Leadership Practices That Support Marginalized Students: Cultural Awareness and Self-reflection

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LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT MARGINALIZED STUDENTS: CULTURAL AWARENESS AND SELF-REFLECTION

Dissertation

by

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Abstract

This qualitative case study, part of a larger group study about how leaders support marginalized student populations in a Massachusetts school district, explored how leaders develop and maintain cultural awareness and self-reflection for themselves and for their teachers. The study asked: 1) How, if at all, does the leader develop and maintain critical self-reflection to support marginalized populations? And 2) What leadership practices does the leader enact, if at all, to engage teachers in cultural awareness and self-reflection? Data was gathered and analyzed from 20 semi-structured interviews, including the superintendent, two assistant superintendents, director of bilingual education, two secondary level principals, two elementary level principals, and 12 teachers, and document reviews. Findings indicate that almost all of the leader participants exhibited cultural awareness and reflectiveness which was attributed to either feeling marginalized themselves, or through childhood and professional experiences. Leaders utilized a variety of leadership practices to maintain their awareness, engage in self-reflection, and create more equitable environments for marginalized students, but these practices were not consistent, embedded, or persistent. Implications of this study reveal that district and school leadership practices to enact cultural awareness and self-reflection of leaders and teachers are critical to effectively address inequities and to support marginalized students.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my loving family. To my mother and father who always believed in me. You modeled and instilled in me the power of hard work, never giving up, and pushing through the seemingly impossible. To my sister, who has been my sounding board, my best friend, my reality check (when needed), and the loudest voice of encouragement. Finally, to Matt, Caitlin, and Regan. You are my everything. Thank you for the endless support so I could become "Dr. Mommy."

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CHAPTER ONE[1]

Introduction

School populations have become more diverse racially, ethnically, socially, as well as by sexual orientation, socio-economic status, disability, language spoken, and cultural identity (Lopez, 2016). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) predicts that enrollment in U.S. K-12 schools will increase by almost 5 million students from 2000 to 2027 (NCES, 2019). Although NCES statistics show the number of Black and White students are expected to drop by 1 million and 6 million respectively, the number of students identifying as two or more races will increase by almost 2 million and Hispanic/Latinx students by 8 million.

Of concern is the fact that emergent bilingual, Hispanic, Latinx, and African American students have significant gaps in achievement in the classroom and on standardized tests (Allen & Steed, 2016; Matsumura et al., 2008). These students are overrepresented in special education (Artiles et al., 2010; Counts et al., 2018); and suspended more frequently and receive harsher punishments for misbehavior than their White peers (Allen & Steed, 2016; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Gregory et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2014a). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students also have higher rates of discipline and absenteeism and lower grades than other students (Kosciw et al., 2018). It is clear that districts and schools are struggling to meet the needs of all learners as our population changes and their needs diversify (Matsumura et al., 2008).

While students' race and ethnicity data have a more meticulous recording history, the statistics for LGBTQ students may be less accurate for three reasons: 1) researchers have

[1] This chapter was collaboratively written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project. Authors include: Margarita Amy, Mark Pellegrino, Jaime Slaney, and Luis R. Soria

traditionally had difficulty operationalizing definitions of LGBTQ individuals; 2) some LGBTQ individuals are reluctant to self-identify; and 3) educational institutions and census information gathered at the state and federal levels did not collect demographic information related to the LGBTQ community until recently (Heck et al., 2016). The Massachusetts Center for Disease Control conducts an annual Youth Health Survey that asks students to identify their sexual orientation. Data reported from their bi-annual Youth Risk Behavior Survey reveals that Massachusetts students who identify as LGBT rose from 7.7% in 2015 to 9.6% in 2017 (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). When compared with heterosexual students, LGBTQ students have disproportionate percentages of being bullied, harassed, and threatened, as well as suffering from depression and suicidal ideation which indirectly contribute to circumstances that increase disciplinary outcomes and negatively affect grades (Kosciw et al., 2018). When student groups have higher victimization rates, they often have higher disciplinary rates as they receive punitive consequences for physically or verbally defending themselves. Additionally, students with mental health challenges struggle socially and battle chronic stress. These characteristics make it difficult for students to emotionally respond to stressful events. Inappropriate, emotional outbursts are often addressed through the disciplinary process.

We have illuminated the change in student populations in schools and surfaced crucial student needs that must be addressed. Next, we explore two essential elements for the study – how we define Marginalized Student Populations (MSP) and the importance of school leadership in supporting these student populations.

Marginalized Student Populations

Individuals and groups can be marginalized based on multiple aspects of their identity that may include race, gender, gender identity, intellectual or physical ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, sexuality, age, and/or religion (Veenstra, 2011). Marginalized student populations are often positioned at the fringes of a community and not allowed to have voice, choice, identity, or full engagement within the community (Crenshaw, 1989). Marginalized groups feel less important when community members of higher position or dominance target them with negative beliefs, behaviors, or judgments (Sue, 2010). As previously stated, marginalized student populations are at higher risk for low academic achievement (Kosciw et al., 2018), pessimistic social-emotional well-being (DeWall et al, 2011), and disproportionate discipline and suspensions (Poteat et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2010). Given the urgency to build, sustain, and measure school connectedness for marginalized student populations (Riele, 2006), and the need to address the impact of social exclusion (Woodson & Harris, 2018), this study focused on how specific categories of marginalized students are supported in school settings.

Leadership Matters

Schools are the primary social context where marginalized students spend a large portion of their day. The school setting can be a hostile environment where marginalized students are at risk to experience adversity such as verbal and physical harassment, institutional bias, and an exclusive school culture (Kosciw, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative that district and school leaders impact and guide how marginalized students are supported and included in the school setting. Indeed, school leaders can play an integral role in "creating schools that value individual differences" (Gardiner et al., 2008, p. 142). School building leaders can have direct influence regarding how schools design, improve, and sustain rigorous instruction and ensure the school

community is a safe space for all learners (Theoharis & Brooks, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2009). District and school building leaders influence policy, pedagogy, and professional learning that can inform and sustain equity, instructional practices, and safe spaces that affect students' sense of inclusion (Sleeter & Grant, 2009). There is increasing literature regarding how leaders advance equity (Theoharis, 2009), build student/teacher relationships (Pearson et al., 2007), influence students' sense of safety (Biag, 2014), and model agency (Johnson, 2007). Additionally, Khalifa, et al. (2016) note the influence of school leaders' self-awareness, teacher preparation, school environment, and community advocacy as a critical means to support learners in school.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose

Given the increased diversity of student populations and their varied academic, social-emotional, and school-environment needs, it is imperative to examine how district and school leaders support traditionally marginalized students in school settings. Among school-related factors that impact student success, leadership is second only to teaching (Leithwood et al., 2004). Specifically, leaders and leadership are crucial to the success of marginalized student populations.

The purpose of our group research project was to examine how district and school leaders support and advocate for marginalized student populations. We sought to understand the ways in which districts might concentrate and sustain efforts to support these students through district and school leadership practices. Specifically, our research aimed to answer the question: In what ways, if any, do district and school leaders support marginalized student populations in schools? For the purposes of this study, the term *marginalized student populations* is defined broadly to

include students who identify as LGBTQ, emergent bilinguals, Hispanic/Latinx, and African Americans.

Accordingly, the overarching research question for this study was: In what ways, if any, do district and school leaders support marginalized student populations in schools? As such, our research team members each applied a different lens to examine the role of leadership in the participating district as outlined in Table 1.

Researchers' Focus Areas

Table 1

Individual Research Topics

Investigator	Research Questions
Margarita Amy	How do leaders perceive they are fostering teacher leadership which supports emergent bilingual and Latinx students? When working to develop teacher leadership, how, if at all, do leaders perceive they are setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization?
Mark Pellegrino	Do teachers with low discipline disparities necessarily embrace culturally responsive discipline practices? How, if at all, does the school leader promote culturally responsive practices of teachers in order to reduce disciplinary outcomes for African American and Hispanic/Latinx students?
Jaime Slaney	How, if at all, does the leader develop and maintain cultural awareness and self-reflection to support marginalized populations? What leadership practices does the leader enact, if at all, to engage teachers in cultural awareness and self-reflection?
Luis R. Soria	How, if at all, do district and school leaders' knowledge, attitudes/beliefs, and practices support LGBTQ youth?

Conceptual Framework

In this qualitative case study, we ground our conceptual framework in the work of Khalifa et al. et al.'s (2016) Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework and the complementary ideas of Leithwood and Jantzi's (1990) Transformational Leadership

Framework. These frameworks guided our review of the literature and informed our study. Khalifa et al. assert that culturally responsive leaders simultaneously resist systems of oppression that exist and affirm cultural practices and identities of students. We merged these two frameworks, as we believe the underlying work of a culturally responsive leader (Khalifa et al., 2016) encompasses Leithwood & Jantzi's (1990) three leadership practices: setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization. For the purposes of this study, we characterize *culture* through a "bottom-up approach" (Birukou et al., 2013) that begins with a set of traits of an individual person, recognizes transmission of ideas and communication as a relevant means of spreading the culture, and then expands to the group culture within a context. For this research, the individual characteristics of marginalized students and their interactions with non-marginalized students are examined within school contexts.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

For this study, culturally responsive pedagogy and its origins in multicultural education informed how we applied Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL). Originally, Ladson-Billings devised the phrase "culturally relevant pedagogy" in *The Dreamkeepers* (1994), a study of eight exemplary teachers of African American students. Ladson-Billings (1995) further developed her theory stemming from the work of anthropologists, sociolinguists, and ecologists. She examined teaching practices that align to the home and community cultures of students of color who had previously not experienced academic success in school. She established the need for a culturally relevant theoretical perspective. In her view, "culturally relevant pedagogy" would produce students who could obtain high achievement, understand and develop cultural competence, and obtain critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Gay (2002) built on Ladson-Billings' (1994, 1995) theory and made a case for improving the academic outcomes of underachieving African, Asian, Latinx, and Native American students through culturally responsive teaching. In order to do this, she further posits that teacher education programs must encompass the appropriate knowledge, beliefs, and skills toward cultural responsiveness. Gay (2002) defined culturally responsive teaching as pedagogy that uses "cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students to build bridges for teaching" (p.106). Villegas and Lucas (2002) assert that a culturally responsive teacher:

> a) is socioculturally conscious; b) has affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds; c) is responsible and capable of bringing about educational change which will make schools more responsive to students; d) understands and embraces constructivist views of both teaching and learning; e) knows about students' experiences outside of school; f) builds on students' personal and cultural strengths while stretching them beyond the familiar" (p. 21).

Culturally relevant teaching and pedagogy provide a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Following the groundbreaking work of Gay and Ladson-Billings to create culturally responsive education, education reformers introduced the notion of the culturally responsive school leader (Johnson, 2006; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). While culturally responsive teaching is critical, it is imperative to ensure the entire school environment, not just the classroom, is responsive to the needs of marginalized students (Khalifa et al., 2016). Riehl (2000) contends, "a genuine commitment to diversity would require administrators to attend to

the fundamental inequities in schooling, to disavow the institutions which they purportedly lead, and to work toward larger projects of social and institutional transformation" (p. 58). In their synthesis of the literature on the topic, Khalifa et. al. assert culturally responsive school leadership is "the ability of school leaders to create school contexts and curriculum that responds effectively to the educational, social, political, and cultural needs of students" (p. 1278).

A culturally responsive leader intentionally engages in leadership behaviors to stop systems of oppression that continue to widen the gap for marginalized student populations (Khalifa, 2018; Riehl, 2000). Khalifa et. al (2016) define these behaviors as "practices and actions, mannerisms, policies, and discourses that influence school climate, school structure, teacher efficacy, or student outcomes" (p. 1274). The culturally responsive school leadership framework is based upon three assumptions and is characterized by four key leadership behaviors:

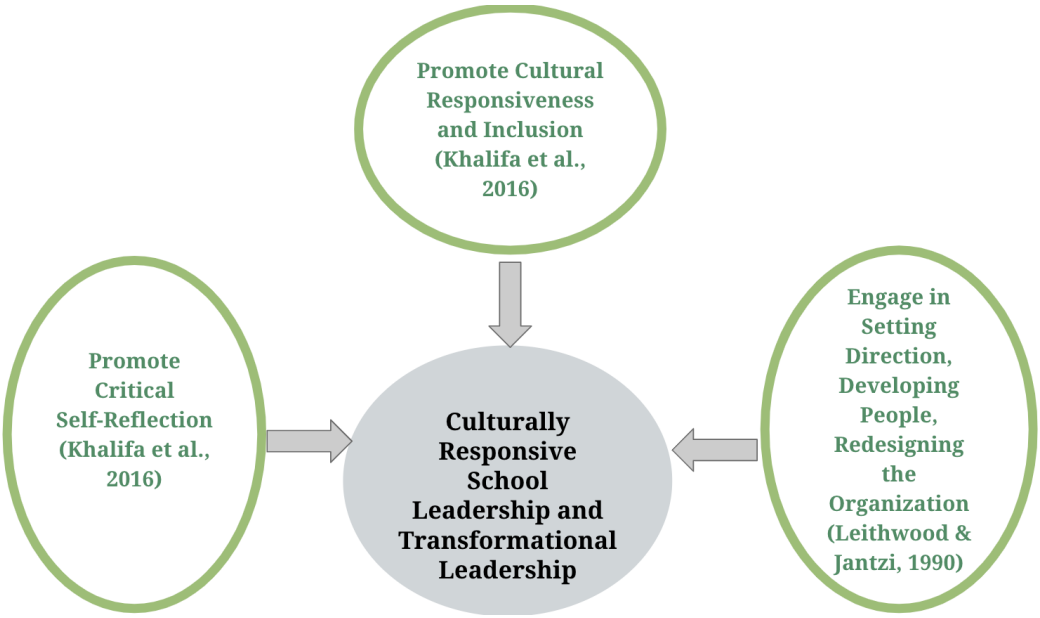
> 1) cultural responsiveness is a necessary component of effective school leadership; 2) if cultural responsiveness is to be present and sustainable in school, it must be foremost and consistently be promoted by school leaders; and 3) culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) is characterized by a core set of unique leadership behaviors, namely: 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 (Khalifa, 2018, p. 13).

For this case study, we utilized two of the four identified behaviors from Khalifa et al.'s framework to guide our work. We focused on the leadership behaviors of being critically reflective and promoting culturally responsive inclusive school contexts as they relate best to our

study. These behaviors, paired with Leithwood and Jantzi's (1990) three transformational leadership behaviors of setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization enabled us to further examine how leaders at the district and school level support marginalized student populations. A visual of the applied frameworks is provided below (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Culturally Responsive School Leadership and Transformational Leadership Frameworks



Critical Self-Reflection

Khalifa et al. (2016) posit critical self-reflection is a crucial first step to a leader's journey of becoming a culturally responsive leader. Critical self-reflection includes the "deep examination of personal assumptions, values, and beliefs" (Brown, 2004, p. 89). Once a leader develops critical self-awareness and reflection they can become conscious of their own personal biases, values, and assumptions that contribute to systematic patterns of oppression and marginalized student populations' experiences in schools (Khalifa, 2018). Young and Laible (2000) argue that "understanding our participation and then unlearning our patterns of thought and action that support racism are necessary steps for dismantling the system of White racism

that exists in our society and in our schools" (p. 389). Without the leader developing critical self-awareness, any attempts at reform will only result in surface level change as opposed to systemic long-lasting reform (Cooper, 2009).

Cultural Responsiveness and Inclusiveness

A culturally responsive leader must actively protect and seek inclusion for marginalized student populations (Khalifa, 2018). In order to repeal systems of privilege and oppression that are embedded within the systemic structures of our educational system, leaders must express intentionality in their behavior to create culturally responsive and inclusive school environments (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa, 2011). These environments must provide cultural mirrors for students in order to create a culturally affirming school environment (Riehl, 2000). Leaders must be willing to have courageous conversations to combat inequities and to promote systemic change (Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Khalifa, 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016; Santamaria, 2014; Singleton, 2015).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders promote leaders and followers to engage in a relationship of mutual respect and power-sharing interactions (Burns, 1978). Leaders who enact transformational leadership influence their followers by behaving in ways that motivate and inspire. They communicate their expectations, demonstrate a commitment to a shared vision and goals, seek new ideas from others, and promote the individual development of others (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders influence their followers. Additionally, these leaders actively solicit new ideas and promote supportive climates. More importantly, they promote the individual development of others (Danielson, 2007; Poekert et al., 2016; Wilson, 2016).

For this research study, transformational leadership theory was informed by Leithwood and Jantzi's research in schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Leithwood et al., 2004; Yu et al., 2002) which expands upon the work of Burns (1978) and Bass (1985). Using this theory as part of our conceptual framework enabled us to further examine how leaders at the district and school level support marginalized student populations. This model describes three broad clusters of leadership practices: setting direction, developing people and redesigning the organization.

Setting Direction, Developing People, and Redesigning the Organization

Transformational leaders set the organization's direction with the intent to create and promote a shared vision, develop consensus, and establish high-performance expectations (Garza et al., 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Transformational leaders develop people within the organization as they strive to provide individualized support, recommend high-quality professional development, and model important values and practices (Day et al., 2016; Poekert et al., 2016; Wilson, 2016). Lastly, a transformational leader redesigns the organization by developing a collaborative culture that promotes shared decision-making and structures to support this type of collaboration (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990).

In summary, transformational leadership theory is an appropriate part of the conceptual framework of this study because leaders who employ transformational leadership practices can directly impact teaching and learning to support marginalized student populations. For this research study, we weave two theories into our conceptual framework, Khalifa et al.'s (2016) culturally responsive school leadership and transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). This conceptual framework guided our review of the literature and informed our study to examine how leaders at the district and school level support marginalized student populations in schools.

Literature Review

There are well-documented research findings related to changing demographics in student populations (NCES, 2019), marginalized students' academic and social-emotional well-being (DeWall et al., 2011), and leadership practices that affect students' success (Theoharis & Brooks, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2009). Additionally, there is a significant body of research related to the specific marginalized student populations that we examined for this qualitative case study. In our review of literature, we first illustrate relevant research on the disproportionality of marginalized students and next illuminate research findings regarding four marginalized student groups: LGBTQ, emergent bilinguals, Hispanic/Latinx, and African American students. We culminate our review of literature with research findings regarding leadership practices that support marginalized student populations that informed our qualitative case study of an urban district in Massachusetts.

Concerns Regarding Marginalized Student Populations

Disproportionality of Marginalized Students

Disproportionality is evident in educational outcomes when there is a significant difference found between marginalized and non-marginalized populations. Disproportionality can be defined as the under-representation of a particular subgroup of the population when measuring positive outcomes such as high academic achievement, feeling connected to school and feeling safe, or an over-representation when measuring negative outcomes including suspensions, special education identification, being bullied, and absenteeism (Bradley Williams et al., 2017). Historically, disproportionality exists in the U.S. educational system with regards to drop-out rates, academic achievement, and disciplinary consequences for several marginalized groups (Gastic, 2017; Mizel et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2014). The disproportionality of

marginalized students' representation and subsequent academic and disciplinary outcomes brings to light a need for targeted advocacy in the school environment. The role of district and school leaders is critical in creating equitable opportunities to learn and ensuring a high-quality education for all student populations (Capper & Young, 2015). To discern the leadership practices that support marginalized students, it is necessary to examine the relevant research regarding the student populations that are featured in this study.

LGBTQ Students. There is expanded scholarship concerning LGBTQ youth experiences in the school setting (Heck et al., 2016). Studies reveal systemic and systematic disparities faced by LGBTQ youth regarding a hostile climate (Greytak et al., 2016) and harsh disciplinary actions (Poteat et al., 2014). Himmelstein and Bruckner's (2011) national longitudinal study of 15,170 students found significant differences between LGBTQ and heterosexual students' disciplinary consequences. Indeed, they found that nonheterosexual adolescents had greater odds than their heterosexual peers of experiencing sanctions. LGBTQ students were more likely to be suspended, arrested, or convicted of a crime. Subsequent research found that LGBTQ students are disciplined for conduct and actions that heterosexual students are not (Snapp et al., 2015). LGBTQ students reported being suspended for non-violent offenses such as public displays of affection, self-expression, and defending themselves from bullies.

Emergent Bilinguals. For this study, English Learners are referenced as emergent bilingual students. This terminology aligns to research that asserts "through acquiring English, these children become bilingual, able to continue to function in their home language as well as in English, their new language and that of school" (Garcia et al., 2008, p. 6). Emergent bilingual students are a fast-growing subgroup among student populations in the United States (Rhodes et al., 2005). The emergent bilingual student population is diverse due to differences in students'

experience with English, individual competence in their first language, and explicit literacy needs (August et al., 2014). These differences, along with other social and environmental factors such as socioeconomic status, influence students' ability to learn to read, write, speak, and listen in English. To best support emergent bilinguals, educators must have a clear understanding of their students' backgrounds, and must focus on providing personalized reading instruction, with varying levels of support. When educators fail to become familiar with and recognize the knowledge, experiences, and values of culturally diverse student populations, they engender a culture of power that further marginalizes ethnic and linguistic minorities (Delpit, 2006). This power imbalance further casts linguistic minorities and emergent bilinguals as deficient in character, behavior, and academic ability (Nieto, 2007; Valenzuela, 2001).

Discipline of Hispanic/Latinx and African American Students. As far back as 1975, racial disparities in suspension rates for African American students have been well documented (Edelman et al., 1975). Edelman and associates found that African Americans were suspended at three times the rate of White students in elementary school and two times the rate in secondary schools. Unfortunately, since that time, this gap has persisted and has been well documented by researchers (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Gastic, 2017; Gibson et al., 2014; Huang & Cornell, 2017; Mizel et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2014). Though the amount of literature is not as expansive, disparate suspension rates for students of Hispanic and Latin American ethnicity (Latinx) students have also been a consistent finding in current research (Anyon et al., 2014; Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015; Morgan & Wright, 2018). This same research has established a strong positive correlation between school suspensions of students of color and incarceration. Dubbed the "School to Prison Pipeline," this is reason enough to improve school support of Hispanic, Latinx, and African American students. However, beyond prison, there are negative effects of school

suspensions that are broader reaching and are far less visible. Research has established links between school discipline and drug use (Hemphill et al., 2014), loss of institutional trust, and lower college enrollment (Yeager et al., 2017).

A crucial outcome of suspensions is the reduction in students' opportunities to learn as they miss valuable class time. Consequently, research has connected student suspensions to course failures, grade retention, and dropping out of school (Barnes & Motz, 2018; Ford et al., 2013; González, 2012; Pesta, 2018; Rocque & Snellings, 2018). One 3-year study of a large urban school district of almost 374,000 students found, in the first year of the study, that suspended students were three years behind non-suspended students on average in their reading ability (Arcia, 2006). Two years later, they were five years behind. This is particularly concerning as reading skills are foundational to all learning. Arcia (2006) made the connection of lagging reading skills with low student achievement and other negative academic outcomes. Ultimately, interrupting the "School to Prison Pipeline" by reducing the discipline of African American and Hispanic/Latinx students will support their immediate educational needs as well as change their lifelong outcomes.

Schools have attempted to address disproportionality in discipline over the years. Many have proclaimed that the disciplinary program School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) will eliminate the discipline gap. While there is an abundance of empirical evidence that demonstrates SWPBIS effectively reduces discipline rates for all subgroups in schools (McIntosh et al., 2018), McIntosh and associates (2018) also found that African American and Hispanic/Latinx students are still suspended at higher rates than White students.

We have illuminated research regarding marginalized student populations. Next, we explore school climate effects on marginalized students and then elucidate leadership practices that are paramount for their academic and social/emotional needs.

School Climate Effects on Marginalized Student Populations

As noted, there is increased literature regarding marginalized students' school experiences. Consequently, it is critical to explore intermediary factors that affect school climate and can impact marginalized students' academic success, emotional well-being, and safety.

Student Connectedness

Marginalized students are better able to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally in school environments when they feel connected and safe in their school (Kosciw et al., 2014). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) defines school connectedness as students' belief that school staff and school peers care about their academic learning and about their personal wellness. Students' sense of belonging while at school impacts how they engage in school and is associated with a number of positive academic outcomes (Johnson, 2009). Studies encompass various terms to characterize student belonging such as connectedness (Joyce, 2015), relatedness (Connell & Wellborn, 1991), or belongingness (Finn, 1989). These terms can be analogous and have been researched in various ways including girls' reduced sense of victimization (Loukas & Pasch, 2012); safeguard against substance abuse, school absence, and suicide ideation (Resnick et al, 1997); and the development of sustained positive teacher-student relationships (Sulkowski & Simmons, 2018).

Belongingness

Students are able to perceive signs and cues from their school environment, educators, and peers that inform whether or not they have a sense of belonging (Okonofua et al., 2016).

These perceptions can affect marginalized students' success both inside and outside the classroom (Blad, 2019). Students who possess a sense of belongingness perceive that they are more competent with higher levels of intrinsic motivation than peers who lack a strong sense of belonging (Osterman, 2000). Conversely, students who perceive inconsistent treatment from their teachers due to their race or ethnic group may respond with defiance and misbehavior (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Social Exclusion

The World Health Organization (2015) defines social exclusion within a relational lens that is informed by disparate power relationships among peers resulting in the marginalization and exclusion of groups of people from social connections and experiences. When children experience social exclusion such as being denied rights, opportunities, and resources that are normally available to all children, their physical, emotional, and mental health wellness can be negatively impacted. Research suggests that aggression, anxiety, and depression have been observed when children have been excluded from their peer groups (DeWall et al., 2011).

Leadership Practices that Support Marginalized Populations

Leadership matters to the success of marginalized students (Khalifa et al., 2016; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018). In the following section we explore specific leadership practices and behaviors that directly and indirectly support marginalized students in schools.

Building Relationships

Disproportionality in disciplinary outcomes for Hispanic/Latinx and African American students is a significant concern for the US educational system (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Mizel et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2014). Although there are promising systemic programs--such as the

three-tiered behavioral program, “Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports” (PBIS)--that reduce disciplinary outcomes for all student subgroups, disproportionality persists (Allen & Steed, 2016). As Hershfeldt et al. (2009) note, “Problem behaviors among students are often a function of a lack of correspondence between the mainstream expectations for student behavior and the diverse cultural orientations students bring to their school environment” (pp. 13-14). Essentially, educators often do not understand how students’ diverse cultural and situational backgrounds inform their behavior (Gay, 2002). Teachers often lack an in-depth understanding of their students’ cultures and values as well as how to develop their culturally responsive skills (Hershfeldt et al., 2009). Hershfeldt and associates (2009) found that these discipline disparities were the result of negative student/teacher interactions. Likewise, most discipline referrals from classroom teachers (where most discipline begins), stem from poor student/teacher relationships (Fox & Hemmeter, 2009). In response to this relational disconnect, Hershfeldt and colleagues (2009) designed the Double-Check framework. At its core, this framework of culturally responsive practices is relational. The framework identified five separate but interrelated components: (a) reflective thinking about the children and their ‘group membership,’ (b) authentic relationships with students, (c) effective communication, (d) connections for students to the curriculum, and (e) sensitivity to students’ cultural and situational messages. Simply put, educators need to better understand their own beliefs and biases as well as students’ perspectives in order to communicate in a way that fosters positive interactions and relationships with their students. Yet supporting marginalized student populations in schools goes beyond relationships.

Instilling High Expectations

Culturally responsive leaders have high expectations for every member of the learning community (Johnson, 2007; Khalifa, 2011; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018). A number of studies

have suggested that without an intentional focus on having high expectations, the organization will continue with systems of oppression for marginalized student populations that surrender to the acquiescence of low expectations and low outcomes (Brown et al., 2011; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa, 2011).

For example, in a qualitative two-phase study, Brown et al. (2011) examined 24 state recognized “Honors Schools of Excellence. " The schools were ranked, based solely on minority achievement, and then separated into two types of schools, small gap (SG) schools who kept achievement gaps between minority and White students to less than 15% and large gap schools (LG) who recorded achievement gaps of 15% or more between their White students and their minority students. Researchers found school principals of the small gap schools expected excellence from each and every student. Principals held the mindset that excellence was achieved by having high expectations for every student, regardless of their starting point or background. Small gap schools defined excellence with measurement of growth as compared to grade-level proficiency. In comparison, the large gap schools defined excellence in more vague terms, mostly by meeting grade-level proficiencies. Principals of large gap schools did not hold the expectation that every child could learn, no matter the circumstance. When asked about the concept that all children can be successful, one principal stated “I don’t think we can guarantee that every child is going to be successful. But we need to provide them the opportunity to be successful” (p. 81). Researchers found that the difference in expectations contributed to the difference in achievement for minority students.

Khalifa (2011) further supports the importance of the culturally responsive leader having high expectations to support marginalized student populations. In his case study examining a principal’s response to teacher acquiescence, the leader’s belief in having high expectations was

crucial to combating low teacher expectations. The principal in the case study enacted an approach to challenge teachers' behaviors through conversations, both individually and as a collective staff. In additional to challenging teachers' deficiency perspective, the principal developed teachers' understanding about race, discrimination and specifically, the impact of the teacher's behavior and low expectations on the student. Due to the leadership practices of upholding high expectations, engaging in critical conversations, and imparting professional learning, teachers improved their practices and supports for students.

In contrast to the above studies, in Gardiner and Enomoto's (2006) qualitative analysis of the practices of six urban principals, researchers found only two of the six principals engaged in the practice of holding high expectations for all students. The other principals demonstrated more of a deficit perspective and focused on what the students lacked (i.e., language, shelter, immigration challenges). The principals in all of the above studies who held high expectations for all were able to challenge stereotypes and systems of oppression for marginalized student populations in order to support students.

Developing Teacher Leadership

Developing teacher leadership has increasingly become a strategy for educational improvement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). York-Barr and Duke suggest "teacher leadership is the process by which teachers individually influence their colleagues, principals and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices" (p. 288). Their study revealed that successful teacher leadership relies heavily on the evidence of specific school conditions to be in place. These conditions include: collaborative and encouraging school culture, roles and relationships (i.e., the establishment of trust), and structures (i.e., access to each other, professional development).

Building on research that underscores the importance of teacher leadership, Anderson (2008) explored the rural school context and argued that teacher leaders influenced these schools, and in some cases, transformed the entire organization. Anderson's research presents a valuable new focus on teachers as leaders beyond their traditional roles. Danielson's (2007) extensive writing regarding teacher leadership divides teacher leader roles into two different categories: informal and formal. Formal teacher leader roles are positions designed and appointed by building or school leaders and recognized by the school community (i.e. department chair, master teacher, instructional coach). Informal teacher leaders are not selected. Instead, "they take the initiative to address a problem or institute a new program. They have no positional authority; their influence stems from the respect they command from their colleagues through their expertise and practice" (Danielson, 2007, p. 16). Her research posits several conditions that can promote teachers to become leaders: (a) a safe environment for risk-taking, (b) administrators who encourage teacher leaders and (c) opportunities to learn leadership skills. Danielson also asserts that administrators must be proactive in their commitment to cultivate teacher leaders.

Promoting Inclusivity

Culturally responsive leaders can create and sustain school cultures that are inclusive (Khalifa et al., 2016; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018). Indeed, school leaders can explicitly maintain safe and inclusive school environments via their actions and practices. Khalifa et al. (2016) posit that leaders can model cultural responsiveness when they interact with and among school staff (Tillman, 2005), recognize and name inequities toward marginalized students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012), and challenge the status-quo of exclusionary practices (Khalifa, 2011). Theoharis (2007) asserts that leaders enact inclusivity when they eliminate exclusionary practices that discriminate and segregate students such as tracked levels of class placement.

Engaging in Critical Self Reflection

Culturally responsive leaders must be aware of and be able to reflect upon their own cultural identity and the identity of the context in which they lead (Cooper, 2009; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa et al., 2016; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Capper et al., 2006; Young & Laible, 2000). It is only after the leader engages in the iterative process of personal cultural awareness and self- reflection that they are able to recognize and combat inequities within the schools they lead (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). The leader's personal cultural awareness and self-reflection assists in the probing and challenging of assumptions and practices within the school that promotes inequitable practices (Cooper, 2009; Khalifa, 2011; Khalifa, et al., 2016; Santamaría, 2014). This leads to transformative action that will result in equitable practices and contexts to support marginalized students (Shields, 2010).

Conclusion

The research we have reviewed indicates that there is an existing opportunity and academic gap for marginalized student populations in schools. We have reviewed literature on the specific populations for this study: LGBTQ, emergent bilingual, Hispanic/Latinx, and African American students to discern the impact of leadership practices to support marginalized student populations. We then explored the impact of leadership on marginalized student populations, with a focus on culturally responsive school leadership and transformational leadership practices. While there is an abundance of research on the disparities and systems of oppression that marginalized student populations face, there is still a relatively smaller body of research on how district and school building leaders can positively impact and change the outcomes for these students. As a result, we constructed a study to answer the research question: In what ways, if any, do district and school leaders support marginalized student populations in

schools? We collected and analyzed data from our study to inform further research studies and provide guidance to district and school leaders to create equitable school systems for all students.

CHAPTER TWO[2]

Methods

This qualitative descriptive case study examined whether and how district and school leaders model, encourage, and sustain culturally responsive practices that support marginalized students. The sections below describe the overall study design and procedures for data collection and analysis.

Study Design

A qualitative, descriptive, single-case study design was applied to answer the group and individual research questions. The descriptive case study design was chosen to uncover and describe the phenomena of leadership within specific, unalienable contexts (Yin, 2018). We identified, examined, and described the relationship between school leaders' beliefs and practices, and the culturally responsive systems, structures, and practices that support marginalized student populations. Through semi-structured interviews, document reviews, observations, and field notes, the team gathered evidence to describe this relationship in the context of a mid-sized urban Massachusetts school district.

Site Selection

The study site selection criteria included: 1) a mid-to-large-sized K-12 urban district in Massachusetts; 2) inclusion of a diverse student body, with at least fifty percent representing marginalized students populations-specifically, LGBTQ, emergent bilinguals, Hispanic/Latinx, and African American; 3) inclusion of school leaders who self-identified (and/or who were recognized by their district leaders) as being culturally responsive; 4) recognition by GLSEN of

[2] This chapter was collaboratively written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project. Authors include: Margarita Amy, Mark Pellegrino, Jaime Slaney, and Luis Soria

Massachusetts as a district committed to culturally responsive ideology through policy, practice, and professional development regarding LGBTQ students; and 5) access to at least two of the district schools. Site selection also required a district that had demonstrated efforts and leadership practices in support of marginalized students.

After engaging in demographic data analysis, several Massachusetts districts aligned to our site selection criteria. To make the final selection of the research site, we examined six GLSEN recommended districts. We reviewed each of the recommended district and school websites for evidence of practices, policies, and/or initiatives in support of marginalized students, with a focused lens on LGBTQ students. We also communicated with local- and state-level professionals who were familiar with the districts and the district superintendents to determine if the leaders demonstrated culturally responsive practices and beliefs. Bayside Hill School District (pseudonym) was ultimately chosen as the focus of the study.

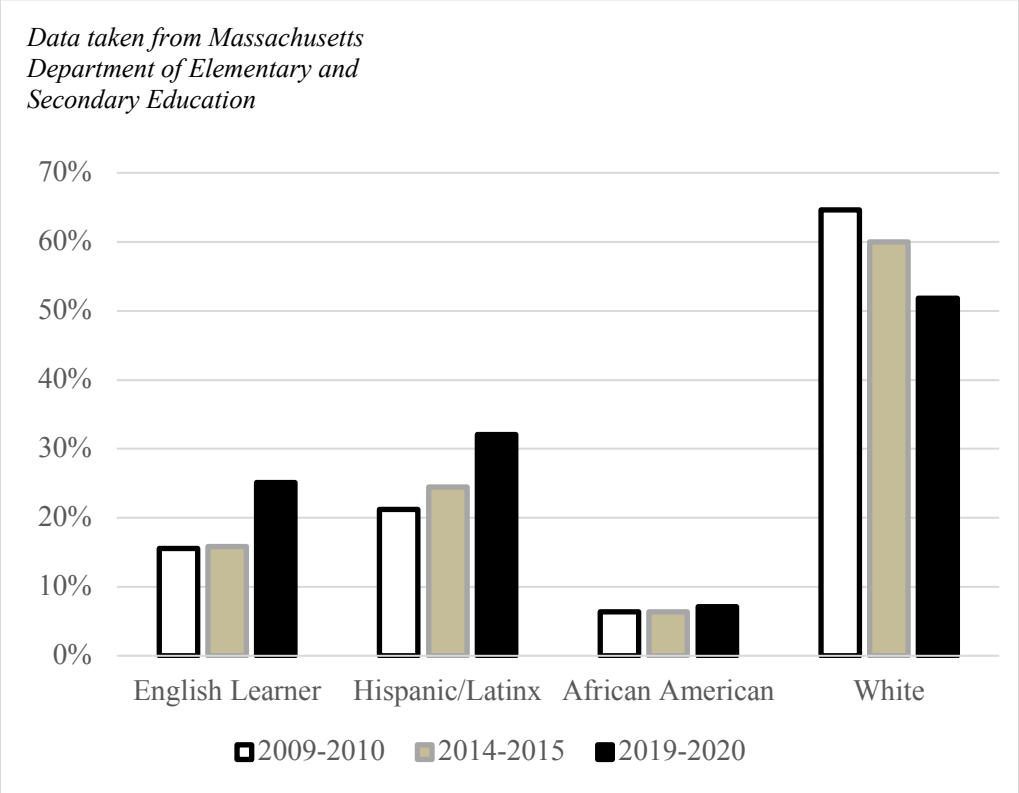
Contextual Background of Bayside Hill School District

At the time of this study, Bayside Hill School District, located in Massachusetts, had a racially and linguistically diverse population (see Figure 2). Of the approximately 950,000 students in Massachachusetts public schools, 21.6% are Hispanic/Latinx, 9.2% are African American, and 10.8% are English Learners, and 57.9% White. In comparison, Bayside Hill Public Schools has a more diverse student makeup. The Hispanic/Latinx population at Bayside Hill is eleven percentile points higher than the state's percentage, and the emergent bilingual (defined by the state of Massachusetts as English Learners) population is fifteen percentile points higher. Figure 2 highlights how the student demographics have shifted at Bayside Hill School District over the last ten years. The Hispanic/Latinx and emergent bilingual student populations have continuously increased during the last five years. Additionally, the White student

population decreased nineteen percent over the past ten years. This shift in population simultaneously occurred with an increase of 1000+ district students. Contrasting this shift in students' racial makeup, the staff demographic has relatively remained White. Research has demonstrated that it is beneficial for schools to have a staff population that mirrors the racial makeup of the student population (Wilder, 2000). However, only 1% of the teachers in the district are African American, while 7% of the students are African American. Likewise, 10% of teachers in the district are Hispanic/Latinx, while 32% of the students are Hispanic/Latinx. This difference in the makeup of the two populations can contribute to disproportionate outcomes for students (Wilder, 2000).

Figure 2

Student Demographic 10-Year History of Bayside Hill School District



The superintendent has been in his position for three consecutive years. The district has fourteen schools, with only one currently identified by the state as "requiring assistance" under the state's accountability measures. During the time of our research, three schools were following a state mandated Turnaround Plan as a form of dramatic and comprehensive intervention, since they were identified as schools also "requiring assistance." According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, schools classified as "requiring assistance" have low graduation rates, low overall performance on statewide assessments, or have low participation on the state mandated assessments.

When interviewed, the superintendent identified equity as a driving force for Bayside Hill Schools. He described the context of the school system, the city itself, and inequities that exist. The superintendent explained student educational outcomes is highly correlated with a student's address. He shared:

> This city is kind of divided with the North/South... Predominantly our students live on the south side. [The south side] has more concentration of housing. There is state and federal low income housing in the South Side. And the north side is very affluent, much more than the south side... So you see it in the performance of students who live on the north side or attend north side schools. We've been really trying to adjust for that marginalization, whether it's by skin color, or income, or by making sure we had an equity model in our schools, and our funding formula.

The superintendent expressed that until recently, inequities evidenced in specific geographic areas in the school district have been largely ignored.

At the time of the research, the district was engaged in implementing a lesson plan mandate, which required teachers to come together and co-plan lessons using a prescribed

template. Co-planning occurred twice a week for math and English language arts. The expectations for co-planning were for all elementary schools, where the teaching teams submit weekly lessons which include both content and language goals. This new mandate harmed the relationship between the teachers and the district leaders. Consequently, teachers felt that this was a top-down mandate and an example of the lack of trust that exists within the district and has resulted in less sharing of practices. Although the district's intent was to increase collaboration among teachers, teachers' perceptions were that they had no time to collaborate or share ideas. As will become apparent in Chapter 4, this initiative was a frequent theme in many interviews.

Data Collection

Research data was collected via semi-structured interviews, document analysis, observations, and field notes to understand whether and how district and school building leaders support marginalized student populations. Case study data was collected from August 2019 through February 2020. The research team collaboratively gathered data to support the overarching question for the larger case study, as well as for the four individual studies that contributed to the larger research.

Interviews

In order to understand how leaders modeled, encouraged, and sustained practices that supported marginalized students, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from the district. Participants included district leaders, school building leaders, teachers, and teacher leaders. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) assert, "Interviews are necessary when we cannot observe behaviors, feelings or how people interpret the work around them" (p.108). The relationship between the interviewer and the respondent is a partnership (Weiss, 1994). Each

participant was interviewed individually for 30-60 minutes. Interviews were conducted in person, recorded, and finally, transcribed using the web-based program, Rev.

Study Participants

Purposive, nonprobability sampling was used to select study participants in order to discover and gain insight into a specific phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this collective study, each researcher sought participants for their respective study informed by their specific criteria and research questions. Participant selection is further discussed in each individual Chapter Three. The following paragraphs describe the criteria we utilized to seek participants for the overarching group study.

Four senior district-level administrators, seven school building leaders, and eighteen teachers were interviewed to explore their individual and collective beliefs toward supporting marginalized students (See Table 2). The Bayside Hill superintendent and assistant superintendent identified a number of building leaders who, in their opinion, demonstrated efforts to meet the needs of the marginalized students.

Each school building leader identified between 1 and 6 teachers who met the criteria for each individual study. In total, eighteen teachers participated in the study. The identified teachers were interviewed to examine their beliefs and practices to support marginalized students. Additionally, teachers were asked whether and how their respective school building leaders support marginalized student populations. Table 2 details the gender and race of each of the participants in the group study.

Interview Protocols

Interview protocols were designed to discover and probe for leadership practices, decision-making, and beliefs in support of marginalized student populations in Bayside Hill

Table 2

Participant Self-Identified Demographics

Organizational Level	Gender		Race/Ethnicity	
District Level Leaders	Female Male	2 2	African American White	1 3
Building Level Leaders	Female Male	5 2	White	7
Teachers	Female Male	13 5	White Hispanic/Latinx	16 2

Public Schools. Questions were created based on relevant literature on the topic. Interview protocols were designed for district and school leaders, teachers, and teacher leaders (See Appendix A which details questions for each participant group). Protocols were piloted with conveniently available educators who were not candidates for the study to ensure the questions were understandable and produced useful data.

Document Review

Purposive sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was used to select documents related to leadership practices to analyze whether and how district and school building leaders support marginalized student populations. The documents included district- and school-level policies, websites, professional learning agendas/presentations, problem solving protocols, school schedules for co-planning, and communications to families and teachers. One researcher reviewed a student organization mission, vision, and value statements, and agendas/minutes of the student organization meetings. We also analyzed the Bayside Hill district's strategic plan (2017), equity plan (2018), and budget (2019).

Observations

Observations were conducted in three schools to provide our team with firsthand examinations of leadership knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practices (See Appendix C for protocol). We observed interactions between leaders and students, teacher leaders and students, and among students. We also observed planning meetings and dual language classroom instruction. For two of the individual studies, observations were conducted to provide "knowledge of the context and specific incidents, behaviors, which can be used as reference points" (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, p.139). These reference points allowed us to triangulate the information gained from interviews and other sources.

Field Notes

Field notes were an additional data source for this study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe field notes as "the written account of the observation, which are also analogous to the interview transcript" (p. 149). Field notes provided knowledge of the context and specific behaviors observed during the time of the interviews and informal observations. The field notes were "reflective," as noted by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), and included "feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations, speculations and working hypothesis" (p. 151). The field notes included but were not limited to interactions with school, district and teacher leaders, teachers and students. The content of the field notes included verbal descriptions, direct quotations and other running narratives based on the observers' comments. A sample of our field note protocol is included in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

Data was collected and uploaded to Dedoose, an online qualitative software, to facilitate coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As transcripts and other sources of data were added to

Dedoose, each individual researcher determined and applied a priori codes (Miles et al., 2014) aligned to categorical themes and that related to individual conceptual frameworks. Data was analyzed through these themes to identify specific words and phrases (Creswell, 2012). This process was iterative and allowed the researchers to modify, clarify, or enhance these themes as the study progressed and data was gathered. In other words, the team, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2015), had “a conversation with the data" (p. 204). Additional emergent coding cycles were completed by all researchers. These cycles were designed to create a more narrowed thematic organization of the initial coding (Saldana, 2013). The team completed pair checks to review each other’s coding cycles to further build trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Positionality

Our research writing reflects our individual interpretations informed by cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics also referred to as “positions” (Creswell, 2012). This research team acknowledges that our research writing can be positioned. For this reason, to minimize potential biases, as a team, we developed interview protocols, coded interview samples in pairs, and maintained a process memo. The research team for this study is composed of four Massachusetts public school administrators. The group has a range of educational experiences in both public and private schools. These experiences include teaching at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Collectively, research members have also served in various roles such as teacher leader, director of instruction, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent in various schools and districts. The team is evenly divided between two women and two men. Of the four researchers, two identify as Latinx and two identify as White. In addition, one researcher identifies in the LGBTQ community. The members of the team

identified their roles and school district affiliation to the participants in the study. The team also shared with each other their unique perspectives and positionality throughout the research process.

CHAPTER THREE[3]

INDIVIDUAL STUDY:

Leadership Practices that Support Marginalized Students: Cultural Awareness and Self-Reflection

Khalifa (2018) posits our educational system maintains oppressive structures (i.e., discipline, academic, opportunities to learn) that negatively impact the lives of marginalized youth. These structures are reproductive, and without intentional efforts to confront them, they will continue. Khalifa (2018) asserts that in order to disrupt these systems of oppression, it is essential for educators, in particular leaders, to understand their power within schools to either maintain oppression or change the trajectory.

In order to change the trajectory, a leader must intentionally engage in culturally responsive leadership practices and behaviors (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Riehl, 2000). Johnson and Fuller (2014) assert culturally responsive leadership "involve[s] those leadership philosophies, practices, and policies that create inclusive schooling environments for students and families from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds" (p. 1). Khalifa et al. (2016) further defines culturally responsive leadership as a set of behaviors that influence "school climate, school structure, teacher efficacy, and student outcomes" (p. 1274) to meet the needs of marginalized students.

Critical self-reflection is an essential culturally responsive leadership behavior to disrupt these systems (Brown, 2004; Brown et al., 2011; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Through this behavior of culturally responsive leadership, school leaders consistently examine their positionality within the school organization and consciously, both

[3] This chapter was authored by Jaime D. Slaney

personally and organizationally, resist the oppression of marginalized youth (Khalifa, 2011; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Engaging in critical self-reflection brings to light personal biases, beliefs, values, and privileges (Brown, 2006; Capper et al., 2006; Khalifa, 2018; Young & Laible, 2000) and propels leaders to see how they are involved, either directly or through inaction, in reproducing inequities (Khalifa, 2018). Ultimately, this critical self-reflection will transform into action to create culturally responsive schools (Khalifa et al., 2016; Shields, 2010). Conversely, researchers have found without the leader's development of personal critical self-reflection, oppressive structures will continue to reproduce (Capper et al., 2006).

The purpose of this individual qualitative research study was to address the research gap that exists related to leadership practices that establish culturally responsive schools, specifically, the leadership practices engaged in to develop both the leaders' and the teachers' cultural awareness and self-reflection. While there is a comprehensive body of research on the importance of cultural awareness and self-reflection to combat the practices of student oppression, there is a lack of research on specific practices leaders utilize to establish this culturally responsive behavior within their organization (Khalifa et al., 2016). To help fill this gap, this research study explored the leadership practices utilized to engage both teachers and themselves to critically self-reflect upon their role, beliefs, and practices that may be contributing to oppressive school structures for marginalized students. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions: How, if at all, does the leader develop and maintain cultural awareness and self-reflection to support marginalized populations? What leadership practices does the leader enact, if at all, to engage teachers in cultural awareness and self-reflection?

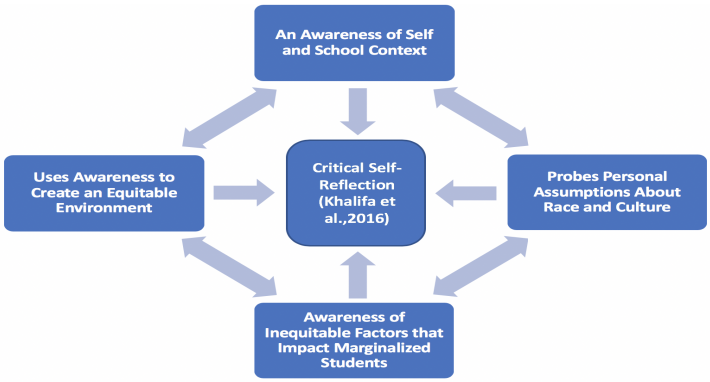
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework I used to guide my review of the literature and inform my study is embedded within Khalifa et al.'s (2016) culturally responsive school leadership framework. For this individual study, my conceptual framework focused on Khalifa et al.'s culturally responsive leadership behavior of being critically self-reflective.

Culturally responsive leadership is characterized by a core set of unique leadership behaviors that influences the way a school organization responds to and meets the needs of marginalized students. One culturally responsive leadership behavior is to be critically self-reflective (Khalifa et al., 2016). Khalifa et al. assert to be critically self-reflective, leaders must engage in four tenets: have an awareness of self and the context in which they lead; be willing to probe personal assumptions, their own and others, about race and culture and impact on the school; have an awareness of the inequitable facets that negatively affect marginalized students' potential; and finally, to use awareness to transform and create a new equitable environment for marginalized students. A visual of the framework is provided below (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Critical Self-Reflection (Khalifa et al., 2016)



An Awareness of Self and School Context

Gay and Kirkland (2003) emphasize that teachers' cultural critical consciousness, "knowing who they are as people, understanding the contexts in which they teach, and questioning their knowledge base and assumptions" (p. 181), is as crucial as effective instructional pedagogy. By extension, culturally responsive leaders must be aware of and be able to reflect upon their own personal beliefs, experiences, assumptions, and frame of mind in relation to their own cultural identity and the identity of the context in which they lead (Cooper, 2009; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa et al., 2016; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Capper et al., 2006; Young & Laible, 2000). Only after the leader engages in such personal reflection are they able to be open to, aware of, and effective with their students to create equity and excellence in their schools (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa, 2010; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Without this awareness, leaders will not be able to recognize patterns of racial oppression (Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

Although research about the significance of leaders' cultural awareness and self-reflection has been clearly established, the support for building cultural awareness is still not the case for the majority of school leaders within the United States (Boske, 2009). As illustrated in her quantitative study of 1,087 school administrators, Boske found school leaders did not prioritize leadership standards that specifically focused on diversity elements for marginalized youth even though they recognized these populations were growing in their schools. Boske asserts that this finding may indicate the lack of ability, willingness, or awareness on the part of our school leaders to foster and prioritize cultural responsiveness in our schools. Without the leaders' awareness, support and advocacy, culturally responsive initiatives can be short-lived (Khalifa et al., 2016; Riehl, 2000).

Probes Personal Assumptions About Race and Culture

Culturally responsive leaders must not only probe their own personal assumptions about race and culture but be willing to probe and challenge others about their assumptions about race and culture (Khalifa, 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016; Santamaría, 2014). Illustrating the danger of the leader not engaging in these practices is a comparative case study of two North Carolina schools that experienced rapid demographic change (Cooper, 2009). Both leaders in the study spoke about the importance of equity, caring, and acceptance of all students. Conversely, staff members and White families spoke about marginalized students in a derogatory and often hostile manner. The leaders did not engage in any strategies to disrupt this thinking or to enact cultural awareness or self-reflection. The unwillingness or lack of knowledge of the leaders to probe others' assumptions about race and deficit understandings of students was a major factor in the upholding of inequitable practices throughout both schools.

Awareness of Inequitable Factors that Impact Marginalized Students

Critical self-awareness and reflection will influence the school leader's effectiveness to meet and recognize the needs of marginalized youth (Capper et al., 2006; Cooper, 2009; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). School leaders must be aware and able to identify the existence of inequitable practices and factors that negatively impact marginalized youth in their schools (Khalifa, 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016; Skrla, 2004; Khalifa et al., 2016; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Through their research on equity audits, Skrla et al. (2004) identified four areas of school programming and practices that have consistently demonstrated inequities: special education, gifted and talented/advanced placement courses, bilingual education, and student discipline. The leader must be able to recognize

injustices for marginalized students in order to disrupt bias, uncover racialized beliefs, and to create equitable systems (Khalifa, 2011; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011; Skrla et al., 2004).

Uses Awareness to Create an Equitable Environment

Gooden and Dantley (2012) argue self-reflection and awareness alone are not enough. They assert awareness must be coupled with transformative action to result in any sustained change. For a leader to positively impact marginalized youths in their schools, they must engage in transformative leadership. According to Shields (2010), "Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others" (p. 559). In her 2010 study of two principals, Shields found both principals had developed cultural awareness and self-reflection and then engaged in a series of purposeful practices. These practices included explicit conversations with their staff around their own beliefs and experiences. To address inequities, principals engaged the staff in the use of data to identify inequitable practices and to determine a plan for the success of all children. This often included experimenting with new approaches and structures. Both principals engaged staff in unlearning of old systems that "perpetuated deficit thinking and inequity and their replacement with new frameworks of inclusion and equity that undergirded the continuous improvement mentality" (p. 576). These practices led to more equitable, just, and culturally responsive schools.

Now more than ever, the ability to lead and sustain culturally responsive schools is critical to the work of school leaders. As established, the leader's ability to be personally culturally aware and self-reflective is a crucial first step. To disrupt oppressive thinking and structures that negatively impact our marginalized youth populations, leaders must engage the school in the same awareness and reflection.

Literature Review

To provide a foundation for this study, this section will contain a literature review of empirical research related to conditions and practices that support systemic cultural awareness and reflection. The first section explores the importance of establishing the condition of trust to enact cultural awareness and self-reflection. The next section examines the use of courageous conversations (Singleton, 2015) as a tool to probe assumptions about race and culture and to create equitable environments. Finally, the third section investigates the mechanism of professional learning as a vehicle to enact systemic cultural awareness and reflection.

Trust and Culturally Responsive Environments

When leaders engage educators in new learning about culture and race, the presence of trust among educators is essential for success (Brown et al., 2011**;** Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2014; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Handford & Leithwood, 2013). The engagement in a new reform, or what Handford and Leithwood (2013) term "a change in organizational behavior" (p. 195), will result in a less skillful initial performance of the new behavior. This is true for schools and educators engaging in new practices that are culturally responsive to their students. For educators to take on this risk, there must be the presence of trust among the school organization (Bryk & Schneider, 2004; Cosner, 2009; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018).

The presence of trust is a catalyst for capacity building. In her 2009 study of 11 Chicago high school principals, Cosner (2009) found the cultivation of collegial trust as an imperative feature for capacity building. Similarly, in Bryk et al.'s (1999) study of 248 Chicago schools, researchers discovered when educators had developed trust and respect for one another, collaboration and reflective dialogue increased.

The perception that their leader is competent is essential to the building of trust among educators. When teachers perceive their leader as competent (i.e., being visible in classrooms, engaging in the learning, delivering professional learning, having high expectations, and engaging in problem-solving rather than avoidance of difficult situations) higher trust levels ensued (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Trust in the leader increases the probability that an educator will engage in new learning and risk a temporary unskillful performance (Bryk et. al., 1999; Handford & Leithwood, 2013). These findings suggest the leader has an imperative role in setting the tone in the building for trusting relationships which will in turn support the enactment of cultural awareness and self-reflection (Brown et al., 2011**;** Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2014; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Handford & Leithwood, 2013).

Courageous Conversations About Race

Justice Sotomayor stated in her dissent in the Schuette v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action (2014)**,** "The only way to stop discrimination based on race is to talk openly and candidly on the subject of race. . . . We ought not sit back and wish away, rather than confront, the racial inequality that exists in our society" (p. 29). The literature echoes Justice Sotomayor's declaration of the importance of open and critical conversations as a strategy to create equitable opportunities for marginalized youth in our schools (Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Santamaria, 2014; Singleton, 2015). These conversations, known as "courageous conversations" in the literature, are meant to engage people in dialogue about race. These conversations are direct, persistent, sustained, and result in transformative action so that the participant gains understanding (Singleton, 2015). For instance, in Santamaria's (2014) qualitative study, leaders were found to initiate and engage in both formal and informal daily courageous conversations even when the topic was not popular. They reported educators with

whom they spoke felt empowered by the knowledge they gained. Similarly, in Khalifa's (2010) ethnographic study, leaders openly engaged in conversations about race and White privilege which had the effect of "removing a considerable amount of cognitive dissonance surrounding race" (p. 635).

Courageous conversations about race and culture can lead to a disruption of inequitable practices and lead to more culturally responsive schools (Khalifa, 2010; Khalifa, 2011; Mansfield & Jean-Marie, 2015; Singleton, 2015). In his 2011 ethnographic study examining a principal's response to low teacher expectations and deal-making for marginalized youths, Khalifa found the principal was able to counteract some of the behaviors regarding low expectations by challenging and confronting teachers directly. The principal normalized discussions about race by engaging in them frequently and by continually challenging staff members to rethink their practices regarding marginalized youths. These conversations resulted in improved practices for teachers and outcomes for students (Khalifa, 2011).

Culturally responsive leaders engage in courageous conversations that speak about race and cultural differences directly, and the impact it has on students' lives in school. Courageous conversations explicitly name personal biases and use real examples to promote self-reflection and bring to surface hidden racialized beliefs (Khalifa, 2010; Khalifa, 2011; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). In Theoharis and Haddix's (2011) mixed methods study of six principals, one principal reported the importance of engaging the staff in conversations "that did not skirt racial issues but to talk about race plainly and often" (p. 1340). In this study critical conversations were a practice enacted to raise the consciousness of the staff members and to prompt them to explore their differing reactions to non-White students.

In contrast, in Cooper's (2009) study, Principal Jacobs, a White woman, expressed "equity-oriented intentions" (p. 710), but she did not engage in any transformative actions to combat or address the negative and prejudiced views from White families and staff. Courageous conversations are premised on the existence of three factors essential for school systems to disrupt educational inequities for marginalized youths: passion, practice, and persistence (Singleton, 2015). While Principal Jacobs expressed the desire (passion) for educating all students, she did not act (practice) or stay the course in creating an equitable education for marginalized youths (persistence). The lack of transformative action resulted in the perpetuation of color blind and oppressive structures within the school (Cooper, 2009).

As illustrated above, it is not enough for the leader to have cultural awareness and reflection; the leader must engage in transformative action to address obstacles and inequities. I will now explore the use of professional learning to probe awareness, bring injustices to light, and to transform the environment.

Professional Learning

In Boske's (2009) study, she found 70% of the leaders who responded indicated there was not the promotion or implementation of culturally responsive professional development for teachers even though their school demographics were becoming increasingly more diverse. This finding highlights the need for the development of culturally responsive practices for both leaders and teachers in schools. One vehicle to both raise cultural awareness and transform cultural awareness into action is through professional learning. This section will examine the importance of professional learning and its impact on marginalized youth.

Professional learning about race and culture must be ongoing, frequent, meaningful, and embedded within the practices of the school (Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix,

2011). Professional learning must engage educators in an ongoing examination of the intersectionality of their own race and culture and that of their students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). In Theoharis and Haddix's study of six leaders, five of the six engaged their staff in continuous professional learning about race. One principal described it as "wrestling with race, our own privilege, and our own experience with race" (p. 46).

Professional learning about race and culture that is embedded within existing collaborative structures has a lasting impact (Brown, et al., 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Across the literature, collaborative structures included reading groups, collaborative learning walks, staff meetings and breakfast meetings to hear student testimonials, and the sharing of staff racial autobiographies (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

Using student data, or equity audits, is another way to engage educators in conversations about inequities to promote cultural awareness and reflection (Skrla et al., 2004). When examining data (achievement data, programmatic data, discipline data) the leader must be aware of and combat color-blind decision making, deficit thinking, and blaming students for failures in order for the practice to promote cultural awareness and self-reflection (Khalifa et al., 2013; Skrla et al., 2004). Examination of data, if done consistently and with an eye towards equity, can be a tool to promote cultural awareness, reflection, and action to support marginalized youth. If critical reflection about race and culture is not talked about when engaging in data dialogue, there is a risk of reinforcing stereotypes and deficit thinking (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

In this study, I examined leadership practices that support and sustain the culturally responsive practice of cultural awareness and self-reflection. The following section will explore the methodology for this individual study.

Methodology

Design of the Study

Guided by the culturally responsive school leadership framework (Khalifa et al., 2016), focused on the leadership behavior of being critically self-reflective, this qualitative case study drew upon interviews and documents collected as part of a larger team project. A full discussion of the methods employed during the overarching study can be found in Chapter 2. Unique to this individual study was the specific interview respondents, how data was collected, and how it was analyzed.

Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from the district to understand the leadership practices leaders engage in to enact cultural awareness and self-reflection. These individuals were selected based on recommendations from both district and building leaders because they either espoused culturally responsive practices or had sensitively dealt with a recent incident in their building that involved a marginalized student. Respondents included the superintendent, two assistant superintendents, director of bilingual education, two secondary level principals, two elementary level principals, and 12 teachers (see Table 3). Each participant was interviewed for 30-60 minutes.

Table 3.1

Interview Subjects

Table 3.1

Interview Subjects

District Assigned Title	*Sub-Group Pseudonym*	*Overarching Pseudonym*
Superintendent of Schools Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Curriculum & Instruction Assistant Superintendent of Equity and Diversity Director of Bilingual Education	District Level Leaders	Leaders
2 Elementary Principals 1 Middle School Principal 1 High School Principal	Elementary Secondary Building Level Leaders	Leaders
1 Elementary Teacher 4 Middle School Teachers 7 High School Teachers		Teachers

This study utilized questions from several interview protocols located in Appendix A (i.e. District Leaders, Culturally Responsive Discipline, Cultural Self-Reflection and Awareness and District and School Leaders' Support for LGBTQ Youth). These interview protocols elicited perceptions of leadership practices that generated cultural awareness and self-reflection. In addition, leaders' responses to these interview questions helped to understand transformative actions that resulted from awareness to create increased equity in the district.

Table 3.2

Participant Self-Identified Demographics

Sub-Group	Gender	Sexuality	Race
District Level Leaders	Female 2 Male 2	Heterosexual 4	African American/Black 1 White 3
Building Level Leaders	Female 4 Male 0	Heterosexual 3 Gay 1	White 4
Teachers	Female 8 Male 4	Heterosexual 11 Bisexual 1	White 12

Document Review

The researcher reviewed the district's strategic plan, the district equity plan, professional development agendas, problem solving protocols, District budgets, the Inclusive Sports Participation Policy, and minutes from the district equity subcommittee to triangulate interview data. The documents were used as a source of data and supported understanding the context and scope of equity work in the district. However, interviews were found to be the most critical to answering this individual study's research questions.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were initially coded for the topic of critical self-reflection from Khalifa et al.'s (2016) culturally responsive leadership framework. Specifically, each transcript was coded based on behaviors which indicated an awareness of self and school context, an awareness of inequitable factors that impacted marginalized students, how the leader probed personal assumptions about race and culture, and how the leader used awareness to create an equitable environment. Additional descriptive codes emerged. They included themes in which leaders attributed the development of their awareness, how awareness was maintained, and leadership behaviors utilized to create more equitable environments. Several additional coding cycles were completed in order to ensure that codes were assigned appropriately.

When reporting qualitative data in reference to participants, I quantified the number of respondents using the terms all, almost all, most, some, one and none. When I utilized the word "all", I am referring to all 8 leader participants. Almost "all refers" to more than three-quarters of the participants. "Most" refers to more than half of the participants. "Some" means more than one participant. "One" refers to only one participant. Finally, "none" refers to no participants.

Findings

In what follows, I describe leadership practices that four district leaders and four building leaders utilized to engage both teachers and themselves in order to develop and maintain cultural awareness and leadership practices that supported marginalized student populations. First, I describe how leaders' perceptions of how they developed and maintained cultural awareness and critical self-reflection to support marginalized populations. Second, I detail how teachers developed cultural awareness and critical self-reflection and those leadership practices found to support this development.

How Leaders Developed Awareness and Created More Equitable Environments

The first research question examined how leaders developed and maintained critical self-reflection to support marginalized students. Almost all leaders interviewed demonstrated cultural awareness. In the first section, I describe how leaders developed awareness. In the second section, I describe the leadership practices used to inform and maintain awareness and self-reflection about inequitable factors marginalized students experience in the school context. Finally, in the third section, I describe leadership practices utilized to address inequities in order to create more equitable environments.

Awareness About One's Own Cultural Identity

Seven out of the eight leaders interviewed demonstrated awareness about their own cultural identity. Awareness was evidenced by comments about one's own race, gender, social identity, positionality, culture, worldviews, and potential biases. For these leaders, awareness was developed in a number of ways. These included experiences from being marginalized themselves, childhood experiences, and from professional experiences.

Awareness About Being Marginalized. Some leaders described their own experiences being marginalized. Leaders reported coming from homes of low socio-economic status and feeling discriminated against because of their immigrant status, their language background, and/or their race. Due to this experience of marginalization, these leaders developed an awareness of themselves and of the inequities their students face. They attributed this awareness in large part to their own marginalization.

One district leader shared a critical incident from his childhood and how this pivotal experience impacted his leadership. He described a personal educational experience where he was educated in a room with no windows in the basement of a school. All of his peers were students of color, and the majority were male. The room was overcrowded, and in his own words, students were, “just hanging out, causing trouble, raising hell.” The leader recalled the teacher taking notice of his strong academic ability and indicated to him that he should not be in the class. The leader described the exact moment where his education changed paths.

> The principal comes down and gets me. I'm like, I know I didn’t do anything wrong this time. We start walking up the stairs from the basement, I'm panicking, we get to the office level floor. And he goes up another flight. So, I'm following him and I'm like 'what's happening?' So, he takes me to a closet and he says "XXX hand me your books." So, I hand him all my books. He opens the closet and in there, there is a stack of all brand new books, I mean, science, math, English. And the books are double the size of the books that I have on me. So, I hand him my shitty ass books and he hands me brand new books, that I have to unwrap. He walks me two rooms down, and says "This is your new class, your new schedule." I walk in, there's one person of the color, Asian, and he became one of my lifelong friends, everybody else is White. And I think about in my

> role, all those boys that I left in the basement, all of my friends. And I think about what was so different, especially about me? Nothing. An adult had the opportunity to create access for me. I guess my experiences and my exposure to experiences gives me a level of empathy, and a profound… sort of indignation for injustice. You know?

This leader, as well as the two other leaders who shared accounts of marginalization, attributed their dedication and drive for this work as a result of their own experiences. They expressed the desire to be the voice for students who may not have it.

Childhood Experiences. Some leaders described how their personal childhood experiences informed their cultural awareness. These leaders attributed their development of awareness from growing up and attending schools in diverse settings, having families who invested in volunteering, from having siblings with disabilities, and from having family members who were prejudiced. One leader discussed her experiences as a White, affluent student with parents who did not want her to be friends with nonwhite peers. She recalled, "Those life experiences, I think, shape us to who we are, and I feel like I just need to be a voice for our kids and the kids who don't have a voice." While these experiences took place in childhood, their awareness progressed and shaped how leaders think of themselves and others.

Experiences in Diverse Professional Settings. Most of the leaders described how professional experiences built their cultural awareness. They discussed how working in diverse settings, having culturally responsive mentors, and conversations with students and colleagues were vehicles for awareness development. One leader credited critical conversations with colleagues as a catalyst for awareness, “It’s a place where you start to question things that you grew up to believe. People question you, not in a bad way, but made you reexamine a set of

beliefs that maybe you grew up with and say, “Is this really what I believe?” These leaders perceived that these professional experiences contributed to their awareness.

While the majority of participants interviewed exhibited cultural self-awareness, it should be noted that one leader did not. This building leader did not demonstrate an understanding of her own bias and how that bias contributed to inequities for marginalized students. This leader expected students and families to assimilate into the majority culture. This was evidenced by her comments about families taking an extended leave from school to visit family from their home countries, “And it is challenging with some of the Brazilian population because school's not that important to some of them. And they'll pull their kids out for a month and go to Brazil for Carnival, and this and that.” This leader appeared to apply a deficit understanding of marginalized families’ beliefs and cultures.

Leaders Used a Variety of Leadership Practices to Inform and Maintain Awareness

Almost all of the leaders interviewed revealed leadership practices they utilized to maintain and to continue to inform their awareness. In examining the interview data, three themes emerged. These included: creating structures for student, family, and community voice to be heard and to impact change, establishing trusting relationships, and, finally, using data to both inform and maintain the leaders’ awareness.

Leaders Created Structures for Student, Family, and Community Voice to be Heard

Most of the leaders reported they created structures and systems, both formal and informal, for students, families and the community to have opportunities to share their voice. These structures gave stakeholders access in order to voice concerns, ideas, and solutions which in turn influenced the leader’s awareness.

The most prevalent structures involved student voice at the secondary level in both the high school and the middle school. The district created and supported student affinity groups that included the Black Student Union (BSU), the Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA), and the Student Immigrant Movement (SIM), student leadership groups, and a student advisory council to the Superintendent. District and secondary level building leaders empowered these student advocacy groups by creating substantial access to both building and district leaders. This structure allowed students to be activists and to influence the beliefs, attitudes, and awareness of others. One leader recalled a critical moment when she had a shift in thinking, awareness, and beliefs regarding LGBTQ students. She confided,

> We have had, in the past, kids from the LGBTQ community from the high school come over and meet with our club as a bridge so that the kids kind of understand. And it was interesting. The first time they came, I sat in their meeting. That was probably three or four years ago. And it was a little ... I needed some time to process after. Many of the students were sharing their story of coming out. And I was a little bit worried because we had some sixth grade students present. I was a little bit worried of how parents would react. I've come a long way since then. My worry isn't the same. I think it's a great thing that they share their message, and I think it's okay that we do this in the safe setting.

This leader attributed student voice as a vehicle to develop her awareness. Students had considerable access to leaders as well within the district. One teacher described her students' access to their building leader, "No matter what she's doing, she finds time to sit down with them. She talks it out." In this district, student voice was valued and recognized as an essential practice to inform and maintain the leader's awareness of inequities.

In addition to student voice, leaders created structures for family, and community voice to be heard. Many leaders referenced conversations with families as an opportunity to inform their awareness. One elementary level building leader recalled a conversation she had with two mothers of color at the beginning of her principalship in her current building, "Family voice is huge. White, middle class families have a voice. Our African American families, two of them last year told me I should watch, because there's racist teachers here. Like red flag, right?"

Alternatively, family voice was dismissed when the leader did not display awareness. The one participant who did not demonstrate cultural awareness recalled having a parent of color approach her at a curriculum event. She recalled the interaction, " a very beautiful black woman came up to me and said, 'Have you noticed that your staff is all White?" The leader shared she acknowledged the lack of diversity of the staff but felt the conversation was "bigger than her" as the parent became "aggressive" about the topic. Instead of engaging in a dialogue about the parent's concerns, she referred the parent to the Assistant Superintendent of Diversity and Equity for the district. This leader shared, "the most interesting thing of all, she was married to the whitest man I've ever seen…and her child doesn't really look black." This leader's lack of cultural awareness impacted her ability to hear and learn from this important stakeholder.

District leaders designed formal structures to elicit family and community voice. They created an ongoing practice called a 'listening tour' where they solicited input from families and the community through email, marketing, and social media. Families and community members filled out a simple questionnaire sharing concerns and then district level leaders went to homes and businesses and listened. One district leader described the practice as a method to inform awareness. He shared, "It's necessary for senior leaders to live in the intensity of the experiences that our families are feeling. There's no one better than the people who are the recipients of our

education to directly communicate that.” Information learned from these experiences helped develop and maintain district level leaders’ awareness of situations and issues that were outside of what one administrator termed his ‘scope of reality’.

Leaders Built Trusting Relationships With Other Leaders

Trusting relationships between leaders built awareness of potential personal and organizational bias. All of the district leader participants claimed to have a strong, trusting, working relationship with the superintendent which supported their work and thinking. This trusting relationship allowed them to openly question practices within the district that were viewed as detrimental to children. Two leaders illustrated a recent event of a teacher speaking openly at a school committee session about her frustration with having emergent bilinguals placed in her classroom. Reportedly, there was no immediate response to the comment by the school committee or the superintendent. One leader asserted her frustration, “That should have been addressed as a community in that moment. And it wasn't. And when it's not, it sends a message to families of ELLs that we support what someone just said because nobody said something different. And I think that's a bigger issue.” The leader went on to share her conversation with the Superintendent that occurred at a senior leadership meeting after the event. She recalled saying, "I'm not trying to make you the poster child, but somebody's got to take this on and create that synergy between city and school." The conversation became a proactive initiative of, what this leader coined, “not letting silence be the narrative,” Similarly, another leader conveyed that support and trust with the superintendent enabled her to engage in challenging work to establish equitable environments for emergent bilinguals. This support helped her persevere through challenging times. She shared:

> You're always crawling and stretching and trying and then this new superintendent came in two years ago and said, "I'm a two-way parent, I believe in bilingualism, I believe in biliteracy, and I support you to do what you need." And that's all he had to say to me. And we've had struggles along the way in establishing new programs, but he has been so supportive and that also makes me want to continue on, right?

The trusting relationship established between senior leaders and the superintendent empowered them to engage in the challenging work and to build joint understanding of the environment in which they serve.

Most of the participants credited maintaining awareness through trusting relationships with other leaders. In particular, district level leaders (superintendent, assistant superintendents, and directors), known as 'senior leaders', discussed building trusting relationships with each other that allowed them to engage in difficult conversations, professional development, and to take risks in their work. Trust among team members deepened leaders' awareness of both themselves and of the marginalized populations within their school system.

Established trust among the senior leadership team created an environment where difficult conversations occurred and leaders deepened their awareness together. Phrases like "we need to lean into the conversation" and "you start with a conversation" were mentioned in almost every interview with a district leader. One leader characterized the outcome of established trust among the team, "we are fine to push each other to make sure that we're not bringing bias into the room… And if a comment is made that maybe isn't inclusive, challenging each other, like, "Okay, but ..." These conversations allowed leaders to challenge each other's beliefs and reflect deeper about their own.

One building leader participant emphasized the importance and benefit of the trusting relationship she had established with senior leaders. This trust allowed her to be vulnerable and ask for help without fear of repercussion. She described the relationship as one of support. She recalled, “I don't think I would've been able to reach out and say ‘help me’ if I didn't feel I could trust that they would not look at that negatively, but look at it as positively.” This leader believed the trusting relationship established with senior leaders helped build her understanding of how to best support marginalized students.

Alternatively, many participants indicated there was work to be done in establishing trust between district level and building level leaders. When asked about the work between the two levels of the organization, one district leader characterized the relationship as still being in the initial stages. She shared, “I think there needs to be a level of trust between those two levels of the organization before you can truly engage in these conversations. I think there needs to be a huge unpacking of the why." Similarly, another district leader conveyed her frustration with building leadership when trying to move initiatives forward. She reflected, “For us as directors, in trying to build the relationships with the principals, we are their colleagues. It's very different than if an assistant superintendent says, okay, you need to do this and of course they will do it.” Without trust between leaders, there was a road block to progress.

Leaders Used Data to Inform Awareness

Almost all the participants recognized the importance of data to inform their awareness of current realities of the district. Data sources included student and staff panorama surveys, curriculum reviews, academic data, emergent bilingual progress plans, discipline data, and informal data, such as discussions with stakeholders. Data informed leaders’ awareness that students did not feel they had a sense of belonging within the school and staff climate was poor.

One leader argued about the importance of the data, “That's really important data that we look at… in my opinion, what we've learned is from some mental instability, or kids feeling not connected, having been marginalized.” Data also informed discrepancies in the curriculum and expectations across the district. One leader described this inequity:

> I think before we can even talk about how to make it more equitable for marginalized learners, we are at a place where we were trying to make it just equal for all students. And so, by making it equal for all students, making sure that all students in the district have access to curriculum. Not every school had access to the curriculum that was put out by the district…now we're tracking that.

While data was used widely to inform awareness, almost all the leaders interviewed shared that the district was in the beginning stages of data use and consistent systems and process are still needed. One leader described her worry about assumptions made without data, “I think sometimes we may make assumptions of how things are going and may not have the actual data to support that. Like I could say, I feel like we are very supportive here…but I've never really gathered hard data.”

Another leader supported this worry about the lack of data and the possible inequities and ramifications for students. He asserted:

> Who are we missing? That we are not even aware that they are marginalized, because institutionally we've done that. We've created those barriers. We take race pretty head on. We take these kinds of matters of equity head on. But not everyone is vocal. And so how do we know who's been marginalized and that the institutional racism or institutional challenges have created that? And how do we break that down?

Awareness about the lack of data was the catalyst for the creation of the racial equity subcommittee under the School Committee. One outcome of the subcommittee was a district wide equity audit. The audit, which commenced in the Fall of 2019, had the following self-described purpose:

> To understand more clearly our assets and challenges which are the drivers behind the gaps in student opportunity and access. Through this audit process, we look to identify and adopt evidence-informed practices so we may build upon our strengths and align resources to support the various requirements of our diverse student body.

This audit will further develop leaders' awareness to support marginalized students. District level leaders shared that audit recommendations will be used to direct the next strategic plan.

Using Awareness to Create More Equitable Environments

Almost all leaders interviewed used their awareness to create more equitable environments. These included: increased visibility and support of student affinity groups, implementation of culturally responsive curriculum and policies, staffing changes, and a more equitable budget structure.

Increased Visibility and Support of Student Affinity Groups

Leaders have created, supported, and implemented practices and symbols to publicly support equity for student affinity groups. At the secondary level, leaders supported students' and staff participation in the GLSEN Day of Silence which is a national student-led demonstration to protest harassment and discrimination of LGBTQ people in schools. The superintendent, assistant superintendents, and high school leaders wore rainbow shirts and lanyards and protested alongside of students. In addition, the LGBTQ flag was approved to be flown outside of the High School next to the American Flag as a symbol of support and to honor

the LGBTQ community. When there was an incident of hate involving the N word, a secondary level building leader partnered with the Black Student Union to create a public service message where leaders, students, and staff were video recorded across all school settings emphatically messaging 'hate has no place in the school'. The secondary level building leader described the initiative:

> And so the messaging is 'Not in my school, Not in my classroom, Not in my field, Not in my court', with the message being the N word, 'not in my school and not in my classroom'. And here's why this is unacceptable. And here's how it makes me feel when I hear that. And so it's involving the entire school community…But this is an inclusive initiative where we want to have all members of our school community involved.

District and secondary level building leaders used their awareness of inequities faced by affinity groups to create practices and to promote symbols of inclusion to create increased equity for students.

Curriculum and Policy Changes

Curriculum and secondary building level leaders have begun to make changes to curriculum and policies to create more equitable environments for students. While curriculum changes are not district wide, small changes have been created that stemmed from their increased awareness of inequities at the high school level. One example was partnering with a university to examine the high school curriculum to ensure students had both "windows and mirrors" within the curriculum. These were opportunities to interact with curriculum that reflected their own cultural identity and also a view into someone else's experiences that didn't mirror their cultural identity. The secondary level building leader described the process as an opportunity "to showcase the achievements, the excellence, and the contributions" of all underrepresented

students and any groups that have been marginalized. Curriculum has been removed that could promote racism, stereotypes, and hate across the departments of the high school. A secondary level building leader shared one example of removing texts from the curriculum and referenced the decision to remove the popular literature *Huck Finn* and the use of the N word in the text. She expressed, "How does that make a student feel with that kind of language in the literature that they are reading?"

Leaders' awareness also resulted in program changes for emergent bilingual learners. Over the past two years, the district increased their dual language programs from one to four. This initiative was initiated by a district leader in charge of bilingual education and supported by the superintendent as part of the district strategic plan. The Office of Bilingual Education examined the demographics in schools and made programmatic changes from that data to best meet the needs of students. One district level leader described the thinking behind the changes and program design:

> So we have different models because of the demographics are not the same. We have to look at the makeup and the profiles of the students in the schools. So it makes sense that at XXX school, where the majority of your students are either heritage learners or English learners, that we did what's a 50/50 model. Fifty percent of the day is in English and 50 percent of the day is in Portuguese because the proficiency level in Portuguese and the literacy level in Portuguese is higher. In a school like XXX, an 80/20 model makes the most sense because you have a lot of monolingual English speakers in those classes and you need to really start with a good foundation in building the literacy.

This district office leader's awareness of the students' strengths and needs created an opportunity for students to learn in and celebrate their native language and have access for success.

In addition to curriculum initiatives, leaders have advocated for more equitable policies and practices for LGBTQ students to have equitable and safer environments. Stemming from the secondary level building leader and senior district leaders' awareness about LGBTQ students and barriers faced, the district adopted an inclusive sports participation policy. The superintendent shared:

> The impetus for the transgender athlete policy was when we were trying to support a student athlete who had transitioned. We felt that we were unprepared and that in order to shift the culture in our programs we needed to commit our beliefs to formalized language. As a result, our policy has become a model for many communities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and perhaps even more widely.

The policy ensured all students have the opportunity to participate in athletics in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity. The policy states, "Interscholastic athletic and co-curricular participation are valuable to students' physical, intellectual, social, and/or character development and accordingly, we value inclusion." In addition to athletics, the district has committed to changing gender identified bathrooms and locker rooms. One senior district leader explained the enormity and importance of the initiative to the institution, "I think we have embraced the philosophy and hopefully kids feel like they belong. At the same time, institutionally, it's (the facilities) set up where they have to divide it…If the structure is set up that you have to be one of the other, that's problematic." Changes in curriculum, programs, policies, and facilities have created more equitable environments for students.

Staffing Changes

Some leaders made staffing changes to promote more equitable circumstances for marginalized students. The removal of ineffective leadership, reallocation of staff for the dual

language program, and changing teachers' grade level assignments were among some of the examples of staffing changes. One senior district leader shared his passion for these decisions, "If you are not about kids, then you're not working here." He believed having the right people in positions was essential to student success.

Equitable Budget

For fiscal year 2019, the superintendent and school committee changed the budget structure to be an equity budget model with "equity" and "access" as the primary budget drivers. Within the budget mission, it reads "We aim to address these inequities, including racism, socio-economic status and language barriers to create an environment in which every child can and will succeed." Leaders described the previous budget structure as inequitable and "disparate" among schools and the new structure as a vehicle to close the budget gap.

> If you are a general education, typical kind of kid, this is how much we are going to spend on your school budget. If your student is an English language learner, we're going to stack on top of that, this additional. If you are a student with special needs, we are going to stack this on top of that. And if your school in poverty, we are going to stack on top of that. We've created a model where schools…our poorest school who had been one of our most underperforming schools, it is kind of lifting up now. But we put four times the investment in that school than we did in the more affluent school on the north side.

The change in budget structure and mission has allowed for the hiring of new positions that support marginalized students. These positions included an Assistant Superintendent of Equity and Diversity, a Bilingual Curriculum Coordinator, English Learner coaches, native speaking tutors, and an equity consultant. In addition, budget items have been allocated to support student

and staff affinity groups to support student and staff culture. These changes resulted from district level leaders' awareness of inequitable opportunities for students.

Leadership Practices to Support Teachers' Cultural Awareness

The second research question examined leadership practices enacted to engage teachers in cultural awareness and reflection. Almost all the leaders interviewed utilized three leadership practices to support the development of teachers' cultural awareness. They included: creating structures for teachers to increase awareness from student voice, facilitating professional learning, and enacting difficult conversations. Each will be discussed in the section that follows.

Creating Structures for Teachers to Increase Awareness from Student Voice

Some of the leaders created structures so that teachers could build their own cultural awareness by learning from their students' experiences. These structures were mostly found at the secondary level. Both of the secondary building leaders interviewed and most of the teachers from those schools referenced learning new information and informing their own thinking about marginalized students from the students themselves.

One structure put in place by secondary level building leaders were frequent student affinity group presentations at staff meetings. One teacher recalled a presentation made from the student immigration movement club and how it helped build her awareness of students' experiences and fears around immigration. She shared, "They came to talk to us about how they were concerned about the current laws, the immigration laws, why it could be creating issues at home. Because, they're nervous that their families could be deported. That was really eye opening." Another teacher referenced how these presentations influenced her approach to designing instructional materials. She recalled the GSA encouraging teachers to be more sensitive and inclusive within the curriculum, "In my mind, 'Oh, it's hard to do that in math.'

And then last year, students said, ‘For a word problem, why don't you make the word problem about a male couple, or something like that?" I was like, ‘That's brilliant’." Frequent presentations from student groups have supported the building of teachers’ cultural awareness and awareness of potential bias.

In addition to staff meetings, secondary building leaders promoted school wide platforms for student voice. One school has daily morning announcements where students from the GSA shared educational messages for both students and teachers. One teacher described the messaging of one announcement about being an ally, “Why do you choose to be an ally? What does it mean? An ally believes all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, deserve to feel safe and supported…It's educating.” Similarly, another student platform mentioned by the teachers were diversity forums which were attended by both students and staff. During the forums, students shared their school experiences through the lens of being a marginalized student. One teacher described the impact of this platform on his thinking regarding his relationships with students. He shared the experience of emergent bilinguals transitioning from the transitional bilingual program into the mainstream classroom:

> They have their friends, they have their community, they have the teachers they know that speak their language. Once they get mainstreamed, they lose that, for the most part. So, a lot of the kids last year, in that forum, talked about when they switched into mainstream classes, the teacher failed to connect to them in any meaningful way. So, I know that I keep trying, because it's a constant process, to connect to all of my students.

Another secondary level building leader created a structure called problem solving conferences in response to supporting teachers’ awareness when they have displayed a less accepting attitude or cultural bias. The purpose of the conference, which could be recommended

by an administrator or requested from the teacher, was to give students an opportunity to voice their feelings and to bring awareness to the teacher of a student's thoughts and beliefs. Here the leader described the impact of the conferences on both the students and teachers:

> Probably eight out of 10 times that we have done these, kids have been much more successful in class. Hearing teachers say things like, 'Oh, I didn't know you felt that way. I'm sorry. I didn't think that's how you would hear me say that'. For the teacher to really hear that student voice… for a lot of the teachers that may not realize the things they are saying or the kids think that they are yelling at them or they don't like them or it's because they're poor or whatever. It's just really been eye opening for some of the adults in the building and they really appreciate having them.

In addition to building based practices, the district level leaders have created a structure for teachers and other staff members to participate in home visits for students who are emergent bilinguals. The district trains staff members, provides a stipend for the visit, and coordinates the visit for staff members. One teacher described the impact of a home visit on his own awareness, "It's been extremely beneficial for me. Just to see what they go through. It's just so beneficial to go see what their actual life is like because it's so different than yours." The practice of creating structures for students to share their voice with teachers has increased and influenced teachers' cultural awareness to support marginalized students.

Opportunities for Professional Learning

Some leaders shared the practice of providing professional learning opportunities for teachers as a mechanism to develop cultural awareness. Professional learning opportunities included secondary level curriculum reviews and the utilization of teacher leaders. These opportunities for professional learning created cultural awareness for teachers.

The district engaged in a curriculum review process by partnering with a well-known university. Teachers at the secondary level across departments engaged in the review with opportunities to reflect upon both the materials and the impact of the materials on students. One English teacher described the exercise of looking through course texts for ethnicity and sexuality of both authors and protagonists and discovered they were predominantly White, straight men. He reflected:

> We have recognized that is a problem. In the short term, have tried to compliment a lot of the texts that are already in our curriculum. We have complimented them with other readings, that include more diverse, both authors and protagonists, so that everyone in our classrooms, regardless of their race or sexuality, feels a sense of self somewhere.

Engaging teachers in this professional learning supported the building of cultural awareness of teachers and to better meet the needs of their marginalized students.

Leaders utilized teacher leaders as a vehicle to develop teacher awareness. Teachers at both the secondary and primary level mentioned teacher leaders, both coaches and affinity group advisors, as resources and support. One teacher described the importance of this support, “We have an English language learning coach who is also present (at Professional Learning Communities). She's really helping us look through the lens of language objectives and helping meet those needs.” District leaders referenced meeting with coaches regularly to model conversation probes and support their work with teachers. One district leader recalled a recent conversation with two coaches pushing their thinking on the purpose of interventions and team time. She recalled the conversation, "Okay, but let's talk about what are we using our intervention for? What are we using our team time for? How are we having conversations in the

data chats?" Leaders recognized the importance and influence that teacher leaders have on building teacher awareness and capacity.

Although the above structures of curriculum reviews and teacher leaders were utilized to support the building of teacher awareness, professional development offerings were found to be an area of weakness for the district. While leaders organized and orchestrated culturally responsive course selections and made them available for teachers, they were sporadic and voluntary. Teachers were aware of the courses and referred to them as a potential opportunity, however none of the 12 teachers interviewed had actually taken the coursework. Both leaders and teachers referred to culturally responsive professional learning as singular opportunities instead of ongoing and embedded. One teacher shared her frustration, “I feel like district-wide they keep saying or introducing new things, but then don't give any of the appropriate training for it… So we have very limited knowledge and no official training that's actually useful to implement in the classroom.” Leaders referenced that the improvement strategies and needs of the district are vast. They also disclosed that prioritizing professional learning topics remains a challenge. One leader referred to this difficulty, “What PD do you pick? When you have 1000 things that are sinking? Unfortunately, it's been something we've been trying to prioritize (culturally responsive teaching), but it's in pockets, and it's more like elective pockets.” This lack of embedded, ongoing professional learning resulted in missed opportunities to build teachers’ cultural awareness.

Difficult Conversations

Most of the leader participants referenced engaging in difficult conversations as a leadership tool to enact teacher awareness. Leaders engaged in direct conversations where they explicitly named personal bias and the impact on marginalized students. One leader recalled an

email he received from a Black, teacher candidate, who was told from the interview committee via email that they couldn't 'see him in the classroom' and he was not hired for the position. The leader went to the teacher in charge of the committee and had a "difficult" conversation. He shared the exchange:

> You all thought that he wasn't a good fit, we'll talk about that later. But you said couldn't see him teaching. You couldn't see a young man of color, who graduated from Harvard School of Education, who has experience as an educator teaching in a classroom. You didn't say he wasn't a good fit or there was a better candidate, you said you couldn't see him teaching. Do you understand how that feels, do you understand that there's bias within that?

This leader challenged the teacher's thinking, directly named the bias that occurred, and forced the teacher to reflect upon his action. This conversation brought awareness. These leaders felt difficult conversations should be the norm rather than the exception and "that whenever there's either a perception or a real inequity, name it and talk about it."

Alternatively, a few leaders felt these conversations were only necessary for egregious circumstances. When asked what they would do if a teacher displayed cultural bias, one leader shared, "Then there's just always having difficult conversations. I mean if somebody really crosses the line it's really having that conversation with them…luckily I don't have a lot of that." For these leaders, conversations about race and bias were not persistent or normalized as a tool to support teacher awareness.

Discussion

This study explored how leaders develop and maintain cultural awareness and self-reflection for themselves and for their teachers in an effort to support marginalized student

populations. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: 1) How, if at all, does the leader develop and maintain critical self-reflection to support marginalized populations? 2) What leadership practices does the leader enact, if at all, to engage teachers in cultural awareness and self-reflection? First, the study found that almost all of the leader participants exhibited cultural awareness and reflectiveness. This awareness was enacted through either feeling marginalization themselves, childhood experiences, and through professional experiences. Second, leaders utilized a variety of leadership practices to maintain their awareness and to engage in self-reflection. Third, leaders utilized their awareness to create more equitable environments for marginalized students. Lastly, although leaders utilized leadership practices to increase teacher awareness, practices were not consistent, embedded, or persistent.

Awareness and Self-Reflection

Almost all of the leader participants in this study exhibited cultural awareness and self-reflection. This attribute is critically important to the leader's ability to recognize inequities, transform schools, and to stop cycles of oppression faced by marginalized students (Brown, 2004; Brown et al., 2011; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al, 2016; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). The one leader who did not demonstrate cultural awareness was unable to recognize her own contributions to inequitable structures and environments (Cooper, 2009).

This study suggests several leadership practices leaders used to maintain and inform awareness and self-reflection. First, leaders created structures for student and community voice to be heard. Leaders used constituent voice as a mechanism to self-reflect and analyze. The work of Khalifa (2012; 2014; 2018) similarly found leaders used voice from students, families, and the community as a vehicle for change. These structures supported leaders' awareness of the current circumstances occurring within the district that effected marginalized students.

Second, district level leaders built trusting relationships with other district level leaders. This trust enabled them to take risks in both their actions and in their learning. When leaders engaged in new learning about culture and race, the presence of trust among educators was essential for success (Brown et al., 2011**;** Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2014; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Trust, especially between senior leaders, allowed them to take on risk to question inequities, deepen their own cultural awareness, and to create awareness of their school system. The lack of trust between some senior leaders and building leaders inhibited progress. This finding was supported by the work of many researchers (Bryk & Schneider; Cosner, 2009; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018) who found in order for educators to take on this risk, there must be the presence of trust throughout the school organization.

Finally, almost all participants used the leadership practice of data analysis to inform their awareness. Skrla et al. (2004) highlight the importance of the use of data to inform cultural awareness and reflection. While leaders referenced data as a mechanism to build awareness, their use of data was in the infant stages and the district lacked consistent systems and processes.

Awareness and Action

Researchers contend self-reflection and awareness must be paired with transformative action in order to stop the reproduction of oppressive structures in our schools (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). Mirroring this research, most of the participants' cultural awareness and self-reflection transformed into action to create more equitable environments for marginalized students. Actions included the creation of structures to promote student voice, curriculum shifts to mirror the current student body at the secondary level, and the creation of dual language programs that celebrates the Portuguese language spoken by a large majority of students in the

district. District level leaders have created an equity focused budget, shifted staffing, and created policy to promote more equitable circumstances for marginalized students.

Enacting Teacher Awareness and Self-Reflection

Participants in this study promoted teacher awareness and self-reflection through varying leadership practices. These practices included creating structures for teachers to increase awareness from student voice, facilitating professional learning opportunities, and by having difficult conversations. Researchers have found that in order for professional learning about race and culture to be successful, it must be ongoing, frequent, meaningful, and embedded within the practices of the school (Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). While almost all of the leaders referenced at least one of the leadership practices to support teachers' awareness and knowledge to support marginalized students, the only practice that was considered by the teachers interviewed to be impactful was having access to student voice. This practice mirrored the attributes of success deemed by researchers by being frequent, meaningful and embedded within the existing structures of the school (i.e., staff meetings). The other practices such as professional learning opportunities were teacher elected, often occurred outside of the school day, and were not connected to the practices of the school. While the leaders interviewed referenced having difficult conversations with teachers, they did not fit the definition of Singleton's (2015) courageous conversations as they were not persistent, sustained, and resulted in action. While "leaning into conversations" was referenced numerous times, it is unclear if leaders had a clear structure to engage in such conversations with teachers.

In conclusion, this individual study, part of a larger group study, examined the importance of critical self-reflection in support of marginalized student populations. The study uncovered the critical need for a leader to enact self-awareness to engage in transformative

actions to create equity within a school system. In addition, this study also revealed the importance of systemic, embedded, and consistent professional learning for all stake holders in order to truly create systemic change for marginalized students.

CHAPTER FOUR[4]

Discussion

This overarching study explored how district and school leaders supported and advocated for marginalized student populations. As such, our research team examined the ways in which the district initiated and sustained efforts to support these students through district and school leadership practices. Soria (2020) examined district and school leaders' practices in support of LGBTQ students. Pellegrino (2020) examined culturally responsive practices in relation to discipline. Amy (2020) examined perceptions of school and district leaders about fostering teacher leadership, specifically to support emergent bilingual and Latinx students. Finally, Slaney (2020) examined the leadership practices engaged in to develop both the leaders' and the teachers' cultural awareness and self-reflection. Collectively, these individual studies contributed to answering our overarching research question: In what ways, if any, do district and school leaders support marginalized student populations in schools? The collective data was analyzed through the lens of leadership practices. Specifically, we utilized both the culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016) and the transformational leadership frameworks (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990) to ground our research.

Four central findings emerged from our collective data analysis and synthesis of the individual case studies. First, the majority of the leader participants were critically aware and self-reflective about their own race, gender, social identity, positionality, culture, worldviews, and potential biases. Second, this self-awareness propelled leaders to take transformative actions in efforts for equitable access, programming, and policies for marginalized student populations.

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[4] This chapter was collaboratively written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project. Authors include: Margarita Amy, Mark Pellegrino, Jaime Slaney, and Luis Soria

Third, leaders engaged in varied actions to develop people to better support marginalized students. Finally, we found divergent levels of trust between leaders and teachers in the Bayside Hill School District.

The following sections will discuss these findings and their implications for both practice and research. First, we discuss the findings. Next, we provide recommendations for practice that can be used to guide the future efforts of leaders seeking to support marginalized students. Lastly, we discuss the limitations of this study and provide recommendations for future research.

Awareness of Self and of Inequitable School Factors

According to Khalifa et al. (2016), awareness and critical self-reflection are crucial first steps to a leader's journey of becoming a culturally responsive leader. Eight out of the 11 leader participants demonstrated awareness and critical self-reflection about their cultural identity evidenced by comments about one's own race, gender, social identity, positionality, culture, worldviews, and potential biases. One White leader recalled her journey to awareness when she started to question her own beliefs and positionality, "it's a place where you start to question things that you were raised to believe and you start to question and re-examine and say, is that really what I think?" In addition, all eight of these participants were aware of inequities that existed for marginalized students within the school system.

While awareness is essential to a culturally responsive leader, in order to stop systems of privilege and oppression that exist within schools, leaders must purposefully and intentionally engage in actions and leadership practices to create and sustain culturally responsive and inclusive school environments (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa, 2011). The following two

sections will describe both actions and leadership practices participants engaged in to create more equitable schools.

Transformative Practices

Most of the district and school leader participants enacted transformative practices to create conditions to support marginalized students. These transformative actions are essential for sustained change (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). The next section discusses transformative practices that district and school building leaders demonstrated to promote equity within the district.

Responding to Stakeholder Voice

Data analysis revealed that the voices of students and community members matter in the Bayside Hill district. Leaders reported formal and informal structures and systems that provided opportunities to learn stakeholders' concerns, ideas, and solutions that in turn influenced the leaders' actions. As a result of their intentional interactions with various district and community stakeholders, district- and school-level leaders shared their explicit and sustained efforts to create responsive actions to support marginalized youth. Aligned to previous research, Bayside Hill leaders described their collective and individual leadership practices to enable their students to thrive socially and emotionally, and to feel connected and safe in their school (Kosciw et al., 2014). Additionally, district and school leaders reported how they established affinity groups with a culturally responsive lens (Khalifa et al. 2016). Participation in the affinity groups enabled students to discover their voices, awaken their critical thinking, and have a hand in decision-making to challenge exclusionary practices (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

Student Voice and Community Voice to Inform Leadership Actions. District and school leaders explained their efforts to use student and community member voice to propel transformative actions. At the district level, both senior leaders reported their sustained efforts to

seek and respond to student and community member contributions when making critical decisions to address LGBTQ policy issues, develop programming for emergent bilingual learners, and denounce exclusionary speech. The superintendent and assistant superintendent engaged in sustained listening tours to hear directly from students, families, and community members. They reported that their primary goal was to understand the stakeholders' perspectives and concerns in order to respond to them with the intent to make improvements in Bayside Hill Public Schools. For example, in reference to students who identify as transgender, the superintendent shared,

> The impetus for the transgender athlete policy was when we were trying to support a student-athlete who had transitioned. We felt that we were unprepared and that in order to shift the culture in our programs we needed to commit our beliefs to formalized language. As a result, our policy has become a model for many communities.

This statement led to the groundbreaking Inclusive Sports Participation Policy in Massachusetts that outlines explicit definitions for sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression for the district. The policy also makes clear the endorsement to ensure full inclusion of students participating in Bayside Hill athletics in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity.

Regarding programming for emergent bilingual learners informed by stakeholder voice, the assistant superintendent reported:

> We had a meeting with families that are in the two-way programs who advocated for the need to build more of a culture of inclusiveness within those programs, to focus more on building holistic needs of language learners. It led to the development of a parent advisory committee for a dual language program, a student advisory committee for those programs and increased effort to build curriculum around Latin American culture and

heritage.

Engaging parents in the decision-making process regarding contributions for district and school improvement ties well with previous studies (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Bayside Hill district leaders are utilizing parent and student voice to develop positive understandings of students' and families' perspective to inform next-level strategies for the emergent bilingual programming and cultural curriculum design.

Additionally, after listening to students and community members, the assistant superintendent referenced future goals to establish a contingent of Equity Ambassadors and a district Equity Committee consisting of Bayside Hill administrators, teachers, parents and students. He noted, "Essentially I'm trying to create a cohort, or an army of individuals, who have some knowledge or expertise that we're constantly working to enhance and support that can also be resources to each other." In fact, these individuals would include "an expert in LGBTQ, an expert in terms of race, an expert in terms of people who are able-bodied or people with a disability, because all of those different lenses or perspectives can be resources for other people." In short, this senior level district leader described future efforts to transform how in-district talent will lead equity actions for Bayside Hill.

Practices for responding to student voice were also enacted by the high school and middle school principal participants in this study. The high school principal revealed her efforts to meet with high school student affinity groups such as the Black Student Union (BSU), Student Immigration Movement (SIM), and Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA). This practice, to listen, enabled students to design and implement student-led activism that influenced the beliefs, attitudes, and awareness of others. The high school principal shared:

Talking to the students and hearing their views and their opinions and seeing the school

> through their eyes helps me be a better principal. It helps me continually refine our school improvement plan and my vision based on what the students are saying we need. But you have to put yourself with the students.

Likewise, the middle school principal reported her continuous, intentional efforts to meet with students, particularly LGBTQ members of the middle school GSA, to implement their input for anti-bullying efforts, visibility, and self-identity disclosure. Both teacher leaders in the high school and middle school concurred with their respective principal. The teacher leaders reported students' consistent access to the school leaders. Regarding the high school principal, the teacher leader divulged, "My (GSA) officers say, 'We want to see if she will be okay with this.' I send them to her. No matter what she's doing, she finds time to sit down with them. She talks it out."

Building Leader Voice and Teacher Voice to Inform Leadership Actions. Our data analysis confirmed findings that Bayside Hill district and secondary level building leaders enacted structures and systems to listen and respond to *student* and *community* voice to support marginalized students. However, there is less evidence that *school building leader* and *teacher* voices are informing district leadership practices. Indeed, during initial and subsequent interviews, the district leaders disclosed very few efforts to learn directly from building leaders and teachers regarding their espoused equity efforts for Bayside Hill Public Schools.

Several participants shared that there was less buy-in for Bayside Hill improvement strategies such as the district effort regarding required lesson plans. District leaders and some building leaders have not fully built consensus regarding district and school improvement goals and priorities across different levels of the Bayside Hill district. One school building leader shared her perspective regarding district decision-making:

> I feel like the people who are closest to the work need to have a voice in the decision

> making process. They need to have the power to be part of the process of leading and directing where the school is going and I think that's how you get long systemic change. I mean, you can mandate change from the top down but it's not sustainable, and I don't think that's how you get real buy-in.

Similarly, when asked about teacher contributions to district improvement strategies, one teacher leader responded, “The district doesn't listen to us.” Another teacher reported her frustration that “things are just thrown at us, instead of taking the time to really develop whole school philosophies or whole district philosophies and train us on the things that we all agree that we want to do.” Likewise, regarding professional development, several teachers reported frustration that the district improvement strategies are constantly shifting with little instructional support for teachers in the classroom. At this stage of understanding, we believe that these building leader and teacher frustrations are informed by their perceived lack of voice and contributions to decision making.

Equity Oriented Policy

Bayside Hill has developed and implemented an inclusive sports participation policy in an effort to provide equitable access to athletes who self-identify in the LGBTQ community, particularly transgender students. The Bayside Hill policy is aligned to the Code of Massachusetts Regulations: Access to Equal Educational Opportunity (Massachusetts DESE, 2018) that includes explicit language regarding anti-discrimination protections for students on the basis of gender identity. Bayside Hill has also created and implemented innovative LGBTQ advocacy guidelines and expectations that serve as a model for other school districts. In addition to protective measures that include comprehensive terminology regarding sexual orientation,

gender identity, and gender expression, the district is making definitive decisions and taking action regarding the establishment of gender neutral bathrooms for all students.

Equity Driven Budget and Staff Positions

Senior district leaders described the previous budget structure and the dispersion of resources as "disparate" between schools resulting in inequities for students in need. For fiscal year 2019, the Bayside Hill superintendent advocated for and implemented a budget structure with "equity" and "access" as the primary budget levers. One district leader described, "We've created a model where schools…our poorest school who had been one of our most underperforming schools, it is kind of lifting up now. But we put four times the investment in that school than we did in the more affluent school." The new budget structure redirected resources to marginalized students who had previously had inequitable access to resources.

The change in budget structure and mission precipitated the creation of new positions within the district. These positions included an Assistant Superintendent of Equity and Diversity, a bilingual curriculum coordinator, some English Language Development (ELD) coaches, native speaking tutors, and an equity consultant. These positions were reported as an invaluable support to both teachers and to students. Indeed, one teacher described the impact of the support, "We have an English language learning coach who is also present (at PLCs). She's really helping us look through the lens of language objectives and helping meet those needs." Further, a district leader shared how instructional coaches change practice to support learners, "Coaches lead professional development, they model lessons and also help guide the co-planning sessions." In short, the newly funded positions supported equity and access for marginalized students.

While leaders have made concerted efforts to allocate funds to address inequities, the district is still faced with concerns. The number of emergent bilingual students has risen

dramatically in recent years and the district is facing challenges to meet their needs. The superintendent described the dramatic shift in demographics in the district, "Our percentage of English Language Learners over the last 10 years has increased. We are at about 3,500 out of 10,000 students that their first language is not English." Another district leader illustrated the inequities with staffing for emergent bilinguals, "Anytime you have a caseload of six students per ESL teacher, that's not being an effective teacher at all... I have a school where there are 360 English learners in a school of 550 kids, and only 7.5 ESL teachers. So that's very inequitable." The increase in numbers of emergent bilingual students across the district has drawn attention to district, building, and teacher leaders to advocate to add more ESL teachers to schools.

Equity Audit

Engaging in equity audits is a way to engage the learning organization in conversations regarding inequities to promote cultural awareness and reflection (Skrla et al., 2004). In the fall of 2019, Bayside Hill School District invested $50,000 in a year-long equity audit through a consultant. The Assistant Superintendent of Equity and Diversity described the equity audit goal to "get a focused area about where we can start to target some of our resources towards." He asked, "Where are we seeing larger inequities and how can we develop strategies around those areas?" He further explained that the audit findings will inform the district strategic plan for the next three years.

Dual Language Programs

According to Sanchez et al. (2018), "Dual language education has been accepted as the only way to continue to have bilingual education programs that are not remedial or transitional in nature." Over the past two years, the district increased the dual language programs from one to four. One district leader spoke of the value of supporting students' native language development

and viewing emergent bilingualism as an asset rather than a deficit. She explained, “I think when you're looking at some of that decision-making around English learners, we're looking at opportunity and access.” The district phased out the Transitional Bilingual Education programs, a reductive model of language acquisition, and replaced them with the dual language programs in Spanish-English and Portuguese-English. One building leader said, “I feel pretty strongly that they are better supported than when they're in English-only programs, and there's of course a lot of research to back that up.” The increased access to the district dual language programs sent a strong message to students, their families, and the community that Bayside Hill values their home languages.

Developing People by Promoting a Shared Vision

Transformational leadership in schools is invaluable as it fosters the collective development of a shared vision (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). Leithwood & Jantzi (1990) define a transformational leader as, “One who helps build shared meaning among members of the school staff regarding their purposes and creates high levels of commitment to the accomplishment of these purposes” (p. 254). District and school leaders who are invested in establishing transformative change for marginalized student populations develop people toward a shared vision regarding culturally responsive practices (Khalifa et al., 2016). Therefore, the leaders must provide opportunities to engage all educators in professional development to further establish, understand, and enact the shared vision.

Bayside Hill district and school leaders implemented professional development opportunities regarding culturally responsive practices. However, the opportunities were reported by school building leaders and teachers as top-down directed, sporadic, and lacking a shared vision. Additionally, several of the PD opportunities were described as “elective” to district

personnel. As a result, culturally responsive practices were not fully embedded in schools. Data analysis revealed less evidence regarding leadership practices to build a collective vision to promote culturally responsive practices between and among levels of the organization.

Professional learning regarding race and culture that is embedded within existing collaborative structures has a lasting impact (Brown et al., 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Bayside Hill has implemented some structures, such as Professional Learning Communities (PLC) for ESL teachers, to develop educators and enable them to share instructional practices. Additionally, the district provides after-school elective PD opportunities for teachers to learn and implement culturally responsive practices. However, these courses were underutilized by teachers. Indeed, one teacher leader disclosed that PD topics were often scattered and insufficient. She reported the need to engage in deep conversations regarding cultural responsiveness, rather than receiving cursory level information. “One day devoted to whatever topic is not deep enough or useful enough to immediately bring back into practice or to skillfully present it to everybody.”

Developing Leaders

Transformational leaders create and foster opportunities to develop people by engaging them in professional learning experiences to support a shared vision and promote organizational change (Danielson, 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Quin et. al., 2015; Wilson, 2016). Professional learning regarding race and culture must be ongoing, frequent, meaningful, and embedded within the school practices (Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Further, professional learning must engage educators in an ongoing examination of the intersectionality of their own race and culture and that of their students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Bayside Hill district and

school building leaders created opportunities to develop people via professional development (PD). For example, senior district leaders reported that they engaged in PD provided by external consultants to develop their collective understanding regarding culturally responsive and inclusive practices. Additionally, they partnered with community organizations to support their ongoing learning. One district leader stated, “We work with a parent organization called Free Bayside Hill Families for Racial Equity.” He further explained that this organization has met with the leadership team to discuss the “prison pipeline, looking at institutional racism and structural racism, and having deeper conversations about that.”

District leaders also reported providing professional learning opportunities for school building leaders regarding equity and inclusion. For example, building leaders were required to participate in monthly equity meetings with a district leader. During this professional learning, district and school leaders engaged in conversations related to the presentations. They were asked to reflect on the professional learning content and consider parents’ perspectives. This led to authentic discourse regarding initial efforts toward a collective vision for cultural responsiveness. However, when interviewed, building and teacher leaders were unable to articulate the district's vision for professional learning to promote cultural responsiveness.

Developing Teachers

Data analysis revealed that building leaders developed teachers through professional learning, staff meetings, district-wide PD, and after school elective options. However, most of these opportunities were not driven by a shared decision-making process. They were mostly directed by building leaders or offered as the aforementioned electives. One elementary building leader designed a book group for her staff to discuss the book *Disrupting Poverty*. She shared, “This is really important thinking we need to be doing as a school.” Another building leader

implemented PD regarding culturally responsive teaching. Her staff participated in a book group to read and discuss *Culturally Responsive Design for English Learners*. These leaders were interested in supporting teachers to improve their instructional practices, specifically regarding how they discipline students and how they interact with marginalized student populations.

Isolated workshops and disconnected training do not lead to the development of comprehensive knowledge (Fullan, 1993). Fullan further asserts that sustained and measurable instructional change must be precipitated by in-depth knowledge. In the Bayside Hill district, participation in culturally responsive PD was not universal and did not lead toward extensive knowledge. The district-led PDs were typically offered as electives or mandatory only for a small group of people. One senior district leader described the PD as "pockets of electives" where teachers opted into the professional learning with no mechanisms to ensure their participation in the PD sessions resulted in changing instructional practice. For example, when teachers participated in PD regarding the new ESL scope and sequence, only a small portion of teachers were mandated to attend yet the entire staff was required to implement language objectives into the mandated lesson plans.

Trust

Leaders who expect to manage adaptive change in their organizations must cultivate a sense of trust with those who will make the change happen (Brown et al., 2011**;** Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2014; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Organizational members traditionally resist change, usually out of fear (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Whether rational or not, fear can impede the implementation of even the most positive organizational changes. District and school leaders must proactively and intentionally build a sense of trust with and among their charges in order to support them as the organization navigates the intended

changes (Bryk & Schneider; Cosner, 2009; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018).

High Levels of Trust Exist Within, but Not Between, the District and Schools

District leaders reported their intent to make instructional practice changes in order to create and enact more equitable outcomes for students. To facilitate change, district and school leaders must design professional learning experiences that enable staff to learn individually, and then collectively share and align their instructional practices. The professional learning tenets of collaboration, reflective dialogue, and shared social resources require trust (Bryk et al., 1999). Additionally, Bryk et. al. (2009) found that these professional learning tenets combined with trust create an efficient cycle for instructional change. For example, when educators work collaboratively, trust grows. This, in turn, increases collaboration, therefore trust subsequently grows again, and so on. This cyclical process reinforces the notion that leaders must structure and support a culture that imbues collaboration, reflection, and shared social resources in order to drive and foster the changes they intend to make. We next examine where trust exists in the district, and where trust needs to be further developed.

High Levels of Trust Exist Among District Leadership Team Members. District level leaders reported that they have strong, trusting, working relationships with each other. They work in an environment that fosters a sense of safety, encouraging vulnerability and critical reflection. Several comments were made by district leaders that evidenced this trust. For example, one district leader reported, “We are fine to push each other; to make sure that we're not bringing bias into the room… And if a comment is made that maybe isn't inclusive, challenging each other. Like (saying) ‘Okay, but …’” These critical conversations encouraged

team members to challenge each other's beliefs and reflect more deeply about their own beliefs and practices.

High Levels of Trust Exist Between Building-Level Leaders and Teachers. Data analysis also revealed a high level of trust between teachers and their school building administrators. Relational trust is essential for teachers to feel safe and be vulnerable with their supervisor (Liou & Daily, 2014). Trust enables teachers to respectfully hear feedback and change their instructional practices. In the Bayside Hill district, teachers across various school buildings confirmed the existing trust between school leaders and teachers. "(My principal) has been supportive. I feel like we're living a dream. We do have all the support we need here…" Another teacher reported, "She's unbelievably, personally connected with everyone, and you can feel that. That's just kind of the administrative presence she brings... a sense of caring."

Relational trust allowed building leaders to conduct difficult conversations with teachers and challenge the status quo. For example, one teacher described trusting her building leader's competence and understanding of marginalized students' needs:

> My administration here in this building is very supportive and conscious of everything that's going on... But they've all been in the district for a really long time, and understand the population, and understand the families, and the parents, and the community, and what needs to go into helping students be successful.

At one school, relational trust enabled teachers to engage in problem-solving meetings designed to solve behavior issues in the classroom. Essentially, if a teacher experienced concerns with a student, they requested a meeting with the student and principal. The principal then facilitated a discussion to enable the teacher and student to share their feelings regarding the situation, brainstorm mutually beneficial solutions, and ultimately repair the relationship. Trust is

essential for this process to work well (Liou & Daily, 2014). As a case in point, one teacher who asked for a restorative meeting, consistently struggled to hear 'student voice' in situations that often led to disciplinary action. The leader shared,

> She's very much a black and white person. She's very much either right or wrong. She's having trouble seeing the gray, and I don't know if it's just more her personality. She's kind of that way in all of her interactions with students. So it's just interesting to me. And so when she requests these problem solving conferences, now we have to really sit down and prep her (so) she can then hear what the kids are saying.

This leader had built relational trust with the teacher which allowed these conversations to occur. Another building leader described how he provided individualized support to help teachers acquire the confidence they needed to support marginalized students. He explained, "I think for some of them, it happens organically, but others need a little bit more of a push."

Less Evidence of Trust Between District-level and Building-level Leaders. In Bayside Hill there is a sense of trust within the district leadership team. There is also evidence of trust between and among principals and teachers at the school building level. However, data analysis suggests that there is not yet a trusting relationship between all school building leaders and the district leadership team. One district leader disclosed:

> I think there needs to be a level of trust between (district & school) levels of the organization before you can truly engage in these conversations. I think there needs to be a huge unpacking of the why… Why is this important for all kids? Why is this important for all individuals?

Less Evidence of Trust Between District-level Leaders and Teachers. Trust between building leaders and teachers is paramount. However, trust between teachers and district level

leadership is also essential. Adams and Miskell (2016) found that trust between teachers and the district can be enhanced or diminished based on teachers' perceptions of the district leadership with regards to benevolence, competence, openness, honesty, and reliability. Though less impactful than trust between building leaders and teachers, trust between teachers and the district leadership should not be ignored.

In the Bayside Hill District, there was evidence of some discord between the district and teachers. One example centered on a lesson planning expectation that was set by the district. The district leadership designed this initiative to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum; in turn, this data would inform the design of the professional learning experiences provided for teachers and increase collaborative efforts among teachers. Alternatively, teachers felt that this was a top-down mandate and an example of the lack of trust that exists within the district. Teachers felt that they had more time to share practices before the mandate, and the lesson planning initiative actually reduced collaborative efforts. The superintendent described the intended purpose for the initiative:

> We're looking for what standards (the teachers) are teaching. We're asking to know how that curriculum lives in that standard, and lives through the content and language objective. … (And without this) I can't provide feedback as an instructional leader.

However, as previously stated, that is not how teachers perceived the district-led requirement to write and submit lesson plans. Teachers reported their belief that the lesson planning initiative emerged from a bureaucratic decision that ultimately reinforced a perceived lack of trust from the district level leaders. Public comments from a Bayside Hill Teachers Union leader summarize teachers' responses regarding the lesson planning initiative:

> Top down regulations and initiatives tie (teachers') hands rather than empower them with the freedom to run their own classrooms. She said that micromanaging staff carries the effect of disengaging the staff, and makes the staff feel unappreciated and not trusted to do the work, and is considered one of the top three reasons why employees resign (School Committee Meeting Minutes, September 18, 2019).

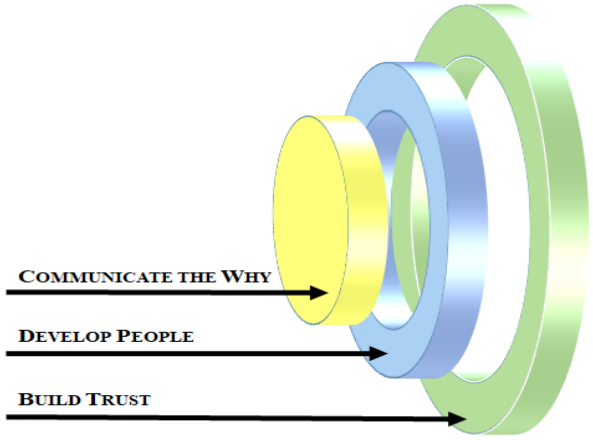
Recommendations for Practice

Data analysis and findings from the four individual research studies informed the following collective recommendations for future Bayside Hill Public Schools leadership practices. The recommendations are informed by the theoretical frameworks of transformative and culturally responsive leadership practices. At the core of our recommended leadership practices, we contend that district and school leaders must design, implement, and assess systems and structures to communicate the "why" of their leadership practices. These systems should be iterative and include stakeholder voice, a practice that leaders currently do well with Bayside Hill students. For example, district leaders can build on their efforts to embed school leader voice regarding *how* improvement strategies can be implemented across the district. Likewise, school leaders can expand their efforts to include teacher voice. Next, we recommend that district leaders intentionally deepen their systems to develop people. When school leaders and teachers better understand the why and how of the improvement strategies, we assert that they will more willingly engage and thrive in professional learning that aligns to the district vision and impacts instructional pedagogy. Lastly, we recommend that district and school leaders further develop trust between and among leaders and teachers. Absent strategic efforts to accelerate resolute trust regarding Bayside Hill improvement strategies, stakeholders may resist

and dissuade endeavors toward the implementation of the strategies. These interconnected recommendations are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Interconnected Recommendations



Communicate the Why

Data analysis revealed that Bayside Hill district leaders have designed and implemented systems for district and school improvements. The systems included leadership practices in support of marginalized student populations such as responding to district and community voice, conducting an equity audit to inform district improvement initiatives, increasing access to Dual Language programming, and revamping the district budget process. We assert that these efforts can be more impactful when they are fully communicated for short- and long-term visioning to all district stakeholders. Data analysis of participant interviews and document review revealed that district leaders have communicated the "what" of their actions. However, there is less evidence regarding explicit communication regarding the "why" of their decisions. Additionally, stakeholders revealed their perception that improvement strategies were happening to them, not in partnership with them. Before moving forward with the design and communication of the next

multi-year strategic plan, district constituents would benefit from hearing the superintendent tell the story of his "why" regarding his leadership practices.

Therefore, we recommend that Bayside Hill district leaders intentionally communicate the *intent* of what has been designed and implemented thus far regarding district vision, strategies, and actions for equity and cultural responsiveness. We also propose that district leaders seek and implement contributions from stakeholders regarding *how* improvement strategies are implemented. The "why" factor for *future* district decision-making can be facilitated via explicit efforts to design and implement systems to learn the *collective* "how" for overarching district improvement strategies. We recommend that district leaders build on their current practice to learn from each other and replicate their intentional conversations regarding district inequities across the district with building leaders, teachers, students, and community members. During several interviews, district leaders shared compelling narratives and revelatory intentions regarding what inspires them toward leadership practices of equity and cultural responsiveness. However, these conversations occurred less frequently across other district levels. Systems to engage in these discussions must occur between district and school leaders. They must also occur between district leaders and teachers in order to garner more buy-in for the district initiatives. Bayside Hill stakeholders would benefit from creating and communicating their collective beliefs regarding district and school supports for marginalized student populations and improvement strategies.

Develop People

Data analysis revealed that professional learning was less systemic across the district and in some cases sporadic. Interview participants disclosed their perceptions that professional learning lacked teacher voice. Therefore, we recommend that district leaders ensure that relevant

stakeholders, including building leaders and teachers have voice regarding the what, how, and why of professional learning. Additionally, to ensure this professional learning is meaningful, we recommend that district leaders embed stakeholders' voice in planning the professional learning. Bayside Hill district leaders can build on their current professional learning systems to enhance school leaders' and teachers' capacity to buy into the district vision. This must include their PD efforts for students who may have been marginalized due to race, ethnicity, or language. During interviews, district leaders revealed their efforts to reflect on and respond to the needs of students who have been marginalized. They reported a vision to promote culturally responsive practices. However, Bayside Hill can benefit from including building leaders and teachers for this vision. To make this happen, rather than offer optional electives, all teachers must provide voice and then engage in professional learning regarding support for marginalized students.

The first step is to develop people through professional learning regarding culturally responsive teaching practices. This professional learning must be ongoing, frequent, embedded in current structures, and meaningful to the educators. It is important for all teachers and building leaders to participate in professional learning where they build joint understandings regarding marginalized student populations and how to support them. They would benefit from engaging in sustained and comprehensive professional learning toward cultural responsiveness that includes increasing awareness, teaching, collaborating, and sharing practices to build each other's collective instructional practices. A focus to develop educators to move across the Cultural Responsiveness Continuum (from color-blindness to relational to responsive) in efforts to build strong relationships can be impactful. Additionally, professional learning can be embedded within the structures of the school day and implemented via the district PD days, staff meetings,

and PLCs that currently exist. Engaging building leaders and teacher leaders as thought partners in this work is critical for the district to consider.

Ultimately, the goal for professional learning at the Bayside Hill School District can enable all educators to engage in practices that support marginalized students. A commitment to develop people should be reflected within all schools, instead of pockets across the district. For this reason, we also recommend that school leaders and teachers establish a shared commitment to incorporate this acquired knowledge regarding culturally responsiveness into their schools and classrooms. District leaders, school leaders, and teachers can name the measurable and observable instructional practices that support marginalized student populations and then determine how to build on them.

Build Trust

Trusting environments are an imperative precursor to building collaborative professional learning communities and to facilitate change. Study participants revealed varying degrees of trust in the Bayside Hill School District across different organization levels. We recommend that district and school leaders intentionally build a sense of trust across the district to bolster the improvement change efforts and to embrace the initiatives regarding support for marginalized students.

We posit that a crucial leadership action toward building trust is to recognize and verbalize that varying levels of trust exist within Bayside Hill. Across interviews, participants openly shared their beliefs regarding where trust was established and where trust was lacking in the district. It is recommended that district leaders bring these conversations to the forefront and communicate this trust phenomenon directly with staff. First, district leaders are urged to directly recognize the perceived lack of trust to acknowledge their awareness of this concern and its

potential impact regarding stakeholder buy-in. Next, district and school leaders can specifically ask teachers where they believe varying levels of trust exist. Finally, the leaders can explicitly communicate their desire to repair and set trust-building as a priority.

Trust is built when educators work collaboratively and engage in a culture that imbues collaboration, reflection, and shared resources. This level of trust was evident among the senior leadership team where members actively engaged in continuous conversations and collaborations that pushed each other's thinking and resulted in shared learning. Trusting relationships were established by meaningful professional dialogue. Therefore, the district is encouraged to replicate this trust-building mechanism across the district. We encourage senior level district leaders to provide opportunities for educators across Bayside Hill such as district leaders, building leaders, and teachers to learn and implement professional discussion protocols. District stakeholders can benefit from utilizing collaborative protocols to collectively build trust among and between district levels. These efforts can occur during the established collaborative structures that already exist such as the Professional Learning Communities (PLC).

Lastly, data analysis revealed that Bayside Hill district and school leaders listened and responded to student and community voice regarding support for marginalized students. Their voice was valued and heard which resulted in transformative actions to support LGBTQ students and emergent bilingual students. This leadership practice further established high levels of trust. The district is encouraged to build upon the structures that have already been implemented for voice and expand it to include building leaders and teachers to further establish trust.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

We acknowledge four limitations for this research. First, this qualitative case study is not longitudinal. Given the six-month timeframe, we examined a bounded system for a short period

of time that may not be representative of the attention, support, and advocacy of marginalized students in the district.

Second, qualitative case studies are not widely generalizable. The probability that the collected data is representative of larger populations is low. This study explored one school district in Massachusetts making the sample size small and idiosyncratic. Additionally, for this study, we were dependent on volunteer participants which resulted in researching seven of the fourteen district schools. This small sample size may have impacted our findings as leader perceptions, practices, and beliefs were obtained from only half of the district schools.

Third, study participants may have had a bias toward marginalized students. The possible bias could have influenced the findings regarding whether and how the district supports marginalized students. Additionally, participant perspectives may have impacted awareness and sensitivity toward culturally responsive support for marginalized youth. More than one participant from each stakeholder group, such as teacher, teacher leader, building leader, district leader, was included in the study when triangulating the collected data to mitigate potential bias.

Lastly, we acknowledge that this study did not examine or measure marginalized students' academic achievement. Although prior research indicates that being safe in school can impact student achievement, we did not explore whether or how district/school leaders strived to enact policies or practices that were explicit to support academic improvement.

Regarding future qualitative case studies informed by this research, we recommend an examination of all district leaders and teachers in the district rather than a small sample size. This would allow researchers to have a larger sample size to inform their findings. Additionally, a longer time span for the research would facilitate longitudinal findings. Furthermore, including more than one district would allow for more generalizability of the findings. Lastly, future research should seek to better understand how students' academic achievement and social

emotional development are impacted by culturally responsive leadership practices, which can be both transformational and transformative.

Conclusion

District and school populations continue to become more diverse racially, ethnically, socially, as well as by sexual orientation, socio-economic status, disability, language spoken, and cultural identity. For this research, we sought to answer the research question: In what ways, if any, do district and school leaders support marginalized student populations in schools? Findings from this case study identified leadership practices that support marginalized student populations. These findings emerged from the collective data and analysis of the individual case studies. First, leaders who were critically aware and self-reflective about their own race, gender, social identity, and potential biases attempted to create equity through actions. These transformative actions included efforts for equitable access, programming, and policies for marginalized student populations.

Next, we found leaders engaged in actions to develop people to better support marginalized students. These actions were more developed at the senior leadership level and less developed among other levels of the organization. While professional learning existed, it was not universally ongoing, frequent, embedded in current structures, or meaningful to the educators.

Finally, we found varying levels of trust between the different levels of Bayside Hill School District. A possible catalyst for this lack of trust was that district leaders often communicated the "what" of their leadership actions and rarely communicated the "why" for the district vision, strategies, and actions for equity and cultural responsiveness. This study illustrated the importance of culturally responsive school leadership and its impact on creating equitable schools for marginalized students.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Intro to the interview:

- Thank you for taking the time to speak with me/us. This will be a 45-60-minute interview. At the end of these minutes, we are hoping to learn more about *your* perspective regarding how leaders support marginalized students in your school district.
- We will be recording this interview.
- At any time during this interview, you can request that I turn off the recording device.
- After collecting our data, we will ensure that schools and/or leaders are not being identified individually.
- The data we collect from this research project will eventually be shared with your central office. However, at no time will your individual responses be shared with anyone in the central office or your district's school committee.
- All interview questions are optional.
- At any time during the interview, you can request to end the interview.

Introduction Questions

- Tell me/us about your role.
- How many years have you been in this role?
- This research focuses on marginalized students and includes race, gender, culture, language spoken, and sexuality. If comfortable, what are the ways in which you identify?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol- Superintendent

- When you think about the student populations in the district, which would you consider to be student populations who are marginalized?
- Tell us about a situation or incident in the District regarding students that involved an inequity based on race, culture, gender or sexuality? What were the district's responses?
- How do you use data to guide your practices and your decision making to support diverse learning populations? Can you give me an example? Have you made any changes in the schools based on this data?

- What professional learning activities has the District engaged in to support diverse learning populations? Has there been any professional learning for principals about cultural responsiveness?

- What opportunities for teacher leadership have surfaced in your school district? Are there particular principals who have been able to successfully foster teacher leadership in their schools?

- What types of professional development have district personnel, including school staff, received regarding LGBTQ students? What would be examples of further professional development that you think district personnel need?

- What are the ways that LGBTQ students are supported in the district?

- What are the non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies that explicitly protect LGBTQ students and how are they manifested in schools?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol- Leadership Perceptions when Fostering Teacher Leadership

District Leaders:

- What motivated you to become a leader?

- What experiences shaped your leadership?Who or what supported you in your leadership journey?

- Can you talk to me about experiences with teacher leadership that you may have had?

- What opportunities for teacher leadership have surfaced in your school district? Are there particular principals who have been able to successfully foster teacher leadership in their schools? Can you give me an example?

- How seriously are teachers' opinions considered? How do they participate in the decision-making process?

- How does the district encourage teachers to experiment with sharing best practices with colleagues?

- How often do you teachers have structured times to meet or engage in professional development? Who sets up this calendar?

  (Probing questions: Ask for examples throughout this entire section.)

- How are teachers being developed in the district? What structures and systems have you put in place to develop the capacity of teachers?

- This research focuses on marginalized students and includes LGBTQ, Emergent bilinguals, Hispanic/Latinx, and African Americans. How, if at all, do you relate to this topic?

- When you think about the student populations in the district, which would you consider to be student populations who are marginalized?

- What are the ways that emergent bilingual students are supported in the district?

- How do you use data to guide your practices and your decision making to support emergent bilingual students? Can you give me an example? Have you made any changes in the schools based on this data?

Principal and Teacher Leaders:

Purpose: To understand, when working to develop teacher leaders, how leaders perceive themselves as setting directions.

- How do teacher leaders contribute to school goals and the decision-making process?

- In relation to everyday practices, how do teacher leaders promote the school vision?

Purpose: To understand when working to develop teacher leaders, how leaders perceive themselves as developing people.

- How are you identifying and developing teachers as leaders?

- How do you support teachers in identifying their strengths?

- How do you plan professional development for teachers?

Purpose: To understand when working to develop teacher leaders, how do leaders perceive themselves as redesigning the organization.

- How do you motivate teachers to seek new ideas and new information that are relevant to the school's development?

- How do you stimulate teachers to constantly think about how to improve the school?

- How do you help teachers talk about research-based practices through inquiry?

Additional Questions for Teacher Leaders:

- What motivated you to become a teacher?

- What experiences have shaped your leadership as a teacher?

- What opportunities for teacher leadership have surfaced in your school district?

- How seriously are teachers' opinions considered?
- How do you encourage teachers to experiment with sharing best practices with colleagues?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol- Culturally Responsive Discipline

Building Leaders:

- If an African American, Hispanic, or Latinx student began demonstrating atypical behavior that required disciplinary action, how might you handle the situation differently?
- How have you supported teachers' learning to improve culturally responsive practices?
- How do you support teachers in embracing culturally responsive practices specific to discipline? How do you hold them accountable for these practices?

Teacher Questions:

- How do teacher behaviors de-escalate or escalate student behaviors? Can you give an example of each from yours or another teacher's experience?
- How do you learn about other cultures and student groups? How does that information inform your lesson planning?
- How do you communicate high expectations to your students? Can you give me an example?
- What are your priorities in establishing a classroom environment for students?
- Tell me about a time you developed a positive relationship with a hard-to-reach student. What were your behaviors that allowed you to do that and what was the outcome? What interests did the student have outside of school? What were his/her talents and strengths?
- If an LGBTQ student begins to demonstrate atypical behavior that requires disciplinary action, how would you proceed? What might be different for them? Thinking about the student's intersectionality, how might race further impact disciplinary actions?
- What role does culture play in your relationship with students? Describe a time you learned about a student's culture and used that understanding to foster a positive relationship.
- How do life situations impact learning? What do you do to proactively and reactively respond to students facing these situations?
- Have you adapted a lesson or activity to better fit the culture or life situation of a student? If so, how? What was the outcome?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol- Cultural Self-Reflection and Awareness

Principal Questions:

- How would you describe the racial and cultural makeup of your student body? Of your staff?
- Tell me about a situation or incident at your school that involved an inequity based on race or culture? What did you do?
- Do you consider your own race to inform decision making? If yes, how?
- Has there been an instance when you have demonstrated leadership or commitment to equity in your work?
- How do you use data to guide your practices and your decision making to support diverse learning populations? Can you give me an example? Have you made any changes in the school-based off this data?
- How do you support teachers and staff with training or professional development to meet the instructional needs of diverse learners?
- How do you encourage and/or provide opportunities for teachers to engage in self-reflection and self-examination elation to race and culture?
- What do you do to help expand your teachers' knowledge of diverse learning populations?
- Have you ever had to handle a situation in which someone made a sexist, racist, homophobic or otherwise prejudiced remark? What did you feel? What did you do?

Teacher Questions:

- Tell me about a situation or incident at your school or in your classroom that involved an inequity based on race or culture? What did you do? What did your principal do to help and support you?
- What professional learning activities has your school engaged in to support diverse learning populations?
- How and what data do you use to guide your practices to support diverse learning populations?
- Has the school leadership encouraged and provided opportunities for self-reflection and self-examination among staff in relation to race and culture? If yes, how?

- Has there been a person or event that has increased your personal awareness of race and culture?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol- District and School Leaders' Support for LGBTQ Youth

Principal and Teacher Questions:

- What are the observable behaviors and practices that make this district/school a visible ally to LGBTQ students?

- If a student were to come out to you as LGBTQ, what would be your first thought?

- How, if at all, does your curriculum include information about LGBTQ people, including LGBTQ people of color, history, and events?

- How, if at all, do non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies explicitly protect LGBTQ students?
- When you consider the supports that currently exist for LGBTQ students, what is working well? How do you know? What supports can be strengthened for LGBTQ students?

Appendix B: Field Note Protocol

Setting: _____
Observer: _____
Date of Observation: _____
Start time of Observation: _____ End Time of Observation _____

	Observations	Observer Reflections/Comments
Physical Setting		
Participants		
Activities Observed		
Interactions Observed		
Conversations Observed		
Other		

Adapted from (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

Appendix C: Meeting Observation Protocol

Meeting Observation Protocol		
Date:	Start Time:	End Time:
Location:	# Members Present:	
Meeting Leader and Role/Title:		
Description of who attended the meeting:		
Meeting Format: (one person leads, group facilitation, group conversation)		

Meeting Objectives	Was this objective accomplished?

Discussion Topics

Participation & Representation	Comments	
Do all members actively participate?		

Are multiple viewpoints represented	
Does the meeting setting encourage participation and interactions?	
Is conflict productive?	
Are members willing to take risks?	
Organization & Structure	Comments
Are objectives clear and understood?	
Does the meeting have clear objectives?	
Do participants contribute to the objective and outcomes?	
Communication	Comments
Are members open and communicate what they think?	
Do members encourage and support each other?	
Results & Actions	Comments
Is an agreed upon decision-making or problem-solving method used?	
Are the next steps and action items clear?	

Adapted from: Faribault, Martin and Watonwan Counties Statewide Health Improvement Program

Appendix D: Structured Abstract for Margarita Amy's Individual Study

Leadership Practices that Support Marginalized Students:
How Leaders Support Teacher Leadership for Emergent Bilingual and Latinx Students

Background:

Demographic shifts in public schools in the United States are continuing to increase the diversity within our student populations in schools. These changes have required leadership at every level in schools in order to create positive learning experiences for students who have been sidelined because of their ethnicity and language diversity. For this reason, leaders have to inspire change in key stakeholders throughout the *entire* organization. Teachers are critical stakeholders in schools and can support powerful changes in school improvement efforts.

Purpose and Research Questions:

The purpose of this individual case study was to identify the perceptions of school and district leaders about fostering teacher leadership, specifically to support emergent bilingual and Latinx students at a public school district in the state of Massachusetts. There are still many unknowns as to how principals encourage teachers to become leaders. My work extended the literature in an effort to understand the transformative aspects of leadership and how it functions across schools within a district. Conversely, there are a lack of studies that explore the perceptions of leaders at the district and school level about fostering teacher leadership, and its incorporation into practice, particularly, in supporting emergent bilingual and Latinx students. This study answered the following research questions: How do leaders perceive they are fostering teacher leadership which supports emergent bilingual and Latinx students? When working to develop teacher leadership, how, if at all, do leaders perceive they are setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization?

Methods:

This study utilized a qualitative case study methodology in order to explore leaders' perceptions about teacher leadership within a bounded system; namely a Massachusetts school district. The most recent model of transformational leadership developed from Leithwood's research in schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000) served as the conceptual framework. This framework enabled me to refine the research questions, review the literature, develop interview protocols; and served as the foundation for sorting, coding, classifying, and analyzing data to understand the role of the leader in setting direction, developing people and redesigning the organization as an invaluable agent of change in schools. Data collection included 13 individual semi-structured interviews with district, building and teacher leaders as well as field notes and document reviews.

Findings:

Findings indicated that school and district leaders perceived they support emergent bilingual and Latinx students through formal and informal leadership practices. The results of this study also found a discrepancy between district leaders, building leaders and teacher leaders' perceptions about opportunities for teacher leaders to engage in sharing best practices, collaborate in a shared decision-making process and participate in quality professional development. Top-down approaches impacted the development of teachers as leaders, creating barriers and challenges in each of three components of transformational leadership (setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization). Recommendations include establishing a collective vision for promoting teacher leadership and for developing teachers as leaders.

Implications:

Future research could be designed to better understand how teacher leadership is enacted to support issues around equity and social justice, and how we might encourage more teacher leadership among underrepresented groups. Additionally, building on the research of Anderson (2008), studies aimed at identifying teacher leaders and their capacity to be transformational over time are worth pursuing.

Appendix E: Structured Abstract for Mark Pellegrino's Individual Study

Leadership Practices that Support Marginalized Students:
Culturally Responsive Discipline Practices to Reduce Disparities for
African American, Hispanic, and Latinx Students

Abstract

Background: Over the past forty years, schools have suspended African American, Hispanic, and Latinx students at significantly higher rates than white students. Culturally responsive interventions that foster positive relationships between marginalized students and educators have been found to be effective. School leaders are called to foster these practices.

Purpose: This individual study examined whether or not teachers with low discipline referrals for African American and Hispanic/Latinx students from a midsized urban Massachusetts district report using culturally responsive discipline practices described in the Double-Check Framework (Hershfeldt etl al., 2009); and how, if at all, they perceive their principal fosters these practices. It was part of a group study that examined how school and district leaders support marginalized students.

Participants: Two schools in the participating district and their principals were identified because they agreed to be in the study and were able to identify teachers with low incidence of Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs). Two white, female principals; four white, male teachers; and five white, female teachers participated in the study.

Research design: The research team used an explanatory case study design.

Data collection/analysis: Data was collected over a four-month period using semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers in two schools as part of the group qualitative case study. Interview questions for teachers were based on a framework designed to identify culturally responsive discipline practices called Double-Check (Hershfeldt etl al., 2009). Questions for the principals were open-ended and asked them to describe how they support teachers in developing

and embracing culturally responsive practices. Interview data were coded and analyzed through the Double Check framework and Khalifa et al.'s (2016 culturally responsive school leadership. **Findings:** This research, though limited by its size, scope, and duration, supported the notion that teachers with low office discipline referrals might embrace culturally responsive practices, at least to a limited degree. Additionally, while principals reported that they had provided culturally responsive professional learning activities for teachers, teachers interviewed did not attribute their discipline practices to these efforts. Recommendations for practice and future research are included.

Appendix F: Structured Abstract for Jaime Slaney's Individual Study

Leadership Practices that Support Marginalized Students:
Cultural Awareness and Self-Reflection

Background: The student population in our schools is becoming increasingly more diverse and marginalized. The increasing diversity in our schools demands our attention and requires a change in our approach to educating all students. Culturally responsive school leadership is essential to meet the needs of marginalized students and to close both the achievement and opportunity gaps that persist in today's schools. Critical self-reflection is an essential culturally responsive school leadership behavior to disrupt inequities in schools and transform schools to become culturally responsive.

Purpose and Research Questions: The purpose of this qualitative research study was to address the research gap that exists related to leadership practices that establish culturally responsive schools related to the development of cultural awareness and self-reflection among leaders and teachers. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions: How, if at all, does the leader develop and maintain cultural awareness and self-reflection to support marginalized populations? What leadership practices does the leader enact, if at all, to engage teachers in cultural awareness and self-reflection?

Methods: To address these questions, I utilized a descriptive, qualitative, case study of a mid to large sized urban district which had a diverse student body population where at least fifty percent represent marginalized populations of LGBTQ, emergent bilinguals, Hispanic/Latinx, and African American students. Khalifa et al's (2016) culturally responsive school leadership behavior of critical self-reflection was used as a conceptual framework to guide the study. It's four tenets for leaders include: having an awareness of self and the context in which they lead;

be willing to probe personal assumptions, their own and others, about race and culture and impact on the school; having an awareness of the inequitable facets that negatively affect marginalized students' potential; and finally, to use awareness to transform and create a new equitable environment for marginalized students. Methods included semi-structured interviews, a review of documents, and field notes as data to determine leadership practices that engage the learning organization in critical self-reflection and awareness.

Findings: First, the study found that almost all of the leader participants exhibited cultural awareness and reflectiveness. This awareness was enacted through either feeling marginalization themselves, childhood experiences, and through professional experiences. Second, leaders utilized a variety of leadership practices to maintain their awareness and to engage in self-reflection. Third, leaders utilized their awareness to create more equitable environments for marginalized students. Lastly, although leaders utilized leadership practices to increase teacher awareness, practices were not consistent, embedded, or persistent.

Appendix G: Structured Abstract for Luis Ramirez Soria's Individual Study

Leadership Practices that Support Marginalized Students:
District and School Leaders' Support for LGBTQ Youth

Background: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth are a marginalized student population in school settings. LGBTQ students are susceptible to suicide ideation, substance abuse, discrimination, bullying, and harassment. District and school leaders can affect practices, policies, pedagogy, and professional learning that advance equity and support for LGBTQ students in schools. Agency for LGBTQ students can be affected by how leaders promote inclusivity, build relationships among and between students and teachers, challenge exclusionary policies and behaviors, use student voice, and model culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Purpose and Research Questions: The purpose of this study was to examine whether and how district and school leaders' knowledge, attitudes/beliefs, and practices regarding LGBTQ students affected the espoused and enacted school policies for advocacy, anti-discrimination, and proactive care for this marginalized population. Accordingly, this study explored the research question: How, if at all, do district and school leaders' knowledge, attitudes/beliefs, and practices support LGBTQ youth?

Methods: I conducted a qualitative case study of a Massachusetts urban school district. Data for the research was collected from semi-structured interviews, document review, and observation of a student organization meeting. For each data source, I analyzed and coded the data to identify patterns that supported or contradicted culturally responsive leadership in support of LGBTQ youth. I utilized multiple cycles of coding, starting with initial codes that surfaced regarding leaders' knowledge, attitude/beliefs, and practices.

Findings: Data analysis from this study revealed four themes. First, leaders created and sustained safe environments in schools for LGBTQ youth. Second, leaders' made efforts to urge the normalization of LGBTQ advocacy and discourse. Third, leaders afforded opportunities for LGBTQ student-led activism. Lastly, district and school leaders need to further their systemic efforts toward establishing and implementing inclusive LGBTQ curriculum and instruction.