

THE PRINCIPAL SETS THE TONE: DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING  
COMMUNITY TO FOSTER CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP TEAMS

by

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(Under the Direction of Sally J. Zepeda)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research study was to examine how the principals of three highly diverse urban elementary schools led their administrative team members to adapt Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices. Leaders must be equipped to address the needs of a growing and diverse student population, even if this knowledge was not acquired during their initial leadership training. Participation in professional learning opportunities is crucial for leaders to enhance their capabilities in culturally responsive leadership. The study yielded the following thematic findings: 1) Fostering cultural responsiveness, within an educational leadership context, is a nuanced and multifaceted journey that requires awareness and acceptance; 2) Leading teams in culturally responsive practices results in a journey involving personal growth, heightened awareness, and a transformative approach to education that embraces diversity and ongoing learning; 3) Engaging in cultural responsiveness is deeply personal work that requires embracing various levels of involvement, understanding, and deep trust. The findings indicate that while culturally responsive leadership professional development positively impacts leadership teams, the school context, leader vulnerability, and the delivery model are major factors on its impact.

Keywords: Cultural responsiveness, Culturally responsive teaching, Culturally responsive leadership, Developing culturally responsive administrative teams, Principal leadership, Professional learning communities for leaders

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation with deep gratitude and love to my remarkable family. My parents, Miguel and Adelfa, have been living embodiments of faith, fortitude, and love in my life. Their unwavering support and encouragement have been the foundation of my academic journey. They instilled my love and passion for education, and I believe these are the big factors why I am in this profession I love. As people of faith, they have instilled in me the belief that God has a plan for our lives, and through Him, all things are possible. Their immigrant experience and even navigating life as non-English speakers, have shown me the transformative power of hard work and dedication.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Racial inequalities have been part of the educational landscape since schools were first established in the United States (Berg, 2021; Noguera & Noguera, 2018). Society has gone through an evolution from segregation, desegregation, and integration of schools to increased diversity and the current push toward cultural responsiveness (Lindsey et al., 2018). This evolution has also been felt by schools that have had to respond to be able to meet the needs of a changing student body (Gooden et al., 2023; Lindsey et al., 2018; Tanase, 2020). Students of color are expected to make up 56% of the student body by 2024 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016); however, the teaching force does not represent that statistic. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education School and Staffing Survey (SASS) showed that 82% of the teaching population identifies as white (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) with the majority being middle class, female, and monolingual (Tanase, 2020).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021), there are 50.1 million students enrolled in public elementary and secondary education in the United States. NCES also reported that 46% of those students were White, 28%; Hispanic, 15%; Black, 5%; Multiracial, 5%; and 1% American Indian. Between 2017-2018, there were 3.3 million teachers in public education and 90,900 principals (NCES, 2020). In contrast to students, NCES reported that 80% of teachers are White; 7% Black; 9% Hispanic; 2% Asian; and 1%, American Indian. At the national level, the demographic profile for principals is like teachers in that 78%, White;

11%, Black; 9%, Hispanic; and 1%, American Indian. Gender inequalities were also found with 76% female teachers versus 24% males, overall (NCES, 2022).

A stateside view of key demographics in Georgia is warranted in that the present study was conducted in a large metropolitan school district. According to the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA, 2020), during the 2019-2020 school year, there were 119,111 teachers in Georgia and 9,960 leaders. GOSA's data indicated that 60.6% of leaders in Georgia are White; 36% Black; 1.5% Hispanic; 1.3% Multiracial/Other; 0.5% Asian; and 0.1% American Indian.

When looking at teacher data, GOSA (2020) found that 68.3% of teachers were white; 26% were Black; 2.6% Hispanic; 1.7% Multiracial/Other; and 1.3% Asian. In contrast, according to the Department of Education, students in Georgia are 37.4% White; 36.5% Black; 17.1% Hispanic; 4.5% Asian; 0.2% American Indian; 0.1% Pacific Islander; and 4.2% Other. Given the national and stateside demographics, it was logical to examine broadly equity and inequalities.

This action research study was conducted in the large, urban school district Metro County Public School (MCPS, a pseudonym). According to the Educator Pipeline Dashboard (2022), the MCPS student demographic was 11.32% Asian; 32.65% Black; 33.42% Hispanic; 4.20% Multiracial; and 18.24% White. Leaders at MCPS were reported as 1.14% Asian; 35.77% Black; 5.15% Hispanic; 1.86% Multiracial; and 56.06% White. The teaching population is 4.12% Asian; 23.56% Black; 5.99% Hispanic; 1.91% Multiracial; and 64.20% White. The statistics show that although 80% of students were a minority group, 56% of leaders were white, and 64% teachers were white.

Different approaches to close inequities have been attempted and documented over time (Moretti, 2015). To lessen achievement gaps predicated on inequalities, strategies, and the reinvention of the most effective ways to engage students has been part of the educational landscape (Khalifa et al., 2016; Moretti, 2015). At first, the idea of assimilation was supported and encouraged to create homogeneous approaches to education (Moretti, 2015). The assimilation strategy focused on “socializing immigrants through teaching them English and American culture and seeking to eliminate and stigmatize the use of their original language” (Cardenas-Gomez, 2018, p. 3).

In the 1970s, multiculturalism emerged as a more appropriate approach in education since assimilation required the disavowal of the student’s primary culture (Lindsey et al., 2018). The ideas around multiculturalism created the pathway for cultural responsiveness (Banks, 2011). Cultural responsiveness aimed to address the inequalities still faced over 60 years after the 1954 court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*. There are many ways of framing the conversation around culturally responsive teaching, and the current racial and political landscape makes the need to clearly define it extremely important. Cultural responsiveness aims to understand the relationship between students’ culture and their learning (Tanase, 2020).

Ladson Billings introduced the term, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) to describe teaching and approaches to learning for students of color. CRP “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references that impacts knowledge, skills, and attitude creating a bridge between home and school life” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20).

Culturally responsive teaching was introduced by Gay as a similar framework for teaching students (Brown et al., 2019). Gay (2018) defined culturally responsive teaching as

using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. In other words, culturally responsive teaching embraces the idea that to reach students more effectively, their cultural groups and perspectives should be part of their school experiences (Gay, 2018).

Culturally responsive teaching acknowledges that to understand students and to embrace who they are, the whole student must be considered recognizing that these cultural groups are deeper than race and involve areas such as ethnicity, gender, language, sexual orientation, and faith (Lindsey et al., 2018). When these experiences are used in schools, students are more engaged, the learning is more meaningful, and knowledge is easier to attain (Gay, 2000).

The study of culturally responsive leadership originated from culturally responsive teaching (Johnson, 2014). While teachers affect the implementation of this work in their classrooms, school leaders are crucial in the development of initiatives and the success in which they are implemented. According to Lindsey et al. (2019), these leaders “display personal values and behaviors that enable them to engage in effective interactions among students, educators, and the community they serve” (p. 5). School leaders must become aware of effective culturally responsive practices, understand the benefits of this work, and support the implementation to best assist teachers and students (Brown, 2007). Culturally responsive leaders must have the insight to not only address and challenge marginalized populations and environments, but they must also ensure the inclusion of other cultures into the spaces they lead (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Intentional leadership practices are the catalyst of culturally responsive teaching practices (Gay, 2010). Leaders are vital in this work and research demonstrates that there is urgency for culturally responsive leaders to ensure the implementation, fidelity, and longevity of a culturally responsive shift (Khalifa et al., 2016). Leaders who desire to make an impact in the disparities

their students face must be willing to act. Gooden et al. (2023) explained that “equity-centered leadership contains a critique of oppressive practice, a commitment to fairness, and an understanding of community and the knowledge within it” (p. 3).

Leaders need to be equipped to address the needs of a growing diverse student population even if this knowledge was not attained during their initial leader preparation. Zepeda et al. (2014) explained, “professional development has been regarded as a remedy to the shortcomings of principal preparation and as a system of support for sitting leaders” (p. 298). Therefore, engaging in professional learning opportunities is key for leaders to grow their capacity in culturally responsive leadership. According to Lopez (2015), “Culturally responsive leadership provides a way for educational leaders to theorize their work, develop agency, take action, and build school-wide capacity on issues of equity, diversity, and social justice” (173).

Instructional leadership’s core behaviors are defined as “developing the instructional capacity of teachers in ways that improve student achievement and everything from establishing professional learning communities, to goal framing, mentoring, and evaluation and assessments” (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018, p. 533). Professional learning communities are formed by all members of the educational team. In fact, professional learning communities are “characterized by the commitment and involvement of all staff in the community, not just teaching staff. People work together across the school, not just in groupings of particular subjects, phases, or roles” (Stoll et al., 2007, p. 17). In other words, a professional learning community (PLC), involves people working together following a shared vision so that all can succeed with a shared commitment to that vision (Lunenburg, 2010). When a PLC is established, there is a common sense of heightened awareness to support students (DuFour, 2004). Successful PLCs tend to have the following characteristics: shared vision, values, and goals; collective collaboration; focus on

results; and the collaboration of leadership (Coenen et al., 2021; DuFour 2004; Lunenburg, 2010; Zepeda 2019).

This study examined a PLC comprised of principals from three highly diverse urban elementary schools as they engaged in professional learning focused on developing culturally responsive leadership practices for themselves and their administrative teams.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The growing diversity in the United States is a vital factor to consider in schools' leadership and teaching practices (Banks et al., 2001; Khalifa et al., 2016). The racial and political tensions our country continues to face are practically impossible to escape. Educators face tensions daily, and they must take the time to understand themselves, the students they serve, and the teachers they lead (Berg & Gleason, 2018; Johnson-Smith, 2020). This work to understand diversity requires leaders and teachers to recognize their own biases and perceptions as the first step to understanding others (Banks et al., 2001; Berg & Gleason, 2018; Gunn et al., 2021; Khalifa et al., 2016).

The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery are examples of some of the high-profile acts of racial injustice in the United States (Bohonos & Sisco, 2021). Nationally, boards of education are managing parental group disagreements about curriculum, textbooks, teaching frameworks, and conversations around Critical Race Theory (CRT). Georgia is one of the latest states to adopt a bill to ban "divisive" concepts in teaching about race with the passage of Senate Bill 377. Senate Bill 377 prohibits any instruction that emphasizes the United States as "fundamentally racist" or that individuals "should feel anguish, guilt or any other form of discomfort or stress" because of their race (p. 2).

Teachers are an essential part of knowledge creation and dissemination (Ankomah, 2020); therefore, their understanding of the students they serve, a desire for equity, and social justice are key to their success. Teachers need support from their school leaders who must also be culturally responsive in their practices.

A search toward equity has become part of the conversation as much as school improvement and accountability. The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provided information on what states were doing to define equity in education. In a qualitative analysis, Chu (2019) reported that most states have a plan for equitable access to educational resources such as funding especially around recruiting and retaining effective educators. Moreover, most states have a definition of equity and have accountability systems that are outcome oriented (Chu, 2019). The conversation around equity is ongoing, and although states are in different places in their pursuit of it, it is an unavoidable component of schools.

#### *Overview of the Research Site Context*

In the past couple of year, Metro County Public School (MCPS) has gone through a transition to new leadership. These leadership transitions came after over 20 years with the same superintendent and a solidified culture and consistent processes, procedures, and instructional framework. After the appointment of the new superintendent, a shift to meet the changing needs of students and their communities was a priority for the district. The new superintendent focused on improving schools, with special attention given to the instructional gaps and lower academic achievement of students of color.

The *Proposal*, as the plan is called, summarized the findings and recommendations of the previous plan and the new efforts of the future strategic priorities. Additionally, MCPS is part of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) Learning 2025 initiative as a

demonstration district seeking to become more student-centered, equity-focused, and future-driven.

As shown in Table 1.1, the *Proposal* highlights four areas as priorities: empathy, equity, effectiveness, and excellence. Each strategic priority includes three goals, with objectives and performance indicators.

**Table 1.1**

*The Proposal’s Strategic Priorities and Goals*

<b>Strategic Priorities</b>		<b>Goals</b>	
Empathy	Cultural competence	Staff and student wellbeing	Educator diversity
Equity	Multi-tiered system of supports	Opportunity and access	Equitable resource allocation
Effectiveness	Results-Based Evaluation System	Talent management	Educational return on investment
Excellence	Preferred education destination	Post-secondary and workforce readiness	World-class communication and engagement

*Note.* Strategic priorities retrieved from the MCPS Proposal document.

To begin this five-year transition, each school was required to develop a Local School Plan of Improvement (LSPI) including goals from each of the priorities. Each school’s LSPI must implement at least five goals, two of those goals must be equity focused. In the search for equity, the unique and individual needs of students are to be addressed with three key goals: a multi-tiered system of supports, opportunity and access, and equitable resource allocation.

Of interest in this study is the strategic priority of empathy. In the area of empathy, cultural competence stands as a key goal of the plan. Each school was required to increase the cultural competence of each individual staff member to improve its programs and to improve engagement of diverse communities. To achieve the goal of empathy, each school was required

to incorporate cultural competence strategies into professional learning to create and respond to the knowledge at the local context that supports diversity.

At MCPS, most of the leadership and certified teaching staff is White like most educational settings (Genao, 2021). This demographic is a stark difference to the student population. According to Gant (2021), “Building a culture of equity requires ensuring that leaders and school staff have a shared vision for what educational equity means, what it looks like, and how to get there” (p. 26). The *Proposal* aims to provide that clear vision and equity focus for the next five years for MCPS.

Educational inequities have been present for many years making it prime time for educators to participate in professional learning that helps them to revamp their practices (Gleason & Berg, 2020). To attain equity, teachers and other school personnel must recognize inequities in all forms, including but not limited to gender, race, class, ability, and language (Lawyer et al., 2020).

While understanding others helps educators to provide educational experiences that embrace students, their families, and their communities, the first step requires the examination of personal, professional, and organizational beliefs (Gunn et al., 2021; Singleton, 2018). This pursuit must start with the leadership to ensure a shift in the organization’s culture (Khalifa et al., 2016; Singleton, 2018). The principal must ensure that leadership teams lead in culturally responsive ways that attend to the adults who have been entrusted to teach highly diverse student populations in their buildings.

The alarming discrepancies between students and educators’ racial makeup created an urgency for this work. Since recruitment of a diverse workforce that would match the students’ racial makeup does not seem feasible, the need to become culturally aware can create windows

of opportunities. Educators must understand that even if they do not have the same cultural background as their students, they need to be aware of cultural differences. Becoming culturally aware does not mean that educators need to be in the same cultural groups as the students or teachers. Instead, awareness allows for educators to be culturally responsive to different groups and cultures, providing a learning environment where all learners and those who educate them are included (Hammond, 2015).

Institutions must recognize how they can play a role in sustaining equity. Along with leading their schools, educational leaders have the responsibility to lead this work and to ensure the implementation of equity practices in their respective buildings. They need to know the communities they serve and the best ways to support the different political and educational concerns they are facing. School leaders should listen to community voices, and show awareness of societal issues (White, 2021). Muhammad and Cruz (2019) explained:

Education is a high-stakes business, not because of a ranking or accountability rating given by a state or government agency, but because educators only get thirteen years to help shape the future of young human beings. This shaping process requires profound care and skill. (p. 3)

Teachers are critical in their influence of students, and school leaders are critical to the effectiveness and capacity building of their teachers. Looking at equity and the need for leaders to be culturally responsive helped to frame the purpose of the study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this action research study was to examine how the principals of three highly diverse urban elementary schools led their administrative team members to adapt Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices. Specifically, the study focused on these three

principals as they participated in a culturally responsive professional learning community (PLC). As a team, they came together to further their understandings of culturally responsive practices and how to implement those practices to foster a more culturally responsive administrative team and school to support the diverse needs of their communities.

### **Research Questions**

To address the purpose of this action research, the following questions guided the study:

1. What actions do principals take to develop schoolwide culturally responsive leadership practices to support diverse student populations and teachers?
2. What are the positive leadership opportunities in implementing culturally responsive practices to encourage the success of diverse communities within urban elementary schools?
3. What leadership challenges arise in the development of a more culturally responsive leadership team and school?

The research questions were examined with an action research design team to study the development of a leadership professional learning community (PLC). The PLC focused on its members building capacity and implementing their learning while working with the members of their leadership teams in three elementary schools. The following provides definition of terms related to the action research study.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, key terms need to be understood. The following key terms are defined:

- Administrative Team in the context of this study is identified as the principal and assistant principals.

- Cultural Competence in this context refers to someone who understands their own culture, biases, and privilege and is in the pursuit of understanding and learning about the culture and backgrounds of others.
- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) “helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469).
- Culturally Responsive Teaching in this context is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively (Gay, 2018).
- Culturally Responsive Leadership in this context is defined as one who provides a way for educational leaders to theorize their work, develop agency, act, and build school-wide capacity on issues of equity, diversity, and social justice (Lopez, 2014).
- Educational Equity in this context refers to the design or redesign of systemic programs and initiatives to address and reduce educational inequity, providing students and staff with targeted supports and enrichment that increase opportunities to succeed.
- Empathy in this context refers to the ability to understand the feelings of another person and place yourself in their position, to consider the perspective of others, affirming and valuing the diversity of everyone in our community.
- Leadership Team in the context of this study is identified as the principal and assistant principals.
- Principal in this context refers to as the leader of the school.

- Professional Learning Community (PLC) in this context refers to a group of educators working together committed to improve their culturally responsive skills and practices through a culture of collaboration and a focus on results.
- Social Justice in this context refers to fairness where all students would have equal rights, opportunities, and treatment.

### **Theoretical Framework**

There are several theories, concepts, and frameworks that have influenced the exploration of cultural responsiveness. The three theories that supported the development of the action research study included culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2013), and culturally relevant leadership (Khalifa, 2018).

In the 1990s, Ladson-Billings introduced the culturally relevant pedagogy framework as such:

Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current status quo of the social order. (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160)

The work of Ladson-Billings (1995, 2018, 2021) also speaks to Culturally Relevant Teaching.

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), three criteria must be met for Culturally Relevant Teaching including: “an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness” (p. 483). Culturally Relevant Teaching empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using their culture to inform building knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Adding to this body of research, the work of Gay focused on teaching practices with a term she devised as culturally responsive teaching. According to Gay (2018), culturally responsive teaching is “using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them” (p. 36). In other words, educators teach to and through the strengths of their ethnically diverse students. Culturally responsive teaching “uses ways of knowing, understanding, and representing, various ethnic and cultural groups in teaching academic subjects, processes, and skills” (Gay 2013, p. 52). Gay (2018) also described culturally responsive teaching as having these characteristics:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's' cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools. (p. 37)

Leaders are instrumental to ensure beliefs and practices unfold in environments that are culturally responsive for their students and staff. Empathy builds cultural competence by examining diversity to address issues of inequitable treatment of students.

Empathy is a foundational block of cultural responsiveness because it allows for personal connections to understand and relate to one another. Leading from an empathetic view helps provide teachers with spaces where they are known and not where they feel alone ((Ünsal & Usta, 2021). Additionally, using empathy allows leaders to support teachers encouraging collaboration and in turn improving the overall performance of the organization (Arghode et al., 2022).

According to Khalifa et al. (2016), “Culturally responsive leadership influences the school context and addresses the cultural needs of the students, parents, and teachers” (p. 1274). Khalifa et al. (2016) developed the Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) Framework. Embedded in the CRSL Framework are four key sets of practices for leaders to follow including: the ability to critically self-reflect on leadership behaviors, to develop culturally responsive teachers, to promote culturally responsive/inclusive school environments, and to engage students and parents in the context of their communities.

Through critical self-reflection, educators look at their personal role and the organization’s role in past acts of marginalizing students (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). These educators “constantly seek, find, and challenge oppressive treatment of students and communities, and push their staff to do so as well” (Khalifa, 2018, p. 61). As leaders commit to self-reflect, they should consider three skills: first, understanding and identifying the oppressive contexts of those they serve; second, recognizing their own background and privilege; and third, pushing others to self-reflect on their roles and to develop responsive structures (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016).

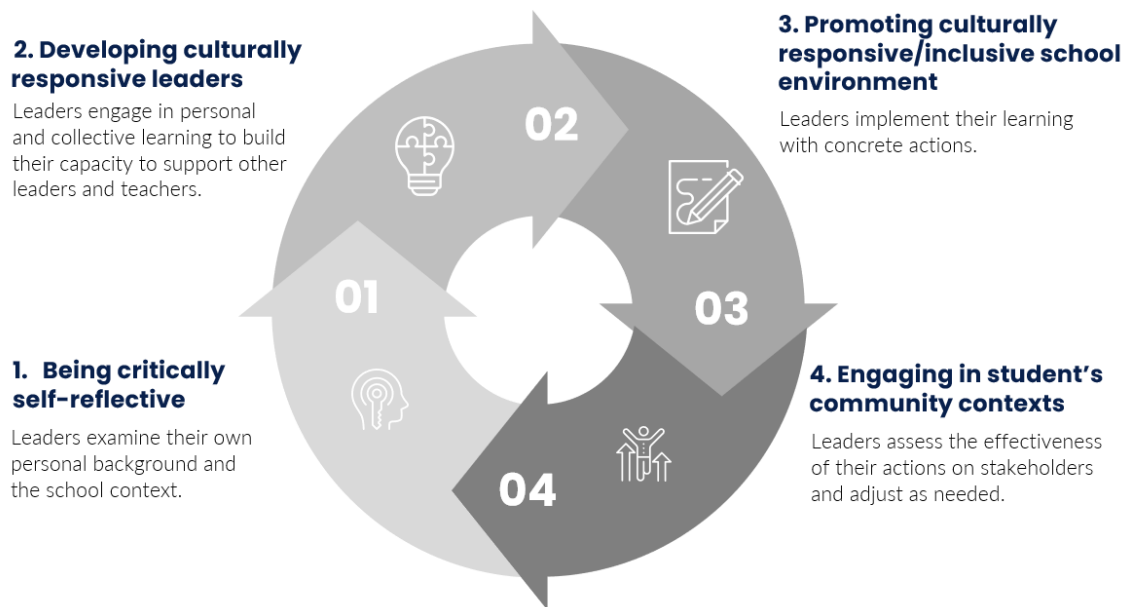
Khalifa (2018) also clarified that “CRSL is a process that cannot be completed. Rather it is a dynamic, fluid set of behaviors that regularly (re)develop the individual and the organization

based on a steady stream of data from the school and community” (p. 60). This fluidity is part of the inspiration of the logic model used for this action research study.

This action research study was premised on the idea that leaders were key in the implementation of culturally responsive practices for schools. Additionally, leaders must first understand themselves to engage in this type of learning. The current study sought to examine the efforts of three principals and their work to become culturally responsive and their implementation of these practices with their leadership teams. The model presented in Figure 1.1 represented the process that leaders followed to reflect, develop, implement, and review culturally responsive practices in their work.

**Figure 1.1**

*Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL)*



*Note.* Adapted from the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework by Khalifa et al. (2016).

The cyclical process began with planning and self-reflection where the principals began to unpack their own knowledge, bias, and understandings of cultural responsiveness. They then

worked as a group to build their individual and collective capacity. The principals implemented the strategies learned and then assessed if the strategies were effective or if readjustments were needed. Based on the finding, the team developed interventions to better assist their work of supporting their administrative teams. The entire cycle was created to develop the capacity of leaders, resulting in effective implementation of culturally responsive leadership strategies and practices.

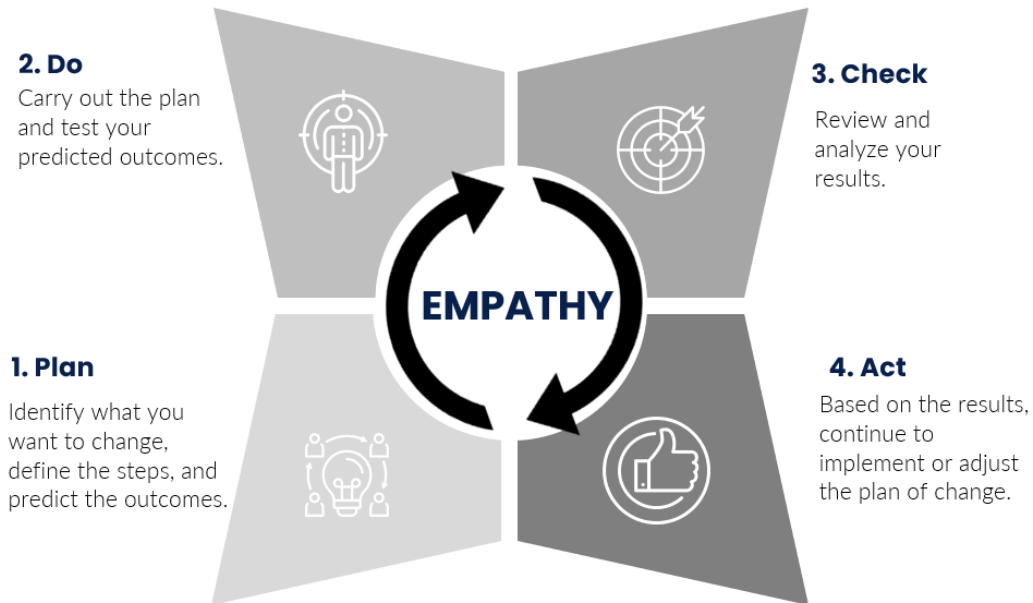
### **Logic Model**

The action research cycle started with leaders reflecting on their knowledge and understanding of culturally responsive leadership practices. Building on critical self-reflection, they engaged in professional learning to build their capacity and to further understand best culturally responsive school practices for leaders. The principals then implemented the leadership practices with their administrative teams. After implementing these practices, leaders worked to assess the impact of these practices on their administrators and their level of engagement. The results about the stakeholder engagement were then reviewed by each leader and a collective self-reflection, resulting in an ongoing and cyclical process of action research.

To analyze the change, the use of the continuous improvement model developed by Deming as cited by Walton (1986), also known as the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Framework, was used. As shown in Figure 1.2, PDCA is a four-step model for carrying out change. The cycle is never ending and is repeated to manage continuous improvement (Walton, 1986).

**Figure 1.2**

*Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Cycle*



*Note.* Adapted from Deming’s Plan-Do-Check-Act Deming Cycle as reported by Walton (1986).

The framework is a four-step model to implement change (Walton, 1986). First, the “Plan” recognizes an opportunity to plan for a change (Walton, 1986). Second, the “Do” carries out an implementation, preferably in small scale (Walton, 1986). Third, the “Check” reviews data and analyzes the results to identify success (Walton, 1986). Fourth, the “Act” is the action taken based on the results found (Walton, 1986). If the plan works, then the cycle is maintained while possibly incorporating a new aspect or widening the scope. If plan with the embedded intervention does not show positive results, improvements are made, and a new cycle is started (Walton, 1986).

*Theory of Change*

The purpose of this action research study was to examine how the principals of three highly diverse urban elementary schools led their administrative team members to adapt Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices. The study sought to understand how principals can implement that learning with the administrators they support. Through this work, school leaders

were continually refining their behaviors and practices by engaging in self-reflection. The logic model followed action research by providing a continual cycle of reflection and implementation for school leaders.

### **Overview of the Methodology**

Action research was the appropriate approach for this dissertation because this type of research functions through collaboration of all parties to find solutions. Corey (1954) explained that action research is done by those who wish to improve their practice. In education, there is a need to find solutions to many of the continuous issues faced by schools daily and the number of inequities students face. Different approaches to close these inequities have been attempted and documented over time. Strategies and the reinvention of the most effective ways to engage students has been part of the educational landscape since its inception.

According to research, culturally relevant teaching strategies are an effective way to diminish the achievement gaps among diverse groups (Banks, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The research concluded that culturally relevant strategies work; however, each school context is different. The use of action research allowed those who are part of the work to improve their practices by engaging in this work (Corey, 1954).

Action research also lends itself to this work because it empowers participants through collaboration and participation (Masters, 1995). Masters (1995) also explained key conditions of action research:

- 1) a social matter is chosen as its subject matter;
- 2) cyclical planning, acting, observing, and reflecting takes place; and,
- 3) the inclusion of those responsible for the practice are part of the work, as well as others affected by it.

Through action research, the principals worked together to study cultural responsiveness in the context of the schools they lead. They developed a focus for the work, engaged in research to build their capacity, implemented practices, and reflected about the effectiveness of those practices for their school.

Culturally responsiveness aims to understand the relationship of culture and their students' unique backgrounds and needs (Tanase, 2020). With a subject matter as personal as cultural responsiveness, it was imperative to include others in the work. Throughout the action research cycles, the team worked together to implement this work. They met, revisited, and studied the data to create adjustments as needed to build the capacity of the those involved in the research.

### **Interventions**

The main interventions for this study were developed in a professional learning community of principals. The group's focus was to implement culturally responsive practices; therefore, their reflections and capacity building were key to the success of examining culturally responsive leadership practices. The action research design team and the action research implementation teams met after each cycle to discuss the impact of the implementation of the interventions on their administrators. After determining interventions needed, the team implemented them and revised as needed following the action research cycle.

The interventions included different professional learning opportunities to build the capacity of the leaders involved. Some of the activities included collective capacity building by engaging in reading about culturally responsive leadership practices, self-reflection, and debriefings about these learning opportunities. While the Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework served as a guide for the study's interventions, a central element in many

of these interventions was dedicated to fostering self-reflection. The Action Research Design Team deemed it crucial to delve further into the leaders' experiences, ensuring they were afforded ample opportunities to gain insights into how their experiences shaped their perspectives. All interventions were designed to increase culturally responsiveness leadership practices.

### **Significance of the Study**

Research shows the importance and need to connect with students' cultures and the positive impact of these practices on student achievement. The role of leadership in this work is very important. To ensure practices are successful and supported, school leaders must be involved. They must become aware of effective culturally responsive practices, understand the benefits of this work, and support the implementation to best support teachers and students (Brown, 2007). Culturally responsive leaders have the insight to not only address and challenge marginalized populations and environments, but they also must ensure the inclusion of other cultures into the spaces they lead (Khalifa et al., 2016).

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

In Chapter 1 of the dissertation an overview of the study is provided as well as the purpose of the study, the research questions, the theoretical framework, logic model, and overview of the action research methodology. Chapter 2 gives a review of the related literature about culturally responsive teaching and leadership. Chapter 3 describes in detail the action research methodology and the ways in which the study was conducted. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the action research. Chapter 5 presents the themes emerging from the case. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the study, offers implications for school leaders, as well as implications for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

As the diversity in schools continues to grow, educational leaders need to become more responsive about how they address these changes (Lopez, 2015). According to Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012), “The increase diversity in schools calls for new approaches to educational leadership in which leaders exhibit culturally responsive organizational practices, behaviors, and competencies” (p. 177). Cultural responsiveness aims to address the disparities still faced over 60 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Gay (2010, 2018) offered that culturally responsive teaching must meet the needs of underachievement of minority students. Gay (2018) explained that culturally responsive teaching is validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory. Since leaders are responsible to create opportunities to develop the capacity of teachers, they also must be culturally responsive to make this work attainable and sustainable (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). Additionally, principals can ensure an inclusive culture in schools (Khalifa, 2013).

The purpose of this action research study was to examine how the principals of three highly diverse urban elementary schools led their administrative team members to adapt Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices. To address the purpose of this action research, the following overall research questions guided the study:

1. What actions do principals take to develop schoolwide culturally responsive leadership practices to support diverse student populations and teachers?

2. What are the positive leadership opportunities in implementing culturally responsive practices to encourage the success of diverse communities within urban elementary schools?
3. What leadership challenges arise in the development of a more culturally responsive leadership team and school?

The research questions were examined in a professional learning community (PLC) with an action research design team to study the development of culturally relevant leadership practices that support leadership teams in their acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and practices needed to lead schools. The PLC focused on building capacity and implementing their learning while working with principals and assistant principals. This chapter examined key areas in the literature including culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally responsive leadership, empathy, social justice, equity, and professional learning communities to situate the action research study.

The review of the literature begins with examining culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching. The work of Ladson-Billings on culturally relevant pedagogy (1995, 1997, 2009, 2021) is first reviewed, followed by a review of culturally responsive teaching as described by Gay (1994, 2010, 2018). The continuation of cultural responsiveness and its evolution is then explored, paying attention to the work on culturally responsive leadership by Khalifa (2013, 2016, 2018, 2021). The review then shifts to examining empathy, social justice, and equity as cornerstones of culturally responsive work. Professional learning communities provide the structures inherent in this learning configuration for the principals at three urban elementary schools.

## **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

The theory of culturally relevant pedagogy was proposed by Ladson-Billings (1995) as a response to the ongoing efforts to find solutions to the diversity of students in schools and the racial, ethnic, and cultural disparity between students and teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Martin & Mulvihill, 2021). In addition to a desire to meet the need of African American students who were consistently underperforming, Ladson-Billings looked at previous research that focused on culture to connect with students (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2021). According to Ladson-Billings (1995), these studies had several commonalities such as: the source of student failure and success was based on the teacher and student language interaction, and student success was based on achievement as determined on current structures. Ladson-Billings (1995) stated, “the goal of education becomes how to fit students constructed as other by virtue of their race/ethnicity, language, or social class into a hierarchical structure that is defined as a meritocracy” (p. 467).

Ladson-Billings (1995, 2021) brought forward that, “culturally relevant teaching must meet three criteria: an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of sociopolitical or critical consciousness” (p. 483). Cultural competence requires students to have awareness and understanding of their own language, traditions, history, and culture while developing the same awareness and understanding in another culture (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Culturally relevant pedagogy “not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469). After grounding the research on culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (1995) highlighted that these teaching behaviors should not be rigid or a designation of “culturally

relevant,” instead a continuum of three propositions are found to have emerged from the research, including “the conceptions of self and others help by culturally relevant teachers, the manner in which social relations are structured by culturally relevant teachers, and the conceptions of knowledge held by culturally relevant teachers” (p. 478).

### *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Behavioral Propositions*

The first proposed behavior by Ladson-Billings is the conception of self and others (Ladson-Billings, 1995). For this behavior, teachers must believe all students “were capable of academic success,” their pedagogy was ongoing and “unpredictable,” that teachers “saw themselves as members of the community,” and their “teaching as a way to give back” (p. 478).

The second behavior, social relations, asserted that the relationship between the students and teachers is equal and equitable, and as culturally relevant teachers, they promoted a community where all learn together instead of being competitive and individualistic (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The third behavior, conceptions of knowledge, is related to how teachers look at beliefs and knowledge.

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant teachers know that knowledge is “shared, recycled, and constructed,” and they “scaffold” students’ learning (p. 481). Based on the work of Ladson-Billings (2009, pp., 37-56; pp., 126-128), Zepeda et al. (in press) examined the nexus between culturally relevant teachers and their classroom practices as presented in Table 2.1.

**Table 2. 1**

*Culturally Relevant Teachers and Principles of Culturally Relevant Practices in Classrooms*

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<b>Culturally Relevant Teachers</b>	<b>Principles of Culturally Relevant Practices in Classrooms</b>
Have high self-esteem and a high regard for others.	Students whose educational, economic, social, political, and cultural futures are supported in becoming intellectual leaders in the classroom.
See themselves as part of the community, see teaching as giving back to the community, and encourage their students to do the same.	Students are apprenticed in a learning community rather than taught in an isolated and unrelated way.
See teaching as an art and themselves as artists.	Students' real-life experiences are legitimized as they become part of the 'official' curriculum.
Believe that all students can succeed.	Teachers and students participate in a broad conception of literacy that incorporates both literature and oratory.
Help students make connections between their community, national, and global identities.	Teachers and students engage in a collective struggle against the status quo.
See teaching as 'digging knowledge out' of students.	Teachers are cognizant of themselves as political beings.

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*Note.* Zepeda et al. (in press). Used with permission.

Since its development, culturally relevant pedagogy has influenced various iterations and although most of them do not fully align to the original model, components of the theory remain consistent (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Although there are nuanced differences, culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive pedagogy are often used interchangeably in the literature and reported in research.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Gay (2018) defined culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. Culturally responsive teaching asserted that to meet the needs of students more effectively, their cultural groups and perspectives should be part of their school experience and used as a vehicle for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive teaching and classroom practices involves responding to the diverse needs of learners (Brown, 2004). According to Gay (2018), culturally responsive teaching recognizes the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups; builds a meaningful connection between the students' home and school experiences; acknowledges and instructs students based on their learning styles; helps students value their culture and heritage; and incorporates information, resources, and materials that embrace multiculturalism.

Culturally responsive teaching acknowledges that to understand students and embrace who they are, the whole student must be considered and who they are should be a part of their learning experiences (Moore et al., 2021). Culturally responsive teachers are aware of their students' cultural groups with the knowledge that these cultural groups are deeper than race and involve areas such as ethnicity, gender, language, sexual orientation, and faith (Lindsey et al., 2018).

Culturally responsive teachers go beyond recognizing or acknowledging the students' cultural groups, and instead, take the time to develop expertise in the students' culture that is factual and relevant (Gay, 2000; Rhodes, 2017). When these experiences are used in schools, students are more engaged, and learning becomes more meaningful and easier for students to become more successful (Gay, 2000). Hammond (2015) furthered that culturally responsive teachers “use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the students know to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing” (p. 15).

#### *Culturally Responsive Teaching Attributes*

Gay (2018) explained that culturally responsive teaching is validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory. Culturally responsive pedagogy positions teachers to see themselves as facilitators and co-learners committed to cultural competence and high expectations (Winter, 2018).

Culturally responsive teaching is validating because “it teaches to and through the strengths of students” (Gay, 2018, p. 36). Culturally responsive teaching additionally builds connections between home and school using a variety of learning styles and educational experiences, helps students value their cultures, and includes a variety of resources to reach learners (Gay, 2018, 2015). Gay (2018) explained “multidimensional culturally responsive teaching encompasses curriculum, content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, classroom management, and performance assessments (p. 39). Culturally responsive teachers are committed to their students and show them that their success is possible by empowering them and building their personal confidence, while moving away from traditional educational practices (Gay, 2018).

Gay (2018) believed that culturally responsive teaching was emancipatory because it “lifts the veil of presumed absolute authority from conceptions of scholarly truth typically taught in schools” and served to humanize individuals by recognizing the various groups of the students served (p. 43). Furthermore, Gay (2018) asserted that culturally responsiveness requires teachers who recognize that:

1. thorough *knowledge* about the cultural values, learning styles, historical legacies, contributions, and achievement of different ethnic groups;
2. the *courage* to stop blaming the victims of school failure and to admit that something is seriously wrong with existing educational systems;
3. the *will* to confront prevailing educational canons and convictions, and to rethink traditional assumptions of cultural universality and/or neutrality in teaching and learning;
4. the *skills* to act productively in translating knowledge and sensitivity about cultural diversity into pedagogical practices; and,
5. the *tenacity* to relentlessly pursue comprehensive and high-level performance for children who currently are underachieving in schools. (p. 53, emphasis in the original)

Teachers do not automatically become culturally responsive; however, culturally responsive teaching requires reform, as well as changes to how teachers are trained and assessed. Genao (2021) positioned:

cultural responsiveness requires individuals to be culturally knowledgeable. This skill is having deep understanding of their own cultural identity and considers differences, and

the skills to understand and develop on the different cultural and community medians of students and families. (pp. 165-166)

When these experiences are used in schools, students are more engaged, the learning is more meaningful, and easier to attain (Gay, 2018).

Cultural responsiveness ensures the inclusion of different cultures into schools, allowing for school community members to feel a sense of belonging. Leaders play a significant role in forwarding practices that support cultural responsiveness.

### **Culturally Responsive Leadership**

The study of culturally responsive leadership originated from the work of Gay (1995, 2021) on culturally responsive teaching (Johnson, 2014) and culturally responsive pedagogy from the works of Ladson-Billings (1995, 2021). Both important groups—leaders and teachers—must be part of culturally responsive approaches to help diverse stakeholders feel like they are welcomed in schools. The changes in student demographics, and the focus on equity have made cultural competence a key component for school leadership that is responsive (Guerra et al., 2022).

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) conducted a study on culturally responsive school leadership in a high school with predominately students of color. In the study, Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) stated, “Cultural responsiveness should be at the center of efforts to improve performance of underachieving groups in multicultural societies; moreover, it is a powerful, persistent, and vitalizing force for improving education for all students” (p. 180). In their case study, Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) found six themes included culturally responsive leadership includes: caring for others; building relationships; persistence and persuasiveness;

being present and communicating; modeling cultural responsiveness; and fostering cultural responsiveness among others.

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) highlighted that relationships build trust and familiarity which has a high probability of helping with student learning because “culturally responsive relationships help to reduce power struggles that manifest themselves in skeptical attitudes and resistance” (p. 198). Furthermore, Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) highlighted in their findings that fostering culturally responsive practices ensured all students were reached by teachers and that modeling these practices by the leader helped demonstrate to teachers that these “approaches have a potential for achieving success” (p. 199).

Johnson (2014) expanded the role of a culturally responsive leader as one whose influence and actions goes beyond the school. Johnson (2014) defined culturally responsive leader as one whose philosophies, practices, and policies “create inclusive schooling environments for students and families from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds” (p. 148). Culturally responsive leaders according to Johnson:

- have high expectations;
- value the history and cultural background of the students’ communities and embed that knowledge in the curriculum;
- create structures to support the students’ parents and diverse communities; and,
- encourage students and faculty to challenge inequities.

Johnson (2014) also stated that culturally responsive leaders used their influence and that of others to advocate for diverse communities.

Marshall and Khalifa (2018) examined how culturally responsive practices could be promoted by instructional leaders to make school more inclusive for minority students and their

communities. Marshall and Khalifa (2018) found that instructional coaches could have a significant and play a useful role in promoting culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy in schools. Marshall and Khalifa (2018) discussed the behaviors of culturally responsive leaders and how those behaviors improved educational experiences for students.

Instructional leadership's core behaviors are defined as "developing the instructional capacity of teachers in ways that improve student achievement and everything from establish professional learning communities, to goal framing, mentoring, and evaluation and assessments" (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018, p. 533). Four main areas were highlighted. These are critical self-reflection, community advocacy and engagement, school culture and climate, and instructional and transformational leadership (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018).

Marshall and Khalifa (2018) found that leaders could have a significant role in promoting culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy in schools, asserting, "We believe that the most promising finding was that districts can establish positions in which instructional leadership coaches can work to strengthen the culturally responsive pedagogy of every teacher in a district" (p. 537). Marshall and Khalifa (2018) summarized their findings, presenting five key themes:

- 1) The ability of instructional leaders to be equitable and culturally responsive was easier when district policies supported the work.
- 2) Trust was a major factor on the coaches' ability to promote culturally responsive pedagogy.
- 3) Coaches also had to unlearn behavior and notions about traditional forms of schooling.
- 4) Quality compensation coaches believed they learned more about their role as culturally responsive leaders because they were part of professional learning with cultural and community liaisons.

- 5) All the tools used by instructional leaders need to reflect a commitment to an attitude of culturally responsive education.

Based on his research, Khalifa (2018) developed a Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (CRSL).

The CRSL Framework is based on four practices:

- critical self-reflection;
- development of culturally responsive teachers;
- promotion of a culturally responsive and inclusive school environment; and,
- engagement of the students' community contexts (Khalifa, 2018).

Leaders who critically self-reflect on their leadership behaviors are committed to continuous learning using data and measurable indicators while leading with courage and an inclusive and social justice mindset (Khalifa, 2018). In their development of culturally responsive teachers, leaders create spaces of collaborative feedback and professional learning opportunities that are focused on data and building the cultural responsiveness of others (Khalifa, 2018).

To promote a culturally responsive and inclusive school environment, leaders promote an inclusive instructional vision, challenge policies that are not inclusive, build relationships, and model CRSL (Khalifa, 2018). To engage the students' community context, leaders find opportunities to include the community to connect with students and families by developing relationship, advocating for families, and providing safe spaces for collaboration (Khalifa, 2018).

Another research effort to apply culturally responsive concepts to school leadership was the work of Genao who examined how Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading (CRTL) is understood among future school leaders and its impact experienced by underrepresented students, families, and communities. Genao (2021), concluded by emphasizing that culturally

responsive school leaders cultivate the culture and climate of schools where the values and beliefs of others are respected. One powerful perspective provided by Genao is how this work is on-going and must be constantly pursued. Genao (2021) asserted “culturally responsive schools are a work in progress and a never-ending work that is requiring to evolve as communities change” (p. 167).

Culturally responsive leadership also serves as a form of “social support” for teachers as they navigate the uncertainties of the communities they serve (Ham et al., 2020, p. 251). In their study of Korean schools, Ham et al. (2020) found a positive effect on teacher’s multicultural teaching efficacy when their leaders were culturally responsive, particularly in areas where more social uncertainties were present. In fact, Ham et al. (2020) found that “if the principal fails to exercise culturally responsive leadership, such loss would be more sticking for teachers working in already challenging situations” (p. 260).

Much like the work of Khalifa, Banwo et al. (2021) defined four behaviors to give opportunities for cultural responsiveness in a school:

- 1) Critical Self Awareness focuses on the need to interrogate ways that leaders, and their organizations contribute to, reproduce, or contest oppressive practices.
- 2) Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Development requires responsive leaders to support new curriculum and instruction models that improve the learning and humanization of minoritized students.
- 3) Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments address school climate and spaces, and how they influence disparities in educational outcomes.
- 4) Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts incorporates adults outside the school as bearers of culturally appropriate knowledge. (p. 3)

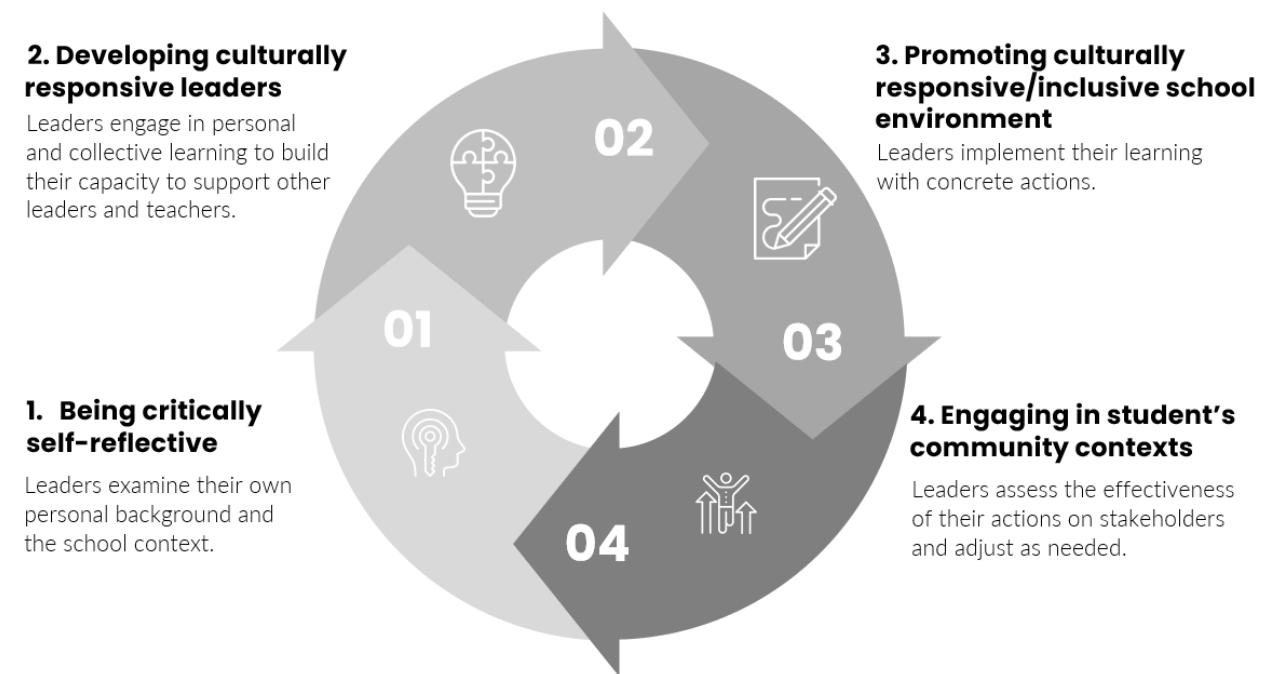
Khalifa (2018, 2020) found that being aware of the cultural demographics of the school was not only important for teachers, but also for leaders. The Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) Framework presents a way for leaders to engage in this work.

*Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (CRSL)*

CRSL has three main components: 1) school leadership, to be effective, must be culturally responsive; 2) that it must be consistently promoted by school leaders; and 3) that is characterized by a core set of leadership behaviors (Khalifa, 2018). These behaviors, as shown in Figure 2.1, are being critically self-reflective, developing culturally responsive teachers, promoting culturally responsive/inclusive school environment, and engaging in students' community contexts (Khalifa, 2018).

**Figure 2.1**

*Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL)*



*Note.* Adapted from the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework by Khalifa et al. (2016).

Table 2.2 highlights culturally responsive leadership behaviors.

**Table 2.2**

*Culturally Responsive Leadership Behaviors*

<b>Culturally Responsive Leadership Behaviors</b>	<b>Description/Explanation</b>
<b>Critical self-reflection</b>	Focuses on how leaders and their organizations contribute, examine, and oppose oppressive practices within their community.
<b>Developing culturally responsive teachers</b>	Focuses on how leaders articulate a vision that supports the development and sustaining of culturally responsive teaching. The leader should recognize and challenge common patterns of inequities in minority groups.
<b>Promoting culturally responsive/inclusive school environments</b>	Focuses on how leaders leverage resources to identify and foster a culturally affirming school environment, challenges the status quo, and seek to challenge and support teachers who fall into the familiar patterns.
<b>Engaging in students' community contexts</b>	Focuses on the leader's ability to engage students, families, and communities in culturally appropriate ways.

*Note.* Based on Khalifa (2018).

Additionally, Khalifa (2018) argued that cultural responsiveness is key for school leaders to be successful, and that school leaders must define and promote it.

Through critical self-reflection, school leaders constantly seek how they are positioned in organizations where they have marginalized students (Khalifa, 2018). Khalifa (2018) highlighted three skills that leaders who are self-reflective should consider: 1) identifying and understanding the “oppressive contexts that students and their communities face;” 2) Being willing and vulnerable to identify one’s own privilege; and 3) the courage to push others to reflect on their role (p. 61).

Leadership practices serve as a catalyst of schoolwide culturally responsive practices (Viloria, 2019). School leaders need to continue the work on culturally responsive leadership behaviors that may help minority students learn on an equal footing with their mainstream counterparts.

### **Empathy**

Empathy, social justice, and equity are foundational to culturally responsive teaching and leadership. Effective leaders must understand their school context, their people, and the needs of their school community. Each school has their own personality, identity, and culture and a lack of intimacy and empathy between administrators and teachers is a problem in schools (Salari & Nastiezaie, 2020). Empathy is a critical part of effective collaboration and a positive work environment (Clark et al., 2019, Mazzone, et al., 2021).

Becoming an empathetic leader can be a challenge because empathy is an area with a complex and vast definition. Coppess (2022) explained that “one of the problems with supporting principals and other school leaders in becoming more empathetic is that the word empathy has been defined in a variety of ways and has a range of implications” (p. 136).

Although empathy is a multidimensional construct, there are components of it defined in research. Clark et al. (2019) made the case that there were three distinct dimensions of empathy: (a) understanding another person's internal state (cognitive empathy), (b) sharing another person's affective state (affective empathy), and/or (c) behaviorally demonstrating that one has understood another person's internal state and/or shared another person's affective state (behavioral empathy)” (p. 171). Leaders who demonstrate empathy think from the perspective of others and create opportunities for others to be understood (Arghode et al., 2022). Empathy requires the understanding of the perspective, experiences, mental state, and feelings of another

person (Mazzone et al., 2021). In fact, empathy is one of the components of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2015). Goleman (2015) explained that empathy does not mean to merely require agreement with another person's feelings; rather, empathy positions that the person understands that there is understanding and caring about perspectives—your own and those of others.

Arghode et al., (2022) explained that “empathetic leaders shape values, and foster collaboration, which, in turn, improves employee and organizational performance” (p. 252). Leaders who embrace opportunities to learn about their people engage them in personal ways, removing the feelings of alienation that some teachers feel (Ünsal & Usta, 2021). These leaders use that knowledge to make an impact in their organizations in many forms and approaches. One of these approaches is through a social justice lens.

### **Social Justice**

Leaders who want to lead inclusive schools that support all, do so with a social justice mindset. Although research does not have a fixed definition of social justice, themes and characteristics of these leaders are highlighted in research (McKenzie et al., 2008; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). Social justice driven leaders confront and work to end the discrimination and oppression of marginalized groups based on color, race, disability, gender, and ethnic background (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Sarid, 2021a). According to DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014), “social justice leadership is demonstrated through ongoing actions, skills, habits of mind, and competencies that are continually being created, questioned and refined” (p. 847). McKenzie et al. (2008) defined social justice leaders as those who attain three goals. First, they raise the academic achievement of all students, second, they prepare students to be critical

citizens, and third, they provide heterogenous and inclusive learning environments (McKenzie et al., 2008).

Furman (2012) highlighted that leadership for social justice is action oriented and transformative, committed, and persistent; inclusive and democratic; relational and caring; reflective; and oriented toward social just pedagogy. Lowery (2022) summarized that social justice leaders develop critical consciousness, reject deficit-based perspectives about students and their communities, recognize multiple identities and the intersectionality of race, gender, disabilities, sexuality, language, and socio-economic status, support historically undeserved groups, and engage the community they serve. Leaders who wish to promote an environment where social justice is embraced create:

a neutral school culture that guarantees fair treatment of all and the communicative environment in which each voice can be heard and a local and contextual determination of the specific social justice dimensions that are needed to be applied in a given context. (Sarid, 2021b, p. 756)

Additionally, social justice leaders work collaboratively with emotional awareness maintaining meaningful relationships (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). These leaders develop programs that foster collaboration and culturally responsive pedagogy by reallocating resources toward materials and resources that are inclusive (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014).

When leaders are seeking social justice goals, leading is a cooperative effort, where leadership is shared “which in turn enabled the principal to influence and direct the behaviors of these stakeholders to achieve social justice goals” (Wang, 2018, p. 480). In other words, through collaboration and leveraging relationships with others, these leaders become agents of change for their schools, attaining the change needed to support marginalized groups.

Although aspects of social justice leadership are found in research, it is also important to highlight that social justice work is different depending on the context. DeMatthews (2015) reported that “leadership for social justice differs across schools because of the various individual, social, political, and organizational variables that impact schools and communities” (p. 140). Perhaps, aspects of social justice leadership, can be the guiding light and not a means to an end (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018). Social justice instead could be used as a framework for a collaborative process where school leadership, students, and the community work together to reach school specific goals.

Following the trail of social justice is equity and the foundational attributes that undergird culturally responsive leadership. Given the purpose of this action research study was to examine culturally responsive leadership practices to support the diverse needs of students, it is important to examine equity and its relationship to the culturally responsive leadership framework as envisioned by Khalifa et al. (2016).

### **Equity**

Amid the current educational climate, a growing awareness of diversity and the academic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an urgency to aim for equity in education. Leaders are not expected to solve all societal problem; however, “they can address key factors in schools that perpetuate inequities (Gooden et al., 2023, p. 3). Leaders must be aware and understand the many sources of inequity that their students experience related to economic, social, cultural, and institutional factors that influence their education (Ainscow, 2020). Ensuring that students receive equitable educational experiences must be the aim of school systems and its leaders (Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021). Although there is not a unique

model of what an equitable and inclusive school looks like, these school environments are inclusive, supportive, and welcoming of all stakeholders (Ainscow, 2020).

McGee and Banks (1995) defined equity pedagogy as “teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate a just, humane, and democratic society” (p. 152). To look at how equity in education is defined, Ankomah (2020) drew from social justice education to make a case for equity, diversity, and social justice in educational programs. Ankomah (2020) called this a moral imperative given increased diversity in the K-12 classrooms. Educational equity is one where the scope of:

privilege and oppression (e.g., race, ethnicity, sociologic status, gender, sexual orientation, religion) are not predictive of or correlated with educational outcomes, broadly defined, in any significant way, and where all learners are able to participate fully in quality learning experiences. (Poekert et al., 2020, pp. 541-542)

To attain equity, teachers and other school personnel must recognize inequities in all forms, including but not limited to gender, race, class, ability, and language (Lawyer et al., 2020).

Leaders understand that “equity in education outcomes should mean that all children receive an education that enables them to fully participate in adult society in a way of their choosing” (Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021, p. 452). Leaders who are focused on equity, must first consider their power and privilege to understand more fully their own identity (Khalifa et al., 2016; LoBue, 2022). Equity driven leaders must reflect on their own perceptions and disrupt any known or unknown biases and views toward students and marginalized groups (LoBue, 2022). According to research on CRSL, “equity centered leadership involves closely interrogating the

role educational systems play or have played in creating and maintaining systemic inequity (Gooden et al., 2023, p. 3). This equity work undergirds culturally responsive leadership as it requires leaders to first understand who they are to be able to support others (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Ultimately, leaders whose desire is to provide students with educational experiences that help them become successful future citizens should embrace the pursuit of equity, recognizing previous systems of oppression, and working as agents of change. The use of Professional Learning Communities is a way for leaders to come together and explore issues in their different schools.

### **Professional Learning Communities**

The cultural demands of today's "rapidly changing environment, requires schools to adapt to shifting (and often increasing) demands" (Coenen et al., 2021, p. 1). As school principals and leaders manage these cultural demands and increasing accountability measures, professional development is used to "fill a gap in the leader's knowledge or skill base" (Zepeda et al., 2014, p. 296). Through intentional and continuous learning, leaders can develop a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to build individual and collective capacity (Hairon et al., 2017; Vescio et al., 2008).

Hoaglund et al. (2014) contended that PLCs "provide the structure that must exist within a school in order to become effective" (p. 521). DuFour (2004) defined a PLC as any group of individuals with a common educational interest. PLCs share a commitment to the vision and goals, a collective responsibility of the school, a clear focus on learning, mutual trust, and care (Affandi et al., 2019; DuFour 2004; Lunenburg, 2010; Park & Byun, 2021; Vescio et al., 2008). According to Affandi et al. (2019), "at the deepest core, professional learning communities were

built as a medium for teachers to learn together in order to improve their performance, and in turn increase student achievement” (p. 315). PLCs require a continuous process of inquiry, reflection, and action (Riggins & Knowles, 2020). The structure of a PLC for school leaders to examine and study culturally responsive leadership practices aligned with the ongoing and iterative nature of action research.

Coenen et al. (2021) explained that a PLC is not a “fixed entity or static feature” and instead it is a space that evolves “based on the interaction that occurs within and the accumulation of experiences, ideas, knowledge and reflections” (p. 3). Through interactions, learning takes place in construction, co-construction, and constructive conflict (Coenen et al., 2021). Construction refers to the PLC members growth by sharing of their personal experiences and learning each other’s strengths, weaknesses, and learning needs (Coenen et al., 2021). Co-construction happens when the meaning comes because of the collective work and understandings from the experience of sharing ideas in a group setting (Coenen et al., 2021). Constructive conflict, which could also be referred to as feedback or criticism, results in developing knowledge from critical reflection and debate (Coenen et al., 2021). The members of the PLC work together and share a commitment to collective growth (Lunenburg, 2010).

In addition to providing a space where learning happens as a collective experience through intentional and specific experiences, the PLC helps overcome the isolation that happens in education (Hoaglund et al., 2014; Park & Byun, 2021). Principals have the responsibility to build the capacity of others in schools and play a key role in the development of PLCs as they bring people together to develop a mission, a vision, value statements, and goals (Lunenburg, 2010).

As instructional leaders in the building, principals, assistant principals, and coaches must also engage in PLCs to model the importance of continuous growth to those they support. As the instructional leadership team, their commitment and engagement to growth enhances the success of a PLC. As DuFour (2007) explained:

the rise or fall of the professional learning community concept in any school will depend not on the merits of the concept itself, but on the most important element in the improvement of any school – the collective capacity, commitment, and persistence of the educators within it. (p. 7)

Instructional leaders must go through this process of learning to understand firsthand how to guide teachers, especially since many principals work in isolation and do not receive many professional learning opportunities (Baker & Bloom, 2017).

Strand and Emstad (2020) conducted a study across six different counties examining a Principal Professional Learning Community (PPLC). The participating principals were part of a project called HeadsUP and were provided with different methods and theories during transnational seminars. Through this study, Strand and Emstad (2020) found that by participating in a PPLC, principals enhanced their leadership skills, gained awareness and security of their own leadership skills, gained new knowledge of the organization and implementation of PLCs, and gained appreciation of PLCs.

Psencik and Brown (2018) looked at many districts and local PLCs. Their findings assert that principals who invest and engage in professional learning, can best lead their students and staff. Principals who engage in PLCs grow to see the value in engaging those who they support in this type of work. Psencik and Brown (2018) explained that “effective principal professional learning is central to the nature and effectiveness of teacher learning” (p 53). The engagement in

this work for principals is key to supporting their school communities. Psencik and Brown (2018) reported that “when principals participate in a learning community and value the shared learning, they experience the power of this work for their teachers. When principals learn, teachers learn. And when teachers learn and improve their instruction, students benefit” (p. 53).

### **Chapter Summary**

Culturally responsiveness started as a response to meet the needs of different ethnic groups in groups. The theory of culturally relevant pedagogy was proposed to address the diversity in student needs as well as teacher preparation (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2021).

Culturally responsive teaching gets to the heart of how students learn and embeds their culture, experiences, and perspective in their everyday learning experience (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Teachers who seek to be culturally responsive understand the factual and relevant aspects of their students’ cultures and connect those concepts to content (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015; Rhodes, 2017).

Culturally responsive leadership encompasses the components of culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching and focuses on the behaviors and dispositions of leaders. Leaders who are culturally responsive care for others, foster relationships, model cultural responsiveness, and foster cultural responsiveness in others (Khalifa, 2018; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). These leaders use their influence to impact the school and the school community (Johnson, 2014; Khalifa, 2018). The Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (CRSL) proposes four practices school leadership should follow: critical self-reflection, development of culturally responsive teachers, promoting a culturally responsive environment, and engage the community (Khalifa, 2018).

Empathy, social justice, and equity serve as drivers for school leaders who work to address discrimination and oppression of marginalized groups (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Sarid, 2021a). Leaders who are driven by empathy, social justice, and equity recognize inequities, confront the status quo, understand the perspective of others, and promote environments that are welcoming and supportive of all (Clark et al., 2019; Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021; Sarid, 2021b). These leaders understand their context and the make leadership moves to build relationships and promote change (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Sarid 2021a; Wang, 2018).

As leaders engage in this work, the use of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) has been highlighted as an effective way to engage in the growth and implementation of new learning in schools (DuFour, 2007; Zepeda, 2014; Zepeda et al., 2004). PLCs are an effective framework for schools to have success, allowing participants with a common goal to experience collective growth (Zepeda, 2017). PLCs serve to remove the isolation that often comes with education and helps leaders to model the importance of continuous growth (DuFour 2007; Hoaglund et al., 2014; Park & Byun, 2021).

Chapter 3 describes the action research methodology, the methods of data collection, and data analysis. In this chapter, the details and context of the research site and the interventions of the study are described.

## CHAPTER 3

### ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As the diversity in schools continues to grow, educational leaders need to become more responsive in addressing these changes (Lopez, 2015). According to Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012), “The increase diversity in schools calls for new approaches to educational leadership in which leaders exhibit culturally responsive organizational practices, behaviors, and competencies” (p. 177). Cultural responsiveness aims to address the disparities still faced over 60 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Gay (2010, 2018) offered culturally responsive teaching to meet the needs of underachievement of minority students.

Gay (2018) explained that culturally responsive teaching is validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory. Since leaders are responsible to create opportunities to develop the capacity of teachers, they also must be culturally responsive to make this work attainable and sustainable (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). Additionally, principals can ensure an inclusive culture in schools (Khalifa, 2013).

The purpose of this action research study was to examine how the principals of three highly diverse urban elementary schools led their administrative team members to adapt Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices. To address the purpose of this action research, the following questions guided the study:

1. What actions do principals take to develop schoolwide culturally responsive leadership practices to support diverse student populations and teachers?

2. What are the positive leadership opportunities in implementing culturally responsive practices to encourage the success of diverse communities within urban elementary schools?
3. What leadership challenges arise in the development of a more culturally responsive leadership team and school?

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research Design**

The three principals in the study have an interest in the area of cultural responsiveness, and they have engaged in some learning around this work. Leading three schools with a large number of minority students, they understood the importance of using their students' culture to support their learning. Given the purpose of the study was to help principals adapt Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices, they were asked to participate in the study.

Qualitative research allows for understanding of the context and environment in which the study takes place from the perspective of those participating in the study (Bloomberg, 2023). According to Bloomberg (2023), qualitative research “is concerned with how the complexities of the social and cultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood within a particular context and at a particular point in time” (p. 74). The purpose of this action research study was to examine how the principals of three highly diverse urban elementary schools led their administrative team members to adapt Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices. These principals needed to increase their understanding of themselves and their context. For the principals, knowing themselves and knowing their context were key factors of the study since qualitative researchers seek to understand how people make sense of their world and their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The work of cultural responsiveness for the purposes of this study required the three elementary school principals to be reflective and intentional in their analysis of themselves as they learned and implemented culturally responsive practices with their leadership teams. Qualitative research “enables in-depth analysis of social, interpersonal, and cultural contexts of education” (Glanz, 2014, p. 52). The work in cultural responsiveness is one that was directly aligned to these three areas. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), “qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (p. 23). As participants engaged in their professional learning community, they worked together to understand themselves, each other, and effective ways to support the cultural context of their school. Since the participants were engaged in this work together to improve their local school practices, action research was appropriate.

### **Overview of Action Research Methods**

Action research is conducted by practitioners in education to improve practices in the educational setting (Glanz, 2014). Since the goal of this work was to build capacity resulting in better school practices, action research was the appropriate method. Action research is done by those who wish to improve their practice through a co-creation of knowledge (Corey, 1954; Coghlan, 2019). In education, there is an ongoing search to find solutions to the many inequities schools face each day. This search for solutions has resulted in different approaches by educators.

This action research study sought to use research-based strategies of cultural responsiveness to address marginalized cultural groups. Research shows that, culturally relevant teaching strategies are an effective way to diminish the achievement gaps among diverse groups

(Banks, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, although the research shows that culturally relevant strategies work, each school context is different. The use of action research allows those who are part of the work to improve their practices by engaging in this work (Corey, 1954; Coghlan, 2019).

Action research empowers participants through collaboration and participation (Masters, 1995). In Action research, a social matter is chosen as its subject matter; cyclical planning, acting, observing, and reflecting takes place; and the inclusion of those responsible for the practice are part of the work, as well as others affected by it (Masters, 1995). Through action research, the administrative team worked together to study cultural responsiveness in the context of the school. They developed a focus for the work, engaged in research to build their capacity, implemented practices, and understood the effectiveness of those practices for their school.

Glanz (2014) provided five guiding steps of action research: reflect, select a focus, collect data, analyze and interpret data, and take action. During the reflection stage, the literature and best practices for innovative ways to improve schools are examined. Specific research questions are chosen during the focus selection step by knowing what you want to investigate, developing some questions, establishing a plan. For data collection, evidence is gathered and then it is analyzed and interpreted. Finally, the decision is made to continue, to disband, or to modify the plan. Glanz (2014) explained that action research is cyclical and ongoing. When looking at the role of the educational leader and the need to be continually involved in assessing instruction and seeking ways to improve their school, action research serves as an appropriate tool to accomplish these efforts (Glanz, 2014).

Figure 3.1 shows a representation of the cycle the researcher and action research design team engaged in, as well as an illustration of action research. The purpose of this cycle is to

ensure that analysis and reflection after implementation occurs so that the action taken proves to be beneficial for the school context.

**Figure 3.1**

*Action Research Model*



*Note.* Adapted from the work of Glanz (2014).

### **Action Research Design**

Action research has been described as a cyclical and participatory process (Drummond & Themessl-Huber, 2007; Karagiorgi et al., 2017). The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) worked through the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) cycle to reflect, analyze, learn, and implement culturally responsive leadership practices. This continual cycle of planning the work, doing the work, checking on the work, and reflecting on the work was imperative for these principals as they worked with their respective leadership teams since the ARDT and the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) were one and the same.

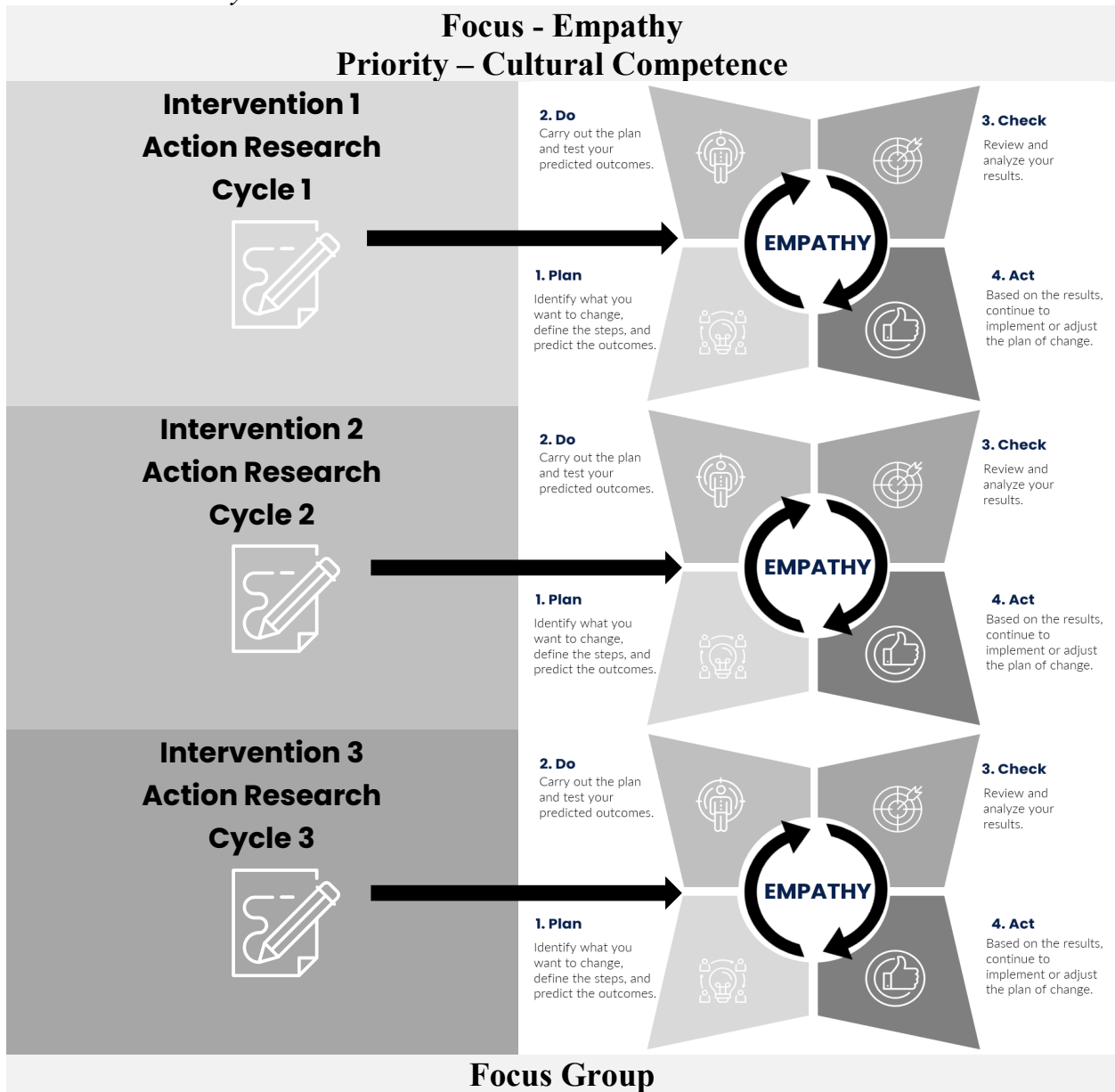
#### *The Spiraling and Iterative Nature of Action Research*

Action research in its fundamental themes is about empowering those engaged in it, collaboration through the work, acquisition of knowledge, and social change (Coghlan, 2019;

Masters 1995). To achieve this, the researcher and participants engaged in a spiral of action research cycles (Coghlan, 2019; Karagiorgi et al., 2017; Glanz, 2014; Masters, 1995). Figure 3.2 shows the spiral of activities that the ARDT and ARIT engaged in as they conducted the action research.

**Figure 3.2**

*Action Research Cycles*



*Note.* Adapted from the Plan-Do-Check-Act Deming Cycle (1986).

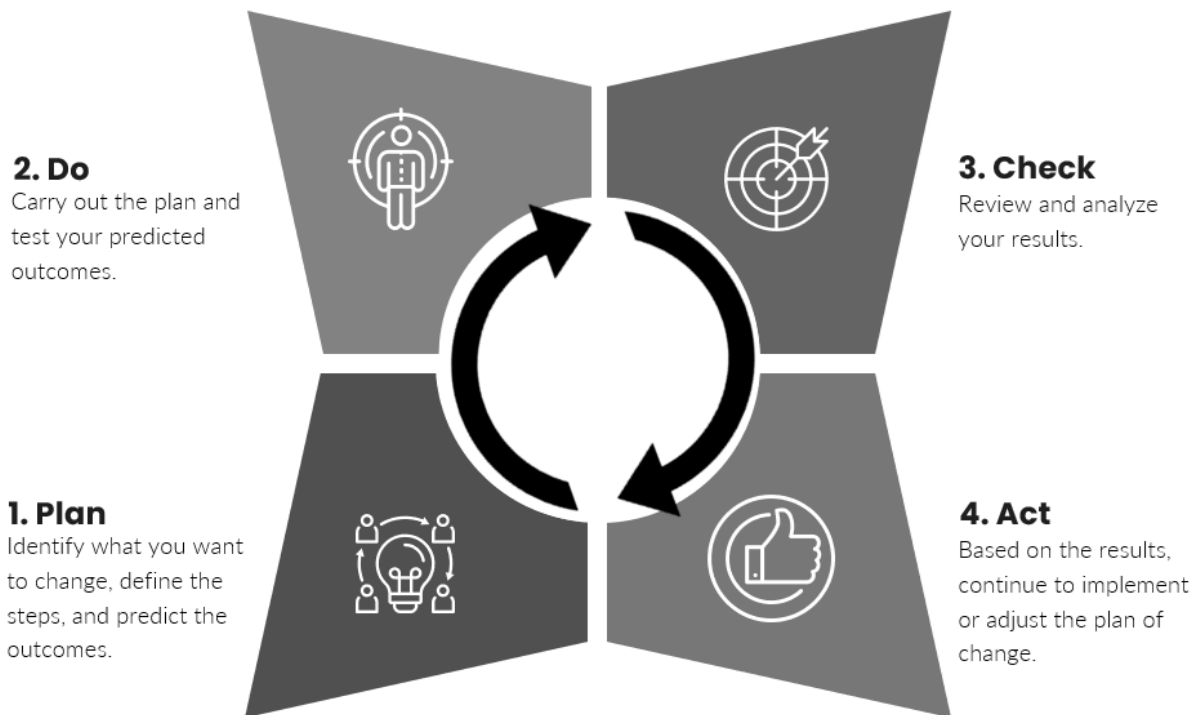
The Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) cycle allowed for the researcher and participants to engage in individual and collective reflection, implementation of new learning, and reflection about the effectiveness of interpretation. Since there was ongoing reflection on the work, the researcher and participants were able to adjust and engage in new learning as needed.

### *Logic Model*

This study followed the cyclical PDCA cycle. The use of this cyclical process made allowances for the leadership team to be reflective in their own practices, build their collective capacity, decide on an implementation plan, and analyze the effectiveness of those interventions. Figure 3.3 explains the full model used for the implementation of culturally responsive strategies and practices.

**Figure 3.3**

### *Logic Model for the Study*



*Note.* Adapted from the Plan-Do-Check-Act Deming Cycle (1986).

### *Theory of Change*

This study examined the implementation of culturally responsive strategies by three elementary school principals. The study sought to understand how principals can successfully implement new learning on cultural responsiveness with the administrators they support. Through this work and the use of the logic model selected, the researcher and participants were continually refining their behaviors and practices by engaging in self-reflection.

The continuous improvement model, PDCA framework, originally developed by Deming was used. The framework is a four-step model to implement change (Walton, 1986). The framework states that the “Plan” recognizes an opportunity to plan for a change, the “Do” carries out an implementation, preferably in small scale, the “Check” reviews data and analyzes the results to identify success, and the “Act” is the action taken based upon the results found (Walton, 1986). If the Plan works, then the cycle is maintained, and a new aspect (intervention) may be incorporated. If the aspect does not show positive results, improvements are made, and a new cycle is started (Walton, 1986). The PDCA is a four-step model for carrying out change. The cycle is never ending and is repeated to manage continuous improvement (Glanz, 2014; Walton, 1986).

### *The Case*

This study took place at three elementary schools in Metro County Public School (MCPS). The research focused on the principals so they could explore ways to support their administrative teams in enacting more culturally relevant practices within the context of their schools. This focus was premised on the fact that principal needed to be able to model and share knowledge about culturally relevant practices if they expected their administrative teams to do so as well. Currently, MCPS is a district going through a significant amount of change after over 20

years of consistent leadership, as well as a significant increase in minority students in the last few years. One of the county's priorities is in empathy, with a focus on culturally responsive practices. All three elementary schools are highly diverse with a majority of students of color.

The focus of the work was based on the learning and implementation of culturally responsive practices of the principals and their administrative teams. Although diverse, the principals and administrative teams vary in the number of years serving in their schools and overall experience in their roles. Additionally, the differences in experience with the teachers in the school makes the need for this work important. Even more prevalent, is the difference of the students' lived experiences to those who teach them. The need for culturally responsive practices in leading teachers is important more than ever, especially if teachers are to make meaningful connections with students.

#### *The Action Research Design Team and Action Research Implementation Team*

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) in the study is comprised of the researcher, the three principals, a retired principal mentor, and the director of leadership development. The Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) included the researcher and three elementary school principals. The three principals in the ARIT team were also part of the ARDT because they did both the learning and implementation of the strategies when working with the administrative team members they supported in their respective buildings. Since this work was to support culturally responsive practices from a leadership perspective, the leaders in the school served as the designers and implementers of the work. The overall purpose was to build the capacity of these principals as they worked with administrators in the school from a leadership perspective.

The primary researcher served to provide content and provide professional learning to principals for the implementation of the work centering on Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices. She had an immense interest in supporting the learning and development of this work to help the principals in the study effectively implement critical self-reflection on leadership behaviors, developing their cultural responsiveness, promoting culturally responsive environments, and engaging their diverse stakeholders with their administrative teams.

Mrs. Amari Moon is the principal of Ivy School of Excellence with 4 years of experience in the role and over 20 years in education. Mrs. Valentine Disla, principal of The American School, is a 4-year principal with 24 years of educational experience. Mrs. Akiema Nicole, principal of The Destined for Greatness Academy, has been at her school for less than 3 years, and has 23 years of education experience. Two of the principals are Black and one is Hispanic; however, members of their administrative teams represent multiple races, genders, and backgrounds.

Mr. Jacob Law, Principal Mentor, and Mrs. Karen Rose, Director of Leadership, both served in the role of supporting principals. Both educators have vast experience supporting administrators and navigating diverse school populations. They also have experience supporting teachers across generations and with different needs. Table 3.1 lists the members of the Action Research Design Team.

**Table 3.1**

*Action Research Design Team*

<b>Team Member</b>	<b>Primary Role</b>	<b>Action Research Role</b>
Primary Researcher	Director	Leads and conducts all research with the team and analyses data. Brings 10 years of leadership experience and 6 years of principal experience.

<b>Team Member</b>	<b>Primary Role</b>	<b>Action Research Role</b>
Mr. Jacob Law	Principal Mentor	Brings 30 previous years of leadership and teaching experience as well as the perspective of mentoring principals.
Mrs. Karen Rose	Director	Being new in the role, provides a connection with the perspective of leadership and the local school with over 20 years of experience and 8 as a principal.
Mrs. Amari Moon	Principal - Ivy School of Excellence	Brings 25 years of experience in education. She has 4 years at her current school and 16 years of leadership experience.
Mrs. Valentina Disla	Principal – The American School	Has 24 years in education with 6 of those years as an assistant principal and 4 years as a principal in her current school.
Mrs. Akiema Nicole	Principal – The Destined for Greatness Academy	Brings 23 years in education, 7 of which were as an assistant principal and 3 years at her current school.

Table 3.2 lists the members of the Action Research Implementation Team.

**Table 3.2**

*Action Research Implementation Team*

<b>Team Member</b>	<b>Primary Role</b>	<b>Action Research Role</b>
Primary Researcher	Director	Leads and conducts all research with the team and analyses data. Brings 10 years of leadership experience and 6 years of principal experience.
Mrs. Amari Moon	Principal - Ivy School of Excellence	Brings 25 years of experience in education. She has 4 years at her current school and 16 years of leadership experience.
Mrs. Valentina Disla	Principal – The American School	Has 24 years in education with 6 of those years as an assistant principal and 4 years as a principal in her current school.
Mrs. Akiema Nicole	Principal – The Destined for Greatness Academy	Brings 23 years in education, 7 of which were as an assistant principal and 3 years at her current school.

*Research Plan and Timeline*

Members of the ARDT were asked via letter in June 2023 to participate in the study for the 2023-2024 school year. The ARDT engaged in different cycles to implement culturally responsive practices. As they worked together, the ARDT reflected on the implementation, prior to starting another cycle. Glanz (2014) defined this as reflective practices since leaders analyze the effectiveness of programs to make improvements or adjustments as needed. Table 3.3 outlines the timeline of the study.

**Table 3.3**

*Action Research Timeline*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action Research Activity</b>
July 2023	Team meeting to explain study by the primary researcher, as well as initial consent. Finalized timeline and meeting dates.
July 2023	Initial principal interview. Initial team meeting to engage in collective and individual work. Selection of articles and books to study.
August 2023	Team meeting to discuss summer learning and implementation of Cycle 1 intervention. Cycle 1 implemented during pre-planning and observed by primary researcher. Followed by principal focus group.
September 2023	Team meeting to review Cycle 1 data and finalize Cycle 2 implementation; intervention implemented; principal focus group.
October 2023	Team meeting to review Cycle 2 data and finalize Cycle 3 implementation; intervention implemented; principal focus group.
November 2023	Final team meeting; final individual interviews of principals; administrator focus group.

The focus groups took place at the start of the Action Research Design Team meetings to debrief on the results of the implementation of the interventions. These team meetings were instrumental in the implementation and adjustments of the cycles. The reflections of the

principals, as well as those who they supported guided the work. A description of the responsibilities of the Action Research Design Team and Action Research Implementation Team activities are shown on Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4**

*Action Research Design Team and Implementation Team Activities*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action Research Design Team (ARDT) Activities</b>	<b>Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) Activities</b>
July 2023	Recruit participants Gather consent	Gather consent
Cycle I July 2023	1st meeting – 1 hour Select articles and book study book Collect artifacts Researcher’s journal Reflection	1st meeting – 1 hour 1st individual interview – 45 mins/1hour each Collect artifacts Researcher’s journal Reflection
Cycle I August 2023	1st observation of principal professional learning implementation Collect artifacts Researcher’s journal Reflection and data collection	1st intervention – 1 hour 1st principal focus group – 30 minutes Collect artifacts Researcher’s journal Reflection
Cycle II September 2023	2nd meeting – 1 hour 2nd observation of principal professional learning implementation Collect artifacts Researcher’s journal Reflection and data collection	2nd intervention – 1 hour 2nd principal focus group – 30 minutes Collect artifacts Researcher’s journal Reflection
Cycle III October 2023	3rd meeting – 1 hour 3rd observation of principal professional learning implementation Collect artifacts Researcher’s journal Reflection and data collection	3rd intervention – 1 hour 3rd principal focus group – 30 minutes Collect artifacts Researcher’s journal Reflection
November 2023	Final team Meeting – 1 hour Collect artifacts Researcher’s journal Reflection Follow-up activities as needed	Final individual interviews of principals – 1 hour Administrators focus group – 1 hour Collect artifacts Researcher’s journal Reflection

## Context of the Study

To understand the impact of the work and its importance, it is necessary to know more about the context of the school system and the schools that were part of the study. Each school context is important since each tells a different story.

### *County Profile*

Metro County Public School (MCPS) is an urban school district in the metro Atlanta area. After over 20 years with the same superintendent and the same school board, MCPS has had a 4-member change on the board and a new superintendent. Along with its changes in leadership, MCPS has also had significant racial changes in the last 20 years becoming a minority-majority school district. In 1962, there were approximately 11,000 students in the county and only 300 of these students were black. At that time, Black elementary students attended an all-black elementary school. In contrast, the county currently has close to 180,000 students and about 82% are students of color.

The new board and superintendent have been working to respond to the demands of the current political climate. A new plan, the *Proposal*, has been implemented with a five-year rollout. Each school within the district must have a plan to enhance equity within its schools. The pursuit of cultural responsiveness and a diverse work force are priorities highlighted in the plan within the equity goal. As shown in Table 3.5, the *Proposal* highlights four areas as priorities: empathy, equity, effectiveness, and excellence. Each strategic priority includes three goals, with objectives and performance indicators.

**Table 3.5***The Proposal's Strategic Priorities and Goals*

<b>Strategic Priorities</b>		<b>Goals</b>	
Empathy	Culture competence	Staff and student wellbeing	Educator diversity
Equity	Multi-tiered system of supports	Opportunity and access	Equitable resource allocation
Effectiveness	Results-Based Evaluation System	Talent management	Educational return on investment
Excellence	Preferred education destination	Post-secondary and workforce readiness	World-class communication and engagement

*Note.* Strategic priorities retrieved from the MCPS *Proposal* document.

*School Profiles*

The study took place in three elementary schools in Metro County Public Schools (MCPS). These schools were led by principals who have begun to engage in culturally responsive work and who desired to continue to build their capacity and that of their administrative team to meet the diverse needs of their schools. All three elementary schools were Title I schools and were majority Black or Hispanic in their student populations. Table 3.6 presents the demographics of each school.

**Table 3.6***School Information and Demographics*

<b>School Name</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Program Enrollment</b>	<b>Student Ethnicity</b>
<b>Ivy School of Excellence</b>	723	English Learners – 23% Special Education – 12% Gifted – 8% Free-Reduced Lunch – 76%	Black – 54% Hispanic – 31% Asian/Pacific Islander – 6% White – 5% Multiracial – 5%

<b>School Name</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Program Enrollment</b>	<b>Student Ethnicity</b>
<b>The American School</b>	984	English Learners – 59% Special Education – 12% Gifted – 5% Free-Reduced Lunch – 82%	Black – 20% Hispanic – 69% Asian/Pacific Islander – 6% White – 3% Multiracial – 2%
<b>Destined for Greatness Academy</b>	751	English Learners – 33% Special Education – 14% Gifted – 11% Free-Reduced Lunch – 84%	Black – 48% Hispanic – 39% Asian/Pacific Islander – 3% White – 7% Multiracial – 3%

### *COVID-19 Effect*

The schools in the study were engaged in intentional interventions and targeting of academic gaps prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Student subgroup gaps were closing, and progress was moving in the right direction. The trajectory came to a halt when in March 2020, MCPS had to close all schools in response to the Covid-19 crisis. The closing of schools required the development of a new instructional format where teachers had to transition to digital learning. Although the county provided devices for students, the school closure highlighted the many needs of the student population.

Although schools opened the following year, MCPS gave parents the option between digital and in-person school. The option between in person and digital schooling resulted in the use of the concurrent model for instruction where teachers taught in person and digital students simultaneously. Grade level attendance ranged from 60 to 80% in person; however, the many physical and emotional demands of the pandemic for both teachers and students resulted in a widening of learning gaps. Teachers and students were absent frequently, lost family members, and experienced illness. After moving forward with a steady direction toward instructional

improvement for a few years, the COVID pandemic required the focus to shift to ensure people were taken care of and as healthy as possible.

### **Data Sources**

Ivy School of Excellence, The American School, and The Destined for Greatness Academy serve diverse student populations. The leadership, faculty, and staff of the schools needed to be prepared to support the diverse needs of students. The principals of the school needed to understand how to support their administrators, by first learning about themselves, and then learning about those who they supported. The ultimately goal remains steadfast to connect and support teachers, who can ultimately influence students. Connecting with teachers in a real way, and creating a culture of respect and mutual acceptance, helps teachers feel connected. Hargreaves (2019) made a case that when teachers feel a connection with their teams, they engage in life, not just work, and this matters for their commitment to the school.

The future instructional goals, mission, and plan of action will continue to be a collective effort between all members of the school. As stated by Erichsen and Reynolds (2000), “If teachers feel respected and heard by the administration and continue to embrace their school's broader educational mission, they may be better able to sustain their morale when working in a struggling school or district” (p. 3). Sustaining morale is especially important in schools like Ivy School of Excellence, The American School, and The Destined for Greatness Academy where retaining teachings is extremely important to support the diverse needs of students.

### *Participants*

To develop a culturally responsive school, the leadership of the school must first engage in this work. Vilorio (2019) explained that leadership practices serve as a catalyst of schoolwide culturally responsive practices. Therefore, these practices must first start with the leadership

team. The principals chosen for the study were selected with this thought process in mind. They engaged in this work to build their capacity and to establish a sense of urgency on the need for Cultural Responsiveness for the remainder of their administrators and their faculty and staff.

Table 3.7 gives information about the principal and administrators in each school.

**Table 3.7**

*Action Research Implementation Team Participants*

<b>Team Member</b>	<b>Principal</b>	<b>Number of Administrators</b>
Ivy School of Excellence	Mrs. Amari Moon Black Female	1 Black male 2 Black females
The American School	Mrs. Valentina Disla Hispanic Female	1 Black female 1 Hispanic female 1 Black male 1 White female
The Destined for Greatness Academy	Mrs. Akiema Nicole Black Female	3 Black females

*Selection Criteria*

Metro County Public Schools is divided into 19 geographical attendance zones. Each of the zones represents a different cluster. The district has 80 elementary schools that feed into the different middle schools. Given the number of elementary schools, the following criteria was used to narrow down the schools. Ivy School of Excellence is in one of the clusters with the highest percentage of Black students. The American School represents the cluster with the highest percentage of Hispanic students. The Destined for Greatness Academy also has many minority students, as well as a high percentage of students in poverty. The principals of these schools have shown interest in culturally responsive work.

## **Data Collection Methods**

Data collection in action research is gathered through engagement with others in the different cycles (Coghlan, 2019). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) defined data as “nothing more than ordinary bits and pieces of information found in the environment” (p. 105). In qualitative research, these bits and pieces of information are gathered through words.

In this action research, several data collections methods were used, including:

- 1) Interviews of the participants in the study at the beginning, middle, and the end of the study.
- 2) Focus groups of the principals after each action research cycle to gather information on the implementation of the cycle, and the tools needed for the next cycle.
- 3) Observations of meetings conducted by principals with their administrative teams.
- 4) Research journal notes gathered during action research design and action research implementation team meetings.
- 5) Artifacts created to facilitate and support the learning of principals and their delivery of information.

All the data gathered during the study allowed for themes to emerge as the researcher used a coding system to analyze the data and to identify these themes.

### *Interviews*

Interviews have been used for centuries to gather information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Bloomberg (2023) explained that interviews are often used as primary method of data collection because they can “potentially result in rich and thick descriptions” (p. 280). Interviews can be conducted person to person and are separated into three types: Structured or standardized, semi-structured, and unstructured (Bloomberg, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Structured or standardized interview protocols have questions that are determined beforehand and do not allow for the perspectives of participants (Bloomberg, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Semistructured interview protocols are more open-ended and serve as a guide for the researcher to explore a topic more broadly (Bloomberg, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Semistructured interview protocols enable the researcher to make comparisons more easily across the participants included in a study. Unstructured interview protocols have very few predetermined questions, and the researcher develops questions based on the responses of the participants (Bloomberg, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Unstructured interviews are more open-ended.

This action research study used a semi-structured interview protocol because it allowed the researcher to explore and to respond to situations at hand as participants explored culturally responsive practices. Table 3.8 illustrates a sampling of semi-structured interview questions.

**Table 3.8**

*Sampling of Semi-Structured Interview Questions*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Semi-Structured Interview Questions</b>
RQ1 What actions do principals take to develop schoolwide culturally responsive leadership practices to support diverse student populations and teachers?	What are examples of culturally responsive leadership practices that you have implemented in your school as a result of the work in the action research?  What are the next steps you would like to implement in your school to continue the work of cultural responsiveness?
RQ2 What are the positive leadership opportunities in implementing culturally responsive practices to encourage the success of diverse communities within urban elementary schools?	How did implementing culturally responsive practices help support the diverse communities in your school?  What opportunities arose as you implemented culturally responsive leadership practices with your team?
RQ3 What leadership challenges arise in the development of a more	What lessons did you learn about the work of cultural responsiveness with your administrative team?

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Semi-Structured Interview Questions</b>
culturally responsive leadership team and school?	What challenges arose as you implemented culturally responsive leadership practices with your team?

The semi-structured interview approach allowed the participants to feel comfortable as they explored their experiences and shared their perceptions. As stated by Glanz (2014), “qualitative interviewers want to encourage a relaxed atmosphere wherein ideas can be exchanged fiercely and easily” (p. 146).

### *Focus Groups*

Focus groups are group interviews or facilitated group discussions where participants come together to share ideas related to the action research (Bloomberg, 2023; Glanz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To allow for the explorations of unanticipated issues, the principals in the study engaged in focus groups, as well as administrative team members who engaged in the work with their principals participated in a focus group at the end of the study. The use of focus groups allowed participants to be relaxed and in their natural atmosphere (Bloomberg, 2023). A total of four focus groups took place during the study. Two principal focus groups were conducted after each intervention and two assistant principals focus groups were conducted at the end of the study. Table 3.9 provides a timeline of the focus groups that took place during the study, as well as a sample of the questions asked of principals and assistant principals.

**Table 3.9**

### *Focus Group Timeline and Sample Questions*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Sample Questions</b>
September 2023	Principals	What key takeaways came as a result of the team’s work on self-identity?  How did the administrative team respond to the work on culturally responsive leadership

Date	Participants	Sample Questions
October 2023	Principals	<p>practices?</p> <p>What opportunities resulted from the work on culturally responsive leadership practices, particularly this focus on bias?</p> <p>What did you glean from your administrative team’s response to the work on culturally responsive leadership practices, particularly this focus on bias?</p>
November 2023	Assistant Principals	<p>What do you believe is the role of the assistant principal in the implementation of culturally responsive practices in a school?</p> <p>What are your thoughts regarding the principal engaging in this work with the leadership team to begin the work around cultural responsiveness in their school?</p>

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*Observation Notes*

Observations are useful to describe complex processes and interactions from a firsthand perspective (Bloomberg, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The primary researcher used observation notes to gather information about the context of the study as principals engaged their administrative teams in professional learning. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explained that observations take place in the location where the phenomenon happens where the investigator can gather a different perspective, observing things that have become routine. The primary researcher observed at each school as the principals applied the interventions during administrative team meetings. A total of nine observations were done, three at each school, in August, September, and October 2023. Table 3.10 provides a sample of the observation notes.

**Table 3.10***Sample Observation Timeline and Highlights*

<b>Observation</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Observation Highlight</b>
The American School: Principal and 4 Assistant Principals present	August 2023	The principal introduced the Culture Tree, provided time for Assistant Principals to read definitions and explore Culture Tree, and provided her own experience to connect to the work.
Destined for Greatness: Principal and 3 Assistant Principals present	September 2023	Principal asked questions to gain insight: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “When do we get to a place where we confront or just remain in acceptance?”</li> <li>- “How do we deal with those biases?”</li> <li>- “How does our belief display or fall on people?”</li> </ul>
Ivy School: Principal and 4 Assistant Principals	October 2023	Principal provided example of a situation with a teacher. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “This reminds me of the conversation we had with that teacher that asked a question about hair.”</li> </ul>

*Researcher’s Journal*

The primary researcher used a journal because it provided a systematic and organized way of documenting data, observations, and reflections during the research process. Through the journal, the researcher recorded thoughts, ideas, and experiences of the participants as they worked to support the administrative team members in their schools as they explored culturally responsive practices. The use of the research journal allowed for reflection, examination of biases and assumptions, and to identify areas for improvement in the research methods. The use of the journal also served as evidence of the research that had been done, which is important for maintaining transparency and credibility in the research process (Bloomberg, 2023).

## *Artifacts*

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explained that the documents used during the action research as “material culture.” As the action research design team and the action research implementation team worked together to develop tools and materials for the action research, these became part of the artifacts. These documents evolved as the study unfolded and were adapted as needed. Appendix D provides the facilitator guides for each of the sessions the principals led with their teams. Although Appendix D gives full details of the artifacts used, the study also included videos, questionnaires, and handouts to ensure the outcomes of the professional learning were accomplished.

Participants examined their own beliefs using the Culture Tree questions to gain insight into their own perspective on each level. Additionally, participants engaged in collaborative conversations and individual reflections to measure their understanding of cultural responsiveness. Each administrative team also developed an action plan for the next steps they would take to continue the work at their schools.

## **Interventions**

The interventions in action research allow the researcher the ability to investigate the effect of practices, programs, or procedures within a group (Glanz, 2014). In other words, after observing and identifying an issue, a researcher decides on actions or interventions to find solutions for the problem, evaluate the interventions implemented, and to decide whether to continue or change the interventions. The interventions in the study developed through the Professional Learning Community (PLC) established by the action research design team. As research indicates, PLC that share a common vision, values, focus, and do so through

collaboration are effective in meeting those goals (Coenen et al., 2021; DuFour 2004; Lunenburg, 2010; Zepeda 2019).

Since the purpose of this study was to examine the adaptation of Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices by principals and their administrative teams, the interventions of the study are directly aligned to the Culturally Responsive Leadership Framework (CRLF) as explained by Khalifa (2018). CRLF highlights four practices for leaders to follow: critically self-reflects on leadership behaviors, develops culturally responsive teachers, promotes culturally responsive/inclusive school environment, and engages students and parents’ community contexts (Khalifa, 2016). Table 3.8 explains the activities in each of the practices in the framework.

**Table 3.11**

*Interventions for Study*

<b>Action Research Cycle</b>	<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Monitoring Strategy</b>
1	Defining and exploring culture, exploring the culture tree, and applying culture to an experience	Observation, individual, and whole group reflection
2	Uncovering your own biases and assumptions, understanding implicit, explicit bias	Observation, individual, and whole group reflection
3	Understanding microaggressions and development of an action plan to support stakeholders’ cultures	Observation, individual and whole group reflection, group action plan

The interventions for the student were selected to align with the Culturally Responsive Leadership Framework (CRLF) as explained by Khalifa (2018). Although the framework goes deeper, the cycles focused deeply on self-reflection. After discussions and reflection from the ARDT, the consensus was that leaders needed to spend time knowing themselves, before starting the work with their teachers and students.

The data gathered during the study was analyzed using methods appropriate for qualitative study. The use of these methods to disseminate the data resulted in themes and patterns to describe the findings of each cycle and the overall study.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

Action research is an ongoing process that works in a cyclical format Glanz (2014). In his work, Glanz (2014), gives steps to engage in action research. These steps are to reflect, to select a focus, to collect data, to analyze and interpret data, and to act. Specific research questions have been chosen to gain a fuller understanding of what to investigate during the study. For data collection, evidence was gathered analyzed, and interpreted. Using the gathered data, decisions were made whether to continue, disband, or modify the plan.

#### *Coding*

The four essential elements of data collection suggested by Bloomberg will be followed. These elements are data reduction, data categories, reorganizing data, and data interpretation and presentation (Bloomberg, 2023). This ongoing process of data collection will be used, as well as coding system to identify themes in the data. To answer the research questions, themes, patterns, trends, and key words will be identified based on the responses from participants during their interviews, focus groups, and observations.

In the study, coding was first noted by color focusing on the data from interviews and focus groups. The researcher color coded the quotes focusing on similar themes and as a way to organize the information. Table 3.12 provides a sampling of codes, the meaning of the codes, and data examples.

**Table 3.12***Coding Table Sample*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Data Sample</b>
CST	Considerations for School Implementation	"I believe, having a group of interest first, and then pushing that out to smaller focus groups because you have to be ready for this work."
PI	Principal Impact on Culturally Responsive Work	"I thought it was important because it showed vulnerability from a leader. Sometimes the work has to be shown by the leadership."
RP	Role of the Principal	"Help the individuals be reflective in their thinking and how they responded or how they acted in certain situations."
CCRT	Challenges in Cultural Responsiveness Learning/Implementation	"I ran the gamut from teammates who were all in and understood that it was necessary to teammates who understood that the work could be challenging, to teammates who were just not ready at all."

*Thematic Analysis*

The thematic analysis will help with the interpretation of the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis helps identify, analyze, organize, and describe data. In order to establish trustworthiness in the findings, researchers must follow a process when identifying themes. As show on Table 3.9, Nowell et al. (2016) presented seven phases of thematic analysis.

**Table 3.13***Thematic Analysis Phases*

<b>Phases of Thematic Analysis</b>	<b>Means to Establish Trustworthiness</b>
Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prolong engagement with data</li> <li>• Triangulate different data collection modes</li> <li>• Document theoretical and reflective thoughts</li> <li>• Document thoughts about potential codes/themes</li> <li>• Store raw data in well-organized archives</li> </ul>

<b>Phases of Thematic Analysis</b>	<b>Means to Establish Trustworthiness</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep records of all data field notes, transcripts, and reflexive journals</li> </ul>
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer debriefing</li> <li>• Researcher triangulation</li> <li>• Reflexive journaling</li> <li>• Use of a coding framework</li> <li>• Audit trail of code generation</li> <li>• Documentation of all team meeting and peer debriefings</li> </ul>
Phase 3: Searching for themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher triangulation</li> <li>• Diagramming to make sense of theme connections</li> <li>• Keep detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes</li> </ul>
Phase 4: Reviewing themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher triangulation</li> <li>• Themes and subthemes vetted by team members</li> <li>• Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data</li> </ul>
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher triangulation</li> <li>• Peer debriefing</li> <li>• Team consensus on themes</li> <li>• Documentation of team meetings regarding themes</li> <li>• Documentation of theme naming</li> </ul>
Phase 6: Producing the report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member checking</li> <li>• Peer debriefing</li> <li>• Describing process of coding and analysis in sufficient details</li> <li>• Thick descriptions of context</li> <li>• Description of the audit trail</li> <li>• Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study</li> </ul>

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*Note.* Adapted from Nowell et al. (2016).

Following these phases ensures that although the primary researcher is part of the research, a process to code and analyze the data was established and followed.

### *Onboarding the Action Research Design Team and the Action Research Implementation Team*

To familiarize the participants of the study, a meeting was held with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) and the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) to discuss the study. Participants were provided with an agenda that had information about the study (see Appendix B). During that meeting, we discussed the title, purpose, and research questions of the study. Since the ARIT is comprised of principals, we discussed how the study would benefit them as participants and its alignment to the requirements of the study. We also discussed the guiding theories of the study and the role of each member of the team and the researcher. After the members of the ARDT and ARIT felt comfortable and understood the study, they were provided with consent forms, and as a team we finalized the meeting timeline.

### **Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability**

In action research, reliability, validity, and generalizability are important concepts that help to ensure that the research is rigorous, trustworthy. Trustworthiness is a key elementary that research should aim to establish confidence in the findings (Bloomberg, 2023). Through reliability researchers can have consistent and stable research findings over time and across different observers (Glanz, 2014). In other words, ensuring that if the research were conducted again by different researchers, they obtain the same results. To ensure reliability, consistent and standardized methods were used. Methods such as clear definitions of terms, consistent data collection procedures, and reliable measures or instruments were used.

Validity referred to the accuracy and truthfulness of the research findings (Glanz, 2014). The findings were based on sound evidence that reflected what they claim to measure. The ARDT and ARIT reviewed the data collected to ensure the results were accurate. Triangulation

methods of collecting data from multiple sources were also used. In the study, interview, focus groups, observations, and journal notes were used.

Generalizability referred to the extent to which the research findings could be applied to other contexts. To increase generalizability, factors considered were the characteristics of the population being studied, the research methods used, and the context in which the research was conducted. Overall, ensuring reliability, validity, and generalizability in action research is important for ensuring that the research is trustworthy, rigorous, and useful for informing practice and policy.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

I grew up in the Dominican Republic and lived there for the first 14 years of my life. As a student in the Dominican Republic, I thrived. I was a straight A student and had very wonderful teachers, who really invested a lot of time in my education. I felt very successful and confident on who I was as a learner and what I wanted to do with my life. Success in school was never a concern for me; it was something I had just experienced all my life. After moving to the United States my experiences as a student were completely different. My status changed from being a thriving student to becoming an English Language Learner (ELL). I began to see the lack of cultural understanding and the assumptions made about me as a student based on my knowledge of English and not who I was as a person.

When I graduated high school and started college, I struggled. I was not proficient in my written English abilities and was not a proficient speaker. After finishing my undergrad, I knew education was the route I wanted to pursue in graduate school. I can honestly say that Education is one of my true passions in life. I love being part of an entity that helps shape young minds. As a teacher, I took each day as an opportunity to enrich the lives of students and help them go

beyond where they thought they could. As a leader, I have had the pleasure of influencing others with that passion in a bigger scale. In my career, I have had the opportunity to see how important it is to know each child and teacher for who they are. It is impossible to fit everyone into a single mold, which is both a blessing and a challenge.

In my experiences as a student, immigrant, and educator, I have been in the midst cultural responsiveness most of my life. As I continued to grow in my leadership, I became passionate about Culturally Responsive Leadership because it acknowledges the whole person. It is a way for educators to take the time to support students and for leaders to support teachers. In both my role as an educator and as a person, I have seen how knowing someone helps in the support of who they are as people.

### **Limitations**

Action research is a valuable approach to research that can generate practical insights and improvements in real-world settings. However, like any research method, there were limitations that arose. This action research was conducted in a specific setting and with a group of leaders, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other settings or populations. Additionally, action research relies on the perspectives and experiences of the participants, which can introduce subjectivity and bias into the research process. It can be difficult to separate the perspectives of the participants from the perspectives of the researchers, which can affect the objectivity of the research. To reduce this, participants that engaged in the action research did so on a voluntary basis. The researcher ensured that participants were fully informed about the research and that their privacy and confidentiality were protected.

While these limitations should be taken into consideration, the researchers took steps to address them in the research design and interpretation of the findings. Although the context was

limited to the schools in the research, the findings add to the body of work on how leaders can engage in culturally responsive practices with their teams.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provides details about the methods and procedures used to carry out this action research study. This chapter provides details related to the steps included in the research design, details about data collection methods, the analysis of data, ethical considerations, and a review of the study's inherent limitations. In addition, detail about how participants were selected was provided as well as a description of the administrative teams at each of the schools the principals led.

In sum, this chapter offers details of the research methods. It provides readers with details of how the research was conducted. Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the findings, and a description of how culturally responsive leadership practices were implemented in the three elementary schools by the three principals in the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

As leaders continue to seek ways to respond to their diverse school populations, they need to find new approaches to support those they lead (Lopez, 2015; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices are needed for leaders who are determined to provide environments that support the diverse populations they support (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). Those who want to be culturally responsive need to understand their own cultural identity, keeping in mind the differences with others (Genao, 2021).

The purpose of this action research study was to examine how the principals of three highly diverse urban elementary schools led their administrative team members to adapt Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices. To address the purpose of this action research, the following questions guided the study:

1. What actions do principals take to develop schoolwide culturally responsive leadership practices to support diverse student populations and teachers?
2. What are the positive leadership opportunities in implementing culturally responsive practices to encourage the success of diverse communities within urban elementary schools?
3. What leadership challenges arise in the development of a more culturally responsive leadership team and school?

In this chapter, the context of the case is explored. Included in the context are descriptions of the schools, their academic needs, and the diverse student populations they serve. Findings from each of the action research cycles are presented.

### **Context**

The action research study took place in the large, urban school district Metro County Public School (MCPS, a pseudonym). MCPS is on its second year of new leadership after over 20 years of the same leadership in both the superintendent’s office and its board. The new board was highly focused on equity and on meeting the needs of the diverse population of the district. As a response, they hired a new superintendent they felt would address these needs. The new superintendent focused on improving schools, with special attention given to the instructional gaps, educator diversity, equity, and lower academic achievement of students of color.

A new plan with Key Performance Indicators (KPI) was developed. For the purposes of this study, the plan is called *The Proposal*. This plan outlined the focus of action into four categories, As shown in Table 4.1, the *Proposal* highlights four areas as priorities: empathy, equity, effectiveness, and excellence. Each strategic priority includes three goals, with objectives and performance indicators.

**Table 4.1**

*The Proposal’s Strategic Priorities and Goals*

<b>Strategic Priorities</b>		<b>Goals</b>	
Empathy	Cultural competence	Staff and student wellbeing	Educator diversity
Equity	Multi-tiered system of supports	Opportunity and access	Equitable resource allocation
Effectiveness	Results-Based Evaluation System	Talent management	Educational return on investment

Strategic Priorities		Goals	
Excellence	Preferred education destination	Post-secondary and workforce readiness	World-class communication and engagement

*Note.* Strategic priorities retrieved from the MCPS Proposal document.

Additionally, MCPS is part of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) Learning 2025 initiative as a demonstration district seeking to become more student-centered, equity-focused, and future-driven.

Each school in MCPS is required to develop a Local School Plan of Improvement (LSPI) including goals from each of the priorities. Each school’s LSPI must implement at least five goals as outline in *The Proposal*. Schools are expected to address these KPIs within five years. The work in this action research aligns with the goal of empathy, specifically, cultural competence. To achieve the goal of empathy, each school was required to incorporate cultural competence strategies into professional learning to create and respond to the knowledge at the local context that supports diversity.

This study took place at 3 elementary schools in MCPS which is divided into 19 geographical attendance zones. The district has 80 elementary schools that feed into the different middle schools. The study covers three different attendance zones. Ivy School of Excellence is in an area with the highest percentage of Black students. The American School represents an area with the highest percentage of Hispanic students. The Destined for Greatness Academy also has many minority students. All three schools are Title I schools with a diverse teacher population.

At MCPS, most of the leadership and certified teaching staff is White. According to the Educator Pipeline Dashboard (2022), the MCPS student demographic show that although 80% of students were a minority group, 56% of leaders were White, and 64% teachers were White.

**Table 4.2***Student, Leader, and Teacher Demographics at MCPS*

<b>Student Demographics</b>		<b>Leader Demographics</b>		<b>Teacher Demographic</b>	
<b>Asian</b>	11.32%	<b>Asian</b>	1.14%	<b>Asian</b>	4.12%
<b>Black</b>	32.65%	<b>Black</b>	35.77%	<b>Black</b>	23.56%
<b>Hispanic</b>	33.42%	<b>Hispanic</b>	5.15%	<b>Hispanic</b>	5.99%
<b>Multiracial</b>	4.20%	<b>Multiracial</b>	1.86%	<b>Multiracial</b>	1.91%
<b>White</b>	18.24%	<b>White</b>	56.06%	<b>White</b>	64.20%

Additionally, MCPS is a highly diverse district with a vast range of socioeconomic and cultural diversity.

*Ivy School of Excellence*

Principal Amari Moon leads Ivy School of Excellence. She has 25 years of experience in education, 16 of which have been in school leadership. She is currently in her fifth year as the principal of Ivy School of Excellence. The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) shows that the school’s mobility rate is 15.70%. The largest school groups are Black and Hispanic, however, there is rich diversity among these groups as well. The school is a Title I school that provides a dual language program for students. The students reading at or above third grade reading Lexile at the midpoint of the year was 56.06% and 55.56% for first graders. Table 4.3 provides information about Ivy School of Excellence.

**Table 4.3***Demographics of Ivy School of Excellence*

<b>School Name</b>	<b>Principal</b>	<b>Number of Administrators</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Program Enrollment</b>	<b>Student Ethnicity</b>
Ivy School of Excellence	Mrs. Amari Moon Black Female	1 Black male 2 Black females	723	English Learners –23% Special Education –12% Gifted – 8% Free-Reduced Lunch – 76%	Black – 54% Hispanic – 31% Asian/Pacific Islander – 6% White – 5% Multiracial – 5%

Principal Moon was interested in the work of cultural responsiveness for her school because of her desire to support the whole child and all the students in the school. As principal, she was aware of the diversity in her school and wanted to support the diversity of her students and teachers. Additionally, the student's screener survey referencing the area of culture and belonging was low for two years in a row. Principal Moon explained that helping teachers understand their students would help them relate to them better and explain that she understood that leaders needed to engage in that work since they support students and teachers. Regarding her own understanding and exposure of cultural responsiveness, Principal Moon explained she has engaged in some of this work, especially since the district did a big push towards cultural responsiveness to ensure everyone belongs. Principal Moon stated that her overall desire was to ensure teachers had the support they needed to understand their role in the support of the diversity in their school.

### *The American School*

The American School is led by principal Mrs. Valentina Disla who has 24 years in education with 6 of those years as an assistant principal and 5 years as a principal in her current school. Mrs. Disla has four administrators that support her school. The school has 984 students with 69% being Hispanic. Although majority Hispanic, the school's population is very diverse representing many countries and a range of cultural experiences. As a Title I school, there is also an array of socioeconomic status in the school. According to data provided by the GOSA, the American School has a mobility rate of 24.70%. Academically, students at or above third grade reading Lexile midpoint was 29.56% and 40.48% for fifth graders. Table 4.4 provides information about The American School.

**Table 4.4***Demographics of The American School*

<b>School Name</b>	<b>Principal</b>	<b>Number of Administrators</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Program Enrollment</b>	<b>Student Ethnicity</b>
The American School	Mrs. Valentina Disla Hispanic Female	1 Black female 1 Hispanic female 1 Black male 1 White female	984	English Learners – 59% Special Education – 12% Gifted – 5% Free-Reduced Lunch – 82%	Black – 20% Hispanic – 69% Asian/Pacific Islander – 6% White – 3% Multiracial – 2%

The need to support the students at her school is what drove Principal Disla’s desire to engage in the work of cultural responsiveness. In addition to supporting the students academically, Principal Disla wanted to support them socially, and explained that her student population comes to school with a variety of needs that should be met in order fully learn. Principal Disla wants this work to help address these students needs by building the capacity of her staff to be culturally responsive. Principal Disla has begun her own work toward cultural responsiveness by participating in professional learning around culture and resources that support that work. Currently, the school is supporting students’ needs on social and emotional learning and restorative practices.

*The Destined for Greatest Academy*

The Destined for Greatest Academy is led by principal Akiema Nicole. She has 23 years in education, 7 of which were as an assistant principal, and 3 years as principal at her current school. The school is a Title I school with a student population of 48% Black and 39% Hispanic. The school’s mobility rate is 22.30%. Academically, 43.33% of its students were at or above third grade reading Lexile at the midpoint of the year and 49.19% of its fifth graders. Table 4.5 provides information about The Destined for Greatest Academy.

**Table 4.5**

*Demographics of Destined for Greatness Academy*

<b>School Name</b>	<b>Principal</b>	<b>Number of Administrators</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Program Enrollment</b>	<b>Student Ethnicity</b>
Destined for Greatness Academy	Mrs. Akiema Nicole Black Female	3 Black females	751	English Learners – 33% Special Education – 14% Gifted – 11% Free-Reduced Lunch – 84%	Black – 48% Hispanic – 39% Asian/Pacific Islander – 3% White – 7% Multiracial – 3%

Principal Nicole’s attraction to the work of cultural responsiveness is a personal one. When Principal Nicole was a student, she experienced the reality of being at a school where she was the minority. In that environment, she was forced to assimilate to the status quo. This experience drove Principal Nicole’s desire to provide an environment where the adults have the skillset to help students know they belong. Principal Nicole also wanted an administrative team that was prepared to model these expectations for teachers. Regarding her own learning and experiences with cultural responsiveness, Principal Nicole has engaged as a learner and self-reflection. She recognizes that the work at her school is currently at the surface level.

The action research focused on how these three principals worked to develop a Professional Learning Community (PLC) with their administrative teams to explore learning around the area of cultural responsiveness. The principals and administrative teams vary in the number of years serving in their schools and overall experience in their roles. Additionally, the differences in experience with the teachers in the school made the need for this work important. The principals in the study wanted to address the needs of their school by engaging in culturally responsive practices with their administrative teams.

## **Action Research Pre-Cycle**

The first step to prepare for the study was to gather participants and gain consent for the work that would take place in the action research. The principals selected represented schools in three different attendance zones with a range of cultural diversity. The three principals in the study had engaged in professional learning around the area of cultural responsiveness and were interested in expanding the work to their administrative teams.

### *Action Research Design Team (ARDT) and Action Research Intervention Team (ARIT)*

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) was made up of the researcher as well as one of the county's Leadership Development Directors and a retired principal currently serving as a Leader Coach. Additionally, the three principals that would implement the interventions at their schools were also part of the ARDT. Before the entire ARDT met, the researcher met with the principals that would participate in the study to explain how this study would require them to be part of both teams. The principals were informed that their perspective and expertise was a key to the work occurring in their schools. The rationale of their involvement in both aspects of the study was accepted by the principals.

During the first meeting, the members of the ARDT were provided with detailed information about the study. They were provided with details of the purpose of the study, the research questions, and how the study would benefit their current work. The guiding theories and the instructional framework were also discussed. The members of the team were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the action research (see Appendix B). Once all the information was provided and questions answered, the members of the team signed UGA IRB consent documents. All meeting dates were discussed and scheduled.

After conducting the initial meeting, an individual semi-structured interview of the three principals in the study took place. Each principal answered questions about their knowledge and interest in cultural responsiveness. They provided insight into the current practices at each of their schools and their leader actions to develop a professional learning community (PLC) among their leadership team. Each principal was asked of any foreseeable challenges or opportunities they thought would arise because of the culturally responsive work they would engage in with their teams (see Appendix C).

All three principals explained their knowledge that cultural responsiveness calls us to understand the cultures in their schools. Regarding their implementation of cultural responsiveness practices, the principals provided examples like translation or communication in the home language, understanding religious groups' needs, promoting inclusive cultural events, and providing books that represent the student populations. The three principals did not foresee any challenges because of this work outside of discovering unknown bias.

### **Action Research Cycle 1**

Action research cycle 1 started in August of 2023 after the first ARDT meeting. During the meeting, the ARDT discussed the interventions of the first cycle. A discussion regarding the best way to start to approach the work around cultural responsiveness guided the conversation. The researcher reviewed the purpose of the study and the framework with the team. The team also reviewed the cyclical approach to action research—Plan, Do, Check, and Act Cycle. Next, the researcher explained that the ARDT was responsible to develop interventions, review the results from the interventions, adjust the interventions as needed, and review data results. During the meeting, the researcher provided a description of the course the principals would engage their

assistant principals in and the outcomes. Table 4.6 shows the full description and course objectives.

**Table 4.6**

*Culturally Responsive School Leadership Course Description and Outcomes*

<b>Description</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
<p>The purpose of this course is to provide opportunities for leaders to examine culturally responsive leadership practices and mindsets. They will engage and understand who they are and how that affects their leadership practices. Leaders will learn culturally responsive tools and how to use these tools to support their diverse teaching and student populations.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Examine one’s own beliefs, assumptions, and actions to take on a responsive approach.</li> <li>2. Engage in collaborative practices to measure individual and collective cultural responsiveness.</li> <li>3. Develop an actionable plan for measurable next steps toward cultural responsiveness.</li> </ol>

The ARDT decided that the focus of the first action research cycle should be around the area of self-reflection, especially with a discussion around culture. The principals in the team asked for discussions and applications to the work to be embedded more explicitly in the session.

The ARDT decided to engage the local schools’ administrative teams in a discussion around culture where the administrative teams at the local level would start by defining culture. The team would also engage in learning around the culture tree where culture is broken down into three levels surface, shallow, and deep. Table 4.7 shows the levels and definitions of the culture tree.

**Table 4.7**

*The Three Levels of the Cultural Tree*

<b>Level</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<p><b>Surface Culture - The Leaves</b></p>	<p>This level of culture has a low emotional impact on trust so that changes do not create great anxiety in a person or group. It comprises observable</p>

Level	Definition
	and concrete elements of culture such as food, dress, music, games, literature, stories, and holidays.
<b>Shallow Culture - The Trunk</b>	This level is made up of the unspoken rules around every day social interactions and norms, such as courtesy, respect, attitudes toward elders, nature of friendship, concepts of time, personal space between people, nonverbal communication, rules about eye contact, appropriate touching, ways of handling emotion, and gestures/animations. It is at this level of culture that we put into action our deep cultural values. Nonverbal communication that builds rapport and trust between people comes out of shallow culture. This level has a strong emotional impact on trust. At the same time, at this level, we interpret certain behaviors as disrespectful, offensive, or hostile. Social violation of norms at this level can cause mistrust, distress, or social friction.
<b>Deep Culture - The Roots</b>	This level involves implicit knowledge and unconscious assumptions that govern our worldview, such as notions of fairness, the definition of family, spirituality, competition, cooperation, decision-making, and connection with nature. Deep culture also governs how we learn new information. Elements at this level have an intense emotional impact on trust. Mental models at this level help the brain interpret environmental threats or rewards. Challenges to cultural values at this level produce culture shock or trigger the brain's fight, flight, freeze, or appease response.

*Note: Adapted from Zaretta Hammond's Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain (2015).*

To explore the culture tree, questions were developed to allow participants in the session to explore their own culture. The ARDT finalized these questions to guide the activity and participants were tasked to take time to answer the questions about their own lives. Table 4.8 details the questions provided during the session.

**Table 4.8**

*Cultural Tree Questions by Level*

Level	Guiding Questions
<b>Surface Culture Guiding Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did your family identify ethnically or racially?</li> <li>• Where did you live - urban, suburban, or rural community?</li> </ul>

Level	Guiding Questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the story of your family in America? Has your family been here for generations, a few decades, or just a few years?</li> <li>• Were you the first in your family to attend college? If not, who did - your parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents?</li> <li>• What are some of your family traditions - holidays, foods, or rituals?</li> <li>• How would you describe your family's economic status - middle class, upper class, working class, or low income? What does that mean in terms of quality of life?</li> <li>• What family folklore or stories did you regularly hear growing up?</li> <li>• Who were the heroes celebrated in your family and/or community? Why? Who were the antiheroes? Who were the "bad guys"?</li> </ul>
<b>Shallow Culture Guiding Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What metaphors, analogies, parables, or "witty" sayings do you remember hearing from parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles?</li> <li>• What did your parents, neighbors, and other authority figures tell you respect looked like?</li> <li>• What physical, social, or cultural attributes were praised in your community? Which ones were you taught to avoid?</li> <li>• What got you shunned or shamed in your family?</li> <li>• What family stories are regularly told or referenced? What message do they communicate about core values?</li> <li>• How were you trained to respond to different emotional displays - crying, anger, and happiness?</li> <li>• How were you expected to interact with authority figures? Was the authority of teachers and other elders assumed or did it have to be earned?</li> <li>• Were you allowed to question, or talk back to, adults? Was it okay to call adults by their first name?</li> </ul>
<b>Deep Culture Guiding Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What shapes your worldview about leadership and teaching?</li> <li>• What messages did you get about intelligence? Did you grow up believing it was set at birth? Did you believe it was genetic?</li> <li>• Did you believe some groups were smarter than others?</li> <li>• What messages did you get about why other racial or ethnic groups succeeded or not?</li> <li>• What did you learn about "doing school"? Was it a place where your culture was comfortable?</li> <li>• What did you learn about the role of a person in their community?</li> </ul>

Finally, the administrative team watched a video to see an example of how preconceived notions affect how we approach situations and then brainstorm ways to apply their learning in their school contexts.

### *Observation Notes of Cycle 1 Interventions*

The first intervention in cycle one of the action research was a deeper dive into culture. Participants had an opportunity to dig into their individual and collective definition of culture. The principals in the ARIT presented the professional learning to their administrative teams. Prior to the start of the first intervention, the researcher read information about the study and gathered consent from the assistant principals. They were invited to be part of a focus group at the end of the interventions to gain their perspectives. Each principal took the content developed during the ARDT and facilitated the learning activities with their respective teams. During the principal facilitation, the researcher observed the administrative team and took notes at each school. Each session took about an hour and half at each school.

### *Ivy School of Excellence*

The Ivy School of Excellence administrative team consists of Principal Amari Moon and three members of the administrative team, three women and one male. The team identifies as Black and one member as a Black woman from the Caribbean. To start the session, Principal Moon provided her context for engaging the team in the work of cultural responsiveness by stating that their staff and student survey data which assessed the area had been low for two years in a row, and she wanted her team ready to support teachers. Principal Moon approached the learning as participating as a facilitator and provided her thinking about the activities.

The team engaged in a rich discussion to define culture and took about 20 minutes to define it. For this team, culture was defined as “norms within a belief system or way of life that

can transfer through generations, workplace, community, that can be guided by religion, socio-economic status, and experiences.” After the team came to an agreement about their definition, Principal Moon led a discussion around the culture tree image. The administrative team began to open and discuss their thought process about culture. Each member brought their personal examples. Principal Moon was vulnerable to share her own surface, shallow, and deep levels of culture and how through experiences in her life these circumstances have changed.

The discussion about the culture tree provided engaging dialog among the team as they explored how even within the Black community, there were different subcultures and how demographics and upbringing influence thought processes. The member of the administrative team who was from the Caribbean spoke about her previous perceptions and misconceptions about Black American children. The work also led to discussions about the importance to go beyond the surface level of culture to relate to others. The administrative team explained they gained clarity about culture and how this work pushed them to think of themselves in a deeper level, and how this work would be great to support their staff members.

### *The American School*

Principal Disla decided to present the learning with her administrative team as a facilitator. This administrative team consists of the Principal Disla as well as four assistant principals. The administrators consist of two Hispanic females, a Black male, a White female, and a Black female from the West Indies. To begin the professional learning, Principal Disla provided context for the administrative team and explained her interest in ensuring that as a team they work hard to support their diverse school community.

Defining culture was a thought-provoking process for the administrative team and after productive struggle, where they worked through their thinking to attain an answer, they came to

a consensus to develop a common definition of culture. Principal Disla really pushed her team's thinking and guided them to think about themselves and the school in their definitions. The principal encouraged them to "think about our school, what factors affect our students" and to "think about the experiences they have had and their students." The team at The American School defined culture as "universal norms and beliefs that bring people together and establishes the values in which we govern the way we operate accounting for economic statuses, age, race, religion, geography, gender, experiences, etc."

When it was time to explore the culture tree, the team engaged in personal conversations related to each level of the tree (see Table 4.7). One member said, "I don't want to be offensive, but as a West Indian I have set culture, but as a Black American, I do not." Another member stated, "I grew up in a suburban White culture, so it was easy, but there wasn't much there. So, my thoughts about culture were focused on religion." One of the Hispanic women spoke about colorism and how she would be considered White, but when she hears music that has African beats to it, she wants to dance and relates to it. The discussions also highlighted similarities among the team that went beyond race and had to do with their upbringing. This helped them see how vast the topic is as they work with students from different cultures.

As a collective team, they felt comfortable sharing about themselves. They discussed the importance of understanding upbringing when trying to understand teachers and students. They spoke about the importance of being mindful about the levels of culture and how that can help them when communicating with others.

#### *The Destined for Greatness Academy*

Principal Nicole at The Destined for Greatest Academy engaged her team as a participating facilitator of the professional learning. The principal started by giving context for

the urgency of this work explaining her desire to support the diverse needs of their teachers and students. Principal Nicole explained that there are 37 different languages spoken at the school and her desire is to ensure all students felt a sense of belonging. This administrative team is made up of four Black women.

After asking all her administrators to consider their own definition of culture, Principal Nicole called them as a team to develop their own definition. For the Destined for Greatness Academy, culture was defined as “a collective set of values, beliefs, behaviors, and experiences that is ever evolving in our lives.”

Principal Nicole had the team look at the culture tree image and definitions and point out what they noticed and then share their answers to the questions related to the culture tree. One of the assistant principals began sharing about her life and her family followed by Principal Nicole who did so as well. One of the assistant principals was uncomfortable sharing about her family and stated she was not comfortable sharing that aspect of her life. Principal Nicole shared more about her personal story and navigated the discomfort by bringing the topics back to the work and encouraged the administrator to provide context outside of family.

Although discomfort was present and evident, as a team they pushed their thinking and navigated the content. Principal Nicole tasked the assistant principals to think about the ways they have remained in the surface level and how as leaders they can push their decisions to accommodate for the deepest levels of culture. One of the administrators even said they need to make sure they hold each other accountable to ask questions.

Principal Nicole encouraged the team to remember they are taking the time to learn more about themselves and to remember that these realizations also affect the teachers with whom they work. As a team, they reflected and came to conclusions such as “awareness opens your eyes and

that leads to conversations” and how “nobody has time to do it, but nobody has time not to do it.” Another assistant principal expressed how the “ever evolving” part of their collective definition of culture was highlighted for her. The team openly wondered and wanted to know how to transfer this knowledge to the rest of the school.

### *Principal Focus Group for Cycle 1*

After the conclusion of the first cycle, the principals participated in a focus group to gather insight of the work they engaged in from their perspective. The three principals were asked about their thoughts on the implementation of the first strategy with their administrative team. Additionally, they were asked the following questions:

- What key takeaways came as a result of the team’s work on self-identity and culture?
- How did the administrative team respond to the work on culturally responsive leadership practices, particularly this focus on culture?
- What do you believe should be your next leadership actions to continue to develop a professional learning community (PLC) focused on culturally responsive leadership practices?
- What transfer of knowledge did you observe from your administrative team as they engaged in this work?

When discussing the implementation of the first strategy, each principal had a different perspective. Principal Moon shared that the work helped the team learn more about each other and what they had in common. Principal Disla expressed that the work opened the opportunity for conversations and how to use those when leading. Principal Nicole talked about how the work highlighted a blind spot she had thinking that everyone in her team would be a willing participant in the work.

Key takeaways that came because of the team's work on self-identity and culture the principals talked about how the work exposed that populations are not defined by one marker. They made connections as a team and were able to better understand each other. They saw the ability that sometimes the responses can be different because identity is a big umbrella. Principal Nicole explained that going through the levels of culture gave her team a better understanding of each other as well as understanding some of the perspectives when they may have different ideas or things to talk about during meetings.

When it came to culture, Principal Moon elaborated:

culture led to the conversation of identity, and it brought about a sense of how huge the umbrella of both of those are because it can be very layered, and we're not always thinking about how it can be layered.

Furthermore, Principal Moon stated that the work "helped us understand each other a little better".

As a collective, the principals solidified the importance of engaging in the work and how looking at culture helped them see the importance of taking the time to introduce the work with their staff. Principal Nicole summarized:

They are leaders, but they are people, too. And the same way that we look at teachers, and you kind of assess where they are, what they'll be able to do. As the principal it is our job to empower and get them there. They may not happen at the same rate or in the time period that you want them to get there, but you have to give people time, especially when you're talking about something this sensitive.

All three principals talked about having a balance of push and pull with the team and staff and how to navigate the readiness of their administrative team.

Regarding next steps to address with their teams, the principals expressed the importance to not make assumptions and understanding that the work needs to be handled with care. They understood the importance to keep the conversation going so that the importance of cultural responsiveness is not forgotten and not solely an activity they did together. They also expressed that they had follow up one-on-one conversations with their teams after the session and to gather their feedback.

### **Action Research Cycle 2**

The second cycle begun with the ARDT meeting in September 2023. The team met and discussed the interventions in Cycle 1. After completing the first intervention, the team brainstormed ideas around the content that would guide the second intervention. As a collective and reviewing the thoughts around the first principal focus group, it was decided to continue to build the capacity of the team. Digging into implicit and explicit bias was decided as the focus of the second intervention.

#### *Observation Notes of Cycle 2 Interventions*

The second intervention started with participants watching a video on overcoming biases. This video was done as a pre-activity to spark their thinking around the topic. At the start of the session, principals reviewed the description of the course and desired outcomes (see Table 4.6) as well as their previous team created definition of culture. Participants engaged in activities to confront their implicit and explicit bias. The first activity had the participants look at an essay titled “Willing to be Disturbed” where they thought about what stood out to them. Participants then looked at a picture advertising pool safety to discuss their thinking of the picture. After the group discussion, participants were tasked with post-work in which they engaged with an

assessment to tackle their biases in an area of their choosing. Table 4.9 details each activity further.

**Table 4.9**

*Culturally Responsive School Leadership Session 2 Activities*

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Directions for Participants</b>
Activity I: Willing to be disturbed spoken essay	After listening to or reading the excerpt "Willing to Be Disturbed," complete the quick write below based on your reflection on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A quote, word, or phrase that resonated with you.</li> <li>• When do you feel most uncomfortable professionally?</li> <li>• What in the article made you feel better about being "disturbed" or uncomfortable?</li> <li>• What is your overall takeaway message from this article?</li> </ul>
Activity II - What will happen video ...	Quick Write Prompt - What do you think will happen next? What were your impressions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Black man in a car...</li> <li>• The group of Black teenagers in the convenience store....</li> <li>• The Black woman with several kids...</li> </ul> What brought you to those conclusions? After finishing the video, were your assumptions correct?
Activity III: Red Cross Poster	Write down 5 things you noticed in the poster.

These activities were meant to spark conversations about the ways perceptions and experiences influence what we see. Additionally, principals were tasked to share information about implicit and explicit bias with their administrative teams. The researcher observed each principal as they presented the information to their administrative teams. Including the pre-work and post-work, each session was about an hour and half.

### *Ivy School of Excellence*

Principal Moon started the work by reviewing the definition of the course. The team then engaged in a discussion about their pre-work. The team immediately jumped in to discuss the personal realizations they had while watching the video. One of the assistant principals recognized that she has her own bias regarding Black males' attire. Another assistant principal discussed how watching spoke to him as a man and a father and made him confront the ways he is shutting down his individuality. The other assistant principal talked about the differences between her perception of the video and that of her husband. She wondered if gender affected how each of them saw the video.

After watching the second video and having to make assumptions about what would happen next, the entire administrative team discussed how although they were the same race as everyone on the video, they were making negative assumptions. The team discussed about the way men and women are portrayed. They discussed the ways the content they are exposed to on television and social media affects the perception of what is real. As a team, they highlighted that in many instances the focus is on the idea of diversity, but not message.

### *The American School*

Principal Disla at the American School explained implicit and explicit bias to the team. In the previous session, Principal Disla was more of a facilitator and for this session asked the team if they would be okay with her becoming a participant facilitator and engage with the team more. As with the previous school, the pre-work also sparked conversations around seen or heard experiences. This group talked about how difficult it is for them to confront older generations in their families and even at work.

When watching the second video, they also discussed how their perspective affected how they interpreted or thought about what would happen next. A conversation around this was sparked by Principal Disla's question "can we see how our experiences shape the way we see things?" Principal Disla also highlighted how all these perceptions go back to personal experiences either by them or the other people in the interaction. The administrative team also engaged in discussion around representation when they engaged in the third activity.

#### *The Destined for Greatness Academy*

The administrative team at the Destined for Greatness Academy spent time reflecting on the pre-work video they watched calling them to walk towards their bias. As a team they spoke about culture being more than race and how the call to be culturally responsive means understanding that one must focus on more than one aspect of culture. They spoke about being reflective and highlighting their own biases by willingly getting out of denial.

The engagement in the activities pushed this team to have conversations not only about their individual readiness for this work, but also their entire school. Individually, they spoke about the need to move away from comfort or remaining in the acceptance of how things are. The team discussed the need to look inwardly and reflect on how their beliefs are displayed or land on people. Additionally, they discussed how they need to grow as a team ensuring that other perspectives are seen, heard, valued, or challenged.

Principal Nicole shared an example of her own bias to engage the group and questioned the team by asking, "how do we become aware of our own unconscious bias?" One of the assistant principals explained, "one way is to engage in this work and hold each other accountable to make sure all our students feel they belong." Principal Nicole then asked, "what are some ways we can begin to get away from negative stereotypes?" to which the team replied

that they should continue to build relationships, address situations when they happen, and check themselves daily.

### *Principal Focus Group for Cycle 2*

After the second intervention, a principal focus group was conducted where the principals were asked questions about the implementation and takeaways of the professional learning they engaged in with their administrative teams. The questions that guided the focus group were:

- Tell us about the implementation of the second strategy with your administrative team.
- What key takeaways came as a result of the team's work on implicit and explicit bias?
- What opportunities resulted from the work on culturally responsive leadership practices, particularly this focus on bias?
- What challenges resulted from the work on culturally responsive leadership practices, particularly this focus on bias?
- What did you glean from your administrative team's response to the work on culturally responsive leadership practices, particularly this focus on bias?
- What do you believe should be your next leadership actions to continue to develop a professional learning community (PLC) focused on culturally responsive leadership practices?
- What transfer of knowledge did you observe from your administrative team as they engaged in this work?

After the discussion around bias, Principal Moon shared her surprise when one of her assistant principals shared having biases towards people of the same race as her. This reminded the group how culture goes beyond race and how other factors affect perception and develop biases.

Principal Nicole spoke about one of her assistant principals referring to bias as “common sense”

and how a key takeaway is that “sometimes what you believe to be explicit bias, is not as explicit to everyone.” Principal Disla realized that although her team is very diverse, they did not realize others were not represented in the poster activity.

Principals were asked about the opportunities that resulted from the work on culturally responsive leadership practices focused on bias. Principal Nicole stated, “the biggest one for us is we know that there are implicit as well as explicit biases that we're dealing with every day, but how do we make one another as a team or individuals is more accountable and making sure that there's some more consistency in how we're dealing with things for our own individual growth as leaders?” Principal Disla explained that for her team “the work lies in understanding and recognizing and respecting other cultures, and how they're represented and misrepresented.” All three principals explained that their next challenge would be understanding what to do next to support their administrative teams and their staff.

### **Action Research Cycle 3**

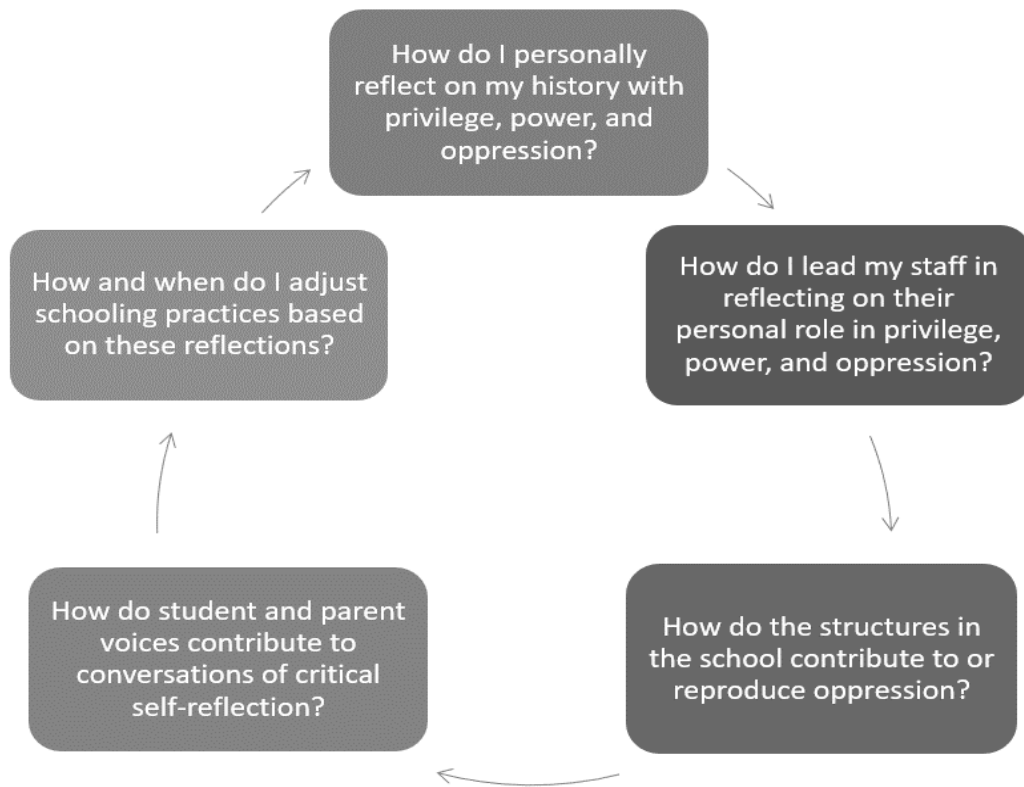
The third and final ARDT meeting took place in October 2023. During the meeting, the ARDT engaged in conversations about the implementation of the second intervention and thoughts around the final intervention. Stemming from the previous principal focus group, all three principals described the need to work on how to support the work with their schools and also understanding how to continue to support their assistant principals. As a result, the team decided to spend more time learning about the Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) Framework, continuing to focus on critical self-reflection as the team navigated the leader actions, teacher actions, and student actions.

The first portion of this session focused on research about cultural responsiveness. Each team listened to teaching by Muhammad Khalifa, who is one of the leading voices and

researchers around this work and the role of leadership. As they listened to the video, each team member was provided with a copy of the Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework and a notetaker to gather their notes on each of the components. Each participant listened to Muhammad Khalifa explain the framework and the Critical Self-Reflection questions. Figure 4.1 shows the Self-Reflection question cycle.

**Figure 4.1**

*Critical Self-Reflection Questions*



*Note.* Adapted from Muhammad Khalifa’s *Culturally Responsive School Leadership* (2018).

*Observation Notes of Cycle 3 Interventions*

The final intervention started with principals providing context for the last session and explained that for the last two sessions, they had focused on the first two outcomes and goals of culturally responsive professional learning. Principals talked about the time examining their own

beliefs, assumptions, and actions and the work collaborating the exploration of individual and collective cultural responsiveness. Culture was defined for each team and each principal explained the reason for the work at their school and their desire to build the capacity of the team to lead this work with our school. Principals explained that for this final cycle they would begin to develop an actionable plan for measurable next steps. Details of each activity are explained in Table 4.2.

**Figure 4.2**

*Culturally Responsive School Leadership Session 3 Activities*

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**Session 3 Activities and Descriptions**

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**Activity I: Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework**

Take a few minutes to read over the handout provided with the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework. We will also have an opportunity to listen to Muhammad Khalifa explain it to us. Take notes as you listen on the table below.

Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors	Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers
Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment	Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts

**Activity II: How Do I Lead Critical Self-Reflection?**

**Locating and Resisting Oppression**

We will now listen to Muhammad Khalifa explain these self-reflection questions to us. Take notes as you listen.

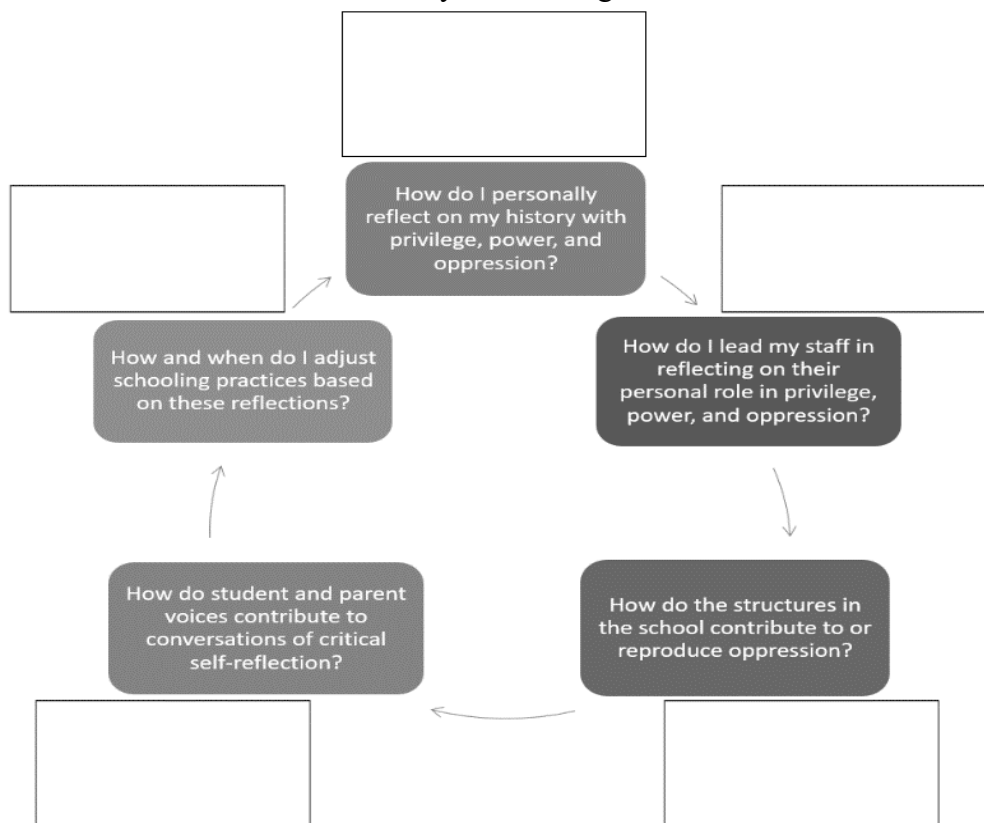
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### Session 3 Activities and Descriptions

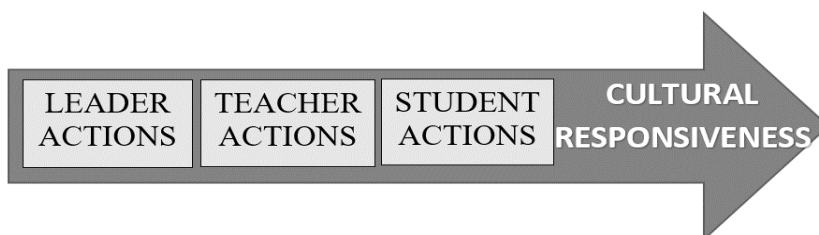
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After reflecting on what you heard, what are your personal responses to these self-reflection questions? Use the blank boxes to annotate your thinking.



#### Activity III. Next Steps

As a team, engage in conversation about what you will do next after learning about Cultural Responsiveness. What are the next LEADER actions, TEACHER actions, and STUDENT actions?



What LEADER actions are needed to support the work of Cultural Responsiveness at our school?

What else do we need to learn in order to increase our capacity?

What do we want TEACHERS to learn or be able to do?

What actions will we observe TEACHERS doing to reach this outcome?

What do we want STUDENTS to learn?

What actions will we observe STUDENTS doing to reach this outcome?

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Each school engaged with the content led by their principal.

### *Ivy School of Excellence*

Principal Moon started by recapping the work previously done. Participants watched the video by Dr. Khalifa and took notes as he explained the Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework. Principal Moon asked, “what are your thoughts on what Dr. Khalifa just shared with us? Did you have any an aha moments or questions?” To this question, one of the assistant principals explained that the video made her pause at the question about how we as leaders have contributed to oppression. The assistant principal recognized that she did not have an answer to that question yet. The team engaged in conversation about other components of the framework and recounted previous conversations with teachers, the use of data to determine inequities, and finding teachers who demonstrate cultural responsiveness already. The team also discussed the possibilities of administering an assessment to determine what teachers know and what they do not know about cultural responsiveness.

After talking about teachers, the team also engaged in conversation about ways to support students. One of the assistant principals explained that although students are seeing themselves more in the curriculum, there are still discrepancies on how they are addressed by teachers. As a team they discussed how they need to understand students “outside of the ABCs and 123.” Furthermore, the team also discussed how some families have trauma that affects the way they engage with schools and how these older generations might not be prepared to deal with all of this trauma or how to approach situations.

### *The American School*

After watching the video on the CRSL framework, Principal Disla asked her administrative team, “what did you hear about being self-reflective in our behaviors?” One of her assistant principals responded, “People have biases and those play out in our leadership

behaviors. That is something that will always be a reflective piece for me because those biases are present.” Principal Disla went back to the handouts and her notes and highlighted the suggestion that this work should be continuous.

After taking some time to think about the self-reflection questions, one of the assistant principals explained how the questions were difficult to tackle because the questions make us consider how we have been the oppressors or that we have privilege. Principal Disla addressed this difficulty with the assistant principal and explicitly asked if he thought this could be difficult to answer because of his privilege. Another assistant principal responded that for her it was about addressing concerns straight on when she sees issues and things that are wrong. Principal Disla further explained that she lives in the box where she is constantly thinking about how “unknowingly, but potentially” she might be oppressing others or being oppressed.

#### *The Destined for Greatness Academy*

Principal Nicole began this session by letting her team know her appreciation for their openness and reiterated how necessary this work was for the team, especially as she navigated some unexpected curve balls. After watching the video, Principal Nicole asked, “how do we become the leaders who are looking for and confronting practices that marginalize?” One of the assistant principals responded, “We have to name them.” The team continued their conversations around ways to ensure they are being intentional to think about ways to grow themselves and support culturally responsive environments.

The self-reflection questions pushed the entire team as they navigated their responses to the questions. The team recognized that they are not thinking about their own privilege consistently or reflect on it as a norm. This team took time to think about their desired leader, teacher, and student actions. The team decided that they want to work to build their own capacity

as an ongoing practice and made a commitment to hold each other accountable to ensure they are doing the right work for students and learn more about the cultures in their buildings. The commitment included challenging the status quo together, while realizing that this work is not a “one size fits all” because everyone is not at the same place of have the same emotional intelligence.

### **Action Research Post-Cycle**

At the conclusion of the interventions, two 30-minute focus groups for the assistant principal who participated in the study were done. One focus group included three assistant principals and the second one included six assistant principals. In total, nine of the ten assistant principals were part of the focus group. One of the assistant principals opted out of the focus group. The questions that guided the focus group were:

- As a result of our work during this action research, how did your definition of cultural responsiveness change or solidified?
- What challenges arose as you engaged in learning about culturally responsive leadership practices with your team?
- What opportunities arose as you engaged in learning about culturally responsive leadership practices with your team?
- How did implementing culturally responsive practices help support the diverse communities in your school?
- What are examples of culturally responsive leadership practices that you have implemented in your school as a result of the work in the action research?
- What are the next steps you would like to implement in your school to continue the work of cultural responsiveness?

- What do you believe is the role of the assistant principal in the implementation of culturally responsive practices in a school?
- What are your thoughts regarding the principal engaging in this work with the leadership team to begin the work around cultural responsiveness in their school?
- As a result of your engagement in this work, what are your key takeaways?

#### *Assistant Principal Focus Group*

The assistant principals in the focus groups expressed their growth as a result of the culturally responsive work they engaged in. The assistant principals made comments such as: “I was slapped in the face with my bias.”, “my perspective is wider and now I can think of other groups.” Additionally, several assistant principals expressed how their definition of culture widened from a view of it solely based on race or on surface level characteristics, to a deeper understanding that our worldview and perceptions determine our culture.

During the focus groups, the assistant principals also discussed how they appreciated this work being led by their principals because it created a connection with the entire team based on a shared openness and vulnerability. The assistant principals also discussed how although this work pushed them outside of their comfort zone at times, it was necessary work for them. One assistant principal stated, “We cannot teach others to do what we are not willing to do.” Another assistant principal said, “It all starts from the leader and then trickles down to the next subgroups.”

#### *Final Principal Interviews*

The final component of the action research were final individual principal interviews. In November 2023, each principal in the study was interviewed to give them an opportunity to

share their insights and their perspectives of the work they engaged in with their teams. The questions that guide the interview were:

- As a result of our work during this action research, how did your definition of cultural responsiveness change or solidified?
- What challenges arose as you implemented culturally responsive leadership practices with your team?
- What opportunities arose as you implemented culturally responsive leadership practices with your team?
- How did implementing culturally responsive practices help support the diverse communities in your school?
- What are examples of culturally responsive leadership practices that you have implemented in your school as a result of the work in the action research?
- What are the next steps you would like to implement in your school to continue the work of cultural responsiveness?
- What leadership actions have you taken to develop a professional learning community (PLC) focused on culturally responsive leadership practices?
- What lessons did you learn about the work of cultural responsiveness with your administrative team?
- What do you believe is the role of the principal in the implementation of culturally responsive practices in a school?
- What are your thoughts regarding the principal engaging in this work with the leadership team to begin the work around cultural responsiveness in their school?
- As a result of your engagement in this work, what are your key takeaways?

Each principal explained their thoughts around the questions and provided their own interpretation of their team's experience and their key takeaways.

Principal Moon explained that this work helped her get a better understanding of leading and helping those she leads and how she will leverage the learning they engaged in to support their work. The work the team engaged in resulted in opportunities to see biases she did not realize the team had and pushed her to be intentional to “rethink, analyze, and reflect” on her own bias. Principal Moon expressed her desire to learn the readiness of her teachers and staff by engaging in professional learning with them and thinking about their own practices. Additionally, Principal Moon appreciated the opportunity to engage in this work with her team explained she was able to develop a relationship with her team in a different way that was personal.

Principal Disla shared that this work showed her that as a team they did understand cultural responsiveness, but engaging deeper in this work helped them see some differences they had in their understanding of culture. For their team, understanding the importance of representation was solidified and the importance of stepping outside of themselves to ensure others are represented well. Principal Disla explained that for her the role of the principal is to make cultural responsiveness a standard so that others understand the importance of the work. Additionally, Principal Disla explained that bringing the topic to the table helped the rest of the team be comfortable when she opened up and participated. Overall, Principal Disla understood that there is a lot of work that still needs to be done and realized the need to be responsive and responsible to push it forward at her school and with her team.

Principal Nicole expressed how engaging in this work intensified her definition around cultural responsiveness and the importance of the work, but also acknowledged she assumed all

members of the team were ready for the work. The image of the culture tree and the realization that much of what they engaged in was at the surface level became a theme for Principal Nicole and her team. Principal Nicole also explained that the discussions with the team was a vivid reminder that perspectives are a big part of how others approach the work. This reminder developed “a sense of urgency and at the same time a sense of patience” for Principal Nicole because as she explained, “responsiveness has a lot to do with who we are.”

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this action research study was to examine how the principals of three highly diverse urban elementary schools led their administrative team members to adapt Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices. The perspectives of the teams were gathered through observations by the primary researcher, as well as principal focus groups. To provide a thorough picture of the study, the findings from three action research cycles were provided. At the conclusion of the three cycles, assistant principal focus groups were conducted and a final principal interview with the three principals in the study. The findings reported in this chapter steered the development of emerging themes. The thematic findings are addressed next in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE**

Qualitative research requires the researcher to interpret the data by using use methods to ensure bias does not guide results. Instead of relying on predefined categories, analysis starts with the open mindedness of the researcher so that themes emerge naturally from the data. For this action research study, Nowell et al.'s (2016) seven phases of thematic analysis was followed.

Nowell et al.'s model gives researchers a step-by-step guide, beginning with getting familiar with the data and noting initial codes. The process then moves through identifying themes, reviewing and refining them, and finally crafting a coherent story from the findings. This structured approach helps the researcher to dig deeper into the data. Digging deeper into the data is essential to find patterns and insights that might be missed with a more prescribed analysis. By using this model, researchers can systematically uncover the messages embedded in qualitative data.

The purpose of this action research study was to examine how the principals of three highly diverse urban elementary schools led their administrative team members to adapt Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices. To address the purpose of this action research, the following questions guided the study:

1. What actions do principals take to develop schoolwide culturally responsive leadership practices to support diverse student populations and teachers?

2. What are the positive leadership opportunities in implementing culturally responsive practices to encourage the success of diverse communities within urban elementary schools?
3. What leadership challenges arise in the development of a more culturally responsive leadership team and school?

This study was based on the premise that effective leadership plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of culturally responsive practices within schools. Furthermore, the study recognized the importance of leaders gaining self-awareness as a foundational step in engaging with this type of learning.

The Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework developed by Khalifa et al. (2016) served as the theoretical framework for this study. CRSL depicts sequential steps for leaders to follow encompassing self-reflection, development, implementation, and review of culturally responsive practices in their professional roles.

Cycles were used to research how the principals in three elementary schools approached the work of cultural responsiveness. To guide the process of each cycle, the application of Deming's continuous improvement model, as referenced by Walton (1986) and commonly known as the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Framework, was employed in the study. This cycle, characterized by its never-ending nature, is repeated to drive continuous improvement (Walton, 1986).

In July 2023, the research began with a team meeting led by the primary researcher, where the study's details were explained, and initial consent was obtained. During this session, the finalized timeline and subsequent meeting dates were established. Simultaneously, the groundwork was laid for the study with the first principal interview and an initial team meeting,

where both collective and individual tasks were delineated, including the selection of relevant articles and books for study. In August 2023, a team meeting was organized to finalize the implementation of Cycle 1 interventions. The first cycle interventions were conducted by principals and was observed by the primary researcher, followed by a principal focus group discussion.

The subsequent months of September and October 2023 witnessed the team's engagement in reviewing data from Cycle 1 and finalizing the implementation plans for Cycles 2 and 3, respectively. These cycles were then implemented, with the second followed by a principal focus group session and observed by the primary researcher. After each cycle, the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) met to analyze the data and finalize interventions for the next cycle. The research culminated in November 2023 with a final team meeting, concluding individual interviews with the principals, and two focus group sessions with administrators to glean valuable insights and reflections.

Chapter 4 provided findings from the three action research cycles. The findings underwent analysis using a systematic coding format applied to the gathered data. Initially, a deductive approach was taken in coding, aligning with the research questions. This approach was then followed by analyzing the data. Since the primary researcher was actively involved in the observation of the implementation of the interventions, a collaborative effort was undertaken to construct meaning related to the implementation of culturally responsive practices within the structures of the respective administrative teams at the three elementary schools. The insights gathered during these observations and recorded in notes, the subsequent focus groups, and interview transcripts served as the guide to construct meaning and to develop themes. Table 5.1 provides a summary of the emergent themes linked to the research questions.

**Table 5.1**

*Summary of Research Questions Linked to Findings and Themes*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Theme</b>
RQ1 - What actions do principals take to develop schoolwide culturally responsive leadership practices to support diverse student populations and teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Overcome challenges in biases and resistance</li><li>• Adopt a strategic and continuous approach to cultural responsiveness</li><li>• Ensure leadership readiness</li><li>• Foster awareness, sensitivity, and relationship-building</li><li>• Aim for a deeper understanding and learning about cultural preparedness</li></ul>	Fostering cultural responsiveness, within an educational leadership context, is a nuanced and multifaceted journey that requires awareness and acceptance.
RQ2 - What are the positive leadership opportunities in implementing culturally responsive practices to encourage the success of diverse communities within urban elementary schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Personal and collective growth</li><li>• Growth and mindset shift</li><li>• Heightened awareness of biases</li><li>• Improved communication and awareness</li><li>• Steadfast commitment to integrating cultural responsiveness into education</li></ul>	Leading teams in culturally responsive practices results in a journey involving personal growth, heightened awareness, and a transformative approach to education that embraces diversity and ongoing learning.
RQ3 - What leadership challenges arise in the development of a more culturally responsive leadership team and school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teamwork dynamics</li><li>• Challenges in cultural understanding</li><li>• Resistance to change and acknowledging biases</li><li>• Achieving high levels of trust</li></ul>	Engaging in cultural responsiveness is deeply personal work that requires embracing various levels of involvement, understanding, and deep trust.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question sought to gather insights into principal actions to further investigate the purpose of the study. What actions do principals take to develop schoolwide culturally responsive leadership practices to support diverse student populations and teachers?

Research Questions 1 findings included:

1. Overcome challenges in biases and resistance
2. Adopt a strategic and continuous approach to cultural responsiveness
3. Ensure leadership readiness
4. Foster awareness, sensitivity, and relationship-building
5. Aim for a deeper understanding and learning about cultural preparedness

**Theme 1:** Fostering cultural responsiveness, within an educational leadership context, is a nuanced and multifaceted journey that requires awareness and acceptance.

The study sought to research the way three elementary school principals approached the work of culturally responsive leadership practices with their administrative teams. The approach and style of each principal was evident from the first observation. Principal Disla approached her team as a facilitator creating a slide deck and used a timer to stay on track. When working with the team, Principal Disla pushed her team's thinking and guided them to think about themselves and the school's context. Principal Nicole was vulnerable from the beginning of the session and started the session from a personal level. The session at the Destined for Greatness school was personal due to Principal Nicole's approach. Principal Moon also approached the work from a vulnerable place and shared with the team how her own surface, shallow, and deep levels of culture have had to change to deal with the different circumstances of her life.

As the interventions progressed, each principal continued to be vulnerable with their teams and although they were leading the professional learning, they also engaged as participants. Each principal shared their thinking and their thoughts around the different components of self-reflection and culturally responsive practices in the work. In her final interview, Principal Disla reflected that she decided to open up with her team stating, "By me opening up that we were going to do this for them, with them, and that their participation was

valuable, made them feel comfortable." Principal Moon also noted that her vulnerability "may have allowed them to be maybe more vulnerable or okay with talking about different things."

In the final assistant principal focus group, the vulnerability of the principals was found to be a key component of their engagement. One assistant principal stated, "Our principal actively participated in the training sessions, demonstrating a commitment to cultural responsiveness from the top down. She set the tone by leading with vulnerability, sharing personal reflections and experiences to encourage openness among the staff." While another assistant principal explained, "I thought it was important because it showed vulnerability from a leader. Sometimes the work has to be shown by the leadership." The assistant principals felt encouraged by their principals explaining that "to see the principal's vulnerability, fostered a real and trusting environment."

The engagement of principals helped the administrative teams overcome resistance and instead allowed for unity in the work. As one of the assistant principals stated, "Our principal's active involvement in the training created a sense of unity, showing that cultural responsiveness is a collective effort." Additionally, an assistant principal also stated, "The principal's involvement created a sense of unity within the school, emphasizing that cultural responsiveness is a collective responsibility. Seeing our principal engage in the same learning process fostered a feeling of togetherness and a shared mission."

The findings also highlighted how important it is for the principals to know their administrative teams to ensure their readiness. Principal Nicole explained that a sense of urgency and a sense of patience is needed sharing, "Leaders aren't always ready to do the work" and, "we cannot make assumptions or take anything for granted when engaging in this work." The principals were intentional to know the work and provided their own growth experiences to "help

the individuals to be reflective in their thinking.” During the observations, conversations took place around the diverse levels of readiness and how personal the work of cultural responsiveness is. The principals addressed these comments highlighting their rationale to start the work with the leadership team to ensure there was a comfort level and trust within the team, before taking the learning to the rest of their schools.

The principals saw the value of starting the work with their administrative teams to ensure that before starting the work with the rest of their schools, they were all on the same page. This consideration was supported by the assistant principals in the study. One assistant principal said, “I believe, having a group of interest first, and then pushing that out to smaller focus groups because you must be ready for this work.” The assistant principals also recognized that the work has to start small and then build, making it continuous because this cannot be a professional development that is “put back on the shelf and revisited as needed.”

The observations of the teams showed how the perspective and personalities of the team influenced the conversations that took place. The goals and approaches of the leader also influenced the level of depth with the work. The vulnerability of the principals produced an environment where the administrative teams understood their principals were engaged and committed to the work, too.

As principals, they understood the importance of their commitment to the Culturally Responsive work and reflected on that importance during their final interviews. Principal Moon said, “It's our duty, our responsibility to make sure that everyone at this school is culturally aware of the diversity within the school.” Principal Disla summarized her role by stating, “My role as a principal is to make it the standard so that it doesn't become personal.” The principals in the study understood how to navigate the dynamics of their teams and how to push

the work forward, when necessary, but also when it was important to pause or to be vulnerable to better connect with their administrative teams.

### **Research Question 2**

The second research question gathered insight into positive leadership opportunities that resulted from the study. What are the positive leadership opportunities in implementing culturally responsive practices to encourage the success of diverse communities within urban elementary schools? Research Questions 2 findings included:

1. Personal and collective growth
2. Growth and mindset shifts
3. Heightened awareness of biases
4. Improved communication and awareness
5. Steadfast commitment to integrating cultural responsiveness into education

**Theme 2:** Leading teams in culturally responsive practices results in a journey involving personal growth, heightened awareness, and a transformative approach to education that embraces diversity and ongoing learning.

Administrative teams that engaged in culturally responsive practices attained personal and collective growth. As teams, they grew close together and engaged in real conversations about their thinking and viewpoints. When explaining the collective work, Principal Nicole said, “Creating a collective learning experience amongst this team and throughout the professional development, the discussions that arose, not just in the sessions, but after the sessions brought insight to me.” Principal Disla explained that “If anything, it made us stronger because despite being so diverse on multiple levels of demographics, we saw similarities amongst each other.”

Principal Moon stated that this work allowed her team “to recognize that we had room to change our thinking.”

Additionally, individual growth was profound resulting in mindset shifts and growth. During the assistant principals focus groups, the following key takeaways were also expressed:

- “It’s important to understand that everyone's lived experience are very real. So, understanding that the things that they are experiencing, how they're being raised, how we've raised affect how we're leading buildings of diverse cultures,”
- “We need to be open, understanding, and brave.”
- “It is important to lean with courage, thoughtful leadership in the face of oppression.”
- “Being willing to challenge your own thoughts and ideas of what is appropriate in inappropriate things within your circles.”
- “Cultural preparedness goes beyond celebrating holidays; it's about understanding the lived experiences of each student. I used to think it was just about tolerance, but now I see it's about embracing and learning from our differences.”
- “This training opened my eyes to the various cultural nuances present in our diverse student body. Before, I primarily focused on academic differences, but now I see the importance of understanding cultural backgrounds.”

As observations progressed in all three elementary schools, the administrative teams referred to previous learning as they made connections to the work. Principals were intentional about bringing forth realizations they came to as a team, and they held their administrative teams accountable for the growth they had achieved through the previous interventions. Since the first intervention dug into culture, principals were able to use their knowledge of the team as a lever to push forward. In fact, by the second session, teams were holding each other accountable.

The engagement in culturally responsive activities, also resulted in a heightened awareness of biases amongst members of the administrative team and improved communication and awareness. During the final focus group, one of the assistant principals even stated, “I was slapped in the face with my bias.” Although the members of the study were diverse in race, age, upbringing, religion, and region, they found areas where they had similar mindsets and others where they thought completely different.

During principal focus groups, they mentioned how these similarities and differences in thinking resulted in further conversations between the team. Principals and assistant principals also spoke of changes in their practices. One of the assistant principals said, “I realized my bias when discussing a student's behavior based on their appearance. It was eye-opening and uncomfortable. The training made me confront biases I didn't even realize I had, especially regarding students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.” Principal Disla’s takeaway on bias was her pursuit of “making sure that I'm not bringing any of my biases into decision-making processes, making sure that I'm not assuming things based on a child's background.”

Another opportunity that came because of the culturally responsive work with administrative teams was a steadfast commitment to integrating these practices into their work. During the focus group, one of the assistant principals spoke about being intentional in her conversations with students and how that has positively impacted their engagement and sense of belonging. Another assistant principal found herself being more intentional when listening and having conversations with others. While another assistant principal spoke about noticing micro-aggressions in the classroom and addressing those.

Principal Moon highlighted how their administrative team is being intentional about using their knowledge to help others grow stating, “We're handling certain situations, how we were helping others to think about the diversity in our school when it comes to their peers, meaning staff members and colleagues.” During the final focus group, one of the assistant principals summarized this opportunity by saying, “We all have very diverse leadership teams right now, and we all have very diverse students. So, it's just an opportunity to learn from those that work closest with you.” Principal Disla spoke about the continuity of this work and how it is important to continue beyond this session. Principal Disla elaborated, “We're hoping that by doing some of this work, it may not be a long-run study like this one but a session to open their eyes to our definition that culture is wider than gender, race, and thoughts.”

During observations, focus groups, and interviews, principals and assistant principals recognized the need for cultural responsiveness, embracing diversity, and challenging personal biases. Data were highly suggestive that the leaders experienced personal growth because of their involvement with the interventions and their reflections around the interventions. Additionally, the communication among the team improved and teams began to avoid assumptions and be more aware of the biases.

During observations, teams discussed further understandings of cultural nuances and many recognized that what previously was more a racial understanding of culture, had transitioned into a deeper understanding of it. Overall, the theme emphasized the transformative effect of cultural awareness on individuals, their administrative team members, and the educational community of the schools.

### Research Question 3

The final research question also explored the purpose of the study. What leadership challenges arise in the development of a more culturally responsive leadership team and school?

Research Questions 3 findings included:

1. Teamwork dynamics
2. Challenges in cultural understanding
3. Resistance to change and acknowledging biases
4. Achieving high levels of trust

**Theme 3:** Engaging in cultural responsiveness is deeply personal work that requires embracing various levels of involvement, understanding, and deep trust.

As principals navigated the challenges of the study, these challenges turned into opportunities for team growth. A deeper look at these challenges is provided in this theme. The challenges in cultural responsiveness encompassed a variety of experiences, from varied team responses and challenges in overcoming biases to the importance of trust. Principals had to navigate the readiness of their leadership teams, and the importance of building trust in small groups for open discussions. During the observations, the dynamics of the team influenced the way the teams operated. Each team had a variety of levels of knowledge and understanding about cultural responsiveness, which was highlighted by the diverse range of responses within the team.

As Principal Nicole stated, “I ran the gamut from teammates who were all in and understood that it was necessary to teammates who understood that the work could be challenging, to teammates who were just not ready at all.” As a principal, a key takeaway for Principal Nicole was the surprise in the variety of willingness and readiness, but also a reminder

that assistant principals, although leaders, also need to be ready to engage in cultural responsiveness work.

Another challenge that surfaced because of the work on cultural responsiveness was the need to overcome biases. Challenges related to overcoming preconceived notions, resistance to change, and acknowledging biases were significant hurdles when engaging in the work of cultural responsiveness. During the final focus group, one of the assistant principals said, “One challenge was overcoming preconceived notions about certain cultural practices. The resistance to change and acknowledging biases was a hurdle we faced during the initial stages.” In one of the observations at a school, one of the assistant principals did not acknowledge biases and rather referred to them as “common sense.” The principal had to navigate the conversation and used a personal experience to help the team member move past her thinking. Principals need to be cautious and not assume that leaders are always ready to engage in cultural responsiveness work.

Principals who engage in cultural responsiveness work need to understand the importance of being open. This openness is not only a necessity for the principals, but also for the members of the administrative team. All participants need to be willing and ready to share their thinking and the places where their thinking comes from to understand each other at a deeper level. During the assistant principal focus group and when interviewing the principals, they all recognized the difficulty of being opened at first. Depending on the comfort level of the team members, their willingness to be open to share their thoughts was attained at different levels.

High levels of trust are important. The study showed the importance of keeping groups small to foster a safe space, acknowledging the discomfort associated with cultural responsiveness work and the necessity of creating an environment where participants feel free to speak openly. During observations, assistant principals talked about how this work is ongoing

and challenging because it disrupts the status quo. One of the assistant principals explained, “this is not a size fits all because everyone is not at the same place or has the same level of emotional intelligence.” Principal Nicole highlighted that if this work is not done the right way with trust as a catalyst, “it can be detrimental” to the growth of others. During observations, another assistant principal also said that if the school environment is not ready to get out of denial, then this effort will fail.

### **Chapter Summary**

Active engagement of principals in training sessions proved crucial in overcoming resistance and promoting collective efforts for cultural responsiveness. Assistant principals noted that the principals' involvement created a trusting environment, emphasizing shared responsibility for cultural responsiveness. It is important for principals to understand their administrative teams to ensure readiness. Principals acknowledged the need for both urgency and patience in cultural responsiveness work, stressing the significance of starting with their administrative teams before extending it to the entire school. Observations highlighted how team perspectives and personalities influenced the depth of conversations. Principals' vulnerability contributed to an environment where teams understood their commitment to the work.

Administrative teams engaging in culturally responsive practices experienced collective growth, fostering unity through real conversations. Principals emphasized the importance of creating a collective learning experience. Culturally responsive activities heightened awareness of biases, improved communication, and prompted realizations among team members. The interventions prompted changes in practices, with assistant principals becoming more intentional in conversations, addressing micro-aggressions, and fostering a sense of belonging.

Navigating challenges in cultural responsiveness involves varied team responses and overcoming biases, with principals needing to assess the readiness of their leadership teams. The observations revealed diverse levels of knowledge and understanding within teams, with varying degrees of willingness to engage in cultural responsiveness work. Understanding the importance of vulnerability is crucial for both principals and administrative team members. Participants need to be willing to share their thoughts. The study highlighted that vulnerability is challenging initially and varies depending on the comfort level of team members and the need for high levels of trust.

**CHAPTER 6**

**CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONNECTIONS TO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES**

The purpose of this action research study was to examine how the principals of three highly diverse urban elementary schools led their administrative team members to adapt Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices. Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and observations of these three principals were providing professional development on culturally responsive practices. Perspectives were gained through the insights gathered by the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) and the implementation feedback from the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT). The ARDT provided insight into the activities and resources of each intervention. The ARIT, which was made of 3 principals and their administrative teams for a total of 13 leaders, engaged in these interventions. The three principals led professional learning on culturally responsive leadership practices with their administrative teams.

To address the purpose of this action research study, the following questions guided the study:

1. What actions do principals take to develop schoolwide culturally responsive leadership practices to support diverse student populations and teachers?
2. What are the positive leadership opportunities in implementing culturally responsive practices to encourage the success of diverse communities within urban elementary schools?

3. What leadership challenges arise in the development of a more culturally responsive leadership team and school?

This chapter begins with a summary of the study, action research approach, an overview of the theory of change, logic model, and theoretical framework, followed by a discussion of findings concerning the guiding research questions. The following section explores the implications and recommendations for practitioners and researchers and the limitations of the current study. The chapter concludes with final reflections.

### **Summary of the Study**

This action research took place in the fall of 2023 at three elementary schools in the large, urban school district Metro County Public School (MCPS, a pseudonym). The primary objective of the research was to investigate the endeavors of three principals as they worked toward becoming culturally responsive, and to assess how they integrated these practices with their leadership teams. The professional learning at each of the schools was led by the principal. Each principal engaged in three professional learning sessions with their team focusing on culturally responsive practices. During each of the sessions, the primary researcher observed the learning. The implementation notes were used by the Action Research Designed Team (ARDT) to finetune further interventions. The research used a qualitative case study approach to investigate how principals led their instructional leadership team's participation and learning about culturally responsive leadership practices aimed at addressing the diverse needs of their populations.

### **Action Research Approach**

Practitioners in education often conduct action research to enhance practices within educational settings (Glanz, 2014). Given the challenges and inequities faced by schools,

particularly concerning marginalized cultural groups, this action research study proposed the implementation of research-based strategies in cultural responsiveness. Existing research demonstrates that employing culturally relevant strategies effectively narrows achievement gaps among diverse student populations (Banks, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Khalifa, 2018). However, acknowledging the contextual variations in each school, this study aims to empower principals to apply culturally responsive practices tailored to their specific school environments.

### **Theory of Change, Logic Model, and Theoretical Framework**

The study sought to uncover insights into how principals could effectively apply these learnings in their support of administrators. Throughout this process, school leaders consistently honed their behaviors and practices by actively participating in self-reflection. This research operated on the premise that effective leadership is essential for the successful integration of culturally responsive practices in schools. Additionally, the researcher acknowledged the foundational importance of leaders developing self-awareness when engaging in this type of learning.

The theoretical framework for this study was rooted in the Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) model formulated by Khalifa et al. (2016). This framework delineates a sequential process for leaders, involving self-reflection, development, implementation, and review of culturally responsive practices in their professional capacities. The study utilized cycles to investigate how principals in three elementary schools approached the work of cultural responsiveness. Each cycle was guided by the application of Deming's continuous improvement model, cited by Walton (1986), and commonly referred to as the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Framework. This cycle is ongoing, emphasizing its repetition to effectively oversee continuous improvement (Walton, 1986).

Three cycles were done for this study. A meeting with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) preceded each of the cycles to finalize the interventions that were implemented by the Action Research Intervention Team (ARIT) at each school. For this study, the three principals who led the work in the ARIT were also members of the ARDT. Their feedback and thoughts about the work were a key element of the design and implementation of the interventions. Three professional development sessions were led by principals.

In the first cycle of the action research, the primary focus was on delving deeper into the concept of culture. Participants engaged in exploring both their individual and collective understandings of culture. The content developed during the ARDT meeting was implemented by each principal as they led learning activities with their respective teams. In the second cycle, participants started with a video on overcoming biases, serving as a pre-activity to stimulate their reflections on the topic. Activities were designed to address both implicit and explicit biases among the participants. Following the discussion, participants were assigned post-work, involving an assessment aimed at addressing biases in an area of their choice. In the final cycle, principals provided a contextual overview of the professional learning. They emphasized the time spent examining personal beliefs, assumptions, and actions, along with collaborative efforts in exploring individual and collective cultural responsiveness. For the final cycle, the focus shifted towards crafting an actionable plan for measurable next steps.

Throughout these sessions, the primary researcher observed the administrative teams, documenting observations at each school. Each session lasted approximately an hour and a half at each school. After each session, a focus group was conducted with the principals and a final focus group was done with the assistant principals that engaged in the lessons. Additionally, initial, and final interviews were also conducted with the three principals.

## **Discussion of the Findings**

The research study was driven by three key research questions, each probing into different aspects. The first question delved into the actions taken by principals in developing schoolwide culturally responsive leadership practices. The second question explored the positive opportunities that surfaced through the implementation of these practices. Lastly, the third question sought to uncover the leadership challenges that emerged because of culturally responsive practices. An in-depth analysis of the qualitative data revealed thematic patterns corresponding to each research question, aligning with existing findings in the literature.

### **Discussion of Findings from Research Question 1**

The first research question inquired about principal actions in developing schoolwide culturally responsive leadership practices. Findings from Research Question 1 revealed key actions, including overcoming challenges related to biases and resistance, adopting a strategic and continuous approach to cultural responsiveness, ensuring leadership readiness, fostering awareness, sensitivity, and relationship-building, and aiming for a deeper understanding and learning about cultural preparedness.

Theme 1 of the study emphasized that fostering cultural responsiveness in an educational leadership context is a nuanced journey requiring awareness and acceptance. Each principal's approach and style, evident from initial observations, varied. As interventions progressed, the principals maintained their vulnerability, engaging as participants and fostering a sense of unity. This vulnerability was identified as a key component in the engagement of the administrative teams, serving to create a trusting environment.

To attain this vulnerability, leaders had to rely on their empathy. Clark et al. (2019) argued that empathy comprises three distinct dimensions: “(a) comprehending another person's internal state (cognitive empathy), (b) sharing another person's affective state (affective empathy), and/or (c) behaviorally demonstrating that one has understood another person's internal state and/or shared another person's affective state (behavioral empathy)” (p. 171). Leaders who exhibit empathy consider the viewpoints of others and establish opportunities for mutual understanding (Arghode et al., 2022). Empathy needs an understanding of the perspective, experiences, mental state, and emotions of another person (Mazzone et al., 2021).

The engagement of principals in the training sessions played a crucial role in overcoming resistance and creating a collective effort toward cultural responsiveness. Leaders dedicated to continuous learning use critical self-reflection on their leadership behaviors. They utilize data and measurable indicators, guiding their approach with courage and adopting an inclusive and social justice mindset (Khalifa, 2018). Much like the work of Khalifa, Banwo et al. (2021) explained that leaders should practice critical self-awareness focused on the need to interrogate ways that leaders, and their organizations contribute to, reproduce, or contest oppressive practices. The assistant principals acknowledged the significance of the principals' active involvement, as it set the tone for a trusting and open environment. The principals recognized the importance of knowing their administrative teams to ensure readiness. Observations revealed conversations around diverse levels of readiness and the personal nature of cultural responsiveness work.

The observations highlighted how team perspectives and personalities influenced conversations, with leader goals shaping the depth of the work. The vulnerability of principals created an environment where administrative teams understood the commitment and engagement

of their leaders. Principals reflected on the importance of their commitment to culturally responsive work during final interviews. They acknowledged their duty to ensure cultural awareness within the school and understood the dynamics of navigating their teams to push the work forward or pause when necessary. The study emphasizes the multifaceted nature of cultural responsiveness in leadership and the importance of leaders' commitment and vulnerability in fostering unity and understanding within their teams.

These findings aligned with research about the actions leaders take when implementing this work. Genao (2021) highlighted the importance of culturally responsive school leaders in fostering a school environment where the values and beliefs of all individuals are respected. Genao emphasizes the ongoing and perpetual nature of this work, stating that culturally responsive schools are "a never-ending work that is requiring to evolve as communities change" (p. 167). Furthermore, leaders committed to equity, as highlighted by Khalifa et al. (2016) and LoBue (2022), must first acknowledge and reflect on their own power, privilege, and identity. These leaders needed to be proactive in disrupting any known or unknown biases and perceptions they may hold toward students and marginalized groups.

### **Discussion of Findings from Research Question 2**

The second research question explored positive leadership opportunities arising from the implementation of culturally responsive practices. Findings from Research Question 2 identified positive outcomes, including personal and collective growth, mindset shifts, heightened awareness of biases, improved communication and awareness, and a steadfast commitment to integrating cultural responsiveness into education.

Theme 2 pointed out how leading teams in cultural responsiveness practices resulted in personal growth, heightened awareness, and a transformative approach to education that embraced diversity and ongoing learning about it. Administrative teams experienced personal and collective growth, fostering unity and real conversations about diverse perspectives. Individual growth led to mindset shifts, emphasizing the importance of understanding lived experiences and the necessity to challenge biases. Leaders committed to social justice actively address and strive to eliminate discrimination and oppression faced by marginalized groups due to factors such as color, race, disability, gender, and ethnic background (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Sarid, 2021a).

The teams integrated cultural responsiveness into their practices, demonstrating a steadfast commitment. Observations and focus groups revealed heightened awareness of biases, improved communication, and a deeper understanding of cultural nuances. The findings showed the transformative impact of cultural awareness on individuals, administrative teams, and the broader educational community. This finding aligned with the research on social justice since leadership focused on social justice manifests through continuous actions, skills, mindset habits, and competencies that are consistently developed, scrutinized, and improved (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014).

### **Discussion of Findings from Research Question 3**

The third research question investigated the challenges in the development of a culturally responsive leadership team and school. Findings for Research Question 3 included insights into teamwork dynamics, challenges related to cultural understanding, resistance to change, acknowledging biases, and the importance of achieving high levels of trust.

Theme 3 highlighted that engaging in cultural responsiveness involves deeply personal work that demands various levels of involvement, understanding, and profound trust. Principals navigated challenges, turning them into opportunities for team growth. The theme delves into these challenges, including varied team responses, overcoming biases, and the crucial role of trust.

Principals had to navigate team readiness and to build trust in small groups for open discussions. Observations revealed diverse levels of knowledge and understanding within teams, displayed in the variability of responses. Overcoming biases emerged as a significant challenge, with resistance to change and acknowledging biases as hurdles. Competent leaders needed a comprehensive understanding of their school context, the individuals within it, and the requirements of the school community. Each educational institution possesses its unique personality, identity, and culture (Salari & Nastiezaie, 2020). Empathy is a critical part of effective collaboration and a positive work environment (Clark et al., 2019; Mazzone et al., 2021).

Openness was identified as essential for both principals and administrative team members, requiring a willingness to share thoughts and perspectives. The theme emphasized the importance of high levels of trust, advocating for small group settings to foster a safe space where participants felt free to speak openly. The study emphasized the ongoing and challenging nature of cultural responsiveness work and the necessity of creating an environment conducive to open dialogue. Arghode et al. (2022) explained that “empathetic leaders shape values, and foster collaboration, which, in turn, improves employee and organizational performance” (p. 252).

### **Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners**

Practitioners can enhance their leadership practices by actively engaging in culturally responsive practices. It is imperative for leaders to embrace vulnerability and empathy, recognizing that their context and the capacity and readiness of their people is a key component of this work. By prioritizing vulnerability and empathy, leaders can create a trusting environment within their administrative teams, acknowledging and valuing the diverse approaches and styles among team members. Moreover, continuous commitment to cultural awareness is vital to teams through the complexities of culturally responsive work.

Overcoming challenges related to biases and resistance, fostering awareness, sensitivity, and relationship-building are crucial components of this endeavor. Leaders should actively address challenges, such as varied team responses, overcoming biases, fostering high levels of trust in small group settings, and ensuring a safe space for open dialogue. In conclusion, practitioners can leverage these practical applications to develop and sustain effective culturally responsive leadership, contributing to positive culture, collaboration, and growth.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Researchers**

Implications for researchers are evident across the three key research questions addressed in the study. First, exploring principal actions in developing culturally responsive leadership practices highlights the need for further investigation into the nuanced journey of fostering cultural responsiveness. Researchers should delve into the diverse approaches and styles of principals, considering the impact of interventions and the impact of vulnerability, emphasizing the role of empathy in leadership development.

Additionally, examining positive leadership opportunities resulting from the implementation of culturally responsive practices provides a foundation for future research on the transformative impact of such practices on personal and collective growth, mindset shifts, and improved communication within administrative teams. Finally, investigating challenges in the development of a culturally responsive leadership team and school emphasizes the importance of personal work, involvement, understanding, and trust. Future research should explore strategies to navigate team readiness, overcoming biases, and fostering high levels of trust in small group settings. Overall, researchers can build on these findings to deepen our understanding of culturally responsive leadership, inform educational practices, and contribute to ongoing improvements in school leadership and organizational culture.

### **Limitations**

This action research study, while valuable in examining the implementation of culturally responsive practices, has certain limitations. The study's scope was influenced by the fact that the district has a specific focus on the work of culturally responsive practice. Consequently, the teams that engaged in the work saw the alignment with the study and the guidance they had received from the district. Additionally, the study examined the implementation efforts led by three elementary principals, which could mean a gap in perspectives. The absence of voices from high school and middle school principals limits the generalizability of the findings, as the dynamics and challenges of fostering culturally responsive practices may vary across different educational levels. Future research should consider incorporating a more diverse representation of school levels and administrative perspectives since this work is context specific.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

This action research study has provided valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of developing culturally responsive leadership practices within educational settings. Through the exploration of principal actions, positive opportunities, and challenges, a multifaceted understanding of the complexities involved has emerged. The study underscores the intricacies in the journey of fostering cultural responsiveness, emphasizing the significance of awareness, acceptance, and the maintenance of vulnerability among educational leaders.

One key takeaway is the pivotal role of empathy in effective leadership. Principals who exhibit empathy create environments that foster unity, trust, and open dialogue within administrative teams. The findings highlight the continuous nature of this work, emphasizing the need for ongoing commitment, reflection, and a proactive approaches to disrupting biases and perceptions. Moreover, the transformative impact of culturally responsive practices on personal and collective growth, mindset shifts, and improved communication indicates positive leadership opportunities. These outcomes underline the potential for educational leaders to actively address and eliminate discrimination and oppression, aligning with the broader goals of social justice and equity in education.

The study also sheds light on the challenges that come as a result developing culturally responsive leadership teams. Overcoming biases, navigating resistance to change, and achieving high levels of trust require comprehensive understanding, empathy, and a commitment to creating a safe and open environment. The importance of small group settings to foster trust and facilitate open dialogue is a critical consideration for educational leaders.

This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on culturally responsive leadership by providing practical insights for practitioners, offering implications for researchers to further

explore, and concluding with an understanding of the multifaceted nature of this essential work in educational leadership. As we move forward, it is crucial for educators, administrators, and researchers alike to integrate these findings into their practices, fostering environments that promote inclusivity, understanding, and continuous growth within educational institutions.

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## APPENDIX A

### Empirical Findings Table

Author(s), Date	Title	Purpose	Method(s)	Sample	Result(s)	Conclusions	Implications(s)
Marshall, S. L., & Khalifa, M. A., (2018).	Humanizing school communities: Culturally responsive leadership in the shaping of curriculum and instruction.	To examine the role instructional leaders have in promoting culturally responsive practices to make schooling more inclusive for minority students and communities.	Six-month case study of a mid-sized school district.	Five individuals in equity related leadership positions, including four instructional coaches with an average of 15 years of educational experience.	Instructional leaders can play a significant role in promoting culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) and practices in teaching and districts can support this work by adding positions that align to this work.	Five Key Themes: -Instructional leaders perceived that culturally responsive practices are better when supported by district policies. -Trust is a key factor. -Unlearning traditional school behaviors is necessary. -The composition of the staff in professional development is important. -The tools instructional leaders use must reflect culturally responsive commitment.	The study had research and practice implications. CRSL can be part of the school and county levels.
Khalifa, M. A., Mark, A. G., & James, E. D., (2016).	Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature.	Comprehensive review of the literature for responsive school	Search methodology to find articles on CRSL.	37 journal articles and 8 books from 1989 to 2014 were found.	The literature is synthesized into four major strands.	Four major strands of CRSL emerged: -Critical self-awareness	CRSL is deeply undertheorized and under researched. CRSL will help

		environments				-Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation -Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments -Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts	minoritized communities.
Madhlangobe, L., & Gordon, S. P. (2012).	Culturally responsive leadership in a diverse school: A case study of a high school leader.	To critically examine and describe how a culturally responsive school leader performed her role.	In-depth case study guided by interpretive and grounded theory.	4 school leaders agreed to participate – two elementary assistant principals, one elementary principal, and one high school principal. 6 teachers and 9 parents	6 key themes emerged from the study: 1. Caring for others 2. Building relationships 3. Persistence and persuasiveness 4. Being present and communicating 5. Modeling cultural responsiveness 6. Fostering cultural responsiveness among others	Results indicate that leaders can make schools more culturally responsive. They can foster relationships that build trust with minority students. Culturally responsive relationships help reduce power struggles. The leader's acceptance to culturally responsive practices helped teachers adjust their teaching.	Although many educational systems in the United States have not changed with the times, cultural responsiveness can help support the needs of the modern classroom.
Johnson, L. (2014).	Culturally responsive leadership for community empowerment	To outline examples of culturally responsive leadership practices and	The leadership profiles were gathered as part of a larger	Profiled 3 historical educational leaders	Referred to culturally responsive leaders as public intellectuals,	Culturally responsive leaders advocate for the change of unequal	Two suggestions for leadership preparations programs are made:

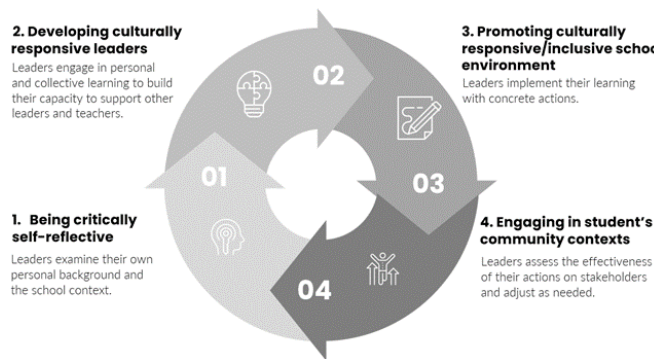
		to expand beyond school leadership roles to encompass community-based leadership	historical study conducted in the previous 12 years		boundary spanners, and advocacy leaders	educational systems.	Expanding the pool of potential educational leaders and providing new community-based practicum experiences are needed. Preparation programs should be reconceptualized to include culturally responsive models.
Coenen, L., Schelfhout, W., & Hondeghem, A. (2021).	Networked professional learning communities as means to Flemish secondary school leaders' professional learning and well-being.	To look at the use of PLCs for principal professional learning.	Longitudinal mixed-method approach	3 in-depth case studies based on 3 district PLCs of 14 secondary school principals were observed over one to two years.	Results rendered a variety of practical outputs and personal outcomes	Allowing principals to come together brings beneficial personal outcomes that help with load of the profession. PLCs contribute to leader professional learning.	Since the study was based on three case studies, it is not confirmed if the conclusions apply to all school principals
Gay, G. (2013).	Teaching to and through cultural diversity.	To examine culturally responsive teaching based on the author's writing and other authors	Essay based on the author's writings	Looked at the past 15 years of written work about culturally responsive teaching	Themes that emerged: 1. cultural difference are normal features of teaching. 2. attitudes and beliefs about cultural diversity need to be positive	Culturally responsive teaching is a technique to support racially diverse learners.	This work is mostly based on the author's own research.

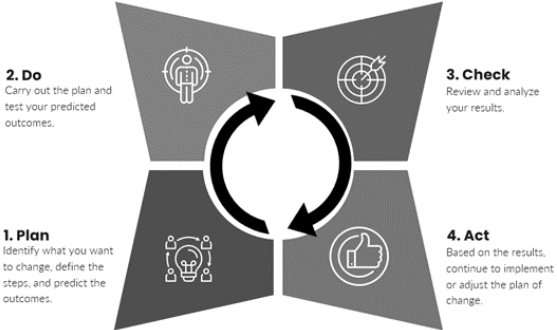
					<p>3. resistant to culturally responsive teaching should be expected</p> <p>4. the values and beliefs of culturally responsive teaching align to the democratic ideals of the United States</p> <p>5. Connections between everyday features of teaching and culturally responsive teaching bring validity to the work</p>		
Ladson-Billings, G. (1995).	Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy.	To argue for a theory of cultural relevant pedagogy.	Ethnographic interviews were conducted in four phases, regular visits to the classrooms for almost two years, 3 days a week. Teacher videos were conducted and observed and ten 2-3-hour meetings were conducted.	Pedagogical practices of 8 exemplary teachers of African American students. All female teachers. Five were African American and three were white.	Culturally relevant teaching must meet three criteria: develop students academically, nurture cultural competence, and develop sociopolitical consciousness. It also conceptions regarding self and other, social relations, and knowledge.	The study provides a beginning look at how teachers can systematically include the students' culture to the classroom.	More research in this area is needed focusing on exemplary teachers to gather wisdom from their practices.

## APPENDIX B

### Action Research Design Team (ARDT) Meeting Agenda

<b>1st Meeting Agenda</b>	
Topic	1st meeting to discuss information about the study, review the responsibilities of the ARDT, and gather consent
Welcome	Team member introductions
<b>Information about the Study</b>	
Title	From the central office to the building level: Developing a professional learning community to foster culturally responsive principal leadership teams
Purpose of the Study	The purpose of this action research study was to examine how the principals of three highly diverse urban elementary schools led their administrative team members to adapt Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices. Specifically, the study will focus on these three principals as they participate in a culturally responsive professional learning community (PLC). As a team, they will come together to further their understanding of culturally responsive practices and how to implement those practices to foster a more culturally responsive administrative team and school to support the diverse needs of their communities.
Research Questions	The following research questions guided this inquiry: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What actions do principals take to develop schoolwide culturally responsive leadership practices to support diverse student populations and teachers?</li><li>2. What are the positive leadership opportunities in implementing culturally responsive practices to encourage the success of diverse communities within urban elementary schools?</li><li>3. What leadership challenges arise in the development of a more culturally responsive leadership team and school?</li></ol>
How might this research benefit	Action research is conducted by practitioners in education to improve practices in the educational setting (Glanz, 2014). In education, there is an ongoing search to find solutions to the many inequities schools face

<p>the participants in the study?</p>	<p>each day. This action research study proposes the use of research-based strategies of cultural responsiveness to address marginalized cultural groups. Research shows that culturally relevant teaching strategies are an effective way to diminish achievement gaps among diverse groups (Banks, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, although the research shows that culturally relevant strategies work, each school context is different. Through this study, principals will be able to apply culturally responsive practices in their school context.</p>
<p>How might this research benefit the schools, the MCPS district, or education in general?</p>	<p><i>The Proposal</i> highlights four areas as priorities: empathy, equity, effectiveness, and excellence. Each strategic priority includes three goals, with objectives and performance indicators. Of interest in this study is the strategic priority of empathy. In the area of empathy, cultural competence stands as a key goal of the plan. Each school will be required to increase the cultural competence of each individual staff member in order to improve its programs and improve the engagement of diverse communities. To achieve the goal of empathy, each school is required to incorporate cultural competence strategies into professional learning creating a knowledge that supports diversity.</p>
<p>Guiding theories</p>	<p>There are several theories, concepts, and frameworks that have influenced the exploration of cultural responsiveness. The three theories that supported the development of the action research study include culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2013), and culturally relevant leadership (Khalifa, 2018). According to Khalifa et al. (2016), “Culturally responsive leadership influences the school context and addresses the cultural needs of the students, parents, and teachers” (p. 1274). Khalifa et al. (2016) developed the Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) Framework. CRSL has four key sets of practices for leaders to follow: critically self-reflect on leadership behaviors, develop culturally responsive teachers, promote a culturally responsive/inclusive school environment, and engage students' and parents' community contexts.</p> <p><i>Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL)</i></p>  <p>The diagram illustrates the four key sets of practices for the CRSL Framework in a circular flow:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>01. Being critically self-reflective</b>: Leaders examine their own personal background and the school context.</li> <li><b>02. Developing culturally responsive leaders</b>: Leaders engage in personal and collective learning to build their capacity to support other leaders and teachers.</li> <li><b>03. Promoting culturally responsive/inclusive school environment</b>: Leaders implement their learning with concrete actions.</li> <li><b>04. Engaging in student's community contexts</b>: Leaders assess the effectiveness of their actions on stakeholders and adjust as needed.</li> </ul>

	<i>Note.</i> Adapted from the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework by Khalifa et al.
<b>Action Research</b>	
Role of Action Research Design Team	<p>Using the cyclical Plan Do Check Act Cycle, the ARDT will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop interventions</li> <li>• Review the results from the interventions</li> <li>• Make adjustments to the interventions as needed</li> <li>• Review data results</li> </ul> <p><i>Logic Model for the Study</i></p>  <p><i>Note.</i> Adapted from the Plan-Do-Check-Act Deming Cycle (1986)</p>
Role of Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide context for the study</li> <li>• Facilitate meetings to develop and review interventions</li> <li>• Provide professional learning to the Action Research Implementation Team</li> <li>• Observe the implementation of the interventions</li> <li>• Study the implementation of the interventions and provide highlights</li> </ul>
<b>Action Items</b>	
Consent	Principals only ARIT CONSENT FORM All need to sign ARDT CONSENT FORM
Action Research Timeline	Action Research Timeline
Action Research Timeline	Action Research Design Team and Implementation Team Activities
Questions	

## APPENDIX C

### **The Principal Sets the Tone: Developing A Professional Learning Community To Foster Culturally Responsive Leadership Teams**

#### **Semi-structured Interview Questions Protocol**

##### **Welcome**

Thank you for your participation today. This interview will take about 60 minutes and will include questions regarding your experiences and practices in culturally responsive leadership practices. I would like your permission to record this interview, so I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview, you wish to discontinue the recording or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. All your responses are confidential, except for the research team. Your responses will remain confidential and be used to better understand how leaders can implement and use culturally responsive leadership practices.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission, we will begin the interview.

##### **Background**

Name, position, school, and time in the role

##### **Introduction Questions**

- What attracted you to the work of cultural responsiveness for your school?
- What work have you completed or participated in regarding cultural responsiveness?
- What current practices are there in place in your current school to address the needs of diverse populations?
- Why is there a need for your school to engage in cultural responsiveness work?

##### **Essential Questions**

- What is your definition of cultural responsiveness?
- What are examples of culturally responsive leadership practices implemented in your school because of this work?
- What leadership actions did you take to develop a professional learning community (PLC) focused on culturally responsive leadership practices?
- What challenges arose as you implemented culturally responsive leadership practices with your team?
- What opportunities arose as you implemented culturally responsive leadership practices with your team?
- How did implementing culturally responsive practices help support the diverse communities in your school?

##### **Closing Questions**

- Are there any additional comments or items you would like to add?
- Is there anything else you would like to add or include?

*Additional questions for follow-up or clarification may be asked.*

## APPENDIX D

### Culturally Responsive School Leadership Sessions 1-3 Facilitator Guide

**Description:** The purpose of this course is to provide opportunities for leaders to examine culturally responsive leadership practices and mindsets. They will engage and understand who they are and how that affects their leadership practices. Leaders will learn culturally responsive tools and how to use these tools to support their diverse teaching and student populations.

**Outcomes:**

1. Examine one's own beliefs, assumptions, and actions to take on a responsive approach.
2. Engage in collaborative practices to measure individual and collective cultural responsiveness.
3. Develop an actionable plan for measurable next steps toward cultural responsiveness.

#### SESSION 1

#### Provide participants with the [Cultural Responsive PD - Session 1 Notetaker](#)

##### Activity I: Define Culture - EXPLORING CULTURE (10 Minutes)

- Have participants define what culture means to them
- Have them write their definition on the notetaker
- After a couple of minutes, have a discussion about everyone's thoughts on culture
- A definition is provided below. Ensure that the created definition includes the bolded components of the definition.
  - *Culture is a set of values, beliefs, or behaviors shared by a group of people based on race, geography, socioeconomic status, experiences, or other common factors. Cultural norms guide the ways that individuals assign meaning to, interact with, and adapt to different contexts. Culture is ever-evolving and is affected by an individual's development, experiences, and surroundings.*
- Have chart paper to collect thoughts or phrases
- After engaging in the discussion, develop a collective definition. Write the group's definition on the Notetaker.

##### Activity II: Cultural Tree - EXPLORING YOUR CULTURE TREE (30 Minutes)

- Have participants reflect on the information provided about the Culture Tree.
- Read Hammond's Explanation of the Culture Tree:
  - *Rather than use the metaphor of an iceberg, I like to compare culture to a tree. A tree is part of a bigger ecosystem that shapes and impacts its growth and development. Shallow culture is represented in the trunk and branches of the tree while we can think of surface culture as the observable fruit that the tree bears. Surface and shallow culture are not static; they change and shift over time as social groups move around and ethnic groups inter-marry, resulting in a cultural*

*mosaic just as the branches and fruit on a tree change in response to the seasons and its environment. Deep culture is like the root system of a tree. It is what grounds the individual and nourishes his mental health.*

*Zaretta L. Hammond (2014)*

- Have them review each of the three layers of culture (surface, shallow, and deep). Participants should take time to answer the guiding questions about each layer of culture, around 3-5 minutes per layer.
  - Have a group discussion about answers and reflection questions
- Have participants think about 2 scenarios and read them to the group to assess the group's understanding of the culture levels.
- Share the concluding thoughts
  - It is essential to focus more on deep culture in order to truly understand who we are and the core beliefs of others. The roots hold the values and help us connect on a deep level and not just from frames of reference.

### **Activity III: Dr. Tyson's Video - APPLYING CULTURE TO AN EXPERIENCE (10 Minutes)**

- Watch the video of Dr. Cynthia Tyson, Ohio State University <https://youtu.be/cm-jjabs9tE>
- Discuss the following questions in relation to the video:
  - How did Dr. Tyson's personal story of her parent's conditions for when it's OK to fight influence how she managed conflict during student altercations?
  - Where do you see this falling on the culture tree?
  - How has your culture influenced interactions with students and families?

### **Closing - EXERCISE FOR SELF-REFLECTION (5 - 10 Minutes)**

- Give time to reflect and discuss the following questions
  - How will these activities change how you manage intercultural relationships?

## **SESSION 2**

### **Pre-Activity - Implicit and Explicit Bias - 25 Minutes**

- Watch the TedTalk – "[How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them.](#)".
- Write down and think about the three call to action items mentioned on the video.

**Provide participants with the [Culturally Responsive PD - Session 2 Notetaker](#)**

Start the meeting by resetting your purpose of the work and by reviewing your definition of culture. Explain to the team that today you will engage in work around bias.

## **UNDERSTANDING BIAS**

### **Activity I - Willing to be disturbed spoken essay - 10 minutes**

- Video -
- Article - Willing to be Disturbed [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1g9GQ--Bj4v1J0HpTHmdU5vutgNblBeVT/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1g9GQ--Bj4v1J0HpTHmdU5vutgNblBeVT/view?usp=drive_link)

- Activity - After listening to or reading the excerpt "Willing to Be Disturbed," complete the quick write below in the "comments" section based on your reflection on the following:
  - 1. A quote, word, or phrase that resonated with you.
  - 2. When do you feel most uncomfortable professionally?
  - 3. What in the article made you feel better about being "disturbed" or uncomfortable?
  - 4. What is your overall takeaway message from this article?

**Activity II - What will happen next ... 5 minutes**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUHop5i8-f4>
  - Stop after 45 seconds
  - Quick Write Prompt
    - What do you think will happen next? What were your impressions?
    - The Black man in a car...
    - The group of Black teenagers in the convenience store....
    - The Black woman with several kids...
    - What brought you to those conclusions?
  - Finish the video and discuss your thoughts.

**Activity III - Red Cross Poster - 10 minutes**

- Let's take another look at implicit bias and how we can look at the same thing and see different things.
- Write down 5 things you noticed in the poster - Pause the video below at 5 seconds.
- <https://youtu.be/8vUi2RAuiO4>
- Discuss responses

**Activity IV - Implicit Association Tests - Choose your own - 15 minutes**

- <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html>
- After taking the Implicit Association Test, reflect on how you can reduce your bias.

## SESSION 3

**I. Begin today's session by recapping some of the work that you have already done.**

**SAY:**

For the last two sessions, we have focused on the first two outcomes and goals of this culturally responsive professional learning. We have examined our own beliefs, assumptions, and actions and collaborated on exploring individual and collective cultural responsiveness. We defined culture for our team and have had conversations about our context. I have explained the reason for this work at our school and my desire to build my capacity and yours in cultural responsiveness so that we might lead this work with our school.

Today, we will begin to develop an actionable plan for measurable next steps. To start this session, we will look at the research on cultural responsiveness. We will listen to some teaching by Muhammad Khalifa who is one of the leading voices and researchers around this work and the role of leadership.

**II. What makes a Culturally Responsive School Leader?**

**SAY:** Muhammad Khalifa, Mark Anthony Gooden, and James Earl Davis developed a Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (CRSL).

**The CRSL Framework is based on four practices:**

- critical self-reflection;
- development of culturally responsive teachers;
- promotion of a culturally responsive and inclusive school environment; and,
- engagement of the students’ community contexts.

**III. Provide participants with the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework Document**

[Microsoft Word - U of M Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework.docx \(umn.edu\)](#)

**IV. Khalifa explains the Culturally Responsive Leadership Framework**

Play Video [In Conversation With - Prof Muhammad Khalifa - YouTube](#)

Start Video at 11:07 and Stop at 21:00

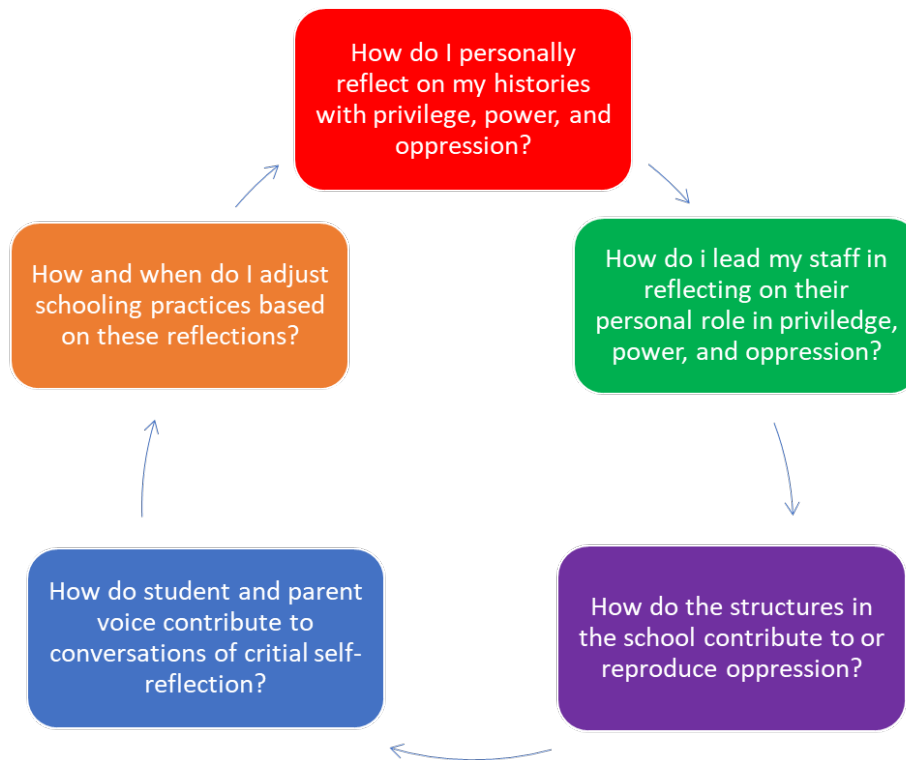
Have them take notes on their notetaker as they listen to the video. You may choose to stop after the first two boxes are discussed and then discuss and then finish the video and listen to the bottom two boxes and discuss.

<b>Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors</b>	<b>Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers</b>
<i>Focuses on how leaders and their organizations contribute, examine, and oppose oppressive practices within their community.</i>	<i>Focuses on how leaders articulate a vision that supports the development and sustaining of culturally responsive teaching. The leader should recognize and challenge common patterns of inequities in minority groups.</i>
<b>Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment</b>	<b>Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts</b>
<i>Focuses on how leaders leverage resources to identify and foster a culturally affirming school environment, challenge the status quo, and seek to challenge and support teachers who fall into the familiar patterns.</i>	<i>Focuses on the leader’s ability to engage students, families, and communities in culturally appropriate ways.</i>

**V. Khalifa explains Critical Self-Reflection**

How do I lead critical self-reflection? Locating and Resisting Oppression

Play Video [In Conversation With - Prof Muhammad Khalifa - YouTube](#)  
Start Video at 31:10 and Stop at 33:00  
Have facilitators take notes during the video on their notetaker.



Give each participant time to reflect on each question personally. Engage in some discussion about their thoughts on the questions.

#### VI. Next steps - Leader Actions, Teacher Actions, Student Actions

As a team, engage in conversation about what you will do next after engaging in learning about Cultural Responsiveness. What are the next LEADER actions, TEACHER actions, and STUDENT actions?