Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District: A District's Support of Principals' Culturally Responsive Leadership Practice

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ENHANCING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICE IN A DISTRICT:
A DISTRICT'S SUPPORT OF PRINCIPALS' CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP
PRACTICE

Dissertation
by

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Abstract

This qualitative single site case study examined how district administrators in one racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse Massachusetts school district supported and strengthened principals' culturally responsive leadership practice. Building coherent culture and structures that provide space to critically self-reflect and collaboratively learn are essential. Data collection included interviews with district administrators and principals, observations of leadership meetings, document review, and a survey. Findings revealed district administrators established collaborative relationships with principals by employing a coherent service-oriented approach. Participants perceived the intentionality of the superintendent's efforts as foundational to building trust, however prior experiences with district leadership impeded these efforts. The superintendent controlled sensemaking to signal equity as a district priority, yet the lack of a shared understanding of culturally responsive practice led participants to conflate culturally responsive practice with other district endorsed equity practices. Attempts were made to align structures and tools to equity priorities, however culturally responsive practices were subsumed within other equity initiatives creating variance in the perception of the effectiveness of how structures and tools support principals' culturally responsive leadership practice. Implications include developing a district definition of culturally responsive practice and using equity

practices as a scaffold to support principals' understanding and enactment of culturally responsive practices that bring critical self-reflection and conversations about racial and cultural bias to the forefront. Future research may extend this study to analyze sensegiving interactions and examine the impact of these interactions on principals' culturally responsive leadership practice.

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Dedication

To my world-

My husband, Tom, and our three incredible children, Lily, Charlie, and Mollie.

I dedicate this to you.

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CHAPTER ONE[1]

Introduction

The National Center of Education Statistics found that in 2017 more than half of all U.S. public school students who identify as Black, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander attended schools whose enrollments were 75% or more students of color (de Brey et al., 2019). These same data also show that the school-aged population is becoming more racially diverse, with the population of White students dropping from 62% in 2000 to 51% in 2017.

The shifting demographic is important given the research showing the relationship between student achievement and the racial isolation of historically marginalized student populations. For example, Berends and Peñaloza (2010) used a national dataset to discover that between the years of 1972 and 2004 Black and Latino students attended schools whose student populations became increasingly racially isolated and that such isolation corresponded significantly to the increase in the achievement gap experienced by these groups during this time period. Similarly, a quasi-experimental study of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District found that the racial achievement gap in high school math scores increased after a court order prevented the district from continuing its desegregation busing program (Billings, Deming, & Rockoff, 2014). This racial achievement gap has been persistent in U.S. K-12 schools despite numerous policy efforts that have aimed to create equitable outcomes for all students (Lee, 2004; Ferguson, 2007; Hanushek et al., 2019).

Given the persistent disparities between racial groups in academic achievement as measured by assessments, the growing population of students of color, and the increased racial

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[1] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Daniel S. Anderson, James J. Greenwood, Sarah L. McLaughlin, Jason W. Medeiros, Tina C. Rogers.

isolation of these students in school, districts face a compelling need to develop, support, and communicate an intentional strategy to support the learning of historically marginalized students. Supporting and sustaining culturally responsive practice is one such strategy.

Gay (2018) points out two facts that demonstrate the need for culturally responsive teaching. She shows that there are consistent levels of student achievement over time for various racial and ethnic groups, but at the same time, there is a wide variation of individual performances within each group. She points out that:

> Achievement patterns among ethnic groups in the United States are too persistent to be attributed only to individual limitations. The fault lies as well within the institutional structures, procedures, assumptions, and operational styles of schools, classrooms, and the society at large. (p. xxii)

In order to confront the inequities that Gay describes, districts require a coordinated, thorough approach to organizational learning in order to alter the institutional and individual dispositions and practices that contribute to these gaps. Coffin and Leithwood (2000) argue for a systemic approach that involves distributing learning throughout individuals in a district, strengthening the relationships and interactions of these individuals, and enhancing the tools and structures that support adult learning. Understanding how school districts respond to the need for their organizations to be culturally responsive is critical to reducing achievement disparities. As such, this research seeks to identify how educators throughout a school district make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice. The specific research questions that we addressed are:

1. How do district administrators, school leaders, and teachers make sense of what it means to be a culturally responsive practitioner?

2. What do those educators do in their roles to enact their understanding of culturally

responsive practice?

Each member of our research team examined a unique facet of school district practice

that has the potential to influence how educators understand the expectation to be culturally

responsive (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Individual Research Topic and Level of Analysis

Daniel S. Anderson	Influencing educator CRP	District Administrators, Educators
James J. Greenwood	Understanding how educators develop CRP	School Leaders, Teachers
Sarah L. McLaughlin	Engaging families with CRP	District Administrators, School Leaders, Educators
Jason W. Medeiros	Understanding CRP through supervision & evaluation	School Leaders, Teachers
Tina C. Rogers	Supporting principals' CRLP	District Administrators, Principals

An abstract for each of the individual studies can be found in Appendices A-D.

A Note on Language

It is important to note that this paper moves between terms for asset-based and affirming

practices such as culturally relevant teaching, culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant

pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and culturally responsive leadership, as well as other

terms. Often related and overlapping, these terms build on one another even when using slightly

varying language and concepts. We use the term "culturally responsive practice" (CRP) as an

umbrella to encompass discrete elements of practice, such as culturally responsive school

leadership (Khalifa, 2018), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018), culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2009), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017). When we refer to the work of specific scholars, we use their terminology, with the understanding that it fits into this broader frame. The literature review will discuss these pedagogies and literature further.

Furthermore, we feel it is important to clarify our use of certain terminology - specifically, "historically marginalized students." As Gay (2010) explains, diversity, identity, and positionality are significant and multifaceted:

> It is also important for authors and teachers to declare how they understand and engage with diversity. My priorities are race, culture, and ethnicity as they relate to underachieving students of color and marginalized groups in K-12 schools. Other authors may focus instead on gender, sexual orientation, social class, or linguistic diversity as specific contexts for actualizing general principles of culturally responsive teaching. It is not that one set of priorities is right or wrong, or that all proponents of culturally responsive teaching should endorse the same constituencies. (p. 52)

Following Gay's example, we want to clarify that our focus is on students from racially minoritized groups (i.e., students of color), students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and linguistically minoritized students. We further detail these groupings - and how we operationalized them - within the methods section. We turn now to synthesize the literature pertinent to the research questions.

Literature Review

This study seeks to understand how educators throughout a district make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice (CRP). There is a growing body of literature that explores

the skills, strategies, knowledge, and mindsets that classroom educators and leaders require to serve effectively in schools whose populations consist predominantly of historically marginalized students. In the subsequent literature review, we first describe the work defining CRP. This includes exploring literature on culturally responsive teaching, the centrality of race in culturally responsive practice, characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy, how educators develop their CRP, culturally responsive leadership practices, and literature on culturally sustaining practice as subsidiary elements therein. We then turn to examine the literature on how districts influence changes in school practice generally. Finally, we explore literature related to our conceptual framework of sensemaking.

Culturally Responsive Practice

Culturally responsive practice exists within the larger framework and scholarship of multicultural education as originally theorized by Banks (1994) and further expanded upon over the years by Banks and several others including Banks et al. (2001), Gay (2002), and Nieto (1996). Multicultural education is a set of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that students must develop in order to interact positively with people from diverse backgrounds (Banks et al., 2001). Relatedly, the theory of culturally relevant practice is grounded in three distinct propositions for outcomes: producing students who can achieve academically, producing students who demonstrate cultural competence, and developing students who can both understand and critique the existing social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.474). In her study of teachers who successfully demonstrate cultural responsiveness, Ladson-Billings concluded that "the common feature they shared was a classroom practice grounded in what they believe about the educability of the students" (p. 484). Culturally responsive practitioners believe that all students, regardless of racial and cultural backgrounds, can be educated. Gay (2013) pointed out

that this disposition is fundamentally different from the way that educational programs and practices have historically been designed for students of color.

According to Gay (2010), "Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioral expression of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognizes the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning" (p. 31). Gay (2002) goes on to further describe culturally responsive pedagogy as:

...using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly. (p. 106)

She emphasized the impact on student academic outcomes, explaining that, "...academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters" (p. 106). In essence, culturally proficient and culturally responsive teachers must actively draw from and engage their students' cultural backgrounds in order to effectively teach them. This involves a tacit understanding of their students' backgrounds, a recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of these cultures, and active resistance to deficit model thinking by working against negative stereotypes and bias. This is especially important as Gay (2013) noted that "Culturally responsive teaching requires replacing pathological and deficient perceptions of students and communities of color with more positive ones" (p.54).

Not all teachers engage in CRP - even though they themselves might self-identify as culturally responsive practitioners. As Warren (2013) found in his research on teachers' culturally responsive interactions with Black students, it may sometimes be that "teachers who

identify themselves as culturally responsive are either not clear about what it means to be culturally responsive…[or] maintain deficit perspectives of diverse youth" (p.175). It is therefore critically important to aid educators in developing a clearer understanding of what CRP is, the characteristics of culturally responsive practitioners, and how they develop such practice.

The argument for CRP is further supported and reinforced by the changing demographics of U.S. public schools, particularly in light of the predominately White teaching body. As stated by Howard (2003), "The increasing degree of racial homogeneity among teachers and heterogeneity among students carries important implications for all educators" (p. 196). This disconnect between the racial identity of teachers (predominantly White educators) and an increasingly racially diverse student body (predominantly students of color) can result in cultural disconnects or racial mismatches that can impede successful CRP practice and further contribute to racial achievement gaps (McGrady & Reynolds, 2012). As such, the importance of racial identity in education must be considered.

Centrality of Race in Culturally Responsive Practice

The importance of considering race, particularly teachers examining their own racial identity as well as those of their students, is a key tenet of CRP. In their work applying a critical race perspective to culturally responsive teaching, Hayes and Juarez (2012) posited that culturally responsive pedagogy must talk about race and "address the sociopolitical context of White supremacy within education and society" (p. 4). Work by Milner (2017) argued that expanding conceptualizations of CRP since Ladson-Billings' initial work have tended to downplay the significance of race. While lauding the expanded definitions' attempts to encapsulate culture and ethnicity, he believes race must remain central stating, "Clearly, culture is not only about race; however, race is a central dimension of culture, and for some racial and

ethnic groups, race is the most salient feature of their cultural identity" (p.5). His adherence to

the centrality of race in CRP aligns with the findings of several related educational studies.

In another study on the role of race in education, McGrady and Reynolds (2012) analyzed

the relationship between teachers' race and their perceptions of students of varying races. In an

analytic sample of around 9,000 students of English teachers, and around 9,500 students of math

teachers, they found that the effects of racial mismatch (when teacher and students racial

identities differed) were significant and often depended on the racial/ethnic statuses of both the

teacher and the student. Their findings show that, "Among students with white teachers, Asian

students are usually viewed more positively than white students, while black students are

perceived more negatively." (p.3). Their results demonstrate that even when controlling for

differences in students' test scores, family socioeconomic status, and other school characteristics,

Black students evaluated by White teachers often receive more negative ratings than White

students evaluated by White teachers. The study concluded that "White teachers' ratings of

students' academic ability and behaviors in the classroom appear susceptible to the racial

stereotypes that depict Black and Hispanic youth as having lower academic potential and Asian

youth as model students" (p.14). Given the disparate evaluation by White educators, coupled

with the fact that most teachers are White, White teachers especially must examine how race

impacts education and their work with students. As Boucher (2016) stated in his study of White

teachers working with African American students: "if we are to close the gap in achievement

between white and black students, we must focus on the people who are currently teaching those

students, and the vast majority of them are white" (p.88). To be clear, this is not to suggest that

White teachers are incapable of successfully teaching students of color. In his work examining

White teachers in urban classrooms, Goldenberg (2014) stated, "I am not inferring that racial

mismatch itself is inherently a problem...However, to be a successful White teacher in a non-White classroom, White teachers must recognize students' nondominant culture and learn how to engage with it" (p. 113).

There are frameworks like universal design for learning (UDL) which are designed to help teachers differentiate their teaching practices to reach diverse learners. However, Kieran and Anderson (2019) caution that teachers who employ frameworks like UDL, but fail to recognize the significance of factors like race and culture when doing so, run the risk of reinforcing and exacerbating disparities in achievement between students of different races.

In his work examining how White teachers maintain and enact dominant racial ideologies, Picower (2009) contended that, "...teachers' life experiences socialize them into particular understandings of race and difference" (p 197). Supporting this notion further, Howard (2006) stated in his reflective work on White teachers in multicultural schools,

> ...teachers must know about themselves before they can ever become transformative educators for diverse students...an unexamined life on the part of a White teacher [any teacher] is a danger to every student and the more I have examined my own stuff related to race, culture, and differences, the less likely it is that I will consciously or unconsciously expose students to my own assumptions of rightness...or my blind perpetuation of the legacy of White privilege. (p. 127)

In related work on the importance of race in teaching, Howard (2003) concurred stating that, "To become culturally relevant, teachers need to engage in honest, critical reflection that challenges them to see how their positionality influences their students in either positive or negative ways" (p.197). He expounded that race and culture are important concepts in teaching and learning and therefore, teachers must, "...reflect on their own racial and cultural identities

and...recognize how these identities coexist with the cultural compositions of their students" (p. 196). That is to say, education involves the interactions that occur in that interplay between teacher identity and student identity. Howard continued that, "The racial and cultural incongruence between teachers and students merits ongoing discussion, reflection, and analysis of racial identities on behalf of teachers, and is critical in developing a culturally relevant pedagogy for diverse learners" (p.196). Having defined CRP, and detailed the importance of race therein, we now outline characteristics of what culturally responsive teaching looks like in practice.

Characteristics of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Although using slightly different terminology from the previously described culturally responsive practice, Ladson-Billings provided a set of insights about culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (2009) identified and outlined several initial overarching characteristics of culturally relevant teachers. They "have high self-esteem and a high regard for others" (p. 37). They "see themselves as part of the community, see teaching as giving back to the community, and encourage their students to do the same" (p. 41). These teachers "see teaching as an art and themselves as artists" (p. 45). They "believe that all students can succeed" (p. 48), "help students make connections between their community, national, and global identities" (p. 52), and "see teaching as 'digging knowledge out' of students" (p. 56).

She goes on to offer several tenets of culturally relevant practice. First, in their classrooms, "Students whose educational, economic, social, political, and cultural futures are most tenuous are helped to become intellectual leaders in the classroom" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 126). Second, "Students are apprenticed in a learning community rather than taught in an isolated and unrelated way" (p. 127). Third, "Students' real-life experiences are legitimized as

they become part of the 'official' curriculum" (p. 127). Fourth, "Teachers and students participate in a broad conception of literacy that incorporates both literature and oratory" (p. 127). Fifth, "Teachers and students engage in a collective struggle against the status quo" (p. 127). And sixth, "Teachers are cognizant of themselves as political beings" (p. 128). These observed characteristics exemplify the disposition toward practice required for students' learning and empowerment.

Gay (2018) described several dimensions of different learning styles of students to which culturally relevant teachers attend: "procedural," "communicative," "substantive," "environmental," "organizational," "perceptual," "relational," and "organizational" (p. 207-208). She argued that for teachers to effectively instruct students, they must be mindful of the individual differences and variations in each of these areas.

Hammond (2015) further distilled the elements of culturally relevant teaching and frames them in the context of brain science, outlining the profile of a "warm demander" (p. 97). She used this term to describe a teacher with both the disposition of deep belief in student potential and high expectations, as well as the effective pedagogical practices that enable all students to succeed. They thus both possess high "personal warmth" and demonstrate "active demandingness" (p. 99).

Hammond (2015) offered specific examples of how teachers accomplish such dispositions and actions. She noted that in building relationships, a warm demanding teacher explicitly demonstrates a "focus on building rapport and trust. Expresses warmth through non-verbal ways like smiling, touch, warm or firm tone of voice, and good-natured teasing" (p. 99). Along with demonstrating "personal regard for students by inquiring about important people and

events in their lives" the teacher thus "[e]arns the right to demand engagement and effort" from the student (p. 99).

Meanwhile, on the instructional side, such a teacher maintains "high standards and offers emotional support and instructional scaffolding to dependent learners for reaching the standards" (p. 99). This enables the teacher to guide students to "productive struggle" (p. 99) necessary for learning. Hammond characterized the warm demander teacher who exhibits these dispositions and skills, saying they are: "Viewed by students as caring because of personal regard and 'tough love' stance" (p. 99). Having established the various traits that culturally responsive practitioners possess, we now turn to examine the research on developing such capacity.

How Teachers Develop Culturally Responsive Practice

In an early work on multicultural education, Campbell and Farrell (1985) identified five overarching categories of multicultural education. These categories were: "environmental/affective setting," "subject competency," "assessment," "reporting progress and referrals," and "learning strategy and materials" (p.139). While their study identified the various competencies in each category from a sampling of 54 teachers in the Dade County school district, they paid little attention to how these teachers developed these competencies. Subsequent studies over the ensuing years have attempted to examine the ways that teachers develop their cultural competency, many focusing on teacher education programs and how they address multicultural education with pre-service teachers (Sleeter, 2001; Garmon, 2004; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Garmon, 2005; Siwatu, 2007; Sandell & Tupy, 2015). Reviews of these programs, however, demonstrate varying levels of success. Existing literature shows that teacher education programs have struggled to effectively equip teachers with the necessary skills to effectively teach increasingly diverse student populations (Sleeter, 2001; Allen et al., 2017).

Indeed, in an examination of the nearly 1,200 teacher education programs nationwide, Cross (2005) found that very few of them are truly grounded in a social justice framework that forwards CRP. Moreover, as Ukpokodu (2011) noted in her work examining the development of teachers' cultural competence in teacher education programs, despite the quantity of research and scholarship on teaching and learning, teachers continued to struggle to teach diverse groups of students. She asserted:

> Even as the scholarship on multicultural education has become pervasive and diversity standards are required, many candidates are graduating from teacher education programs without developing the cultural competence needed to be successful teachers in today's classrooms. (p.433)

Given the struggle to develop CRP in pre-service teachers, the role of principals in developing these practices becomes even more critical.

Culturally Responsive Leadership Practice of Principals

The way principals lead a school has major effects on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004). Most critical is the way they shape a school culture that focuses on student learning and stimulates educator improvement (Louis & Wahlstom, 2011). Furthermore, establishing a culture that is built on strong relationships with students, families, community members, and staff positively impacts students' success (Khalifa, 2013; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Given this information and the opportunity gap that exists for historically marginalized students, Khalifa (2018) argued that principals are "best positioned to ensure that aspects of schooling […] become culturally responsive" (p. 53). It is for this reason that principals' culturally responsive leadership practice is critical.

Johnson (2006) furthered Ladson-Billings's CRP research to demonstrate the need for culturally responsive leaders who consider various historical, social, and political contexts when responding to the needs of their historically marginalized student populations. Culturally responsive leaders lead in a way that ensures equitable opportunities to learn and in doing so think "about culture differently beyond celebrating and embracing diversity, to see culture as an active force of change politically, socially, and economically" (Lopez, 2015, p. 172).

Culturally responsive principals lead with an equity lens and intentionally challenge dominant epistemologies. Khalifa (2018) described culturally responsive leadership as a set of behaviors that promotes an inclusive school community that positively impacts historically marginalized students and families. He specifically identified four behaviors: "(a) being critically self-reflective; (b) developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula; (c) promoting inclusive, anti-oppressive school contexts; and (d) engaging students' Indigenous (or local neighborhood) community contexts" (p. 13).

This research suggests the importance for leaders of majority-minority schools to understand how to support students, families, and teachers whose dominant culture differs from their own. Though this literature focuses on culturally responsive leadership, it is worthy to note its relation to social justice leadership. Theoharis (2007) defined social justice leadership as "principals mak[ing] issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalized conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership, practice and vision" (p. 223). Culturally responsive and social justice leaders make intentional decisions to eliminate oppressive behaviors and structures in schools. Several empirical studies demonstrate how culturally responsive and social justice leaders establish an inclusive culture that challenges past inequities and supports the learning and growth of others.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies and Concluding Reflection

Because we examined various aspects of cultural responsiveness, from teaching to leading, and drawing on the ideas of various thinkers, we use the term culturally responsive practice (CRP) to incorporate all of the threads above. As Paris and Alim (2017) noted, culturally sustaining pedagogy builds on previous "asset pedagogies" to further reject the "deficit approaches" of the past which "viewed the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of many students and communities of color as deficiencies to be overcome in learning the demanded and legitimized dominant language, literacy, and cultural ways of schooling" (p. 4).

Throughout the literature referenced above, a consistent theme was that culturally responsive educators have the capacity to reject deficit mindsets linked to the languages, cultures, and abilities of historically marginalized students, their families, and the communities in which they live. These educators embrace an inherent belief in the educability of all students, a willingness to challenge the status quo, and a willingness to reflect on how one's identity informs practice. In addition to beliefs, the literature outlines the pedagogical skills required in the classroom. These include the ability to set high expectations while offering high levels of support, the ability to scaffold instruction, and the ability to bridge students' lived experiences into classroom learning experiences.

While this literature offers valuable insight into the beliefs and skills required for closing racial achievement gaps, the focus of most of this research is at the classroom or school level. Building-level leaders and educators who have access to this knowledge base have the potential to shift school-level practice in meaningful ways, but there is little offered as to how districts can sustain this work throughout the school system. The next section describes research conducted on the ways school districts generally influence school-level practices.

District Administrators' Influence on School Practice

Districts and district leaders are responsible for building the capacity of individuals and the district, writ large (Honig, 2008). Leithwood et al., (2000) synthesized results from three qualitative multi-case study designed to identify the conditions that support (or fail to support) professional learning at various levels across school districts. They concluded that district and school leadership were most influential in fostering both individual and collective learning when districts' missions and visions prioritized continuous professional growth.

Whenever districts take on new initiatives, they benefit from building a learning infrastructure. For example, Florian et al., (2000) examined 15 districts from 13 states to evaluate the practices that contribute to successful policy implementation. The study explored both state-level and district-level strategies. They found that districts that emphasized eight specific strategies experienced a successful implementation process. Among them were practices similar to those found by Leithwood et al., (2000). These included placing an emphasis on building instructional capacity, supporting collaboration among teachers, evaluating the new practices being implemented, and aligning district finances to their goals.

A number of studies discovered similar results. Rorrer et al., (2008) further support the role districts can have in building teacher capacity throughout their organization. This study used a six-stage iterative narrative synthesis to propose a theory for districts to engage in systematic change that advances equity. They found, in part, that districts must intentionally build capacity. They noted three strategies as fundamental to building capacity: (a) communication, planning, and collaboration; (b) monitoring goals, instruction, and efforts through the use of data and accountability, and (c) acquiring and aligning resources. Similarly, Leithwood and Azah (2017) conducted a literature review and compiled a list of district characteristics linked to contributing

to student achievement. They then measured the extent to which these characteristics influenced achievement in a sample of school districts in Ontario, Canada. The characteristics with the strongest effects on student achievement were having a learning-oriented improvement process, having a clear mission, and using evidence to adjust practice.

The research above consistently highlights how districts can build capacity through a clear mission, strategic use of resources, and institution of a collaborative learning-oriented process for implementing new strategies. At the same time, some authors caution that this model of district leadership may not transfer easily into every context. For example, Rorrer and Skrla (2005) described successful leaders as policy mediators whose skill set should include relationship building, culture building (specifically, a culture of achievement), and flexibility (an ability to adapt policy to fit a local context). Trujillo (2016) extended this emphasis on the local context by warning how most district research ignores the systemic variables within communities that contribute to school outcomes: "Without also acknowledging the predictive power of contextual factors related to poverty, race, or distinctive historical realities...some of these studies shift attention away from….inequities that shape districts' capacity" (p. 37). Most of the studies referenced above focused on enacting policies and practices that implement new standards (e.g., curriculum standards, student assessment standards, and accountability standards) that arise from federal or state mandates. These policies are often broad and fail to take into consideration the unique cultural, political, and socio-economic landscape in which a school district operates.

CRP acknowledges these local identities and aims to reframe them as assets to be nurtured as contributing agents to student learning. Our study sought to understand how such

practices are enacted throughout a district. There is little research, however, exploring how to enhance high-leverage CRP throughout a school district.

Additionally, the research focused on supporting the CRP of building-level faculty and administration is lagging. In a review of empirical studies measuring the effects of in-service interventions that promote culturally responsive teaching, Bottiani et al., (2018) found only 10 studies that met their methodological criteria and thus were unable to make conclusions regarding patterns around the efficacy of such interventions. In addition to these challenges of measurement, there is little research that examines how school districts pursue a coherent and consistent application of CRP throughout their operations. Much of the literature focuses on school-level actors alone or in the context of teacher education programs.

Despite the broad array of literature on individual classroom and leadership implementation of CRP, research has not addressed how a district acts to strengthen CRP throughout its schools and classrooms. This gap in understanding how educators successfully develop their capacity, how school leaders support and evaluate CRP, and how districts broadly enact support of CRP comprehensively motivated the individual portions of our study.

Conceptual Framework

As the student population of public schools grows increasingly more diverse and increasingly different from the culture of school staff, it is critical for district and school leaders to understand how educators make sense of their responsibility to improve student outcomes for these students. As noted above, adopting a culturally responsive approach requires developing certain understandings and skills about how historically marginalized students learn and succeed. Sensemaking offers a frame through which we can examine how such understanding and skills develop within a district.

Sensemaking can be applied to a variety of sectors and organizations. It is frequently applied when analyzing an organization's experience in times of unpredictability, shifting conditions, and emerging challenges (Weick, 1995). As school districts enroll growing populations of historically marginalized students, there are changing conditions and new challenges that educators must address in order to best serve their students. How individuals understand, interpret, and respond to changes in the situated context of their school setting plays a critical role in how educators implement reform efforts (Spillane et al., 2002). The social interactions that occur as a result of these changes also inform individual sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis; 2005; Coburn, 2006). In addition to how one's own positionality impacts their understanding and beliefs of race and culture, a change in the school's demography will alter how educators perceive the context in which they work.

Weick (1995) presented "sensemaking" as a means to understand the process of how individuals and organizations assign meaning to events. Weick's research focused largely on organizational disasters that initiate the process of people trying to make sense of unexpected events. Maitlis and Christianson (2014) examined a broad set of sensemaking literature to clarify the types of triggers that can prompt sensemaking, including "cues--such as issues, events, or situations--for which the meaning is ambiguous and/or outcomes uncertain." Such cues "interrupt people's ongoing flow, disrupting their understanding of the world and creating uncertainty about how to act" (p. 70). Weick, as well as Ancona (2012), argued that sensemaking consists of a continuous process that may be linear or nonlinear. Sensemaking "involves coming up with plausible understandings and meanings; testing them with others and via action; and then refining our understanding or abandoning them in favor of new ones that better explain a shifting

reality" (Ancona, 2012, p. 5). In this sense, sensemaking presents a cycle of understanding, enacting one's understanding, and refining that understanding through interaction with others.

Organizational actors do not simply consume and interpret new information in one static exchange. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) used one university's implementation of a strategic plan to map out the iterative process by which leaders and stakeholders live through a dynamic change process. They explained how leaders provide information and guidance to key constituents (sensegiving), which is consumed and interpreted by their audience (sensemaking), who, in turn, communicate signals back to leadership corresponding to their levels of understanding, agreement, and capacity (sensegiving). As a result, the organization enters a cycle of sensegiving and sensemaking that allows for the mutual exchange of information, the refinement of strategy, and the targeted allocation of resources.

Similarly, in her study of three British symphony orchestras, Maitlis (2005) examined the social processes of organizational sensemaking. Her framework centers on the reciprocal and dynamic process of sensemaking and sensegiving to influence others' understanding of a situation. Building on the work of Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), Maitlis concluded that organizational sensemaking is a fundamental social process where "organization members interpret their environment in and through interactions with others, constructing accounts that allow them to comprehend the world and act collectively" (p. 21). She further asserted organizational sensemaking is informed by two distinct process characteristics: control and animation. These characteristics describe how heterogeneous groups interact throughout the sensemaking process. The amount of leader sensegiving is directly related to the degree of control exerted with the process. As such, when leaders use structured and consistent opportunities (e.g., performance evaluation, staff meetings, professional development) they can

exert a high degree of control over the sensemaking process for stakeholders. Simultaneously, the level of stakeholder sensegiving animates the sensemaking process by signaling to leaders how they understand the targeted concept. An animated stakeholder group increases the flow of information and the frequency of interactions pertaining to the targeted behavior. Maitlis posited that the variance in both control and animation leads to four distinct forms of organizational sensemaking: guided, fragmented, restricted, and minimal. No one form of sensemaking is preferred; instead, she argues that the form rightly depends on the type of outcome sought. For instance, she described how guided organizational sensemaking is "particularly valuable in situations that require the development of a rich, multifaceted account that can be used as a resource for ongoing and spontaneous actions, such as establishing an organization's core values" (p.47). Her quadrant framework offers a structure to examine the intersection of leader and stakeholder sensegiving within a sensemaking process.

Such a lens is important for our aim at understanding how educators understand and enact culturally responsive practice, because it demands a paradigmatic shift in their professional practice. The reciprocal and countless interactions between teachers, building leaders, and district leaders are central to sensemaking. The complexities of these interactions often lead to differences in the way individuals understand and interpret information. Similarly, CRP emphasizes the need for teachers and leaders to reflect on their own cultural experiences and perspectives to understand how their bias impacts and influences others. Therefore, sensemaking provides this research team with a systematic process to evaluate how district leaders, building leaders, and teachers make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice. We now turn to Chapter Two and a full description of our research design and methods.

CHAPTER TWO[2]

Research Design, Methodology and Limitations

This chapter presents the research design and methodology for the group study. To understand how educators throughout a district make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice (CRP), we engaged in a qualitative case study. This chapter begins by outlining the study design. The site selection follows and includes a description of the process and parameters we used to identify the Massachusetts school district. Next, the data collection section details the specific information that was relevant to consider to support the research purpose. The chapter concludes by detailing the data analysis the team of researchers used.

The methodology explained here relates to the overarching group research. Specific methods for individual studies are detailed in Chapter Three.

Study Design and Site Selection

This study utilized a single site case study design in one Massachusetts school district as a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This structure is particularly appropriate as the "boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2014, p. 16). As a bounded system, this district provided the context for examining the implementation of culturally responsive practice within a specific context. Specific site-selection and data-collection procedures will be detailed next.

We sought a mid-sized Massachusetts school district serving students in Kindergarten through Grade 12 for our research. Students in this state score high when compared to other U.S. states on many of the standardized testing measures used to identify domestic and international

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[2] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Daniel S. Anderson, James J. Greenwood, Sarah L. McLaughlin, Jason W. Medeiros, Tina C. Rogers.

achievement gaps, like the National Assessments of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). For example, Massachusetts students would score first among 35 participating nations on the PISA if it registered as an independent country, but the disaggregated scores of its Black and Latino students would leave it in the bottom quarter of this same sample (Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership, 2018). This tension between overall high achievement and persistent achievement gaps makes Massachusetts an ideal site for such exploration.

We initially narrowed our site search by prioritizing districts whose student population included at least 50% of students representing a historically marginalized population. We considered three dimensions of diversity: race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and second language learning status. We operationalized these dimensions of diversity through standardized, publicly available demographic data collected by all districts and published by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Racial, socio-economic, and linguistic definitions and indicators are defined by the state.

Further vetting of potential sites included considerations of district size (total enrollment), avoidance of potential bias, and geographic location. We sought a district with a total enrollment between 2,000 and 16,000 students to provide the critical mass to have a sufficient number of district-level administrators and likely more than one elementary school. Additionally, a district of this size allowed researchers to examine various school-level practices. To minimize bias, any districts where members of the research team currently work or had direct experience were removed from consideration. Lastly, with all five members of our team being situated in Boston or the Greater Boston area, districts were eliminated from consideration based on practical concerns.

The initial analysis and filtering process yielded 18 potential districts. We removed districts with active superintendent searches. The team then reviewed the websites of these districts to gain insight into how, if at all, CRP had been implemented or prioritized. Districts with no references to culturally responsive practice were removed, resulting in seven possible district sites. We continued vetting the finalist sites and sought the willingness of district and school leadership to participate in the study. We settled upon a mid-sized Massachusetts school district, referred to by the pseudonym Sunnyside. We turn now to detail our data collection process.

Data Collection

As qualitative researchers, we collected narrative and visual data (Mills & Gay, 2019). Being "the primary instrument" for data collection, we bring subjectivity and bias that influences this work (p. 16). Therefore, to establish validity and credibility of the study, the team of researchers "practice[d] triangulation to compare a variety of data sources and different methods with one another in order to cross-check data" (p. 560). The research team relied primarily on four data sources: documents, interviews, a survey, and observations. Individual studies used different combinations of these data sources, further detailed in Chapter Three.

Data collection began with introductory meetings with district staff to familiarize ourselves with the site and its context. We also used that opportunity to seek documents and to schedule further data collection through interviews and observations.

The team established an audit trail in the form of a process log to ensure the dependability of the data collected (Mills & Gay, 2019). The process log was maintained in a shared document. Here we created an explicit record to track our research progress. For example,

we date-stamped each entry, logged the data source, location of the work, researcher, and specific observations or reflections.

Document Review

The research team began with a document review in order to examine how the district described its efforts regarding culturally responsive school practice. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained how documents have the ability to serve a number of purposes. Most pertinent to our study are documents' ability to "furnish descriptive information," "offer historical understanding," and "track change and development" (p. 182). This initial document review provided us with a descriptive backdrop of how the district positioned its public stance on CRP.

We developed a protocol (Appendix E) that enabled us to identify and code documents that met our criteria for promoting a shared understanding of CRP. The team began by first reviewing district public websites and documents hosted there, and by requesting three years of district improvement plans, district professional development plans, and school-site plans. Specifically, we sought documents that included language referring to CRP. This included language referring to "cultural competency," "cultural proficiency," "diversity," "multi-cultural practice" or similar or related terminology. We asked the district to provide any such documents that articulated the district's stance on CRP. The team used results from this review to further the document review by requesting materials from district trainings, district-wide community meetings, school-based trainings, or school-based community meetings. Additionally, following a specific request, we received a sample of de-identified teacher evaluation documents. If the above-referenced documents did not explicitly reference CRP (or similar terms), the team asked district and school-based leaders about the existence and availability of such documents. These documents provided insight into district understanding and context of CRP, and informed

preparation and protocols for interviews as well. Individual team members sought out additional documents unique to their area of focus.

Interviews

We conducted 34 semi-structured interviews. Table 2.1 displays the list of interview respondents. Semi-structured interviews provided the team with the flexibility of the wording of interview and probing questions which enabled us to respond to interviewees (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Table 2.1

Participants Interviewed

Level of Organization	# of Respondents	School Level (Elementary)	School Level (Secondary)
District Staff	7	N/A	N/A
School Leader	8	5	3
Teacher	19	13	6
Total	34	18	9

We used nonprobability sampling, specifically purposeful sampling (Mills & Gay, 2019) to identify interview participants. Specifically, we aimed to interview district-level administrators, including, but not limited to: superintendent, assistant superintendents, and directors or coordinators who work with building administrators and/or teachers. We ultimately included all schools across the district that were richly diverse across four criteria: racial, cultural, economic, and linguistic. We interviewed building leaders and teachers from each school.

We then employed snowball sampling (Mills & Gay, 2019) to identify teachers who were identified by principals and district leaders as exhibiting CRP. In snowball sampling, "...the process begins by asking well-situated people: 'Who knows a lot about_____? Who should I talk to?'" (Patton, 1990, p.176). Specifically, we engaged building leaders first, asking them to identify teachers who they perceived to be especially competent and effective in working with diverse student populations and then requested that those participants identify further teachers. We also asked principals to send their faculty a weblink to a brief screener survey that introduced our research study and offered teachers an opportunity to connect with us directly. This approach yielded three interviews. This survey can be found in Appendix F.

The research team developed three interview protocols. We created one each for district leaders, school leaders, and teachers. To guide the semi-structured interviews, all researchers used protocols tailored to the purpose of the individual studies and to the interviewee's role. To establish a relationship with interviewees (Weiss, 1995), researchers began by introducing themselves and asking general questions about the interviewee's role and prior experience. Subsequent questions were designed to elicit participant perspectives that pertained to research questions. Protocols appear in Appendices G-I.

To refine the validity of interview questions and ensure questions elicited responses that aligned with the study's purpose, the research team used cognitive interviews (Desimone & Carlson Le Floch, 2004). We piloted the protocols with educators from other school districts. We then asked probing questions to explore the interviewee's understanding of the question's intent. This process allowed us to improve the interview protocols so that they better realized the research questions.

Prior to beginning each interview, researchers explained the purpose of the study and then asked participants to sign an IRB approved statement of informed consent (see Appendix J). To increase participants' comfort levels, administrator interviews were conducted in their offices (or other appropriate space) and teacher interviews were held in a private location in their respective buildings. While the interview duration varied slightly, most interviews spanned 30-45 minutes. Each interview was audio recorded (unless consent to record was not granted) and later transcribed. We took notes during interviews when we were not granted consent to record.

Online Survey

Educators in the district were also offered the opportunity to respond to questions offered via an online survey. This survey allowed our team to cast a wider net and reach a larger number of educators than would be possible through conducting interviews exclusively. The survey was constructed in the program *Qualtrics* and was administered to district and building leaders during a district leadership meeting. Subsequently, building leaders were asked to administer the survey to teachers in their respective buildings by distributing a link to the survey via email. Table 2.2 presents the list of respondents.

The survey focused on educator understanding and enactment of CRP. Questions included likert scale types as well as "check all that apply" questions. The survey protocol is Appendix K.

Table 2.2

Survey Respondents

Level of Organization	# of Respondents	School Level (Elementary)	School Level (Secondary)
District Staff	8	N/A	N/A

School Leader	6	4	2
Teacher	19	18	1
Total	33	22	3

Observations

The team observed district-based or school-based professional development related to CRP during the time of the research project. According to Maxwell (2009), observations can help rule out "spurious associations" drawn from interview data and provide varied data that rely less on inferences from "researcher prejudices and expectations" (p. 244). We further requested to observe two leadership meetings to examine how district leaders support principal learning. Highly descriptive field notes were collected during observations with a focus on noting early impressions, key remarks, phrases, and interactions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Observations specific to individual studies will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three. Appendix L contains the general observation protocol.

For professional development sessions, researchers functioned as observers rather than as participants, knowing that "The researcher's observer activities are known to the group; participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 145). Depending on the format of observed community meetings, the team adopted the role of participant-observer if we deemed the context as one that would help us "gain insights and develop relationships with participants that would not be possible" if we otherwise did not engage in the program (Mills & Gay, 2019, p. 549).

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this qualitative case study, we drew on constructivist epistemology to explore how participants make sense of a common phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Constructive, or interpretive research, "assumes that reality is socially constructed; that is, there is no single, observable reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9). Specifically, we used sensemaking theory to understand how educators and administrators within a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse Massachusetts school district make sense of and enact CRP.

The research team employed a coding regime for all data. We considered a code to be "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). Coding encompassed data from all sources: document review, interviews, survey, observations, and field notes, so that patterns or contradictions were identifiable regardless of the data source.

The research team began the coding process by generating a list of codes prior to data collection. This initial process offered the opportunity for the team to begin to articulate what the sensemaking process might entail for a district's CRP. Strauss (as referenced by Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 58) suggests four categories of codes to start with: "conditions," "interactions among actors," "strategies and tactics," and "consequences." Each of these categories informed our application of the conceptual framework. For example, how actors understood the local context of the district informed the sensemaking process in the district. These variables fell under the category of "conditions," and initial codes included "change in district leadership" or "student demographic change."

Once we began to collect data, we culled a subset of the data, and team members coded discrete units of data individually. Individuals compiled initial codebooks that evolved over time. As more data was collected, more codes emerged that caused us to reflect on our established codes. Patterns emerged that allowed us to group codes into categories. We used criteria from Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to guide and check our process of categorization. Our categories

were "responsive," "exhaustive," "mutually exclusive," "sensitizing," and "conceptually congruent" (p. 212-213). These reminders served to make the process systematic and organized.

Throughout this iterative process, individuals ensured that their codebook maintained a structure. This structure was informed by our sensemaking framework as well as the relative magnitude and frequency of the codes and categories themselves. The codes were recorded in a consistent format, defining for each code: code name, description, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, and typical and atypical exemplars (Saldaña, 2013). We used analytic memos as tools when we conducted fieldwork and then coded them when appropriate.

We utilized several CAQDAS packages for qualitative research and coding. This provided infrastructure as well as analytic approaches such as code frequency analysis. Some coding was done by hand before entry into the database. The analysis adhered to strict ethical standards. We coded all participant data and refrained from drawing conclusions from incomplete analysis.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. As the case study focused on one specific district in Massachusetts, results may not be entirely generalizable. However, given the number of mid-sized districts within the state with substantial populations of marginalized students, we view our findings as both relevant and timely. The qualitative design of the study was subjective and bias potentially affects research findings. To minimize bias, researchers triangulated findings to ensure validity and reliability. Finally, the timeframe of our doctoral program limited the scope of our research. We maintained a deep commitment to the process, to the opportunity for learning, and to providing the selected district with useful findings.

The topic of CRP can be perceived as sensitive as it encompasses issues of race, culture, and diversity. As our interviews collected self-reported information, it is critical to consider the social desirability effect on answers provided. While the topic can be sensitive, no educator interviewed expressed or displayed discomfort with the questions.

This study faced a few limitations that arose during data collection. First, in terms of sampling, some groups had more complete and representative participation than others. While all district administrators with relevant experience and all instructional coaches were participants in the study, not all secondary department heads were interviewed. Additionally, the teacher sample was sizable, but had a particularly high concentration of educators whose content area is English as a Second Language. While their views are important, it is possible that a teacher sample that included interviews with a more proportional representation of content areas would have been different. However, none of the patterns identified in these findings emerged only from ESL teachers or with ESL teachers providing the preponderance of the evidence, so the conclusions appear not to have been skewed by their active participation.

The reciprocal and ongoing nature of sensemaking presents a challenge of researching it over a relatively short period of time. In her intensive study, Maitlis (2005) embedded herself as a researcher for a period of two years. Conversely, our research was bounded by several months and the limited availability of data collection time. The small number of observations conducted potentially limited our ability to capture the fluid and ongoing nature of sensemaking. Future research would be well served to include more observations of opportunities for sensemaking and sensegiving.

The understanding and enactment of culturally responsive practice by educators in Sunnyside, holds applicability to other districts. Beyond Sunnyside, there are 102 other districts

in the state within the 2,000 to 5,000 enrollment size range. However, the profound population shift to a majority of marginalized students over the past 20 years could be a limiting factor as few other districts have experienced this degree and pace of change. Moving forward, given the national demographic shifts occurring throughout the United States, more districts could be faced with this phenomenon that was a predominant trigger for educator sensemaking in Sunnyside.

CHAPTER THREE[3]

A District's Support of Principals' Culturally Responsive Leadership Practice

Given the long history of racial and ethnic achievement gaps in public education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), state and federal policy initiatives have prompted district administrators to shift from managing operations to improving teaching and learning for all students (Honig, 2008). Rorrer et al. (2008) assert that rather than working independently in the central office, district administrators should work collaboratively with principals.

Leithwood et al. (2004) report that principal leadership "is second only to teacher quality among school-related factors that affect student learning" (p. 3). Accordingly, it is imperative that district administrators work closely with principals and develop their capacity (Honig, 2008). While some literature describes what districts do to support instructional leadership (e.g., Honig, 2008; Leithwood, 2010; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001), there is a gap in understanding what districts do to support culturally responsive leadership. This work is important in advancing social justice in schools (Theoharis, 2010).

To best support historically marginalized students, culturally responsive practice (CRP) is not situated only at the teaching level but should be embedded comprehensively throughout the school context. (Gay, 2018). Khalifa et al. (2016) extend these assertions and claim culturally responsive leaders are integral in supporting marginalized students and communities. Culturally responsive leaders intentionally confront inequities and are essential in engaging students, parents, teachers, and communities to create equitable and inclusive school environments (Khalifa, 2013; Khalifa et al., 2016; Lopez, 2015; Reyes & Garcia, 2013).

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[3] This chapter was individually written by Tina C. Rogers

Modeling and support are critical to further the learning and growth of culturally responsive leadership practice (CRLP) (Johnson, 2006; Khalifa et al., 2016). Though there is a need to support principals' CRLP, specifically, research highlights the need for districts to build capacity of principals, generally. Coffin and Leithwood (2000) were interested in evaluating principals' perceptions of how the district promoted their learning. Results indicate the most valued form of support comes from collaborative interactions where principals are supported in knowing how to identify and work through obstacles, rather than simply knowing about obstacles they may encounter. Supportive relationships with district administrators enrich principals' learning.

While the purpose of our group case study was to understand how various stakeholders in a diverse, mid-sized Massachusetts school district make sense of and enact CRP; this individual study explored how district administrators support the growth of principals' CRLP. Therefore, the two questions that guided this research were:

1. How do district administrators support principals' growth and strengthen principals' culturally responsive leadership practice?

2. How do district administrators and principals perceive the effectiveness of the support?

Understanding how districts can systematically support and enhance principals' CRLP is likely to provide useful information to guide efforts to create inclusive schools that honor historically marginalized students. This research provides insight into how district administrators can approach this work with principals.

Additionally, this individual study will leverage Maitlis's (2005) sensemaking framework of the broader study detailed in Chapter One. This theory is particularly useful because it focuses on two complementary dimensions: sensegiving, the interactive exchange of information

between district administrators and principals, and sensemaking, how these individuals internalize, understand, and enact the information.

Literature Review

Two bodies of literature frame this study. The first is culturally responsive leadership practice (CRLP), and the second is effective strategies districts use to support principals' learning. I address each in turn.

Culturally Responsive Leadership Practice

There is a need for CRLP because marginalized students "consistently and persistently perform lower than their peers according to traditional measures of school achievement because their home culture is at odds with the culture and expectation of schools" (Castagno & McKinley Jones Brayboy, 2008, p. 946). Similar to social justice leadership, culturally responsive leadership focuses leaders' attention on equity and diversity (Lopez, 2015).

Khalifa (2018) argues that "Oppressive structures and practices in schools will remain in place unless (a) the status quo is challenged and (b) educators and leaders know how to properly push against oppression" (p. 7). To combat oppressive structures, culturally responsive leaders are critically self-aware, foster culturally responsive teaching, promote inclusive schools, and engage marginalized families and community within the school context (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Lopez, 2015; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Two culturally responsive leadership behaviors: critical self-awareness and fostering culturally responsive teaching are explained in turn.

Critical Self-Awareness

Cultural responsiveness is a journey that begins by examining one's beliefs, values, and views about specific marginalized groups in order to understand how biases impact the

"conscious choices that leaders make" (Lopez, 2015, p. 176). Exploring how principals sustain CRLP, Lopez asserts that one of the most challenging barriers is the lack of awareness of one's biases and beliefs about the capabilities of marginalized students and families. Critical self-reflection develops one's ability to identify their own privilege and bias in turn understanding the impact he/she has on marginalized students.

As leaders critically self-reflect they are also able to understand oppressive institutional structures and practices that exist within schools (Khalifa, 2018). Khalifa describes self-reflection as a process to understand oppressions, become conscious of and talk about one's own privilege, and engage in courageous conversations. The willingness to openly engage in cycles of talk about race, culture, privilege, and bias impacts the school community. Weick et al. (2005) posits that cycles of talk inform action. He asserts, "Actions enable people to assess causal beliefs that subsequently lead to new actions undertaken to test the newly asserted relationships. Over time, as supporting evidence mounts, significant changes in beliefs and actions evolve" (p. 416). In other words, CRLP prioritizes critical self-reflection to negotiate information and impact educators' beliefs and actions.

Being aware of systemic inequities is critical to CRLP (Khalifa, 2018). By publicly acknowledging systematic inequities and their own bias, leaders model transparency for teachers (Santamaria, 2014). Being "conscious of stereotype threat" enables leaders to understand the "reality of racism" empowering them to "initiate and engage in critical conversations" (p. 367). As leaders embark on a journey of critical self-awareness, they are able to challenge the status quo and engage teachers in the journey as well.

Foster Culturally Responsive Teachers

Equity focused leaders support teachers in becoming more knowledgeable about historical, social, and political inequities (Johnson, 2014). Khalifa (2018) claims, "It is important that educators see that their actions toward minoritized students can, quite literally, impact the life trajectories of those students" (p. 23). Developing personal, positive, and encouraging relationships with teachers impacts the way leaders and teachers interact (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Santamaria, 2014). Trusting relationships open lines of communications and influence a leaders' ability to have courageous conversations about inequities (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Mugisha, 2013; Santamaria, 2014).

Culturally responsive leaders consciously and intentionally address classroom inequities and empower teachers to make equity-driven decisions (Mugisha, 2013). To develop teacher awareness, data and research must be used to "tell the truth" about the communities they serve (Santamaria, 2014, p. 371). When conversations begin with research that challenges inequities, groups are able to engage in storytelling, a culturally responsive practice (Gay, 2018). This practice leads teachers to question situations and reexamine assumptions. Meaning is then constructed when "people organize to make sense of equivocal inputs and enact this sense back into the world to make that world more orderly" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410).

Culturally responsive leaders are "critical, reflective, purposeful, and fearless in seeking ways to bring about change for disadvantaged youths, students of color, students marginalized by the school system, and immigrant families in their schools" (Lopez, 2015, p. 180). As student demographics continue to shift, it is increasingly important that district administrators support principals' CRLP. I turn now to discuss what research says about how districts build principals' capacity.

District Support to Enhance Principals' Capacity

District administrators need to support principals' CRLP. Given the complexity of reform, the decisions districts make are essential to improving teaching, learning, and academic outcomes for students (Honig et al., 2009). Eilers and Camacho (2007) assert coherent district supports results in school improvements, claiming "Intensive district support matters in contributing to readiness for reform and thus turning around a low-capacity school" (p. 634). Historically, however, district and principal interactions were largely regulatory, focusing primarily on the monitoring of policy implementation rather than focusing on student learning (Honig, 2008).

Research predominantly focuses on the need for district administrators to reimagine their relationships with principals and focus on supporting principals as instructional leaders (e.g., Honig, 2008; Leithwood, 2010). However, given the long-standing opportunity gap, Johnson (2006) demands that principals need support and models to enhance their CRLP. The forthcoming literature analysis focuses on district administrator and principal interactions that support sensemaking of new information. Through this synthesis, three themes emerged: (a) communication of a clear, common vision, (b) supportive and collaborative relationships, and (c) accountability. Each is explained in turn.

Communication of a Clear, Common Vision

Research shows collaborative strategic planning processes and communication structures are imperative for maintaining clarity and purpose across a district in turn raising expectations and academic achievement of marginalized students (Leithwood & Azah, 2017; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). By consistently communicating a shared vision for the culture and climate of the organization and holding it central in all meetings and decision-making, districts sustain district-wide commitment to the defined purpose (Leithwood & Azah).

Conversely, Moorosi and Bantwini (2016) found when there is a lack of collaboration in the strategic planning process, principals are not well-informed and therefore the district strategic plans are not mirrored in school improvement plans. Furthermore, district administrators must consistently visit schools to provide principals with differentiated professional development that is connected to district goals, discuss challenges and strategies that integrate the district vision, and use sustained, consistent language. Doing this connects principals' and district administrators' understanding enabling principals to implement the district vision in a way that aligns with the culture of their school (Honig, 2012; Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Supportive and Collaborative Relationships

Supportive relationships between district administrators and principals (Casserly et al., 2013; Eilers & Camacho, 2007) and between principal colleagues are critical (Coffin & Leithwood, 2000; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Eilers and Camacho (2007) claim that "multiple and coherent district supports at the school level and collaborative leadership between levels leads to school improvements" (p. 633). However, Honig and Rainey (2014) critique district administrators, asserting that they rarely provide principals with the intensive supports they need to improve student learning.

The Council of Great City Schools maintain to effectively support principals, district administrators should visit classrooms with principals, engage in conversations about instruction, and respond to difficult situations within the school and community (Casserly et al., 2013). Additionally, district administrators must be "willing to accept ownership of difficult challenges and seek solutions without placing blame" (Casserly et al., p. 10) and model reflective practices to bring thinking and sensemaking to the surface (Honig, 2012).

Along with district-principal relationships, districts must support principal colleague relationships. To systematically influence instructional improvements and narrow the achievement gap for marginalized students, districts must commit to prioritizing strong principal training and support systems and use data to ground the training and feedback (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). As learning is a social process, districts did not expect principals to lead in isolation. They established meetings where principals met regularly to share challenges and strategies. Leithwood and Azah (2017) extend this and contend that these networking times should not only be used to provide professional development but also to authentically engage in reflection of school and district problems.

Accountability

Along with improving instruction and outcomes, Rorrer et al. (2008) emphasized the need for leaders to own past inequities and increase transparency to maintain an equity focus in reform decisions. By creating a demanding culture that is focused on equity, districts can successfully close the achievement gap (Theoharis, 2010). Though school structures and practices often allow inequities to be explained away, Skrla and Schuerich (2001) argue all five superintendents in large, diverse districts were able to use accountability structures to push against deficit thinking and past practices that maintain inequitable access. All superintendents in this study accomplished this by "providing highly visible, irrefutable evidence, which could not be ignored, that the districts were not serving all children equally well" (p. 243).

Furthermore, Honig's (2012) comparative qualitative case study demonstrates the need for district administrators to hold principals accountable. Specifically, she asserts the need to "conclude meetings with principals by identifying next steps for both the principal and the [district administrator] in helping the principal focus" (p. 748). Through closely monitoring goals

and accountability (Leithwood & Azah, 2017), having continuous conversations about student performance (Casserly et al., 2013), and holding principals directly accountable for student achievement (Skrla et al., 2011), districts can raise leaders' expectations for marginalized students.

This prior research suggests an important role for district administrators in supporting capacity building among principals in general, and specifically for CRLP. Strengthening school leadership to ensure schools are culturally responsive requires that we rethink leadership and the support needed to continuously reflect, learn, and grow. This study contributes to this literature by examining how district administrators can influence principals' CRLP. I now turn to describe the methodology of this individual study.

Methods

In alignment with the qualitative research design and methodology of the group research, this individual research utilized a single case study design (Yin, 2014). This case study design was appropriate because "A central characteristic of all qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24).

Data Collection

As discussed in Chapter Two, this case study included document review, semi-structured interviews, observations, and a survey. These four data points were used to answer my two research questions.

Document review was used to ground the research in the context of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I collected and reviewed district documents to understand how culturally responsive practice is communicated in print to principals and to gather information to confirm or contradict other data (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Documents Collected

District	
	Equity Plan (2019)
	Instructional Monitoring Tool (2019)
	Leadership Meeting Agendas (2018)
	Data Meeting Protocol (2019)
	Data Meeting Minutes (2019)
	Mentor Handbook (current)
	Code of Conduct (current)
	Family Student Guidebook (current)
	Strategic Goals Booklet (current)
	Policy Handbook (current)
School	School Improvement Plans (2017[6], 2019[2])
	Turnaround Plan

I conducted individual semi-structured interviews to gather specific data from respondents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Given that this individual research sought to understand how district administrators supported principals' culturally responsive leadership practice (CRLP) and the perception of these supports, two protocols were established: one for district administrators and one for principals (see Appendices G-H). I used variations of open-ended questions to elicit data to answer my question such as: "How does the district support the learning and growth of principals?" (district leader) or "How does the district support your learning and growth?" (principal). Follow-up questions and probes were developed to clarify or explore a response more deeply. For example, "Do you see these supports enhancing your learning and growth?" was a possible probe for the principal question above.

I interviewed principals and district administrators who are responsible for supporting principals with a research partner. Table 3.2 summarizes participant data.

Table 3.2

Participant Data

District Administrators	Years in Current Role	Year in Sunnyside
Superintendent	<1	7.5
Assistant Superintendent	<1	<1
Director of Human Resources	3	3
Director of Special Education & Student Services	<1	*10
Director of English Learners & World Languages	1.5	NP
Math Coordinator	3	12
Principals		
Elementary Principal	3	4
Elementary Principal	9	9
Elementary Principal	12	12
Elementary Principal	11	11
Secondary Principal	<1	<1
Secondary Principal	3	3
Secondary Principal	*6.5	*6.5

*Note: *accumulation of years but interrupted service; NP (information not provided)*

An observation protocol was used to organize descriptive and reflective notes (see

Appendix L). I conducted two observations of leadership meetings to obtain information about

the depth and context of interactions between district administrators and principals. This information informed the interviews and provided points for reference.

Prior to the start of the meeting, I took descriptive notes of the room and surroundings. Emerson et al. (1995) urged qualitative researchers to "recognize and limit reliance upon preconceptions" in order "to get close to those studied as a way of understanding what their experiences and activities *mean to them"* (p. 12). I took jottings that focused specifically on the exchange of language (sensegiving) between district administrators and principals. I also noted body language during verbal interactions.

As "[w]riting field notes *immediately* after leaving the setting produces fresher, more detailed recollections" (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 40), I tape recorded my reflections and later transcribed reflections and jottings into typed field notes. Additionally, "a researcher's stance in fieldwork and note-writing originates in his outlook on life" (p. 42), therefore, I reflected to "self-consciously recogniz[e] [my] fundamental orientation" (p. 43) to bring perspective to the bias that shaped the way I made sense of the observation.

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded then transcribed using Rev.com. Transcripts, documents, and field notes were uploaded into Dedoose for coding. Throughout the research process, I maintained a process memo to document the data collection and analysis. I worked to ensure reliability and refinement of coding. There was a data analysis cycle for coding transcriptions (Saldaña, 2013) with the goal of understanding how district administrators supported principals' CRLP. During the first round of coding, common themes emerged. In the next round, themes from documents, interviews, observations, and the survey were coded and categorized based on frequency and in accordance with the sensemaking framework. Table 3.3 shows how the

frequency of responses were categorized. These adjectives were used throughout the findings to quantify responses.

Table 3.3

Response Categories

Level of Organization	All	Most	Some	Few	None
District Administrators n=6	6	5-4	3-2	1	0
Principal n=7	7	6-5	4-3	2-1	0

 Drawing on the literature, I attended to three forms of district support with a priori codes: communication, relationships and, accountability. I developed a codebook explaining these codes and codes that were developed throughout the data analysis process.

I use specific language throughout my findings. First, "district administrator(s)" to refer to administrators based in district and central offices who work directly with school principals. There are a variety of district-level leaders who support principal learning (e.g., Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, Directors, Coordinators). Second, the term 'leader(s)' is used when talking together about district administrators and principals. Third, the director of a secondary alternative program was included in the principal dataset. Fourth, I specifically explore culturally responsive leadership practice (CRLP), one component of CRP (see Chapter One).

Findings

Answering my research questions, two themes emerged: establish a supportive, equity-driven culture and enhance district structures and tools. Data for both research questions are presented concurrently within each theme.

Establish a Supportive, Equity-Driven Culture

The first theme to emerge was the district's efforts to establish a supportive, equity-driven culture. Data showed two practices that support principals' culturally responsive leadership practice (CRLP): foster collaborative relationships and communicate equity as a priority.

Foster Collaborative Relationships

The primary purpose of district leadership was to foster collaborative relationships by establishing a coherent service orientation from the district to schools. For instance, in a response representative of most leaders, one principal explained, "Central office serves the schools, the schools don't serve central office." The superintendent framed the motivation to create this culture: "The district isn't going to move until we learn how to support schools." All district administrators recognized this commitment, one asserting it is a "priority for us is to support the principals directly." Another district administrator expressed this support as having a ripple effect: "The easier I can make the principal's job, the more they can be with their teachers, the better experience our students will have."

This fundamental shift in how central office functions created opportunities for frequent, informal interactions and built transparency between district administrators and principals. For instance, one principal shared, "I'm meeting with [district administrators] regularly. So I know what the expectation is." A district administrator explained how they reframe their behavior, "So rather than…'This is the initiative', principals are very much part of conversations."

Furthermore, most leaders felt this service approach is building trust between district administrators and principals. For example, one principal revealed, "It feels like [district administrators] are here to support, it doesn't feel like [they're] here to catch us." The superintendent reflected, "I think that's the piece that has made a difference and has really helped to build the trust- is that there's communication. And it's two-way, it's not top down." Another district administrator illustrated how the service orientation makes them reflect on behaviors: "Principals are very much part of conversations, although there are moments where, sort of, edicts are coming out from central office, I'll be like, 'Oh, wait a minute, let's think about having a conversation'."

Although most evidence pointed to the strength of these collaborative relationships, some leaders acknowledged barriers to this collaboration. Whether citing "personality clash or just stylistic differences" or insisting dysfunctional relationships with prior district administrators created "PTSD", building collaborative relationships is a "work in progress." A few leaders insisted the impact of these barriers makes it challenging to engage in "hard conversations" or "be honest about saying things that feel uncomfortable." One district administrator disclosed, "I haven't had enough trust, or have been vulnerable enough to say what I see… to [principals] because I don't feel like I've built enough trust."

In an effort to prioritize a commitment to this service orientation, the superintendent operationalized the expectations and built accountability amongst district administrators. The superintendent described the work with district administrators to "map" how their leadership roles impact schools: "Our Director of Finance, we see him as…[supporting] resource allocation. How are you deciding who gets what money and working closely with…[leaders] to figure out, are those even the needs we have." With a common understanding of the purpose of their roles,

the superintendent held every district leader accountable for supporting principals and honoring their voices, asserting: "I put pressure on every central office employee." The superintendent explained district administrators submit weekly reports and meet in person.

> I check in with them every two weeks, some of them weekly. And I'm like, 'What supports did you provide?' 'What did the principal say?' 'How is the principal handling it?' 'How do you know that they're doing it?' 'You didn't talk to the principal, this meeting's over!' I need you to talk to the principal and come back and let me know. I'm not conversing with you about what's happening in schools if we have not included the principal.

Most district administrators also referenced these meetings. For example, one administrator stated, "That basically is what everybody's evaluation was about in [the superintendent's] first year."

While trust is evolving, participants perceived the intentional efforts to build a coherent service orientation as foundational in supporting principals' CRLP. This fundamental shift lays the foundation to develop a non-judgmental culture where leaders can have vulnerable conversations about biases as shared partners.

Communicate Equity as a Priority

A second way Sunnyside established a supportive, equity-driven culture was to communicate equity as a district "priority" or "goal". The superintendent used controlled, formal sensegiving channels, such as district documentation, to build coherence across district initiatives. For example, Sunnyside leadership created a new symbol, see Figure 3.1, that aligned equity initiatives: universal design for learning (UDL), social emotional learning (SEL), and positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) which the superintendent stated, "[I]s the

beginning…what you don't see is there's a watermark…it's our logo with the core values of equity, innovation, and excellence."

Figure 3.1

District Visual
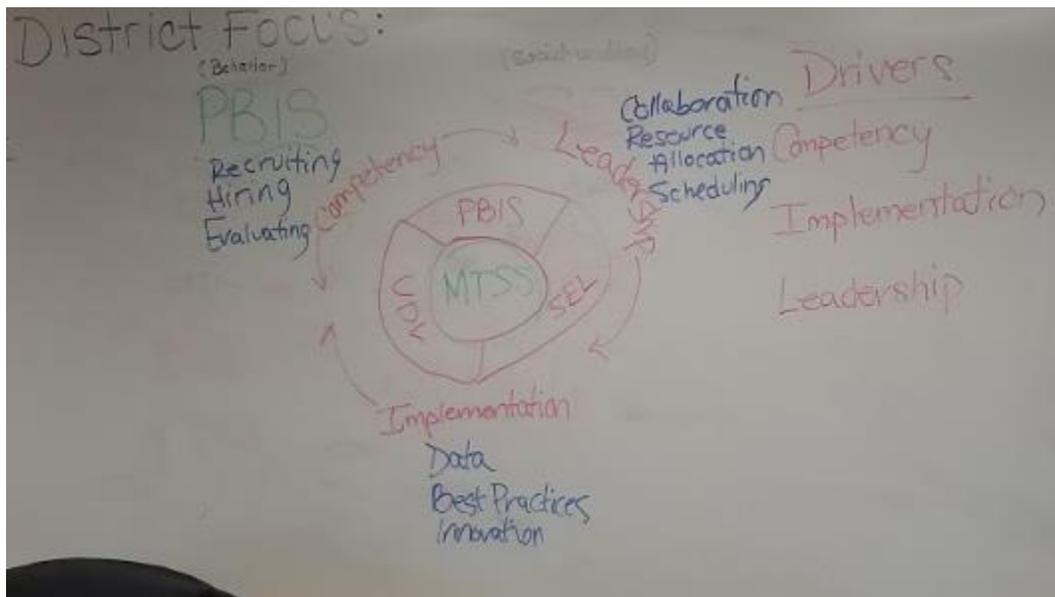
The superintendent also used the Equity Plan as an initial step to control sensemaking (see Figure 3.2).

> Our [Equity Plan]…lists our goals, our strategic initiatives and on the back it ties into some equitable practices…this year our goal is to develop a comprehensive plan around equity. But I felt because [equity's] our core value, there at least needed to be something, even if it's small, that puts [equity] on the table so we're not ignoring it while we work on a more comprehensive plan. And that has been distributed at this point.

Figure 3.2

Equity Plan

Strategic Objectives			
Continuous Reflection and Improvement	Academic Excellence and Innovation	Respectful and Responsible Relationships	Engaged and Equitable Community
1. Increase academic achievement for all students by implementing innovative and equitable teaching practices	2. Develop aligned K-12 curricula that is culturally relevant and engaging to meet the needs of all students	3. Recruit and maintain a workforce that is diverse, highly skilled, and professional	4. Increase students' academic success by building family and community partnerships
Strategic Initiatives			
All initiatives begin with equity in mind and practice. Educational Equity is recognizing that all students, leaders and educators are not the same yet all deserve access to achieve the same positive outcomes. RPS equitable schools and classrooms will make accommodations for all differences so that the possibility of the best opportunities are the same for everybody.			
Equity Plan			
1. Create and measure self-assessment tools to measure the collective understanding of equity and culturally responsive teaching 2. Analyze and create action plans for subgroup performance data to close the achievement gap	1. Design and implement culturally responsive curricula that is creative and global 2. Analyze school climate and classroom instruction to take actions based on the trends found using the Instructional Monitoring Tool	1. Increase understanding of the importance of equity and cultural proficiency through professional development 2. Pilot implicit bias training to create a culture of self-reflection 3. Emphasize and sustain ownership of the district's shared vision on equity, excellence, and innovation	1. Build and expand an inclusive equity team that partners with community 2. Increase parent voice through frequent public engagement opportunities 3. Support all families in gaining knowledge of academic and behavioral curricula

Further document review demonstrated symbolic, yet perfunctory sensegiving of equity and CRP. A symbol appears on every district document with the words "Equity, Excellence, Innovation". Banners with this symbol hang in some buildings throughout the district. While the words 'equity', 'culture', or 'cultural' was referenced 147 times in a review of 19 district and school documents, most times it was signaling: "Equity Plan", "Equity Coordinator", and "culture of collaboration". These words are only occasionally operationalized, for example, defining equity, (see Figure 3.2), and detailing expectations of the hiring practice. A hiring policy states, Sunnyside will "make additional efforts to recruit, employ and promote qualified members of groups formerly excluded." These largely casual and token references to equity and CRP impacted sensemaking.

Sensemaking of CRP. All district administrators and principals espouse equity as a district value. For example, one principal explained "Equity is hugely important to

[superintendent]. Excellence, innovation, equity, like that's what [superintendent's] talking about." Moreover, most leaders perceive the superintendent's efforts to align district initiatives to the equity goal as supportive. As one principal stressed, "Equity has been a word that every superintendent has used. I think [superintendent] is the first leader who's actually actioning equity as a path forward."

Despite embracing equity as a value, interviews and observations corroborated document review and revealed varied and cursory understanding of CRP. Most leaders pointed to a lack of specific focus on CRP and conceded "we have not done a good job of defining [CRP] explicitly" One district administrator explained it this way:

> We kind of skim the surface. It's a topic we know we have to get deeper on. We realized that it's especially important here in [Sunnyside]. That's as far as I've gotten here. We haven't really taken any steps further.

During an observation of a leadership meeting one principal remarked on the lack of deep connection to CRP in the Equity Plan, (see Figure 3.2), "Cultural responsiveness is listed, but it's not jumping out. It feels overt." Though there was a shared commitment to equity, there was a lack of a shared understanding of CRP.

Along with a lack of shared understanding of CRP, most leaders feel they have not developed a strategy to operationalize CRP. By way of example, one principal shared, "I think the district is creating space and has explicitly created the expectation, but I'm not sure that we have built our tool bag yet for it." While another district administrator noted the juxtaposition between talk and action, "It's a lot of discussion but then what's the action that goes with it? I sometimes don't connect the two."

Most leaders contended turnover in district administration (all district administrators held current roles for three years or less, see Table 3.2) was a barrier to developing a shared understanding and operationalizing CRP. For instance, one principal asserted,

> There's been a lot…of turnover, and each superintendent has made some type of attempt. But it's been poorly defined and not consistent. There's been no carry over. So, depending who's been the superintendent, the attempts to do any work around race and culture have had very different flavors to them, and it's been inconsistent.

Though there is not a shared understanding of CRP, when asked to expand on their individual understanding, leaders reverted to describing current equity-centered instructional practices. Most leaders expounded on the tenants of UDL, and some referenced SEL and PBIS. As a result, CRP is subsumed within other practices, one principal explained:

> The district spends a lot of time talking about equity more than necessarily cultural responsiveness. I think that's a smart move on their part. I think they differentiated out that the true reason to be culturally responsive is to provide equitable access.

All leaders also identified understanding students' background as foundational to CRP. Ensuring curriculum and instruction is representative of the diverse student population, and self-awareness and willingness to learn were discussed less frequently.

Two practices emerged as important to developing a culture that supports principals' growth and strengthens their CRLP: develop collaborative relationships and communicate equity as a priority. The fundamental shift in how district administrators support principals along with intentionally signaling equity as the central value informed the sensemaking process. However, having a commitment without a shared definition of CRP and clear action steps, limits principals' impact and forces them to rely on individual practices and beliefs to make meaning.

Enhance District Structures and Tools

I turn now to present findings for my second theme, enhance district structures and tools. If not for the supportive, equity-driven culture, district structures and tools are likely to be disjointed and ineffective. This was apparent as most leaders blamed tensions with prior district administrators for structures historically failing to support their learning. Leaders asserted "until this year, nothing" and "never anything" to describe previous learning experiences. For instance, one principal described the effect of turnover on their CRLP, "It seems like we're always introducing the idea of talking about race or talking about hard conversations. But we're never really having hard conversations." These frustrations have led principals to go outside the district for support. By way of example, one principal shared, "I don't think that there's been anything that I would say is targeted to where I'm at…for all my PD needs across any topic, I tend to go outside and find them myself." However, all leaders affirmed their new superintendent's efforts, boasting feeling "uplifted" and "hopeful."

The data showed four main structures, two of which supported principals' CRLP: leadership meetings and data meetings, and two which largely did not: learning walks and professional development. Each will be explained in turn.

Leadership Meetings

Leadership meetings were most frequently cited as a sensemaking structure that supported principals' learning. The superintendent used agendas to frame year-round leadership meetings where either all leaders or specific district administrators and principals meet. Interviews, observations, and documents revealed the superintendent was re-envisioning the purpose of these meetings to align with equity priorities, provide a space for collaborative learning, and model CRLP, specifically self-reflection.

A review of five leadership meeting agendas from January 2018 through June 2018 corroborated leaders' assertions and illustrated past meetings were largely used to disseminate information. Some topics listed on agendas were: Director Updates, Budget Deadlines, and Roll Out Discipline Document. An agenda from January 2020 depicted a greater focus supporting principals' CRLP with two hours dedicated to an equity activity, however the remaining nearly four hours were devoted to other district initiatives. These competing interests make it challenging to consistently prioritize supporting principals' CRLP during leadership meetings.

Evidence showed the superintendent is making efforts to set the stage to engage in reflective conversations about race and culture, asking fellow administrators:

> How do we engage our teachers in a way that all black men aren't criminals or dangerous… In order to do that you got to have some uncomfortable conversations. So [leaders] started with Brene Brown['s book] around braving and taking risks…[W]e want everyone to be comfortable getting uncomfortable, and knowing that you are not going to be held accountable for questions that you ask if you're asking them from the frame of, I'm asking because I need to learn how to get better.

An agenda and observation of a meeting validates this work. "BRAVING" is the first norm listed on this year's leadership agenda. It's meaning is defined, "Boundaries, Reliable, Accountable, Vault, Integrity, Non-judgement, Generosity of Intentions/behavior." These words were put into action during a leadership meeting I observed. While reviewing the district's Equity Plan (see Figure 3.2) a principal expressed concern, "Cultural responsiveness feels disconnected. It doesn't feel like there's an outcome." The superintendent responded, "That was a good BRAVING moment. I'm glad you pushed back on me. It made me think we need to go back to the drawing board."

With this foundation, more time is devoted to sensemaking of CRP and materials and activities are being used to foster reflective practices. The superintendent used text-based discussions to drive reflective conversations. One principal described this experience, "Everybody talked about, do we know who are you in this scenario? Can you relate to this?" Most respondents shared that this collaborative learning experience pushed them to reflect on interactions they have with teachers and requested "support…expanding my capacity to engage teachers in the conversations."

An observation of a two-hour follow-up activity revealed high levels of sensegiving within small groups. The superintendent used a protocol to guide small groups in discussions that were grounded in culturally responsive text. Each group read a different section of the text. For example: group one read "Why Cultural Proficiency?", group two read "Why Choose Equity?" During this controlled sensemaking process, small group networking prompted leaders to reflect and connect the text to personal experiences such as leadership experiences and prior professional learning opportunities. By way of example, one principal asserted, "A lot of White people don't see white privilege. As a leader, I want staff to be active, not defensive in these conversations."

Observations of high levels of sensegiving within these small groups were corroborated by survey data, see Table 3.4, where principals cited informal conversations and reflection as most influential supporting their CRLP. Using a Likert scale, principals' self-reported how influential various experiences have been in improving their CRLP. Survey results indicated principals perceived connections with colleagues as more influential than any type of professional development in enhancing their CRLP. Furthermore, principals perceived self-reflection on their identity and experiences with students and families as most influential.

Table 3.4

Principals' Perceived Influence on Their Culturally Responsive Practice

	Very (1)	*Somewhat (2)*	*Not at all (3)*	*I have not had this experience (4)*	Mean	Std Deviation
Personal self-reflection on my own cultural identify	83%	17%	0%	0%	1.17	0.37
Reflecting on my experiences with students and their families	100%	0%	0%	0%	1.00	0.00
Learning about the people and history of the district	67%	17%	17%	0%	1.5	0.76
Through informal professional conversation within the school	67%	33%	0%	0%	1.33	0.47
Through informal professional conversation within the district	67%	33%	0%	0%	1.33	0.47
District-based professional development	17%	67%	17%	0%	2.00	0.58
School-based professional development	0%	100%	0%	0%	2.00	0.00
External professional development	50%	50%	0%	0%	1.50	0.50
Through supervision and evaluation	17%	67%	17%	0%	2.00	0.58

Note: n=6

In spite of high levels of engagement during small group networking, participants often struggled to openly share their reflections with the larger group. When the superintendent brought participants together to reflect, the environment and body language became less relaxed and few leaders engaged. The superintendent asked, "Why CRP?...What are the implications of this work within Sunnyside?" Three participants shared short reflections during this time, one stating, "You have to know your own story and others' stories as well." Low levels of participant sensegiving had the superintendent jump quickly from one question to another then lamenting, "This is not a gotcha. People are in different places…We are moving forward with this work…to roll out a comprehensive equity plan." Interviews substantiated this, one district administrator explained, "In our larger group meetings, I don't know how comfortable people feel…sharing." Groups did not actively process together. Connections, reflections, and interpretations remained with the individual or in small groups. As a result, there may be variation in participants' understanding of CRP rather than having shared organizational understanding.

Sunnyside used leadership meetings as a structure to engage leaders in reflective conversations about CRP. Their "BRAVING" norm laid the foundation to dig deeper into culturally responsive work. However, with no structure to support critical self-reflection or provide opportunities for principals' networking and collaborative learning, leadership meetings are the primary sensemaking structure. The need to support various district initiatives: UDL, SEL, PBIS, becomes a barrier to maintaining consistent focus on supporting principals' CRLP.

Data Meetings

Data meetings were a second structure that was revamped to support principals' CRLP. In prior years, data meetings were used as a compliance mechanism. The superintendent recounted their experience at Sunnyside prior to becoming superintendent,

> Data meetings have always been a dog and pony show. We take all the data we know, we put it in a pretty slide for you, you come in, and then we regurgitate to you what we already know. And so thank you for the show. We leave, there's no feedback, and you didn't learn anything.

Most principals reflected similarly on prior experiences that portrayed data meetings as a waste of time and left them feeling unsupported. "It was completely just [principals] create ... after I've handed it off to [district administrators]…we never really got feedback."

The superintendent described saying to principals, "We help you use the data to really drive your school. So there's a lot of support around looking at data and figuring out who has the strength in the district to help support that." Along with modeling for principals, the superintendent strives to use data meetings to hold principals accountable for district initiatives.

> Central office is pulling the data and there's a list of things we're looking at… attendance … discipline data…MCAS data…The admin team will look at it, we'll generate our own questions, two weeks prior to that data meeting we're going to send our questions, comments, things noticed and wonders to the principal so that they can be prepared. Then [principals] have a section that they can ask us around data we can't pull, they present around [district initiatives]. And then there's a conversation and there's feedback as a result of that with some follow up supports based on what comes out of that.

Principals view these data meetings as a collaborative sensemaking opportunity that will result in next steps and support for their buildings. One principal shared, "Our data meeting is supposed to be in response to [district leader] questions. Then collectively we're supposed to create a plan to address any challenges."

Data meeting minutes indicated high levels of sensegiving between leaders throughout the meeting. These conversations were guided by the Data Meeting Process protocol, (see Figure 3.3). The first half of the meeting was dedicated to holding principals accountable for district initiatives. For example, one principal reported supporting UDL with "School-wide strategies (mini-formative assessments)…and curriculum mapping." The remaining time was used to develop an action plan to support the individual school. Meeting notes demonstrated sensegiving is aligned to district goals and is driving the allocation of district resources. One example of this in response to the question, "How can central office offer support?", was to have a district administrator model how to "integrate technology into lessons." The Data Meeting Process protocol showed accountability beyond the one meeting during a "PHASE 5: Monitoring Process."

Figure 3.3

Data Meeting Process

Data Meeting Process

<u>The following faculty are required to attend data meetings:</u>

Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Special Education, Director of English Language Learners, Math Coordinator, Special Education Coordinator, Student Support Services Coordinator, and School-Based Administrators

PHASE ONE: Three weeks prior to the school's data meeting, the Director of IT will provide the following data to the central office administrative team and the Principal.

- Student Attendance (Students with multiple absences and tardies per Code of Conduct)
- Staff Attendance
- ELL ACCESS
- Behavioral data such as out of school suspensions and in school suspensions
- MCAS Data
- DIBELS (ES only)

- DRA (ES only)
- Common Assessment Data
- Subgroup Data
- Lowest 25% Student data
- Grades
- NWEA
- Restraints
- Class Size

PHASE TWO: At least two weeks prior to the school's data meeting, the central office administrative team will review the data and generate notice and wonders.

PHASE THREE: The Assistant Superintendent will send these thoughts to the Principal at least one week prior to the data meeting.

PHASE FOUR: During the data meeting:

1. Principals will provide feedback to the notice and wonders generated from the central office data review related to the entire _____ process. (15 minutes)
2. Principals will describe how they are supporting the three pillars: PBIS, SEL, UDL. (15 minutes)
3. Principals will share information about their CPT cycle. (15 minutes)
4. The team will develop an action plan to support the school. (45 minutes)

The entire data meeting will last no more than 90 minutes. It is imperative that a significant portion of the time is spent on developing an action plan.

PHASE FIVE: Monitoring Process: After the data meeting, there will be subsequent monitoring processes that will be conducted by the Assistant Superintendent.

The district used data meetings to model CRLP, build accountability in district initiatives, and use data to allocate resources. I turn to present data on two structures that are not yet perceived to support principals' CRLP.

Learning Walks

Learning walks were a third structure that emerged in the data as supporting principals' learning, however were not perceived as effective in supporting principals' CRLP. During learning walks, groups of administrators visit classrooms and use the Instructional Monitoring Tool (IMT) to calibrate observations and norm principal feedback (see Figure 3.4). Some

principals reflected on prior experiences, one shared, "I honestly never got anything out of it."

Conversely, there is a perception that the enhanced IMT promotes collaborative learning and

supports principals' feedback. By way of example, one principal stated, "Learning walks help

calibrate us. So actually, I said, Okay. So this is what we're focusing on, now I can use these

tools to do my observations and share them with my team."

Figure 3.4

Instructional Monitoring Tool

The IMT focused conversations on student learning and instructional practices that are aligned to

district priorities, however CRP is largely subsumed within UDL, SEL, and PBIS practices.

Interview and document analysis suggested the IMT was collaboratively developed to

align conversations to district initiatives. The superintendent's goal was for principals to use

group feedback from the IMT to inform teaching and learning practice. The superintendent

elaborated on how the IMT supports aspects of culturally responsive conversations:

It gives look for's that we'd like to see in the classroom….looking for who are the

demographics in our schools, do we have representation of various forms of literature, or

articles or whatever it is we're asking kids to do. And if not, what is it that they're doing

that they can bring their own experiences in?

Despite listing UDL practices throughout the IMT, there is a lack of explicit connection to racial

and cultural diversity. As a result, conversations about teaching and learning may not center

around culturally proficient pedagogy.

Professional Development

The fourth and final structure that emerged from data was professional development

(PD). Evidence showed the district has not intentionally used PD structures to enhance

principals' CRLP. One principal described their frustration with district PD, "They really rely on

train the trainer models, but they never train the trainers[principals]. They just think we come

with these built in knowledge and expertise." As principals do not have a common understanding

of equity and CRP, relying on a "train the trainer" model adds to the organizational confusion.

Additionally, without training and common expectations, it is challenging to provide staff with

PD on difficult topics like race and culture.

Furthermore, district PD experiences were described as "blanketed PD" that did not meet

the individual's needs. Most leaders reflected on a specific one-size fits all approach to district

PD causing a detrimental domino effect on educators. One principal lamented, "It's a really great

way to disengage a staff." Most principals agreed that this one-size fits all approach to

developing awareness of bias created a "defensive and very combative…situation" and

principals were "left to pick up the pieces." Survey results corroborated these findings with only

17% and 0% of respondents asserting district-based and school-based PD, respectively, as very

influential to their CRP (see Table 3.4).

In addition, there was a lack of consistent purpose in district PD. Leaders referenced a myriad of district PD topics, some being SEED training and Eric Jensen's *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*. The lack of a central focus in district sensegiving caused ambiguity in organizational sensemaking. The superintendent expressed concern,

> I feel like we've had many starts in [Sunnyside] around equity. I think people are very comfortable talking about poverty because poverty is not my fault. Poverty's like your parents don't have jobs, poverty's not my fault. People are very comfortable talking about equity from the lens of yes, kids should have access.

Subsequently, all leaders who have worked at Sunnyside for at least one year asserted that accessing PD outside the district was the primary source of learning. One principal explained "I actively seek opportunities to develop myself outside of my job." Though being the primary source of learning, survey data suggests external PD was perceived to be 50% less effective in supporting principals' CRLP than self-reflection (see Table 3.4). Principals referenced attending a variety of external PD, e.g., various conferences and courses at local universities. Inherent in having the autonomy to select external PD as a primary source of leadership growth, is a discrepancy in knowledge and understanding of district initiatives. These discrepancies can exacerbate issues with common language and shared vision and lead to a disjointed implementation of district initiatives.

There is, however, a realization that these inconsistencies exist leading the superintendent to intentionally provide principals' with PD that aligns to district initiatives. Evidence revealed the focus of PD was related to initiatives such as UDL as opposed to building principals' CRLP. For example, an agenda showed an external consultant delivered PD on UDL.

Additionally, recent efforts to attend conferences as a leadership team impacts organizational sensemaking. Most leaders elaborated that these opportunities allow them to grapple with district priorities that impact their practice. One principal explained, "It really helped me to understand the direction that the leadership team wanted to go." They went on to say, "[The PD] armed me with a lot of information…and gave us a lot of tools and resources."

Despite PD being aligned to district initiatives such as UDL, it has not explicitly focused on enhancing principals' CRLP. As such, principals are leveraging their knowledge of equity-centered frameworks, such as UDL, to inform their CRLP. Though in district shared PD experiences and external shared PD experiences appeared to have a positive impact on sensemaking, principals did not perceive PD as very influential to their CRLP.

Discussion

This individual strand described how district administrators in one Massachusetts suburban school district sought to support principals' CRLP and how leaders perceived the effectiveness of these supports. In response to my first research question, data analysis showed that district administrators established a supportive, equity-driven culture and enhanced district structures and tools. In response to my second research question, finding suggested that though there is ambiguity and variance in how the culture and structures support principals' CRLP, there was a perception that critical self-reflection and informal conversations were most influential to principals' CRLP. The following sections discuss the potential implications these findings may have for districts seeking to support principals' CRLP.

Establish a Supportive, Equity-Centered Culture

The success of reform efforts relies on the collective understanding of the reform and the support efforts to build leadership capacity (Leithwood, 2004). Research on building principals'

capacity suggests that district administrators should work collaboratively with principals (Honig, 2008) and to enhance their CRLP, principals need modeling and support (Johnson, 2006; Khalifa et al., 2016). Further, the most valued form of professional learning comes through collaborative sensegiving interactions where principals are supported in a journey of self-reflection and sensemaking (Coffin & Leithwood, 2000; Lopez, 2015). Consistent with this research, Sunnyside leadership is focused on establishing a coherent service-oriented model to build trust between leaders and transparency in the districts' equity goal. With trust and transparency, there is potential to support principals' critical self-reflection. Critical self-reflection is a journey that begins with the individual reflecting on their own identity. By examining one's privilege, beliefs, and biases individuals develop a critical-awareness and are able to recognize systems and practices that further marginalize diverse student populations. It is then leaders are able to challenge the status quo and foster teachers' CRP.

Research on enhancing principals' capacity suggests district administrators and principals should jointly engage in job-embedded supports (Honig, 2012) and establish a common understanding of the districts' equity-driven purpose (Leithwood & Azah, 2017; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Furthermore, the relationships between district administrators and principals is foundational to leading principals "to become more critically self-reflective and aware of their privilege and oppressive behaviors towards marginalized students" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 74). The literature also indicates that principals rarely get this type of support.

Sunnyside district administrators shifted the narrative of district administrator-principal relationships from regulatory and reactive (Honig, 2008; Rorrer et al., 2008) to relationships that promote sensegiving and build trust. The superintendent explicitly named the purpose of district leadership is to support schools, rather than for schools to support the district. This service

orientation provided principals with access to district administrators and built transparency in district initiatives. The superintendent established strategic coherence across district administrators' roles and held every district administrator accountable to these efforts. By requiring reports, holding regular meetings, and using the evaluation tool with each administrator, there was coherence in their efforts to support principals. The commitment to build collaborative relationships is building trust and establishing a culture to engage in "healthy" and "uncomfortable" conversations. As principals perceived reflection and informal conversations as most effective in supporting their CRLP, Sunnyside has the opportunity to leverage these relationships to individualize support for principals, promote critical self-reflection, and support principals in fostering teachers' CRP.

Furthermore, the superintendent controls the sensemaking process by using formal channels such as district documentation and leadership meetings to signal the importance of leading with equity (Leithwood & Azah, 2017; Moorosi & Bantwini, 2016; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Although Sunnyside espoused equity as a value, there was not a specific focus on or a shared understanding of CRP. It is critical for districts to not just develop a shared commitment to the goal of increasing equity and access, but also to have a strong shared definition of what CRP means as well as developing strategies to enact CRP. Furthermore, leaders need not only to have knowledge of practices, but also to unpack their beliefs that drive practices. Until there is a commitment to reflect on one's identity, CRP will be viewed as a practice enacted within other district initiatives rather than being a conscious behavior that informs beliefs and practice.

Enhance District Structures

Meaning is constructed by individuals and organizations through a dynamic, iterative social process (Maitlis, 2015; Weick, 2005). District administrators used structures to both control and

animate the sensemaking process. The superintendent animated sensemaking by engaging all stakeholders in "extensive sensegiving" (Maitlis, p. 31). By aligning support structures and tools to their equity goal and using data to ground conversations that drive accountability, district administrators are beginning to push against deficit thinking and past practices that maintain inequitable access (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Sunnyside leadership embedded structures into the school day to support sensemaking interactions between leaders. Though aspects of these structures are beginning to support principals' CRLP, there are areas that could be strengthened. District structures and tools should be tightly aligned to CRP. For example, learning walk tools should clearly articulate what culturally responsive practices principals are looking for and then teams should debrief strategies and tools to use in addressing racial and cultural gaps they see in classrooms. Furthermore, principals do not lead in isolation. It will be important for district leadership to consider creating opportunities for principal colleagues to network. These networks should not be seen as PD, but rather an opportunity for principals to authentically reflect and engage in sensemaking of challenges that are relevant to their CRLP.

Contrary to research that asserts principals need differentiated professional development (PD) that is connected to district goals (Moorosi & Bantwini, 2016), Sunnyside has historically offered "blanketed" PD. Principals have been forced to seek PD outside the district. When external PD is principals' primary source of learning, there is a gap in organizational sensemaking of district initiatives. Therefore, it is critical that districts evaluate the PD they offer principals and the opportunities they provide to debrief with colleagues. Group size matters in facilitating these types of PD. Leaders engage in higher levels of sensegiving when in small groups (three to five participants) rather than reflecting with all participants in a larger group.

Also, if principals are responsible for leading culturally responsive PD for others, they need extensive preparation and training.

In sum, Sunnyside district used a service-orientation to build collaborative relationships between district administrators and principals that can be leveraged to support principals' reflective practice. The lack of specificity in expectations of CRP resulted in discrepancy in organizational sensemaking. Once a definition and shared understanding of CRP is established, structures and tools must be tightly aligned to support principals in operationalizing CRP and to provide principals with networking opportunities to reflect on experiences.

These findings have implications for future research on enhancing principals' CRLP. By aligning structures that allow leaders to engage in sensegiving about environmental cues, meaning is negotiated and organizational sensemaking evolves. This study did not measure the impact supports have on principals' CRLP. Conducting a multi-year study would allow time for more observations to analyze sensegiving interactions and examine the impact of these interactions on principals' CRLP. Additionally, research suggests the importance of vision setting and communication in supporting change (Leithwood & Azah, 2017). I contend these findings confirm and extend this research. This study suggests that the visioning process also relies on all members of the team developing a common understanding of how core practices are defined and having clarity in how to operationalize that understanding to achieve the vision.

Conclusion

This individual strand explored how district administrators in one Massachusetts school district sought to support principals' CRLP and how the leaders perceived the effectiveness of those supports. Through this strand, I identified that district administrators attempted to support principals' CRLP by establishing collaborative relationships, communicating equity as a priority,

and aligning district structures and tools to the district's equity priority. I also concluded that districts must leverage collaborative relationships with principals promote critical self-reflection, and support principals in fostering teachers' CRP. Furthermore, districts should develop a shared definition and understanding of CRP as well as develop clarity in how to operationalize CRP. Throughout this sensemaking process, CRP should be contrasted with equity-driven initiatives so practices do not become conflated diminishing factors like race and culture. This study's findings can begin to provide insight into supporting district administrators in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities who are working to support principals' CRLP.

CHAPTER FOUR[4]

Discussion, Recommendations, and Implications

This study examined how educators in the Sunnyside School District make sense of what it means to be culturally responsive and how they enact that understanding in their various roles. Employing a sensemaking framework, the five members of our research group each examined a specific area of district practice and investigated how stakeholders approached culturally responsive practice (CRP). Specifically, Rogers (2020) focused on district administration support of principals' culturally responsive leadership practice; Anderson (2020) focused on district administrator understanding and influence on educator CRP; Medeiros (2020) focused on how school leaders and teachers utilized supervision and evaluation to construct a shared understanding of CRP; McLaughlin (2020) focused on CRP as it relates to educators' family engagement practices; and Greenwood (2020) focused on how educators perceived their development related to CRP.

We conducted this case study in the Sunnyside School District, a district in Massachusetts, serving between two and five thousand students Pre-K to 12. Sunnyside's enrollment is composed of almost 90% students of color, nearly half of whom are classified as economically disadvantaged, and between 10 - 20% as English Learners. The demographic makeup of the student population has become markedly more diverse in the last two-to-three decades. (See Chapter Two for a full description.)

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[4] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Daniel S. Anderson, James J. Greenwood, Sarah L. McLaughlin, Jason W. Medeiros, Tina C. Rogers.

In this final chapter, we answer our overarching research questions by presenting the common themes that emerged from our individual findings as well as implications for practice, policy, and research.

Synthesis of Shared Findings

The most prominent finding across all of our studies was that educators in Sunnyside did not operate with a shared understanding of CRP. While there were some similarities in the ways that district administrators, school leaders, and teachers discussed issues of equity, school leaders and teachers developed individualized understandings of CRP in the absence of a common definition from district leadership. Educators then enacted those understandings in varied, inconsistent ways.

Moreover, in the absence of a single espoused definition of CRP, other ideas and frameworks that are understood as district initiatives served as proxies for CRP. For example, when asked about their understanding and enactment of CRP, educators referred to the universal design for learning (UDL) framework and used its components to explain CRP. In addition to UDL, educators often connected the framework of CRP to positive behavioral interventions systems (PBIS) and social emotional learning (SEL), all of which were the focus of professional development initiatives in Sunnyside. Educators of all roles followed this pattern. Additionally, educators connected CRP to the value of equity that is espoused in the district from the top level of leadership. This focus on equity as a proxy for CRP may derive from the direction given by district leadership. In conversation, the Sunnyside superintendent shared a belief that culturally responsive practices were not only about issues of race but more broadly around issues of access.

The absence of a district-espoused definition of CRP, however, did not lead to a dearth of educator sensemaking; in fact, several distinct patterns formed around CRP sensemaking. The

following sections outline triggers in the Sunnyside district that prompted educators to interpret CRP on their own, and the behaviors that they displayed while interpreting these triggers and engaging in behaviors they believed to be culturally responsive.

Sensemaking Triggers within Sunnyside

How organizational leaders respond to sensemaking triggers impacts the organization's capacity to process, understand, and respond coherently to change. Such triggers include "environmental jolts and organizational crises," "threats to identity," and "planned change interventions" (Maitlis & Christanson, 2014). Maitlis (2005) characterized responses to these events as having varying levels of control (the extent to which leaders structure opportunities to guide understanding) and animation (the extent to which stakeholders participate and engage in the sensemaking process). Our data revealed three triggers that spurred educators in Sunnyside to make sense of what it meant to be culturally responsive: (1) demographic changes within the student population, (2) frequent turnover in superintendent leadership, and (3) investment of resources towards implementing UDL practices. Together, these changes jolted how educators saw their responsibilities to educate historically marginalized students in Sunnyside and have animated considerable amounts of sensemaking. After describing each of these triggers, we evaluate them in the context of Maitlis's framework and describe how efforts to control and animate understanding of CRP informed its enactment.

The Demographic Change of Sunnyside

A desire to understand how to support the diversity of Sunnyside's student population arose as a consistent theme in the data. Interview participants used language of "old" and "new" to articulate the difference between Sunnyside's pre-2000 demography (a predominantly white, ethnic European population) to its current racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse

composition. These responses conveyed apprehension amongst educators of all racial and ethnic backgrounds about how the district as a whole was meeting the needs of its students. While most participants named "diversity as a strength" of the district, teachers within Sunnyside expressed feeling on the frontline of this demographic change. Contributing to their sensemaking around Sunnyside students was the perception of consistent negative media attention of the district and, more generally, the sentiment in the community that the schools were now "second rate."

Educators acknowledged a need for the district to respond to Sunnyside's local context and explore the racialized environment inside and outside of the school system. A school system's ability to respond strategically to racial demographic change, such as the one experienced in Sunnyside, requires leaders to reflect on how personal, professional, and organizational identities contribute to practices that are not aligned to the needs of the new populations entering the school system (Evans, 2007). The racialized perceptions in the community made it challenging for the district to address CRP because, as one district leader put it, racism "feels like it's very much alive in [the] community."

Tensions in District Leadership

Tensions in district leadership were the second prevalent trigger that spurred Sunnyside's sensemaking of CRP. One form of tension stemmed from steady turnover in the district office leadership team (four superintendents in nine years). Frequent leadership transitions created few opportunities for educators to internalize and incorporate practices tied to a unified, lasting vision for teaching and learning. When sensemaking opportunities did arise, leader sensegiving was inconsistent and varied. The educators who have remained through these changes lamented that models of CRP either have not carried over across leaders or have not been defined at all.

In addition to the challenges caused by multiple leadership transitions, educators described damage caused by the poor leadership skills of some of these past administrators. Educators used phrases like "scary" and "reign of terror" to describe prior leadership. These previous experiences left some teachers feeling "attacked," and subsequent leaders expressed having to "fix" the conflicts that arose from these moments. Such repair work was done at the expense of building new and different approaches to teaching Sunnyside's students. As a result, school leaders expressed feeling alone and responsible for supporting the educators in their buildings through the issues related to the demographic changes referenced above. School leaders longed for a district culture that allowed for open conversation to occur, one where educators are "talking about race and just how it impacts kids, and how it impacts teachers."

District Commitment to UDL

A third trigger that arose as a contributor to CRP sensemaking in Sunnyside was the district's continuing commitment to incorporating UDL as an instructional strategy. UDL, a set of classroom-based planning practices that enable access for diverse learners, was highlighted in the district's Instructional Practice Guide (developed in 2017). Educators explicitly connected the focus on UDL and access to a larger focus on equity. This comprised the district's tiered system of instructional support, along with SEL and PBIS. Elements of UDL, SEL, and PBIS also appeared in the district's Instructional Monitoring Tool (updated in 2019, under the new superintendent), a classroom observation protocol intended to calibrate observations and norm school leader feedback. These practices have been the focus of leader sensegiving, and educators have had multiple opportunities to think about, adopt, and practice the pedagogical skills that contribute to these models. When asked to describe their understanding of CRP, educators frequently referenced components of UDL along with references to SEL and PBIS.

Though UDL and CRP have some commonalities, such as the belief that barriers to equitable access lie within educational systems rather than as deficits in students, they should not be conflated (Kieran & Anderson, 2019). Both frameworks require educators to understand students' individual needs and proactively remove barriers that are embedded in the systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. However, without intentionally acknowledging personal bias and considering how racial, cultural, and linguistic differences affect student learning, the differentiation within UDL may not be responsive to the unique needs of historically marginalized populations. The conflation of UDL and CRP surfaced in conversations with Sunnyside educators as they pivoted to more technical language tied to instructional practice and away from matters concerning beliefs about students' racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities. Thus, the use of UDL, or even of equity, as an explanation for CRP impinged on complete understanding of the latter.

The messaging that equity and UDL were about more than just race had the unintended consequence of diminishing the consideration of race and culture in educators' enactment of their practice. The UDL focus diluted the commitment to reflecting on one's own identity and how that identity informs one's beliefs and practices related to supporting historically marginalized students, crucial elements of CRP. As Weick (1995) posited, when sensemaking creates and maintains coherent understandings, collective action is enabled. In findings across the individual studies, action was neither collective nor consistent in Sunnyside.

Assessing the Sensemaking Processes within Sunnyside

A district leader can perform sensegiving by creating structures and systems that build efficacy toward the district's mission and vision (Leithwood, 2010) thus engaging in controlled sensemaking of the organization (Maitlis, 2005). These sensegiving opportunities can both

inform how district stakeholders understand key messages and provide opportunities for stakeholders to contribute to the organization's learning. It is the dynamic interplay between enactment, environment, and sensegiving that "differentiates sensemaking from interpretation" (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 84) and shapes the way practice and beliefs are adjusted and become accepted. In the case of Sunnyside, we saw fragmented organizational sensemaking (animated, but not controlled) when it came to the core beliefs surrounding CRP, and guided organizational sensemaking (controlled and animated) around the practices like UDL that educators used as proxies for CRP.

Fragmented Organizational Sensemaking of CRP Beliefs

Our data did not indicate that there were regular opportunities for educators to talk about how they might proactively confront the biases towards Sunnyside students that existed in the community, nor did it indicate that there were widespread opportunities to reflect on what biases educators themselves may have held or how those biases impacted their practice. Without such structure, high levels of animation could lead to multiple, narrow, and divergent understandings, leading the group's sensemaking to be "fragmented" (Maitlis, 2005). Fragmented groups act inconsistently and incoherently. Sunnyside consequently lacked coherence around conversations regarding the educator beliefs associated with CRP.

Findings across several of our individual studies revealed that individual educators' personal stories and life experiences held the most influence on their understanding of CRP. When such understandings are individualized and unique, the actions resulting from them are varied. In addition to educators' tendency to use other frameworks as proxies for CRP, there were also examples of how educators were acting within their own conceptions of CRP. These examples included varied ways of

- introducing culturally relevant literature and themes in their buildings and classrooms;
- honoring student expression of cultural norms (e.g., not making eye contact with figures of authority);
- having documents translated into other languages;
- measuring family engagement by tallying attendance at school events; and,
- leveraging teacher evaluation as a CRP accountability tool rather than a developmental opportunity.

While each example represented a genuine attempt to act in a culturally responsive way, the actions were based on individualized understandings that had been formed in isolation and therefore had limited alignment. Furthermore, educators lacking a clear understanding of CRP or not having life experiences that enriched their understanding of CRP tended to enact more traditional or technical practices that were not fully in line with CRP scholarship or concepts.

Guided Organizational Sensemaking of CRP Practices

Educators in Sunnyside expressed confidence in the knowledge they were gaining about UDL. This CRP sensemaking trigger corresponded with a high level of leader control, signifying significant leader sensegiving. Sunnyside constructed a clearly defined commitment to UDL as an instructional strategy. They developed tools and protocols to ground feedback in UDL, and they allocated resources in accordance with this initiative. But this focus on UDL (and its use as a proxy) as discussed above, did not immediately translate into understanding of CRP aligned to its defining characteristics.

Despite the resources, structure, and support devoted to UDL, school leaders expressed improvising strategies to engage their respective faculty on issues related to CRP. The superintendent, however, was clear in asserting that district sensegiving uniting the two was intended to begin with the district Equity Plan. Admitting it was not yet a comprehensive plan, they clarified that the plan's impetus was to establish equity "as a value" so that the district would not be "ignoring it." In systems change, maintaining systemic focus on equity begins with

a strategic plan that is communicated to the community (Leithwood & Azah, 2017). However, the highly emphasized implementation of UDL did not immediately translate into the ability to use it as a scaffold for furthering sensemaking of CRP.

Discussion

Our analysis of how educators make sense of and enact CRP has implications for practice, policy, and research. We address each in turn.

Implications for Practice

Working with building and district leaders, educators should develop a shared definition for and deepen their understanding of CRP. This shared definition would then inform teaching practice and professional development opportunities that enhance and sustain CRP. Because schools are dynamic, social organizations where heterogeneous groups of educators continuously strive to make sense of the cues from their environment, we propose a model for how leaders could establish a strategic approach to organizational CRP sensemaking.

In doing so, we extend one of Maitlis's (2015) four forms of organizational sensemaking, guided organizational sensemaking, proposing a model to support practitioner sensemaking of CRP. We claim there are two unique patterns for sensemaking within the realm of CRP: a sensemaking structure for learning related to teaching practices that support historically marginalized students, and a pattern of behaviors associated with unpacking beliefs about students and their families - mindsets that are critical to CRP.

Figure 4.1 illustrates a model for organizational sensemaking specifically as it relates to CRP. This conceptualization emerged from the study's overarching research questions, which sought to understand, first, how educators make sense of CRP and, second, how they enact that understanding through their practice. As such, the figure depicts two concentric loops

representing the iterative cycle of understanding and enacting new practice at both the individual and the organizational levels. We claim that there should be an intentional, aligned, and coherent approach to supporting sensemaking at both of these levels. In order to enhance CRP throughout a school district, the guidance and structures offered at the organizational level should not only detail and direct sensemaking activity, but should also serve as a model for individual stakeholders of what they should personally be reflecting upon and doing to grow CRP in their own work as culturally responsive practitioners. The double-sided black arrows between the two loops in the figure indicate the need for the organization and individuals to engage in sensemaking and sensegiving exchanges that will help refine collective practice over time.

Figure 4.1

Sensemaking of CRP
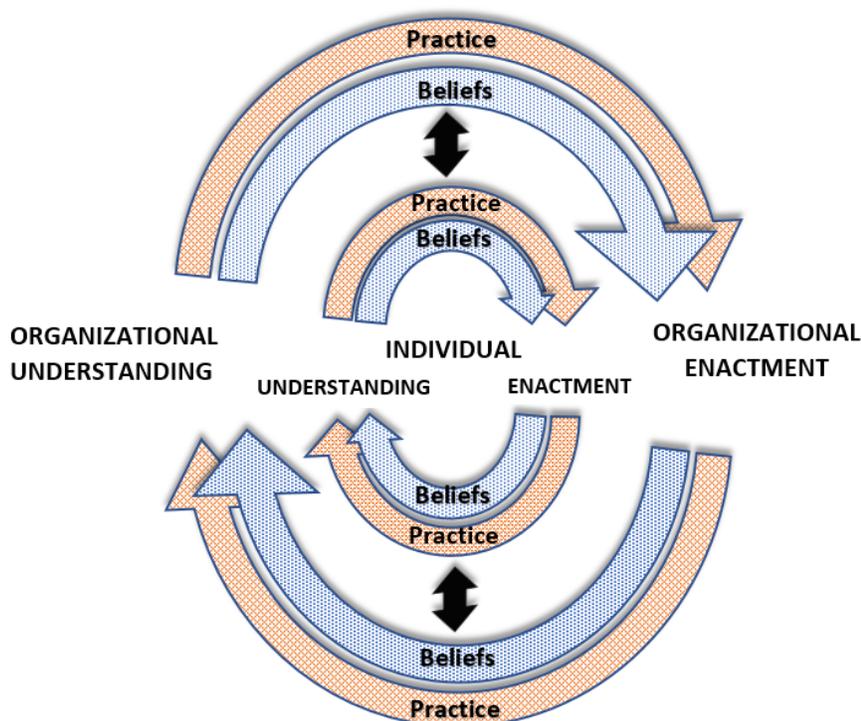
As noted above, this sensemaking requires a continuous cycle of learning, reflection, and implementation related to both the beliefs (represented in blue) and the practices (represented in

orange) encompassed by CRP. The distinction between these concurrent cycles of learning is equally as important as the relationship between the organization and the individual. In this current study, we found a lack of controlled sensegiving by district leadership pertaining to CRP beliefs. Even though there was a highly controlled and animated sensemaking process for UDL and other related practices, the absence of a similar sensemaking process pertaining to CRP beliefs resulted in Sunnyside's educators relying on their current interpretations of the environment to inform the way they made sense of CRP. We contend that in order for districts to realize the benefits of organizational sensemaking of CRP, processes must be characterized by both high control and high animation in order to promote the practices and the beliefs related to CRP.

In addition to this model, we also acknowledge that federal, state, and local agencies are continuously implementing new reform initiatives. These reform efforts are often seen as something "new" for educators to learn and implement rather than an adjustment to current practice. When implementing CRP, districts should critically analyze their current landscape to assess how their current vision, core values, policies, and practices align with the tenets of CRP. Districts should then consider how they can leverage what already exists within the district, for example UDL practices, as a scaffold to support organizational sensemaking of CRP. This principle holds true for the introduction of any new concept, particularly in light of the evidence that educators in Sunnyside often did seize on the few examples or concepts that they were provided.

Superintendents, school leaders, other district leaders should tightly align formal structures and tools such as scheduled meetings, district documentation, and formal committees to develop a shared understanding that builds on prior knowledge, practice, and policy

(illustrated in the orange outer loop of Figure 4.1). These structures and tools should clearly

articulate a district definition of CRP and empower stakeholders to negotiate meaning over time.

For example, districts should consider developing observational tools and rubrics that clearly

articulate the culturally responsive practices for which principals are looking. Teams should then

debrief strategies and identify tools to use in addressing gaps they see in classrooms. Again, this

interplay between individual and organizational beliefs and enactments is modeled in Figure 4.1.

If educational leaders form a better understanding of how teachers and other educators

effectively develop CRP, then principals and district leaders will be able to use this information

to more effectively design ongoing professional development programs and learning

opportunities that sustain and enhance educators' CRP. Our data suggests that educators (both

teachers and leaders) found opportunities—when they had them—to learn more about their

surrounding communities and the history of the region to be helpful, in turn impacting educators'

individual beliefs as represented by the inner blue concentric loop of Figure 4.1. As a result,

professional development should be specifically tailored to learning the history of the district and

the cultures of the populations therein. All educators should seek professional development

opportunities that are immersive in both their professional and personal networks. Educators

should also continue to pursue opportunities that provide them the experience of being in the

minority and living and working amongst historically marginalized and minoritized groups.

These should include opportunities to reflect on their identities and the ongoing significance of

race. All educators, both white and educators of color should seek and develop ways to

strengthen their individual practices and beliefs surrounding CRP as illustrated by the inner

concentric loops in Figure 4.1.

Teachers who have been evaluated and deemed as having stronger CRP practices by their principals and peers could be placed in leadership positions serving in mentorship roles for both new and veteran teachers. New teachers could model their developing practice on the best examples of skilled teachers. Moreover, they should work towards developing their practice and pedagogy in their direct work with students and families.

Implications for Policy

The findings presented in this study and the accompanying studies of the research group suggest several implications for policy. First, we list several district level policies and then turn to addressing school level policies and teacher preparation policies. As we saw in Sunnyside, one area that educators may immediately gravitate to when implementing CRP is ensuring instructional materials are relevant and representative of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse student populations. Policymakers, particularly state education agencies or occasionally legislatures, are frequently in a position to provide guidance or requirements to school districts and other local education agencies on acceptable curriculum and instructional materials. If guidance or requirements do not direct educators towards cultural responsiveness, this may either be lost as a priority or educators may attempt to address it themselves and veer far afield if uninformed. This unique sensegiving opportunity allows states, either through adoptions or general guidance, to create the initial resources that any district must consult when undertaking a curriculum effort. Curriculum policy can channel leaders and educators towards CRP and inform their understanding.

A second implication involves licensure and tenure policies. State agencies or legislatures generally provide regulation or legislation governing requirements for educator licensure and certification. Similarly, school districts engage in collective bargaining or directly mandate contract terms to enumerate tenure-granting policies and requirements for teachers,

administrators, and other educators, depending on the state collective bargaining environment. In all of these cases, there are opportunities to establish standards for teacher and administrator practice as well as for permanent status to be granted. These mechanisms can signal the importance of CRP by elevating it as a requirement. They may also make use of the captive audience that must attend to them by including detailed guidance on what CRP is and how to implement it.

Third, as states or districts establish evaluation policies, they have an opportunity to ensure that expectation-setting documents direct educators towards culturally responsive practices. Mandatory rubrics, resources on effective practice, and guidance documents that spotlight pedagogy can encourage CRP. Additionally, if policymakers frame educator evaluation as a system for supporting educator growth, and not strictly for accountability, school-based leaders can encourage educators to document and engage with elements of teaching practice that promote the self-reflection and critical consciousness required to understand the intersection of race, identity, and practice. Doing so will further support the interplay between organizational and individual practice and beliefs related to CRP (see Figure 4.1).

We now turn from district-based policies toward policy suggestions for teacher preparation and continuing development. As teacher education programs strive to prepare the next generation of teachers who will serve an increasingly diverse student body, there are implications for improving their work to better equip teachers around CRP. Teacher education programs should assess the current state of their coursework and curriculum and enhance it to more thoroughly address development of CRP. Teacher preparation programs might also require a practicum that includes cultural immersion experiences working in diverse populations, supporting individuals' sensemaking of beliefs and practices related to CRP (see Figure 4.1). To address the cultural mismatch of the teaching force and student body, teacher preparation

programs might aggressively enhance their outreach to (and recruitment of) candidates of color and teachers from diverse backgrounds to increase the diversity of the teacher population. Moreover, as districts continue to work with the continuing education of current and veteran teachers, districts must develop ways to enhance ongoing professional development beyond that which teachers obtained in their teacher education. If teachers did not have strong CRP components in their teacher education programs or graduate work, district teacher induction programs could include a course studying the demographics of their local communities to engender understanding of the racial, ethnic, and cultural identities of the students and families they will be serving.

Family engagement policies and practices can be adjusted to support the immediate needs of a school district experiencing substantial shifts in student and family demographics. Financial investments in translators, interpreters and parent activity accounts can meet near-term needs. However, effective and meaningful family engagement is not attainable without educators who are willing, supported, and prepared to engage in meaningful partnerships. Instead, efforts will be misaligned. As Mapp (2013) posits, the capacity of educators must be strengthened in four areas in order to achieve impactful family engagement: capabilities, connections, confidence and cognition. There is evidence of educator cognition of family engagement, believing it to be a critical component of their work. Mapp's other three areas directly connect to components of CRP: holding informed and asset-minded beliefs about families from other cultures (capabilities), building trusting relationships through social networks (connections), and feeling a level of comfort in working across diverse populations (confidence). Districts such as Sunnyside can more effectively build the capacity of educators to engage families with CRP. This can begin

with the induction and mentoring process as a key area of orientation and ongoing support for new educators and continue with regular opportunities to explore beliefs and practices.

Finally, all of the preceding policy ideas must be carefully considered. As policymakers consider adopting positions that encourage schools or districts to implement culturally responsive practices, they must be attentive to the challenges faced by educators who feel urgency but do not understand the subject. We have seen in this case study a tendency for educators to fixate on the first ideas that they can understand. Policy must take into consideration the need to provision for real concrete guidance on practice and for time and expertise to accompany any implementation, lest educators fearful of being on the wrong side of conversations about race and inequity rush for the wrong solutions in an effort to feel and be seen as acting correctly. If guidance and scaffolding are not channeled by policy to be priorities, educators, from district officials to individual classroom teachers, may be incited to grasp at partially or completely unrelated ideas, and then to solidify them before more authoritative knowledge can be provided. Policymakers should work with practitioners to identify the places where policy interventions may elevate the urgency of performing CRP, without undermining it as a compliance activity. A compliance-only approach would reduce the influences shown in Figure 4.1 to one loop of practices and negate the beliefs loop.

Implications for Research

Finally, our study has implications for future research. The findings across the individual studies point towards a need to further study the way in which educators negotiate multiple parallel sensemaking efforts. We found educators in Sunnyside grappling with the meaning of CRP and equity at the same time that they sought to understand and enact other concepts, such as universal design for learning (UDL) and social-emotional learning (SEL). Educators, then, made sense of one concept by relating it to another, particularly if they were more fluent in one.

Research in this area could improve how we understand a school district's—or any institution's—approach and capacity to incorporate simultaneous initiatives supporting historically marginalized students. This focus would potentially expand Figure 4.1 to incorporate multiple loops of understanding and enactment happening at both the organizational and individual level each related to a specific initiative.

Additionally, this case study focused on the perceptions of educators within the district and did not examine their interactions with students or families. In the context of sensemaking research, it would be instructive to see examinations of organizational sensemaking using accounts from the perspectives of the organization's clients or consumers. This case study focused on educators and their leaders, just as Maitlis (2005) examined the roles of orchestra musicians and their executives. Literature that rounded out this view with, for example, the perspectives of students and families in Sunnyside might increase our understanding of how these stakeholders participate in the sensemaking and sensegiving activities within the organization.

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Appendix A

Abstract for Daniel S. Anderson's Individual Study

Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District:

Central Office Administrators' Sensemaking and Sensegiving of Cultural Responsiveness

Culturally responsive practice (CRP) by educators is an essential tool to serve increasingly diverse public-school populations. This study examines the sensemaking and sensegiving that district central office administrators undertake regarding what it means for educators to be culturally responsive practitioners. This dissertation used a case study of a mid-sized urban district which has not yet undertaken systematic effort on CRP to explore three research questions: (1) How do district administrators understand what it means for educators to be culturally responsive practitioners? (2) How do district administrators seek to influence the cultural responsiveness of educators? (3) What does evidence suggest about the efficacy of these efforts to influence the cultural responsiveness of educators? Data included interviews with seven district administrators and nineteen teachers, a survey of 33 educators in the district, and a review of internal district documents. Findings included that administrators had limited understanding of CRP, though they believe it to be important. They connected CRP to methodologies and practices in which they were more fluent. Sensegiving by district administrators was more effective at conveying the importance of CRP than its meaning or how to implement it. Absent a shared definition of CRP, but with heavy signaling of its importance, educators developed varying conceptions through their sensemaking. This case study suggests several implications for research, policy, and practice, including for the study of sensemaking in multi-layered organizations grappling with multiple changes and for implementation by school districts of CRP, as well as barriers to such implementation.

Appendix B

Abstract for James J. Greenwood's Individual Study

Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District:

How Teachers Make Sense of Their Cultural Proficiency

While the U.S. student body is increasingly racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse, the teaching population itself, however, does not mirror this same diversity. As such, there is an urgent need for teachers who can adequately meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population (Sleeter, 2001). Some teachers are undeniably more successful at the task of educating diverse student populations than others. How then - are these teachers in particular - successfully able to effectively teach students across various lines of difference? The purpose of this qualitative individual study is to explore teachers' views on how they have developed their cultural proficiency. How do teachers who have been identified by school leaders as particularly effective at teaching diverse student populations develop their culturally responsive practice, and more pointedly - their capacity to effectively teach students from historically marginalized groups (i.e. students from racially minoritized groups or socio-economically disadvantaged groups)? Utilizing a sense-making framework, and gathering information using methods including semi-structured interviews, teacher questionnaires, and reflective journaling, this study uncovers emergent themes and trends in how individual teachers within a diverse Massachusetts school district make sense of the process by which they developed their culturally responsive teaching capacities and practice. If educational leaders form a better understanding of how teachers effectively develop their cultural competencies, then principals and district leaders will be able use this information to more effectively design professional development programs that

sustain teachers' cultural proficiency and better equip them to successfully serve the increasingly

diverse student population.

Appendix C

Abstract for Sarah L. McLaughlin's Individual Study

Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District:

Engaging Families Through Culturally Responsive Practice

As the populations of public schools in the United States grow increasingly more diverse, it is critical for district and school leaders to understand how educators make sense of their responsibility to improve outcomes for historically marginalized students. Culturally responsive practice (CRP) is a framework of beliefs and practices to enhance these students' success. Additionally, it is well established that family engagement in schools also supports student achievement. This qualitative case study explores the intersection of CRP and family engagement by focusing on two research questions: (1) How do educators understand CRP in efforts to engage families of marginalized students and (2) How do educators enact that understanding in practice? It is part of a larger case study examining understanding and enactment of CRP in a diverse Massachusetts school district. Along with Mapp's (2013) Dual Capacity Building Framework of family engagement, I apply Maitlis' (2005) organizational sensemaking theory to data collected from semi-structured interviews, document review and an online survey. Findings reveal that educators understood CRP in regards to family engagement as the need to know students and families and recognize differences in their cultures. Also, educator understanding emanates from both personal and professional experiences including learning from colleagues, students and families. However, educators lack a common definition or understanding of CRP in regards to family engagement. Consequently, family engagement practices vary and tend to be more traditional versus reflective of CRP. This study revealed the need for stronger district direction and support for CRP and family engagement.

Appendix D

Abstract for Jason W. Medeiros's Individual Study

Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District:

Understanding Culturally Responsive Practice Through Supervision & Evaluation

This qualitative case study of a medium-sized Massachusetts school district was part of a larger study exploring how educators throughout a school district make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice (CRP). This individual study focused on how school leaders and teachers incorporated their understanding of CRP into the supervision and evaluation process. Despite a growing body of literature on the effectiveness of educator evaluation standards on teacher practice, there is little on how these tools increase teachers' capacity to support the learning of historically marginalized students. Specifically, this research asks two questions: (1) How do teachers and school leaders understand CRP? (2) How does the supervision and evaluation process contribute to a shared understanding of CRP for teachers and school leaders? Data were collected from 22 semi-structured interviews of school leaders and teachers, document review, and an online survey. Incorporating a cognitive framework for policy implementation, findings revealed that school leaders and teachers understand CRP through their own identities and life experiences and through their interpretation of the district's professional environment. Findings further noted that the lack of a shared definition of CRP in the district contributed to inconsistent application and prioritization of CRP in the supervision and evaluation process. Without a shared understanding, educators often pivoted to other district initiatives to describe CRP. Implications include the need to establish a system of reflection and practice for educators to explore the beliefs they hold about historically marginalized students and how those beliefs inform practice.

Appendix E

Document Analysis Protocol

Item Name	Date of publication	Format	Author	Intended Audience	Code	Detail

Appendix F

Interview Screener Survey

You are invited to participate in a web-based online survey on culturally responsive practice in education. This is a research project being conducted by a team of doctoral students at Boston College. It contains just 4 questions designed to provide aggregate information and to ask for volunteers for future activities such as interviews.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to understand how various educators within the school district make sense of what it means to implement "culturally responsive practice" and how that understanding influences an individual's practice. The intent of this study is to explore how information and knowledge about culturally responsive practice is accumulated, shared, and then translated into practice. It is not an evaluation of the district's or individual educator's efforts.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

BENEFITS

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about the role that district leaders, school leaders, and building-level educators alike share and implement local best practices in support of historically marginalized student populations.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than the risk that you may find some of the questions to be sensitive.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your survey answers are collected as data and will be stored in a password protected electronic format. This platform does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. Within the survey you will be asked if you are interested in participating in an additional interview. If you choose to provide contact information such as your phone number or email address, your survey responses may no longer be anonymous to the researcher. However, no names or identifying information would be included in any publications or presentations based on these data, and your responses to this survey will remain confidential.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact our research supervisor, Professor Martin Scanlan via email at martin.scanlan@bc.edu.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT:

Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Clicking on the "Agree" button indicates that

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older Anonymous
- ❏ AGREE
- ❏ DISAGREE

Anonymous Questions

What is your professional role in your school district? (Please select the answer that best fits your primary role)

- ❏ District Administrator
- ❏ Principal/School Leader
- ❏ School Level Administrator
- ❏ Teacher
- ❏ Paraprofessional
- ❏ Other School-Based Educator
- ❏ Other: _____

For how many school years have you worked in this district (in any educational role)?

Based on your experience in this district only, have you engaged in the following practices with the purpose of reflecting on or improving your understanding of "culturally responsive practice?" Please check all that apply.

- ❏ Personal self-reflection on my own identity
- ❏ Personally sought out professional development through a course, seminar, etc.
- ❏ District-based professional development
- ❏ School-based professional development
- ❏ Through supervision and evaluation
- ❏ Professional coaching offered by district staff
- ❏ Through informal professional conversation within the school
- ❏ Through informal professional conversation within the district
- ❏ Any experience focused on the practice of family engagement
- ❏ None of the above

Interview and Survey

If you would be willing to be interviewed by a researcher about the professional learning experiences you identified above, please provide an email address and phone number.

Note: your responses will not be reported anywhere linked to your contact information. They will only be used in written analysis as part of an aggregate of all responses. The research team may not be able to interview all willing participants if the response is high.

Name

Email Address

Phone Number

Is there a colleague from the district skillful in culturally responsive practice whom the research team should contact for an interview? If so, please provide their name and contact information. Your referral will be kept confidential. You may enter multiple colleagues.

Appendix G

District Administrator Interview Protocol

Introduction

   a. Welcome and thank you for agreeing to this interview
   b. As a reminder, the purpose of this study is that: "We are seeking to understand how various educators in the district make sense of what it means for educators to have culturally responsive practice, and how that influences what they do. This is not an evaluation of individual educators or of the district; it's a case study that is part of our doctoral work."
   c. Your confidentiality will be maintained by anonymizing all information
   d. I have a consent form that outlines the background of this interview. I want to give you time to review this before we begin, and I will need you to sign it
   e. Would you confirm that it is okay to record, just for our research purposes. No recordings will be shared.
   f. Thank you
   g. We're going to start with some background questions

Background Questions
   2. Would you confirm your name and your role here?
   3. How long you have been at the school/district?
      a. How long an educator?
   4. How did you come to be in this role? What was your trajectory?

Understanding of CRP
Again, in this study, we are seeking to understand how various educators in the district make sense of what it means for educators to have culturally responsive practice, and how that influences what they do.
   5. What do you think it means for an educator to be culturally responsive in their practice?
      a. [Probe for further clarification/detail as needed.]
   6. Where does this understanding come from? How have you come to this understanding?
      a. Probe: Does the district explicitly define cultural responsiveness, cultural proficiency, or a similar ideas for educators?
         i. If so, how would you explain it?
      b. Probe: To what extent is that same understanding shared throughout the district?
      c. How did that come about (or what do you think the barriers are to that shared understanding)?
   7. Can you think of one specific practice that is implemented throughout the district that supports the diverse student body?

Experiences Supporting Principals
Thank you. The next question relates to how the district influences and supports principals, generally.
   8. How does the district support the learning and growth of principals?

a. Do you see these supports enhancing principals' learning and growth?
b. If yes, how? In what ways?

Experiences with CRP Work

Shifting now, the next set of questions relates to how the district influences culturally responsive practice of educators.

9. Do you see the district trying to explicitly influence teachers' or principals' cultural responsiveness in any way?
   a. If yes, how? What ways does the district do this?
   b. What are the effects on practice?
   c. [If respondent only answered for teachers or principals, ask again about the other group]
   d. [If necessary] How has the district used [as needed, any of:] policy, brokering and boundary spanning, direct influence, professional development?
10. Would you identify any changes in your or others' perceptions of what it means to be culturally responsive that came as a result of district action?
    a. Can you say more about how the district action influenced you?
    b. If needed: Specific probe re school leaders and teachers
11. Would you identify any changes in your or others' practice that you have made explicitly to be more culturally responsive as a result of district action?
    a. Can you say more about how the district action influenced you?
12. Is there anything we missed or anything you would like to add?
13. For context, how do you identify in terms of race and ethnicity?

Appendix H

School Leader Interview Protocol

1. Introduction
    a. Welcome and thank you for agreeing to this interview
    b. As a reminder, the purpose of this study is that: "We are seeking to understand how various educators in the district make sense of what it means for educators to have culturally responsive practice, and how that influences what they do. This is not an evaluation of individual educators or of the district; it's a case study that is part of our doctoral work."
    c. Your confidentiality will be maintained by anonymizing all information
    d. I have a consent form that outlines the background of this interview. I want to give you time to review this before we begin, and I will need you to sign it
    e. Would you confirm that it is okay to record, just for our research purposes. No recordings will be shared.
    f. Thank you
    g. We're going to start with some background questions

Background Questions
2. Would you confirm your name and your role here?
3. How long have you been at the school/district?
    a. How long have you been working in education?
4. How did you come to be in this role? What was your trajectory?

Understanding of CRP
Again, in this study, we are seeking to understand how various educators in the district make sense of what it means for educators to have culturally responsive practice, and how that influences what they do.
5. What do you think it means for an educator to be culturally responsive in their practice?
    a. [Probe for further clarification/detail as needed.]
6. Where does this understanding come from? How have you come to this understanding?
    a. Probe: Does the district explicitly define cultural responsiveness, cultural proficiency, or a similar practice for educators?
        i. If so, how would you explain it?
7. Can you think of one specific practice that is implemented throughout the district that supports the diverse student body??
    a. Probe: To what extent is that same understanding shared throughout the building? How did that come about (or what do you think the barriers are to that shared understanding)?

Experiences supporting principals
Thank you. The next set of questions relates to how the district influences and supports you as a principal, generally.
8. How does the district support your learning and growth?
    a. Do you see these supports enhancing your learning and growth?

  b. If yes, how? In what ways?

Experiences with CRP Work

Shifting now, the next set of questions relates to how leaders in the district attempt to influence culturally responsive practice.

9. First, in terms of your growth, do you see the district trying to explicitly influence your cultural responsiveness in any way?
   a. If yes, how? What ways does the district do this?
10. Would you identify any changes in your perceptions of what it means to be culturally responsive that came as a result of district action?
    a. Can you say more about how the district action influenced you?
11. As a leader yourself, how do you approach determining if a teacher is effective at teaching students from diverse backgrounds?
    a. Does the supervision/evaluation process play a role at all?
    b. What does feedback look like? What areas for growth do you observe?
12. What framework/structure/language do you lean on to talk about that aspect of teacher practice?
    a. How did you come to that understanding?
    b. To what extent is that same understanding shared throughout the building?
    c. How do teachers respond to that feedback?
    d. How did that come about (or what do you think the barriers are to that shared understanding)?

Last topic now. I want to inquire about family engagement in such a diverse context...

13. How do you, as a leader, try to engage families in the life of the school?
    a. Probe: Was it always this way?
    b. Probe: How did you come to develop this approach?
14. What are your expectations for teachers in terms of family engagement?
    a. Probe: Have these expectations shifted at all from your learning in the district?
15. What have been your successes in this area?
16. What about areas of struggle?
17. Is there anything I missed or anything you would like to add?

Appendix I

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Introduction
   a. Welcome and thank you for agreeing to this interview
   b. As a reminder, the purpose of this study is: "We are seeking to understand how various educators in the district make sense of what it means for educators to have culturally responsive practice, and how that influences what they do. This is not an evaluation of individual educators or of the district; it's a case study that is part of our doctoral work."
   c. Your confidentiality will be maintained by anonymizing all information
   d. I have a consent form that outlines the background of this interview. I want to give you time to review this before we begin, and I will need you to sign it
   e. Would you confirm that it is okay to record, just for our research purposes. No recordings will be shared.
   f. Thank you
   g. We're going to start with some background questions

Background Questions
2. Would you confirm your name and your role here?
3. How long you have been at the school/district?
4. How did you come to be in this role? What was your trajectory?

Understanding of CRP
Again, in this study, we are seeking to understand how various educators in the district make sense of what it means for educators to have culturally responsive practice, and how that influences what they do.
5. What do you think it means for an educator to be culturally responsive in their practice?
   a. [Probe for further clarification/detail as needed.]
6. Where does this understanding come from? How have you come to this understanding?
   a. Probe: How did your undergraduate, graduate and/or pre-service education prepare you to effectively teach students across lines of difference?
7. Were there specific lived-experiences in your background that were particularly helpful in shaping your cultural proficiency? (Don't lead, but if they need examples - i.e. international travel or cultural immersion experiences)

Experiences with supervision
Thank you. The next set of questions relates to your experiences with supervision.
8. What opportunities do you have to learn about, share ideas, or get feedback on this aspect of practice?
   a. Probe: Has there been any feedback through supervision, be it a helpful suggestion or a commendation?
   b. Probe: If you needed support, who would you turn to? Why that person?
   c. Probe: How did they develop that skill?
9. Has the evaluation process played a role at all? If so, how?

a. Probes could be about self-assessment, goal setting, observations, or evaluation

Experiences with CRP Work

Shifting now, the next set of questions relates to how the district influences culturally responsive practice of educators.

10. Do you see the district trying to explicitly influence teachers' cultural responsiveness in any way?
    a. If yes, how? What ways does the district do this?
    b. What are the effects on practice?
    a. [If necessary] How has the district used [as needed, any of:] policy, brokering and boundary spanning, direct influence, professional development?
11. Would you identify any changes in your or others' perceptions of what it means to be culturally responsive that came as a result of district action?
    a. Can you say more about how the district action influenced you?
    b. If needed: Specific probe re school leaders and teachers
12. Would you identify any changes in your or others' practice that you have made explicitly to be more culturally responsive as a result of district action?
    a. Can you say more about how the district action influenced you?
13. Is there anything we missed or anything you would like to add?

Thank you. The next set of questions relates to your experiences with Family Engagement.

Family Engagement

2. How do you work to engage families?
    a. PROBE: What are your family engagement practices?
    b. PROBE: Are there different things for different families?
3. Why do you do family engagement?
    a. PROBE: What are you trying to achieve?
4. Next set of questions is about how you as an educator learned to do family engagement OR How do you decide what to do?
    a. Something that influenced you
    b. Colleague, experience, training, PD
    c. Directives or requirements from district or school leaders
5. Is there anything we missed or anything you would like to add?

Appendix J

Interview Consent Form

Consent Form

BOSTON COLLEGE
Lynch School of Education
Professional School Administrator Program

Research Study: Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District

Individual Consent Form

Introduction:
    You are being asked to participate in a research study exploring how various stakeholders make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice.
    You were selected to be in this study because you are either a central office leader, a principal, or a teacher in the Sunnyside Public Schools.
    Please read this form. You may ask any questions you have before agreeing to participate in this study.

Purpose of Study:
    The purpose of this single-site case study is to understand how various educators within the school district make sense of what it means to implement "culturally responsive practice" and how that understanding influences an individual's practice. The intent of this study is to explore how information and knowledge about culturally responsive practice is accumulated, shared, and then translated into practice. It is not an evaluation of the district's or individual educator's efforts.

What Will Happen in this Study:
    If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in one or more of the following: (1) a semi-structured interview facilitated by one or two of the researchers, (2) a focus group facilitated by one or two of the researchers, (3) a regularly scheduled meeting or training that is observed by one or two researchers, (4) an online questionnaire. The interviews, focus groups, and observations will be audio recorded.

Risks and Discomforts of Being in the Study:
    There are no expected risks. This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

Benefits of Being in the Study:

The purpose of this single-site case study is to explore how various stakeholders make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice. The participants may derive some benefit from having the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their experiences. Further, the district may benefit from the information gleaned from the interviews and information gathered during this study. However, no benefit to the participants can be guaranteed.

Payments: There is no payment or other compensation for participating in this study.

Costs: There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Confidentiality:

Participants' identities will remain confidential throughout the research and reporting of this study. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected file, this includes transcripts of interviews. Audio files will be deleted upon the completion of this study.

Mainly just the researchers will have access to information; however, please note that a few other key people may also have access. These might include government agencies. Also, Institutional Review Board at Boston College and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records. Otherwise, the researchers will not release to others any information that identifies you unless you give your permission, or unless we are legally required to do so.

Choosing to be in the Study and Choosing to Quit the Study:

Choosing to be in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to be in this study, it will not affect your current or future relations with the Sunnyside Public Schools or Boston College. You are free to quit at any time, for whatever reason.

Getting Dismissed from the Study:

The researchers may dismiss you from the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) it is in your best interests (e.g. your identity cannot remain anonymous), or (2) you have failed to comply with the study rules..

Contacts and Questions:

The researchers conducting this study are Dan Anderson, James Greenwood, Jason Medeiros, Sarah McLaughlin, and Tina Rogers. The Boston College faculty advisor for this study is Martin Scanlan, Associate Professor, Lynch School of Education and Human Development. For questions or more information concerning this research, you may contact him at martin.scanlan@bc.edu or 1-617-552-1255.

If you have any questions about your rights as a person in this research study, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu

Copy of Consent Form:

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:
  I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form. I have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to be in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates:
Study Participants Name (Print):_____Date: _____

Participant's Signature: _____Date: _____

Witness/Auditor Signature: _____Date: _____

Appendix K

Online Survey Protocol

You are invited to participate in a web-based online survey on culturally responsive practice in education. This is a research project being conducted by a team of doctoral students at Boston College. It should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to understand how various educators within the school district make sense of what it means to implement "culturally responsive practice" and how that understanding influences an individual's practice. The intent of this study is to explore how information and knowledge about culturally responsive practice is accumulated, shared, and then translated into practice. It is not an evaluation of the district's or individual educator's efforts.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

BENEFITS

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about the role that district leaders, school leaders, and building-level educators alike share and implement local best practices in support of historically marginalized student populations.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than the risk that you may find some of the questions to be sensitive.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your survey answers are collected as data and will be stored in a password protected electronic format. This platform does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. Within the survey you will be asked if you are interested in participating in an additional interview. If you choose to provide contact information such as your phone number or email address, your survey responses may no longer be anonymous to the researcher. However, no names or identifying information would be included in any publications or presentations based on these data, and your responses to this survey will remain confidential.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact our research supervisor, Professor Martin Scanlan via email at martin.scanlan@bc.edu.

SOURCE MATERIAL
This questionnaire was adapted from original materials provided by the Washington state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Original materials may be accessed on the OSPI website: https://www.k12.wa.us/special-education-9

The following references also informed the questionnaire's content:

> Mason, J. L. (1995). Cultural competence self-assessment questionnaire: A manual for users. Portland, OR: Portland State University, Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health.

> Goode, T. D. (2000). Promoting cultural competence and cultural diversity in early intervention and early childhood settings. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Child Development Center.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT:
Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Clicking on the "Agree" button indicates that
- · You have read the above information
- · You voluntarily agree to participate
- · You are 18 years of age or older

○ Agree

○ Disagree

What school setting do you currently work in?

○ District-Level

○ Secondary School (6-12)

○ Elementary School (PK-5)

Which of the following best describes your role?

○ District-Level Administrator

○ School-Based Administrator

○ School-Based Educator

For how many school years have you worked in the field of education?

○ 0-5

○ 6-10

○ 11-15

○ 16-24

○ 25+

For how many school years have you worked in this district (in any educational role)?

○ 0-5

○ 6-10

○ 11-15

○ 16-24

○ 25+

This research defines culturally responsive practice as a combination of educational mindsets, instructional skills, and pedagogies that collectively reject deficit mindsets linked to the languages, cultures, and abilities of historically marginalized students, their families, and the communities in which they live. Such practice entails beliefs and practices such as:
- · an inherent belief that all students can learn
- · a willingness to challenge the status quo
- · a willingness to reflect on how one's identity informs practice
- · the ability to set high expectations while offering high levels of support
- · the ability to scaffold instruction
- · the ability to engage students' lived experiences into the classroom learning experiences

Given this broad overview, respond to the following prompts regarding your own practice:

I am confident in my own understanding of the diverse cultures of the students and families in the district.

○ Very

○ Somewhat

○ Not at all

○ Not sure how to answer

I am confident in my own understanding of how students' cultural backgrounds influence their learning and behavior.

○ Very

○ Somewhat

○ Not at all

○ Not sure how to answer

How frequently do you take part in (or support) the following practices?

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Modify instruction so that students from different cultural backgrounds have their unique learning needs met.	○	○	○	○	○
Examine assessment data with the specific purpose of exploring any discrepancies in performance by cultural background	○	○	○	○	○

Ensure that classroom displays and curriculum materials contain pictures and images that reflect the cultural backgrounds of students and families in your district	○	○	○	○	○
Assess whether or not curriculum resources are free from negative cultural stereotypes	○	○	○	○	○

How frequently do the following practices occur throughout your building (or buildings if you are responsible for more than one building)?

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Modify instruction so that students from different cultural backgrounds have their unique learning needs met.	○	○	○	○	○
Examine assessment data with the specific purpose of exploring any discrepancies in performance by cultural background	○	○	○	○	○
Ensure that classroom displays and curriculum materials contain pictures and images that reflect the cultural backgrounds of students and families in your district	○	○	○	○	○

Assess whether or not curriculum resources are free from negative cultural stereotypes	○	○	○	○	○

Rate how influential the following types of experiences have been in helping you improve your culturally responsive practice?

	Very	Somewhat	Not at all	I have not had this experience
Personal self-reflection on my own cultural identity	○	○	○	○
Reflecting on my experiences with students and their families	○	○	○	○
Learning about the people and history of the district	○	○	○	○
District-based professional development	○	○	○	○
School-based professional development	○	○	○	○
External professional development	○	○	○	○
Through supervision and evaluation	○	○	○	○
Professional coaching offered by district staff	○	○	○	○

Through informal professional conversation within the school	○	○	○	○
Through informal professional conversation within the district	○	○	○	○

To what extent are the following aspects of the supervision and evaluation process utilized to explore culturally responsive practice?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
Self-Assessment & Goal Setting	○	○	○	○	○
Classroom Observation	○	○	○	○	○
Formal conferencing (formative or summative)	○	○	○	○	○
Informal conferencing or coaching	○	○	○	○	○
Written evaluations	○	○	○	○	○

For each of the following, SELECT the items that you currently utilize to complete the stated task. Then, RANK ORDER them with the most important items listed first.

If I want to have more...
 information about the diverse cultures of the families in my district...
 I go to...

Items listed in order of their importance to you

_____ District Leaders

_____ School Leaders

_____ Professional Peers in district

_____ Professional Peers in other districts

_____ Students and Families directly

_____ Community Resources

_____ External Professional Development

_____ Independent Research/Self-Reflection

_____ I don't know where I would go

If I want to learn more about how...
a student's cultural background influences learning and behavior...
I go to...

Items listed in order of their importance to you

_____ District Leaders

_____ School Leaders

_____ Professional Peers in district

_____ Professional Peers in other districts

_____ Students and Families directly

_____ Community Resources

_____ External Professional Development

_____ Independent Research/Self-Reflection

_____ I don't know where I would go

If you want to have more...
information on how student achievement looks for students of different cultural backgrounds
I go to...

Items listed in order of their importance to you

_____ District Leaders

_____ School Leaders

_____ Professional Peers in district

_____ Professional Peers in other districts

_____ Students and Families directly

_____ Community Resources

_____ External Professional Development

_____ Independent Research/Self-Reflection

_____ I don't know where I would go

If I want...
feedback on my own efforts to support the learning of students from diverse cultural backgrounds...
I go to...

Items listed in order of their importance to you

_____ District Leaders

_____ School Leaders

_____ Professional Peers in district

_____ Professional Peers in other districts

_____ Students and Families directly

_____ Community Resources

_____ External Professional Development

_____ Independent Research/Self-Reflection

_____ I don't know where I would go

If I want advice about how...
to communicate effectively with families from diverse cultural backgrounds
I go to...

Items listed in order of their importance to you

_____ District Leaders

_____ School Leaders

_____ Professional Peers in district

_____ Professional Peers in other districts

_____ Students and Families directly

_____ Community Resources

_____ External Professional Development

_____ Independent Research/Self-Reflection

_____ I don't know where I would go

Appendix L

Observation Protocol

Date: _____   Description of activity (what is being observed): _____
Time Start: _____   Time End: _____
Location: _____   Participants: _____

Component	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
☐ Description of participant ☐ Description of activity ☐ Interaction ☐ Behaviors ☐ Unplanned event ☐ Specific comment/quote ☐ Non-verbal behavior ☐ Physical setting		
☐ Description of participant ☐ Description of activity ☐ Interaction ☐ Behaviors ☐ Unplanned event ☐ Specific comment/quote ☐ Non-verbal behavior ☐ Physical setting		
☐ Description of participant ☐ Description of activity ☐ Interaction ☐ Behaviors ☐ Unplanned event ☐ Specific comment/quote ☐ Non-verbal behavior ☐ Physical setting		
☐ Description of participant ☐ Description of activity ☐ Interaction ☐ Behaviors ☐ Unplanned event ☐ Specific comment/quote ☐ Non-verbal behavior ☐ Physical setting		