

Community-Based Equity Audits: A Practical Approach for Educational Leaders to Support Equitable Community-School Improvements

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Abstract

Purpose: To equitably transform urban schools of color and the neighborhoods where they are nested requires approaches that promote community equity and foster solidarity among a range of stakeholders. However, most school–community approaches solely focus on improving school-based outcomes and leave educational leaders with little guidance for how to critically understand their school’s community context and act in solidarity with neighborhood stakeholders on community issues. The purpose of this conceptual article is to introduce what I call community-based equity audits and explain how educational leaders can use this process to work toward equitable school-community outcomes. **Method and Approach:** This process builds on equity audits in educational leadership, community audits, and community-based research practices and is theoretically grounded in Freirean dialogue. To demonstrate its impacts, this article draws on reflections of aspiring principals who conducted community-based equity audits in a leadership preparation program. **Findings:** The

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community-based equity audit consists of four phases: disrupt deficit views about community, conduct initial community inquiry and shared community experiences, establish a community leadership team, and collect equity, asset-based community data for action. **Implications:** This instrument is developed to guide educational leaders, and those who prepare them, in creating context-specific, equitable school–community solutions.

Keywords

leadership, school–community relations, community-based equity audit, equity audit, shared leadership, leadership preparation

In an era where top-down education reforms have failed to equitably transform urban¹ schools of color and the neighborhoods where they are nested, an increasing number of scholars argue for more bottom-up, community-based reforms and approaches (Horsford & Heilig, 2014; Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011; Schutz, 2006). There is growing advocacy for community-based reforms because “‘community’ offers a powerful rallying point and medium through which to challenge oppressive and alienating practices” (Philip, Way, Garcia, Schuler-Brown, & Navarro, 2013, p. 174). Thus, to equitably improve urban school and community outcomes requires approaches that foster solidarity among a range of stakeholders, especially educational leaders. While important, most school–community approaches only focus on increasing school-based outcomes such as student test scores and traditional forms of parental involvement, but disregard broader community concerns like social inequality and neighborhood development (Green, 2015a; Khalifa, 2012; Miller et al., 2011). This often results in educational leaders having little guidance for how to critically understand and act in solidarity with their school’s community, particularly underserved communities of color (Auerbach, 2010).

Furthermore, most educational leaders are grossly underprepared to address the range of inequities in underserved communities of color such as structural and institutional racism, systemic poverty, and violence (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Evans, 2007; Ishimaru, 2013). Since educational leaders play an essential role in establishing relationships between schools and local communities (Cooper, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Larson, 1997; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; McCray, Beachum, & Grant, 2011; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Scanlan & Johnson, 2015; Stovall, 2004; Warren, Hoong, Leung, & Sychitkokhong, 2009; Watson & Bogotch, 2015; Wilson, Riehl, & Hasan, 2010), working in solidarity with an array of stakeholders for equitable school and community improvement

must be a priority for educational leaders and those who prepare them. Thus, educational leaders need “strategies and tools with which to successfully accomplish this work” (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004, p. 134).

The purpose of this article is to introduce what I call community-based equity audits as an instrument, strategy, process, and approach to guide educational leaders in supporting equitable school–community outcomes. The community-based equity audit helps educational leaders reconsider underserved communities—which in this article refer to low-income, urban communities of color²—from resilient and asset-based perspectives. In this article, I draw on quotes from aspiring principals who conducted community-based equity audits in a leadership preparation program’s School–Community Relations Course to illustrate how these audits could shape leadership work toward transforming urban schools and communities. I specifically draw from aspiring principals’ end-of-course reflection assignment in the course.³ While scholars’ work on equity audits in educational leadership inspired and influenced my thinking in developing this process (Capper & Frattura, 2009; Capper, Frattura, & Keyes, 2000; Capper & Young, 2015; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Skrla et al., 2004; Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009), community-based equity audits aim to extend existing equity audits by placing most emphasis on achieving equity in the communities where schools are located instead of only inside of schools. Placing emphasis on equity in the community is important because local community is central to how people organize and act collectively to address social inequities (Collins, 2010).

Community-based equity audits are distinguished in six ways. First, the community-based equity audit is not a step-by-step, one-size-fits-all, linear process that must be followed religiously, even though I numerically demarcate the phases of the audit below to guide leaders with implementation. Instead, it is an approach that educational leaders and community stakeholders can flexibly apply to develop context specific strategies to pressing school–community concerns. Second, the community-based equity audit should not be viewed as a quick fix solution to “technical problems” that urban schools and communities experience. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) define technical problems as challenges that can be solved with current strategies, procedures, and quick fixes. Not intended to undermine a sense of urgency, community-based equity audits should be viewed as an approach to address adaptive and systemic problems that require time, trust, experimentation, iteration, and commitment to shift from deficit to asset-based perspectives about students, families, and communities (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Mapp & Hong, 2010). Third, community-based equity audits and equity audits in educational leadership can

be used individually or in tandem. This article, however, focuses on the stand-alone use of community-based equity audits.

Fourth, while this article primarily positions the principal as an educational leader and highlights her or his role in co-facilitating this work with a team, educational leadership exist in a range of community-based spaces that are beyond the principalship (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). In centering principals and their teams in this work, my aim is not to position principals as “enlightened and omnipotent saviors” (Mohan, 2001) to students and families in low-income, urban, communities of color, but rather as advocates *for* and *with* communities. Fifth, the community-based equity audit was created on the premise that families of color in urban communities are *not* “hard to reach,” but rather school’s traditional “outreach” strategies are often ineffective and culturally incongruent for working in solidarity with communities (Henderson et al., 2007; Mapp & Hong, 2010).

Sixth, as school leaders, their teams, and community stakeholders engage in this work, they must commit to equity anchoring their practice. As Gorski (2013) argues, “A commitment to equity is, in essence, a commitment to fairness, to equal opportunity, [and] to fair distribution of resources” (p. 20). Hence, for this article, I define equity as fair access to and distribution of opportunities, power, and resources, within and outside of schools that can improve children’s⁴ life outcomes.⁵ In what follows, I first review literature that informs the community-based equity audit. Then, I discuss how I draw on Freirean dialogue to theoretically ground this work. I next describe each phase of the audit process and conclude with implications for leadership preparation and future research.

Literature Review

To establish a scholarly foundation for community-based equity audits, I review literature on equity audits in educational leadership, community audits, and ethical and professional norms for community-based research. Within these literature strands, I discuss important research findings and how they inform community-based equity audits.

Equity Audits in Educational Leadership

Scholars and practitioners have used equity audits for decades in various fields of study, including health care, business, and education (Skrla et al., 2004). However, in education, equity audits have been most commonly used for curriculum auditing and to enforce civil rights and state accountability policies (Skrla et al., 2009). While equity audits have an impressive history

in education research, I pay particular attention to the instrument's use in the field of educational leadership. For at least the past 15 years, educational leadership scholars and practitioners have applied equity audits to assess and achieve equity across a range of school-based outcomes such as student placement, academic achievement, and discipline (Brown, 2010; Capper et al., 2000; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Skrla et al., 2004; Skrla et al., 2009). Capper and Young (2015) traced the history of equity audits in the field and suggest:

Educational scholars began employing the methods of equity audits long before the process was introduced to the educational leadership community by Capper & Frattura (2000) who offered a Demographic Questionnaire as a key tool in leading beyond inclusion and that included detailed and key components of later equity audits. (p. 187)

Equity audits, however, gained significant popularity in the early 2000s when Skrla et al. (2004) formally introduced the term and instrument to the field.

Empirical research on equity audits has mainly focused on the implementation process and the ways that school leaders use the tool (Capper & Young, 2015). Bleyaert (2011) examined the implementation of equity audits across five high schools required to meet a state curriculum mandate in math. She found that collaboration was essential to the equity audit process and that some schools needed external assistance to adequately apply them. In schools where there was not a culture of collaboration, many school leaders viewed equity audits as another report to complete. Similarly, Brown (2010) relied on equity audits to examine patterns of systemic inequity across 24 elementary schools. Aiming to highlight schools that were advancing academic excellence and equity, Brown found that equity around teacher quality, demographics, and programs was fair. However, she also found that student achievement inequities were most salient, particularly between students of color from low-income backgrounds and their White, middle-class peers. Additionally, equity audits have been applied in rural settings (Cleveland et al., 2012) and in urban and suburban contexts (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Green & Dantley, 2013; Skrla et al., 2009).

While equity audits provide an important lens to assess school-based inequities, Skrla et al. (2009) suggest the power of equity audits is in its process because it creates space for collective decision-making, gathering and grappling with the meaning of data, and mutual planning for change. However, given the amount of decisions and range of school and community actors, the equity audit process is rife with power dynamics that must be addressed for stakeholders to work in solidarity.

Though scholars do not fully agree on a process for conducting equity audits, several key features are commonly employed across nearly all equity audit processes in educational leadership. Skrla et al. (2004, 2009) use an equity audit process that analyzes twelve indicators across three categories: teacher quality, programmatic equity, and achievement equity. These scholars advance a seven-step implementation process: (a) creating a committee of relevant stakeholders, (b) presenting the data to the stakeholders and graphing the data, (c) discussing the meaning of the data, (d) discussing potential solutions, (e) implementing solutions, (f) monitoring and evaluating results, and (g) celebrating successes and/or returning to step three of the process. Similarly, Capper and Young (2015) offer a six-phase equity audit process: (a) achieving proportional representation, (b) establishing an equity audit team, (c) designing the equity audit, (d) collecting and analyzing data, (e) setting and prioritizing data-based goals, and (f) developing a plan for implementation. One of the major distinctions between Capper and Young's (2015) and Frattura and Capper's (2007) use of the equity audit is they anchor their work in integrated/inclusive practices, as measured by proportional representation,⁶ as a way for *all* students to actualize high achievement and to mitigate further marginalization of students.

Moreover, McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) described several equity traps—assumptions that prevent educators from believing that their students can be successful learners—that educational leaders experience when doing equity work in schools. These scholars offer four examples of equity traps: deficit views, racial erasure, avoidance and employment of the gaze, and paralogical beliefs and behaviors. Of several strategies they suggest that equity audits can counter equity traps. McKenzie and Skrla (2011) offer additional work that focuses on equity audits at the classroom level. They describe how classroom-level equity auditing should focus on teaching and learning, discipline, parental involvement, and programmatic equity. Through auditing these key areas, teachers can identify and address equity issues in their classrooms.

While equity audits in educational leadership have made important contributions to the field, this literature emphasizes equity within schools. Less attention is given to the ways in which larger, community-based constraints often shapes the inequities that manifest inside of schools, like racial segregation, poverty, and violence. Including the community context into the equity audit analysis is significant because the destinies of schools and communities are linked (Berliner, 2006; Warren, 2005).

Community Audits

Like equity audits in educational leadership, community audits or community auditing also inform the conceptualization of community-based equity audits.

Packham (1998) broadly defines community audits as “a method of evaluation or the obtaining of information which can use a variety of research techniques, carried out by any number of people” (p. 249). The *audit* in community audit is etymologically rooted in the Latin meaning of the term *audire*, which means to hear or engage in the act of listening. Therefore, an essential part of the community audit is “hearing people’s views, opinions, needs or what resources are available” (Packham, 1998, p. 250) instead of the audit being used as a punitive evaluation for high-stakes accountability purposes. Various forms of community audits have been employed across several disciplines, including community development (Packham, 1998, 2000a, 2000b), sociology (Lyon & Driskell, 2012; Perry-Smith & Anderson, 1992), medicine (Crombie, 1993), public health (Minkler & Hancock, 2003), and education (Gallagher, Bagin, & Kindred, 2002; Krimbill, Gray, & Hyde, 2013; Rodriguez, 2014). Across these disciplines, community audits have been used to gather information from local stakeholders about key community issues.

According to Packham (1998), community audits have several guiding principles. First, broad-based, community participation is central to community audits. Participation is used to empower people to critically understand, contribute, and act on issues that directly impact their lives. Community stakeholders are positioned to have joint ownership of the information and processes that emerge during the audit along with the school or university stakeholders who may initiate the audit. Moreover, if audit initiators are not from the community (e.g., principal, researcher, teacher, etc.), then her or his role is to facilitate the participative and implementation processes (Packham, 1998). The initiators, therefore, become critical collaborators with community stakeholders, but not sole leaders of the work or holders of knowledge. Second, persons who conduct community audits should possess a commitment to social justice, equitable change, and community autonomy (Humphries & Truman, 1994). During the community audit, participants should relinquish deficit perspectives and practices about communities and build individual and institutional capacity to sustain the work (Smith, 1993). Third, equal importance is placed on methods (i.e., process) and quantitative and qualitative goals that community stakeholders identify.

Additionally, anchored in community-based research partnerships (CBRP) in the field of public health, Minkler and Hancock (2003) put forth a type of community audit, which they call a framework for community-driven asset identification and issue selection (Minkler, 2005). As hallmarks of CBRP, the framework centers on systemic inquiry, participation, and action. Their framework particularly focuses on the role of “community outsiders” (e.g., researchers and practitioners) in facilitating the process. Three principles guide their framework. First, the framework’s initial

priority is starting where people are. This is done to demonstrate faith in communities to identify issues that are important to them and to ensure that the issues that are addressed are central to the community. Minkler and Hancock (2003) explain:

Starting where people are would have us shelve more traditional approaches, in which the researcher enters the community with his or her research topic and method predetermined. Instead . . . it would have us foster a dialogical process through which the community's felt concerns heavily shape and determine the topic chosen, how it is explored, and to what ends. (pp. 136-137)

In other words, starting where people are means not starting where audit initiators want to start, but where the community deems important. Starting where people are also includes "listening for and honoring what James Scott (1990) calls the "hidden transcripts,"⁷ or private discourse of an oppressed community (p. 137). Second, this work requires community outsiders to acknowledge and begin with community assets and strengths, instead of deficits and problems. In doing this work, community outsiders should aim to not only develop cultural competence, but also *cultural humility*, which "incorporates a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique, to redressing power imbalances . . . to developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic advocacy partnerships with communities" (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 117). Without cultural humility educational leaders might forget that this work is a lifelong process and reproduce hierarchal relationships with the communities they seek to empower.

Third, explicit focus is placed on authentic dialogue to foster co-learning among stakeholders. Minkler and Hancock (2003) thus offer several strategies: walking and windshield tours, community surveys, community capacity inventories, community asset mapping, risk mapping, community dialogues/guided discussions, developing opportunity indicators, visioning processes, creative arts, and interviews with formal leaders, informal leaders, and with what they term *regular folks* (see also Lyon & Driskell, 2012; Sharpe, Greaney, Lee, & Royce, 2000). To identify informal community leaders, Minkler and Hancock (2003) recommend asking several questions that are outlined in Appendix A. In sum, community audits are key for involving local and outside stakeholders in collaborative efforts anchored in community empowerment. The tool is however limited in that it does not offer a process to equitably improve both school and community outcomes. I next discuss why it is important for educational leaders and their teams to establish ethical and professional norms for this work.

Ethical and Professional Norms in Community-Based Research

Community-based research is important because it is an approach that centers perspectives, ideas, and solutions that emerge from local actors. In this section, I draw heavily on Campano, Ghiso, and Welch's (2015) notion of ethical and professional norms in community-based research because it offers a comprehensive example of its implementation in an educational context, "especially [those contexts] of cultural diversity, systemic inequity, and power asymmetry" (p. 29). The authors provide a set of guidelines for community-based research that they developed through collaborative work with a linguistically diverse and multiethnic Catholic parish, its school, and its community center. Located in a traditionally underserved, low-income community of color, Campano et al. provide a case study example of how these norms and practices were conceptualized and enacted to foster lasting relationships across social and institutional boundaries. According to the authors, community-based research is "research *along-side*, rather than merely *on*, community members that takes seriously their own questions, forms of knowledge, and interests" (p. 30, italics added). This type of work with communities aims to develop deep levels of authentic trust, particularly within diverse communities that have experienced persistent inequity.

Campano et al. (2015) offer five norms for conducting community-based research that address unequal power dynamics across cultural, social, and institutional lines. First, equality is the starting point, not the end point. Community outsiders—for example some educational leaders—who take this vantage point should view every community stakeholder "as equally intelligent and remain vigilant against the impulse to circumscribe others' capacities" (Campano et al., 2015, p. 37; see also Mapp & Hong, 2010). Instead of equality being some nebulous end goal, it should be ingrained into every experience with community stakeholders. As educational leaders start from this position, they aim to forge horizontal relationships that promote democracy and abandons hierarchical forms of participation and authority. Practically, this can be addressed through constantly rotating community members in leadership positions for all school–community efforts (Campano et al., 2015). This can also be addressed through establishing core beliefs for equitable school–community partnerships. Henderson et al. (2007) argue that these core beliefs include (a) all parents and families have dreams for and want the best for their children; (b) *all* families have the capacity to support their children, although in different ways; (c) school staff, community members, and parents should be equal partners; and (d) the responsibility for creating partnerships between schools and communities ultimately rests on the

school, particularly school leaders (see also Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernández, 2013; Mapp & Hong, 2010).

Second, community members' knowledge and perspectives must be taken seriously, as they should be considered intellectual partners. This is important because as Campano et al. (2015) argue:

When working with members of historically disenfranchised communities who may experience what Fricker (2007) has characterized as 'systemic identity prejudice,' whereby someone is discredited in their capacity as a knowledge generator "owing to some feature of their social identity." Due to the intersections of race, social class, language difference, gender, and immigrations status many community members . . . may be likely to experience identity prejudice and thus be more vulnerable to research relationships that discount their perspectives. (pp. 38-39)

Educational leaders must therefore recognize that community members could offer lived-experience that provide significant information when strategizing about community concerns and how to address them. Educational leaders must also constantly reflect on whose voices are included and excluded throughout school–community interactions. Campano et al. thus offer suggestions that can assist educational leaders in including a diversity of community voices such as respectfully soliciting perspectives from community members who are hesitant to speak, purposefully including opportunities for differing perspectives, and alternating who crafts meeting agendas. These strategies are useful for all stakeholders throughout the community-based equity audit process.

Third, specific research foci and questions are co-designed with community members. In taking this perspective, educational leaders demonstrate that knowledge and solutions are not exclusively generated in universities or K-12 schools and then transmitted to people working and living in communities (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Rather, educational leaders and any "community outsiders" should bring their interests to communities, which should be shared, but situated within the larger community's interests. Importantly, Campano et al. (2015) first spent 9 months in the community supporting local projects and developing relationships, which suggest that educational leaders should spend quality time in the community where their school is located before commencing collaborative work. Co-designing research with the community can take on many forms, but should be addressed through ongoing dialogue to establish common interests.

Fourth, research on/with/for the community should benefit the community (see also Hostetler, 2005). From the outset, there should be joint clarity

around how the collaborative work will benefit the community. Indeed, the community-based equity audit should result in improvements across both school and community spaces, particularly in areas that the community values. Campano et al. (2015) suggest employing participatory action research strategies that “situate inquiry within joint processes that honor the needs and interests of all involved” (p. 43). Fifth, research is made public in transparent, collaborative, and creative ways. Therefore, the processes and results of the community-based equity audit should be shared between school and community settings in ways that are understandable for a range of stakeholders across multiethnic and multilingual contexts.

In sum, these bodies of reviewed literature provide a foundation for my conceptualization of community-based equity audits. I draw across each literature strand in particular ways. From the research on equity audits in educational leadership, I draw on the centrality of equity and its implementation process. I use community audits to center systemic inquiry, community dialogue, participation, and empowerment. I also draw on specific community audit strategies such as community asset maps, community dialogues, community visioning, community opportunity indicators, and cultural humility. Finally, community-based research practices provide an approach to work equitably with community stakeholders that accounts for a diversity of identities, ongoing equality, and power dynamics. It also considers co-designing change strategies that are aligned with community interests and knowledge, it makes central that all collaborations must benefit the community, and it requires educational leaders to critically reflect on their positionality and practices as they work alongside communities.

Theoretical Framework: Freirean Dialogue

To theoretically ground community-based equity audits and the ethos that should anchor educational leaders’ perspectives and approaches in this work, I draw on tenets from Paulo Freire’s (1970) notion of dialogue. Freire, a Brazilian educator, described the tenets of dialogue in his popular text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as: love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking. In this section, I discuss each of these tenets and their applicability to educational leaders conducting community-based equity audits (see Table 1).

According to Freire (1970), dialogue is essential to bringing about radical change in underserved communities. Freire’s notion of dialogue is rich, unmasks asymmetrical power relations, and aims to forge horizontal partnerships, which is contrary to traditional forms of dialogue that only consist of shallow discussions between stakeholders. He argues, “dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s ‘depositing’ ideas in another, nor can it

Table 1. Tenets of Freirean Dialogue.

Tenet	Description
Love	The foundation of dialogue. An act of freedom void of sentimentalism and manipulation that loves people, the school, and community and all their stakeholders.
Humility	Educational leaders are always open to new ideas and understandings, and they never assume that they possess all of the answers about what is best for the community.
Faith	Educational leaders have immutable confidence in the community to describe and transform their reality. Leaders constantly draw on the experiential knowledge of the community during all phase of the work.
Hope	Community equity is seen as attainable.
Critical Thinking	Educational leaders and local actors are aware of the systems and structures that perpetuate community inequity.

Note. Adapted with slight modifications from Miller et al. (2011).

become a simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’ by the discussants” (p. 89). Hence, dialogue should not be co-opted into a tool of domination where people in privileged positions speak for underserved communities, thus educational leaders and their teams must create space for community stakeholders to speak candidly about their reality. Freire importantly offers a warning in taking a dialogical approach: “Those [educational leaders] who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly” (p. 60).

As such, I draw on Miller et al.’s (2011) articulation of Freirean dialogue for educational leaders. These scholars draw on Freire’s work to expand conceptualization of educational leadership, to offer pragmatic responses to urban inequity, and to demonstrate how educational leaders can be guided by the tenets of Freirean dialogue. I next discuss each tenet.

Love

Fundamentally, Freirean dialogue is rooted in love. Freire (1970) asserts, “Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people . . . Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself” (p. 89). In this sense, love is an act of freedom that engenders other acts of freedom, and is void of sentimentalism and manipulation. Freire contends, “If I do not love the world . . . if I do not love the people—I cannot enter into dialogue” (p. 90). Therefore, educational leaders must

develop a genuine love for their school, community, and its people as well as a deep desire to transform community inequity (Dantley & Green, 2015; Douglas & Nganga, 2015). Also, in developing this love for students inside of school, principals will ensure that all students can read at high levels, have equitable access to the best instruction and teachers, and close gaps on achievement benchmarks.

Humility

Additionally, dialogue cannot exist without humility. As Freire (1970) notes, “Men and women who lack humility (or have lost it) cannot come to the people, cannot be their partners in naming the world” (p. 90). Through humility, dialogue becomes a conduit for school and community stakeholders to learn and act in solidarity. In doing so, “leaders who seek change must go to the people humbly, open, and ready to listen to their ideas” (Miller et al., 2011). Indeed, when conducting community-based equity audits, educational leaders must abandon arrogance, ignorance, and any distinctions between them and the community. These leaders must also transform their language from one of separation to one of solidarity. For example, when working with humility, educational leaders’ language should change from “those students,” “that community,” and “those people” to “our students,” “our community,” and “we/us.”

Faith

Similar to love, Freirean dialogue requires an intense faith in humankind—especially for those who have historically experienced oppression—to transform oppressive conditions. Freire (1970) posits, “Faith in people is an a priori requirement for dialogue; the “dialogical [person]” believes in others even before she/he meets them face-to-face” (pp. 90-91). When educational leaders act without faith in students, families, and communities, they think they are the sole agent of change and engender what Freire calls “paternalistic manipulation” (Freire, 1970). Therefore, when conducting community-based equity audits, educational leaders must have faith in communities’ rich history, culture, diversity, assets, institutions, and people’s capacity and agency to enact equitable community change.

Importantly, when love and humility are in manifestation, they produce a climate of mutual trust. This mutual trust, according to Freire (1970), “leads the dialoguers into even closer partnership in the naming of the world” (p. 91). Mutual trust cannot occur until stakeholders constantly demonstrate congruency between their words and actions (e.g., Ishimaru, 2013). Hence,

educational leaders cannot expect for communities, especially those that have historically experienced marginalization, to immediately trust them. These leaders, therefore, must not become weary in the well doing of developing mutual trust. In turn, this can be used to assess leaders' levels of love, humility, and faith for low-income communities of color (Dantley & Green, 2015).

Hope and Critical Thinking

Freirean dialogue is also anchored in hope because as he asserts, "dialogue cannot be carried out in a climate of hopelessness" (Freire, 1970, p. 92). Grounded in hope, community inequity is not viewed as deterministic, but rather opportunistic (Freire, 1992). Therefore, educational leaders and communities should consider community equity as attainable, and a just future as possible (Freire, 1992). Additionally, dialogue entails critical thinking, also known as "conscientization," which is a critical consciousness about the contextual structures that perpetuate oppression in people's lives. This type of critical thinking is inextricably linked with action. Critical consciousness considers history, which will help educational leaders understand low-income communities of color from their complex pasts as well as their contemporary realities. Therefore, educational leaders must critically and deeply understand the historical, political, social, and economic contexts of communities, and the structures, policies, and practices that reinforce community inequity (Cooper, 2010). As Miller et al. (2011) argue, "Leaders, then, can only go to the people and work with the people when they know the rich contours of the people's lives unfolded in time" (p. 1084).

Taken together, I draw on Freirean dialogue because of its alignment with the literature on community audits and ethical norms for community-based research. For example, community audits as articulated by Minkler and Hancock (2003) are rooted in Freirean dialogue that starts where the people are, focuses on assets, and seeks authentic dialogue and co-learning with local communities. Freirean dialogue is also consistent with Packham's (1998) notion of community audits that espouse broad-based participation and suggest that people be dedicated to social justice and equity. In addition, the five norms for conducting community-based research resonate with the methods, attention to class and power, and participatory aspects of Freirean dialogue. Thus, together, the reviewed literature and Freirean dialogue offer firm research and theoretical grounding to inform the community-based equity audit process.

In sum, Freirean dialogue is useful for guiding educational leaders, and their teams, in conducting community-based equity audits *with* and not *for* communities. Operating from a Freirean dialogical perspective, educational

Table 2. Community-Based Equity Audit Process.

Phase	Description	Freirean Tenet
One	Disrupt deficit views of community	Love
Two	Conduct initial community inquiry and shared experiences	Critical Thinking
Three	Develop community leadership team (CLT)	Humility
Four	Collect equity, asset-based community data for action	Faith and Hope

leaders are better positioned to understand and work in solidarity with communities. Educational leaders are also positioned to authentically work with the people in the community for equitable change, and in doing so, “the people will find themselves in the emerging leaders, and the latter must find themselves in the people” (Freire, 1970, p. 163). As educational leaders use Freirean dialogue to guide community-based equity audits, they are better situated to value students, families, and communities of color. I next describe the community-based equity audit process.

Community-Based Equity Audit Process

In this section, I describe the community-based equity audit process that includes four phases: (a) disrupt deficit views of community, (b) conduct initial community inquiry and shared community experiences, (c) establish Community Leadership Team (CLT), and (d) collect equity, asset-based community data for action (see Table 2). I discuss each phases from the perspective of a principal co-leading and facilitating the audit process with a team. Moreover, I developed these four phases through integrating core tenets of the reviewed literature and theoretical framework, and after revising the process based on feedback from aspiring school principals in a leadership preparation program, over a 2-year period. Each phase corresponds to one or more Freirean dialogue tenet that is most applicable at that phase of the process.

Each phase provides practical actions for leaders to start this work, and also allows for modifications to address different needs and issues in particular contexts. While I discuss the phases sequentially, teams should take the liberty to apply the phases in ways that best suit their context, though all teams should begin with Phase I. Finally, *community* includes several features such as (a) networked relationships and commonalities (Furman, 2002); (b) mutual political, cultural, economic histories and contemporary struggles,⁸ and a collective

consciousness to “act to defend, rebuild, or resist threats to that collective understanding” (Ginwright, 2010, p. 78). Community can also be conceptualized “as a source of learning, support, and agency for individual and collective empowerment” (Philip et al., 2013, p. 175). But, for the purpose of the audit process, community is initially geographically defined according to zip code to obtain the largest amounts of data about the community from the U.S. Census Bureau and other free databases that provide useful community information (Lyon & Driskell, 2012). Though this definition is limiting, community can also be defined as attendance boundaries, census tracts, neighborhoods, or in other ways beyond these parameters that best suit particular contexts (e.g., Wood & Lemley, 2015).

Phase I: Disrupt Deficit Views of Community

Disrupting deficit views about underserved urban communities of color is the anchor of this work (e.g., Evans, 2007; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 2010). To begin, principals should create a team of school-based stakeholders to initiate this work on their campuses. Similar to the equity audit, this school leadership team should consist of at least 9 to 12 members who have diverse perspectives and backgrounds (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Skrla et al., 2004). Members should represent a range of racial, social class, gender, and age backgrounds as well as come from a variety of positions such as: administrators, teachers, staff persons at the school (e.g., bus drivers, lunch servers, administrative assistants, teacher assistants, etc.), parents, and students.⁹ The school leadership team should be proportionally representative of the community in which the school is located, and every member should be treated equally, regardless of their positionality (Campano et al., 2015; Capper & Young, 2015). Essentially, this school leadership team will be tasked with building an infrastructure to support equitable school–community outcomes and serving as a problem-solving entity for related issues (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Skrla et al., 2004). This group is important because they will become a central part of a larger community group in Phase III—the Community Leadership Team.

Adopt Freirean and asset-based views of community. To start disrupting deficit views about the community, the school leadership team should participate in studies and discussions on *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and deconstructing deficit thinking (Garcia & Guerra, 2004), for example. During these conversations, team members should define and discuss their current school–community practices, and then problematize ways to apply the readings to shift these practices (individually and collectively) to Freirean and asset-based perspectives instead of traditional, deficit views of underserved urban communities

Table 3. Traditional (Deficit) Versus Freirean (Asset) Perspectives of Communities.

Issue/Topic	Traditional (Deficit) View	Freirean (Asset) View
Students and families of color from low-income communities	These persons are lazy, they do not work hard, and need to be fixed	These persons live in neighborhoods that are constrained by unequal power dynamics that yield inequity and oppression
Ability of students and families of color from low-income backgrounds	Agentless, recipient of services, must have external, expert assistance	Active change agents who can name and transform their reality
Community conditions	Intergenerational and unchangeable, the result of local actors' maladaptive behaviors	The result of historical oppressive structures and conditions are not immutable but transformable
Role of school leaders and teams	To work <i>on</i> and teach students and families how to fit White, middle-class norms, teach parents how to support school-based efforts	To work <i>with</i> students, families, and local actors to transform inequitable community <i>and</i> school conditions

(see Table 3; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; López & Vázquez, 2006; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Wilson et al., 2010). This phase on shifting to asset-based perspectives should precede any solidarity work with the community, because if asset perspectives are not in place, research suggests that team members will more than likely treat community members such as parents as agentless actors, docile recipients of services who require outside expert training, and “as ‘objects’ for rehabilitation” that need fixing to align with White middle-class notions of parenting (Rocha-Schmid, 2010, p. 344). This will in turn impede progress and will not leverage the expertise of community members. Therefore, taking on asset-based perspectives is an act of love, which is the foundation of Freirean dialogue (Freire, 1970).

Establish equity-based core beliefs. One of the team’s first actions is to define asset and equity-based core beliefs and non-negotiables about school–community engagement (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mapp & Hong, 2010). Drawing on Henderson et al.’s (2007) suggestions, teams should discuss, grapple with, and integrate these scholars’ four

equity-based core beliefs into their work with the community, as well as generate at least three more core beliefs that are relevant to their particular context.¹⁰ While doing this, the school leadership team should spend quality time addressing myths, assumptions, and stereotypes about students, families, and the community (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Gorski, 2013), as well as affirming their commitment to equitable, collaborative, and dialogically centered school-community change (Freire, 1970; Packham, 1998). Thus, school leadership team members should commit to cultural humility throughout this process (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

After teams have established equity-based core beliefs and non-negotiables, if applicable, they should next assess the effectiveness of their current school-community practices (e.g., PTA meetings, open house), and realign them with their new core-beliefs. To do so, teams could ask questions about existing practices such as: How and to what extent have existing practices interrupted unequal power relations between schools, parents, and administrators? How and to what extent have existing practices built collective power with parents and local stakeholders? How and to what extent do existing practices create space for parents and local stakeholders to co-produce agendas, initiatives, and solutions? How and to what extent do current practices focus on community interests and not solely school interests? Based on responses to these and other questions, the team may decide to eliminate some or all of their existing practices and start afresh. Also, and later in the process, this team will help determine appropriate professional development for school stakeholders to institutionalize these beliefs and practices throughout the school. Initially, this team should meet at least biweekly and then move to monthly meetings as their work becomes more established (Frattura & Capper, 2007).

Phase II: Conduct Initial Community Inquiry and Shared Community Experiences

The purpose of the second phase of the audit process is to help school leaders and their teams develop connections with community-based organizations and community leaders. During this phase, school leaders will also spend time in the community to further develop partnerships with the community and better understand the local context. This part of the audit process has three key actions: conduct initial community inquiry through asset mapping, interview community leaders, and have shared community experiences. Throughout this phase, educational leaders and their teams should be developing critical thinking to understand the interconnectedness of systems and structures that promote community inequity (Freire, 1970).

Conduct initial community inquiry through asset-mapping. During the initial community inquiry, leaders and their teams will create a three-layer asset map of their school's community (Green, 2015b; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Lyon & Driskell, 2012). In this article, assets are defined as the "gifts, skills, and capacities of individuals, associations, and institutions" within a community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p. 25), which the "entire community can use to reduce or prevent poverty and injustice" (Oliver, 2001, p. xii). For the audit, teams should initially focus on mapping institutional assets (e.g., places of worship, shelters), because they often serve as sites of connection, places of engagement, and avenues for social capital development for students, families, and community members (Green, 2015b; Miller, 2012; Warren, 2005). See Appendix C for example of an actual map.

To create the maps,¹¹ teams can use Google Maps because it is free, intuitive, and readily accessible. When creating the community asset map, leaders and their teams should first identify the school. Then, teams should identify as many institutions that fit into the following categories: places of worship, social service organizations, and miscellaneous to include any other assets that may not be in the former two categories (e.g., nonprofits, financial institutions). Next, leaders and their teams should select five or more organizations (i.e., institutional assets) on the map and create a profile that highlights: the leaders and leadership team at each organization, each organization's mission, proximity of the organization to the school (e.g., 2 miles from the school), the resources that each organization has, contact information, ways that the organization could potentially partner with the school, and any other pertinent information. Identifying these institutions are important, because the CLT will often partner with these organizations for subsequent phases of the audit. Also, within teams, leaders should discuss the assets of each organization, why they were chosen, and how they might influence the school and community.

The community asset map(s) will show where institutional assets are in the community, which in our preparation program has enhanced aspiring school leaders' understandings about their school's local context and further pushed them to disrupt deficit views about the community. I have also found that the map often informs principals and teachers who may be unaware of these assets because they live in other communities. For example, after creating a community asset map, one leadership preparation student in my School-Community Relations course reflected,

My school mainly serves students of color from low-income backgrounds, and there is a food pantry directly across the street from our school. However, no one in our school knew about it until after I created the community asset map.

Another student noted, “The map helped me to understand the variety of assets I may have simply driven by on my daily commute.” One student commented,

I would not have known about the assets in my school’s community without creating the map. It helped me locate organizations that the school can partner up with. It also gave me a better idea of what the community has access to.

Interview community leaders. The asset map is also used to help teams identify five or more community-based organizations, so they can schedule one-on-one meetings with each organizations leader. The leaders of community-based organizations are important to the audit process because they occupy formal positions of power in the community (Lyon & Driskell, 2012), and can share resources and leverage networks for subsequent phases of the audit. Understanding who the community leaders are can also uncover the power structure in the community: those individuals and organizations that make key decisions in the community.

Moreover, the purpose of the one-on-one meetings is to learn more about the community, understand the organization’s background and resources, assess whether the leader would be a good fit for the CLT, and identify who the community’s informal leaders are. Furthermore, educational leaders and their teams should ask several key questions during the one-on-one meeting that will help them further their critical understanding about the community (Freire, 1970; see Appendix B). During these meetings, team members should also inquire about leaders joining the CLT to address some of the pressing school–community issues.

Additionally, during the one-on-one meetings with “formal” leaders, to identify two informal leaders in the community, team members should use Minkler and Hancock’s (2003) suggested questions (see Appendix A). Sometimes persons who hold informal community leadership positions are more in tune with the day-to-day realities of students and families, and have a more experiential understanding of the systems that impede equity. Thus, during one-on-one meetings with “informal community leaders,” the school leaders and their team should ask key questions that will help them deepen their critical understanding about the school–community, and understand what these leaders have to offer and how they might work in solidarity with the school and other local groups to address important issues (see Appendix B).

Shared community experiences. After creating the community asset map and conducting the one-on-one meetings, leaders and their teams should have a good sense of where they want to have their shared community experience.

The purpose of this aspect of the audit phase is to spend quality time in the community listening, supporting, and learning about the community (Campano et al., 2015). In addition to drawing on information from previous phases of the audit, to identify places to spend time, team member could consider: (a) bus routes that families take on a typical day; (b) organizations that students, families, and community members deem important; (c) organizations and places that the community leaders suggested; (d) organizations that serve student demographics reflective of the school (e.g., YMCA, shelter). For example, if 15% of the school's populations are identified as students who are homeless, then, school leaders and their teams should spend time at local shelters volunteering and supporting ways to address homelessness. Shared community experiences can also include attending local community meetings, rallies, marches, festivals, church services, patronizing local stores, hair salons and barbershops, volunteering at community-based organizations such as soup kitchens, or afterschool events at locations in the community, to name a few (Green, 2015a; Khalifa, 2012).

Shared community experiences should not be used to reinforce deficit perspectives about students, families, and community members. Instead, school leaders and their teams should approach these experiences in proactive and asset-based ways with awareness of the systems and structures that shape local actors' conditions (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). If deficit views emerge during these experiences, team members should challenge each other to recast such perspectives through Freire's (1970) critical thinking tenet that situates inequity on systems and structures not people. In addition, school leaders should approach every community experience with the tenets of Freirean dialogue, especially with love and faith in the people, and not to be the center of attention. They should also view the experiences as opportunities to learn and develop deep trusting relationships with the community. No matter where school leaders and their team spend time, they must continuously operate from the premise of equality—that is, everyone in the community is equally intelligent, despite their circumstance or societal position (Campano et al., 2015).

Spending time in the community can be powerful experiences for all persons involved, open lines of communication, and create partnerships between schools and community-based organizations. These shared community experiences can have a significant impact on school leaders and educators who have not previously engaged in such experiences. One aspiring principal in our leadership preparation program reflected on her experience at a local church:

Seeing families outside of school in such an intimate environment as church allowed me to gain a rare perspective into a different aspect of the

multi-dimensional lives that the families at the school lead. Furthermore, awareness of the fact that immigrant families at my school share a common community space that can help unify them and build their support network will be helpful in future efforts made to foster a partnership that does not currently exist between the school and church.

Having an opportunity to spend time in the community gave this student rare insight into students and families' lives outside of the school setting and also created an opportunity for collaborations between the school and church.

Another aspiring principal reflected on an experience after also attending an event at a local church: "When I told people from the church that I was from the school they said, 'You're the first person that we've ever met from the school even though it is only a few blocks away. Thanks for reaching out.'" Through this experience, this student was positioned to start a relationship with the church. Another student attended a community revitalization meeting and was able to offer input into a local decision after attending one meeting at the community health clinic. She explained:

Meeting attendees included the health care team representative, two employees from the bus station . . . and the chief of staff for a city council member. As the bus station representatives displayed maps and discussed which bus stops in the area were in the most need of weather shelters, I realized there was an opportunity to advocate for action regarding my school's long-standing concern over the safety of the nearest public bus stop on South Park. . . . Many of our students walk to this stop daily. Having used this bus route on multiple occasions, I am fully aware how dangerous the walk feels as cars whiz by at 50 mph. [Then] I raised my hand and spoke about the matter.

By attending this community meeting, the student was able to make connections between neighborhood and school interests, and advocate for changes that would benefit her school. She continued:

However, the city councilmen's chief of staff was sitting next to me and passed me his card and offered to look into the matter. The next week I walked to the bus stop and took pictures of the overgrown trees, which forced students and other pedestrians to walk within two to three feet of the busy road. The chief of staff and I exchanged emails and within a few weeks the trees had been trimmed back considerably. We still hope to have a sidewalk created one day, but the tree trimming made a visible difference for foot traffic before and after school.

Through spending time in the community and attending local meetings, this student was able to advocate for students' safety. All of these examples

provide a small glimpse into the importance of spending quality time in the school's local community. Even though principals have demanding schedules, it is imperative for them, along with their teams, to spend time with and in the community to develop authentic relationships with students, their families, and community members (Green, 2015a; Horsford, 2010; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012).

Phase III: Develop Community Leadership Team

School leaders and their teams should at least invite the three formal and two informal community leaders—as well as other persons whom they identify—to be part of the CLT. The CLT should also consist of other community stakeholders who are demographically representative of the community and who live in the area. From the start, the CLT should reinforce the asset and equity-based core beliefs and non-negotiables to drive all decisions and actions (Frattura & Capper, 2007). In addition, every person's contribution should be treated equally and not dismissed as uninformed. Persons from certain races, social class, and gender groups should not dominate conversations (e.g., White, middle-class, males). The leadership of this group should regularly rotate to ensure equality and diversity of voices and perspectives (Campano et al., 2015). This group will serve as the intermediate between the school and community, with representation from both places. As a CLT, this group will be tasked with taking several actions that mainly include gathering data to work toward equitable school–community change. Getting the right people on the CLT is imperative because this group will spearhead the rest of the audit process. This phase is aligned to dialogic humility, because educational leaders and their teams should be open to new ideas about with whom and how to work in solidarity with local actors for school–community equity (Freire, 1970).

Phase IV: Collect Equity, Asset-Based Community Data for Action

This phase of the audit has several action steps and is used to help the CLT better contextualize the community-based setting of the school, its assets, and its inequities. With these data, the CLT will work with local stakeholders to act on the most pressing concerns and have faith in the people of the CLT to transform these concerns as well as an indomitable hope that school–community equity is possible (Freire, 1970). The three subsections for this phase are collect data on school–community history, analyze community opportunity indicators, and conduct critical community dialogues (CCDs).

Collect data on school–community history. The CLT will first gather data on several key areas of the school and community’s history. Lyon and Driskell (2012) note that most stakeholders are tempted to skip or skim through community history to get to concrete change strategies. But, developing a rich understanding of a school–community’s history is essential for understanding how the community and school has changed over time, and for developing critical thinking about how the current economic, political, and social histories shape community inequity. To learn about the school–community history, the CLT should first draw on the experiences of community stakeholders on the team, which can offer tremendous insights into the school and community’s history. Also, the CLT should conduct a representative sample of community interviews with stakeholders who hold a historical perspective about the community and/or school (Lyon & Driskell, 2012). These individuals can include senior citizens, community residents of two or more decades, and persons who have worked in the school or community for at least 20 years. Members from the CLT should co-design the interview protocol and jointly conduct the interviews in community spaces. A main goal of the interviews is to develop a deeper and comprehensive understanding about people’s experiences in the community and to learn more about the most pressing school–community inequities (Green & Gooden, 2014; Horsford, 2010; Khalifa, 2012). In conducting these interviews, again the CLT must have faith in people to name their realities and solutions to community concerns (Freire, 1970).

The number of interviews may vary depending on the context. Ideally, however, the CLT should aim for interviews with somewhere between 5 to 50 people. But, most importantly, the CLT should aim for saturation with their interviews. In other words, the CLT should stop conducting interviews when nothing new emerges about: when and why the school and community were created, if and how the community has changed over time, the community’s perception about the school, key school–community inequitable areas of concern, and the community power structure for decisions. During the interviews, the CLT should also understand how race, social class, language, gender, ability, sexuality, religious preference, and other areas of socially constructed difference impact access to opportunities—like quality education for all community members, employment/business pursuits, and safety—as well as if and how they have changed over time. Additionally, all CLT members, especially school leaders, should also spend time analyzing and discussing archived newspaper articles, library archives, neighborhood plans, current and historical city plans, and any other useful archival documents to better understand the school–community (Green & Gooden, 2014; Lyon & Driskell, 2012).

Collect data on community opportunity indicators. Next, the CLT will assess community opportunity and equity. To do so, the CLT will collect and critically

analyze data on key opportunity and demographic indicators that have been defined in the literature as affecting students, families, and community members' quality-of-life (Miller, 2012; Powell, Reece, & Gambhir, 2007¹²). According to Lyon and Driskell (2012), community indicators can be used to describe, evaluate, and prescribe change for local conditions. More practically, the CLT should examine at least seven community opportunity and demographic indicators by zip code: (a) total population, (b) total population disaggregated by race, (c) median household income and disaggregated income levels by families, (d) total unemployment rate and disaggregated by race, (e) total poverty rate and disaggregated by race, (f) graduation rates, and (g) number of individuals 25 years and older with an associates degree or higher. These indicators should be used as a starting point and not the end; therefore, teams should revise these indicators as needed to fit their context. When creating additional indicators, the CLT should draw on Minkler and Hancock's (2003) suggestion that relevant community opportunity indicators: make sense to the community, measure things people care about, are powerful and carry social and political significance, and measure important community determinants, respectively.¹³

Next, the CLT should critically examine the data to understand which students and families are most adversely affected by these conditions and if they are centrally located in any particular area of the community. The community opportunity data should also be mapped to augment the asset maps with a more comprehensive picture of the community (Green, 2015b). The CLT should examine indicators across multiple levels because descriptive indicators, like community opportunity indicators, need a comparative benchmark to have greater meaning and to become evaluative (Lyon & Driskell, 2012). Hence, the CLT should comparatively evaluate these data at the community level (per zip code) and the city level, and look for areas of disproportionate and proportionate representation to identify salient places of equity and inequity between the community and city levels (Capper & Young, 2015). For example, if the city's poverty rate is 24% but the community's poverty rate is 48%, then the community's poverty rate is twice as high as the city's rate, which represents a major inequity in the community.

These data can be revealing and describe specific areas that need to be addressed in the community. Looking at these data with CLTs across the same school district and city can also be revealing as educational leaders can gain a comprehensive perspective about the ways in which certain communities are affected by inequity. Combining historical and contemporary data about the community will provide a more complete perspective of what has occurred and what is occurring in the community. With this information, the CLT can better understand the conditions before strategizing about what needs to be changed. However, as Lyon and Driskell (2012, p. 146) note, "Description,

while a necessary step to improving the quality of community life, seldom is sufficient by itself,” so these data must be linked to action, practices, and policies, which I discuss in the next phase.

Critical community dialogues. This part of the audit process is most important for transforming the previously collected data into useable information to act toward equitable change. The CCDs are the staple of the audit process because it is the space where a range of school–community stakeholders will share and exchange ideas, engage in ongoing discussions, identify community concerns, and strategize about solutions (Campano et al., 2015; Minkler & Hancock, 2003). It is important to note that CCD is not a one-time meeting to solicit community input that is never implemented or a space where school stakeholders control the meeting and set the agenda to chastise families about what they need to be doing. The critical community dialogues consist of four types of meetings, which should be ongoing. The CCDs should be held at different community locations, the CLT should jointly create the agenda for each meeting and rotate who facilitates them (Campano et al., 2015).

The First CCD is the *Community Aspiration Dialogue*. To begin, the CLT should establish group agreements to create boundaries for the conversations and to make sure that things get accomplished. During this CCD, the purpose is to dream about what the school(s) and community could and should be like. Seven questions across three areas (i.e., longevity, assets/improvements, and resources/participation) should guide the discussions in a mix of large and small groups. During small group interactions, representation from the CLT should be present in each group. Attendees should discuss a variation of these questions. A good starting place for discussion questions are found in Appendix B, Section 2. CLT members from the school in particular should humbly come to the people to openly listen to their aspirations and ideas, and not assume that they have all the answers (Freire, 1970).

The second CCD is the *Community Opportunity Dialogue* in which data about community opportunity indicators and equity (that was collected in Phase III), root causes to inequity, and potential solutions are shared and discussed. The attendees should also examine, discuss, and expand the community asset map(s), as community stakeholders will have an opportunity to identify additional institutional and other types of assets in the community. In deciding what assets need to be added to the map, community input should include members from various races, social classes, genders, spiritual/religious, sexual orientations, and ability backgrounds. Based on the community opportunity data, asset maps, community interviews, community history analysis, peoples’ input, and other data sources, the attendees should identify one to three pressing school–community concerns. The goals for this CCD

can be achieved during two to four meetings, and should be anchored in the belief that community equity is attainable (Freire, 1970).

The third CCD is the *Community Planning Dialogue* where stakeholders collectively develop an *equity-focused* vision statement for the community and school. Drawing on data from the first CCD about community aspirations, the vision statement should “collectively define a shared dream of what their community can become” (Sharpe et al., 2000, p. 209). Importantly, it may take three to five meetings to provide an opportunity for all community stakeholders to genuinely have input on the vision statement. Also, during these community planning dialogues the CLT and other school–community stakeholders should begin developing specific and measurable goals that address the pressing areas of concern (see Capper & Young, 2015). At the conclusion of this dialogue, the CLT should host a community forum with local elected official to inform her or him on the community’s plans and to solicit support. A 1-page document should also be produced to share with elected officials and their staff that succinctly documents what the issues are, the plan of action, and how the elected official could support. The fourth CCD is the *Community Action Dialogue*. The purpose of this CCD is to transform the information from the previous meetings into a succinct action plan. During this CCD, the CLT and other attendees should clearly outline the issues to be addressed, who will address them, identify resources will they use, identify what benchmarks will be used to assess progress, and identify an accountability system. Finally, this work does not end here. Rather, educational leaders and their teams should continuously engage in this process until there is complete equity within their school (e.g., 100% academic achievement and graduation rates, etc.) and outside of their school’s four walls (0% poverty and homelessness, etc.).

Conclusion

To address the growing levels of inequity in communities, it is imperative that educational leaders be prepared to understand and work with school–community stakeholders to tackle these concerns. While I have identified four phase of the community-based equity audit process, there are certainly more phases and subsections that could be added to the process based on the specifics of a school–community. But, like equity audits in educational leadership, the community-based equity audit “provide[s] significant, useful, and easy starting points” for those who want to use the process (Skrla et al., 2004, p. 155). In addition, through Freirean dialogue, the community-based equity audit provides school and community stakeholders with insights about the imperative to develop and approach this work with love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking (Freire, 1970).

Though this article introduced community-based equity audits, more empirical research is needed to document the qualitative and quantitative impacts of this work on student, school, and community outcomes over time. To do so, individual schools and districts should start including community-based equity audits into their practice. Additionally, educational leadership programs should integrate community-based equity audits into their preparation curriculum to better prepare aspiring school leaders with the knowledge and skills to work in school–communities, especially in under-served urban areas. This process is also useful for teachers, consultants, and students who are concerned about this work. While the community-based equity audit may seem like a long process, it can be conducted in shorter time periods. Even when conducted over a few months, the community-based equity audit can accelerate educational leaders’ learning about community. As one aspiring principal noted, “Performing the community-based equity audit was a learning experience for me. I learned more information about the community in these past few months than in the combined years that I have worked at my school.”

Moreover, this article makes several key contributions to the field of educational leadership. First, it extends the rich body of research on equity audits to include schools’ local communities. Second, one of the critical theoretical elements of this approach is its collective and community-based articulation of leadership. In doing so, it contributes to existing research in the field that aims to extend the notions of educational leadership beyond schools’ four walls (e.g., Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Khalifa, 2012; Miller et al., 2011). Third, this article provides educational leaders with a practical approach for working with local stakeholders in equitable ways. Finally, the community-based equity audit provides a bottom–up, community-based approach to address school–community inequities, and more importantly, offers educational leaders and those who prepare them practical strategies and a place to start for doing this work.

Appendix A

Questions to ask to identify informal community leaders

1. When this community has had a problem in the past what person(s) has been involved in working to solve it?
2. Whom do people in this neighborhood go to for help or advice?
3. Whom do children go to for help or advice?
4. Who gets things done in the community?

Appendix B

Some questions to ask “formal” and “informal” community leaders during one-on-one meetings

Section 1: Questions for Formal Community Leaders

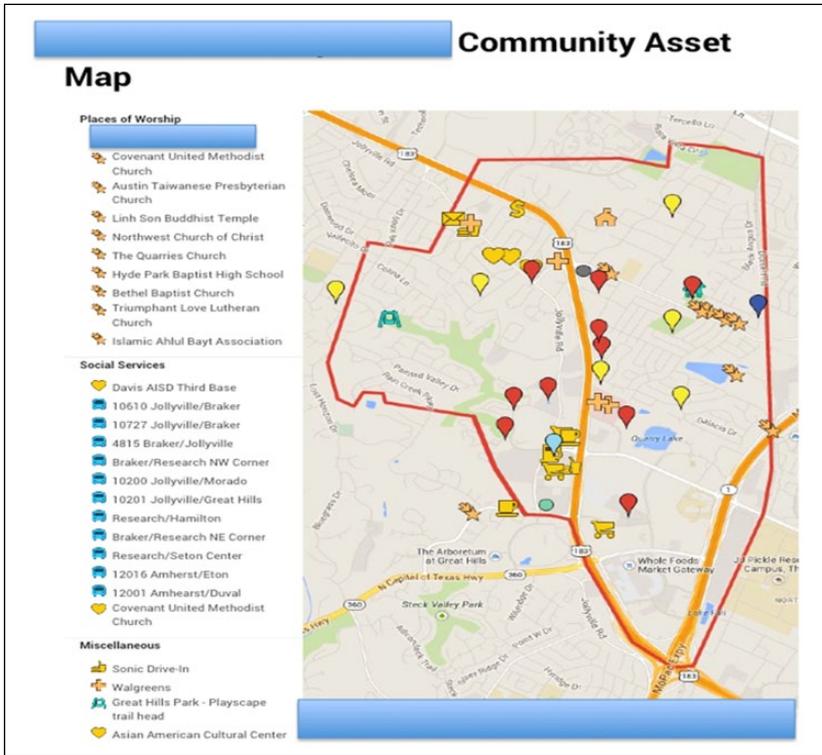
1. What is your organization’s history in the community, and given this history, what are the assets in the community?
2. What systems, structures, policies, and practices contribute to school and community inequity?
3. In what ways does your organization support members of the community, especially students and families?
4. What are some of your current and long-term goals for improving the community in equitable ways?
5. What resources can your organization contribute to these goals, and what other organizations do you partner with (and in what ways) to address these goals?
6. How and in what ways might we collaborate to address community-school concerns?
7. For me to gain a better understanding of the community, what experience would you suggest I participate in, why, and does your organization offer any of these experiences?

Section 2: Questions for Informal Community Leaders and during Aspiration CCD

1. How long have you lived in this community and how has that experience been?
2. What are some things that you like about living in this community? If you had a magic wand, what would you change about this community?
3. What is your dream for this community and the schools located within it?
4. What skills, interests, and abilities do you contribute toward equitable community change?
5. If there were others, especially at the local school that shared similar vision would you be willing to partner with them or fold your existing efforts into such an initiative?
6. What would excite you to become involved (or more involved) in improving our community?

7. What are your hopes for children ten years from now in our community?
8. For me and other stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the community, what experience would you suggest I participate in, and why?

Appendix C



Example Community Asset Map.

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Notes

1. In this article, the term *urban* is used to describe geographic location (i.e., inner city), although I realize that it has other racial and social class connotations. This research is not in anyway intended to essentialize “urban” and “low-income or under-served communities of color.” It is also important to note that the community-based equity audit can be used in suburban and rural school districts.
2. Especially African American.
3. I have designed and taught a course on School-Community Relations in my university’s Principal Preparation Program for the last 2 years. Per institutional review board approval, students have voluntarily allowed for me to share their quotes and experiences.
4. Children should also include all people in this context, and refers to students, their families, and all community members. However, I focus on children because of the focus of this article.
5. Equity according to this definition in schools may manifest as all students having access to high-quality teachers, instruction, and learning opportunities. In communities, equity as such might manifest in that all children, their families, and community members have access to safety, high-quality employment opportunities, quality housing, and so on.
6. According to Capper and Young (2015), proportional representation means, “the demographics of the school are reflected in every classroom, activity, setting, or experience within the school” (p. 191). However, the authors’ explicitly state that proportionate representation does not apply to student achievement measures, as the ultimate goal should be for 100% of students to score in the top range on standardized state achievement test (see Capper & Young, 2015).
7. Scott’s (1990) idea of the “hidden transcript” is a type of critique of power that goes on behind public interactions (or “offstage”) in which the holders of power do not see or hear. For example, this might include parents voicing their true positions about a school–community initiative at their homes instead of at a school event with administrators, teachers, and other people who hold formal positions of power in the school system.
8. The collective political, cultural, and economic histories are not just with those groups who have been oppressed but are also connected with those groups that have done the oppressing. Therefore, in this sense, community can include both those who have been oppressed and those who have done (or do) the oppressing (see Freire, 1970).
9. I completely acknowledge that defining community by zip codes or attendance boundaries and even neighborhoods can be problematic and limiting, as persons who live in community spaces may choose to define community differently. As such, when the CLT is formed, they should spend time discussing if, and how,

- they might want to define what community means, but again, these stakeholders should understand the reasons why zip codes were initially used—to obtain opportunity data from local, state, and federal sources. Groups are encouraged to create their own definitions of community, thus, this article just offers places to start.
10. Both school leadership teams and CLTs should explore ways to make students central to this work and also look for ways to connect the CBEA process to curriculum and class assignments (e.g., project-based learning, critical literacy, place-based education) to inform the process.
 11. See above for specific examples of “core beliefs.”
 12. I am currently designing a web-based platform for schools and communities to make unique maps to display this information.
 13. Minkler and Hancock (2003) refer to these as face validity, social value, and theoretical and empirical validity, respectively.

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