Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District: Central Office Administrators' Sensemaking and Sensegiving of Cultural Responsiveness

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ENHANCING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICE IN A DISTRICT: CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS' SENSEMAKING AND SENSEGIVING OF CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

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Abstract

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.

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Dedication

To Dr. Sarah Faude, the best role model an aspiring scholar could have, a tenacious warrior for racial justice, an unbelievable spouse, and the best provider of support and fun a person could ask for. This is for you, without whom it would never have been completed or even imagined.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

List of Figures

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

[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 who 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

[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]

CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS' SENSEMAKING AND SENSEGIVING OF CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

This individual case study is part of a broader examination of sensemaking, sensegiving, and implementation of culturally responsive practice by educators throughout one school district. Culturally responsive practice (CRP) encompasses various asset pedagogies, including culturally responsive teaching. This practice is critically necessary because of the need to effectively prepare young people of all racial and cultural backgrounds. Geneva Gay (2018) proposes two facts that demonstrate the need for Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in schools: while there are consistent levels of student achievement over time for various racial and ethnic groups, there remains a wide variation in the individual performances of students within each group. Gay, a leading scholar, emphasizes:

> The 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. (2018, p. xxii)

Students coming from any racial group are capable of achievement, but in American society, institutions consistently impede such success. CRT is offered as an antidote, or "conceptual proposal for correcting these achievement problems" (Gay, 2018, p. xxii).

Our research team, across five studies, examined what educators thought it meant to be culturally responsive in their practice as well as how they enacted these techniques. The research group engaged in a mixed methods qualitative case study to determine broadly:

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[3] This chapter was individually written by Daniel S. Anderson.

1. How do district staff, 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?

Each study focused on a specific aspect of CRP or on a different combination of stakeholders, drawing on data gathered collectively at the shared research site. This study focuses on the understanding of district administrators and their interactions with teachers.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

Literature on sensemaking and sensegiving offers a lens through which to understand how both central office administrators and teachers conceptualized culturally responsive practice. This district case study draws on these concepts to investigate three crucial 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?

For the purpose of this inquiry, "educators" are primarily teachers, but occasionally include other staff members. "District administrators" include high-level leaders (e.g. superintendent, assistant superintendent) and other district staff who support schools and districts (e.g. curriculum director, student services director).[4] Their roles ranged from a focus on curriculum and instruction, student support, family engagement, operations, and compliance functions. Their

[4] Instructional coaches (elementary schools) and department chairs (high school) were instrumental in the operations and learning of the district. These staff were mostly (all but one) based in specific schools. Both groups were considered teachers, but while this group was not situated as central office staff members, they emerged at times in responses as a distinctive group in the middle of district and teacher sensemaking and sensegiving.

activities considered in this study include policy, brokering and boundary spanning, direct influence of staff on schools, and district professional development.

Literature Review

To provide a contextual framework for this study, I review three bodies of literature. Sensemaking and sensegiving offer a frame for examining educator understanding of new practices. Culturally responsive practice is the focus of this inquiry. Finally, I examine studies of how district administrators influence teacher practice. For additional examination of these literatures, see chapter 1.

Conceptual Framework: Sensemaking and Sensegiving

This project draws on foundational understandings of sensemaking and sensegiving, with particular attention to the four forms of organizational sensemaking identified by Maitlis (2005). These concepts enable an understanding of educator perceptions and implementation of CRP.

Sensemaking is the process by which people understand and process surprising events (Gioia and Thomas, 1996; Maitlis & Christenson, 2014; Weick, 1995). This includes responses to the stimuli and the creation of tools for meaning construction (Brown, 2000, 2004; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick & Sutcliffe 2001; Weick et al., 2005; Weick, 1988). Weick (1995) traces the origins of sensemaking literature, beginning with examinations of how people organize "stimuli into frameworks" (p. 5). He emphasizes that sensemaking is not passive and calls attention to how sensemaking is situated within existing institutions, saying, "Organizations also have their own languages and symbols that have important effects on sensemaking" (p. 3). Weick identifies characteristics of sensemaking, including that it is situated in context, social interactions, and environment and that it is "driven by plausibility rather than accuracy" (p.17).

These “set sensemaking apart from other explanatory processes such as understanding, interpretation, and attribution” (p. 17).

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) propose the idea of sensegiving, which they conceptualize as “the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (p. 442). For example, leaders atop hierarchies seek to perform sensegiving that influences the sensemaking of subordinates. Spillane et al. (2002) argue that differing interpretations resulting from sensemaking still represent sensemaking. For example, a response by teachers that is not completely aligned, does not mean that those actors failed to make sense of district initiatives. They still made sense of stimuli, but came to divergent conclusions. Additionally, Maitlis and Christianson (2014) point out that sensemaking can be influenced by elements as diverse as organizational power dynamics and individual emotions. This emphasizes that sensemaking is not siloed, so in the context of situations such as a school district initiative, major changes in practice will never be enacted through simple diffusion of knowledge by practitioners.

Particularly crucial are concepts elaborated by Maitlis (2005), who identifies that organizational sensemaking includes constant sensemaking and sensegiving by all individuals inside of it. She goes on to categorize “four forms of organizational sensemaking” (Maitlis, 2005, p. 32) including: “guided organizational sensemaking” (p. 35), in which both leader and stakeholders are active sensegivers; “fragmented organizational sensemaking” (p. 36), in which leaders provide little sensegiving to stakeholders who actively engage in sensegiving through questioning and narratives; “restricted organizational sensemaking” (p. 39), wherein leaders seek to influence stakeholders who offer few alternative views or sensegiving of their own; and finally, “minimal organizational sensemaking” (p. 42), characterized by little sensegiving from

anyone. Maitlis's (2005) concept of "control" by leaders can best be understood as a high level of sensegiving, including through facilitation and structure. This complex view, which informs my inquiry, helps avoid assumptions of simplified, unidirectional influence and cautions against taking for granted the effectiveness of top down messaging. The overall organizational sensemaking encompasses the discrete sensemaking and sensegiving efforts of all individuals.

Culturally Responsive Practice

Numerous scholars have identified instances of white cultural dominance in American education (Delpit, 1988; Garcia, 1993; Lee, 2005; Leonardo, 2009; Valdés, 1996) and deficit-based understanding of students of color (Gay, 2018; Paris & Alim, 2017). James A. Banks, in the foreword to Gay (2018), traces the history of problematic scholarly traditions: to explain lower academic performance of students of color, scholars first viewed them as bearing genetic differences, then espoused a model of "cultural deprivation" (p. xii) that ignored societal or structural factors. This focus on a lack of cultural capital encouraged still low expectations for students and put the onus on students rather than the institutions failing them. Reacting to this, "cultural difference" scholars recognized assets of students and communities and established the concept of culturally relevant/responsive teaching/pedagogy:

> This theory postulates that the discontinuities between the school culture and the home and community culture of low-income students and students of color are an important factor in their low academic achievement. Consequently, the academic achievement of these students will increase if school and teachers reflect and draw on their cultural and language strengths. (Banks in Gay, 2018, p. xii)

In response, scholars and educators developed asset-based pedagogical models, which asserted that teachers should see multicultural student backgrounds as strengths upon which to

build, crucial in humanizing and properly educating students of color (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Dee & Penner, 2016; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee, 1995; McCarty & Zepeda, 1995; Moll, 1992; Nieto, 1992). Inquiries have addressed Culturally Responsive Teaching and teachers (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009), Culturally Responsive School Leadership (Khalifa, 2018), and Culturally Responsive Teaching and brain science (Hammond, 2015). Gay explains that Culturally Responsive Teaching is effective practice grounded in crucial values and beliefs: "Its key anchors are the simultaneous cultivation of the academic success and cultural identity of ethnically diverse students" (2018, p. xxii). Hammond (2015) characterizes effective teachers (those who engage in such practice) as "warm demanders" who maintain both "active demandingness" and "personal warmth" for students simultaneously as their key dispositions (p. 99). By structuring and enacting culturally relevant or responsive methods, educators can build relationships with students and enable their learning.

Going further, several scholars identify approaches for culturally sustaining pedagogy, which not only utilizes student cultural assets, but values and sustains those aspects of students' identities (Alim & Paris, 2015; Paris, 2011, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). Further detail on asset pedagogies under the umbrella of CRP is elaborated in Chapter 1.

District Influence on Teacher Practice

School district administrators play a pivotal role in translating concepts into practice, even policies and plans that are directed at teachers. Honig et al. (2009) explain that an effective central office orientation "involves strengthening the authority and attendant capacity and professional practice of both central offices and schools to strengthen teaching and learning" (p. 21). As Burch and Spillane (2004) note, "After superintendents and school boards establish new policies, mid-level staff have the job of translating big ideas […] into strategies, guidelines, and

procedures" (p. 4). Even more crucial, Elliott (2000) emphasizes that research has shown reform efforts that bypass districts have limited impact. Administrators perform sensegiving in multiple spaces, which I examine in turn: policy, brokering and boundary spanning, direct influence of district administrators on schools, and district professional development.[5] This section concludes with an examination of limitations on district influences.

Policy

One primary tool to influence teaching at a district's disposal is policy (Elliott, 2000). Examples include "curriculum initiatives, guidelines for new teaching practices, or new policies for special education or school councils" (p. 168), all related to CRP. Elliott further identifies criteria for increased likelihood of policy successfully influencing organizational learning, including clear expected outcomes, autonomy for schools of implementation to achieve those outcomes, and structures for collaboration. District policy may also influence teachers by establishing ties between them. Coburn et al. (2010) summarize past research showing that teacher ties often form thanks to homophily, proximity, or perceived expertise. They also find that a connection to "reform activities" (p. 39) also plays a role in prompting educators to connect with each other. Coburn and Russell (2008) show further that district policies can channel and influence the manner in which crucial teacher social interactions occur, by strengthening ties, increasing access to expertise for teachers, and increasing depth of interaction for teachers with other educators. This suggests that while policy does not solely determine teacher action, it can create conditions and steer efforts to a certain degree.

[5] This study focuses on central office attempts to influence educators, so literatures related to district influences on other factors, such as on school leaders (Honig, 2012), will not be reviewed.

Brokering and Boundary Spanning

Wenger (1998) characterizes communities of practice within organizations as being isolated artificially, with their own characteristics and routines. However, even as they enshrine their own procedures and cultures, they are connected to others to some degree by sitting within the same organization. This creates opportunities for actors who span boundaries to reconcile varying views and practices held within the separate silos. Burch and Spillane (2004) elaborate that because "district offices are primarily responsible for cultivating the exchange of information and expertise within and across schools," as a result "central office staff members help determine how principals, teachers, and other school administrators perceive and act on district instructional reform policies" (p. 4). Coaches in particular can play a crucial role in forging connections. Swinnerton (2007) gives examples of how a coach "served as a broker and boundary crosser by connecting and translating work between schools and the central office" (p. 208). These boundary spanning activities enable central office staff to be "exerting influence on the core activity of schooling (teaching and learning) through a variety of means" (p. 198).

Direct Influence of Staff on Schools

Honig (2008) describes effective district assistance to schools as "a relationship in which participants more expert at particular practices model those practices and create valued identity structures, social opportunities, and tools that reinforce those models for more novice participants" (p. 634). Burch and Spillane (2004) identify various school- and teacher-facing roles in districts who interact with and influence schools in additional ways. These include "tools designers," "data managers," "trainers and support providers," and "network builders" (p. 4). These roles are sometimes general, and sometimes tightly defined. Marsh et al. (2010) and

Swinnerton (2007) clarify that instructional coaches in particular are often a conduit for the implementation of reforms directly with teachers, thanks to their roles as instructional leaders.

District Professional Development

Elliott (2000) discusses district-led trainings: "Training may be treated as a short-term effort to build the skills required to implement a specific innovation. More rarely, it also may be considered a long-term investment in capacity development" (p. 173). This approach, Elliott elaborates, has great potential: "Changed classroom practices and increased teacher commitment can result when districts focus both planning and resources on the development of personnel through professional development" (p. 173). Youngs (2001) confirms that professional development often "strengthened teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions" (p. 278) though it did not reliably lead to other changes. Using district data on professional development expenditures, Little (1989) establishes that districts have the ability to influence teacher learning thanks to their position as the primary providers of professional development, which they can align to priorities. Scanlan and Lowenhaupt (2015) argue in particular that "Medium and small urban districts face unique opportunities to promote [effective] professional learning" through partnerships, higher education institutions, community groups, and non-profit organizations present in cities (p. 235).

Impediments to District Work

Burch and Spillane (2004) identify "four common barriers, as seen from the school level, that prevent central staff and school leaders from interacting in productive ways" (p. 5), including: district staff not prioritizing relationships with schools, communication through command rather than conversation, ignorance of school-based issues, and insufficient central knowledge of teaching and learning. The pace and scope of change can also be self-defeating. In

cases where multiple reforms or a large-scale change are required of teachers in schools, educators begin to make choices about what to prioritize, confounding the efforts of district policy (Datnow, et al., 2003). Therefore, if conflicting initiatives are present at once in a district—even if only in competition for a time—they will, at best, not all succeed.

Roles such as that of the boundary spanner discussed earlier can be tenuous, because the conception of working across silos is often antithetical to the organizations within which such staff members sit. Honig (2006) traces this issue: "as [boundary spanners'] tenures wore on, their new, nontraditional, and organizationally marginal positions became liabilities that curbed their ability" (p. 365). This uncertainty may affect any efforts at influencing teacher practice.

Finally, teacher learning and implementation of initiatives have multiple influences, with central office staff members representing just one in a complex web. Daly (2010) warns "too often, knowledge transfer is assumed to move in a rational and predictable manner through formal professional development experiences, trainings, or some form of professional community" (p. 2). On the other hand, "informal webs of relationships are often the chief determinants of how well and quickly change efforts take hold, diffuse, and sustain" (p. 2).

Literature and this Study

Culturally responsive practice is essential to serving diverse student groups. To promote this practice, district administrators undertake sensegiving and sensemaking. That sensemaking occurs through various activities. Teachers, meanwhile, undertake their own sensemaking related to culturally responsive practice and even sensegiving between each other and back to district administrators. At the same time, efforts that administrators assume may be the primary means of teacher knowledge building may be entirely overshadowed by learning through social networks or failures in central office-school relationship building. This case study examines the

intersection of these dynamics to explore how sensemaking occurs in a multi-layered organization to understand implementation lessons for culturally responsive practice.

Methods

Data Collection

As discussed in Chapter 2, data collection for this qualitative case study utilized several techniques. To investigate the research questions of this individual study, I employed the following qualitative methodologies: interviews, document review, and a survey.

Interviews

Interview participants for this study included a mix of district administrators (7), teachers (15), and instructional coaches (4). Educators were identified through "purposeful sampling" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). I therefore identified participants who either determine policy or expectations related to instructional practice, who lead initiatives targeted at the cultural responsiveness of teachers, who have a boundary spanning role, or who directly train, coach, evaluate, or support teachers on their practice. The participant group was further expanded through participant referral or "snowball sampling" (p. 98) as administrators and practitioners identified teachers whose work in the district might be related to the research questions of this study. Finally, the research group distributed an interview sign-up survey to teachers throughout the district, identifying further volunteers to speak about their varying experiences (Appendix F).

In keeping with the overall conceptual framework of this study, interview questions (Appendix G, H, I) centered on both sensemaking of interviewees related to the definition and implementation of culturally responsive practice as well as the sensegiving that central office staff members undertake for teachers (and vice versa). I used the interviews to gather data on the ways that participants undertake sensemaking themselves about culturally responsive practice

and utilize the district levers discussed earlier as a means of sensegiving directed to teachers. Interviews were semi-structured (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews were recorded (with participant consent) and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The research team field tested the questions with practitioners outside of the research site to improve the protocol, using cognitive interviews. Participants were anonymized by the removal of identifying information.

Document Review

I collected and reviewed over 40 documents (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasize that documents can be useful if they "are found to be illuminating to the topic of research and incorporated into the process of inductively building categories and theoretical constructs" (p. 181). I examined documents that represented the district's values, operations, and sensemaking, such as district strategic plans, guidance, and superintendent newsletters, using a protocol (Appendix E). I reviewed documents from multiple years, preceding the current superintendent's administration, to have points of comparison. To help answer my second and third research questions, I examined documents describing district efforts to influence implementation by teachers (which may indicate sensegiving) through activities such as plans, professional development materials, evaluation materials, and curriculum or instructional policy guidance and tools. I obtained internal documents by request from district leaders and interview participants, as well as examining publicly available district resources. Several documents were named by interview participants, who then agreed to share them.

Surveys

I employed a survey of 15 questions shared by the research group (Appendix K), completed by 33 participants. A survey was useful as a method to rapidly collect additional data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) which I used to corroborate and challenge the findings of the

interviews and documents. The survey was designed and administered digitally using Qualtrics. The survey was sent to all principals in the district, who were asked to share the link with teachers via email and meetings. The district leadership team of central office administrators and school leaders completed the survey during an existing meeting. Prompts asked participants to share background information such as role and years in the school district, and about their perceptions related to CRP, how they learn about it, and how the district supports it.

Data Analysis

As discussed in Chapter 2, data collected as part of this project was assessed using a coding process. All interview and document data, once transcribed and digitized, were thematically coded independently by each team member. The findings of this chapter reflect my codes only. Coding was applied to all interview transcripts and documents, with codes developed so that they are "responsive," "exhaustive," "mutually exclusive," "sensitizing," and "conceptually congruent" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 212–213). Following my preliminary inductive coding, I then reviewed data and developed codes link to Maitlis's (2005) "Four Forms of Organizational Sensemaking" (p. 32) to understand how information is being processed and conveyed throughout the district. I analyzed survey results using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and averages, primarily to compliment findings from the coding process. For additional detail on the research team analytical process, see Chapter 2.

Findings

In the sections that follow, I respond to each of the research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter. I argue 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. I first examine how district administrators understand CRP and then how they seek to influence others.

How do administrators understand CRP definitions and implementation?

District administrators at Sunnyside, which has not initiated formal or concerted work on any CRP framework, have both a limited understanding and varying ideas about CRP. When asked whether there was any district definition or guidance in this area, one district administrator commented, "I've heard we really have to look at culturally responsive teaching, but nobody ever said what that looks like." Nevertheless, district administrators were actively sensemaking in relation to CRP. One articulated a pattern of a lack of a centralized definition joined by individual awareness of the topic: "I don't know if we have something specific, that…we define it as. But, I think it's definitely on everyone's minds." Staff generally used shared ideas and language about equity as a stand-in for CRP. One district leader explained, "we do have a definition of equity." They defined equity as the provision of access for all students to learning.

District administrators' ideas about CRP implementation were equally vague, and at times they even struggled for words: "So, for me, it's really, um, really like a big spectrum that we're always growing on. Like, I don't think we're either there, we're not, or like, 'Okay, I'm officially ... Like, give me my award. I'm culturally responsive.'" When they did articulate culturally responsive practices, their answers were as varied as they were contradictory: 7 district staff articulated 21 distinct themes. For example, one said, "If we're really culturally responsive, we would see all, you know, all flags all over," while others explicitly called for avoiding reliance on surface-level representations, saying "we focus on…building relationships with

students, [not symbols like holidays]. I think those things are important to acknowledge, but that does not give students access to curriculum."

Throughout the responses, though district administrators never mentioned having discussed them together, five themes were evident in their thinking about CRP: (1) it is important; (2) educators should know students and their cultures; (3) educators should provide relevant and representative instructional materials; (4) CRP is explained through other practices; and (5) race plays an important role. The sections that follow take up each theme in turn.

Ascribing Importance to CRP

Without being asked directly about its importance, six of seven administrators interviewed identified CRP as a "priority," "goal," or something that "matters," and credited signals from the superintendent as why. One administrator explained: "I think the Superintendent is constantly thinking about it, so it just naturally comes out in conversation as well. But I know last year there was definitely a specific time in the agendas made for equity discussions." Administrators beyond the superintendent also believe in the importance of CRP. One administrator said succinctly, "We need it," and another dryly validating, "it's certainly an area that I think I need to get more training in personally."

Knowing Students and Their Cultures

When asked what it means for educators to be culturally responsive in their practice, all but one administrator spoke of the need to know students. This sometimes meant knowing individual students as when one respondent described CRP as "awareness of the students in front of you, and their backgrounds" and another added "you have to know who's sitting in your classroom because what's culturally responsive for one classroom is not necessarily culturally responsive for the next." Others focused more on ethnic, racial, cultural, or linguistic groups,

saying that CRP meant, “understanding that there's other ways other than the one we know in North America [and] that they're valuable.” One shared a perception that: “you know, students, making eye contact and in, you know, some cultures…that's not what they do with adults.” Another’s definition of culturally responsive practice included “being aware that those cultures have certain traditions, certain ways to look at education…because certain cultures don't give eye contact, but they're still being respectful.” Since educators named few specific examples of CRP, it stands out that this specific example of “knowing students” was named by multiple administrators.

Relevant and Representative Instructional Materials

Instructional materials that were relevant to and representative of student diversity were a third theme named by administrators as important to CRP. One administrator mentioned that they would expect educators developing instructional materials to “be thinking about our students [when] creating problems” because otherwise, “they might not be able to relate to what we're talking about because they haven't experienced it.” Another participant said that “the ‘building relationships’ piece is just knowing the kids and knowing their interest […] so thinking about how we can take […] curriculum and put it into something that they can relate to and that they're really interested in.” In a response representative of many, one administrator responded that “I would ideally have all the textbooks that may be representative of the [students’] culture.” Two district leaders specifically attempted examples in the context of mathematics, citing the importance of narrative problems not relying on ideas that students might not be familiar with if they came from other countries (“snow” and “watermelons” were both mentioned). Following the pattern of their general definitions of culturally responsive practice, they did not explain their views beyond one or two sentences. Representation is aligned to CRP, but is only part.

Linking CRP to Other Practices

Administrators struggled to describe how CRP is implemented, often relying on other methodologies with which they were more fluent to explain the unfamiliar. For example, one district leader proposed that "our focus right now is UDL [Universal Design for Learning] because if you're doing UDL, you are doing culturally responsive teaching." Despite empirical research that demonstrates that this is not the case (Kieran & Anderson, 2019), Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was the most commonly cited methodology by district administrators. Other practices that interviewees also referenced in an effort to define or explain CRP included the implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL), positive behavior intervention systems (PBIS), and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).

This pattern extended not just to major, nationally known frameworks for practice, but also to day-to-day work, especially when directed at non-white or immigrant students and families. One staff member spoke about providing multilingual information for families as CRP: "that's a big chunk of my job…providing the same access to information for families [through] translations, interpretation services." While not misaligned with the intentions of CRP, this is a surface level adaptation that ignores the broader pedagogical gaps CRP addresses. CRP was also described by respondents as equivalent to diversity efforts, such as when one administrator spoke of the human resources department as enacting CRP through "a real strong push around hiring [...] thinking about diversifying our staff." One administrator feared an instinct of looking at regular activities as CRP: "hopefully [...] what doesn't happen is people like, 'Oh good, you know, that box is checked.'" Initial definitions of cultural responsiveness were vague and the specific application through the familiar missed that not all equity efforts achieve CRP.

Interrogating the Role of Race in Cultural Responsiveness

Administrators frequently (all but one) called attention to the role of race when discussing CRP practices, though in different ways. When asked about CRP, one interviewee made the connection immediately, saying, "I mean, there's a racial element to this." For many, culturally responsive practices were about more than race. One participant summarized this view, saying of CRP, "it's not really just race, or ethnicity, or religion, there's a lot that goes into what we're talking about when we talk about culture." These examples overlapped with the focus on equity, which was often operationalized as access for all.

For other administrators, however, the role of race in CRP was directly connected to Sunnyside itself as an important contextual point, as when one administrator stated plainly "Obviously, racially it's a very diverse district." Administrators referenced racial diversity as a central reason for implementing CRP in Sunnyside. One worried particularly about the limited perspective of their mostly white workforce who may not consider the values of families because of what one administrator called "a white way of thinking." More bluntly, and a bit resigned, another stated in an interview that, "it's quite a xenophobic district, town." At the time of this study, the city was still grappling with decades old demographic change that, according to interviewees, was not well received by longtime residents. One district staff member emphasized that many resident and educator responses were not just bigoted, but also out of touch, because residents inaccurately treated the changes as recent: "part of the conversation has been, our town is changing […] the only thing that's happening now is different groups may be coming, but the shift from white to whatever it's going to be happened 15 years ago." This leader reiterated the ramifications: "And so we have a teaching staff that reflects the old regime, but we have a student body that reflects the new reality." This "new reality" came up in many interviews, and

there was a clear tension in the minds of respondents. In another administrator's phrasing, "I think we have educators there, and we definitely have town leaders there that are […] really thinking like decades ago, instead of really being forward thinking, and meeting the students that we have in front of us and their needs."

The divides in Sunnyside created challenges for district leadership, interested in implementing CRP. In interviews, almost all administrators raised that discussing race in the district was fraught: "[to] talk about things like…culture, and race and ethnicity…it's really sort of a touchy subject in [Sunnyside]." Others went on to specify times when educators within the district had actively resisted conversations about race, equity, and diversity. In one school, "They were trying to have [an] after school faculty meeting once a month and discuss perceptions, and privilege, and people got very upset, very uncomfortable and quickly shut it down." Two leaders described fear of union pushback if conversations about race or prejudice were broached, one describing teachers as "getting very uncomfortable," "backing out" and ultimately telling administrators "I don't want to do this anymore."

In sum, district administrators had general ideas about CRP and difficulty explaining it in practice. This vagueness in district administrator understanding of CRP in their sensemaking undermined their attempts at messaging in their sensegiving of CRP to other educators. This is the focus of the next section.

District Administrators' Attempts to Influence CRP

While the district had not yet organized a major CRP initiative at the time of this study, district administrators did describe efforts to influence teacher practice, representing their sensegiving. Using data from district administrators, teachers, and documents, this section examines the ways that district administrators in Sunnyside attempted to influence others' CRP,

and the extent to which they succeeded in their efforts. Overall the attempts that administrators identified were largely individual and were not aimed at concerted district-wide change. These limited efforts have resulted in something of a paradox, with teacher awareness of CRP as a priority raised, but unaccompanied by knowledge of its meaning or implementation. Five themes emerged. Three examine ways in which the organizational sensemaking is more controlled (Maitlis, 2005), or characterized by high levels of leader sensegiving, in that district administrators: (1) focus on signaling, vision, and branding; (2) are attentive to the pace of change; (3) often seize on the most easily understood and concrete ideas. Two final themes explore educator reactions to gaps in sensegiving, looking at (4) the ways they respond in entrepreneurial ways in the resulting gap, as well as (5) how message consistency diminishes with distance from the superintendent.

District Administrators Message Value but not Meaning

The most concerted sensegiving activities taken by district administrators to influence CRP practices were to message its value. These efforts succeeded somewhat in conveying the importance of CRP but fell flat in establishing its meaning or how to implement, due to the gap (established in the last section) in understanding by district administrators of how CRP is defined and implemented.

Administrators and teachers identified tone setting by the superintendent as being instrumental for them:" I think we're really lucky […] because [the superintendent] really gets it and [and is] also very forward thinking, and really, really pushing the envelope.” Another administrator confirmed: “knowing that it's a priority, that it makes the agenda. You know, we have a lot to talk about every meeting […] that it's the priority, it's a good sign.” Further messaging happened in the creation of a district-wide vision statement: “we talked about that

equity piece kind of being the forefront and then everything kind of falling underneath that." This new district equity plan document included explicit callouts to CRP and expected actions such as a mandate that "All initiatives begin with equity in mind and practice." It directed that educators "Design and implement culturally responsive curricula that is creative and global." Even a teacher skeptical of central office effectiveness credited the superintendent related to equity work: "Do I believe that [the superintendent] understands the needs? I do," adding: "I really do believe the work is coming."

District leaders explicitly connected the vision to school level change. One administrator detailed this intent: "the district plan […] trickling down to the school improvement plans" and resulting in school improvements that "reflect the district" commitment to equity. Multiple school improvement plans confirm this. One even included a provision to "Create and measure self-assessment tools to measure the collective understanding of equity and culturally responsive teaching." Another administrator framed the extension to teachers, that "The goals of the teachers [reflect] the school improvement plan, which is reflecting the district plan […where] equity is a piece."

Despite branding and leadership, some staff were frustrated that practices had not caught up with messaging: "Oh, it's in our values, it's in our mission statement, it's in our logo. [In the acronym] 'E' is equity. You can see it's annoying me because it's not equitable." Given the inconsistent understandings of district administrators of what CRP is and should look like, this is not surprising. One district administrator stated flatly, "there's not a lot of, 'This is what equity actually looks like.'" Teachers were accordingly mixed in their ability to define CRP. One instantly responded that "it means recognizing that, when you have a student who's culturally and linguistically diverse, in your classroom, it's a strength, and not a detriment." Others

struggled much more than even the administrators. One teacher was completely baffled, taking the idea of cultural responsiveness as access to an extreme, both attempting to answer and asking the interviewer: “So culturally responsive is also like, is your community using the internet? Can they get it on an app? Most people don't have computers in their homes. What is the culture around even prioritizing academic success?”

Curiously, though administrators and teachers agreed that the district had not greatly influenced teacher CRP, many of the same ideas that administrators held were repeated by those they had supposedly not influenced. Major themes that teachers and coaches frequently repeated included: the importance of relationships and the need to know students’ cultures, as well as the tendency to define CRP using more familiar methodologies. One coach made this argument, saying that “you have to know your kids…You have to know them intimately… that's the only way you can be culturally responsive.” Another educator trying to explain CRP echoed the idea of understanding cultural groups: “for me [CRP] is to think about the students' backgrounds, and to really kind of, when you have a student whose part of a certain culture, to figure out what are those little nuances of that culture.” Twelve of nineteen interviewed coaches and teachers brought up understanding students’ backgrounds as defining CRP, almost as high a proportion as for administrators. This was the most common idea for both groups. This convergence was conspicuous in the context of these educators having said that the district had no shared work or conversations.

District Administrators Are Attentive to the Pace of Change

The absence of a district-wide initiative focused on CRP appears to have been a strategic choice by the superintendent and district leaders. In particular, this pacing is characterized by a focus on building shared central office understanding as a prerequisite to broader work with

educators, resulting in limited work with educators on how to understand or implement this priority area.

The superintendent explicitly named a priority of unifying the district leadership[6] and building their capacity to lead for equity: "we've really rolled that out to our administrative team and we're trying to really stick to that, because teachers can't do it until they're comfortable that their leadership is able to handle it." Participants affirmed that for leadership (both in central office schools), equity is a concrete and consistent focus of work. Administrators describe this work as happening in several cross-leadership contexts: "workshops over the summer. We have monthly meetings. And usually it comes out somewhere in those meetings." Administrators also describe the superintendent adding "a section into the agenda about equity" as well as having staff read and discuss articles.[7] One administrator elaborated "the process is the product. The group being together and kind of working through what does it mean to be culturally responsive? […] So that we kind of coalesce into this shared understanding." This would enable them to "then take that back to the buildings and kind of model, not that exact process but model some sort of a process or a practice to have that conversation at the building level." This sentiment that the work should begin with leadership, coalesce, and then spread out, was common among district staff.

Even as leadership focused on coherence at the leadership level, they still initiated some efforts to influence teacher practice around CRP. In addition to typical supports like joining school leaders for walkthroughs or conducting them on their own, or visiting teacher teams to collaborate or share resources, leaders also described two key resources, the "Instructional

[6] This section is focused on educators such as teachers and coaches. School leaders (principals) are not discussed. In her related study, Rogers (2020) examines the influence of district administrators directly on school leaders.
[7] Some documentation corroborates this assertion, with book excerpts related to equitable practice and discussion protocols included in leadership's meeting materials.

Monitoring Tool" and professional development (PD) as the key opportunities to share CRP practices with educators. The Instructional Monitoring Tool, listing expectations for teacher practice, was structured as an inventory of classroom practices, adopting some language from the Universal Design for Learning Framework, perhaps one explanation for the conflation of district administrator understandings of CRP efforts and UDL. Observational areas identified in the tool are aligned to CRP, such as "The teacher facilitates the classroom discussion to enable all students to think and discuss their ideas."

Several teachers also mentioned required professional development (PD) sessions hosted by the district aimed at aligning educators' perceived definitions of CRP. One teacher explained that in PD, "they constantly say: 'these are your students. These are the types of kids that we have. What can we do to best support them?'" Teachers shared that PDs often centered on understanding specific traditions of well represented cultural or ethnic groups in the district, although one teacher suggested that such sessions have ceased lately to occur: "PD that we used to do around learning, 'Don't do this when you're in a room with some Vietnamese folks because they view this as offense'[…] I found them useful, but I don't see that anymore." In addition to district-led PD, several staff members—particularly the coaches—shared being sent to external conferences which were explicitly focused on equity or CRP.

Unfortunately, these efforts have not amounted to a concerted change in educator understanding throughout the district of CRP. One of the instructional coaches confirmed that the structured conversations about culturally responsive practice are still situated at the district level, and have not yet reached all educators: "I don't think that it's gotten down to teachers." Another coach shared the belief that teachers are not yet influenced: "At this point, no, I don't think so."

Administrators and Educators often Seize on the most Easily Understood and Concrete Ideas

As district administrators described efforts to influence equity in educational practice throughout the district, they tended to emphasize work that was easiest to digest. Even though they characterized CRP as centering on beliefs and dispositions, the enactment they described was procedural. This trend in their discussions of CRP work encompassed, on one hand, operational or procedural activities, and on the other, structured curriculum work.

Operational or procedural efforts, as in administrator misunderstandings of CRP described earlier, largely focused on providing translation or diversifying hiring. While district administrators framed certain operational or compliance functions as their opportunity to influence cultural responsiveness, these efforts were cursory, as when translation "access" was provided by providing language in "each in one of our major languages." Administrators also described the staffing of liaisons with specific linguistic fluency as a recent effort on behalf of families, and that community engagement was an increasingly prominent element of those liaisons' role. As stated earlier, administrators conflated diversity in hiring with CRP. As a result, they described examples of procedures and mindsets that needed to change to become more aligned with CRP, such as recruitment and hiring practices. These changes relate to diversity, equity, and inclusion, but not teacher CRP, which is focused on instructional practice.

In terms of teaching and learning, administrator efforts and teacher engagement both focused on tangible changes that could be made quickly, rather than changing understanding or beliefs. Curriculum was the centerpiece. The superintendent named this as an early area of implementation: "going back to curriculum. Again, looking for who are the demographics in our schools, do we have representation of various forms of literature […] And if not, what is it that [students are] doing that they can bring their own experiences in." Another district leader echoed

that curriculum alignment was a priority for district CRP: “a goal [for] the district is: have a culturally responsive curriculum, K to 12, but it's a very new goal.” Administrators described an effort to create curriculum maps, spanning the entire district. One explained that the superintendent named CRP as a priority and “then the next thing that we did was, we put it right on our curriculum map, so culturally responsive is like part of our curriculum map now.” The Sunnyside curriculum mapping template contains multiple prompts asking the educators using it to attend to specific aspects of design, now including “cultural responsiveness.” Districtwide professional development plan documents for elementary and secondary schools also included dedicated time set aside for this curriculum mapping, as did several individual school improvement plans.

Teachers echoed these assertions. When asked how the district pursues CRP, one commented: “in our curriculum development work […] cultural relevancy has become a part of that.” Educators referenced some tangible changes that they could make to have relevant and representative curricular materials, one explaining that “the easiest entry point is to just giving kids relevant materials […] how can I improve my teaching? I can just buy these books and bring them out to the kids. And kids acknowledge it.”

Unfortunately, just as district administrators’ descriptions of cultural responsiveness were vague and contradictory, curriculum efforts were also limited. One administrator described their own and others’ hesitation to aid teachers with the cultural responsiveness component: “so my question was, what would a teacher write in that box? And that's up for discussion.” Despite time and resources to begin the curriculum mapping in a culturally responsive way, again, implementation fell short. Some educators were leery of focusing too much on representative materials. One coach was blunt about their worry that materials alone were more compliance

than substance: “Because I can't assume to know that if I put a book in front of you that looks like you that I've done my job.” Another coach went into more detail with this critique of colleagues’ ideas that it was enough to “have books in my classroom that are diverse.” She responded that “I think they're great, but it's insufficient.” At least one teacher agreed with this critique, saying of CRP implementation that “I feel like it's very surface…I'd like to see more teachers being more culturally responsive beyond putting up books that, you know, might show a brown kid.”

Sensemaking in a Vacuum

In contrast to the proceeding few areas of highly controlled sensemaking, in the general absence of sensemaking by leadership, I find that teachers pursue their own sensemaking by searching out resources themselves or by seeking out colleagues. In a response representative of many, a teacher explained, “I think younger teachers, or anybody who… is aware of cultural sensitivity practices, they seek things out on their own. Whether it be like, ‘Oh, read this book. Did you see this article?’” Another white teacher was more specific that teachers must broaden their understanding, championing “just reading media that is from the perspective of people of color.” Teachers cited books, professional periodicals, and educator Instagram accounts.

Without clear guidance, teachers sensemaking had developed faulty ideas about CRP. Several suggested that CRP was a way to remediate student or family deficits, directly at odds with scholars who developed CRP. Compared to only one district administrator, nearly a third of school-based educators made at least one such statement. This sometimes manifested as a belief that culturally responsive teachers are more understanding of student or family failings because of their perceived challenges (e.g. attendance, trauma, poor academic performance, etc.). One such teacher stated that “if a kid is […] misbehaving […] it's our job to not only reteach the

expectation, or just give them the benefit of the doubt that nobody at home is reinforcing it." This teacher simultaneously held a narrow view of behavior and a deficit mindset of family capability. Teachers sometimes exhibited pity and low expectations, as when one stated, "It's already hard enough for a lot of [students] to invest, just because for so many different reasons." One educator signaled her deficit orientation by contrasting her home culture with what she presumed was her students' home cultures: "When my kids come home […] homework has to be done [...] Because that's the culture in our home. We sit down. We eat dinner together." Again, a white educator showed that they see students and families as requiring her intervention to achieve her standard.

Message Consistency Diminishes with Distance from the Superintendent

The second characteristic of the leadership sensemaking gap was that message consistency diminished with distance from the superintendent. That is, with layers in the organization, from superintendent to district administrators to staff (such as coaches), to teachers, the coherence of messaging lessens moving outwards. Parallels in ideas were strongest between adjacent layers, so that district administrators and coaches, or coaches and teachers, were much more likely to agree and offer similar opinions than were the more separated district administrators and teachers. Diffusion in consistency was present even in some of the most commonly cited ideas. For example, even as each group of educators mentioned the importance of knowing students and their culture, the consistency of that message dissipated. While six of seven (86%) district administrators considerer that as a defining characteristic of CRP, and three of four coaches (75%), only nine of fifteen other teachers (60%) did. This trend continued with respect to multiple ideas and awareness of central office activities in the district. One coach confirmed this progressive diminishment of the sensegiving's effect: "I think that teachers, at

least this year and the coaches as well… are now more aware that they are not aware…and not all teachers, but definitely the coaches." Coaches, closer to the superintendent and to district administrators, having received the sensegiving activities more, are more closely aligned.

There are some clues as to why coaches repeat answers of district administrators more closely than teachers do. The coaches and district administrators described direct interactions between these crucial building-based mediators and central office staff, including planning and coordination meetings and practice opportunities. Educators did not describe comparable activities of either district administrators or coaches with teachers, meaning that the sensegiving activities directly seeking to influence coaches are not repeated to deliberately influence teachers. One educator described how seldom coaches repeat efforts at directly working with teachers on practice among their other responsibilities: "I've seen two out of the four coaches are starting to do collaborative planning […] with teachers […] which I was surprised that they hadn't necessarily been doing in common planning time [...] They just started." One coach described responding to a district administrator who worried that the coaches would not "really be able to bring [instructional supports related to equity] right back to their teachers" by saying, "this is a long-term goal, and we want people to start thinking about it." This reported interaction suggests that a reason for the lack of consistent messaging across all tiers of the organization may be the lack of access to conversations that district staff and coaches are having, during which they can grapple with this unfamiliar area of practice. It also echoes to the earlier described theme of seeking consensus among leaders but delaying efforts at the school level, at least for now.

Discussion

This study analyzed how district administrators understood CRP and sought to influence educators' engagement in it. Findings showed that at Sunnyside, educators were broadly aware of CRP and frequently understood it as a priority, though they were not yet sure what it meant or how to implement it in practice. In the absence of a major sensegiving effort by the district to define CRP, which they value, educators in the district seized on the signals that they did receive and understand, and then sought out resources to determine what to do. The sensegiving of district administrators—particularly the superintendent—spurred guided organizational sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005) of CRP. The tendency of educators to cite the same few examples repeatedly, such as understanding culture through student eye contact, implies that when these educators do get a signal, they make use of it. This suggests that if leaders emphasize a few key messages, stakeholders will likely embrace them. However, with little specific sensegiving about the meaning of CRP, organizational sensemaking around CRP's implementation is fragmented. This challenge is exacerbated by the complexity of CRP, which requires recasting the relationship between teacher and student. In light of these patterns, I turn below to implications for research, policy, and practice.

Maitlis's (2005) framework provides a way to examine how sensemaking and sensegiving operated in Sunnyside. Due to the layered nature of the organization, some, such as district administrators and building-based instructional coaches, at times acted as sensegiving leaders, and at other times as sensemaking stakeholders. Doing both sensemaking and sensegiving simultaneously likely diluted the consistency of their messaging because they did not fully understand CRP before trying to assist others. In the context of intentional organizational change efforts in particular, further research on the critical role of messenger or

middle-layer leader sensemaking and sensegiving could enrich scholar and practitioner understanding of the necessary preconditions of new knowledge spread.

At the same time, the presence of multiple initiatives all related to teacher practice (e.g., UDL, SEL, PBIS) muddled the enactment of CRP. Because educators at all levels relied on these other frameworks to fill in the gaps with their understanding of CRP, their sensemaking of CRP progressed without some crucial elements specific to that framework alone. Further research should examine how organizational sensemaking handles multiple new frameworks at the same time. When stakeholders are attempting to perform sensemaking of multiple schema that overlap but are not the same, how can sensegivers enable other sensemakers to fully understand and to integrate separate frameworks?

Finally, a conspicuous finding was that when discussing CRP, a pedagogical tradition designed to serve students of color, participants struggled when discussing race. Given the continued high levels of racial segregation within schools and districts, and because CRP often requires (particularly White) educators to both teach differently and reframe their beliefs and schema about students, scholarship could explore how leaders perform sensegiving to spur educator development away from deficit ideologies.

Educators at Sunnyside exposed a number of challenges for any district considering a move towards culturally responsive practice. Both district administrators and teachers worried about conflicts with their colleagues, expressing concerns about prejudice, racism, or union resistance. They attributed some of the anticipated resistance to fear of saying the wrong thing in difficult conversations. This is perhaps why several district administrators brought up trust between adults as a characteristic of CRP itself, or at least its implementation.

The deficit mindsets that some educators exhibited are worrisome and appear pervasive. Districts moving to implement CRP widely will need to carefully consider their approach. One tactic may be to explain the values and philosophy behind CRP, but focus on its implementation in the classroom. Additionally, the tendency of some educators in the district to view CRP as just another pedagogy for fixing student failure belies the tremendous task of training educators in this pedagogy. Even if educator mindsets were no issue, the conceptual underpinnings of CRP are complex; CRP asks educators to eschew viewing students as interchangeable members of a monolithic culture. While the individualized spirit of CRP certainly has overlaps with other frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), this too can be an opportunity and a challenge. On one hand, the relatedness of concepts could provide a schema to explain the elements that do overlap. On the other hand, the ease of conflation can make it easier—as in Sunnyside—to avoid essential conversations about that which is indelible to CRP.

In the absence of information, rather than engage with more authoritative sources, educators present themselves as having answers or they ask those closest for help. When misdescribing CRP through the lens of other (un)related pedagogical areas, they rarely asked or wondered if they were correct; even when they stated that they were not sure how to define it, they quickly did so anyway. This reveals a strange contrast: while educators described the topic of race as fraught, they also confidently explained characteristics of CRP through things they were comfortable with. This may be why, while educators tried to define CRP as addressing race, when they defined their own efforts they talked about much safer areas of practice: selecting texts, building individual relationships, and executing their own operational plans. This suggests that even educators who recognize the centrality and importance of difficult conversations regarding race will shy away from them if they are not well facilitated.

Policymakers seeking to spur adoption or expansion of CRP must be mindful of broader uneasiness and resistance to conversations around race.

Broadly, policymakers must be cautious when implementing multiple initiatives that require significant sensemaking. They should also be leery of expecting any major change without considering the needs for knowledge building and technical support. Additionally, policymakers should consider staff cognitive capacity along with considerations such as human resources, funding, and staff time in determining expectations.

Sensemaking related to culturally responsive practice is so complex that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners must devote significant attention to raising understanding of the concept, let alone its effective implementation. The courageous conversations required to engender CRP—widely needed by deserving students nationally—will be well served by additional consideration.

CHAPTER FOUR[8]

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.)

[8] 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.

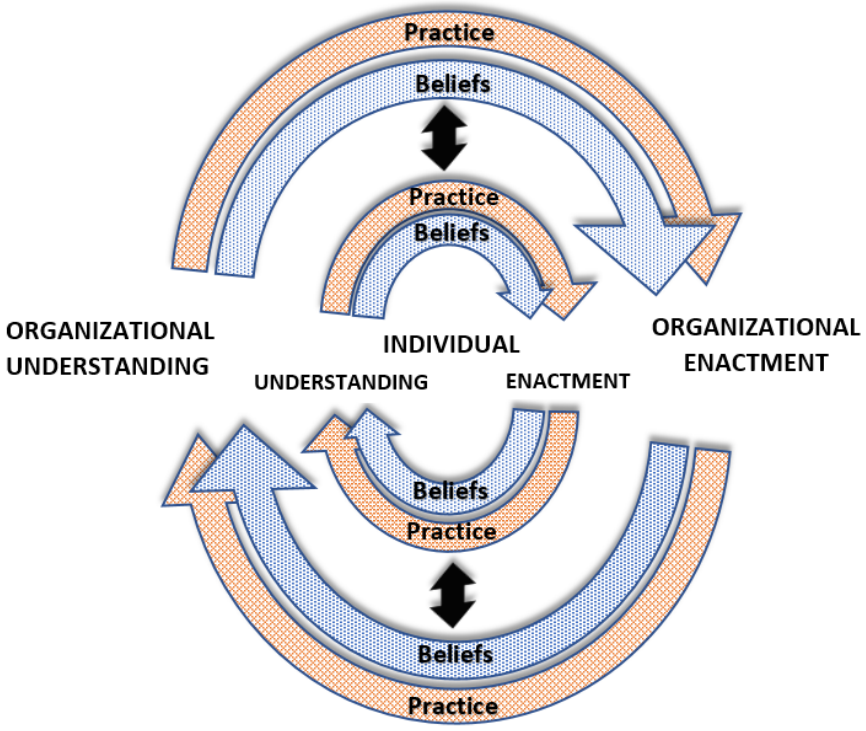
In doing so, we extend one of Maitlis's (2015) four forms of organizational sensemaking, guided organizational sensemaking, proposing a model to support practitioner sensemaking of CRP. We claim there are two unique patterns for sensemaking within the realm of CRP: a sensemaking structure for learning 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 which 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 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 B

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 C

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 D

Abstract for Tina C. Rogers's Individual Study

Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District:

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

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 impede 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. Though attempts were made to align structures and tools to equity priorities, 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. Recommendations include developing a district definition of culturally responsive practice while leveraging equity practices as a scaffold to support principals' understanding and enactment of culturally responsive practices. Also, efforts should be made to support sensemaking of individual and organizational beliefs through critical self-reflection and conversations about

racial and cultural bias. Future research may extend this study to analyze the sensegiving interactions and examine the impact of these interactions on principals' culturally responsive leadership 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: _________
Time Start: _________
Location: _________

Description of activity (what is being observed): _________
Time End: _________
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		