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**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY EXPLORING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE  
TEACHING AND LEARNING**

by

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B.A. May 1998, Saint Paul's College  
M.S. Aug 2013, Regent University

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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May 2023

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Dr. Steve Myran (Director)

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## ABSTRACT

### AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY EXPLORING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

James H. Jones Jr.  
Old Dominion University, 2023  
Director: Dr. Steve Myran

With the continued transformation of the cultural landscape of America and the recognition of the importance of our diverse communities, schools and educational leaders across the country must transform and grow to be reflective of this diverse world. Because it has been demonstrated that principals have a profound impact on instruction and student learning, facilitating the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogies can play a critical role in developing and sustaining effective urban schools. However, there is an undertheorized tension between the inequality regimes of managerialism and the goals of culturally responsive school leadership, highlighting that the undergirding theories of action of managerialism are conceptually and practically incongruent with the core mission of equity and social justice. This literature begs the question, is social justice and equity possible under the auspices of scientific management and colonization? This study, drawing on qualitative and ethnographic methods, explored how school leaders committed to the principles of cultural competence and culturally responsive practices navigated these incongruent theories of action in their day to day work as agents of equality and equity. Analysis unearthed a tiered model where, at the center, the school leaders eagerly and intuitively adopted culturally responsive practices and readily saw the value, not only for students' learning and growth, but in guiding and facilitating a healthy learning environment for all. However, in the outer tiers of the model these educators encountered organizational and structural obstacles which were primarily rooted in traditional managerial oriented norms, values, and beliefs. Scientific management and its influences on organizational

practices represented a host of barriers, both theoretical and practical, that limited the kind of free exchange of cultural resources and knowledge that is needed in a diverse world.

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God loves me. He provided me with the wisdom and fortitude to persevere. Along with that, He made certain to guide my thoughts and behaviors when I knew not what determination I needed, nor where it would spring from. Those who know me, know I do what I do for Team Jones. They serve as the biggest source of my strength and drive. My mother and father, both watching over me, are glorifying, celebrating my success and will to push through adversity. To my wife and partner; the Yin to my Yang; my balance; who continues to support and encourage me, Zarifa - you have stayed the course throughout this project, both the challenges and accomplishments, and your dedication is my lifeline. Quayla, The Ace - you and I have experienced so much together - growing and learning and building with one another, and this task was no different. The boys: Jaxon and Liam - this is for us. The Black boy, underestimated and misguided in a world, falling short to connect and develop us; falling short to invest in us, and thereby making us the best version of ourselves; and falling short of providing us the equitable opportunity, we rightfully earned and deserve, to be successful in education and throughout life. I love and adore you all and submit this work as a testament and model for who we are and what we can do when focused and determined. Thank you to my sisters for their transparent and direct encouragement, knowing this work was bigger than me. Knowing it was for Joyce and Chick and all they instilled in us, growing up at 644.

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I was able to take my dream and make it my drive.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

Schools and their leaders have a responsibility and duty to ensure students and, just as importantly, teachers are provided the scaffolding and support they need to best accomplish their goals. With the continued transformation of the cultural landscape of America and the recognition of the importance of our communities, schools and educational leaders across the country must transform and grow accordingly to be reflective of this diverse world. In many of these diverse areas there continues to be increasing numbers of homogenous teachers and staff, including school leaders, consisting of White, middle class teachers, unfamiliar with those they serve (Feistritz, 2011; Genao, 2016). Increasing cultural and diversity awareness of teachers encourages the establishment and development of a positive organizational culture, conducive for teaching and learning, improving student achievement (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Wang & Degol, 2016). In keeping with this, providing an equitable education for all students has become challenging, as classrooms are becoming increasingly more diverse in terms of culture; linguistics; ethnic groups; religions; and economics (Genao, 2016). As such, Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL), which is focused on addressing how race, power, and individual, institutional, and cultural racism impact the learning outcomes for students of color (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015), is foundational in the preparation of school leaders and teachers. Because it has been demonstrated that principals have a profound impact on instruction and student learning (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016), facilitating the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogies can play a critical role in developing and sustaining effective urban schools (Ezzani & Brooks, 2018; Rigby, 2014).

In the following sections, I explore culturally responsible leadership through a set of interrelated theoretical constructs designed to guide the problem identification and frame the research questions of this study.

1. Culturally Responsive School Leadership
2. The Legacy of Scientific Management
3. The Colonialism of Public Schools
4. Epistemic Justice
5. Accountability, School Improvement, and Reform
6. School Leadership and Its Impact on Teaching and Learning

### **Culturally Responsive School Leadership**

Building on the above, school leaders play a pivotal role in the establishment of and ensuring safe, responsive teaching and learning environments for all students, particularly those students failing to achieve academically at the level of their peers. As emphasized by Minkos et. al. (2017), Black and Hispanic students consistently perform below their White peers, exacerbating the racial and ethnic disparity which exists. Along with this, it is important to know that while White students in public schools decreased from 2003-2013, from 59% to 50% (Kena, Hussar, et al., 2016), our students continue to see a lack of diversity in their classrooms, with 82% of their teachers being White and 76% of them being female (Goldring, Gray & Bitterman, 2013). In efforts to ensure teaching and learning communities, exercising culturally responsive practices for all students and considering the increase in a more diverse student population, combined with an employee population lacking similar cultural diversity, is vital for school leaders to examine and modify organizational structures.

School culture is vitally important in the lives of students, and as Vass (2017), emphasized, it is fundamental to schooling, as it shapes educators' thinking, beliefs, and actions, as well as how they communicate. As such, it has an impact on policy, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Along with this, many teachers need to be better prepared to effectively meet the instructional, socio-emotional and disciplinary needs of these students, which they serve (Hagenauer, Hascher, & Volet, 2015; Schonert-Reichl, Kitil, & Hanson-Peterson, 2017) and in order for schools to be successful, school leadership must address the preparation of a faculty not fully integrating and addressing culturally responsive awareness into all areas of the school environment, including curriculum impacts on instruction, discipline, and educational experiences. Appropriate preparation of school leaders and teachers is essential to ensuring students are provided positive teaching and learning environments, receiving an equitable education, and the tools and resources needed to be successful in life. Cultural awareness and embracing the diversity for individuals in schools, including principals and their staff is necessary, as Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) facilitates the recognition and actions driven towards cultural competence, addressing how race, power, and individual institutional, and cultural racism impact the beliefs, structures, and outcomes for marginalized and students of color (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015).

### **The Legacy of Scientific Management**

Closely related to the above, the organizational structures of public schools as we have come to know them are historically anchored to Taylorism and Scientific Management (Cuban, 2013; Myran & Sutherland, 2019; Tyack, 1974), and have continued to play a dominant role in how we conceptualize, organize, and administer our schools. As highlighted by Myran and Sutherland (2019), this continued influence of scientific management has been referred to as

new-Taylorism or Neo-Taylorism (Au, 2011; Gronn, 1982), Managerialism (Gunter, 1997), or Neo-Managerialism (Terry, 1998). In this dominant paradigm they emphasize that there deeply held assumptions of linear cause and effect pathways between the organizational structures and the power of schools and student learning. As Adams and Myran (2021) emphasize, this “underrepresents the reciprocal role that parents, the community and the students play in shaping the learning setting” (p. 3). They go on to emphasize that a set of functionalist and deterministic outlooks are part of the prominent neo-managerial paradigm that assume that student learning is the result of policy initiatives and (Cuban, 2013) and the efficiency of well-run bureaucracies (Callahan, 1962; Willower, 1973). In this way, as they highlight, the authoritarian and prescriptive nature of the accountability movement (Au, 2011; Ravitch, 2016) conflates setting standards for the standardization of content, and instruction and assessment (Cuban, 2001), and promotes rigid scripted curricula (Sawyer, 2004), which in turn “undermines opportunities for students to be co-producers of their own knowledge (Myran & Sutherland, 2019) and for parents to engage in meaningfully shaping their children’s educational experiences (Dias, 2005)” (p.3).

This neo-managerial foundation is antithetical to the goals of culturally responsive leadership as CRSL seeks to recognize how race, power, and individual institutional, and cultural racism impact beliefs, structures, and outcomes for marginalized and students of color (Gooden & O’Doherty, 2015). The neo-managerial traditions can’t account for the bidirectionality between and among diverse cultures, communities, values, histories, goals and needs. The efficiency and uniformity norms of neo-managerialism are a poor foundation for the goals of addressing culturally responsive awareness into all areas of the school environment, including curriculum impacts on instruction, discipline, and educational experiences. Considering this, one



can see the link between scientific management and its effect on accountability for students and schools.

### **The Colonialism of Public Schools**

Drawing together several themes explored above, one can see what Shahjahan (2011) called the colonial vestiges of educational policy, research and neoliberal reform in our early efforts to responsibly address the call for greater respect, understanding and integration of more culturally diverse perspectives. In recent years scholars have called for the decolonization of schooling (Tejeda, Espinoza, Gutierrez, 2003) and educational leadership (Khalifa, Khalil & March, 2019). The decolonizing of schools and related practices is crucial to ensuring cultural awareness, including equity, the appropriate and reasonable equal access and achievement of all learners, irrespective of class, culture, gender, and race among others (Lebeloane, 2017) for all students. Decolonizing is necessary to make progress towards a more culturally responsive climate and culture, more conducive for academic success for Black, brown, and marginalized communities. In terms of decolonizing education, it is a valuable process to be undertaken, as it presents as a discrete and often overlooked element with global historical repercussions; representing a political and epistemological rupture (Otto, 2013), one necessary for growth and development to be made in the areas of curriculum development; teacher pedagogy; and the ability in forming positive and lasting relationships with students of varied and diverse backgrounds.

### **Epistemic Justice**

In this way, equitable access to high quality educational resources that integrate culturally responsive learning experiences is critical to equity and social justice. That is, opportunities to engage in substantive knowledge creation – that is knowledge beyond compliance to that gained

through ridged scripted curriculum – has material, economic, social, political, civic and symbolic value, and opportunities to be engaged in more substantive and reciprocal learning opportunities determines one's access to and use of these knowledge resources (Adams & Myran, 2021). The failure to create, protect, and scaffold experiences for students to engage in the kind of deeper learning supported by culturally responsive classrooms and schools is a form of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007), that is, a biased refusal to confer credibility upon knowledge claimants and barring active participation and acceptance in epistemic communities (McConkey, 2004). What is particularly important here is that as Myran and Sutherland (2019) has emphasized, the study of learning has demonstrated that knowledge is co-constructed through the learner's deliberate and active agency in a complex and dynamic reciprocal interaction between their unique backgrounds, prior knowledge, and the social and educational context. Adams and Myran (2021) build on this emphasizing that a socially just outlook on learning goes beyond should access to existing standards of knowledge, "but the inclusion as active members of the community of knowers who actively engage in constructing, co-constructing and reconstructing knowledge in new and innovative ways" (p. 68). As such, "members of a community of knowers are valued for their pluralistic and dynamic outlooks rather than pressured to passively conform to existing canons of knowledge" (Adams & Myran, 2021, p.68). Culturally responsive school leadership may be one means for facilitating school environments that offer these kinds of learning opportunities.

### **Accountability, School Improvement and Reform**

Building on the above, it is important to discuss the topic of school accountability, exploring its relationships to Culturally Responsive School Leadership. Policy and legislation, along with implementation practices, lead the way in determining if measures of accountability

are fair and equitable for all. Those responsible for these decisions must begin to develop legislation allowing states and districts to better address their most impactful concerns, including culturally responsive practices and their impact on student success. Accountability and assessment have failed to promote equitable impacts on student learning. Accountability continues to expand, with standards based becoming the law of the land, however, as it has grown, assessment and accountability failed to make a way for those who do not fit in (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2013). It is high time leaders make meaningful decisions in relation to testing, leader and teacher development, and the role of accountability. Those who lead have been placed in this role for a reason; they must make a way for teachers and students to grow, without being subjected to fair and unjust accountability practices.

### **School Leadership and its Impact on Teaching and Learning - Student Discipline**

#### **Inequities**

When examining the colonization of education and the need for epistemic justice, it is vital for school leaders and instructors to be well educated about those they serve and interact with daily, therefore, a culturally diverse teacher population may be better positioned in developing an understanding of the perspectives of those from cultures and beliefs different from themselves (Faas, Darmody & Smith, 2018). In keeping with this, a focus on the cultural development and diversity understandings of teachers and their pedagogies, while keeping accountability in mind, will provide better opportunities for students of color to be successful academically. In Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis' (2016) a synthesis of the literature on school principals, they highlight four main behaviors of culturally responsive school leaders. These are: principals critically self-reflect on their leadership behaviors; they develop culturally responsive teachers and curricula; promote culturally responsive and inclusive school environments; and

engage students and parents. Culturally Responsive School Leadership is a willingness and explicit execution of actions by school leaders and teachers to include all students in the educational process, ensuring success and growth for all children taught, specifically those who have been marginalized, perhaps due to race or economic status (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

Culturally Responsive School Leadership is necessary in addressing a variety of issues impacting students of color and those marginalized, including curriculum development, school climate, and the role of student discipline. The school leader drives the mindset and actions of a building and has his or her pulse on essential actions needed for the success of their organization, aid in establishing and maintaining a presence and effective relationship with the community members they work alongside and serve. Discipline referrals are routinely higher among Black and Latino students in comparison to their White counterparts (Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Monroe, 2005). These offenses often include aggressive behavior, defiance or questioning authority (Irby, 2018), which can lead to either short or long-term removal from the school setting, hindering their ability to achieve and be successful academically. In keeping with this, “There is a growing consensus that school discipline policies must achieve a third goal of equitable treatment of students that disrupts the production of racial discipline disparities” (Irby, 2018, p.5). Furthermore, items of this nature are a direct indictment on school cultures and their malevolence for non-white students, exposing them to what can be considered a hostile teaching and learning environment. Being aware of the cultures and backgrounds of those being educated; their needs educationally; and the relationship established with stakeholders can be a part of ensuring school leaders are providing students and families with a quality and equitable education.

A picture begins to emerge where the calls for culturally responsive school leadership are theoretically, philosophically, and practically incongruent with the legacy of scientific management, the colonization of public schools, and the limitations of current accountability systems. If we don't better understand this historically rooted incongruence and how to best address it, implementing culturally responsive practices with fidelity will be impossible, and historically marginalized communities will continue to experience the impacts of epistemic injustice. Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL), characterized by addressing how race, power, and individual, institutional, and cultural racism impact beliefs, structures, and outcomes for students of color (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015), is foundational in the preparation of school leaders and teachers. However, the organizational and leadership norms of public schools, developed during the industrial revolution and influenced by the scientific management and the efficiency movement that followed, are fundamentally incongruent with the ideals of CRSL. In keeping with this, we continue to see the strong presence of scientific management in the neo-managerial influence of the accountability movement. Moreover, if learning is education's primary goal, we have to ask if these scientific management influenced norms support the kinds of culturally responsive practices that recognize all students as credible knowledge claimants. Similarly, the colonial vestiges of power and control can readily be found in educational policy, research and neoliberal reform that leaves the core issues of inequity unaddressed. A particularly concerning place where these issues reveal themselves are in the inequitable ways student discipline is addressed in our public schools. Culturally Responsive School Leadership offers a potential pathway through addressing these scientific management and colonization barriers to educational equity by including all students in the educational process, ensuring success and growth for all children taught, specifically those who have been

marginalized, perhaps due to race or economic status (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). It is past time to address and begin developing not only theoretical, but practical solutions to combating the challenges faced by schools, school leaders, and their communities.

### **Problem Statement**

We can see in the above a tension between the power dynamics of traditional organizational structures, which have been heavily influenced by scientific management (e.g. Cuban, 1990; Tyack, 1974), and the ideals of Culturally Responsive School Leadership, and more broadly, social justice, which recognizes the dominant culture of power have historically shaped the individual, and institutional, cultural beliefs, structures, and organizational norms that marginalize some while privileging others (Brooks, Miles, Buck, 2008; Thrupp, 2003; Ward, Bagley, Lumby, Woods, Hamilton, & Roberts, 2015). For example, Brooks, Miles, and Buck (2008) identified a debate in the literature about the degree to which social justice work was possible under the auspices of scientific management. In this way, there is an inherent tension between the inequality regimes – that is the interrelated practices, processes, action and meanings (Acker, 2006), shaped by scientific management, that marginalized minority students and the goals of culturally responsive school leadership. This dissertation takes the position that the undergirding theories of action, both explicitly stated and the de facto theories, are conceptually and practically incongruent with the core mission of equity and social justice. As such, efforts to bring about any substantive and lasting change are unlikely under the continued influence of scientific management.

### **Statement of Purpose**

It is important to recognize and explore how schools prepare and respond to these students, determining if those actions are closing academic gaps between these students and

other demographic groups. The purpose of this study is to explore emergent beliefs and practices of educators related to culturally responsive educational practices as they are implemented in organizational contexts that I argue are theoretically and practically incongruent with the conceptualization of culturally responsive education. This study is particularly interested in the lived experiences of educators (school leaders and teachers) of minority and marginalized students, including African American males in secondary settings, as these students (and Hispanics) continue to fall behind their peers in student achievement (Kena et al., 2016). This study explores the experiences of educators as they have worked to implement culturally responsive practices; including their exposure to professional development topics, support resources, supervision and mentorship, parent and community interactions, their interactions with peers and most importantly, their interactions with students.

Currently the literature remains indeterminate on the limitations of traditional scientific managements' influence on organizational structures capable of supporting the mission of culturally responsive education and social justice. The research on decolonizing education (Khalifa, Khalil, Marsh & Halloran, 2019; Scully, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012) offers a powerful theoretical lens for advocating for culturally responsive and diverse practices, along with analyzing these data and understanding the potential limitations of scientific management on the effective implementation of culturally responsive educational practice. This work seeks to explore the degree to which educators find their efforts to be stewards of culturally responsive education theoretically and practically at odds with the foundations of scientific management. More narrowly, this study examines and considers how these educators sought to impact student achievement and reduce disciplinary infractions, both of which widen the gap of achievement

between marginalized groups of students and their counterparts and any potential obstacles that are encountered.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the lived experiences of educators engaged in ensuring culturally responsive educational practices and how do the organizational structures, habits and norms of their school support, or constrain these practices?
  - a. How do these educators define Culturally Responsive education and leadership?
  - b. What culturally responsive leadership beliefs do individuals possess and utilize to build and develop inclusive organizations?
  - c. Does cultural awareness by an individual impact their ability in establishing and forming impactful relationships affecting student achievement and discipline?
  - d. How does Culturally Responsive teaching and learning impact decisions by staff as it relates to the education of the children and families they serve?
  - e. How does the dominant school culture support, constrain or shape the implementation of these practices?

### **Significance of the Study**

A change and evolution of mindset is needed to be shared by all educators, ensuring progress is made by all students, as current education practices reflect a thinking and implementation driven by original foundations of schooling which impact student development, both academically and socially. It is surprising that this issue has not been more at the forefront of K-12 education, considering schools in their initial purpose, were designed to “wipe indigenous cultures, norms, languages, spiritualities, and epistemologies clean of ‘indigeneity’ (Hohepa, 2013; Minthorn & Chavez, 2015)” (Khalifa, Khalil, Marsh & Halloran, 2019, p.2).



What has received only limited attention in the literature is that the scientific management undergirding of public education is fundamentally incongruent with the goals of social justice and equity – these historically recalcitrant organizational structures were designed for uniformity and compliance and serve as an inappropriate basis of solving deeply entrenched systemic inequities.

School leaders and teachers are not afforded leeway for excuses, as they are accountable to do whatever it takes for their community and its families, and yet they are asked to address complex social, educational, economic, and psychological challenges within an organizational structure fundamentally designed for uniformity and compliance. Furthermore, students are the focal point for why educators do what they do. Regardless of background, race or ethnicity, and cultural differences, effective and thoughtful educators take students where they are, investing in them academically and socially; best preparing them for what is next; sending them into the world with an ability to better handle what may come. It is vital to be aware of their needs, providing an adequate and equitable education, affording them an opportunity to be prepared for life after school, including college and their career. However, they need a reimagined organizational structure that is specifically designed for diversity, not one rooted in the principles of efficiency and uniformity.

As the landscape of education is changing, including the communities served and those serving them, cultural connections are critically impactful when discussing student academic success and growth (Khalifa et. al, 2016). As such, this study is valuable in that it will add to the conversation on the conditions that support or constrain the positive teacher-student relationships associated with a reduction in behavior issues, greater engagement in learning, higher social functioning, and the development of positive academic identities (De Royston et al., 2017) which

all are supported within culturally responsive educational programs. Furthermore, school leadership and teacher pedagogy are factors that can impact student achievement, and failure to address the organizational structures that support school leaders and teacher's roles in culturally responsive teaching and learning negatively affect children's, particularly historically marginalized, opportunities in acquiring an equitable education, and affording them opportunities for success beyond school (Ezzani & Brooks, 2018). Students and families require school leaders and teachers serving in an ethno humanist role, where their educational ideals and practices empower them and their students, drawing from shared funds of knowledge (Khalifa et al., 2018), and this is achieved is in recognizing and valuing the differences among students, and from there, purposefully engaging in practices ensuring equitable opportunities for success are made available for all. Developing a deeper understanding about families and students, building on their ancestral assets and knowledge (Khalifa et al., 2018), schools may find themselves having a more significant impact in the establishment of relationships, thereby allowing for greater student learning.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to examine and determine levels of cultural responsiveness in schools by both principals to teachers; and of teachers to their minority and marginalized students. In order to make this determination, an ethnographic study, exploring the nature of relationships and how they are developed is explored through interviews and observations (Fusch, Fusch, Ness, 2017). Along with this, the humanistic angle was examined, learning how relationships develop between school leader and teacher and teacher and student, impacting student achievement and development. From there, as illustrated by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) I made use of data interpretation, developing ideas about findings connecting to related research.

The value of culturally responsive interventions inspiring students to engage, learn, and grow must remain a central part of the discussion.

This study is qualitative in design, utilizing an ethnographic approach of school leaders and teachers, determining their level of cultural responsiveness. Data collection was conducted through interviews of educators in leadership roles, including teacher leaders (e.g., department chairs and instructional leaders; curriculum leaders; and program directors). Along with this, targeted discussions were held around most emergent themes. Similarly, we discussed professional development sessions for teachers and opportunities teachers take to engage students in Social and Emotional Learning activities. The sample size, data collection tool and data analysis tools are discussed in chapter 3.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review**

The literature review consists of detailed examinations of the scholarship directly connected to various factors related to Culturally Responsive School Leadership and Teaching and Pedagogy, including its role relative to structures and organizations conducive for teaching and learning for students of diverse ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. I begin with a discussion of Culturally Responsive School Leadership, including the impacts on teacher pedagogy and student discipline, and the value of establishing cultures and climates conducive for student success for African-American males at the secondary level. As discussed in Chapter One, I explore the historically rooted legacy of scientific management, neo-managerialism, the colonization of public schooling and leadership, the subsequent epistemic injustices experienced by historically marginalized peoples, the limitations of the current accountability system, and the implications for school leadership and its impact on teaching, learning, and student disciplinary inequities experienced by historically marginalized students, particularly, Black students. These six key areas are outlined below and offer a roadmap for Chapter Two.

1. Culturally Responsive School Leadership
2. The Legacy of Scientific Management
3. The Colonialism of Public Schools
4. Epistemic Justice
5. Accountability, School Improvement and Reform
6. School Leadership and Its Impact on Teaching and Learning

## **Culturally Responsive School Leadership – Overview and Impact**

It is crucial for minoritized students, those who have been structurally oppressed due to differences between them and their dominant social peers (Khalifa et al., 2019) to be embraced and valued, as they go secluded from equitable opportunities in life and Culturally Responsive School Leadership and its agents aid in providing this need. Schools and the communities they serve, including minoritized students, are becoming more diverse and the educational system and its leaders' abilities to adapt accordingly require immediate attention. Due to the need to close the racial student achievement gap, a central issue in education today, and its impact on policy and legislative initiative, Culturally Responsive School Leadership is critical in schools (Khalifa et al., 2016). Along with this, the discipline gap, including referrals, suspensions, and expulsions, among races is a genuine concern in need of addressing. Blacks and Latinos are more likely than Whites to be referred to the principal's office for offenses of defiance, speaking loudly or questioning authority, which directly impacts these student's level of engagement, thereby impacting critical areas of concern, including student achievement and truancy. Items of this nature are a direct indictment on school cultures and their malevolence for non-white students, exposing them to what can be considered a hostile teaching and learning environment.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership grew out of the theory and practice of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (e.g., Richards & Brown, 2007), and Culturally Responsive Teaching (e.g., Gay, 2018), which has their foundations in various critical theories such as critical race pedagogy (e.g., Lynn, 1999), and multicultural education (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). While these constructs vary somewhat in their conceptualization and intended practice, they share a core focus on revealing the systemic inequities inherent in the dominant managerial and colonized paradigm, exploring the relationship between privilege, power, and oppression

(Brown, 2004; Niesche, 2019) “calls educators to activism” (Brown, 2004, p. 86), and is “grounded in the day to day lives of people, structure and cultures” (Brown, 2004, p. 78).

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) is a willingness and explicit execution of actions by school leaders and teachers to include all students in the educational process, ensuring success and growth for all students, specifically those who have been marginalized, perhaps due to race or economic status. Along with this, CRSL promotes and sustains an environment stable enough to attract, maintain, and support the further development of good teachers (Khalifa et al., 2016), as staff development and growth have a direct influence on student achievement. Furthermore, CRSL guarantees those charged with leading, promoting an inclusive school climate for all, along with those students who have been marginalized within most school contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016). Lastly, culturally responsive school leaders establish and maintain a presence and effective relationships with the community members they work alongside and serve. Keeping this in mind, the school leader is one who drives the mindset and actions of a building and has their pulse on what actions are needed is essential to the success of their organization.

School leaders are inundated with various tasks, including implementation of curriculum; student and teacher development; addressing community concerns; and assessment and accountability. However, culture remains a centerpiece in organizational structure and the role of cultural competence, along with its repercussions on the direction and development of a positive school culture are not to be discounted. Culture – the establishment and development of a system of shared beliefs, values, norms, symbols, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that members of a group utilize to make sense of the organization, fostering a sense of identity and community (Bustamante, Nelson, and Onwuegbuzie, 2009) is a leader’s mark. Culturally

Responsive School Leadership is complex and diverse, an open system of areas which must be engaged and addressed with purpose and the intention of leading to change, culture is included in that change and is to be addressed in the dialogue of CRSL.

In examining CRSL, those in charge possess a particular knowledge base, set of traits and behaviors enabling them to expand their influence, thereby being more impactful within the organization. This allows them to understand and address the cultural needs of those they are most engaged with – students, teachers, and parents. They understand the role of race and social justice, making it a part of the dialogue. Along with this, school leaders of this nature ensure the preparation of staff and address culture development simultaneously. When stepping back and looking at the big picture for leadership development, CRSL includes being an anti-oppressive/racist leader; one who is transformative in practice, ensuring social justice for all; students, staff, and the larger school community (Khalifa et al., 2016). These leaders must be willing to be bold and daring, going against the grain of the norm, advocating for and affirming the communities they serve.

School leaders' leadership is to be distributed to the teacher if success is to be ascertained and the importance of a highly qualified and impactful teacher is vital when discussing CRSL. It can be argued teachers are just as valuable as school leaders when discussing student achievement, however, principals are the most recognizable position in a school, and bear high stress of accountability for progress or lack thereof (Khalifa et al., 2016). Keeping this in mind, school leader's investment in teacher development in their actions is essential, as teachers and teacher leaders can be key in the establishment of a community of CRSL. Those leaders exercising CRSL understand they impact student learning and achievement multiple ways, including the assurance of building and improving teachers, making certain they have strong

relationships with students and families (Khalifa et al., 2016). A powerful task for school leaders is ensuring appropriate professional development is performed with teachers and staff, including monitoring, and following up, as this aids in being responsive to those students most in need.

Students and communities are provided a disservice when teachers are not included in ongoing development aimed at their betterment where instruction or the development of relationships is concerned. As Jason found in 2000, one of the most critical issues identified was “preparing teachers for multiethnic, multicultural settings.” Teachers, along with school leaders have a duty to be best prepared for those they serve, and to not provide them what they may need may be seen as criminal, considering the long-term impact on education and quality of life.

### **Historic Foundations of Educational Leadership: The Legacy of Scientific Management**

In examining the landscape of education and where some of its organizational structure springs from, it is important to note a portion of this educational framework revolves around Frederick W. Taylor’s 1911 publication, “*The Principles of Scientific Management*,” designed to address organizational problems, inefficiencies, and adverse employer-employee relations (Tanjeja, Pryor, & Toombs, 2011) during this particular time in American history. These principles and practices were believed to increase productivity of employees, thereby making their companies more profitable and efficient. Taylor’s work centered around the following topics: *Industrial Efficiency and Work Measurement; Standardization; Delineation and Management of Tasks and the Piecework Concept; and Organizational Behavior* (Tanjeja, Pryor, & Toombs, 2011). In observing the benefits of these tenets and foci, schools adopted practices reflecting these principles, as they would be sending those students into that workforce. Additionally, school districts recognized these as elements to be undertaken by school leaders in efforts ensuring teachers and students are best prepared for teaching and learning, though it



should be noted at the time of its publication, America was in the midst of an Industrial Revolution; a time when factories and relative work of that nature were, essentially booming, dictating how organizations were structured. Though wildly popular and found to possess themes and ideas beneficial at the time, the country has progressed and thought patterns and mindsets are in need of a shift. Kim shared in a 2017 article, “Management techniques based on the idea of economic efficiency are directed towards systematic control, but productivity cannot be improved only through strict management and control.” In order to ensure a culturally responsive community and educator, we must use the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching and learning (Gay, 2002) and not base the management of schools on archaic notions, theories, and practices, as these can establish barriers to necessary reform. In examining the impact of Scientific Management, we must key in on concepts failing to allow for the implementation of Culturally Responsive practices desperately needed in our schools today.

As with all theories and practices, there are some positive holdovers, and the Scientific Management mindset is no different. An ongoing focus is the responsibility of the employers (school leaders) to take care of their employees (teachers) and their interests as well as the interests of the organization (Tanjeja, Pryor, & Toombs, 2011). In keeping with this, and seeing support from the likes of Henry Ford, Taylor’s belief that employees are to be best trained for their job is vital. To go along with this, the preparation and selection of school leaders needs to be discussed, as a school’s success is largely defined by the principal, as school leadership is second only to classroom instructional practices for positively influencing student learning (Liou and Daly, 2018). The school leader is vital in the development of a positive and responsive school culture; one conducive for teaching and learning by both students and teachers. School

leaders are selected based upon a variety of traits and behaviors, with none particularly outweighing the other, as strong knowledge base; the ability to be an effective two-way communicator; willing believer in the establishment of positive relationships; along with other variables all carry some weight in determining if a school leader will be impactful, bringing about student success along with teacher growth. Leadership pipelines and programs are instrumental in aiding students in framing problems in education and forming a mindset to do something about it (Gooden & Dantley, 2012), and those singularly focused on developing members of its organization to assume various forms of supervisory and management roles must be willing to engage and develop those candidates in multiple facets, including the ability to implement a culturally responsive community of learning for all students.

### **The Colonization of Schools and Oppression**

In examining school leadership and its relationship to cultural awareness and diversity, it is significant to consider the basis of what the educational system is established upon, along with who is doing most of the leading. The original foundations of schooling and leadership continue to have a lasting effect on today's system, including the idea that Westernized Eurocentric schooling serves as a tool of imperialism, colonization, and control of indigenous and minoritized people (Khalifa et al., 2019). Though, not indigenous to the United States, African-Americans have long been a victim of control and persecution, often at the hands of Whites, determined to exploit or appropriate them, by any means – violent or otherwise, into thinking and believing that which they believe, and unfortunately, this practice does not escape the realm of education. The decolonization of leadership and schools is valuable to teaching and learning because it offers a lens for understanding the impacts of our field's history and aids in the establishment of meaningful partnerships with the students, providing an ethno humanist role

(Gooden, 2005), where school leaders and students are empowered (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). In examining colonization, it is important to recognize the role of race and how it does play a role in relationships between African-Americans and Whites, as schools continue to be rooted in whiteness (Hines III, 2016). It is time for minoritized students to be embraced and valued, as they have been structurally oppressed due to differences between themselves and the dominant group (Khalifa et. al, 2019). Educators lacking an ability to culturally connect, thereby inviting diversity, lead to the development of “weaponized silence” (Gibson, 2017), an unfortunate reality where teachers fail to adequately address students’ needs, because they are ill equipped to adequately (or willingly) speak to the questions and concerns put before them. In these situations, when teachers are unable to satisfy the hunger for a student’s yearned to understand; empower them make connections; and ensure the develop deeper meaning, a pedagogical and psychological “flattening” of identity and theft of momentum (Gibson, 2017) occur, where those students most in need of connection are left only with a sense of emptiness. It is imperative education begin developing dialogue centering around the elimination of colonized leadership, as it has been shown by Khalifa et. al. in 2019 to destroy and have negative impacts on the culture, epistemologies, knowledge, and self-determination of not only indigenous, but also minoritized people.

Along with the colonization of schools, is white fragility, defensive moves used by White people to deny the impact of race or try to explain race away (Hines III, 2016). This is important to address because communities and schools are becoming more diverse by the day, while many who lead are White and will be addressing the concern of culturally responsive school teaching. White fragility conveys an elitist idea which, like colonization, reinforces the desire for minorities and indigenous people to assimilate or be ostracized, unable to prosper in life. In

keeping with this, in 2016, Hines III wrote, “White fragility upholds the premise that only White people are considered to be standard examples of normality, universality, and goodness,” which supports the colonization mindset. The colonization of schools by leadership who believe themselves to be better or that no problem exists fails to afford all students an equal opportunity at access to an education providing them the opportunity to be successful, not only in life, but also in school.

### **Epistemic Justice**

Building on the above, we can see inherent tensions between the legacy of scientific management and the inequality regimes of a colonized education system that marginalized minority students, and the goals of culturally responsive school leadership. The undergirding theories of action shaped by scientific management, neo-managerialism and the colonization of education, both explicitly and implicitly, are conceptually and practically incongruent with culturally responsive leadership and the core mission of equity and social justice. In keeping with this, it is crucial for people to feel as though they belong to a community and have worthiness, in order for success and growth to manifest. Unfortunately, in education, this epistemic justice or recognition and credibility (Jones, 2002; McConkey, 2004) is not available to all communities of students, due, in part, to the legacy of scientific management and the colonization of education, where learning is viewed as the dissemination and acquisition of standardized knowledge, where curriculum and pedagogy is defined by the dominant class and where class, race, gender, and socioeconomic status serve as a means of sorting students into their assigned place in the larger sociocultural and socioeconomic order (Adams & Myran, 2021; Myran & Sutherland, 2019). Epistemic justice is concerned with the “conferral of credibility

upon knowledge claimants” and emphasizes that credibility is achieved by one’s active participation and acceptance in one’s epistemic community (McConkey, 2004, p.198).

All students deserve a safe space for teaching and learning, where they feel valued, seeing recognition of who they are, ensuring their concerns and needs are reflected in the teaching and learning process. Along with this, because some communities of people and students have been victimized by transactional injustice and unjustly discounted, and in order to build and develop a sense of belonging, (Anderson, 2012; Khalifa, 2020), this recognition should be explicitly evidenced in curriculum development, instruction, and the establishment of a climate and culture conducive for their academic success and social growth. Furthermore, it is important for educators, particularly building leaders and teachers, to recognize and value marginalized students, who often come from minority communities, as they are in positions of advantage and should seek out those disadvantaged and help them do better (Anderson, 2012). In keeping with this, school leaders and their visions for academic and social excellence must be explicit in expectations and steps needed to make epistemic justice for all a reality. In doing so, they must establish ways to engage with these communities, ensuring learning and further understanding is taking place.

What must happen is a focus on reform in education, ensuring epistemic injustice is acknowledged and strategically and appropriately addressed. Considering that prejudice and the errors produced by it are wrongful (McConkey, 2004; Anderson, 2012), it is important for school leaders to encourage and promote related training, along with providing specific feedback when needed (Khalifa, 2020) to teachers. This practice contributes to continued growth and development of educators and aid in ensuring and establishing credibility, social justice, and development of equity for those marginalized. It cannot be understated that this work cannot be

done in silos of teaching and learning and understanding, as members of the educational environment must have “shared inquiry” – where they focus on terms of equality (Anderson, 2012), allowing favor for all and play vital roles, including families, who must recognize the lack of epistemic justice and push for specific and actionable systemic reform in education (Khalifa, 2020). Along with families, educators have to be responsible and demand change from themselves, accessing not only research and information, but also by becoming more active participants within the communities they serve (Khalifa, 2020). In this way, Culturally Responsive School Leadership may serve as a powerful tool for overcoming the legacy of scientific management, the impacts of the colonization of schools and as a means of promoting epistemic justice.

### **Accountability in Education and the Assumptions about Teaching and Learning**

A fair and equitable chance for schools and their students, while optimistic, does not always exist for various reasons, including race, gender, and socioeconomic status. In an effort to ensure students’ needs are met and schools are maintaining their part, accountability – commonly considered the quality of education – is in place. In examining accountability, it is crucial to know and understand how legislative and political measures impact opportunity to achieve these aforementioned goals of prosperity and increase. Measures of accountability and their impacts go beyond policy makers, modifying what will be scrutinized and counted and tabulated, along with what is taught and who will be doing the teaching. As we look at the history of accountability, training the rising generation in morality, citizenship, and the basic skills by the three *Rs* (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2013) is where the country began, however, as time has passed, it seems targets of measurement have also. It is these developed targets that

drive decision making in terms of assessment and accountability, and included in these targets of measure are performances of marginalized students, to include African American males.

The educational landscape began changing with the establishment of child psychology (Ravitch, 2002) and the discussion of increasing rigor for all students, revolving around assessments moving from memorization and recall to something more standard in nature and backing the support of the science field. This shift in mindset concerning academic assessment, led by Thorndike, imagined education to be an exact science, and his interests, centered around making use of student assessment data to drive the improvement of instruction, ironically, had no intention of measurements of academic performance being utilized for purposes of accountability (Ravitch, 2002) may have invited the scrutinizing eye of the public. In keeping with this, it was initially a positive concept among educators, as it focused on utilizing the data of assessments to drive decisions pertaining to students, including programs students should participate in and social promotion, which interestingly enough, had become popular prior to the 1950s, as those students were needed in the work field. On the other side of this coin was the child psychologist, who believed retention and failure was a shot upon the mindset of the student (Ravitch, 2002).

Fast forward to 1966, where the Coleman report, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* was released, which compared the distribution of resources and opportunities and examined differences in achievement scores or outcomes among children of different races (Ravitch, 2002), including African Americans and their White counterparts. In reflecting on accountability of today, these continue to remain key focal points relative to the efforts of schools, where resources and quality of instruction are concerned, leaving society to wonder if non-white students are receiving what they need to perform, not only in school, but also in life. Following the Coleman report, the movement became a focus on performance by students in addition to the

potential increase of resources. In a nutshell, how students perform was now under the microscope and was to reflect directly upon the efforts of districts, schools, and teachers, encompassing and balancing the accountability for all members of the community of learning. Thereby, this led to the mass introduction of bureaucracy to the field of education and the thoughts that more resources should equate to better student performance on assessment. The National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) established in 1970 began to provide mounting data and trends, placing a picture on what was going on in relation to student assessment and accountability. As the numbers came, so did the pressures from the community for action to take place, specifically to address the gaps between the classes and the gap existing between the races. In a sense, it turned from the development of the student at the forefront, to ensuring the schools ran on a business-like model, where the primary focus was results on achievement tests; what was *not* being done; and how balance across the board among various demographics was to be achieved. Grounded in the legacy of scientific management and the colonization schooling, with the influx of political pressures, came the split and conflict between those who instructed and those who created the policy and legislative guidelines relative to instruction and assessment.

As we can see, the direction for accountability and assessment, though a necessity, would be challenging. You have stakeholders, with vested interests on their own sides, with competing interests. The teachers, more concerned with the development of the student as a person and understanding the role of assessments, are now threatened by the role of the policy maker, who appears to be consumed with why the students are not performing at a particular level, driven only by the desire to increase test scores. As Deschenes, Cuban, and Tyack (2013) pointed out, there will always be a number of children who do not or cannot accomplish what their schools



expect them to accomplish. This also rings true in relation to districts and federal guidelines. While early history of accountability provides a foundation of good days to come, with student achievement being positively impacted, it sheds light on why teachers continue to feel at risk and mistrusted, not only by the public, but also by those who are supposed to be their greatest supporters.

There is a skewed perception of accountability, leading many to believe testing is accountability and vice versa. However, the idea of measuring the quality of education by the academic performance of students is not one with a long pedigree (Ravitch, 2002), and discussing accountability, it must be acknowledged students, teachers, principals, and school districts have a shared responsibility for student success and growth. While no one entity plays *the* key role of determining what measures are to be utilized, these stakeholders have vital parts in what is implemented and, more importantly, student achievement. Therefore, the duty of school leadership is verifying teachers – perhaps the key implementers of instruction – are provided the education and knowledge necessary to ensure proper pedagogy is utilized. Accountability is a necessary evil, which should be financially prudent and equitable in multiple ways for all, encouraging educators to maintain a moral and ethical compass, as unintentional bias and consequences must be considered when developing various accountability measures, particularly in examining marginalized and Black and Brown student’s academic achievement. Along with this, accountability in education has to be flexible and open ended, as it cannot survive as a “cut and dry” concept, unwilling to adapt with the changing times and lives of those it is designed to protect and serve.

## **Exploring Assumptions About Learning and Leadership**

Furthering the discussion of accountability, the role of school leadership where learning and achievement is concerned for students and teachers cannot be disregarded. Largely, educational leadership has been immersed with the mindset of efficiency and uniformity (Myran & Sutherland, 2019) and the science of management for all parties. However, what many teachers are aware of is that students are malleable and ever changing and for many of them, inconsistency is the constant, therefore, to expect and demand “machine like” results is overwhelming for the student and teacher. When this is taken into consideration, what becomes important more often than not for school and district leaders is how students perform on assessments and what needs to be done, instructionally, to ensure all students perform adequately on achievement tests. Consequently, what may be lost is the growth and development of the teacher, who feels threatened and under strain. When students fail to perform, the teacher is often placed under the microscope, interrogated as to why their students are not performing, and it is assumed they are incompetent, when what may need to be examined is the need for intentional and purposeful education for teachers, in an effort to positively impact and modify pedagogy; pedagogy reflective of the students and communities being served.

It is vital to recognize learning begins and ends with the learner, and schools must acknowledge who they are; discover what motivates them; and determine how to best ensure success, regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic standings. Along with this, there are hosts of outlooks and behaviors impacting the learning of students (Myran & Sutherland, 2019), including their personal lives and societal events impacting their homes. Learning and assessment, and in connection, achievement and accountability cannot be plugged into one form or type of assessment, and unfortunately, policy makers find themselves focusing on one primary

form of test, failing to acknowledge the realms at which students can learn and display what they know. Those in charge must begin testing to determine whether students have the necessary skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, including problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, and entrepreneurship (Shepard, Hannaway & Baker, 2009). Unfortunately, teaching and learning seen as irrelevant by particular groups of learners, specifically African American males – for whatever reason – will continue to have little positive impact upon assessment and accountability.

Teachers often receive scrutiny when scores are not reflective of expectations, however, if a prevailing belief is leadership is secondary only to teaching in its importance to student learning (Myran & Sutherland, 2019), focus on teacher professional development should be the shift, as opposed to blame. Many school leaders' minds continue to circle around the theory that schools, teachers and students included can be managed, with the assumption that students and student knowledge are the products of efficiently managed inputs and resources (Myran & Sutherland, 2019). However, what must take place is a paradigm shift where leaders are trained and taught to utilize distributed leadership, which theorizes school leaders are positively impactful in multiple areas including student engagement and learning; the production of professional learning communities; and teacher effectiveness. Considering these elements should positively impact student achievement in terms of accountability, seeing an increase in comparable scores among White students and their counterparts.

Reflecting on leadership is key in terms of accountability and achievement. If teachers are to guide and provide all students the knowledge and understanding required to be successful on assessments, thereby having a positive influence in the realm of accountability, it is imperative they are surrounded by leaders who see them as more than those who prepare a

student for an assessment. They must be encircled and encouraged by leaders seeing them as change agents, transforming students from test takers to citizens, worthy of becoming leaders in the communities in which they live and serve.

### **School Leadership and its Impact on Teaching and Learning**

In looking at the role of the principal concerning school and student success, along with how goals are achieved, in 2011, Hsiao and Chang found principals have important responsibilities and should lead their teachers in making changes at schools. As school leaders are prepared and join the ranks of supervision and guidance, their education must include recognition of their influence on teachers' own learning, instruction, and ultimately, student achievement (Khalifa et al., 2016). Culturally responsive school leaders understand their visions and ideals reflect a genuine effort in designing and establishing organizations sensitive to the racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and gender strains faced in education. It is essential those charged with guiding school buildings are transformational leaders, aimed at forging school cultures conducive for teaching and learning, providing the development necessary for their teachers to grow, thereby allowing student success to take the forefront. The ability and willingness to develop an innovative climate within their organization is key to success, as teachers need to perceive their schools as a place where they can learn and grow to better serve students and families (Liou & Daly, 2018). These leaders acknowledge that working in isolation can be dysfunctional to organizational improvement, emphasizing the need for greater collaboration among members of the school's community (Jason, 2000). Building and creating agents of change is valuable in the establishment of a culturally responsive community and positive culture of learning.

In keeping with this, teacher-student relationships are vital in connection to student achievement and the establishment of a positive school culture and in 2004 Brown found student learning is contingent on a teacher's ability to create and sustain optimal learning environments, bringing about the value of shared and distributed leadership. School leaders guiding a CRSL community ensure collaborative efforts targeted at growth and development. Included in this process is increasing cultural competency of teachers, building a sense of self-efficacy, empowering individuals and groups to grow in confidence they can solve their own problems and achieve their goals (Jason, 2000). An area of concern and focus is communication between teachers and students who often come from varied and different backgrounds. Transformational leaders guarantee culturally responsive teachers utilize communication reflecting students' values and beliefs held about learning, the responsibilities of teachers, and the roles of students in school settings (Brown, 2004).

The transformational principal works to promote and shape a normative school culture of continuous improvement, reflecting a value both espoused and practiced in a learning organization (Jason, 2000). They examine curricula and its impact on teacher development and student achievement, as the development and implementation of curricula reflects an understanding of students and community needs, staff areas of growth, and the value school leaders place on education. School leaders vested in this forum aid in the establishment of a multicultural community; one aimed at making certain teachers are culturally responsive, guaranteeing the education students receive is adequate. A multicultural education is one understanding the needs of every child and responding to each one sensitively, fairly, and effectively (Jason, 2000). The delivery of content is important to consider, as curriculum development and revision, along with instructional delivery are instrumental in teaching and

learning and student achievement. Transformational leadership is a mindset undertaken by those desiring and willing to be impactful upon students and teachers and the culture of learning they are responsible for. These leaders are willing to utilize creativity, motivation and collaboration to forge an agenda of transformation (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). In keeping with this, these communities include collaboration among adults; set high expectations; develop and maintain supportive resources for students and staff; and lastly, have a high academic focus and collaboration among all students (Tichnor-Wagner, Harrison & Cohen-Vogel, 2016). The transformational leader sets the bar of expectations and assists staff and students in achieving the goals and objectives. In doing this, support is afforded for students and teachers, enabling them ownership in the process, not telling them what to do, but rather illustrating and preparing them for tasks and duties they are expected to perform.

### **Teacher Pedagogy**

Teaching and learning begin and end with the learner, and their best interests, regardless of variables, must be at the forefront of how schools are organized and operate. As schools and systems, we must rethink both the content and process of what we have been trained to believe, which includes how and what we teach our students, considering social justice materials can appear to be sanitized and not focus on the role of the oppressor (Gibson, 2017). There are hosts of outlooks and behaviors impacting the learning of students (Myran & Sutherland, 2018) and school leadership and its value in addressing Culturally Responsive Teaching and Pedagogy is not to be discounted, as leaders of organizations are impactful, leaving lasting impressions upon not only students, but also students and communities. Transformational leaders create an environment with strong relationships established on trust, shared vision, goals, with a sense of community (Khalifa et al., 2016). School leaders undertake a significant amount of

responsibility, and part of that is ensuring teachers are best prepared and made to feel as though they are a part of the process, as principals impact teachers in a number of ways, including leadership style and their ability to develop trust and professional learning community (Rigby, 2014). These traits of a well-trained building leader, undoubtedly, aid in the establishment of collective efficacy as a culture and encourage the retention of those teachers. In 2011, Hsiao and Chang found principals have important responsibilities and should lead their teacher in making changes at schools, as they are directly impacting students daily within the classroom. A powerful task for school leaders is ensuring appropriate professional development is performed with teachers and staff, including monitoring, and following up PD's that build on the knowledge gained and allow teachers to refine and develop appropriate lessons, as this aids in being responsive to those students most in need.

It is important for teachers to be as best prepared as possible to engage and serve students in a variety of settings, yet continues to be an area of continued concern. In 2000, Jason found one of the most critical issues in creating diversity in schools was "preparing teachers for multiethnic, multicultural settings," however, Ford and Moore shared in a 2013 article, African-American males are more often taught by teachers who are unqualified and/or poorly prepared, including in the area of cultural competence, thereby having little positive effect on increasing Black male students' achievement. Teachers and school leaders have a duty to be primed for those they serve, providing a quality education considering the long-term impact on career and quality of life. Leaders exercising CRSL understand they impact student learning and achievement in multiple ways, including the assurance of building and improving teachers, making certain they have strong relationships with students and families (Khalifa et al., 2016). CRSL includes being an anti-oppressive/racist leader; one who is transformative in practice,

ensuring social justice for all, both students and staff (Khalifa et al., 2016). These leaders must be bold and daring, going against the grain of the norm, advocating for and affirming the communities they serve. Along with this, they must be at the forefront of innovation and partnerships with key stakeholders, as community service to students and their families is vital. Cultural diversity does not include the visible reminders through race or gender reflections, but it must also include themes of diversity woven throughout its curricula. In examining curriculum development and teacher pedagogy, current curriculum and practice does not appear to afford Black, brown, and marginalized students' tools to begin to create a reading, writing, and learning blueprint of their own experiences (Gibson, 2017), necessary for them to engage and share. Teaching pedagogy to include content and delivery must contain a purposeful planning to include the backgrounds and experiences that are all inclusive.

### **Teacher Student Relationships Relative to Student Achievement**

Those school leaders and teachers proven to be culturally responsive have shown to have an impact on the academic success and developmental growth of their students, indicating the value of caring and positive teacher-student relationships (TSR). A positive relationship can prompt a failing child to re-engage and succeed, and conversely a negative relationship can cause a child to disengage from learning (Bacon et al., 2007). Consequently, consider the impact of negative teacher-student relationships. If a student feels as though they are unworthy or without value, and never learn to form lasting caring and positive relationships with their teacher, what will become of them? It has been shown, teachers, who genuinely care about who their students are and invest in learning who they are, have been most impactful. Teacher-student relationships matter because they are associated with a broad array of valued student outcomes including: academic achievement, affect, behavior, and motivation (Gehlbach et. al, 2016). Furthermore, as



Bacon et al., pointed out in a 2007 study, dropout rates for African American students are 68% higher than for European American students. As a teacher focused on building the most competent students, the goal is to provide educational excellence for all, making certain students are equipped with the skills needed for the real world, and, in order to do so, we must stress understanding the student's needs through relationship building and academics, including supporting those students sincerely in dire need.

The plight of the African American male and their academic progress is a growing and well-documented concern. In this era of high-stakes testing, their lack of success is becoming more than an education point, it is now stretching into the realms of social justice. As pointed out by Nelson in a 2016 article, racial marginalization and poverty intensify these negative academic outcomes and as a result, low-income Black boys continue to test in the bottom 25%. Forging caring and positive relationships with their teachers is a huge step in the right direction for AA male students. It is important for schools to begin examining the role of the educator and how they form these valuable and impactful links with children. In keeping with this, districts and schools must begin placing a focus on professional development and how-to in this area, embedding it within the culture and everyday practice of schoolhouses and related buildings. To further support this matter, in 2016 Nelson argued scholars partly attribute boys' underachievement to a lack of emphasis on the relational dimension of schools, or not taking a relational learning stance with boys, thereby emphasizing the microscope under which schools need to place this topic. Taking this a step further, caring, and positive relationships have been studied and it was determined students themselves said they worked harder when they perceived their teachers cared about them personally and academically (Alder, 2002). If the educational field desires to see significant academic success and gains, a stake must be made in the forming

of supportive and caring teacher-student relationships, which includes the undertaking of learning and understanding the cultures and backgrounds of these students.

What is often lacking in the classroom is the lack of effort from the student; it is not the shortage of knowledge or desire to be challenging. This provides us with the grounds that, regardless of what the classroom teacher believes about a student, it may be more about what is felt by the student. In 2012, Field and Hoffman pointed out, when students see their teachers as warm, mutually respectful and autonomy supportive, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged. Therefore, based upon a small, yet powerful relationship, students are willing to work harder and be more engaged, which hypothetically, should lead to increased academic success. Engagement and effort are vital, as they are the best deterrent for negative behavior in the classroom, which, in turn equate to favorable academic outcomes. We know this to be valuable in today's classroom because Black male students are more likely to be labeled with behavior problems, punished, and have difficulty accessing educational opportunities (De Royston et al., 2017). Once this label is placed upon the student, it is quite difficult to be removed, thereby establishing another barrier to be overcome. Often, these "teacher given" assumptions of Black males as the "bad kid" lead directly to official documentation as a Student with a Disability. Consequently, studies have shown African American students with disabilities have a lower graduation rate than their counterparts. The caring and positive TSRs created and nurtured serve the AA male student well, specifically in the areas of behavior and engagement, thereby leading to success academically.

As teachers continue to grow and develop as educators, they must be willing to embrace the lives of the students, gaining insight as to how they are best served, including the establishment of positive working relationships. Although a caring and positive relationship can

prove difficult to form, it should be invested in routinely and purposefully. The value of TSRs must not be undersold, as relationships become the very “medium through which students’ engagement, effort, and ultimate mastery are clearly realized” (Nelson, 2016). Academics and the bond between the teacher and student go hand and hand. If educators desire to see student growth on assessments, it is time to develop methods and ways to allow their students to know how they feel about them as people, allowing them to understand their best interest and life is of their concern. Furthermore, in probing multiple articles on the topic, what stood out were the academic and social and emotional needs of students. While they appear to be unrelated entities, they cannot be examined separately when students are concerned, considering, as Bacon, Banks, Young, and Jackson indicated in a 2007 article, caring communities and personal relationships are necessary elements for success in urban schools. The recognition and development of these relationships are especially crucial for Black boys, as they need to be able to achieve academically, given the empirical evidence which emphasizes how positive learning relationships are especially beneficial (Nelson, 2016). Along with this, their social and emotional needs must be met in order for lifelong growth and success to take place. As the literature will show, forging and developing caring and positive relationships with teachers is a huge factor in both of these areas for African American males and teachers must embrace and bear this challenge.

### **Organizational Culture and Climate**

Culturally responsive school leaders possess a number of behaviors that improve the lives of children (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018) and adults. Considering the era of high stakes testing, making use of transformational leadership is a necessity, as transformational principals must be open to change, embracing its prospect, realizing school improvement is inextricably connected

to the school personnel and their professional development and growth (Jason, 2000). School leaders must be willing to be transformational in style and purpose, providing impact on culture, including teacher and student development. Along the way, school leaders prepare and educate staff for this responsibility considering leadership is a shared responsibility, with teachers serving as transformational agents making schooling not perpetuate “the inequitable treatment in the disempowerment of many groups (Jason, 2000). Culturally responsive school leaders understand their visions and ideals reflect a genuine effort in designing and establishing organizations sensitive to the racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and gender strains faced in education.

The aim of those guiding school buildings is transformational, forging school cultures conducive for teaching and learning, providing the development necessary for their teachers to grow, allowing student success to take the forefront. Culturally Responsive School Leadership is complex and diverse, an open system of areas which must be engaged and addressed with purpose and the intention of leading to change, culture is included in that change and is to be addressed in the dialogue of CRSL. Culture is a leader’s mark and personality that they bring to the school community. It is imperative school leaders make certain the diverse and complex communities they serve are provided an appropriate and equitable education, as the importance of relationships is central to the total schooling experience, including students and staff (Vass, 2017). Success of diverse students is critical to their personal fulfillment, considering how this forms the foundation for their overall well-being and economic status as adults. Principals can create culturally responsive school environments for marginalized children that serve to fulfill these goals by promoting high expectations for kids, especially among teachers and other school

personnel. Such high expectations can promote a child's academic achievement, social and psychological development, and success in daily life.

### **Student Growth and Achievement**

School leaders must recognize their influence on teachers' own learning, instruction, and ultimately, student achievement (Khalifa et al., 2016). Principals are the most recognizable position in a school and bear high stress of accountability for progress or lack thereof (Khalifa et al., 2016). School leaders are responsible for providing supportive leadership, direction, energy, and support for the process of change (Hsiao and Chang, 2011), therefore, as transformational leaders, they elevate their schools in the areas of teacher development and culture; both of which have significant impact upon student growth and achievement. Furthermore, staff development is a field of focus, as professional development, and growth, including pedagogy, have a direct influence on student achievement and later success in career and life. Teachers, and their abilities to ensure equitable and efficient teaching and learning for all students, are key components when examining student academic success.

In keeping with this, CRSL promotes and sustains an environment stable enough to attract, maintain, and support the further development of good teachers (Khalifa et al., 2016), guaranteeing those charged with leading and promoting an inclusive school climate for all, including students who have been marginalized within most school contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016). The importance for marginalized and African American students to be successful is a vital component in the CRSL discussion, and it should be noted the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment results analyzed by personnel at the Institute for Educational Policy, City University of New York indicated, "Black students on average scored

below White students by one standard deviation, which amounts to the difference between the performance of a fourth grader and an eighth grader” (Miksic, 2014, p.1).

Furthermore, providing curricula rich in examples and relevancy to the cultural needs of students can increase student engagement, increasing student achievement and test scores (Irby, 2018; Miksic, 2014; Bartz and Rice, 2017). By this means, it is imperative school curricula (colonized curriculum) be reviewed and improved, rewritten correctly to suit those it is to serve (Lebeloane, 2017), including social justice materials, which often seem sanitized and not focused on the role of the oppressor (Gibson, 2017). The information in the curriculum should reflect a genuine and true level of knowledge of the community it will be utilized with and for, thereby legitimizing it for use with all students, including, and not in spite of, those Black, brown, and marginalized. We task teachers with implementation of curriculum via teaching and learning, including ongoing assessment. During this process, we base valuable educational decisions pertaining to students, among other things, on teachers’ statements and observations included in report comments and conversations at the round table.

As Gibson (2017) points out “the predictable, yet cruel irony is that the same teachers who write report card comments, indicating that they want increased student participation began to systematically problematize the students who were thinking deftly and asking critical and necessary questions about complex oppressions” (p. 54). Teacher pedagogy, what and how they teach, is vital and school leaders should have this at the forefront of what they do when planning and preparing their staff. Principals need to consistently contribute to the development and use of culturally responsive teachers and to aid these teachers in overcoming any implicit or explicit biases demonstrated towards marginalized children (Gibson, 2017). In keeping with this, being aware of those educated; their needs educationally; and the relationship established with

stakeholders ensure school leaders are providing students and families with a quality and equitable education.

### **Academic Success for and Establishing Environments of Academic Achievement for the African American Male**

African American males are at risk. Ensuring they are provided environments encouraging academic excellence is vital, as their places of learning should support their desire and need to be successful educationally. This includes support from educators and conditions of the organization. Culturally Responsive School Leadership and Pedagogy, discussing what elements in schools and classrooms must be present for AA males to be successful must be expounded, as ensuring their best opportunity to learn cannot exist without knowing what has to be in place. It is vital to pay appropriate attention to the climates in which teaching and learning takes place, considering the learning environment plays a crucial role in their success, as classroom context is an important risk contributor; one promoting, exacerbating, and/or maintaining poor academic outcomes for AA boys (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). Putting this in perspective, they remain the most at risk, relative to other groups, for disparities in academic outcomes (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). Further examination of these classroom environments provides insight into classroom politics and teacher expectations of students, including the indication some teachers of AA males tend to have lower expectations for the abilities and performances of this group of students (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). Failure to establish learning conditions conducive for effective teaching and learning for AA males contribute to disproportionate representation of AA males among serious school discipline procedures (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009), because they feel disengaged and not invited to be a part of the teaching and learning process, failing to recognize the role their education can play in their life

and career prosperity. Consequently, this can lead to a higher dropout rate, as discovered by the Schott Foundation in 2009.

Taken together, one can see that the pressures of the accountability movement have intensified the disconnections between the dominant scientific management influenced leadership paradigm and science of learning. The assumptions about learning present in the dominant leadership paradigm casts the student as the product of what schools do and underestimates the active and deliberate role of the student. While not often framed together, this observation has considerable implications for how we think about the concept of decolonizing schools and overcoming oppression. As long as the dominant paradigm calls for uniformity, predictability and a limited content and pedagogical pallet from which educators can draw from, real social justice can never be realized. Culturally responsive school leadership offers a powerful set of tools for school leaders, advocating for more effective pedagogy, building stronger and more socially just organizational climates/cultures, and building trusting relationships. However, the limiting factors of the dominant leadership paradigm, shaped by scientific management, and the western-euro colonizing of schooling undermine this potential.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodology**

In chapter I, I offered an introduction and background to the focus and purpose of this study, including the purpose statement, research question, problem statement and the significance of the study. Chapter II in turned offered a review the literature related to culturally responsive leadership, highlighting the use of culturally responsive leadership strategies as it relates to schools as organizations and teachers of students, particularly African American students. Chapter 3 discusses the qualitative methodology of an ethnographic investigation, exploring the experiences and behaviors of middle school principals and teachers in suburban contexts in a Local District in Virginia. Along with this, Chapter III describes the rationale behind the research, including the research questions, methodology, population, instrumentation, the data collection, and analysis techniques, along with the limitations to the research, and a final analysis and summary of important considerations for the study.

### **Research Purpose**

As discussed in chapter 1, there is an inherent tension between the power dynamics of traditional neo-managerial influenced organizational structures and the ideals of Culturally Responsive School Leadership and social justice. The identification of this tension recognizes that the dominant culture of power has historically shaped the individual, and institutional cultural beliefs, structures, and organizational norms that marginalize some while privileging others (e.g., Brooks, Miles, Buck, 2008; Thrupp, 2003; Ward, Bagley, Lumby, Woods, Hamilton, & Roberts, 2015), and questions if equity and social justice are possible under the auspices of scientific management (Brooks, Miles, & Buck 2008). This study seeks to explore these inherent tensions between the inequality regimes that marginalized minority students and

the goals of culturally responsive school leadership and takes the position that the undergirding theories of action, both explicitly and implicit, are conceptually and practically incongruent with the core mission of equity and social justice. As such, efforts to bring about any substantive and lasting change are unlikely under the continued influence of scientific management.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore emergent ideals related to culturally responsive educational practices as they are implemented in organizational contexts that I argue are theoretically and practically incongruent with the conceptualization of culturally responsive education. This study is particularly interested in the lived experiences of educators (school leaders and teachers) of minority and marginalized students, including African American males in secondary settings, as these students (and Hispanics) continue to fall behind their peers in student achievement (Kena et al., 2016). This study explores the experiences of educators as they have worked to implement culturally responsive practices; including their exposure to professional development topics, support resources, supervision and mentorship, parent and community interactions, their interactions with peers and most importantly, their interactions with students.

Currently the literature remains indeterminate on the limitations of traditional scientific managements' influence on organizational structures capable of supporting the mission of culturally responsive education and social justice. The current research on decolonizing education (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012; Martin et al., 2017; Tejada, et al., 2003) offers a powerful theoretical lens for analyzing these data and understanding the potential limitations of scientific management on the effective implementation of culturally responsive educational practice. This study examined and considered how educators in an urban school district sought to

impact student achievement and reduce disciplinary infractions, and the degree to which these efforts to be stewards of culturally responsive education were theoretically and practically at odds with the foundations of scientific management.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the lived experiences of educators engaged in ensuring culturally responsive educational practices and how do the organizational structures, habits and norms of their school support, or constrain these practices?
  - a. How do these educators define Culturally Responsive education and leadership?
  - b. What culturally responsive leadership beliefs do individuals possess and utilize to build and develop inclusive organizations?
  - c. Does cultural awareness by an individual impact their ability in establishing and forming impactful relationships affecting student achievement and discipline?
  - d. How does Culturally Responsive teaching and learning impact decisions by staff as it relates to the education of the children of the families they serve?
  - e. How does the dominant school culture support, constrain and/or shape the implementation of these practices?

### **Research Design**

Given the purpose and research questions, a qualitative, ethnographic case study method is well suited for this study (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017). This study is qualitative in design, making use of multiple interviews of school leaders and teachers in leadership roles, utilizing experience and personal feedback as they may be most useful in determining perception, thereby allowing for reflection and improved teaching and learning. A qualitative method, utilizing the primary setting, and keeping with advantages of witnessing in the moment activities and

dialogue aided in the authenticity of information, allowing for the natural setting to provide context rich and in-depth understandings (Conrad, University of Wisconsin). An ethnographic method was used; ensuring the issue of various cultures is addressed, along with phenomenology, as phenomenology allows the researcher to be concerned with the lived experiences of the people involved (Groenewald, 2004).

Use of these methods provide opportunity for observations and engagement with the people surrounding the research, including school leaders, teachers, and students. Additionally, the study explored the nature of relationships between teachers and what are considered typically urban middle school and/or African American male students to examine and understand the role these relationships play in students desiring to be diligent in class, and being successful academically, all while growing socially, in a setting with their peers. Furthermore, the humanistic angle was explored, learning how particular people “tick” and connect with others, specifically young AA males in middle school. Data was collected through interviews, investigating the lived experiences of educators. From there, as illustrated by Bogdan and Bilken, 2007, I made use of data interpretation, developing ideas about findings and connecting them to the related literature.

### **Interviews**

Considering this is a case study, the researcher must value multiple perspectives and complex realities rather than singular or objective claims to meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) within the organization. In order to gather varied outlooks, I conduct semi-structured interviews with multiple members of the organization, representing different stakeholders and allowing for more trustworthy and genuine responses. The sample of those being interviewed include teachers and building leaders, allowing for varied lenses and thoughts.

### **Site and Population Selection**

This study is being conducted in a large urban school district in a southeastern region of the United States, serving approximately 20,000 students. The district is made up of 1 alternative school; 2 elementary/middle combined schools; 19 PreK/Elementary schools; 5 middle schools (with 2 being “choice schools”); and 4 high schools. Thirteen of the elementary and middle schools receive Title I Part A federal funds. Along with this, the district employs approximately 1,500 teachers. Furthermore, information is being collected from those in leadership roles at Title One Middle School, composed of predominantly African-American students (male and female), where the teachers in the building are composed of a diverse range of age and years of experience.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

A qualitative investigation method was chosen to examine the leadership behaviors and actions of Principals and teachers in *A. Local District*. Those principals and teachers who participated in the study were selected through purposeful sampling based on their roles in supporting culturally responsive school leadership practice. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and school, investigating the self-identified behaviors and actions of school leaders, teachers, and students. From there, as illustrated by Bogdan and Bilken, 2007, I made use of data interpretation, developing ideas about findings and relating them to the literature. Along with this, participants completed a survey, identifying their own knowledge and understandings of Culturally Responsive School Leadership. This approach allowed me to identify and describe the leadership strategies school leaders perceived as influential to their success in supporting historically marginalized and disengagement students using the CRSL framework identified by Khalifa et al. (2016).

Through descriptive qualitative reporting techniques (Merriam, 2002; Hatch 2002; Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995) themes that arise during the study were discussed and evaluated. While race, gender, and age of the teacher will not be examined as a major factor in this study, it is important to point out, relationships can be built and destroyed on cultural understanding and these factors present and barriers in this area at times, therefore, someone conducting this study without time constraints may find this a valuable area to examine.

### **Interview questions**

In the qualitative research process, questions articulate what the researcher wants to know, relative to intentions and perspectives of those involved in social interactions (Agee, 2009).

“From the perspective of an educator in an urban middle school, what factors promote the development of cultural responsiveness, including positive relationships and academic success between school leaders and their teachers and teachers and their African American male students, thereby enabling them to be successful students?”

1. Are you familiar with the phrase, “Culturally Responsive?” If so, when you hear the phrase, “Culturally Responsive,” what comes to mind? If not, how would you define it based upon those words? (You may provide a list or answer in complete sentences, however you feel most comfortable).
2. In reflecting on your curriculum, what do you believe needs to be done in efforts to make certain it is attempting to ensure equitable education to all involved?
3. Relationships are groundwork for much of what educators do. How would you describe your most positive teacher-student relationships, including what allows them to work best (i.e., effective communication; shared interests; common

respect)?

4. In keeping with this, in terms of positive relationships, what do they look like outside of school for you, including what allows them to work best (i.e., effective communication; shared interests; common respect)?
5. In looking at teacher-student relationships, care is important. Can you provide me a definition of teacher care for students and describe what it looks like in your district; school; and/or your class?
6. In your opinion and experiences, would you say this [teacher] care for students typically equates to a positive relationship with your African American male students? If so, what elements exist to illustrate this relationship?
7. What we value tends to guide our actions and behaviors. Keeping this in mind, explain what value you place on positive relationships with your African-American male students and share how you work to build and develop these relationships. Along with this, do your relationships with your African-American males determine how they will or won't behave and achieve in your class/school?
8. Adults and children, while different in age, can be similar in thoughts and behavior. This is no different for various races of people. What Whites do and how they think, African-Americans may or may not, due to culture and life experiences. Keeping this in mind, explain what you do differently with African-American students in comparison with their White peers to establish relationships?
9. People are different, and children are no different from adults. Knowing this, how

do the relationships you have with your AA male students differ from relationships you share with other students (male or female)?

10. What types of events or happenings do you wish your school did to encourage the development of positive relationships between students and teachers?

### **Data Analysis and Constant Comparative Analysis**

Following data collection, information was analyzed to identify emergent themes arising from data collection methods. Interviews were accurately transcribed and, from there, coded for common themes and ideas; and finally synthesized for reflection. Not only this, information from all sources were triangulated, ensuring authentic and genuine connections and differences, allowing for sincere discussion. “There are three main stages of constant comparative analysis. The first stage is open coding, which is “like working on a puzzle” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 223). During this stage, the analyst is participating in coding the data, wherein the analyst chunks the data into smaller segments, and then attaches a descriptor, or “code,” for each segment. The next stage, axial coding, is when the researchers group the codes into similar categories. The final stage is called selective coding, which is the “process of integrating and refining the theory” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 143). Through this process, the researcher can “create theory out of data” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 56)” (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Figure 1 below graphically captures the process of codes, categories, and theory (Saldaña, 2021). From there, coding the data was important in classifying information. In doing so, recognition of the various methods of coding includes the following:

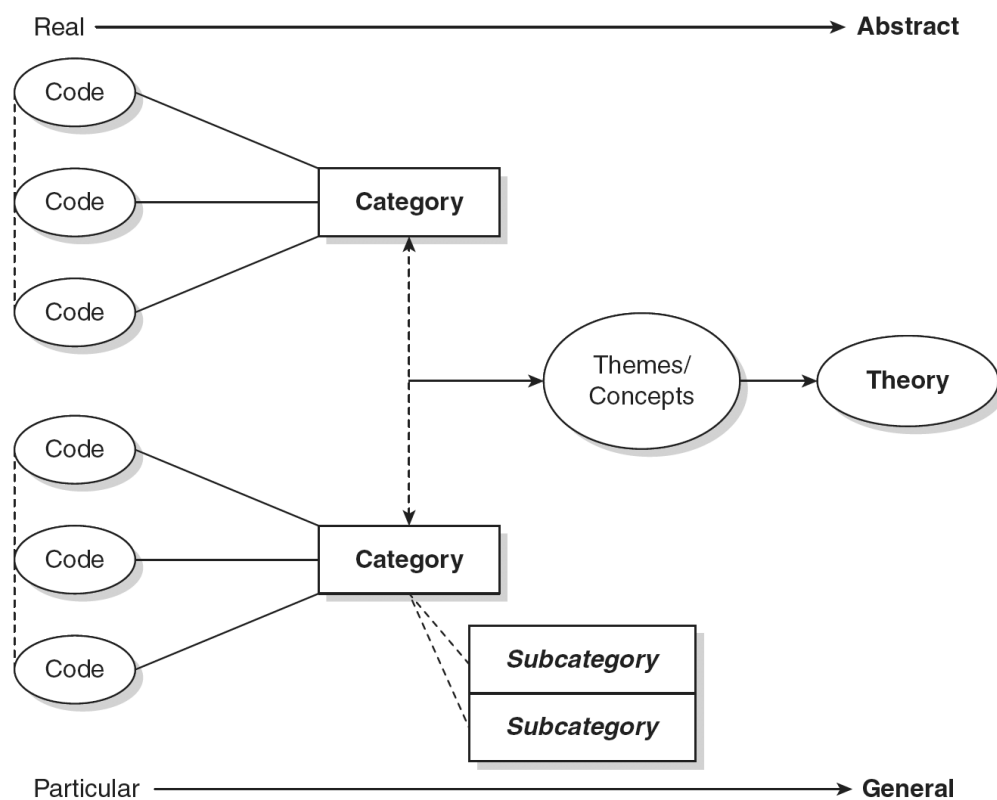
Furthermore, this form of analysis, along with the types of coding, are essential with constant comparative analysis to combine inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed or shared (Grove, 1988; Dye, et al. 2000), being sure



to record and classify. In keeping with this, ongoing and fine-tuning and polishing of information across is necessary, ensuring accurate categorization and coding. Not only this, categorizing allows for reduction in complexity of the environment, provide direction for the activity, identify the objects of the world, lessen the need for persistent learning, and afford the opportunity for relating and classification of events and phenomena (Grove, 1988; Dye, et al. 2000; Saldaña, 2021).

Figure 1

*A Streamlined Codes-to Theory Model for Qualitative Inquiry (Saldaña, 2021)*



### **Ethics and Trustworthiness**

The role of the researcher in qualitative studies is primarily observant, with little participation, as the researcher was directly placed in the environment, causing minor distraction.

While biases were acknowledged prior to the study taking place, it should be noted, expressed biases should not impact the collection and analysis of data. These biases can be but are not limited to the: researcher's gender and race; level of varied cultural knowledge; and school leadership and teaching experience. Additionally, due to the nature of the study and its place in society, study participants, during interviews were treated fairly, free of any personal bias existing, allowing for their views and beliefs to be openly shared and communicated, providing a "safe space" for dialogue. In an effort to ensure ethical practices, not only were participants made aware of happenings throughout the process, including prior to interviews, and completion of surveys, the following protocol was utilized:

1. Consent by all participating parties.
2. Use of validated instruments.
3. Protocol for data collection.
4. Verification of transcripts.
5. Analysis and synthesis of data.
6. Transparency of data collected and findings.
7. Ensure participants are comfortable with perhaps being uncomfortable.

Furthermore, in ensuring trustworthiness, the following are essential to ensuring a moral and reliable interaction and collection of information from the interviewee exists.

- 1) **Credibility** – capturing the fundamental nature of the phenomena based on the lived experiences of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
  - a) Member checking
  - b) Audit trail
  - c) Auditor

2) **Transferability** – describing a phenomenon, the context it takes place in and the participants with enough detail that readers can assess the transferability of the findings to similar populations or context (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

- a) Thick descriptions (Patton, 2002)
- b) Direct participant quotes
- c) Triangulation
- d) Using multiple sources of data that support the development of the themes (interviews, document analysis, member checking, field notes, extemporaneous notes, reflexive journaling, etc.)

3) **Dependability**

- a) Dependability refers to the consistency of findings and the ability to replicate them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability was achieved through triangulation of data sources, the use of an audit trail and memos (Patton 2002).

4) **Confirmability** – Confirmability refers to the themes and findings of the study being derived from the participant voices and supported by the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

- a) Furthermore, confirmability is achieved when participant voices are expressed with researcher bias managed well. To achieve confirmability, I utilized member checking and memos to address and manage biases, triangulation to assure participant voices are evident, and thick description using member quotes.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher is to collect and analyze data through interviews. Along with this, the researcher is to remain objective at all times, taking notes of interactions between school

leaders and staff, whenever possible and teachers and students during class and, if possible, hall interactions. Additionally, the researcher is not placed in the setting to engage and/or disturb anything in place by either school administrator or teacher. Not only this, but the researcher also created one-hour windows for each interview with participants, where they were audio recorded and transcribed. Following this, the researcher shared transcriptions with participants for review, welcoming reflections, and feedback. Lastly, the researcher requested follow-ups as deemed necessary and appropriate. Additionally, the researcher was responsible for the planning, collection, and analysis of data throughout and the close of the study, including all. I was responsible for conducting all interviews. Following data collection, I reviewed and analyzed the collected data, categorizing and coding information in an effort to outline arising themes through the duration of the research study, making use of them in chapters IV and V.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

I delve into this study, driven to be better educated as to how an obvious and impactful concern can be best addressed and reasonably, yet efficiently and effectively reformed. Due to the fact I am a middle-aged African American male, educated in the public education system in which I work and live, I share many of the same values of those I work alongside, yet have a different lens from which I see through. I see this system and its challenges and success through that of the African-American male in a system which has constantly shared the thought of them lacking credibility because they are not White, middle-aged, or middle class (McConkey, 2004). Furthermore, I have invested 25 years in the PreK-12 sector, serving in various roles, including custodian; Instructional Assistant/Teacher's Aide; classroom teacher; and most recently as a building administrator and find this study meaningful as it directly impacts the community I represent, grew up with, and serve. Therefore, I am particularly interested in what I have

outlined in previous research as the incongruence between the neo-managerial traditions of educational leadership and the need for various viewpoints and what we can do to implement sustainable reform. It should be noted, I fully acknowledge potential bias, in terms of how I identify, my emotional stance and that which remains unseen and unlearned by me, I do not seek to bracket those biases in order to encapsulate these preconceptions, theoretical commitments, and experiences (Le Vasseur, 2003), as the researchers' bias shouldn't be "bracketed" or ignored, but explored and made transparent (Hammersley, 2000).

## CHAPTER 4

### Data Analysis & Results

#### Purpose of Study

As discussed in greater detail in earlier chapters, the purpose of this study is to explore the emergent beliefs and practices of educators related to culturally responsive educational practices as they are implemented in their various organizational contexts. I built the argument that the managerial paradigm which has dominated the organizational and structural norms of education and educational leadership are theoretically and practically incongruent with the conceptualization of culturally responsive education. While literature has critiqued the managerial paradigm and advanced the field in regards to diversity, equity, and inclusion, including the specific construct of culturally responsive education, what remains largely unexplored are the incongruent theories of action that educators must navigate everyday as they grapple with the tensions between the limitations of traditional scientific managements' influence on organizational structures capable of supporting the mission of culturally responsive education and social justice. In keeping with this, the study set out to understand the lived experiences of educators engaged in ensuring culturally responsive educational practices and how the organizational structures, habits and norms of their school support or constrain these practices. Specifically I asked, 1) how these educators define culturally responsive education and leadership, 2) what culturally responsive leadership beliefs do individuals possess and utilize to build and develop inclusive organizations, 3) does cultural awareness by an individual impact his or her ability in establishing and forming impactful relationships affecting student achievement and discipline, 4) how does culturally responsive teaching and learning impact decisions by staff

as it relates to the education of the children and families they serve, and 5) how does the dominant school culture support, constrain or shape the implementation of these practices?

### **Analytic Process**

Following the analytic processes outlined in chapter 3, I loaded the interview transcripts into Nvivo qualitative research software and built the model presented below through iterations of open, axial, and selective coding to develop, clarify, expand, dispute, confirm, and refine a thematic structure that represented the lived experiences of the research subjects as they navigated the phenomenon under investigation. Below I briefly describe each of these levels of analysis followed by a detailed discussion of the final model.

### **Open Coding**

Through the interview process and using open coding, I followed the stories of the research participants, looking for themes and pieces of the puzzle of the phenomenon under investigation to unearth their lived experiences. This development helped me to “chunk” the larger data into smaller segments, and then attach a descriptor, or “code,” for each of these segments. This process included discussing lived experiences (childhood and adult); personal biases; career experiences and goals; visions and expectations relative to behavior of children and adults. In keeping with this, the interviewees and I openly shared and discussed common thought processes and value systems. It was through this process that I was able to develop an increasingly detailed understanding of this phenomenon which in turn helped me to narrow and focus my analysis in each subsequent round of coding.

Overall, the participants, whether leaders at the division, school, or classroom levels, provided their knowledge and insights, along with clarity, which encouraged and supported my evolving understanding of their experiences. Through the interviews and follow-up interactions,

I engaged in substantive discourse about their experiences that were relative and near to my own. Importantly, their stories evolved from general descriptions of information to detailed and specific recollections of situations and interactions between individuals, both students and adults, related to culturally responsiveness and cultural competency. In keeping with this, participants provided insights as to how their experiences molded and forged their beliefs and values surrounding culturally responsive school leadership and cultural competency. During the interviews, the need and value of cultural competency and cultural responsiveness relative to teaching and learning and relationship establishment with children was expressed consistently, with participants sharing their personal experiences and observations as to how these topics impact how they function and what we do as leaders of an educational institution. Importantly, when asked about cultural responsiveness and responsibility and cultural competence, all participants shared thoughts about what they believe it to be; what it looks like in action; and how it impacts children, along with why adults need to ensure this is at the forefront of what they are doing in districts, schools, and classrooms relative to actions and decision-making. In this way, the interviews provided detailed and thick descriptions of the phenomenon which allowed me to make explicit the patterns of cultural and social dynamics that is the hallmark of qualitative research (Holloway, 1997).

Building on the above, participants ventured into discussing actual events where the existence or lack of cultural competence and responsiveness facilitated or hindered the adult's ability to be successful in building relationships or positively impacting the academic success of students in their care. Furthermore, the interviewees shared their first-hand experiences, recognizing the complex dynamics between adults and children. They acknowledged children would only "be children," having limited varied experiences, while adults were more "lived,"



and needed to exercise a willingness to go beyond their own personal experiences and beliefs and expand their minds, being open to embracing and engaging with students on another level. This insight was deemed an important theme in the study highlighting that teaching and learning, as well as human growth and development, is interactional and ongoing. As such, the growth and development of students, the professional growth of educators, and the building and refining of healthy and productive school cultures is always unfolding within the relationship among administrators, teachers, students, families, and communities.

During the initial period of open coding, I followed the tone and tenor of each transcript and coded in an open and fluid way, allowing the interviewee's words to drive my coding structure. As common broad categories emerged, I refined the names of various codes to condense these common broad themes. The following initial themes emerged from this first round of coding:

**Table 1**

*Open Coding*

African American support	Authenticity	Barriers	Care for Children	Climate and Culture
Culturally Responsive (what it is)	Dialogue and Vulnerability	Educational Expertise	Educational Mismatch	Educator Experiences
Educator	Family	Progress Made	Reflects	Relationships

Frustration	Disconnect		Students	
Safe Spaces	Self-Awareness and Reflection	Solutions	Student Achievement	Student Life
Student Support	Teacher Support	Transformative Practices	What Doesn't Work	

As the initial round of coding took formation, it was driven by a set of emergent ideas which stood out, representing an overall coding structure which I built on in subsequent analysis. These included teacher care, where participants clearly communicated how ensuring teachers doing what was best for themselves translated to what was best for young people. Foreshadowing observations made in subsequent levels of this analysis, what stood out was the clear connections to the very nature of learning. That is, the ultimate goal of creating and nurturing culturally responsive school environments involves an "intermutual" dynamic between learners, the educational climate, and adults (Alexander, et al., 2009). Words from one participant echoed these sentiments, "Culturally responsive would just be my understanding that as we share content with students, they will continue to see themselves in the process of learning. So regardless of reading, writing, or arithmetic, our young people will always be in a space where not only are they being provided content, but they see themselves in the content that they're receiving. How it relates to school leadership is - it is our responsibility as instructional leaders, whether you be a principal, assistant principal, member of the instructional leadership team lead for PLC, grade level lead. No matter your role. It is still absolutely your responsibility, to have an open heart with regards to making sure that our students always comfortable; that they

always feel engaged; that they always feel seen; that they always feel heard; and then it goes back to your advocacy to ensure that you know what you're delivering that day, making sure that your students can illustrate a level of mastery.” This statement promotes the mindset that students are not the products of what educators do, but they develop and grow within an interactional mix of the student's prior knowledge and experience, their agency and introspective capabilities and the social and reciprocal dynamics of the school, and community context. Moreover, this intermutual dynamic changes the context as it changes the students – where the students themselves give shape to the learning environment through their engagement within it. In this way, the research participants emphasized the interactional dynamics among teacher care, reflexivity, and student care; a dynamic seen as critical to growing mutually supportive and productive school cultures. Exemplifying this observation, one participant went on to say, “I also think that caring isn't a cookie cutter approach to every kid in your classroom. And that, especially as we start to have conversations with kids, even as early as four and five up to 18, what do they need, asking them because caring about them as me and I'm taking enough time to ask you, you know what's a way that I can show you that I care about you or what type of recognition motivates you, because to be the best teacher you can for a kid, you can't operate off of assumptions.”

It was interesting to see this development, as it illustrated a sincere focus on making connections between teacher and student growth and development, rather than laying focus solely on that of the teachers and educators in their roles. In keeping with this, this commentary illustrated an ability and willingness to self-reflect, understanding the benefits and need for engaging differently with today's students, including being culturally competent and responsive in various ways. The research participants seemed to have a deep intuition that students are not

simply the products of what schools do, but are causal agents in their own right that need to be understood and valued for their unique individual, community, and cultural backgrounds. To emphasize this point, one participant shared, “The cornerstone of everything that I do is just a love for those around me - 100%. And I know this may sound cliché, but I truly love people. I genuinely am interested in what makes people tick.” Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, it provided the groundwork for the importance of student care, which is elemental and valuable in the realm of teaching and learning and instruction, which goes beyond the books and worksheets and exams, recognizing the centrality of developing, cultivating, and maintaining strong relationships with students, families and the community. These insights were condensed from the open coding in Table 1, to the following overarching themes:

- Teacher care (being concerned with and making certain teachers are doing the best for themselves and their students)
- An ability and willingness to self-reflect, understanding the benefits and need for engaging differently with today’s students, including being culturally competent and responsive in various ways.
- Student care (for the student and who they are)
- Barriers and Facilitators for teachers and student care, genuine self-reflection, and culturally responsive practices

### **Axial Coding**

Building on the above, in the next stage of axial coding, I developed; clarified; expanded; disputed; confirmed; and refined the initial thematic structures of data. In keeping with this, I read and interpreted the transcripts, clarifying, and confirming the coding structures, challenging my assumptions by looking for counterevidence and re-analyzing, refining, and strengthening the

code structure. Along with this, axial coding served as the foundational building block of connecting codes amongst the phenomena within themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). For example, each participant clearly identified and created a general definition of cultural competence and what it means to be culturally responsive, allowing those terms to serve as a foundation, as it was important for all related information to be organized under this theme, allowing for pinpointing various barriers and challenges along with their impact(s). From there, possible solutions and remedies were brought together, addressing the primary concern of culturally responsiveness, ensuring equity for all students and families, along with meeting the professional and personal needs of educators. At this level of coding, I began to see the fusion of the broad themes of teacher care, reflexivity, and student care themes with the more specific cultural competence and organizational barriers and facilitators themes seen in the more synthesized three levels below.

**Table 2**

*Axial Coding*

Identification of Cultural Competence, CRSL Awareness and the Recognition of the Need for Change	Barriers and Challenges to Cultural Competence and Appropriate Responsiveness	Solutions and Continued Efforts to Support All
1. Care for Children	1. Barriers	1. African American support
2. Climate and Culture	2. Dialogue and Vulnerability	2. Authenticity
3. Culturally Responsive (what it is)	3. Educational Expertise	3. Progress Made
	4. Educational Mismatch	4. Relationships
	5. Educator Experiences	5. Reflects Students
		6. Safe Spaces

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4. Student Achievement	6. Educator Frustration	7. Solutions
5. Self-Awareness and Reflection	7. Family Disconnect	8. Transformative Practices
6. Student Life	8. What Doesn't Work	9. Student Support
		10. Teacher Support

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Further building on the above, I noted tensions between the limitations of traditional scientific managements' influence on organizational structures capable of supporting the mission of culturally responsive education and social justice. More specifically, the importance of teacher and student care, reflexivity, safety, dialogue, and vulnerability in promoting culturally responsive education and leadership was expressed as paramount, while at the same time the organizational norms of the managerial paradigm presented a host of barriers and limitations. Along with this, I noted in the coding structures an underlying emphasis on key aspects of the science of teaching and learning, including the reciprocal dynamics of relationships, including care, hearing and listening, interaction, and engagement, elements that are often missing in traditional conceptualizations of leadership and management.

### **Selective Coding**

Finally, through selective coding I developed a model representing the overall structure of the phenomenon. In this process, I interrogated the data, ensuring validation among identified themes and ideas. Eventually, the stages of coding aided in narrowing focus, making certain appropriate relationships existed. Furthermore, three overarching themes which stood out were Cultural Competence: Beliefs and Values; Barriers and Challenges; and Solutions for Continued Growth. Identifying the aforementioned themes allowed me to develop a sense for how a topic

of this nature might be best addressed in the field of education, providing moments for discussion along with opportunities to establish and implement reasonable solutions to address the challenges faced in dealing with cultural competency and culturally responsive behaviors or the lack thereof. Not only that, these identified themes serve as springboards for continued conversations about cultural competency and its impact in other realms of life beyond education, including politics, sports, and the career and college world. The selective coding procedures not only allowed for the focusing of data and themes, but also for the expansion and evolution of these ideas, allowing them to exist simultaneously in other domains of life.

More specifically, by spiraling back to the driving research questions and interrogating the three overarching themes discussed above, I was able to make more specific connections to these emergent observations which resulted in the following tiered model. At the center of the model, we can see the core value expressed across the interviews that (1) defined Culturally Responsive education and leadership in reciprocal and interactive terms. Building outwardly from this center, participants expressed a deep value for the importance of (2) building the organizational capacity to create spaces that facilitate and support this kind of reciprocal and interactive dynamic. With such organizational spaces established, the research participants believed that (3) cultural awareness does impact their ability to establish and form impactful relationships which in turn impact student achievement and discipline. With this fundamental optimism for the potential of the reciprocal sharing of cultural resources, the research subjects expressed concerns for, (4) the organizational barriers to bringing Culturally Responsive teaching and learning into the day to day work of schools. Finally, they framed these organizational barriers within, (5) aspects of the dominant school culture that struggles to support culturally responsive practice. Fundamentally, these individual educators expressed deep value

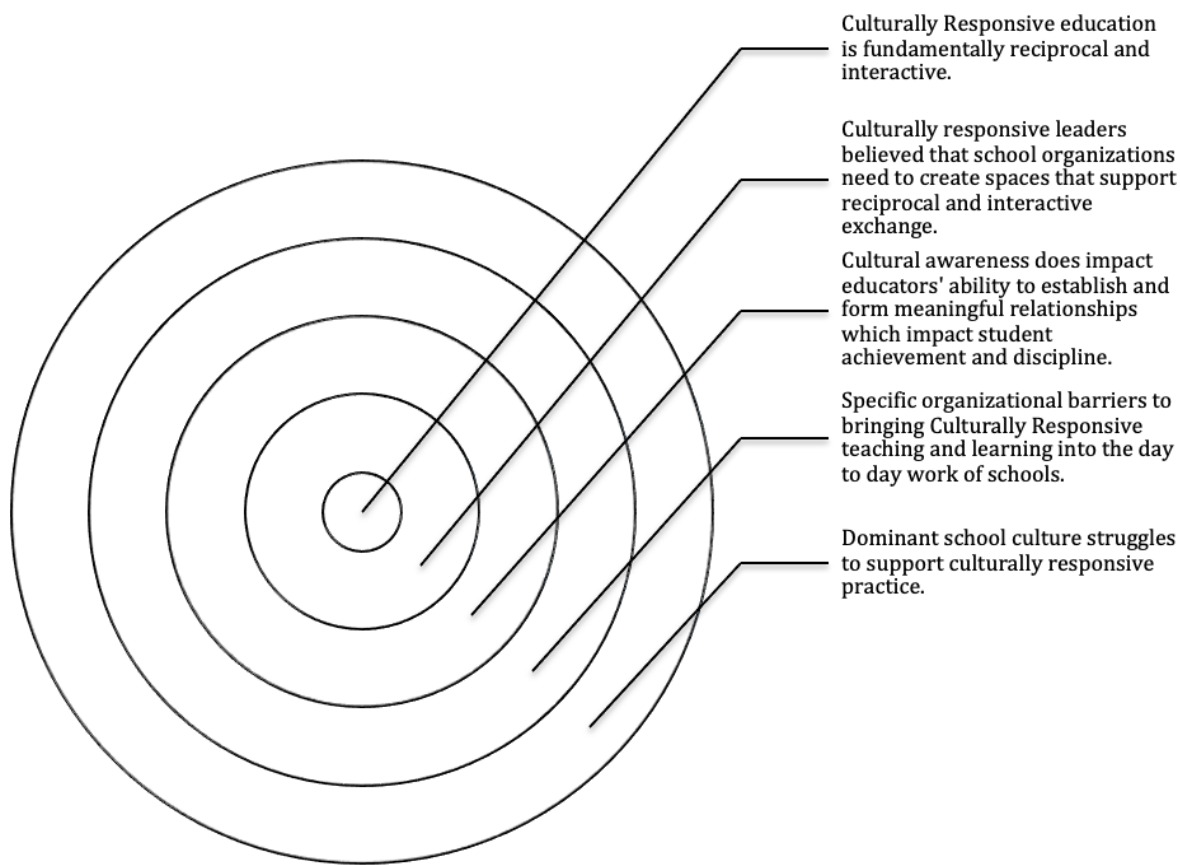
for CRL; recognizing the importance of relationship building, a climate of care and safety, and reflectivity, but found themselves struggling with the organizational norms which interfere with their ability to really engage in these ways. The outer layers of the tiered model represented traditional managerial organizational norms which are antithetical to the core values at the center.

In this way, the final selective coding can be conceptualized as a social ecological model highlighting the research participants' central passion and value for building trusting, safe, and supportive relationships with students and families that facilitate the reciprocal and interactive exchange of cultural resources and values. Building on these central values, beliefs, and actions, they believed this kind of relationship building and reciprocal exchange of cultural resources had a positive impact on students' achievement and discipline. However, they also expressed concerns and cautions about specific organizational barriers that limited or constrained their ability to fully live out these values and beliefs in their day to day work. Moreover, in the outermost ring of the ecological model, they recognized that elements of the dominant managerial school culture were the source of those specific organizational barriers. In this way, the social-ecological model presented in Figure 2 highlights a drive among these educators to develop culturally responsive educational relationships with their students and the communities they serve through reciprocal and interactive communication and exchange but were often constrained by organizational norms that tend to be built on the managerial traditions of knowledge dissemination and power.



**Figure 2**

*Culturally Responsive Leadership as the Reciprocal Exchange of Cultural Resources Locked Within the Dominant Managerial School Culture: A Social-Ecological Model*

**Findings**

It can be argued learning and growth are interactional and is not the delivery of content from experts to students, but rather a reciprocal exchange and interaction among stakeholders, including families, pupils, and teachers (Alexander, et al. 2009; Myran & Sutherland, 2019) In this way, an argument is built that cultural competence is a form of learning which can be understood through a science of learning lens. In examining the findings from the study, the research participants' conversation and dialogue lent itself to this frame of thought.

Throughout the interviews, some elements remained consistent. For example, the participants, regardless of role; age; gender; or race and ethnicity shared a willingness to learn and understand others and self-reflection as key elements for progress to be made in the area of cultural competency, particularly ensuring culturally responsive teaching, and learning practices were utilized with fidelity. Along with this, participants communicated cultural competence and the ability to exhibit cultural responsiveness was not specifically a race issue, but one which centered around the lived experiences and knowledge-base of an individual, relative to diverse populations of people, combined with one's efforts to ensure all stakeholders feel valued, including themselves. Furthermore, those interviewed shared this is an ongoing and fluid process, one which would not be solved quickly, and could be nurtured and groomed in a progressive process, to include dialogue and training, with rich and authentic interactions and experiences. In keeping with this, they emphasized that those conversations must be thoughtful and sincere, rooted in honest sharing, to include the creation of safe spaces for all involved, allowing for vulnerability to exist and thrive, leading to growth and development and solutions. What compels these findings is the utilization of dialogue to drive the act of teaching and learning, ensuring growth and development exists and is ever changing relative to the educator and student, and for this continued evolving to take place, positive and impactful relationships must prevail. In reflection of the interviews and what was shared and learned along the way, the ultimate connection is how these emergent insights were connected to the driving research questions. The ecological model in Figure 2 offers a framework for exploring these driving questions as expressed in Table 3.

**Table 3***Relationship between the Driving Questions and the Ecological Model*

<b>Driving Questions</b>	<b>Ecological Model</b>
How do these educators define Culturally Responsive education and leadership?	Culturally Responsive education is fundamentally reciprocal and interactive.
What culturally responsive leadership beliefs do individuals possess and utilize to build and develop inclusive organizations?	Culturally responsive leaders believed that school organizations need to create spaces that support reciprocal and interactive exchange.
Does cultural awareness by an individual impact their ability in establishing and forming impactful relationships affecting student achievement and discipline?	Cultural awareness does impact educators' ability to establish and form meaningful relationships which impact student achievement and discipline.
How does Culturally Responsive teaching and learning impact decisions by staff as it relates to the education of the children and families they serve?	Culturally Responsive education is fundamentally reciprocal and interactive.
How does the dominant school culture support, constrain or shape the implementation of these practices?	Specific organizational barriers to bringing Culturally Responsive teaching and learning into the day to day work of schools.  Dominant school culture struggles to support culturally responsive practice.

## **How Educators Define Culturally Responsive Education and Leadership**

As my interview participants and I began to center the dialogue around what it means to be culturally responsive, participants shared thoughts and ideas relative to this point. Participant Yellow shared the following, centered around thought processes and establishing relationships. “The first thing I think about is our ability to relate to the kids we serve. You know, I think I look at your ability to understand where kids are coming from.” He went on to say, “Now, I might not like it; might not pique my interest; but I need to learn what they're exposed to and the type of music; the type of TV shows; the type of style, just so I can build that relationship.” From there, he added, “I think cultural responsiveness is huge when you think about what kids experienced in their home relative to the way they communicate.” Along with this, he pointed out, “Can our teachers work with kids; communicate with kids; and learn what makes them tick? In order to get them, you got to hook them, and I think knowing what they like and what their interests are and what's pertinent in their homes, is how you hook them.” In reflecting upon this, it leads me to ask, do culturally competent and responsive educators know their students? The answer is a resounding, “Yes, they do,” and they are aware of the value in knowing them.

Not only this, but participant Blonde also went on to say, relative to culturally responsiveness that “As a student, a teacher is creating relevance for me when I walk into his or her space that I can either see part of who I am or my culture, or my identity represented. This supports the need for value and building and foraging necessary relationships. Building on aforementioned views, Blonde also added, “If we're going to grow that cultural awareness, then it comes from learning and understanding different narratives.” Once again, providing a case of the narrative for introspection; self-reflection; and continued development of educators and schools (as organizations). Furthering this topic of ensuring relevance for all, participant SB

said, “Being aware of different cultures, essentially, why an individual may think or act the way that they think; it doesn't necessarily have to do with always teaching things differently but just more of an awareness.” This further substantiates that school leaders and educators have to be aware of who they have before them and how to make them feel invaluable throughout the teaching and learning process.

In recognizing all members with equal worth and value, Red shared, “We schools are a melting pot, and we've got students in here and adults and, you know, teachers and other staff and people who are in and out of our buildings from all different backgrounds and life experiences, and that we are tasked with, you know, moving everybody forward and helping everybody experience growth. Participant Crimson went on to say about this topic, “I think it's where you are understanding of cultures, like your own culture but other cultures as well...and not being biased; and trying to see everybody...you know, everybody's perspective, and not let your bias control how you react to situations because someone else's cultural difference is different than yours.” Each of these school leaders indicated their wisdom, willingness, and understanding that what we do, as school leaders, goes beyond reading, writing, arithmetic, and high-stakes assessments. It includes an acknowledgement and intentionality to make certain all families and students are considered in the decision making process, ensuring the academic and social growth of all students.

What was shared by the participants indicated they viewed cultural responsiveness and competence as being more so about what behaviors and best practices are necessary to engage and grow all students. Building on this, not only students of a particular demographic, but all students who are presented before them, regardless of the educator's role. Here I observed a deep commitment in communication and relationship building, investments in really listening to what

matters to students and learning who they are culturally and individually. However, what should not be missed here is, not only is cultural diversity and competence a skill utilized by educators for the growth and development of students, but it is also a necessity for educators, regardless of role, to use as they continue to evolve as teachers and leaders of staff. In keeping with this, with any skill, knowledge must be provided; modeling should take place; resources provided; and implementation and assessment should be ongoing to make certain progress is not stagnant.

The research participants in this study defined culturally responsive leadership and education in similar terms to that found in the literature. Specifically, they focused on valuing student's prior knowledge and experience, establishing and nurturing relationships through open communication, dialogue, listening, and hearing with intentionality. Similarly, they saw culturally responsive practices as reciprocal and dynamic – not simply content to be disseminated to passive students, or a leadership strategy to be imposed on subordinates, but a genuine exchange of ideas, beliefs, and experiences. Here we can see the focus on communication and reflection emphasized by Brown (2004), and the recognition of the power dynamics of social organizational norms discussed by Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis (2016) and Gooden and O'Doherty (2015).

Expanding on what the literature emphasizes, these research participants expressed a view of culturally responsive leadership as fundamentally reciprocal and interactive, the importance of creating safe and reflective spaces, and that such efforts do facilitate impactful relationships impacted student achievement and discipline. They shared a vision that was less of a list of factors and more of an ecological model that recognized their own values, beliefs, reflectiveness, and actions as giving shape to, while being shaped by the school community. In

this way, their lived experiences reflected a system of values, beliefs, and actions, rather than a set of strategies.

### **How School Leader's Beliefs about Culturally Responsive Education Shape Their Work**

A school leader's beliefs about culturally responsive education shapes their work in a myriad of ways, including how they communicate with their staff, particularly modeling what is expected to be done relative to the families and students being served. These beliefs and values, shaped throughout their own lived experiences, can be seen through their words and actions. They would prefer educators invest in the lives of their students; be willing to dedicate and pour their all into what we do, including prioritizing being the "one" students can depend upon, regardless of their background, making them aware of their value and role in the educational process.

In examining how culturally responsiveness shaped their efforts in their respective roles, participants shared specific actions and behaviors illustrating efforts reflecting cultural competence. For example, Crimson spoke to days in the classroom and compared them to current visits and interactions from the role of school leadership, "I was never like the traditional teacher, so when everyone was teaching and doing all the things on the first day; it was like the first week I needed to get to know my kids. I want to know them; I want to know about them; I want to know all the things." She went on to say, "I'm staying in contact with the families; going to their basketball games; football games; something in the community to support them. I think that's what worked for me, because they saw me care, especially when I'm working in Title I schools, they don't feel like people care about them. [Students believe] You look at me as a grade or score, SOL Score. And I wanted to always show them when I was a teacher that you're more than a score; you're a person; so, learning about that person before giving them the content is

what was a win-win for me.” Not only this, Yellow delved into how he leads and drives his staff around this topic, indicating, “I don't want you [teachers] to send everything to me. I'll gladly take it, but there's some things I want people in the middle of, because you're interacting with this kid every day, for at least 90 minutes, versus I see them in the hallway, or I see them in the cafeteria. So, I want...I impart my own wisdom in my own expectations on the teachers. So, they're able to kind of do the same thing.” In examining this practice, it would seem GH sets the expectation for teachers to assume accountability of being the primary connection between school and the family, encouraging teachers to set the tone and positive relationship with students. In addition, we can see the theme of relationship building and interactive and reciprocal nature of learning and professional growth emphasized above.

Here we can see the research participants stories exemplified the four main behaviors of culturally responsive school leaders of (1) critically self-reflection, (2) culturally responsive curriculum, (3) creating inclusive school environments, and (4) engaging not only students, but parents and the larger community (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis (2016). Moreover, we can see the themes of the reciprocal and interactive nature of culturally responsive practices, creating safe spaces, and the impact of building and nurturing impactful relationships on student achievement and discipline (see Figure 2).

### **Do School Leader's Cultural Awareness Impact Establishing Impactful Relationships**

As the interviews evolved and conversations centered around a school leader's cultural competency and awareness and how it aids in establishing impactful and necessary relationships, specific situational and genuine examples were provided by those interviewed. They shared how their respective lenses afforded them wisdom at establishing and growing relationships with children. In keeping with this, they were able to provide how these behaviors were beneficial in



developing a climate and culture conducive for teaching and learning by all, for all. At one point, participant Red expressed, “Teachers need to work to build connections with every kid in this building regardless of the color of their skin or their background.” Red also shared, “Kids...they're not going to connect with the learning if they don't connect with you in some way,” further strengthening the argument for the establishment of meaningful relationships with the families and students school leaders and teachers serve and looping back to the central theme of the ecological model that centered culturally responsive practice as reciprocal and interactive. Along with this, participant Blue believes, “Building relationships and rapport...is of the utmost importance because I think having that strong foundation is what allows you to push on kids, beyond their level of comfort, beyond their level of, you know, once they're fatigued. You know where they get exhausted; that's what allows you to push them beyond the limits that they may think they could go.” This exhibits an understanding of knowing what facets of the relationship are needed tapping into as we do this work with young people at the secondary level. It brings to mind the necessity for relationships and bonds to be established and forged if academic and social growth is to be made.

A critical observation here is that educators no longer need to exist in the realm of a daily “power struggle,” where they feel constantly challenged by those they yearn to grow, but rather are nourishing a partnership for success, with them serving as welcome guides and leaders. Learning, by its very nature is reciprocal and interactive, is nested within the social ecological conditions of the school and requires psychologically safety in order to best leverage one's full capabilities. The power struggles which are perpetuated by the managerial norms discussed in Chapters One and Two, undermine trust, relationships, discourse, and safety, undermining learning itself. The research participants' recognition of the dynamics of these traditional power

struggles offers new insights for fine tuning our collective understanding of the value of culturally responsive education. A school leader's cultural awareness impacts establishing relationships in a number of ways. Culturally competent and responsive school leaders, those who are cognizant of the need to ensure teachers are working to build relationships. They, themselves, are well aware of the need for and importance of viable and positive relationships, as they have a significant impact on the academic and social development of their students.

### **Do Beliefs about Culturally Responsive Practices Impact Decision-making and Action?**

For many participants, significant conversation was had about decision-making at the building level, including personal experiences they found beneficial along with options moving forward in the realm of cultural competence and culturally responsive school leadership. For example, Yellow spoke about an eye-opening experience he had - Project Inclusion. He went on to say, "Project Inclusion was centered around taking kids that were in the middle of the road; a diverse population and we explored gender and sexuality and race and different topics, because it's all about, you know, there's more to me than what you see. So that had me going through that process with kids and talking to kids...this is an emotional roller-coaster; kids are crying one minute; laughing the next; back to crying because of the stories that they're sharing and because of the experiences they've had." In sharing this moment, it allowed me insight as to what he found to be valuable, knowing the lived experiences of the child and how that impacted who they are and capable of becoming. Furthermore, participant Brown shared the following from a district lens, "I think that we need to focus on self-reflection. You know we can continue to, you know, push literacy and math. I have no issue with that. You know I know that learning loss has been a huge focus, but I think that nothing impactful will take place until we do a diagnosis of the hearts, minds and mental health of educators. We need to reach the heart, the minds and the

souls, and the mental health of social emotional status and health of our educators, if we plan to continue to make a difference. And to your point, a culturally competent school division is a school division that has healthy educators. And I don't know if we are all healthy right now because of what we've been through [COVID Pandemic] so healthy educators promote healthy children, better prepared to do the work, man.” This illustrates the need to prioritize those directly serving our families and students at the building level, making certain they are best prepared and equipped to handle the challenges faced on the daily basis, including the element of cultural competence and culturally responsive school leadership and decision-making. In keeping with this thought, and speaking to teachers in general, Orange contributed, “It's the awareness that you bring into it [teaching]; that you know that. Let's face it, everybody brings some type of background and biases or favorites, or pet peeve; everybody brings something into that arena. And you have to be aware of that. So that you don't let it limit you in working with other people. Everybody's different, and it does shape you; absolutely shapes you.”

One of the most powerful aspects of these observations was that the lived experiences of the research participants emphasized that knowing your students, that is really knowing who they are, listening to them, and learning about their backgrounds, changed them as people and educators. The managerial norms of our field rarely recognizes this bidirectionality of growth and development commonly acknowledged in the educational psychology literature. This recognition that the students and their communities' reciprocal interaction with the educators in the school shaped and changed those educators and the culture of the school as they are being shaped and changed by it themselves (Myran & Sutherland, 2019).

As discussed in Chapter One, the traditional managerial paradigm assumes that students are the products of policy and bureaucratic structures, and what schools do (Myran & Sutherland,

2019) and not so much the role that students play in their own learning. Similarly, drawing on Adams and Myran (2021), I pointed out that the authoritarian and prescriptive nature of the accountability movement has conflated setting standards for the standardization of content, instruction and assessment, and promotes rigid scripted curricula that disseminates content to passive students through a transfer/acquisition metaphor (Donaldson & Handy, 2020). These power dynamics and the failure to understand the reciprocal and interactive nature of learning undermines opportunities for students to be co-producers of their own knowledge (Myran & Sutherland, 2019) and for parents and the community to engage in meaningfully shaping their children's educational experiences (Adams & Myran, 2021; Myran 2018). The lived experience shared by the research participants highlighted that they embraced how their interactions with students and their communities fostered their own growth and change. Moreover, they leveraged this personal and professional growth and development to be better at serving their students and communities. Here we can see the three innermost elements of the ecological model (see Figure 2) capturing this potentially transformative observation.

In terms of management and traditional education, we are no longer engaged in a 1950s setting of education, to speak of. We no longer have the expectation of rows and pupils dressed in "church" or official dress wear. We have progressed into a time where different strategies and planning are necessary to make specific targets and goals, to include breaking through the exterior of some of our families and students; connecting with them; and having them understand their well-being is first and foremost. In many cases acknowledging the need for different and doing different, keeping the stakeholders in mind and at the forefront of planning prove to be positively impactful, allowing for change to occur.

## **What is the Role of the School Climate in Shaping, Supporting or Constraining the Use of Culturally Responsive Practice?**

The interview participants in this study expressed that school leaders have a huge undertaking as they work to directly impact the school climate and culture, establish routines and behaviors which sway the climate of buildings towards success and equity. They emphasized that school leaders must ensure that growth and development is occurring with all stakeholders, making certain all have the capacity to perform their duties and responsibilities in the most effective ways. Furthermore, they acknowledge their responsibility for shaping and supporting, and encouraging the use of culturally responsive practices in their buildings. In keeping with this, they highlighted that they have been tasked with taking young children and adults and forging and facilitating their growth into citizens who are lifelong learners, career ready, and prepared to engage with diverse communities of people. Not only this, but they must also make certain they invest in the staff and students, as a community. Cultural competence goes beyond the students, as it is about shaping and facilitating all stakeholders involved in the process, valuing who they are and what they bring to the table as members of the teaching and learning community. In this study, the research participants shared their stories, views, and experiences of how they navigated their responsibilities within the norms of the school climate that both supported and constrained their development and use of culturally responsive practice.

### ***Shaping and Supporting***

In terms of school climate and its role to ensure cultural competency and responsive practices, the school leaders went on to share intimate thoughts and feedback on what they value and believe. While the school's primary function is that of an academic institution, it is more than that. It is a complex organization, responsible for developing well-rounded citizens, who

are able to do more than perform on state and district assessments. In keeping with this, it is school leaders who must take advantage of the opportunity and invest in fostering the reciprocal growth and learning of children. In fact, participant Orange let us know, “You know this is interesting and as part of my philosophy when I think back, kids don't go to school wanting to take an assessment, they don't get up in the morning and say, ‘Oh gosh, it's testing day, I can't wait to get in the door.’ You need something at school to want to get them to come to school. So, I'm really big on activities and clubs, and many times, many of my best relationships have come through those as a principal, with the principal advisory board; my folks that I have had on the board that I get to work with and change, I build those relationships with them.” In sharing this, it illustrates the school's primary goal and target of keeping the whole child at the forefront of decision making and initiative development.

Not only this, school leader, Brown, feverishly communicated, “We have to model access; we have to model engagement; you know we have to model cultural competence, via our strategic plan; via the policies in our school division; via our procedures, regulations, and our school division via the professional development; focus areas that are a priority for our division; what we expect of every employee that we hire; what we expect of every leader, what we expect of every teacher; what we expect of every aspiring individual in our school division and I think that we have to stay committed to the commitment around inclusivity, or you know being exclusively about kids too. But inclusivity and diversity and really not be afraid to talk about it. And to make it a priority.”

Schools have opportunities and resources to assure students and staff are afforded room to grow in various ways beyond academics. However, as illustrated by these educators, what seems to shape and support the use of culturally competent practices was not traditional top-

down managerial leadership strategies, but a depth of personality and character which were key components of how these educators built the capacity within their schools to do this important work. In doing so, they invested in allowing for vulnerability, thereby leading to building relationships, including trust and opportunities for the safe exchange of cultural values, helping schools to contribute to fostering composed and balanced individuals. An example of this can be found in White's statement about cultural responsiveness and establishing trust, "When I think of cultural responsiveness, I think of it as a duty on the educators' part to be aware and purposeful in our conversations our and actions; our awareness and our interactions; to take notice of and acknowledge the culture of the person that we're interacting with and that definitely includes the students. But I think it includes one another too, because I think the largest piece, and this is what I wish I could put into a magic pill for everyone, kids, see what they have modeled before them, so if we are doing it to one another, kids are going to notice that it's authentic when we're doing it to them. So, they are watching the interactions between adults, and I'm not just talking about cultural responsiveness, but with anything. I think particularly with cultural responsiveness, we can put on this facade that *looks* like we're being purposeful and intentional with kids because of their culture and background, to include ethnicity, race, whatever. If we interact with other adults, and they see through that, then obviously, our efforts become disingenuous." Cultural competency is larger than books, as it begins and ends with the person, and the interactive and reciprocal sharing of experience, and demonstrating an ongoing process of betterment for the well-being of oneself and others. In this way, those aspects that fostered growth and learning about the value of culture were rooted in principles of learning, relationship-building, trust, and the epistemic valuing of culturally diverse experiences and views.

### *Constraining*

Conversely, schools and organizations unintentionally place barriers or constraints against encouraging cultural responsiveness and inclusivity through continued use of scientific and managerial practices. “For example, in terms of curriculum and pacing, a school leader shared, “I think sometimes, especially our seasoned teachers, say 10 or more years, and our [brand] new teachers, they want to always walk this particular line and be doing this at this particular time and things of that nature and sometimes it's okay to do some things strategically different because, you know you're making an impact. You got a kid every day for 180 days. You are in a prime position to sway and impact that child one way or another. Regardless, if they're White or Black or regardless of their ethnicity. Regardless of what they are, you know, it's okay to be uncomfortable sometimes and be yourself and do things out of the box and out of the book.” Furthermore, another participant, Red, went on to say, on the topic of professional development, “I'm not big on PD staff meetings. I know sitting through those as a teacher I didn't pay attention, like, no you're not grabbing me and you're not changing me through forcing me to sit here for an hour, hour and half, two hours and talking to me. It doesn't matter how important the topic is.” Practices of this nature further reinforce the adherence to scientific management principles which inhibit ongoing growth and development by schools, contradicting the established expectations and guidelines which schools were established and operate on, which is to safeguard the lives of its students and staff and create spaces for genuine growth and development.

It is not only overly strict adherence to curriculum and the pressures of high-stakes testing and outdated professional development practices of this nature with staff, but also with students. Blonde, who has worked at the school and district level expressed the concern, “We



focus so much on kids' deficits, and we get them to build goals around the things they're not good at. And so, by the time they're in fourth and fifth grade, when you mention goal setting or aspiring to do things, they automatically connect with things they're not good at. So, if we want to stop leaving kids behind, in my opinion and thought, we connect their interests early on in the work." Based upon this observation, schools and its practices are in dire need of transformation, perhaps shifting from building and developing from areas of growth and, rather, focus on identifying and amplifying areas of strength, thereby providing a sense of confidence in students' abilities and will to achieve and do well in various areas of schooling.

### **Summary of Findings**

There are theories of action educators navigate every day, embracing the struggle between the challenges of scientific management and its influences versus today's educational organizational structures, capable of supporting the mission of culturally responsive education and social justice. A massive cultural shift has occurred in our country, throughout communities, education, and schools, where education is becoming driven more by interaction and reciprocity between pupil and teacher. In these organizations, spaces are created for families and students, allowing them opportunities to communicate and exchange thoughts, ideas, and beliefs, without fear of retaliation or scrutiny.

However, that evolution has not moved at the same pace in terms of preparing educators and schools for today's families and students, consequently hampering schools' and locales' abilities to be most impactful where teaching and learning is concerned. Taken together, the findings highlight the development of cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching and learning to be a shared responsibility on all stakeholders' parts, including the organization and its leaders; the teacher; the learner; and those families engaged in the process. This study,

centering around the role and responsibility of the leaders in education, highlights the need and willingness for growth mindsets to exist, allowing for flexibility and understanding, along with genuine care for all stakeholders involved. Not only this, once the commitment is made to cultural competence and responsiveness, schools and organizations must invest in developing appropriate guidelines, systems, and opportunities for continued education and learning in this realm. Furthermore, additional challenges and barriers, including the day to day operations of schools and offices need to be addressed, allowing for the establishment and advancement of cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching and learning, centered around rich, genuine, and thoughtful dialogue, driven to create and develop solutions which will positively impact student achievement, while simultaneously growing our educators.

Scientific management and its influences on organizational practices construct a host of barriers, both theoretical and practical, that limit the kind of free exchange of cultural resources and knowledge that is needed in a diverse world. These limiting forces prevent the full evolution of education's ability to train its practitioners to effectively serve children, families, and communities. In keeping with this, the practices associated with scientific management in consort with the colonization of education (Khalifa, Khalil, Marsh & Halloran, 2019; Scully, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012) hamper opportunities for communities and schools to mature simultaneously, thereby straining the relationship necessary for ongoing success. Furthermore, educators and students need theories, models, practices, examples, and solutions that are reflective of the experiences they live and engage with on a daily basis. Not only this, but they also require and deserve training and teachings which will provide them the robust tool they need to be most impactful, allowing both teacher and student to flourish.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion And Implications

As I described in the first chapter of this dissertation, there is a tension between the power dynamics of traditional organizational structures, which have been heavily influenced by scientific management (e.g. Cuban, 1990; Tyack, 1974), and the ideals of Culturally Responsive School Leadership, and more broadly, social justice, which recognizes the dominant culture of power have historically shaped the individual, and institutional, cultural beliefs, structures, and organizational norms that marginalize some while privileging others (Brooks, Miles, Buck, 2008; Thrupp, 2003; Ward, Bagley, Lumby, Woods, Hamilton, & Roberts, 2015). This literature begs the question, is social justice and equity possible under the auspices of scientific management? Here I noted an inherent strain between the inequality regimes of managerialism and the goals of culturally responsive school leadership, highlighting that the undergirding theories of action of managerialism are conceptually and practically incongruent with the core mission of equity and social justice.

In this way, I was very interested in understanding how educators committed to the principles of cultural competence and culturally responsive practices navigated these incongruent theories of action in their day to day work as agents of equality and equity. Prior to this study, little was known about this phenomenon and the current literature remains indeterminate on the limitations of traditional scientific managements' influence on organizational structures capable of supporting the mission of culturally responsive education and social justice. This work sought to explore the degree to which educators find their efforts to be stewards of culturally responsive education theoretically and practically at odds with the foundations of scientific management. More narrowly, this study examined how these educators sought to impact student achievement,

through the establishment and nurturing of healthy and positive relationships, along with adhering to their beliefs and values as culturally responsive school leaders. Not only this, but this study also allowed participants to share how their actions and beliefs allow students and staff to grow and develop in terms of cultural competency. All of this, taken together, illustrates the efforts necessary if schools are to flourish as learning and culturally competent human organizations.

### **Implications**

Interview participants were eager adopters of culturally competent practices and framed this work in very human terms. However, as they worked beyond their own immediate realms of influence they encountered more significant organizational barriers, including the effects of the historically embedded norms of scientific management and the colonization of education. Furthermore, they articulated how these barriers impact teaching and learning which, in turn, has repercussions on student academic achievement, thereby influencing the accountability and success for schools. Here we can see a kind of self-replicating dynamic where the normative structures of schooling, the well-embedded colonized practices, and an accountability climate that demands success through theories of action that are often antithetical to the goals of learning, equity, and justice. Building on this, what should not be discounted is the critical role that culturally responsive school leadership and practices could have on overcoming this paradox of working towards ensuring socially just and equitable opportunities for communities, families, and students within the confines of organizational structures that are fundamentally designed for uniformity. For me this highlights the incongruent theories of action and reveals a significant barrier to the future of this kind of work. Namely, in order to capitalize on the ways that culturally competent leadership can draw in and value more diverse student populations, the

outwardly structures need to be re-conceptualized and reformed to better support the good work that is currently being done in the middle of the model (see Figure 2). In short, the outward leadership and organizational structures need to be better aligned with the values of relationship building, reflexivity, trust, and the interactional and reciprocal nature of diversity and learning.

I assert that if educators are serious about ensuring teaching and learning communities that can exercise culturally responsive practices for all students and considering the increase in a more diverse student population, combined with an employee population lacking similar cultural diversity, it is vital for school leaders to examine, understand, and modify the traditional managerial organizational structures that have historically reproduced inequity. Moreover, I highlight that Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) facilitates the recognition and actions driven towards cultural competence, addressing how race, power, and individual institutional, and cultural racism impact beliefs, structures, and outcomes for marginalized and students of color (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015). Here we can see an important, but under-theorized barrier between the incongruent theories of action that undergird the managerial norms that shape our daily practice and the equity driven goals of Culturally Responsive School Leadership. Below I'll explore several implications for how the findings from this study offer refined insights about how the field might set about this important work of transforming the organizational structures to better meet this important goal.

In exploring the implications for how school leaders can facilitate organizational and professional growth at the district, school and classroom levels in an increasingly diverse world that fosters high quality and impactful teaching and learning, the role of cultural competence may offer a powerful lens for how educators reimagine organizational and leadership structures that are congruent with the goals of equity and justice. The participants in this study emphasized

that beyond the value of the standardized content that all students are exposed to, that students need to see themselves in the content and to see themselves in the ways that they interact and make sense out of that content. They seemed to intuitively understand that learning is more than the delivery of content from the expert to the novice, “that knowledge is constructed through the learner’s deliberate and active behaviors in a reciprocal interaction between their propensities as a learner, their prior knowledge and schema and the social and educational context” (Adams & Myran, 2021, p. 4). For example, one research participant made an emotional appeal for how important it was to assure that students feel safe and comfortable, to feel engaged, seen, and heard and made connections between this sense of community connectedness and self-confidence and mastery learning. In this way, culturally competent leadership provided a lens for thinking about learning in a counter-managerial way that builds the organizational capacity to support that mindset the students are not the products of what educators do, but that diverse peoples develop and grow within an interactional mix of our prior knowledge and experience, cultural and racial background, agency and introspective capabilities and that these individual dynamics are in constant and varied reciprocal exchange. Furthermore, such a culturally competent leadership lens recognizes that as educators when we are prepared to enter the school context with the open heart that one research participant talked about, we understand that this intermutual dynamic changes and shapes us as we are seeking to mentor and guide the learning of others – that is, student are shaping us as we are working to shape them.

Furthermore, as we consider how this affects education theoretically, we have to think about how we prepare educators and students for the diverse and changing world in which they live and work. In keeping with this, how will school systems address the concern of diversity awareness and cultural competency, making certain to educate and prepare all stakeholders

involved in the teaching and learning process, as this challenge goes beyond teachers and principals and district leadership. At what point do we begin to center and engage in conversations around Critical Race Theory and recognize its role in today's educational system, and ironically, its role comparative to that of scientific management. Taking all of this into account, we must consider and evaluate how this impacts students as they make the transition from a traditional high school setting to the real world, college and career ready. Not only this, but education also has to reflect and evaluate logistics and operations of systems and implementation of effective practices, determining what steps toward progress are being made versus that which remains status quo. The findings from this study may offer a means of addressing these thorny questions, recognizing that the historically rooted managerial and colonized norms of the field are antithetical to the goals of just and equitable opportunities for learning. More importantly, the counter-managerial values in the center of the model offer a lens for reconceptualizing how we answer the questions above, embracing a mindset that students are not the products of what educators do, but that diverse communities of knowers and learners are engaged in an interactional and reciprocal dynamic of teaching and learning that values each member of the school community. With careful attention to the tensions in the model, such a mindset could prompt the important work of replacing the managerial paradigm with a human and learning centered conceptualization of school organizations.

As we look to next steps, Crimson shared, "I really think we do need professional development, like from a professional that has been trained to talk about cultural awareness, cultural competency, all the things; I mean, because what happens is, when you're speaking from personal experiences, that's how your personal biases kind of come in; and I think sometimes the mark is missed versus having someone that has been professionally trained, that, you know, they

can train our staff, and then our staff can then exhibit that in our school. And I also think it will be good for students as well.” Furthermore, one of the things coming from this study is that not all school leaders follow what textbooks say, and impact can be driven by out of the box thinking and action, partnered with open dialogue and communication. Not only this, but they also followed their professional hearts and souls, they listened to their students, and paid attention to their own reflections, though acknowledged in some instances, professional development might be called for. In keeping with this, the data collected also suggests they were on the right track, but that they are constrained by the rigidity of the managerial paradigm. Consequently, this indicates the need for a hybrid approach, where they continue to be reflective and student centered, and engage each other in shared professional development where they build and refine from these important insights. These ideas were strengthened by the foundation and framework they established, built upon being reflective, open, student-centered, and self-reflective, aware that everyone has biases.

### **Conclusion**

Teaching and learning begins and ends with care. A care for and about others and the inclination to make decisions keeping communities and families and students at the forefront of decision-making and implementation of culturally responsive and educationally prudent practices. Not only this, but also a care for oneself and a willingness to invest in continued education and development relative to one’s role and responsibility. Students are not the products of what educators do, but rather develop and grow within social and reciprocal dynamics which help to support and propel learning. Traditional education and its pathways have evolved over the years and cultural competence, in its very nature, is a learning experience, one which should advance and expand alongside education. As communities and families change, so



should the world around them, particularly schools, affording students rich and genuine opportunities to learn, reflecting the world in which they exist in and will one day explore without tutelage and guidance from educators. In terms of students, one participant put it in very clear terms, indicating, “It is about rising up to meet students where they are thinking about their backgrounds when you're planning different things; you know, making sure that they are represented in your staff. Being responsive in and understanding where students come from and holding high expectations for them, and just being responsive to their needs. [Also] as a leader and ensuring that your staff is doing the same thing.”

Another viewpoint from the school leader lens and what must be done to aid our educator colleagues, another individual shared, “We [as division and school leaders] would need to make sure that everyone understands that we believe not only in our language; not only in what we say but our actions, daily; that every child deserves an equitable education. And then you have to unpack what equitable means. Equitable is not equal because, you know, equality and equity, they're not the same thing, nor should they be. We should be giving students what they need, with the understanding that what they need may not be the same as what a student right beside them needs, but our toolbox; our toolbox is so diverse and so learner-driven, that we can provide them what they need.” In keeping with a similar paradigm, Red conveyed, “If you are leading a building of a diverse group of human beings, and all of the stakeholders included, right? So, all the families that you're going to interact with; all the students you are going to interact with; the higher ups that you're going to interact with; the staff that you have. If you can learn something about them, and where they come from and relate it to some personal experience that you have, then I think you go a long way towards building some inclusivity into how you operate.” This frame of mind exemplifies collaboration and community; the belief and determined mindset that

teaching and learning is more than students and teachers and assessments. Growth and development, particularly in education, is centered around relationships of vulnerability and reciprocity, where varied thoughts, beliefs, and values are established and prosper in safe spaces, allowing for the formation of “one mind one belief,” focused on success and growth for all stakeholders, leaving none behind and taking none for granted, valuing all of what each has to offer and contribute.

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### Education

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PhD in Educational Leadership – May 2023 Dissertation: *An Ethnographic Case Study, Exploring Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning*

#### **Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA**

M.S. Educational Leadership – August 2013

#### **Saint Paul’s College, Lawrenceville, VA**

B.A. English, Secondary Education – May 1998

### Leadership Experience and Roles

July 2022 – Present	<b>Assistant Principal of Operations</b> , Denbigh High School, Newport News Public Schools
July 2019 to June 2022	<b>Assistant Principal</b> , Jones Magnet Middle School, Hampton City Schools
August 2014 to June 2019	<b>Assistant Principal</b> , Tarrant Middle School, Hampton City Schools
Summers 2018 – 2020	<b>Summer School Site Coordinator</b> Virtual Middle School, Phenix PreK – 8, Spratley (Kilgore) Gifted Center, Hampton City Schools
Aug 1999 – June 2014	<b>Secondary Language Arts Teacher</b> , Hampton City Schools

### Professional Activities

- Equity and Diversity Team of Hampton City Schools, established 2020
- Hampton City Schools Code of Conduct Work Team (2020)
- Best Use of technology to Enhance Content Learning in Grades 6-12 (Summer 2014)
- Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS), Syms Middle (2012 – 2014)
- Hampton City Schools Policy Committee (2012 – 2022)
- Curriculum Development Team, Language Arts (2012)
- Student Council Association Sponsor, Benjamin Syms Middle (2011 – 2014)
- Presenter at the District Wide Language Arts Professional Development (2009)
- Hampton City Schools Teacher Advisory Council (2004-2007 and 2006-2010)
- Secondary Comments Reform Committee (2005)
- Summer AVID Training (July 2000)

### Certifications, Honors, And Awards

- Benjamin Syms Middle School Teacher of the Year (2008)
- National Junior Honor Society Sponsor, Phi Beta Chapter (2003 – 2010)
- Who’s Who Among America’s Teachers (2000)