaps, to name a few. As such, they present conditions for exploring how leaders and leadership teams can fold transformational practices into the work of enlisting staff, families, and communities in the work of equity-minded goals in aspirational urban school environments.

In contrast, the Appalachian and Mississippi Delta schools represent the urgent and unique disadvantages that persist for historically disadvantaged students in non-urban settings. In the United States, these schools are in places of highest socioeconomic disadvantage where teacher shortages, rural remoteness, and multi-generational poverty create layers of academic achievement barriers. The depiction of predominantly Black and White rural towns also serves to expose forms of inequities that are different in United States regional contexts. The use of both urban and rural exemplars to develop a more robust examination of underwhelming literature on equity leadership is meant to support comparative understandings of transformational leadership practices in relation to different structural challenges and cultural contexts.

5. FINDINGS
5.1. Case-Level Themes

Results are presented as case-level themes related to the TL dimensions of transformational leadership organization vision, professional learning, collaboration and structural redesign and equity-oriented practices at each school. Overall, across cases, leaders and leadership teams described context-responsive approaches that integrated TL practices with the unique circumstances of the underserved urban and rural schools in their contexts. With specific examples, this section shows how equity-oriented leadership was enacted.

5.1.1. Case A: Urban High School

Vision-Casting Regarding Anti-Racist and Restorative Practices

Urban High School (Case A) possessed a clear and compelling vision on anti-racist pedagogy and restorative justice. School administrators also conceptualized equity in a practical way that did not treat it as an abstract ideal but as a goal within reach of eradicating racial disproportionality in discipline and

achievement. For instance, the school dropped zero-tolerance policies and replaced them with restorative circles, creating space for dialogue and accountability. The staff recounted incidents where leadership clearly communicated the vision, for example, in staff development workshops and in staff meetings and linked the school values to students' well-being and justice **(Shields, 2010; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016)**. This regular communication of a shared vision of equity aligns with **Bass and Riggio's (2006)** transformational leadership style of "idealised influence," which serves to inspire staff to put energy into their practices towards a more collective social justice goal.

> **Teacher Learning Communities Using Equity Audits**

The second significant strategy at Case A was the development of teacher-led professional learning communities (PLCs) who conduct regular equity audits. Disciplinary referrals, enrollment in honours classes, and participation in extracurricular activities, disaggregated by race, gender, and socioeconomic status, were audited. The district and school leadership provided teachers with protocols and tools for equity data analysis that allowed the teachers to critically reflect on their practice **(Skrla et al., 2009)**. Facilitators demonstrated how the process paradigm-shifted thinking from models of student success deficit to school-based structural and instructional determinants. The process also provided for an emphasis on the intellectual stimulation component of transformational leadership in the form of encouraging staff to challenge assumptions and embrace new equitable instruction paradigms **(Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005)**.

> **Family Partnership Redesign**

Case A leaders redesigned family partnerships to address working-class and multilingual family needs. Staff worked with parents to schedule night office hours to fit parents' shift work, and interpreters were recruited to translate all communications into multiple languages. Nighttime was also leveraged to experiment with a "family advocacy liaison" program, in which bilingual school staff were charged with assisting families in "learning how to advocate for their children within the school system." In these ways, Case A interventions reflected the TL aspect of individualised consideration as leaders made efforts to accommodate the specific case of disadvantaged families **(Bass & Riggio, 2006)**. Local stakeholders also offered testimony that these efforts helped build credibility and improve parental involvement in school decision-making, which is a critical component of equity leadership **(Ishimaru, 2019)**. Case B: Urban Elementary School

> **Individualised Support Systems with Equity Filters**

Instructional leadership was realized as MTSS support for students at Urban Elementary School (Case B).

Leaders' practice as the "MTSS with equity filters" referred to intervention processes as systemic barriers, such as language access, housing instability, and trauma history. For example, attendance teams repurposed from truancy compliance coaches and instead collaborated with families on transportation stipends and community referral resources. This relates to TL's inspirational motivation component under which there is a shared understanding of leaders to the extent of them committing that "no child will fall through the cracks" **(Leithwood et al., 2020)**. Teachers reported that such an element produced a less punitive care culture that lowered suspension and retention variability. Student Leadership and Student Voice Councils

> **Student voice embedding was another feature of Case B.**

Leaders established student councils at each grade level to provide feedback on school climate, cafeteria food, and playground safety. Importantly, the councils were intentionally constructed to include representation from students with disabilities and English learners. Student voice feedback was often read during staff meetings, evidence that student voice was put into practice and in policy. This is related to intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration of transformational leadership because when learners are empowered, they can be a co-construction of equity **(Mitra, 2018)**. Staff and parents reported that relational trust and a climate of increased inclusion were cultivated through councils like these, evidence that

transformational leadership can invigorate hidden voices of marginalised groups into decision-making.

5.1.2. Case C: Rural K-12 School

Community-Rooted Vision Leveraging Local Assets

In Case C, Rural K-12, the case study articulates a vision that aligned with values in community and close resources. The principal noted "our students' future is tied to this community", education as world citizenship preparation, and service to the neighborhood. The vision materialized in the form of distance-learning partnerships with the local universities to offer higher level courses not otherwise accessible to the rural school districts. By juxtaposing cross-boundary collaboration alongside community pride, leadership defined a vision that was aspirational yet place-bound **(Beard & Brown, 2018)**. The practices complement the TL dimension of idealised influence which inspires staff to link teaching with sustainability in community and equity **(Khalifa et al., 2016)**.

> ➢ **Staffing Innovation Through Grow-Your-Own Pipelines**

Filling remaining staffing needs, Case C leaders created a "grow-your-own" teacher pipeline by recruiting paraprofessionals and other community members into teacher education programs for certification to teach a specific subject. Cross-certification of current staff to teach multiple subjects was also provided. This other human resource development is another example of the transformational leadership element of personalized consideration, as supervisors put time and care into the professional development of staff that had existing cultural ties to the community **(Bass & Riggio, 2006)**. Parents and staff described how the program stabilized and diversified staff, which created better teacher-student relationships and a healthier learning environment.

5.1.3. Case D: Rural Middle School

Wraparound Services through Inter-Agency Compacts

Case D, Rural Middle School, was equity-centered in its organization of wraparound services through inter-agency coordination. Knowing that most students faced poverty-related, health care, and transportation challenges, school administrators developed compacts with county agencies to provide tele-counselling, mobile health clinics, and pool bus rides. These practices reflect the inspirational motivation of transformational leadership when leaders, for equity purposes, "define a new vision of collective responsibility required for true collaboration outside of school boundaries" **(Ishimaru & Lott, 2015, p. 234)**. Teachers reported that these services reduced absenteeism and improved student well-being, creating a more stable instructional climate.

> ➢ **Inclusive Scheduling and Dead-End Track Removal**

A second important endeavor was the restructuring of master schedules to phase out "dead-end" courses of study that were stigmatizing to low income and special education students. These were replaced with heterogeneous learning groups that included tires of supports. This change took much convincing and professional development to overcome staff resistance, but leaders positioned it as essential to broadening equity and student opportunity. It was a paradigm example of intellectual stimulation of TL in the sense that it had pushed assumptions regarding ability grouping and fairness in rural schools **(Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005)**. Existing research had suggested higher participation and performance rates for students who were formerly assigned to remedial tracks; thus, transformative potential of redefinition of structure was present.

Table-2: Illustrative Artefacts Mapped to TL Dimensions

Case	Artefact	TL Dimension	Equity Link
Urban HS (A)	Restorative practice handbook; equity audit reports	Vision & Intellectual Stimulation	Anti-racist discipline reform; teacher reflection on equity data
Urban ES (B)	MTSS intervention protocols; student council agendas	Inspirational Motivation & Individualised	Equity filters in interventions; inclusive student voice

		Consideration	
Rural K–12 (C)	Distance learning MOUs; grow-your-own program brochures	Vision & Individualised Consideration	Expanded access to courses; community-rooted staffing
Rural MS (D)	Inter-agency service agreements; revised master schedule	Inspirational Motivation & Intellectual Stimulation	Wraparound services; elimination of inequitable tracks

5.2. Cross-Case Patterns

Cross-case analysis of the four case schools suggests three broad patterns in how TL practice was enacted to promote equity in poor contexts. With different contextual conditions in urban and rural locations, leaders concluded with similar commitments to equity-oriented visioning, shared learning arrangements and structural reorganization for inclusion. These commitments were, however, taken up in forms shaped by resource constraints, community aspirations and organisational traditions.

5.2.1. Equity-Oriented Vision and Collective Sensemaking

The principals from both urban and rural contexts drew and restated a long-term vision for equity, which served as the moral direction for their leadership. In the urban cases, it was more of a deliberative statement of anti-racist education, restorative practice and deconstruction of exclusionary discipline policy commitments. Case A leaders for example, brought up restorative justice in staff meetings and family engagement work as examples of the explicit naming of the school as a site of racial equity change. Rural leaders (Cases C and D) made a call to community resilience and equal opportunity as frames, frequently citing local assets like farm-school relationships or regional universities to provide students with access to doors to future success. Thus, equity visions differed in contexts but vision as an inspiring and uniting instrument was the same. The present study therefore recommends equity-based dialogue for enabling school change in that it builds mutual commitment and informs decision-making in cases of limitation of resources **(Shields, 2018; Khalifa, 2018)**. It was not a matter of one message to everybody but of creating an equity narrative that reacted to local issues and histories.

5.2.2. Distributed Leadership and Collaborative Professional Learning

A second cross-case theme involved purposeful use of distributed leadership models to enlist and involve staff and stakeholders in equity work. Within the urban districts, this was particularly visible in the creation of equity-minded teacher learning communities and student voice councils (Cases A and B). Teachers conducted equity audits of their own practice and reviewed disaggregated data for areas of disproportionality, while student councils were empowered to make decisions related to school climate and discipline.

At the national schools, distributed leadership took on more pragmatic forms. For example, Case C leaders-built grow-your-own teacher pipelines to address shortages, pushing teachers to work in multiple capacities as instructional leaders and community recruiters' mentors. Case D leaders leveraged inter-agency partnerships, such as compacts with local health providers, to deliver wraparound services. Both cases are indicative of how rural principals enacted intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration by empowering staff to rethink roles and responsibilities.

These findings are consistent with previous work that positions distributed leadership as an equity lever particularly when leaders create conditions in which a diversity of voices including subordinated students and teachers, naturally are at the table and helping to make decisions **(Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Theoharis, 2009)**. Most of all, both urban and rural examples showed that transformational leadership was less about heroic vision and more about creating systems in which all work was equity.

5.2.3. Structural Redesign to Include and Provide Access

The third cross-case pattern involved structural redesign to undo systemic inequities. In

the city cases, this entailed rethinking family structures to accommodate the schedules of working parents and the need for multi-language interpretation. In rural schools, structural reform involved eliminating "dead end" tracking systems and offering college preparatory classes to all students, even if this required creative scheduling and virtual learning partnerships.

These interventions align with the transformational leadership approach's impulse to reframe organisational norms to make them inclusive (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leaders in all contexts all recognized that equity meant more than symbolically repositioning vision statements; it required reworking the institutional practices that were in the business of reproducing inequity. However, the evidence also shows that budget austerity stunted the extent of these changes. For example, while Case D was able to enact inclusive scheduling, the lack of staff with specialist credentials impeded the provision of differentiated supports. I offer this to underscore the tension between equity aspirations and structural capacity in under-resourced schools, a dynamic that is all too frequently experienced in the equity leadership literature (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Horsford, 2019).

5.2.4. Contextual Limitations and Adaptive Leadership

While the trends were consistent, situational constraints shaped their expression. Urban school leaders operated in racially mixed, politically contentious contexts where equity efforts were often met with external demands for accountability and family and community activism. Rural school leaders were faced with geographic isolation, a small pool of talent for employees, and a greater responsibility for maintaining community traditions. These variations highlight the contextual nature of transformational leadership. Across context, leaders drew on core TL dimensions vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration but adapted their practice to local conditions.

Theorists and researchers on transformational leadership have built in the recognition that it is neither mimetic nor one-size-fits-all but rather the ability to be malleable and take into consideration contextually distinct demands (Hallinger, 2011; Shields, 2018). Cross-case comparison therefore makes evident that while TL has a prescribed pathway for approaching equity leadership, transfer must be context-dependent.
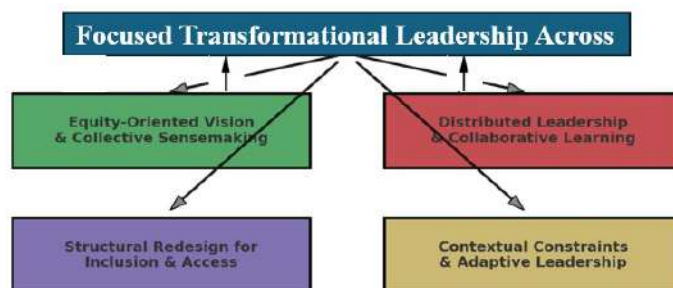
Fig-1: Equity-Focused Transformational Leadership Across Contexts
Source: (Author's construct based on study findings (2025))

Figure 1: Synthesized Model of Equity-Focused Transformational Leadership Across the Four Cases. Transformational leadership practices are essentially redirected to equity, and there are four interconnected dimensions: vision for justice, distributed capacity-building, community co-leadership, and structural redesign. The model depicts how the dimensions strengthen one another: vision for justice guides professional learning and capacity-building, which in turn

reach out to community partnerships and structural innovations that anchor equitable outcomes. By identifying patterns across cases, the model also demonstrates the universality and local variation of equity leadership in low-income urban and rural schools. For example, urban cases were anti-racist and inclusive school cultures, while rural cases were community-based leadership and service integration. Overall, the model shows that equity-oriented TL is not a fixed formula but a

living process, context-responsive yet guided by core transformational principles of vision, collaboration, and systemic change.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings in this chapter are discussed in relation to the guiding questions of the study, which addressed how transformational leadership (TL) and equity-oriented leadership (EOL) are enacted in low-income urban and rural schools and what aspects of the context influence the enactment of TL/EOL. The cases differed in size, resources, and community demography, but shared across cases was how the four aspects of transformational leadership, i.e., vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized support, and distributed leadership were purposefully reframed to support equity. This section positions those findings in relation to literature, suggests theoretical and practical contributions, and maintains implications for leadership practice, preparation, and policy.

6.1. Transformational Leadership

These results support that TL variables are strongly in use in settings with marginalized communities but in a very contextually differentiated manner. Vision-casting, for instance, took place at all sites but with different content: urban principals were more focused on antiracist and restorative justice commitments, while their rural counterparts explicated equity as preserving neighborhood resources and providing access to more schooling opportunities. This is in line with research that TL is not a prescriptive but an adaptive model that leads tailor to fit local needs **(Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Hallinger, 2018)**. TL was therefore "equity-infused" and these results explicate how traditional leadership predictors can be leveraged to dismantle inequities if situated with a social justice position **(Shields, 2010)**.

Intellectual stimulation was also enacted in differing ways across cases. In urban contexts, leaders pushed teachers to examine variation in discipline and bias in instruction via formal equity audits, in line with TL's tenet that leaders support professional development by disrupting assumptions **(Bass & Riggio, 2006)**. However, in rural contexts, intellectual stimulation was expressed as creative thinking about staffing pipelines and distance learning, and this was both a pragmatic and an equally equity-driven

approach. These results help to highlight that while TL constructs may be broadly generalizable, their operationalization in practice varies greatly depending on context, resources, and community norms **(Day et al., 2016)**.

6.2. Equity-Oriented Leadership as an Extension of TL

With a clear equity focus, the current study also broadens the TL framework. Although much of TL literature has focused on the development of a shared vision, collective efficacy, and faculty support, it has been critiqued for not necessarily addressing structural inequities **(Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016)**. In contrast, current study participants embedded TL with EOL actions such as culturally responsive teaching, inclusive decision-making, and reframing family engagement. This supports Shields' (2010) concept of "transformative leadership" that situates TL as unambiguously oriented toward justice. Cross-case themes also indicate that TL with an equity focus is not a bolt-on but an internalized model practice in contexts of chronic inequity. For example, individualised support, one of TL's defining features, was expressed not only at the teacher-mentoring level but also at the student intervention level, particularly through the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) with equity filters. This is in addition to other work that has documented equity leadership as frequently involving differentiated support for marginalised students **(Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014)**. Likewise, distributed leadership, which was once viewed as teacher self-governance, was extended to include student voice councils and community partnerships, highlighting how equity thinking also broadens who is seen as a leader in the school **(DeMatthews, 2018)**.

6.3. Urban-Rural Contrasts and Contextual Adaptation

One advantage of this study is that it shows how equity-driven TL takes shape in urban and rural contexts. Although both schools were involved in equity work, they answered contextual pressures in different ways. Urban leaders grappled with racial and language diversity, fiscal austerity, and legacy issues around disproportionate discipline. Their equity efforts antiracist vision statements, multilingual family engagement, and teacher learning communities to

address bias respond to the demands of working across multiple, complex ecologies **(Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016)**.

In contrast, rural leaders were focused on community integration and resource innovation. With limited external support, they developed develop-your-own teacher pipelines and tapped into distance-learning collaborations, which speaks to adaptive capacity where space is wide open. Their equity orientation was less around pushing back against overt racial injustices and more around not letting rural students be excluded from advanced educational opportunities or placed on "dead-end" tracks. This maps onto recent research showing that rural school leadership is often required to navigate between equity, sustainability, community-building, and managing scarcity **(Eppley & Howley, 2019; Roberts, 2021)**.

Together, these findings point to the idea that context is a generative, not merely a constraint factor on the development of equity-oriented TL. Principals do not give up TL principles in resource-limited or demographically unusual contexts; rather, they reinterpret them as locally relevant practices that still aim for equity goals.

6.4. Theoretical Contributions

Ideally, this would provide a theoretical contribution to the nascent body of work seeking to connect transformational and equity leadership literature. The results present a case that TL, when actualized in conditions of historical marginalization, has an innate proclivity towards equity-orientation by default. In that way, it is misleading to view TL and EOL as two separate frameworks. In fact, this study is less an investigation of transformational leadership and more an explication of an integrated model-analogously named "Equity-Focused Transformational Leadership"-in which the issue of equity is not peripheral but central to leader use of vision, motivation, and collaboration.

Likewise, this hybridization of threads is also an attempt to respond to other critics of TL as idealised or as politically neutral **(Shields, 2010; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012)**. The cases show that TL, when actualized with an equity focus, is political: principals pushed against inequities in the system, redistributed opportunity, and reorganized school practice. In

doing so, they actualized TL as socially transformative practice, bridging mainstream leadership theory and justice-focused, critical conversation.

6.5. Leadership Practice and Policy Implications

For the field of TL, this research offers evidence that equity-focused TL can be both required and feasible in low-resource schools, but only through intentional adaptation. For TL to become antiracist and culturally sustaining, urban leaders must be mobilized to make those approaches their top priority, while rural leaders must build strategic alliances and improvise within structural constraints. Distributed leadership, shared with students, community members, and teachers alike, was key in both cases for ensuring the durability of equity efforts. Future leadership development programs should therefore attach TL models to explicit equity training so that new leaders learn how to adapt across contexts.

The findings have implications for policy as well, but also with differences between urban and rural contexts in mind. Urban schools would benefit from investment in professional development on equity audits and restorative practices, while rural schools need policy infrastructure that would allow flexible staffing pipelines and interagency collaborations. Both would be better served by systems of accountability based on equity outcomes rather than aggregate levels of performance. These kinds of policy would legitimize the type of practice demonstrated in this study on a larger scale, while also countering the anecdotal extremes that equity-focused TL has become.

6.6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the multiple-case design advanced analytic generalizability, this study remains limited to its sample of four schools across two broad contexts. Future research could build on this work more easily with larger cross-regional samples or longitudinal designs to explore the development of equity-oriented TL over time. Quantitative studies could then also examine the link between equity-focused TL practices and observable student outcomes as a complement to the qualitative results offered in

this paper. Further research is also needed on leaders' positionalities and identities, and how these impact the enactment of equity-centred TL, only briefly touched on in this study.

7. CONCLUSION

Broadly speaking, the study's outcomes reveal that transformational leadership (TL) as implemented in financially restricted urban and rural schools automatically becomes equity oriented. School principals in all contexts reimagined TL aspects as equity drives that counter inequities, empower stakeholders, and maximize local assets. Cross-case themes - equity-driven vision, distributed leadership, systemic support redesign, and context-sensitive innovation - constitute a framework for "Equity-Focused Transformational Leadership Across Contexts." Positioning TL in an equity framework, this research not only contributes to theoretical understandings of leadership but also offers practical wisdom for practitioners' and policymakers to help restructure schools to be more inclusive and equitable schools.

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