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Culturally Responsive Leadership: Promoting Critical Consciousness Through Community-Based Schooling

A dissertation proposal submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

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2023

The dissertation of Vanessa Ruiz is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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EPIGRAPH

"To be culturally humble means that I am willing to learn."

Joe Gallegher

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to my family, friends, and colleagues for their unwavering support. Thank you to my parents and siblings for your love and faith in me. My friends, your constant encouragement and patience were invaluable. To my colleagues, your insights and support significantly shaped my work—special thanks to my dissertation advisor for your guidance and belief in my abilities. To everyone else who supported me along the way, your help was vital. This journey would have been impossible without each of you. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Based Schooling

by

Vanessa Ruiz

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2023
California State University, San Marcos, 2023

Professor Brooke Soles, Chair

Culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) is essential to research regarding

culturally responsive pedagogy, reform, and social justice education. This comprehensive study

sought to provide a responsive framework to meet the needs of diverse students in a holistic

approach not limited to culturally sustaining pedagogy. This study included the clarifying strands of CRSL: critical self-awareness, teacher preparation, school environments, and community advocacy. Behaviors associated with CRSL emphasize fairness, inclusivity, representation, and social justice in public educational settings. This analysis revealed historically marginalized students' and communities' rich narratives of agency, appropriation, and resistance to oppression; nevertheless, CRSL also recognizes the history of injustices marginalized populations have faced and the need for schools to resist continuing the contexts of oppression. Because young scholars in marginalized communities endure oppressive structures, including educational institutions, culturally responsive school leaders have an ethical responsibility to counter this oppression. This research drew upon current research on leadership, social justice, culturally responsive schooling, and historically marginalized communities. This study reflects leadership's continued promise and implications for community-based schools.

Keywords: culturally responsive leadership, socially conscious leadership, community-based schooling, culturally responsive education, social justice education.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

As school leaders across the United States strive to develop the most effective strategies to support their diverse student populations, there are undeniable realizations regarding the stark demographic discrepancy between students and educational staff. The National Center for Educational Statistics predicts that by 2023, White students will constitute approximately 42% of the K–12 student population, a decrease of 8% from 2016, and the proportion of African American students will remain stable at 15% (Hussar & Bailey, 2007). However, according to a 2016 report from the U.S. Department of Education, there is a significant racial imbalance among educational staff; in 2012, 82% of teachers were White compared to 8% Latino and 7% African American. This demographic pattern extends to school administrators who are 80% White, 10% African American, and 7% Hispanic. Thus, the demographics of students versus educational staff and administrators underscore a notable discrepancy that demands attention and remediation.

The literature reveals that discord can occur when teachers do not share the same cultural backgrounds, linguistic codes, social protocols, and value systems with their students (Lindsey et al., 2018). Therefore, school leaders need to do more than just acknowledge challenges; they should actively advocate for students who have been marginalized historically and are still facing marginalization today. Over the past decade, the expectations for school leaders have expanded, and now more than ever, administrators must have a social justice vision (Carlisle et al., 2006). Through tools of cultural proficiency, a social justice vision is made possible (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). The literature review presents a discussion of these essential elements of cultural proficiency.

Introduction to the Context and Nature of the Study

The foundations of multicultural education began during the civil rights movement. This movement gave roots to culturally sustaining and responsive pedagogy. However, to address systematically oppressed communities, district leaders implemented traditional Eurocentric curricula and policies (Gay, 2010). These pervasive outcomes stem from the academic opportunity gap, reflecting large-scale injustices that violate U.S. value of parity. For many students from historically marginalized groups, upward social mobility is only attainable with quality education (Beachum, 2011).

Consequently, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the opportunity gap, researchers have investigated educational inequalities to understand the student experiences in today's public schools (Gay, 2010). The constraints of urban communities contradict the ideology around education having a uniform approach. With increased attention to accountability for student achievement, educators have begun to look for ways to take the lead in reform efforts that serve historically marginalized student populations (Singleton & Linton, 2006). In today's schools, culturally responsive administrators continuously build off an equitable vision, strengthen teacher leadership, and influence schools to operate as learning communities (Leithwood et al., 2008).

Statement of the Problem

The United States is more racially and ethnically diverse than ever. As a result, knowledge of ethnically diverse cultures, families, and communities should guide curriculum development, classroom climates, and instructional strategies (Gay, 2010). The literature suggests that teachers must recognize and assimilate qualities important to children and honor them through inclusive teaching practices (Cross et al., 1989). Additionally, this awareness

affirms the diversity that students, their communities, and teachers reflect (Lindsey et al., 2009). With this cultural shift, administrators must adapt to provide an equitable educational experience (Gay, 2010). Chapter 2 of this dissertation seeks to explicate the impact a critically conscious administration has on cultivating an inclusive school climate. By implementing a conceptual framework for culturally responsive leadership, administrators can create policies that address the opportunity gap between historically marginalized students and their White counterparts (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002).

The countless changes in the U. S. political and demographic environment make it necessary to acknowledge people from diverse backgrounds (Cross et al., 1989). For this reason, it is essential to understand what aids this equity and inclusion: leadership humility, cultural humility, and cultural competence (Lindsey et al., 2009). First, leadership humility encompasses a willingness to view oneself accurately (Gay, 2010). Cultural humility suggests a way of knowing and behaving to enact culturally responsive leadership practices in others. Therefore, knowing and behaving are fluid processes. Cultural competence combined with cultural humility is a lens to explore self-awareness and engage in critical self-reflection (Cross et al., 1989). Through self-awareness, leaders can overcome resistance from staff members and forces in social, institutional, and organizational environments that reinforce the status quo (Lindsey et al., 2009). Leaders who embrace cultural competency consider the diverse context in which they must execute their leadership. Similarly, a culturally responsive leader must proactively consider the political climate and how it impacts their staff, students, families, and the organization (Lindsey et al., 2009).

Conceptual Framework

Lindsey et al. (2018) characterized cultural proficiency as a mindset that entails a paradigm shift from viewing others as problematic to viewing how one works with people different from oneself to ensure effective practices. The authors presented four tools of cultural proficiency:

- The guiding principles of cultural proficiency serve as an introduction for a person or organization to identify their core values as they relate to diversity issues.

- The cultural proficiency continuum provides language to describe unhealthy values and behaviors of persons and organizations; in addition, the continuum assesses an individual desired state.

- The five essential elements of cultural competence serve as standards by which one develops healthy individual values or behaviors and organizational policies or practices.

- Identifying the barriers to cultural proficiency provides persons and their organizations with tools to overcome resistance to change.

Lindsey and Terrell (2009) asserted that educational leaders must be willing to examine themselves and the organizations they lead to address the pervasive educational inequities today. In addition, their research suggests that equity and high levels of student achievement can come to fruition if leaders utilize the tools of cultural proficiency with fidelity. As a result, transformational leaders are responsible for considering how their actions impact the colleges and the students they serve. According to Terrell and Lindsey (2009) these transformational leaders can use the tools of cultural proficiency as a template for their personal and professional development. For this purpose, this study relied on the essential elements of Cultural Competence to develop organizational policies and practices (Lindsey et al., 2009).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This narrative study explored how socially just leaders' personal and professional experiences influence their leadership and how their leadership encourages culturally proficient practices (Polkinghorne, 1995). Given the demographics of students in K–12 settings, much of the existing research on the need for socially just and culturally experienced leaders. However, more studies are needed about how socially conscious district leaders implement culturally proficient policies regarding community-based schooling (Maier et al., 2017). The assumption is that if a leader promotes and establishes the conditions for cultural proficiency, students from historically marginalized communities will benefit and academic outcomes will increase, closing the opportunity gap. In addition, there will be indicators of success related to discipline with suspension, expulsion, and, ultimately, graduation rates (Lindsey et al., 2018). With the direction of culturally proficient leaders, more students will be recognized and included in the general education environments, which will contribute to a community of learners. The questions salient to this study examined the culturally responsive practices of district leaders and explored their knowledge, predispositions, and performances. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. To what extent was the cultural proficiency framework instrumental in assisting leaders in establishing community-based educational initiatives?

RQ2. What strategies did administrators employ to overcome challenges during the execution of community-based educational initiatives?

Significance of the Study

This study aimed to better understand the role of district leaders in leading a school to become culturally proficient by narrowing or closing the opportunity gap in culturally diverse

schools (Lindsey et al., 2018). For leaders to implement changes that enable a district to understand cultural differences, they must understand their personal biases and assumptions. Moreover, leaders must prove willing to pursue effective ways to successfully educate all students from all ethnic and social backgrounds (Lindsey et al., 2018). This study offers insight into how school district building leaders honor the integrity and strengths each student brings to their school. The objectives of the study were to explore, describe, and examine how the findings of previous researchers and theorists on culturally responsive school leadership might explain the practices of influential leaders as they relate to community-based schooling (Maier et al., 2017).

This research aimed to illuminate the necessity for enhanced standards for developing leaders by leveraging the insights derived from face-to-face interviews and a leadership focus group. The objective of this research extended to acquiring supplementary documents on policy and procedures that demonstrate successful outcomes with students from historically marginalized communities. Ultimately, the research sought to provide a comprehensive representation of culturally proficient leadership that fosters a school culture of cultural proficiency. This culture operates, thinks, and evolves in a manner that respects all students and upholds their inherent right to learn.

Definition of Terms

In this study, I defined specific terms to provide a framework for understanding the key aspects of leadership that are sensitive to cultural diversity.

Color blindness is an ideology that perpetuates systemic inequity by avoiding meaningful discourse regarding race and racism (Marx & Larson, 2012).

Cultural competence relates to the assumption of responsibility for learning about the cultures of students and the community and integrating this understanding of culture as a foundation for instructional practices (Cross, 1989).

Cultural proficiency means honoring the differences among cultures, viewing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully among various cultural groups constitute critical aspects of cultural proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2018).

Deficit thinking is a process that blames school failure on the students' racial, ethnic, and low socioeconomic status, citing students entering school unprepared to learn based on their parents' lack of interest and lifestyle (Valencia, 2010).

Educational equity is the realization of policies, practices, and programs that eliminate barriers regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, ability, age, and national origin. Additionally, the system ensures equal access and holds those historically underserved to the same rigorous standards indicative of academic success as all other students (Skrla et al., 2009).

Race is the socially constructed meaning attached to various physical attributes, including but not limited to the skin and eye color, hair texture, and bond structures of people in the United States and elsewhere (Singleton, 2006).

Racism is the belief and enactment of beliefs that one set of characteristics is superior to another (e.g., white skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes are more beautiful than brown skin, brown eyes, and brown hair; Singleton, 2006).

Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities, including students with disabilities, English language learners, historically marginalized communities, and other legally protected groups (Carlisle et al., 2006).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 provided an introduction and background for the study. This chapter also detailed the problem addressed and the purpose, significance, delimitations, and assumptions of the study. Key terms were defined for clarity. The conceptual framework, Five Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency, served as the lens for exploring socially just leaders' personal and professional experiences. This research investigated how these experiences influence leadership styles and how such leadership promotes culturally proficient schools through community-based schooling (Maier et al., 2017). Though there is a wealth of research addressing the need for and how to develop culturally responsive educators, more studies about how the experiences of school leaders encourage cultural proficiency. Therefore, I organized this study into five chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the study, and Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on the connections between social justice leadership, the pathway to cultural proficiency, and community-based schooling. Chapter 3 reveals the research design and methodology of this study and states its limitations; additionally, Chapter 3 offers a discussion of the instrumentation used to screen participants and a description of the process used to understand how the lived experiences of district leaders shape the decisions they make. In Chapter 4, I provide an analysis of the study and present the findings. Finally, Chapter 5 contains a summary and conclusion of this study and makes further recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Cultivating a framework for culturally responsive instruction is pivotal, as it fosters an increased sense of belonging among students and educators when leaders express vulnerability and commit to collaboration (Lindsey et al., 2009). In this context, creating a safe space for staff to self-reflect, develop professionally, and collaborate effectively becomes essential (Cross et al., 1989). Becoming a culturally proficient administrator requires explicit values and practices that enable staff to interact effectively across diverse backgrounds and create an inside-out approach (Lindsey et al., 2009). However, these systems and structures will only succeed by considering the lived experiences of historically marginalized students. Riehl (2000) identified three tasks to determine whether administrators are prepared to respond to diversity and demonstrate multicultural leadership. These include fostering new definitions of diversity, promoting inclusive instructional practices, and building connections between schools and communities. In addition, culturally responsive leaders can amplify reform with an equity lens. For example, at the district level, mandates are only effective to the extent they are locally enforced (Cross et al., 1989). Because of this, Riehl asserted that leaders need to consistently identify and evaluate district policies that oppose an equitable school system.

Consequently, a culturally responsive leadership framework is vital because it allows a pathway for marginalized students to have an equitable and inclusive experience (Lindsey et al., 2009). A personal belief system, modeled with a student-centered approach grounded in access and antiracism, is found in administrators who consistently self-reflect (Yukl, 1989). Therefore, equity requires all stakeholders to have access to the knowledge necessary to be successful, even if those needs vary across racial or socioeconomic lines (Riehl, 2000). Genuine inclusion means

taking measures to bring traditionally excluded individuals and groups into processes, activities, and decision making to share power.

Leadership Styles for Diverse School Contexts

To achieve success, leaders must possess the ability to accomplish their goals through the actions of others. Culturally Responsive Leadership (CRL) helps create inclusive environments for critical stakeholders from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds, which is essential for workplace productivity. Spillane (2005) defined culture as a collective way of thinking, believing, and knowing, including shared experiences, consciousness, skills, values, forms of expression, social institutions, and behaviors. As a result, thriving public sector and human service leaders need to use greater empathy and humility while considering the needs of diverse communities (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002). As learners, leaders must integrate new information with prior knowledge and culturally based experiences (Yukl, 1989). Effective decision making creates a more collective framework built upon an existing foundational background. Culturally Responsive Leadership involves philosophies, practices, and policies that are flexible and responsive to change. This model proposes an examination process to ensure the organization can pivot based on the current internal and external context (Spillane, 2005). Ladson-Billings (1995) has suggested that to position a school for effective change, leaders must have high expectations for service and incorporate the community's history, values, cultural knowledge, and student demographic base. Moreover, by adopting a culturally responsive leadership framework, leaders gain the capacity to make decisions that correspond with the needs and expectations of stakeholders, particularly in the context of program implementation. To engage in culturally responsive change efforts, schools need to recognize the role of all employees in assessing stakeholders' needs. When shared power is limited, culturally responsive change

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efforts should be focused on flattening the hierarchical structure and engaging in shared decision-making processes (Yukl, 1989). Culturally proficient leaders have organizations that successfully reach their goals, provide opportunities to improve cultural competence, and ensure decisions connect to a broader social, political, and cultural awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Culturally Responsive Leadership

Culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) combines transformational and instructional leadership. Nelson and Guerra (2014) argued that cultural competence reflects how leaders interact successfully in a diverse environment. These leaders consider the cultural aspects of leadership and student learning to require a paradigm shift from traditional notions of school–community relationships. Initially, the conversation regarding culturally responsive practices primarily focused on classroom practices (Johnson, 2014). However, recent efforts have applied a culturally responsive framework to administration (Alkhateri et al., 2018). Culturally responsive school leadership involves strategies supporting the needs of students and families from diverse backgrounds to create inclusive school environments (Johnson, 2014). This leadership style includes fostering a caring relationship, building trust, and promoting cultural responsiveness (Alkhateri et al., 2018).

Johnson (2014) asserted that culturally responsive administrators are willing to challenge assumptions about communities different from their own and implement strategies to engage and include all campus students. Therefore, administrators play a vital role in ensuring that diverse schools are inclusive and culturally responsive to the needs of all stakeholders (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). To achieve this, leaders need to display transparency reflecting the values and beliefs that afford access and academic excellence to historically marginalized students (Khalifa et al., 2016). The role of the principal must be considered and is essential in the school environment

(Johnson, 2014). Culturally responsive administrators continually accept, appreciate, and embrace the different cultures at their school, and within their community, by using inclusive strategies to engage all families (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Considering the historical context of public schools in the United States and the persisting inequalities, CRSL has become a relevant topic to examine issues of cultural responsiveness and schoolwide reform (Alkhateri et al., 2018)

Traditional Leadership

According to Khalifa et al. (2016) and Fullan (2014), principal leadership is second only to classroom instruction in its impact on student outcomes. In recent decades, administrators have displayed two primary leadership paradigms: transformational and instructional leadership (Leithwood et al., 2008). More specifically, this literature review explores four leadership styles through the lens of cultural proficiency. The four essential components of leadership are influence, support, vision, and teamwork. Specifically, obtaining these skills changes work performance, motivation, and organizational goals (Leithwood et al., 2008). In addition, administrators need training to address culture, privilege, and racism; therefore, administrators rely on student success and a positive environment (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Finally, although leadership is critical, the practice of administration depends on the context of the unique school setting.

Over time, the traditional approach to leadership has derived from the public sector business context. First, this leadership style mirrors that of a manager in charge of a group conditioning employees to attain specific desired outcomes (Bass, 1990). Second, researchers suggest traditional leadership builds on respect and loyalty to the leader; in this context, the word leadership is interchangeable with exercising authority over a group of subordinates (Beachum, 2011). Thus, this top-down leadership model indicates clear supremacy and hierarchy (Bass,

1990). Leaders in a globalized, multicultural organization must learn to create value from diversity. Third, traditional leadership styles rely on lower-order motivational tools, micromanagement, and hierarchical approaches. Working from an authoritative style, leaders who operate with conventional management techniques limit their ability to motivate employees through praise, coaching, and constructive feedback. To serve diverse perspectives, a more inclusive approach to leadership is essential. Inclusive leadership is needed to support an inclusive climate that values different team members for what they bring to work practices (Ashikal et al., 2021). Inclusive leadership focuses on accepting members for who they are and allowing them to contribute their unique abilities and perspectives, and transformational leadership focuses on motivating and developing members based on the organization's needs (Eisenbach et al., 1999).

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership can occur between experts in the field, middle management, and other stakeholders and lead to mobilizing change (Larsson & Löwstedt, 2020). Shared leadership through a distributive process creates opportunities for culturally responsive practices. Research regarding distributed leadership relies on interactions between people (Beachum, 2011). For example, Larsson and Löwstedt (2020) explained that the intersection of leaders, followers, and situations provides a way of understanding the activities of multiple groups of individuals in a school who work as guiding staff in the instructional change process. Organizations responding quickly to marginalized communities' needs must continue to improve their decision-making processes (Spillane, 2005). For example, nurturing positive and meaningful interactions between leaders and employees strengthens workplace inclusion, which is especially important for organizations and leaders with an increasingly diverse workforce and clientele (Larsson &

Löwstedt, 2020). Moreover, inclusive leadership and practices are associated with decreased conflict and more significant innovation and job commitment. To be culturally responsive, leaders must eschew the stale regime and become open to diverse opinions, values, and beliefs (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Cultural competence and humility are critical to developing a culturally responsive leadership style.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a style in which the leader determines the needs and creates a vision to guide the change process (Eisenbach et al., 1999). The leader can cultivate a sense of community and commitment to others in the group through inspiration. The leader demonstrates, communicates, and motivates the audience to see a vision (Beachum, 2011). This is an indication that people follow a leader because of inherent qualities such as trust and honesty (Bass, 1990); for example, the stronger a leader's ability is to build trust, the higher level of loyalty employees will exhibit. These qualities inspire and motivate change within an administrator's role (Simsek, 2013).

Transformational leaders also adopt an effective combination of holistic and individualistic approaches to meeting collective goals. According to Bass (1990), the transformational leadership theory consists of four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. These four dimensions enable administrators to cultivate growth within their unique context. Moreover, transformational leaders strive to create a dynamic working environment that challenges old approaches and develops new innovative practices (Simsek, 2013). For advancements to occur, administrators must continue to expand their instructional practices.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership emerged in 1970 due to educational initiatives aiming to improve the academic experience for students. According to Fullan (2014), this shift calling for administrators to evolve from the managerial role to act as instructional leaders emerged as an essential policy recommendation around ineffective school research. Many administrators characterize instructional leadership as setting high expectations for teachers and students and equipping them to strengthen their instruction. In efforts to address the needs of diverse scholars, Alkhateri et al. (2018) have argued that administrators should develop as culturally responsive instructional leaders. A critical aspect of leadership is to enhance teachers' professional capacity and improve the quality of instruction (Beachum, 2011). By explicitly addressing diversity within curriculum and instruction, teachers can be responsive to the cultural capital that pupils, families, and communities bring to the school system dynamics (Fullan, 2014).

Culturally Responsive Leadership in Action

To be a culturally responsive leader means actively responding to the diversity in the school population. Educational practice reflecting an interconnected worldview as legitimate, authoritative, and valid can create a culturally responsive approach that benefits the entire community (Johnson, 2014). Through this approach, administrators demonstrate and promote inclusive practices that challenge deficit theorizing (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Deficit thinking serves as a lens through which individuals view educators' explanations for the disproportionate school failure of black and brown students or those living in poverty (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Through this lens, marginalized students get blamed for their low academic performance. For example, deficit thinking supports labeling disabilities and the use of behavior interventions pervading the disciplined practices as they relate to historically marginalized students (Darling-

Hammond, 2007). To combat deficit thinking, leaders can incorporate the six characteristics of cultural proficiency: blaming the victim, oppression, pseudoscience, temporal changes, educability, and heterodoxy (Cooper, 2007). Culturally responsive leaders use this framework to understand how educators blame students for institutional failures (Johnson, 2014). These failures lead to systems of oppression that perpetuate inequitable principles and practices.

Cultural Influences and Biases

Educators' perceptions, beliefs, biases, and subjectivity play a vital role in the vast academic and discipline gap between students from various cultural backgrounds. Influenced leaders must possess a consciousness of cultural diversity to address preconceived notions, informing their instructional practices and policies (Magno & Schiff, 2010). To establish an inclusive learning community, leaders must prioritize the unique experiences of their students and exhibit ethics of care. Strong relationships with families and local organizations positively impact students' learning experiences (Khalifa, 2016). By establishing an environment that is academically rich, welcoming, and supportive of the cultures of all stakeholders, leaders can begin to shift school culture (Magno & Schiff, 2010). However, when teachers use negative or critical language to talk about students, it hampers the effectiveness of these educational initiatives. For example, brown and black students are often labeled as apathetic toward education or lacking the motivation to succeed. These descriptors describe students as confrontational, having attitudes, and needing control to conform (Cooper, 2007). Sadly, students often see themselves through the same deficit lens their teachers and administrators used, and administrators must be capable of confronting barriers by acting with a moral purpose to disrupt negative perceptions of students (Magno & Schiff, 2010). As culturally responsive leaders seek

to create an inclusive school community, they must be willing to analyze the presence of institutional discrimination and racial tensions within the organization (Khalifa, 2016).

Vygotsky (1978) argued that administrators must understand the impact of internal bias to enact schoolwide policies, and Khalifa (2011) agreed that instead of using a biased lens to view students, educators must view student behaviors from a cultural perspective. Through culturally responsive leadership, administrators can create an environment that nurtures all students, regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Richards et al., 2006). Ultimately, students do not benefit when educators seek to minimize the importance of their race or try to discount the social factors of racial inequality (Khalifa, 2011). Community culture continues to be the core of a student's learning experience. Subsequently, students build their intellectual capacity by interacting with those around them (Richards et al., 2006). Unfortunately, in many instances, the curriculum minimizes the accomplishments of minorities by focusing on a Eurocentric ideology (Magno & Schiff, 2010).

Many administrators intentionally or unintentionally promote traditional ideology through their instructional practices despite the alternative cultural point of view (Cooper, 2007). Cultural biases in teaching dictate how ethnically and culturally diverse students will often have to cease learning behaviors that reflect facets of their home or native culture (Magno & Schiff, 2010). Sadly, many educators view culturally diverse students as incompetent when they fail to adopt classroom practices and behaviors aligned with mainstream cultural values. As a result, students must take remedial classes if they do not assimilate into the Eurocentric teaching practices (Richards et al., 2006). It is difficult and detrimental for some students to adopt behaviors not reflective of their cultures (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, ethnically diverse

households are more likely to maintain cultural practices and behaviors aligned with their indigenous culture but may not necessarily reflect conventional beliefs (Magno & Schiff, 2010).

Culturally Sustaining and Responsive Pedagogy

Identifying the challenges students from historically marginalized communities face in schools is the first step toward finding a solution to address those issues and concerns. Unfortunately, the current educational context offers students little purpose in attending school and limited support in becoming successful (Paris & Alim, 2017). This deficit in pedagogy and curriculum calls for a more innovative approach to instruction. Culturally sustaining pedagogy builds on decades of asset-based pedagogical research, including culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings,1995), Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, and Linguistic Pedagogy (Hollie, 2017). Furthermore, according to Paris and Alim (2017), Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy affirms and respects the critical components of the preceding asset-based pedagogies but also elevates them. Instead of just accepting or affirming the backgrounds of students from historically marginalized communities, as seen in culturally relevant pedagogy, Culturally sustaining pedagogy connects to students' cultural knowledge and prior experiences. This approach views schools as places where the artistic ways of being in communities of color are sustained rather than eradicated; as a result, culturally sustaining and responsive pedagogies promote equality across racial and ethnic communities and seek to ensure access and opportunity.

Cultural responsiveness evolved from believing all students can learn and thrive academically (Boykin et al., 2005a). When educators value the cultures and experiences of students, they can create learning opportunities while providing access and equity through quality programs to close the opportunity gap (Emdin, 2016). Boykin et al. (2005) positioned the theories of cultural responsiveness at the center of academic initiatives for students performing

below grade level and asserted that the connection between students and instructional content is culture. Educational outcomes are enhanced when students see their culture in the curriculum (Magno & Schiff, 2010). Cultural responsiveness uses students' cultural experiences to make the classroom content more applicable and reliable, thus creating an authentic experience and connection (Emdin, 2016). In addition, being responsive to the community's needs helps students develop a sense of belonging.

A strong sense of belonging contributes to an individual's psychological development (Vygotsky, 1978). The multiple implications that a sense of belonging poses in areas such as health, psychology, management, and educational sciences have yielded several interpretations (Richards et al., 2006). The most common definition focuses on attachment, usefulness, and a sense of pride (Boykin et al., 2005). The second defining attribute encompasses a student's positive relationships with peers and teachers. For these social relations to be accurate, Williams and Downing (1998) stated that they must be accompanied by encouragement, acceptance, support, and warmth. Third, the individual must demonstrate a willingness to get involved meaningfully within the community, and Williams and Downing argued that this involvement can take place in or outside the classroom. Harmonization is the fourth attribute of belonging; in his definition, Maslow (1962) highlighted the importance of individuals adapting and adjusting to align with various situations. Ultimately, this sense of belonging creates engagement and connections to the learning community (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Cultural responsiveness and belonging integrate an individual's beliefs and experiences while exposing them to high-quality programs (Vygotsky, 1978). However, responsive practices in the most limited, simplistic manner hinder understanding the more significant implications of

culture and learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Ladson-Billings (1995) presented three primary ideologies relevant to culturally responsive pedagogy:

- Students must be academically successful.

- Students must develop and maintain a sense of cultural competence.

- Students must develop the ability to become critical thinkers.

The foundational component of the culturally responsive pedagogy view is facilitating academic success for all children through identifying, nurturing, and utilizing student-centered methodologies that promote student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014). Consequently, culturally responsive teaching results in students apprenticing in a learning community rather than being taught in an isolated environment. This learning community creates authentic dialogue and real-life experiences (Boykin et al., 2005). Therefore, the shift to this instructional approach results in teachers and students engaging collectively in the struggle against the status quo (Williams & Downing, 1998).

Implications of Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is a progressive movement that began in the mid-1970s. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This theory focuses on race as a social construct and purports that racism is not merely the product of individual bias or prejudice but is also embedded in legal systems and policies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014). For the sake of comparison, CRT presents an understanding of how racism has shaped social institutions such as the criminal justice system, education system, housing market, and health care system (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This framework can help individuals understand how oppressive public education policies and practices have shifted. Beyond the individual characteristics of academic achievement and cultural competence, students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2017). This way of thinking allows students to critique the cultural norms, values, morals, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities. Although CRT began as simply a movement in the law, it rapidly spread in education; thus, CRT can be used to explain various educational issues from school discipline, hierarchy in schools, tracking, multicultural education, and even the debate over ethnic studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Literature regarding CRT reveals the implications of racism on education policy, school funding, desegregation, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teacher education.

Impact of Culturally Proficient Leadership on Curriculum and Instruction

Cultural proficiency is an inside-out process aimed at changing one's assumptions about students and the world in which they live (Lindsey et al., 2009). This approach requires leaders to engage in a reflective analysis of their biases, behaviors, and beliefs. Furthermore, culturally competent leaders develop and display a vision of schooling that accounts for the diverse needs of students (Alkhateri et al., 2018). Leaders do this by institutionalizing cultural knowledge and providing opportunities for professional development related to culture, equity, diversity, and inclusion (Lindsey et al., 2009). Equally important is how culturally competent leaders model the behaviors they desire to see and establish relationships between the school, families, and the community. When administrators fail to do so, misunderstanding and assumptions regarding marginalized students result in cultural destructiveness. According to researchers such as Riehl (2000), school leaders must be culturally competent to address the needs of economically and linguistically diverse students, and Khalifa (2018) claimed that culturally proficient schooling requires creating an inclusive learning environment. Unfortunately, most education reformers focus exclusively on instructional, transformational, and transactional leadership models to address the cultural needs of students, and it has become increasingly clear that these same

leadership strategies do little to address the needs of historically oppressed students and their families. As society shifts from a traditional approach to a more innovative learning design, the unique needs of students must be accounted for (Lindsey et al., 2009). This strategy should involve the use of both theoretical and culturally proficient principles.

Culturally Responsive Instructional Coaching

A thriving multicultural vision requires a robust multicultural curriculum to create a community of belonging within the classroom. By emphasizing responsive pedagogy, leaders capture an important action-based aspect of learning (Riehl, 2000). Culturally relevant instruction allows leaders to create school contexts and curricula that respond effectively to students' educational, social, political, and cultural needs (Riehl, 2000). With educational trends reflecting a cultural and linguistic mismatch between teachers and students, historically marginalized student populations require adequate support based on student-centered learning (Alkhateri et al., 2018). This approach results in students' more significant personal investment in their education because they feel valued and that they belong in their classroom environment. When schools craft structures that support the personalization and connection to trusted adults, students are more likely to gain transferable academic skills. These skills surface as a sense of purpose and connection to school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014).

School administrators are critical in guiding teachers to become culturally responsive. This outcome can be achieved by recruiting and retaining culturally responsive teachers and mentoring and modeling culturally responsive teaching (Riehl, 2000). Once teachers obtain cultural proficiency, leaders must be willing to advise teachers about how to initiate courageous conversations to challenge the impact of their assumptions regarding race, culture, and biases (Singleton, 2012). Coaching conversations are necessary to recognize prejudice and eliminate

racist rhetoric. Culturally responsive school leaders must also be willing to counsel those teachers who recognize this work is not for them (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014). This strategy will help build the entire staff's capacity to handle situations related to equity and inclusion.

Culturally Responsive School Discipline

Safety and security are paramount in creating an inclusive school environment. Frequently, microaggressions lead to unforeseen disciplinary actions due to misconceptions of various cultures (Hallinger, 1992). Microaggressions send negative messages to students about their identities, which can be mislabeled and categorized as defiant, and, as a result, they suffer from a cycle of traditional discipline practices (Dewitt, 2018). The systems and processes related to discipline play a key role in reaffirming a positive school culture and ensuring the well-being of students (Dewitt, 2018). Research regarding discipline practices reveals that many Black, Latinx, and students with disabilities are removed from class for insignificant misconduct (Alkhateri et al., 2018). Exclusionary disciplinary practices exert so much pressure on students that they often choose not to stay on campus (Alkhateri et al., 2018). Teachers must assess cultural proficiency to change the narrative and create pathways for historically marginalized students (Hallinger, 1992). Unfortunately, teachers often interpret and react to students' behavior from the viewpoint of privilege that only considers the middle class (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013). Similarly, teachers implement classroom management practices that alienate students from historically marginalized communities (Emdin, 2016). These actions, whether or not intentional, lead to misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and discrimination (Alkhateri et al., 2018)

Identifying the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency

Identifying the barriers provides persons and organizations with tools to overcome resistance to change. The obstacles to cultural proficiency are resistance to change, systemic

oppression, unawareness of the need to adapt, and a sense of entitlement (Alkhateri et al., 2018). These barriers often manifest in statements such as, "It is not me that needs to change." This oppression often comes when school leaders hold deficit-oriented opinions about minoritized children and families (Lindsey et al., 2009). Existing research has indicated that educators blame poor students and families from historically marginalized communities for problems in education, and this deficit thinking has created barriers to equitable learning environments. The guiding principles of cultural proficiency provide an introduction for persons or organizations to identify their core values relating to diversity issues (Lindsey et al., 2009). The principles provide a framework for examining schools' core values and how espoused theory and theory in action differ as schools undergo academic self-study (Lindsey et al., 2009). The guiding principles counteract the barriers and demonstrate how the diversity of students informs professional practice by responding to student learning needs. The guiding principles of cultural proficiency espouse that culture is a predominant force in shaping values, behaviors, and institutional policies and practices (Alkhateri et al., 2018). People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.

Every group has unique culturally defined needs that must be respected. People have personal identities and group identities. Given the current context, individuals' dignity is only considered if their people's satisfaction is also preserved (Lindsey et al., 2009). Each cultural group has unique cultural needs. The best of both worlds enhances the capacity of all. Each culture defines the family as the primary support system in children's education. School systems must recognize that marginalized populations must be at least bicultural and that this status creates a unique set of issues to which the system has the moral obligation to respond (Alkhateri

et al., 2018). In sum, community school pillars are the mediating factors through which schools achieve good student outcomes.

Community-Based Schooling

The United States Department of Education has asserted that high-quality schools have the power to transform children's lives by closing achievement gaps and equipping students for success in higher education and their future careers. Community schools bring educators and community partners together to create high-quality schools with an integrated approach to academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement (Richardson, 2009). Today's increasing economic inequality and residential segregation have triggered a resurgence of interest in community schools due to the need for more support within schools (Maier et al., 2017). Richardson's 2009 study results revealed that community schools are effective when they are comprehensive, research-based, locally owned, and designed in response to local needs and assets. Comprehensive community schools are committed to new ways of collaborating and sharing leadership, using research-supported practices, and forging powerful partnerships that define a community school. The community schools' pillars were created as a road map to support school districts and enable educators and communities to create safe and welcoming schools that are also high achieving, even in places where poverty and isolation make that especially difficult (Maier et al., 2017). The connection between these pillars makes community schools a practical approach to school improvement (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d). Richardson also argued that implementation of these pillars increases the odds that young people in low-income and under-resourced communities will be in educational environments with meaningful learning opportunities and ample high-quality teaching and support to address learning barriers. Additionally, Mapp et al. (2014)

discussed how these initiatives will support the establishment of a culture of high expectations, trust, and shared responsibility. With all four pillars in place, community schools have the features found in high-quality schools in better-resourced communities and countries where local institutions, family resources, and the combined capabilities of community members complement what the local schools can provide (Maier et al., 2017).

Over the past decades, a growing body of research has identified the characteristics of schools where all children learn and thrive (Maier et al., 2017); nevertheless, children living in predominantly middle-class White neighborhoods are far more likely than other children to have access to those schools (Mapp et al., 2014). In addition, advanced areas have higher local tax bases to finance high-quality schools (Richardson, 2009). Although few schools in any community provide the full range of social-emotional learning, high expectations, and nurturing environments that students need, middle-class parents and districts can supplement what schools provide with resources and support outside of school (Coalition for Community Schools, 2022) Effective community schools link schools to like-minded community-based organizations, social service agencies, health clinics, libraries, and more (Richardson, 2009). In addition, these schools identify and take full advantage of local assets and talent. This customized, responsive programming takes time to develop, thus, community-based schools spend extensive time conducting needs assessments and building solid relationships with community partners. The community schools' approach is not a prescriptive model with predetermined activities and services that district or state education leaders should impose on families and educators (Richardson, 2009.) Instead, policymakers play a role in community-based schooling initiatives by creating a stipulated framework to guide the work, offer technical support and advice to school teams, and provide the resources and infrastructure needed to sustain these efforts

(Coalition for Community Schools, 2022). With these supports, local educators, partners, families, and community members engage in a deep and collaborative inquiry process to develop a comprehensive understanding of local needs and assets. Through these initiatives, district leaders can design the schools, adapting the specifics of the pillars to address the local context (Coalition for Community Schools, 2022). Engaging all sectors of the school community in understanding and co-constructing community schools is critical to creating a shared vision and building the trusting community needed to facilitate, sustain, and take ownership of the desired changes.

Community Schools as a Response to Poverty and Inequality

Educators, community leaders, and advocates have long viewed community schools as a robust, comprehensive response to the needs of neighborhoods experiencing poverty and racial isolation. Mapp et al. (2014) explained that the approach dates back to early 20th-century efforts to make urban schools "social centers" that serve multiple social and civic needs. As industrialization, immigration, and urbanization increase, a socioeconomic shift has occurred, creating new roles for public institutions to address the needs of the urban poor. Many of these social reformers in the 19th century looked to schools as social centers that could help address these needs. The next wave of support for community schooling came in the 1930s as social reconstructionists sought to give schools a critical role in addressing the social disparities of the Great Depression. This crisis called for new economic and political structures and large programs to relieve poverty (Richardson, 2009). The James Adams Community School is an example of a school rooted in this history. Between 1943 and 1956, this segregated school located in Pennsylvania served Black students in grades K–9 by day. By night, it operated as a community center, offering free activities and classes for students, families, and community

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members (Richardson, 2009). Its existence challenged the belief that Black students were inferior as the school and community worked together to create activities, curriculum, and community-based learning opportunities that were both challenging to and supportive of the students (Maier et al., 2017).

Effectively Implementing Integrated Student Supports

Across various programmatic models, integrated student support strategies emphasize the importance of coordination and strong relationships between organizations, including shared governance and blending resources as cost-effective means to address student and family needs (Biag & Castrechini, 2016). However, the existing literature reveals that properly integrating community schools will take more work. Richardson (2009) has contended that building consensus around sharing resources among stakeholders takes extensive planning. In addition, community-based schooling initiatives require a commitment to systems changes that take considerable time (Biag & Castrechini, 2016). The critical dimensions of school–community collaboration include focusing on collaborative efforts between specific programs and services or significant systemic reform. Although the scope of cooperation varies, ownership of programs and services is most effective when there is shared responsibility between the school and the local community (Biag & Castrechini, 2016). In schools, Richardson pointed out that this could include restructuring to combine complementary efforts supported by general funds, special education entitlements, grants, and philanthropic funding; additionally, implementation research has demonstrated the importance of systemic support, structures, and processes in yielding positive results for program participants. The better implemented and more comprehensive the community school program, the more likely it is to deliver positive outcomes for students and families.

Four Community-Based School Pillars in Support of Effective Conditions and Practices

The four pillars are fundamental to the success of community-based schools. Individually and collectively, they serve as scaffolding that supports schools to instantiate the conditions and practices that enhance their effectiveness and help them surmount the barriers to providing high-quality learning opportunities in low-income communities (Richardson, 2009). The conditions these pillars enable are those that decades of research have identified as school characteristics that foster students' intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development. Table 1 shows the traits inherent to high-quality schools in alignment with practices related to the four pillars of community-based schools (Coalition for Community Schools, 2022).

Table 1.

High-Quality School Traits Aligned with Community-Based School Pillars

Community-based school pillar	Characteristic of high-quality school
Integrated student support addresses out-of-school barriers to learning through partnerships with social and health service agencies and providers, ideally coordinated by a dedicated professional staff member. Some employ social-emotional learning, conflict resolution training, trauma-informed care, and restorative justice practices to support mental health and lessen conflict, bullying, and punitive disciplinary actions, such as suspensions.	• Attention to all aspects of child development: academic, social, emotional, physical, psychological, and moral • Extra academic, social, and health and wellness support for students, as needed • Climate of safety and trusting relationships
Expanded learning time and opportunities, including after-school, weekend, and summer programs, provide additional academic instruction, individualized academic support, enrichment activities, and learning opportunities that emphasize real-world learning and community problem solving.	• Learning is the top priority • High expectations and strong instruction for all students • Sufficient resources and opportunities for meaningful learning
Family and community engagement bring parents and other community members into the school as partners with shared decision-making power in children's education. Such engagement also makes the school a neighborhood hub providing adults with educational opportunities, such as ESL classes, green card or citizenship preparation, computer skills, art, STEM, etc.	• Strong school, family, and community ties, including opportunities for shared leadership • Climate of safety and trusting relationships
Collaborative leadership and practice build a culture of professional learning, collective trust, and shared responsibility using such strategies as site-based leadership and governance teams, teacher learning communities, and a community school coordinator who manages the complex joint work of multiple schools and community organizations.	• Culture of teacher collaboration and professional learning • Assessment as a tool for improvement and shared accountability

Note. ESL = English as a second language; STEM = Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Pillar 1: Integrated Student Supports

The first pillar focuses on integrated student support. The pillar represents a school-based approach to promoting students' well-being by providing and coordinating services for students and families that target academic and nonacademic barriers to educational and life success (Coalition for Community Schools, 2022). Given the compounded inequalities that disadvantaged children face outside of the school environment, integrated student support processes entail wrapping a comprehensive array of individualized services and support networks around young people in the community (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.). The services may include health and human services, such as physical, dental, and mental health programs, as well as student and family counseling. They are not limited to but may include onsite childcare and early childhood development programs, job training and placement, transportation and housing assistance, and child nutrition and food assistance programs (Castrechini & London, 2012). The terms integrated student supports, community/school partnerships, school-linked services, and wraparound services interchangeably describe the principles and practices designed to address disadvantaged youth's social and economic challenges (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.). Integrated student support and wraparound services provide a tool for building constructive relationships and addressing gaps in care for students needing additional support. When well-designed, Castrechini and London (2012) argued, the services are collaborative, community-based, culturally competent, individualized, strengths-based, and outcomes-oriented. These shared principles embedded within pillar one provide the basis for understanding schools' integrated student support delivery model.

Pillar 2: Expanded and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities

The second pillar focuses on expanded learning time and opportunities (ELT/O) before and after the typical school day. This ELT/O may also happen over summer vacation and during other breaks (Castrechini & London, 2012). These programs give students more time for learning and offer opportunities to develop academically, socially, emotionally, and physically in ways that amplify activities in the regular school day and are intended to expand students' academic interests and increase their success. Expanded time sometimes extends instruction during the typical school day (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.); however, most of the time is used to engage students in community-based learning opportunities with partners. The activities often form informal, out-of-school learning experiences rather than traditional classroom instruction. For example, since 1994, the federal government's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program has sought to increase children's academic enrichment opportunities during nonschool hours (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.). The program provides $1.14 billion dollars annually, supports after-school and summer learning opportunities, and extends school-day strategies. In addition, some states provide additional funding to support ELT/O programs.

Pillar 3: Active Family and Community Engagement

The third pillar encompasses a broad array of interactions among parents, students, educators, and community members (Ludwig & Warren, 2009). The variety falls along a spectrum in which families and community members exercise varying degrees of power within schools. At one end of the spectrum, parents take a more active role in supporting their children academically and volunteering in the school. At the other end, families and community members hold meaningful roles and take the lead in shaping change at both school and district levels (Coalition for Community Schools, 2022). Most common are the school-related supports that

families provide their children at home, such as creating a safe and stable environment and helping with homework. In addition, the ongoing interactions between home and school aim to provide a check-in about programs and children's progress and encourage parents and community members to volunteer at school (Ludwig & Warren, 2009). Family and community engagement also includes parents or community members coming to the school to access services related to their or their family's well-being. Finally, engagement encompasses community organizing outside the school focused on school improvement, led by parents, students, and community members (Warren et al., 2009). Community refers to the people and organizations in the neighborhood or neighborhoods near the school that include, but are not limited to, students' families (Coalition for Community Schools, 2022). Through this collaboration, community organizing can build relationships that encourage leadership development, and these leadership opportunities may lead to campaigning for change in school and district policies that promote school reform. These family and community engagement strategies seek to improve student outcomes and strengthen families and communities by involving families and community members in their students' education at home and school (Ludwig & Warren, 2009). Traditionally known as parent involvement, family and community engagement is used more frequently to recognize increasingly diverse family arrangements and highlight the dynamic nature of effective parent and community involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Pillar 4: Collaborative Leadership and Practices

The final pillar examines collaborative leadership and the practices used to engage stakeholders with different experiences and expertise. A study by Rubin et al. (2002) surveyed this approach to leadership which includes parents, students, teachers, principals, and community

partners working together and sharing in the decision-making process. These collaborative practices rely upon leadership personnel skillfully managing relationships by creating structures and activities to support and sustain these interactions. According to Rubin and colleagues, collective leadership focuses on governance methods and procedures that encourage a joint dedication to school improvement objectives. It also promotes widespread participation, collaborative decision-making, and mutual responsibility for student learning outcomes over an extended period. Spillane and Diamond (2007) further specified that such collaboration includes spaces for frequent and open communication between players, allowing time for developing trusting relationships.

In most schools, collaborative leadership and practice involve collaboration among teachers, administrators, and union leaders. This collaboration includes professional learning communities and school teams making decisions and planning to improve school policy and classroom teaching and learning, as well as teacher development strategies, such as peer assistance and review (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). In community schools, the collaboration includes community school directors, local government agencies, families, community members, and leaders of community-based organizations (Jenkins & Duffy, 2016). These expanded collaborations focus on school governance and program planning, coordinating services associated with the other three community school pillars, and maintaining constructive relationships among professional staff, families, and community partners (Rubin et al., 2002). These examinations of collaborative leadership and practice show that this approach to school governance and decision making fosters conditions necessary to improve student outcomes and relationships within and beyond the school walls (Jenkins & Duffy, 2016). Moreover, when well

done, such collaboration leads to several positive outcomes for students because it increases stakeholder commitment and trust.

Summary

The complex role of the school leader is a multifaceted concept. School administrators not only have the responsibility to manage this leadership role, but they must also ensure the necessary skills to meet accountability demands, guide instruction, provide support for teachers, and meet the evolving needs of all students (Fullan, 2014). Therefore, the primary role that exceeds all is the ability to develop and shape a positive climate that allows students to realize their full potential (Hallinger, 1992). The literature indicates that many administrators rely primarily on instructional and transformational leadership, but a more holistic approach is necessary to make changes and incorporate all stakeholders (Dewitt, 2018). Administrators must actively lean into their roles in shaping the climate and understand the leadership style most conducive to effecting change. To develop a culture of empowerment, school leaders must consider several variables, such as disproportional enrollment in special education programs, curriculum, and assessment. Social justice schooling incorporates racial equity, social class, and student access (Fullan, 2014). Moreover, Lupton (2005) has claimed that social justice in education is a deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of force, and Carlisle et al.'s (2006) findings revealed that the definition of social justice is not separate from educational leadership practices.

Administrators play a vital role in social justice education and culturally responsive schooling (Alkhateri et al., 2018). The literature indicates that when all community members are involved in the process, the culture reflects and empowers all members (Singleton & Linton, 2006). For example, if achievement gaps depend on the relationship between race and poverty,

Latino populations have a higher likelihood of experiencing poverty, which affects family and educational resources. Social justice is debated throughout the literature, particularly regarding school administrators' and teachers' roles and responsibilities to ensure social justice in education (Lupton, 2005). Concepts such as freedom, democracy, and human rights have all emerged as prominent, and interpersonal factors that give rise to inequalities have become far more complex (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013). There is a need to consider social justice problems because schools are human-centered social institutions.

Equity and access stem from developing strategies to cross the cultural boundaries between educators and historically marginalized students (Lupton, 2005). Being equity conscious includes modifying instructional practices for various learning styles of multiple ethnicities and cultures (Fullan, 2014). Administrators must be aware of diversity among scholars and teachers for equity and access to be successful. This approach allows administrators to provide support based on the teacher's needs (Singleton, 2012). Providing educators with opportunities to learn more culturally responsive curricula and behavior management strategies will build a more robust teacher capacity and increase retention (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013). The literature points to the importance of leaders in creating and managing culture. Different socioeconomic status plays a critical part in the quality of education children receive. To build a culturally competent school community, administrators and teachers must engage in self-reflection and critical self-analysis to promote sociocultural consciousness (Fullan, 20014). Failure to do so may result in administrators and teachers using their biases against students rather than seeing their students' strengths (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014). Many educators need to self-assess and thus challenge their values, beliefs, and attitudes regarding diverse communities. Their engagement in critical reflection results in responsive teaching and learning.

Chapter 3 METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

This narrative study explored administrators' experiences in implementing culturally responsive policies, structures, and procedures that impact historically marginalized students (Creswell, 2007). In addition, this study considered how individual administrators implemented a district's strategic plan to fit the needs of their specific student population. Consequently, the research design was to determine the best method that would result in the ability to draw reliable and valid conclusions from the data collected. For this purpose, the methodology section included data collection, participants, and three research phases. First, this study investigated the lived experiences of K–8 school administrators at Title I schools in San Diego, California. To identify and describe the participants' lived experiences, a deep understanding of these experiences, gained through semistructured interviews and observations, was necessary (Creswell, 2007). Mertler (2019) discussed how interacting with the data produced rich narratives, a key qualitative research component. Thus, through this process, the story was the research study's outcome. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. To what extent was the cultural proficiency framework instrumental in assisting leaders in establishing community-based educational initiatives?

RQ2. What measures were adopted by administrators to navigate through challenges while implementing community-based educational initiatives?

These research questions help readers understand how culturally proficient leaders developed and implemented community school initiatives. I interviewed district leaders and focus groups centered on community-based schooling to answer the research questions. These tools allowed me to explore opinions, behavior, and experiences of classified and certificated

management. All these methods presented a holistic view of culturally sustaining and responsive leadership from a cross-representation of administrators.

Research Design

Each research question was aligned to a specific data collection method (see Table 2). The data collection methods determined patterns of beliefs and practices of culturally responsive and sustaining leadership. The rationale for the various data collection methods was to validate through multiple sources the sound development of a detailed analysis and to learn about cabinet-level and school-site leadership ideologies, policies, and practices relevant to community-based schooling (Creswell, 2007).

Table 2.

Research Questions Aligned to Data Collection Methods

Data collection method	Focus area	RQ1	RQ2
Self-assessment	Initial reflection	X	X
Semistructured interview	Leadership journey		X
Focus group	Community-based schooling initiative	X	

Note. RQ1 = To what extent was the cultural proficiency framework instrumental in assisting leaders in establishing community-based educational initiatives? RQ2 = What measures were adopted by administrators to navigate through challenges while implementing community-based educational initiatives?

Additionally, the data collection captured how administrators used descriptive and reflective approaches to make choices supporting students' needs from historically marginalized communities. The intent behind comparing these results was to determine how the participants' responses could contribute to coding development to identify similarities and differences (Levitt et al., 2018). For this study, I used a structural coding approach. Structural coding is an analytic cousin of holistic coding. The latter, however, is more exploratory and even tentative, and the

former is framed and driven by a specific research question and topic. This process created a quantitative scale to analyze the data accordingly (Levitt et al., 2018). For clarity, this study, across four phases, differentiated approaches to capturing participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2007). This quantitative analysis method included a dynamic, intuitive, and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking, and theorizing (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Participants completed the self-assessment (see Appendix A) 2 days before their scheduled interview to set the context. The self-assessment results helped the participants understand how their personal experience related to the essential elements of cultural proficiency. During the semistructured interview, the participants could elaborate on their leadership journey associated with culturally proficient leadership. According to Kallio et al. (2016), semistructured interviews are the most widely used interviewing format for qualitative research. Appendix B shows how the semistructured interview protocol was organized according to the five essential elements in the cultural proficiency framework. Semistructured interviews rely on predetermined, open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee (see Appendix Z). Furthermore, these individual interviews allowed the interviewer to delve deeply into social and personal matters. For this study, the semistructured interviews focused on the participants' leadership journeys and how their lived experiences had shaped them (Creswell, 2007). Given the variety of responsibilities of a district leadership role, these interviews were well-planned and structured to allow for consideration of possible crises. Interpreting these results to find similarities and differences supported administrators in developing a culturally proficient lens.

Participants were sourced from populations that included district cabinet members, school administrators, and classified management personnel. The participants were chosen

according to their management titles and roles in developing community-based schooling initiatives. These initiatives empowered students to confront and overcome personal challenges and structural barriers while utilizing the support of a cooperative school district. The three participating cabinet members included the superintendent, the director of educational services, and the director of student services; each played a substantial role in developing the district strategic plan and setting the shared vision. The superintendent was responsible for overseeing district-wide policies related to the strategic plan. The director of educational services determined the instructional roadmap for the district and led curriculum development and professional learning opportunities for teachers. The director of student services built the district's positive behavioral interventions and supports.

The classified management participants included the director of fiscal services, director of human resources, and director of technology were a substructure for the implementation of community-based schooling initiatives. The final group of participants included school site administrators. Principals, assistant principals, and deans of students were vital in integrating districts' community-based schooling initiatives with students and families. The intersections of these various stakeholders allowed for in-depth insights into the data collected by utilizing the strengths of qualitative research.

A qualitative narrative study approach specifies a culture-sharing group's shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language (Polkinghorne, 1995). The roadmap indicated in (Table 2) lays out the research design, and the narrative aspect of the study tied in all different components as they related to the personal experience of each leader (Creswell, 2007). The research design for this study was a qualitative approach framed by a narrative inquiry of identity and experience. Polkinghorne (1995) described narrative inquiry as a profoundly

relational inquiry that allows for the events of most significance to be brought forth in the stories participants tell (e.g., stories that were said for and about them and stories that they with which they engaged), which influenced their sense-making. Narrative inquiry gave insight into the participants' experiences in learning and leading without undue direction from the researchers. Because of this, it was vital that I considered how this inquiry may lead to vulnerable conversations. The relational ethics approach shaped the ongoing negotiations between the participants and me. Relational ethics view ethics in terms of relationships rather than directives. In this specific study, I had a collegial working relationship with all participants. For this reason, I was intentional with how positionality and relationships influenced the narrative study (Creswell, 2007). The narrative study not only looked at the personal experiences of individuals; it also considered the broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts that influenced, formed, and gave expression to these individual experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Through activist framing, I explored participants' emotional connections to cultural proficiency and the sources of those connections as they related to their journeys. In addition, I examined how district cabinet members collaborated to support administrators in implementing the strategic plan. Hence, the research design emphasized opportunities for participants to reflect on their emotional connections to cultural proficiency, adaptive leadership, and the evolution of their identities concerning community schooling. Each participant, in one way or another, demonstrated an investment in their district through recent challenges. The collective impact was amplified with this group of participants because each participant connected to the district and community. The emotional connection made their leadership approach uniquely different from other school districts, and the narrative research design allowed these leaders to tell their stories.

District Context

To better understand the implication culturally responsive leadership had on community-based schooling, this study examined the leadership practices of principals and district cabinet members as they led seven Title I schools in Southern California. The district's enrollment was approximately 3,000 students ranging from Pre-K–8. The district mission acknowledged students as diverse, unique, resilient, curious, compassionate, and limitless learners. In this district, the leaders believed that caring relationships based on integrity, honesty, and respect for diversity were essential to learning. When students left this district, it was the desire of all stakeholders that students knew and were able to recognize their significance and potential. They used their 21st-century learning experiences to thrive as tomorrow's leaders, workers, and democratic citizens.

During the 2020 school year, this district introduced its new strategic plan to foster equitable student achievement through multitiered support systems. The plan introduced four priorities:

- fostering student growth, leadership, and achievement

- fostering staff growth, leadership, and collective efficacy

- fostering school community and connectedness

- fostering operational systems that support effective schools

The four priorities centered around creating an equitable education for all students. The district's Multi-Tier System of Support approach offered the potential to create needed systemic change through intentional design and redesign of services. It supported quickly identifying and matching all students' needs through a data-based decision-making process.

The first priority focused on adopting and implementing a culturally responsive, standards-based curriculum in order to foster student growth. In addition to implementing culturally responsive instruction, the strategic plan called for antiracist instructional practices that affirmed Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students. District cabinet members recognized the need to provide relevant, effective professional development for all certified and classified instructional staff to achieve this shift. Table 3 shows the funding considerations for priority one.

Table 3.

Priority 1 Funding Considerations

Resource investment	Estimated annual cost	21–22	22–23	Funding Source
Curriculum 21–22: science 7–8; math adoption K–8	$700,000	✓	✓	Restricted lottery, textbook fund
Professional development	$150,000	✓	✓	LCFF
Intervention teacher, 1 per school site	$840,000	✓	✓	Expanded learning
Additional classroom support	$235,000	✓	✓	Expanded learning
Summer school 21–22	$280,000	✓	✓	Expanded learning
Additional services support: BCBA, psychologist, TOSA ed services	$232,000	✓	✓	Special ed, expanded learning

Note. LCFF = Local control funding formula; BCBA = Board-certified behavior analyst; TOSA = Teacher on special assignment.

The second priority put forth in the strategic plan focused on recruiting and hiring a diverse and talented workforce to foster staff growth. The district planned on implementing this through effective coaching, directed to principals and teachers, on culturally responsive leadership. As part of this plan, the cabinet team partnered with the University of California, Los Angeles, to develop a professional learning roadmap for culturally responsive leadership. Furthermore, district management led Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at every

system level and provided job-specific training for classified staff. Finally, embedded within the second priority were expanded teacher leadership opportunities through site-based Instructional Leadership Teams/equity teams. Table 4 displays the funding considerations associated with priority two.

Table 4.

Priority 2 Funding Considerations

Resource investment	Estimated annual cost	21–22	22–23	Funding source
Summer learning institute • Certificated: 3 days, mid-August • Classified: 3 half-days • Staff retreat: 1 day, early August	$787,000	✓	✓	ESSER2, ESSER3
Instructional coach • 1 per elementary site, special ed, preschool	$1,080,000	✓	✓	ESSER3
Principal coach (.60 FTE)	$103,000	✓		ESSER3
Leadership stipend (certificated and classified)	$160,000	✓	✓	Expanded learning
Assistant principal ES • 1.00 FTE ES split • 1.00 FTE ES split • 0.50 FTE ES (other 0.50 site funded)	$347,000	✓	✓	ESSER3

Note. ESSER = Elementary and secondary school emergency relief; FTE = full-time employee; ES = elementary school; LGEA =Local government education authority

The third priority district priority focused on fostering school community and connectedness through implementing an effective, authentic social and emotional learning (SEL) program across all schools. This priority included adult SEL training, staff, student survey data,

and a well-implemented SEL curriculum. In addition, the strategic plan called for developing a solid restorative practices system and positive behavior intervention systems across the district for all students, staff, and leaders, including Restorative Practices staff training. The leadership team hoped to create inclusive schools that fostered a sense of belonging and connectedness through these shifts. Priority three focused on celebrating culture and identity with school events, family engagement, and instructional practices and creating these inclusive events to foster student leadership and voice. With the support of student services, the district leadership team coordinated community engagement supports and services on site. Priority three included creating family centers and family engagement teams at every school site. The funding considerations for priority three are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.

Priority 3 Funding Considerations

Resource investment	Estimated annual cost	21-22	22-23	Funding source
Panorama	$29,000	✓	✓	Learning loss mitigation
Parent volunteer coordinators • .4688 FTE – 1 per site	$139,000	✓	✓	Expanded learning, ESSER3
Family engagement center • New center per site • Parenting classes	$196,000 $70,000	✓ ✓	✓	Expanded learning, Title I, parent engagement Expanded learning
Restorative practices training • 7 restorative practice leads • 7 social workers				
TOSA, parent engagement	$95,000	✓	✓	Title I, parent engagement

Note. FTE = full-time employee; ESSER = Elementary and secondary school emergency relief.

Priority four focused on fostering operational systems that support effective schools. The priority began with developing a school site facilities plan for all campuses to identify facilities-related priorities and improvements. Through these plans, the classified management team hoped to create an equitable method for prioritizing operational and facilities district-wide, including but not limited to technology, facilities, nutrition, and fiscal services. The funding consideration for priority four is listed in Table 6.

Table 6.

Priority 4 Funding Considerations

Resource investment	Estimated annual cost	21–22	22–23	Funding source
Furniture refresh	$1,000,000	✓	✓	ESSER3, LCFF
Classroom projection devices	$890,000	✓		ESSER2
Student/staff technology • Chromebooks, 750 annually • Staff devices, 100 annually	$372,000	✓	✓	LCFF, lottery, unrestricted
Classroom refresh • Carpet/tile, paint, security shade	$410,000	✓	✓	Facilities fee, bond fund
Facilities master plan	$30,000	✓		Facilities fee
Kitchen upgrades	$210,000	✓	✓	Nutrition fund, bond fund
Infrastructure upgrades	$1,250,000	✓	✓	Bond fund

Note. ESSER = Elementary and secondary school emergency relief; LCFF = Local control funding formula.

For this study, the district priorities explained previously regarding the purpose of culturally responsive leadership and the role of community-based schooling policies encompassed all stakeholders. In addition to including each importance, it was essential to

understand the allocation of funds. When considering factors that influence student success, many district leaders focused on teachers, counselors, and other school-based professionals interacting daily with students. However, district spending had become a crucial component of student success because it determined which initiatives took priority. The strategic alignment of resources to district goals was paramount in ensuring district dollars with the best interests of students in mind. When district leaders worked together to determine spending priorities and create a strategic plan, they had to consider the lens they used to lead and make decisions. For this reason, I used the culturally proficient framework to understand better how the participants' worldviews impacted their decisions and actions when leading community-based schooling initiatives. By learning to be culturally proficient, leaders could develop skills for having the tough conversations needed to manage and respond to the dynamics of difference. In addition, I recognized that culturally proficient change was systemic, requiring school leaders to work strategically with stakeholders throughout the system (Cross et al., 1989).*f*

Cultural Proficiency Framework

Culture shaped behaviors, values, and institutions and influenced everyone. To provide an equitable education, leaders must assess their culture and learn to manage the dynamics of difference. The framework for this study comprised four tools aimed to help educators work toward cultural proficiency (see Appendix C). Welborn et al. (2022) asserted that when leaders acquire the skills and language to support their unique community context, they can engage their students and their families in communities of learning. The tools of cultural proficiency are not strategies or techniques; instead, they teach individuals how to perform professional leadership responsibilities and cultural proficiency. Being culturally proficient is exemplified by a reliance

on assessment data, the delivery of curriculum and instruction, interaction with parents and community members, and planning and use of professional development protocols.

In the present study, the tools of cultural proficiency provided a framework for analysis of individual values and behaviors and of the school district's policies and practices. Appendix C presents the five essential elements of the cultural proficiency framework as introduced by Lindsey et al. (2009). The five essential of cultural competence serve as standards by which leaders can develop healthy individual values and behaviors and school site policies and practices, and Lindsey et al. (2018) argued that actions related to them lead educators to a shift in thinking represented by the continuum (see Appendix D). Additionally, the essential elements serve as standards upon which to forge culturally competent values, behaviors, policies, and practices.

The first aspect of cultural competence focuses on assessing cultural knowledge, which means being aware of how one's own culture is similar to or different from others' cultures (Lindsey et al., 2009 Cultural understanding also means effectively engaging in cross-cultural situations. Valuing diversity, the second element, requires individuals to make attempts at inclusivity for those whose viewpoints and experiences differ from their own. Being able to understand and value diversity not only enriches conversations but aids in decision making and problem solving (Lindsey et al., 2009). The third aspect is management of the dynamics of difference; this means viewing conflict as a natural and normal process with cultural contexts that could be understood and supportive of creative problem solving. Adapting to diversity is the fourth element of the cultural competency framework. This aspect centers on a willingness to learn about others and use others' cultural experiences and backgrounds in educational settings.

The final aspect relates to institutionalizing cultural knowledge by making learning about cultural groups and their experiences and perspectives integral to those groups' ongoing learning.

Culturally proficient educational leaders are aware of their culture and the effect it might have on those they serve. To successfully navigate various situations, they invest time in learning about the culture of the school and broader district, the cultures of the parents or guardians, and the culture of the larger community (Welborn et al., 2022). In doing so, they ably anticipate how these cultures will interact, conflict, and enhance one another. In the spirit of valuing diversity, educational leaders welcome parents and community members into the school setting and appreciate the challenges of achieving healthy diversity. Managing the dynamics of difference is also essential for culturally proficient leaders when effectively implementing change initiatives. An educational leader recognizes that conflict is a normal and natural part of life and must develop the skills to positively and constructively manage conflict (Welborn et al., 2022). The culturally proficient approach to leadership requires administrators to help fellow educators, parents or guardians, and community members understand that what appear to be clashes in personalities might be cultural conflicts. As a result of conflicts that arise, culturally proficient educational leaders commit to the continuous learning that is necessary to resolve issues caused by differences.

When culturally competent district leaders prepare to implement various initiatives, they seek to enhance the substance and structure of the policies created so that the guiding principles inform all work of cultural proficiency and the continuum. Through this strategy, leaders can institutionalize cultural knowledge (Welborn et al., 2022). Appendix C reveals the interaction of different types of behaviors. Culturally incompetent behaviors and reactive practices help generate tolerance and compliance with mandates for educational equality. Activities and

attitudes that proactively seek personal transformation support the goal of educational equity. The continuum helps leaders understand how community-based school initiatives impact various stakeholders. As they adapt to diversity, leaders must examine overt and unintentional discrimination policies and practices.

A culturally proficient educational leader influences the culture of their school and district so that the guiding principles inform policies and practices of cultural proficiency (Kikanza et al., 2005). The leaders use teachable moments to share cultural knowledge with colleagues, supervisors, parents and guardians, and the communities they served (Welborn et al., 2022). When conflict arises, culturally proficient leaders create opportunities for groups to learn about one another and engage in ways that honor who they were. Through the present narrative study, participants shared their experiences with the five essential elements of cultural proficiency. Experience in this context refers to a combination of events the individual went through and their response to them. Each personal journey was unique, and each participant's life experiences shaped their evolving leadership style. The study was an opportunity for participants to self-reflect on the factors contributing to their leadership journey. My intention was for this study to help the participants understand what motivated and drove them as culturally proficient leaders. Welborn et al. (2022) defined the experience-based approach as a comprehensive new way of developing leaders; this approach elevated job experience, life experience, and specific skill development. Through this narrative study, leaders were able to reflect on how their experiences shaped their methods while building community-based schooling initiatives.

Data Collection

This study incorporated two data types to investigate school administrators' culturally responsive leadership strategies. The first data type was semistructured interviews strategically

designed to yield in-depth responses from cabinet members, classified management, and school site administrators regarding their leadership experiences, perceptions, and knowledge. In their own words, a semistructured interview allowed participants to reveal how they understood cultural responsiveness and disclosed their feelings and observations. The interview guide Appendix J covered the main topics of the study. However, for consistency, the semistructured interviews and focus groups focused on the five essential elements of cultural proficiency.

The second data type resulted from a focus group discussion with district leadership around community-based schooling initiatives. The protocol included conversations about administrators' actions, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships in their natural settings. The primary purpose of this research was to draw upon participants' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions in a way that would not have been feasible using other methods, for example, observations, one-to-one interviewing, or questionnaires. Focus groups helped generate hypotheses and develop questions or concepts for questionnaires and interview guides (Kitzinger, 1994). They were, however, limited in terms of an ability to generalize findings to a whole population, mainly because of the small number of people participating and the likelihood that the participants would not be a representative sample. Therefore, the moderators had to create a clear protocol to facilitate a successful focus group. In addition, the moderator had to possess good interpersonal skills and personal qualities, engage listeners, and remain nonjudgmental and adaptable. According to Kitzinger (1994), these qualities promote participants' trust in the moderator and increased the likelihood of open, interactive dialogue. One crucial feature of the focus group of this study was to ensure that the interactions between participants highlighted their worldview; this focus group brought together classified and certificated leaders who prioritized community-based schooling initiatives, which enabled

participants to ask each other questions and reevaluate and reconsider their understanding of their experiences. Conducting focus groups also proved much more collaborative than other study forms, which Kitzinger has noted offers participants an empowering process.

Phase One: Self-Assessment

Certificated administrators and classified management began by completing a self-assessment on the essential elements of cultural proficiency. Welborn et al. (2022) designed the self-assessment deployed in this study for participants to reflect in preparation for the semistructured interviews; notably, Welborn et al. stated that a self-assessment tool helps participants explore their cultural competence and allows them to reflect on their skills, knowledge, and awareness as well as how those traits relate to the essential elements of cultural proficiency. The self-assessment also helped identify potential biases, as each individual has unique preferences, perspectives, and ideas. In fact, the blend of individual patterns in the world creates an essential diversity, so equality was vital in understanding everyone's unique perspectives and how assumptions could interfere with our ability to be impartial and unbiased. Welborn et al. further noted that one's biases could be the root of singular thought processes and actions, yet people rarely discuss their impact on decision making and community work, even though every culture has biases related to norms, values, and community. All participants who opted into the study completed the self-assessment (see Appendix H). Administrators and management staff received an email and consent form regarding their interest in participating in this study (see Appendix F; Appendix G). Therefore, the self-assessment provided a baseline of information and a starting point for conversations about becoming culturally proficient. This self-assessment tool was vetted by Welborn et al. (2022) and designed to help leaders brainstorm ideas for developing skills and knowledge to increase their cultural competence.

Phase Two: Semistructured Interviews

The sit-down interview is a standard method for collecting qualitative data in higher education research. However, it often separates informants from their routine experiences and practices in natural environments (Kusenbach, 2003). This separation is problematic, especially when the research focuses on participants' experiences within a specific domain. For this study, participants could choose from virtual, in-person, or walking interviews (see Appendix I). Carpiano (2009) defined walking interviews as a form of semistructured, qualitative interviews that, as the name implies, are conducted by researchers accompanying individual informants on outings in their familiar environments, such as a neighborhood or larger local area. Kusenbach (2003) has explained how the walking interview integrates the benefits of both sit-down interviews and observations and builds on the two traditional methods by utilizing the environment as a tool that prompts interaction, conversation, and participant reflections. Walking interviews often produce rich, detailed data because the environment inspires participants' thoughts, memories, and actions (Evans & Jones, 2011). Kusenbach also posited that the walking interview was well-positioned to qualitatively explore environmental themes; these themes included engaging the participant with various spaces and people in everyday life and encouraging reactions to, and memories associated with, various campus landmarks (Carpiano, 2009). By incorporating this social architecture, participants can also draw on the human actors in the environment. As a result, the data yielded for this study revealed how the participant reacted while walking through a specific place with the participants.

These environmental themes allow a deeper exploration of each participant's experiences in a specific space and the social, organizational, and institutional orders that impact these experiences (Kusenbach, 2003). For this reason, I conducted semistructured interviews that

included the option of a walking interview if the participant was willing and able. The interviews aimed to further explore how school leaders in formal roles conceptualized culturally responsive leadership and investigate whether there were different patterns of practice or divergent belief systems among educator leaders within the district. In addition, these walking interviews allowed me to observe how participants' identities acted as a filter to shape their perceptions of the environment, which Harris (2016) asserted helps expose the nuances of how educators' backgrounds inform their interactions on campus. Throughout the walking interview, I observed how administrators announced and implemented community schooling initiatives through a lens of cultural proficiency. The participant interviewees ranged from teacher leaders, school administrators, district office educators, and classified management. As a district administrator, I built rapport with participants and the community, which Harris has explained allows for more profound, authentic responses. The walking interviews were recorded for later data reduction and analysis. If requested, some discussions were conducted via phone or Zoom, and others were face-to-face to accommodate the schedules of the educator participants.

Phase Three: Focus Groups

As a qualitative method for gathering data, focus groups combined several participants to discuss a topic of mutual interest (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). As part of the data collection process, researchers could audio record and transcribe the conversation in the focus groups (see Appendix E; Appendix J). The significant advantage of focus groups was that they offered the chance to observe participants engaging in interaction that was concentrated on attitudes and experiences that interested the researcher (Krueger, 2014). This advantage stood out compared to informant interviewing and participant observation (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). For this study, I focused on group protocol. Appendix E displays a focus group protocol that explicitly laid out a

forum to engage in discourse and activities regarding cultural proficiency, school climate, and community-based schooling initiatives. As the primary investigator, I conducted the focus group with the aid of a research assistant. The focus group took place during the weekly district leadership meeting, a time that did not disrupt participants' school routines.

Procedures

There are many different qualitative sampling procedures. For this study, criteria sampling emerged as the most appropriate. This method enabled me to select participants who met the necessary criteria (Denzin et al., 2006). This narrative study involved semistructured interviews and a focus group to understand the lived experience of the participants. For this reason, data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection so that I could generate an emerging understanding of research questions, which in turn informed both the sampling and the questions being asked (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The semistructured interview questions intentionally supported open, direct, verbal questions that elicited detailed narratives and stories, per a model presented by Denzin and Lincoln (2005). These questions were intentionally linked to the cultural proficiency framework underpinning the study. Appendix H contains the scripted interview questions.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Through purposive sampling, my participants were selected intentionally due to their diverse knowledge of the cultural domain related to this phenomenon of interest. Mertler (2016) referred to this specific strategy as criterion-based sampling. It involved intentionally selecting individuals with varied experiences in their environments to learn about or understand the topic (Creswell, 2007). This study focused on school leaders,' classified and certified, lived experiences as they decided on community-based schooling policies. Although the term

educational leaders was used when describing this population, some study members had yet to work as classroom teachers. Additionally, some participants in this study were administrators and classified management who identified as racially diverse or as part of an underrepresented minority group. Therefore, this research included school principals and vice-principals identifying as African Americans, Latinx, Pacific Islanders, and Others. Representation from various cultural backgrounds was essential for culturally proficient leaders.

Representation assures that school principals, teachers, or other school-based leaders reflect the racial and cultural diversity of the local communities they serve. This model allows students of color to see themselves reflected in the educators and leaders surrounding them at school and then imagine bigger and bolder dreams for themselves. Each study participant shared their experiences through the theoretical lens of cultural proficiency. Participants completed a self-assessment before a semistructured interview regarding leadership, artistic ability, and school culture. After considering the various methods, such as phenomenology, ethnography, and case studies, narrative research emerged as the most appropriate for this study. According to Mertler (2019), narrative research examines the interactions, behaviors, and perceptions within groups, teams, organizations, and communities. Moreover, the central aim of this study was to provide holistic insights into people's views and actions through the collection of detailed observations and interviews. I discussed school administrators' change efforts and behaviors leading to highly diverse student populations for this study. Increasing cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in San Diego public schools has resulted in the need to study the culturally responsive leadership strategies that school administrators employ to engage and include all students.

Data Analysis

To genuinely understand the effectiveness of culturally responsive strategies, it was necessary to view how school administrators utilized them. Recounting personal stories in their natural settings was essential. Narrative inquiry reveals unique perspectives and a deeper understanding of a situation; this approach often amplifies the voices of marginalized populations who have historically been silenced. Thorne (2000) stated that researchers use narrative analysis to understand how research participants construct stories and narratives from their experiences, meaning there exists a dual layer of interpretation in narrative analysis. First, the research participants interpreted their own lives through history. Then I interpreted the construction of that narrative. The processing for data analysis included organizing and preparing the data, reading and reviewing all of the data, and coding the data into themes to form a central idea, per Thorne's model. Observing how these administrators successfully navigated, engaged, and included students from various backgrounds was essential to understanding the culturally responsive leadership strategies they used that might benefit other administrators in similar contexts.

Positionality

Positionality describes an individual's worldview and position about a research task and its social and political context and reflects the work a researcher chooses to adopt for a research study (Rowe, 2014). My positionality as the sole researcher was essential to consider when establishing the context of this study from a district lens and a worldview lens. I have been an educator in the district since 2016 but began my career in 2014 teaching secondary and postsecondary math. In 2022, I was named the District Administrator of the Year. After working 6 years as a classroom teacher, I became the principal at the only middle school in the district in

which I was currently serving my 3rd year. Having worked in this small district for 4 years, I have built positive rapport and meaningful relationships with many school community staff, parents, and students.

I continue to be one of the few Latina administrators in the district over the last 20 years. This demographic was visible, public, and obvious. Having fulfilled several leadership roles in the community, I suspected some educators and parents might or might not have been comfortable sharing their experiences and beliefs with me in this study, primarily because it focused on culturally responsive leadership. My reassurance that my role as a researcher was distinct from that as a teacher or administrator might or might not have impacted the responses that participants provided. As a 30-year-old Latina, I remained aware of my own bias, assumptions, and worldviews and attempted to keep my frame of reference at a distance. I accomplished this through established and unbiased semistructured interviews and focus group protocols.

Qualitative research methods have been criticized for lacking rigor and for impressionistic and biased results. To maintain objectivity, I ensured a protocol that resulted in accurate data reporting. These strategies included triangulation, corroboration, peer review, respondent validation, persistent observation, and prolonged involvement. I used an applied thematic analysis approach to reduce bias, provide structure, and integrate reflexivity using textual data (Creswell, 1998). During the data analysis process, I used several of Creswell's strategies to ensure the quality and rigor of the data. Creswell (1998) described eight of the most commonly cited techniques and their purposes as a balance against the imposition of researcher bias and assurance that the study could be trusted to provide information on some essential human phenomena. For this study, member checking was one strategy included in the data

collection process. Member checking involves presenting findings to research respondents for feedback on how well the results fit their experience.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Transparency was essential throughout this process so that I could adequately address how credibility and validity claims fit with the narrative study. Validity in qualitative research meant the appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data (Gunawan, 2015), for example, whether the research question was valid for the desired outcome, whether the methodology was appropriate for answering the research question, and whether the design was good for the method when the sampling and data analysis were correct. Finally, the results and conclusions were valid for the sample and context (Flick, 2004). Therefore, I employed multiple procedures for the research study's qualitative phases to ensure the validity, results, and interpretation of the data (Gunawan, 2015). For example, the qualitative interview question came from a reliable and vetted source: the study design centered around educational leaders' beliefs and practices. In addition, all qualitative phases of the study employed a standardized technique known as triangulation. In the study, triangulation was achieved by collecting data from various sources— educators, administrators, cabinet members, and classified staff—using multiple methods such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups, as outlined by Flick (2004).

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Limitations of the Study

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My positionality with the school district is a limitation in this study. As a district administrator and principal at one of the sites, educators, administrators, and cabinet members might have not responded sincerely during the interviews or the focus group. Additionally, participants may have carried an expectation that they were supposed to answer questions in a certain way. Due to my positionality, participants might have omitted things from their responses

or added things that did not reflect authenticity. Another limitation was that the district in which I work had already begun a district-wide initiative in leading for equity, so responses might not reflect a history of beliefs or practices but simply reflect what was being prompted by the district. I attempted to minimize these limitations as much as possible. I reminded the participants that all responses would be confidential and that they could decline to answer any questions and withdraw from the study without ramifications. I encouraged open and honest responses by assuring participants that my role as the investigator was to gather data that would help move our district forward in our efforts toward social-emotional learning and culturally responsive and sustaining teaching. Despite potential limitations, this study had crucial educational research, policy, and practice implications.

Chapter 4 RESULTS

Introduction and Research Questions

This study explored the influence of socially aware leaders' competencies on their

leadership approach and advocacy for culturally sensitive practices. Building and maintaining

culturally sensitive education policies rooted in the community were particularly important. The

motivation behind creating these environments was to leverage the educational experiences of

students from underrepresented communities with this leadership style. Improving culturally

sensitive education policies could enhance students' academic results and narrow the

achievement gap. As a result of these policies, school leaders may see success through reduced

suspension and expulsion rates and higher graduation rates. Culturally aware leaders could

reduce students' sense of marginalization and exclusion, fostering a vibrant learning community.

This research looked closely at district leaders' culturally responsive practices, focusing on their

knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1. To what extent was the cultural proficiency framework instrumental in assisting

leaders in establishing community-based educational initiatives?

RQ2. What measures were adopted by administrators to navigate through challenges

while implementing community-based educational initiatives?

Cultural proficiency is a strategy that begins with evaluating an organization's internal

strengths and how they can be used to form structures that help school leaders create effective

community-based educational policies. This study primarily considered how these structures, or

lack thereof, affected district leaders as they tried to develop sustainable initiatives. Community-

based education initiatives focus on building partnerships between schools and the local

community to enrich the educational experience and cater to students' unique needs. These

initiatives aim to maintain a collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship between the school and the community, utilizing local resources, knowledge, and expertise.

This research aimed to explore the five essential elements of cultural competence presented in the figure in Appendix C, which offers insights into how using this framework can positively affect district leaders as they create and drive sustainable community-based education initiatives. Relying on cultural proficiency can help district leaders effectively create policies and practices involving the local community. District leaders can use the assessing cultural knowledge element to understand community members' cultural backgrounds and needs, allowing them to tailor their initiatives accordingly. Valuing diversity and managing the dynamics of difference equip leaders to promote inclusivity, respect diverse viewpoints, and navigate potential cultural conflicts that may arise while implementing community-based education initiatives. Adapting to diversity allows district leaders to flexibly adjust teaching methods, curricula, and resources to cater to the diverse needs of students within the community. By institutionalizing cultural knowledge, number 5 of the essential elements of cultural competency, leaders can weave cultural proficiency into the organizational fabric, ensuring the sustainability and deep embedding of community-based education initiatives in the school's culture. Implementing cultural proficiency enables district leaders to nurture a collaborative relationship between the school and the community, utilizing the strengths and resources of both parties. This cooperative approach can result in an inclusive and equitable educational experience that caters to students' needs, encourages community involvement, and leads to positive educational outcomes. Table 7 outlines the approach used in this paper to address the research questions using related themes and subthemes, which tie back to the conceptual framework for cultural proficiency. The first section of Chapter 4 addresses Research Question 1

by focusing on the role of each system. By contrast, the latter section of Chapter 4 discusses how the pillars of community-based schooling exemplify culturally proficient leadership in action, thereby addressing Research Question 2.

Table 7.

Themes and Subthemes Related to the Study's Research Questions

Research question	Theme identified by theoretical framework	Indicator	Subtheme
1	1. Assess cultural knowledge—leaders initiate learning about their own and others' culture as assets for making changes that benefit the underserved student.	Leadership characteristic • Humility • Empathy • Perseverance	• Early childhood experience • Mentorship • Conscientious leadership
	2. Value diversity—leaders are inclusive of people and cultures with viewpoints and experiences different from their own for the benefit of their school and community.	Leadership style • Servant leadership • Shared leadership	
2	3. Manage the dynamics of difference—leaders use problem solving and conflict-resolution strategies to include multiple perspectives and teach about the dynamics of cultural interaction.	Leadership challenge • Building, managing effective teams • Managing change • Balancing competing priorities	• Empathy and listening • Building authentic relationships • Continuous learning and growth
	4. Adapt to diversity—leaders use their cultural knowledge to guide school policies that achieve equitable educational and socially just outcomes.	Leadership strategy • Clear communication • Reciprocal relationships • Data-driven accountability	
	5. Institutionalize cultural knowledge—leaders' cultural knowledge is evident in their behavior and in school policies that address educational inequities and close access, opportunity, and achievement gaps.		

Note. RQ1 = To what extent was the cultural proficiency framework instrumental in assisting leaders in establishing community-based educational initiatives? RQ 2 = What measures were adopted by administrators to navigate through challenges while implementing community-based educational initiatives?

The data highlighted the critical role of cultural understanding in leadership to reach community-based school goals. Leaders who comprehensively understood diverse cultures could build better relationships and improve performance, creating a school environment that matched community values. This understanding of culture began with learning about the various cultures within the school community. This knowledge came from exposure to diverse groups, education in inclusive environments, skills in language and communication, upbringing in various cultures, and lessons in fairness and social justice. Such understanding allowed leaders to provide support tailored to each student's needs, fostering an environment that respected different identities.

Appreciating diversity, a crucial part of cultural understanding, was achieved through empathy, teamwork, and advocacy for social justice. Leaders who embodied these traits understood the importance of involving the community and created an inclusive environment that encouraged collaboration, trust, and respect, ensuring that the school's practices reflected the community's cultural values. The interviews with participants showed the importance of a leader adapting to diversity. This skill involved recognizing diversity, developing cultural competence, building relationships, customizing instruction, applying the community, collaborating with community organizations, and pursuing professional development. Leaders who adapted to diversity promoted an inclusive and influential leadership style, using the strengths of diversity to create a school culture that indeed mirrored its community. By assessing, valuing, and adapting to diversity, leaders with cultural understanding created an empowering environment where every student could thrive. Strengthening culturally sensitive education policies reinforced the school community and transformed it into an accurate reflection of the dynamic society it served. Table 8 shows the three main goals of culturally proficient leadership and corresponding subthemes.

Table 8.

Themes and Subthemes as Revealed by Findings

Leadership goal	Subtheme
1: Assesses culture→integrated student supports	Early childhood experiences Mentorship Conscientious leadership
2: Values diversity→family and community engagement	Empathy and listening Building authentic relationships Continuous learning and growth
3: Adapts to diversity→collaborative leadership and practice	Collaboration and teamwork Tailoring instruction and supports Data-based iterative decision making

Approach to Data Analysis

Utilizing Parsons and Brown's (2022) model of inductive analysis, a systematic and iterative process was adhered to during data collection. The process was designed to efficiently organize, describe, and interpret data. The data analysis approach was grounded in the conceptual framework outlined in the methodology section, informing the structure of the interviews and the focus group protocol. The research design procedure involved mapping each research question to a corresponding data collection method. These methods were selected to reveal patterns in beliefs and practices associated with culturally responsive and sustaining leadership. Various data collection methods allowed for a comprehensive analysis and provided insights into leadership ideologies, policies, and practices regarding community-based education. The data collection process was centered around documenting how administrators used descriptive and reflective approaches to address the needs of marginalized students. The aim was to compare results to identify commonalities and discrepancies, leading to the development of

coding techniques. A structural coding approach was employed to conduct the quantitative data analysis.

Before the interviews, participants completed a self-assessment, providing additional context and helping them understand how their personal experiences aligned with cultural proficiency principles. Semistructured interviews were conducted, enabling participants to elaborate on their leadership journeys in the context of culturally proficient leadership. These interviews were planned meticulously around meaningful discussion and involved district cabinet members, school administrators, and classified management selected due to their roles in developing community-based education initiatives. A qualitative narrative approach investigated shared values, behaviors, beliefs, and language patterns within the culture-sharing group. The research design also incorporated a narrative inquiry of identity and experience, allowing participants to share significant events that influenced their perspectives.

After the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed using Descript, a transcription application. Ensuring the accuracy of these transcriptions involved proofreading them while listening to the recordings. Following the completion of accurate transcription, an open coding process was initiated. This process involved an exhaustive examination of the raw data through a line-by-line reading in which each line was scrutinized to identify meaningful units of information, or codes, which were generated based on the data's content and context. This careful approach allowed vital concepts and themes to be derived from the text, ensuring no critical details or nuances were overlooked.

At this stage, the focus was on identifying and highlighting patterns and concepts rather than dissecting them. Structural coding was employed for data analysis. This technique, driven by specific research questions and topics, seeks to identify and analyze certain elements or

structures within the data (Saldana, 2016). It breaks down the data into discrete components and categorizes them based on predetermined codes or themes, providing a more targeted and systematic analysis. In subsequent coding rounds, all interviews and the focus group transcript were read line by line, and any codes in alignment with the existing code list were noted (Given, 2008). A targeted search was then conducted for codes created based on the variables in each system of the conceptual framework. Despite some codes not being evident in the transcripts, connections were drawn between the open and original codes, resulting in an extensive list of variables contributing to culturally proficient leadership. These variables were then grouped under broader themes. Specific quotes from the transcribed interviews that supported the recurring themes identified in the interview data were diligently sought (Creswell, 2007). This interpretive process requires creativity and subjectivity (Given, 2008). Specific codes emerged as significant in the findings, even though they did not align with the existing framework and were included in the data.

Profile of Participants

The research participants were meticulously chosen from a public education district in Southern California. The data collection employed a dual-method approach to amass pertinent data. I initiated nine independent, semi-structured conversations with district authorities responsible for particular departments or educational institutions. A focus group comprising seven education leaders with proficiency in designing and deploying community-oriented academic initiatives was also assembled. Participants for this study were chosen with careful consideration of their comprehensive knowledge and hands-on engagement with culturally sensitive leadership and community-based education. Their valuable expertise and practical experience in these fields rendered them optimal candidates for this study. Moreover, these

district participants supplemented the research with additional specifics and contextual data that bear significant relevance, a point that will be further underlined in the subsequent discourse.

The participants were chosen due to their leadership roles and contributions to community-oriented educational endeavors. These initiatives strive to equip students to surmount personal obstacles and hindrances, aided by the supportive infrastructure of the school district. The cabinet participants consisted of the superintendent, the director of education services, and the director of student services, each playing pivotal roles in shaping the strategic blueprint and vision of the district. The superintendent governed district-wide policies concerning the strategic plan. The director of education services guided the educational trajectory and nurtured teacher growth. The director of student services emphasized positive behavioral interventions and support. The classified management participants comprised the directors of fiscal services, human resources, and technology. These departments constituted the bedrock for launching community-based educational initiatives. School administrators, such as principals and assistant principals, played a vital part in integrating these initiatives with students and their families. Cooperation among these participants facilitated a holistic comprehension of the data gathered, capitalizing on the strengths of qualitative research.

Staff Participants

This focus group of this research project was graced by the active participation of seven full-time district leaders. An open invitation was extended to all current classified and certificated district leaders within this school district (see Appendix F), and the call was also answered by several staff members who previously held leadership positions and were currently engaged in roles closely associated with the district. These staff participants contributed significantly to the research, equipped with a profound understanding of community-based

schooling pillars. Their intimate involvement in developing policies anchored in cultural

proficiency enriched the discussions, adding depth and critical insights to the process. They

brought a vast and profound body of knowledge regarding culturally proficient leadership,

shedding light on its implications on district and school policies. Their collective experiences and

wisdom provided a well-rounded, holistic perspective. Table 9 displays an overview of the staff

participants, their current roles, and their previous leadership positions within the district and

offers a detailed look into the depth and breadth of experience and expertise these individuals

brought to the study.

Table 9.

Overview of Staff Participants

Position	Pseudonym	Gender	Age range	Participation	Years in current role	Ethnicity
Superintendent	Emily	Female	46–55	Interview	4	White
Deputy superintendent	Mallory	Female	46–55	Interview, focus group	3	Mexican
Director of student services	Brenda	Female	36–45	Interview, focus group	3	White
Director of HR	Tim	Male	46–55	Interview	2	Mexican
Director of afterschool programs	Julian	Male	46–55	Focus group	2	Black
Director of technology	Ron	Male	36–45	Interview	3	White
Elementary principal	Daniella	Female	46–55	Interview	3	Mexican
Elementary principal	Chloe	Female	25–35	Interview, focus group	3	Hawaiian
Elementary principal	Jasmine	Female	25–35	Interview, focus group	4	White
Elementary principal	Sam	Male	36–45	Interview, focus group	3	White
Instructional coach	Diane	Female	36–45	Focus group	3	Mexican

Participant Overview: Emily

Emily embarked on her journey in education in 1998 when she joined the San Diego Unified School District, driven by a strong calling to contribute to the education system. Despite encountering a hierarchical power dynamic that stifled her creativity, Emily persevered and pursued a master's degree in business administration, showcasing her commitment to

professional growth. As Emily held various positions at San Diego Unified School District, she had the opportunity to work under the guidance of a supportive African American woman who believed in innovation and nurtured Emily's creative thinking. This experience and her data assessment, accountability, and grant writing skills enabled Emily to make a tangible impact in the education sector. Seeking new challenges and perspectives, Emily joined the Los Angeles Unified School District, where she thrived in a diverse leadership team and an organic and collaborative working environment. Mentored by Angela Bass, a prominent figure in education, Emily gained confidence in her leadership abilities and developed a deep commitment to making a difference.

Emily's perspective and values are rooted in competence, initiative, and a dedication to improving the education system. As a culturally proficient leader, Emily embraces essential elements of cultural proficiency. She appreciates the value of diverse perspectives, particularly African American culture, understanding that it enriches the educational experience for all. Emily actively seeks to promote inclusive leadership and representation within her school community. Recognizing the power of personal stories, Emily upholds an environment where individuals feel heard, valued, and represented. She encourages open dialogue and sharing diverse experiences, believing personal narratives inspire and drive positive change. Emily actively addresses the lack of representation in specific settings, striving to create equitable opportunities for all students and staff. Emily embodies a culturally proficient leader with her diverse background, passion for education, and commitment to inclusive leadership. She aspires to be an inspirational advocate for equity and representation in education, utilizing her experiences to shape a better future for students and educators.

Participant Overview: Mallory

Mallory's leadership journey began as a principal and district leader in the Unified School District, where she dedicated 11 years to educational leadership. She later served as the Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, extending her influence. Mallory also became the Deputy Director for the Office of English Language Acquisition at the U. S. Department of Education, influencing national policies for English language learners. Key mentors in her career were Libby, a former superintendent, and Sherry, the superintendent in Santo. Mallory's experiences as an English language learner in a first-generation Mexican American family shaped her dedication to educational equity. Influential teachers during her Chula Vista Elementary School District education fostered her passion for learning. Her education policy studies at Stanford University underscored her resolve to tackle educational inequities. Mallory is deeply committed to respecting every individual's worth, fueled by her strong work ethic. She values family engagement in education.

Diversity is essential to Mallory's leadership. She incorporates diverse perspectives in educational programs and encourages respect for students' backgrounds. Mallory prioritizes language services for inclusive parent engagement. Her leadership journey, marked by diverse experiences, influential mentors, and deep-rooted values, is driven by her dedication to equity, diversity, and equal opportunities. Her ultimate goal is to have an enduring educational impact, working toward a more equitable future for all students.

Participant Overview: Brenda

An experienced educator, Brenda began her career teaching in Title I schools in Los Angeles, focusing on special education. She moved into a special education coaching role at the district office of Alliance College-Ready Public Schools, where she first demonstrated her

leadership capabilities. Brenda became a director and a collaborative leader who facilitated understanding and provided resources for her team. She later served as a regional director at Aspire Public Schools, managing special education budgets, which tested her resilience and taught her valuable leadership lessons. Currently, Brenda works in Lemon Grove to ensure marginalized students are heard. Her commitment to inclusivity and empathy originates from her diverse church upbringing and personal health challenges, including a cleft lip and multiple surgeries. Despite career challenges, Brenda remains dedicated to special education, valuing the importance of hearing and considering every voice in shaping the future of education.

Participant Overview: Tim

Raised near Lemon Grove, Tim was determined to attend college and earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and accounting. After facing challenges in managing a family business, he transitioned to education, aiming to influence students facing similar struggles. Starting as a teacher, Tim gradually moved into leadership roles like instructional coach and data coordinator, realizing his broader influence as an administrator. To extend his impact, he acquired an administrative credential and became a principal. Throughout his career, Tim has had several mentors who supported his growth. He proactively seeks mentorship and values the guidance he receives from experienced individuals. Tim's leadership philosophy is based on a commitment to serving as a servant leader, prioritizing students' needs, and continuously learning and evolving. Tim's experience in a bilingual San Diego Unified School District program influenced his career. Despite initially disliking the long commute, he came to appreciate the value of bilingual education. Inspired by this, Tim implemented dual immersion programs in the schools he has led. His journey from business owner to educational leader reflects his commitment to community service and to making a difference in students' lives. His

leadership is marked by valuing mentorship, putting students first, and dedicating time to personal development.

Participant Overview: Ron

An experienced leader, Ron believes in harnessing team members' skills to achieve shared goals and in creating an inclusive, collaborative environment where staff contribute to decision making. His early leadership roles and experiences as an only child with a single mother helped shape his ability to analyze situations and streamline processes. Ron has held leadership roles across various industries, including engineering, technology, and education, focusing on enhancing efficiency and reducing costs. In his current role in education, Ron values diversity and uses it to drive projects forward and improve problem solving. He believes in assigning tasks that align with an individual's skills and abilities. Despite his direct communication style occasionally causing conflicts, Ron relies on open communication, awareness of different perspectives, and factual evidence for conflict resolution. When making decisions or initiating new initiatives, Ron considers the long-term benefits to the district, aligning decisions with guidelines, streamlining services, and prioritizing the educational process. His experiences and analytical ability shape his leadership approach.

Participant Overview: Daniella

Daniella, a dedicated educator with over 26 years of leadership in community-based schooling, started as a teacher before transitioning into a Title I coordinator role. She champions a culturally proficient learning environment and understands the complexities of education budgets. Her philosophy revolves around "heart-first education" which included fostering intellectual and emotional growth, and encouraging critical literacy. Daniella has a mixed cultural background and prioritizes educational diversity to create an inclusive and representative

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learning space. She values dialogue, positive relationships, and constructive criticism in conflict resolution. Always striving to improve, Daniella continues to work on expressing empathy and support better. She understands the need for African American representation and works with her team to incorporate diversity into the curriculum through a human rights lens. Daniella employs a gradual, collaborative approach when implementing changes, balancing directive leadership with collective problem solving. Daniella promotes cultural proficiency by building relationships, fostering critical thinking, and encouraging inclusivity. Her leadership style is marked by an ability to value diverse perspectives, listen actively, and reflect on her practices.

Participant Overview: Chloe

Chloe is an education leader who began as a teacher and took up leadership in a new charter school due to necessity. The shift from being a colleague to a leader was challenging, but she used the opportunity to learn and grow. Education and leadership have always been crucial in Chloe's life, as she experienced firsthand the power of education and actively took on leadership roles during her school years. Chloe exhibits the key attributes of agency, initiative, adaptability, and commitment to making a tangible difference in education.

Participant Overview: Jasmine

Jasmine is a dedicated leader in special education, currently serving as the principal of San Miguel School. Her journey in special education began in college, and she has since worked in various roles, including teaching and administration, in large and small school districts. Jasmine's dedication to inclusivity stems from her experiences with isolation and academic struggles. She values open communication, transparency, and serving the school and students' needs. Regarding conflict resolution, she promotes open dialogue and ensures that all parties are

prepared for difficult discussions. Jasmine also emphasizes understanding her staff's perspectives when introducing changes.

Participant Overview: Sam

Sam is a veteran educator dedicated to leadership and cultural proficiency, teaching in schools with diverse student populations. His professional development experiences highlighted the need for broader change beyond his teacher, coach, or administrator roles. Sam's upbringing in a predominantly White community initially limited his exposure to diversity, but he grew his cultural awareness through higher education and working in diverse settings. His leadership is guided by three core values: analyzing the impact of decisions, centering students' needs, and addressing knowledge and skill gaps. Sam implements a culturally responsive teaching framework and continuously integrates diverse perspectives into the curriculum. He strives to balance structural changes with emotional engagement in promoting cultural proficiency.

Participant Overview: Diane

Diane, passionate about education and literature, was inspired to become an English teacher by her 8th-grade teacher. After earning a bachelor's degree in English and gaining teaching experience, she realized she wanted to impact education on a broader scale and took on various leadership roles. With her mentor's encouragement, she further developed her leadership skills through the pursuit of a master's degree and administrative credentials. Now an instructional coach, Diane assists teachers with professional development. Shifting from teaching to leadership, she learned to appreciate adult teachers' different perspectives and experiences. Diane values building relationships with students beyond academics and seeks to understand their emotions and interactions. She believes in connecting with everyone, appreciating unique backgrounds, and fostering trust. Her experiences as a Mexican American shape her

understanding of her students' diverse backgrounds. Her school's student body is primarily

Black and Mexican, which is reflected in the leadership team. However, the staff lacks ethnic

diversity and is primarily female. Other aspects of diversity, such as age, socioeconomic status,

and gender orientation, are also minimally represented. Enthusiasm marks Diane's leadership

journey for education, commitment to relationships, and acknowledgment of diversity. She aims

to create an inclusive educational environment that celebrates everyone's strengths and

backgrounds.

<div align="center">Organization of Findings</div>

Goal 1: Improving Student Supports with Cultural Assessments

Through their interviews, the participants shared how they skillfully interlaced diverse

cultural threads to create a comprehensive and inclusive learning environment. Acknowledging

and integrating elements from their unique school communities, these district leaders

constructively developed school policies focused on integrated student supports. Such

approaches have been influenced by their deep understanding of cultural norms and values and

their aims to create an inclusive environment that celebrates diversity and fosters mutual respect.

These leaders recognize the power of a culturally relevant curriculum and understand how it

drives student engagement and academic success. At the heart of their policies is the

commitment to robust family and community engagement and a recognition of its vital role in

shaping the educational trajectory. Moreover, these district leaders create a safety net that

prioritizes culturally sensitive mental health support grounded in students' values.

Complementing these efforts, these leaders champion professional development and training

focused on cultural competence for both teachers and staff. In seamlessly blending these

elements, the district leaders have created school policies that foster a more equitable and inclusive educational environment, ensuring every student's comprehensive development.

Early Childhood Experiences

Cultures and early childhood experiences are deeply interconnected. Early childhood is a crucial period when children are highly influenced by their cultural environment. Culture encompasses the beliefs, values, traditions, customs, and practices of a particular society or group, and it plays a significant role in shaping a child's development and life trajectory. This intricate weave of values can be likened to a profound, intrinsic belief that each individual deserves unconditional support and should be afforded equal opportunities. Mallory, a deputy superintendent stated, "Leadership requires a deeply held core belief in the value of humanity and that every human being deserves to be loved, valued, respected, and to have every opportunity given to them." This interplay between culture and early childhood experiences is particularly evident in forming one's identity. One way culture and early childhood experiences are connected is through identity formation. Cultural experiences expose children to their cultural practices, languages, and customs. Through these experiences, children learn about their cultural heritages and develop a sense of belonging and identity within their communities. Understanding who they are and where they come from shapes their self-concept and self-esteem. Reflecting on the importance of holistic child development, which includes intellectual, emotional, and social growth, leads to a compelling perspective shared by an elementary school principal. Daniella, a elementary principal said, "Prioritizing the emotional well-being of the individual, caring for the whole child, is vital. This includes a slight element of critical literacy, where I encourage children to question and understand the world around them."

This comprehensive perspective on education significantly enhances language and communication skills development, which are vital facets deeply influenced by cultural factors during early childhood. Language and communication skills are other vital aspects influenced by culture during early childhood. Cultural experiences expose children to their communities' languages, allowing them to acquire and develop language skills. Language shapes how individuals think and perceive the world. The impact of cultural experiences on language, cognitive development, social interactions, and academic success cannot be overstated; Daniella's reflection encapsulated this: "My decision to pursue bilingual education was influenced by the significant benefits I experienced firsthand from it." Bilingual education plays a crucial role in an increasingly global society by fostering cognitive development, social interactions, and academic success and building cultural competence and empathy. Daniella's journey has uniquely positioned her to be a strong leader in this field. Her firsthand experiences and academic insights provide her with an intimate understanding of the challenges and rewards of bilingual learning, enabling her to guide and inspire students on their paths to bilingual proficiency. As Chloe stated:

> My early childhood education profoundly shaped my leadership style. The lessons I learned, the challenges I overcame, and the mentors I encountered ignited my passion for leading with empathy and resilience. These experiences taught me that leadership is not merely about guiding but learning, adapting, and growing alongside those you lead.

Early educational experiences also play a pivotal role in shaping culturally proficient school leaders through exposure to diversity, participation in an inclusive educational setting, development of language and communication skills, involvement in intercultural experiences, and instruction in equity and social justice education. Mallory shared the following:

> I was an English language learner. I'm the middle of five kids raised by a single mom, a first-generation Mexican American. So, my first language was and is

Spanish. I know now I got lucky to some degree because our schools don't always
do justice to our parents' dreams.

Such early childhood experiences, particularly those that expose individuals to diverse

cultures, languages, and backgrounds, enhance an appreciation for diversity and cultivate cultural

sensitivity. Having been immersed in various educational environments during their schooling,

school leaders benefit from firsthand experiences and interactions with individuals from varied

cultural backgrounds.

Cultural experiences also heavily influence socialization and interpersonal relationships

during early childhood. Cultural norms and practices guide social interactions, helping children

understand appropriate behavior, social roles, and expectations within their culture. These early

socialization experiences lay the foundation for how individuals navigate and form relationships

throughout their lives, influencing their communication styles, values, and understanding of

social dynamics. Chloe powerfully expressed details about the influence of early experiences on

later personal and professional engagements:

> As I continue my journey, I want to become a culturally proficient leader who can
> harness the power of diversity within the community to create a more prosperous,
> inclusive environment. I want to be a leader who encourages open dialogue,
> fosters growth, and promotes a positive and supportive working environment.

The interwoven journeys of personal growth, leadership development, and cultural

proficiency emphasize the transformative potential of education. Crucially, this narrative

underscores the significance of inclusive and nurturing environments that promote personal

excellence and diversity. These environments, invaluable in fostering individual worth and

encouraging unique perspectives, steer progress toward a more compassionate, understanding,

and equitable society. This is clear from Mallory's experience: "Having been a struggling

English learner, I felt what it's like not to understand and to be upset because I do not understand

and to feel discriminated against. It was rough.' Mallory's rich exposure deepens her understanding of and respect for people's differences, a cornerstone in developing cultural proficiency.

Mentorship and Supports

Mentorship is fundamental in shaping culturally proficient leaders who are self-aware and informed about how their biases impact decision making. By modeling culturally proficient leadership, mentors can build a greater capacity for cultural competence in their mentees and help them maneuver multifaceted dilemmas. Ultimately, mentorship strengthens trust and relationships with stakeholders, allowing leaders to excel in multicultural environments. Emily attests to this belief by sharing, "I have been fortunate to have been guided and inspired by various well-educated and diverse leaders. Their dedication to the success of all students resonated deeply with me and motivated my choice to become an educator." Although navigating cultural complexities can be challenging, each district leader interviewed has had a strong mentor who guided them in navigating various complexities. In addition, these mentors provided constructive feedback, helping principals understand what they are doing well and where they could improve. A mentor can validate the principal's thoughts and actions, reinforcing that they are on the right track. Mentorship plays a pivotal role in developing expansive networks of diverse individuals. Sam, reflecting on his journey as a principal, shared,

> Having a mentor was a turning point in my leadership journey. Their guidance was not just about imparting knowledge or sharing strategies but about instilling a mindset and viewing challenges as opportunities for growth. Their mentorship fostered my resilience and adaptability, attributes that have been pivotal in shaping me into the principal I am today.

These connections can provide mentees with unique learning experiences and foster enduring relationships that prove invaluable in future professional endeavors. With their wisdom and

experience, mentors can serve as guiding lights, navigating mentees through the complexities of their career trajectories. For example, Mallory attested to the transformative power of such a mentorship. She was fortunate to receive guidance early in her career from an insightful superintendent working in a low socioeconomic community. The mentorship was more than just professional development; it was an education in values, resilience, and adaptability. Her mentor guided her through the peaks and valleys of the professional journey, coached her through challenging situations, and celebrated her triumphs. Importantly, this mentorship was not a fleeting interaction but a lasting relationship that spanned decades. It profoundly shaped Mallory's career, leading to an unexpected reunion when she worked for her mentor at the U. S. Department of Education nearly 20 years later. This reconnection underscores the enduring nature of mentor-mentee relationships and their potential to significantly influence a mentee's career trajectory. Mallory's journey underscores the profound impact of mentorship, demonstrating that the connections and lessons learned can have far-reaching effects. Her story is a testament to the power of mentorship in shaping successful careers and illustrates the importance of building and maintaining diverse networks as well as the lasting value such relationships can provide. Mallory testified to this:

> Having a mentor who shares my cultural background has shaped me as a leader. This shared experience provided an authentic understanding and a unique perspective that transcended professional guidance, offering invaluable lessons rooted in our shared heritage and helping me navigate the leadership path with more confidence and cultural pride.

Not only did this relationship foster confidence in Mallory's leadership journey, but it helped to acknowledge her background so that she could continue to grow in her cultural competency.

Conscientious Leadership

Effective leadership relies on ethics and integrity, as culturally responsive leaders demonstrate. These leaders pay meticulous attention to details, resulting in thoughtful decision making. Their high moral standards guide their actions, leading to transparent and responsible school operations. They accept their mistakes and their teams' mistakes, using these instances as learning opportunities; consequently, they create a nurturing environment where everyone feels appreciated and respected. They also consider how their decisions affect their employees, students, and community. As Mallory said, "A leader's main job is to serve, inspire, and empower others." Conscientious leadership promotes trust and enhances decision making. Daniella, an elementary school principal, noted, "Shared goals are crucial for growth. A common objective promotes collective buy-in, and we celebrate our achievements together." Effective communication is a vital part of articulating a clear vision.

Leaders must foster strong language and communication skills and appreciate linguistic diversity. Exposure to different modes of communication enhances understanding of cultural nuances. Leaders who are mindful of others' perspectives become more self-aware and compassionate. Brenda, a student services director, noted that diverse communication skills allow leaders to connect with people from various cultures. Multilingual leaders or those with experience working in linguistically diverse environments usually have enhanced communication skills. An elementary school principal, Chloe highlighted how a diverse communication approach helps in "a comprehensive approach to problem solving. If we do not consider multiple perspectives, problems will persist." Administrators often mediate when conflicts occur between staff or between staff and students. They facilitate discussions to help all parties understand each other and work toward a resolution. They are responsible for promoting

a safe and respectful school environment. As a school administrator, Jasmine emphasized that "our job is to guide and motivate our staff to be the best educators for our students. If they are not meeting these expectations, we must make tough decisions." Their work involves facilitating open discussions, helping parties comprehend each other's perspectives, and guiding them toward a harmonious resolution. They rationally navigate these sensitive issues, ensuring all voices are heard and respected. As Brenda asserted:

> Authentic and constructive feedback has always been crucial to my growth. Since the day I started as a coach, I have understood that people will form perceptions about me. While it is tempting to expect everyone to know my intentions and understand where I am coming from, I have learned that this is not owed to me. It is a continuous process of growth and understanding.

Furthermore, administrators are responsible for cultivating a safe and respectful school environment where everyone feels valued and heard. This goes beyond merely resolving conflicts; it entails fostering a culture of respect, open communication, and mutual understanding.

Administrators strive to create an atmosphere conducive to learning, growth, and collaboration, where every school community member feels secure and appreciated. Jasmine, a seasoned school administrator, stressed this point by underscoring that their duty extends to guiding and inspiring the staff to be the best educators for their students. This role often involves complex decision making, especially when educators fail to meet the set expectations. However, these challenging moments are part and parcel of their responsibility as leaders. Jasmine emphasized, "Our job is to guide and motivate our staff to be the best educators for our students. We must make tough decisions if they are not meeting these expectations." From Jasmine's perspective, an administrator's role is not conflict resolution or maintaining a safe environment. It is about exhibiting leadership, setting the tone for the entire school community, and making

tough calls for the greater good. This commitment to excellence, empathy, and an unwavering dedication to their students' best interests defines their roles as school administrators.

When faced with difficult decisions, leaders should consider multiple perspectives. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the issue and might reveal unseen solutions. Chloe added that "culturally responsive leadership involves hard work and thoughtfulness. Leaders should model the behavior they expect in others." Making decisions can be challenging, especially considering immediate and long-term consequences. A seemingly beneficial decision now might have adverse effects in the future. Leaders sometimes make mistakes, but acknowledging them, learning from them, and applying these lessons to future decisions is crucial.

Goal 2: Promoting Diversity through Community Involvement

A school administrator is pivotal in fostering a school environment that values community involvement. They are responsible for encouraging inclusivity and participation from all school community members. A key aspect of their role involves encouraging parent participation. Administrators welcome parents from all backgrounds to participate in school activities, from committees and parent–teacher meetings to special events. Their unique perspectives enrich discussions and lead to more comprehensive and inclusive decision-making processes. The school administrator also oversees the organization of cultural events. These events, highlighting traditions, cuisines, music, and arts from around the globe, not only cultivate an appreciation for cultural diversity but also engage the broader community in the life of the school.

Forming partnerships with local community organizations that serve diverse populations is another essential part of an administrator's role. These alliances can provide valuable

resources and expertise, creating a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

Community outreach is a crucial responsibility of school administrators who connect with the

community by visiting local centers and religious institutions and attending neighborhood

meetings. Such engagements allow them to better understand families' cultural norms and help

schools more effectively cater to their diverse student body. Promoting diversity within the

school's staff is another crucial task under an administrator's purview. Schools can foster a

culture that acknowledges and values different perspectives and experiences by hiring teachers

and staff who mirror the diverse student population. Implementing an inclusive curriculum is

another aspect of the administrator's role. Mallory stated:

> As an administrator, championing an inclusive curriculum is critical to my role.
> By embracing diversity in our learning materials, we create a learning
> environment that respects and values all perspectives, encouraging our students to
> understand and appreciate the richness of our diverse world.

Administrators ensure the curriculum reflects different cultures' histories, experiences, and

contributions. This strategy fosters mutual respect and understanding among students and allows

those from diverse backgrounds to see themselves in their studies.

Lastly, a school administrator must ensure language accessibility. In circumstances where

the community houses families who speak languages other than English, translation services

should be provided for school meetings and for school documents, allowing all families to

engage fully with the school. A school administrator catalyzes community involvement,

fostering an inclusive environment that values diversity, encourages active participation, and

respects all cultures.

Empathy and Listening

At the core of their leadership style, these administrators sincerely commit to listening to

every individual within their school community, including students, families, and staff. They

recognize and appreciate that diversity goes beyond simple demographics. It spans a broad

spectrum, covering cultural backgrounds, languages, traditions, and unique experiences. Their

understanding of diversity is not a superficial nod toward political correctness, nor is it a passive

acceptance of demographic facts. Instead, it is a deeply ingrained aspect of their leadership

philosophy, a compass that guides their decision-making process and influences their daily

practices. It shapes their problem-solving approach, interaction with others, and vision for the

school. Supporting colleagues in this capacity is a challenging task. As Brenda explained:

> Individuals possess deeply personal and entrenched identities that are not always
> apparent on the surface and might even remain undiscovered. These realities
> intersect frequently in our work, particularly in student services and special
> education. This field is often fraught with trauma, continually causing us to
> experience secondary trauma throughout our day-to-day interactions.

Because of this, leaders must cultivate a safe space for their staff. They must focus on creating an

environment where all backgrounds are included and strive to make it welcoming. These leaders

genuinely value diversity, and this appreciation is not an abstract concept but an active ingredient

of their leadership style. They endeavor to build a space where everyone—irrespective of their

various backgrounds—is seen, valued, and heard, regardless of their backgrounds. This sense of

respect and value for diversity forms the cornerstone of their leadership approach. It drives their

ability to design effective, culturally sensitive, and inclusive initiatives, which in turn shapes an

educational atmosphere where every student, parent, and staff member feels acknowledged and

welcomed. By doing so, these leaders transform the school into a vibrant microcosm of the

larger, diverse community it serves. Their leadership becomes a powerful instrument for

inclusivity, respect, and positive change within their school community. Mallory highlighted the

profound impact of personal narratives:

> The ability to turn personal experiences or narratives, even those involving
> adversities, into strengths, is significant, as it introduces a perspective drawn from

direct experiences into the discourse. Our team, intentionally built or fortuitously gathered, comprises individuals who were either chosen or already a part of this place, and they share a profound dedication towards prioritizing students and focusing on families.

At the core of their leadership style, these administrators commit to listening. They recognize and appreciate that diversity goes far beyond simple demographics. It spans a broad spectrum, covering cultural backgrounds, languages, traditions, and unique experiences. School leaders often serve as emotional pillars for their community. By demonstrating empathy, they can provide emotional support to students and staff, which is crucial for mental health and overall well-being. Jasmine stated,

> There was a moment when empathy truly made a difference. I remember a student struggling both academically and emotionally. Instead of focusing solely on academic performance, I took the time to understand their circumstances, listen, and show that I genuinely cared. This helped the student feel seen and heard and allowed us to address the root of the academic difficulties. Empathy in leadership is not just about kindness but building trust and understanding that paves the way for transformative solutions.

As is obvious from this response, a leader's behavior serves as a model for students and staff. Demonstrating empathy and active listening can foster these skills within the school community, leading to more respectful and understanding interactions.

Building Authentic Relationships

School administrators lay the groundwork for authentic relationships by adopting a leadership style centered on open communication, visibility, and empathy. They prioritize clear, transparent communication with all stakeholders, including staff, students, and parents. They nurture a culture of trust and mutual respect by listening attentively and responding empathetically to concerns and suggestions. Furthermore, their consistent presence in classrooms, hallways, and at school events makes them accessible to everyone within the school community. In addition, administrators acknowledge and celebrate the efforts and achievements

of students and staff members, further strengthening these relationships and fostering a positive

school culture. They value the perspectives of all community members, practicing active

listening to understand differing viewpoints and validate individual feelings. This understanding

extends into their decision-making processes, including those involving staff, students, and

parents, and demonstrates respect for others' opinions while instilling a sense of value and

ownership within the school community. When asked about her leadership strategy, Brenda

expressed the following about her unique approach:

> I need to spend more one-on-one time with our principals, enabling them to carry
> out their duties effectively. Instead, the goal is to avoid formalities like surveys or
> professional development sessions and engage in more personal, face-to-face
> interactions. This approach allows me to gain a more authentic understanding of
> how things are operating at the grassroots level.

Principals also show unwavering emotional and professional support to their staff. They

exhibit understanding and empathy when staff members face personal challenges, and they

provide professional development opportunities to encourage growth and advancement.

Consistency, reliability, and fairness are cornerstones of their approach, establishing trust and

reinforcing their commitment to the school community's best interests. Lastly, administrators

strive to personalize interactions, trying to know students, staff, and families on a personal level.

They further solidify these authentic relationships by learning names, understanding individual

backgrounds and interests, and expressing genuine care for each individual's well-being. In

conclusion, school administrators create and maintain authentic relationships by exhibiting

empathy, maintaining open communication, fostering inclusivity, and demonstrating a genuine

commitment to their school community.

Continuous Learning and Growth

School administrators proficient in understanding different cultures effectively incorporate these practices into their leadership, leading to a learning environment that acknowledges and celebrates diversity among students, families, and staff. These leaders know that gaining cultural competence is a journey, not a destination. It requires a commitment to continuous learning, growth, and personal and professional development. They constantly seek chances for self-reflection, evaluating their biases and assumptions, and comprehending cultural nuances. Chloe stated, "The difference between buy-in and ownership is if I am trying to get buy-in, that is my idea, that I am telling you that this is what is good. With ownership, it is okay. We have a goal; we have a vision." Their dedication propels them to create an environment encouraging dialogue and collaboration with individuals from various backgrounds. This interaction broadens their perspective, enhances their cultural proficiency, and helps them become influential leaders in a diverse school community. Ultimately, their leadership style embodies the strength found in unity, respect for diversity, and continuous growth. Brenda attested to this strategy by sharing,

> People need more room for growth than one might initially assume. This is akin to planting a tree; if you anticipate the tree's growth, you wouldn't confine it to a tiny planter. Instead, you provide it with a large space where it has the potential to grow and thrive fully.

When others are empowered to learn and continue to achieve success, they are comfortable sharing their stories with others. Principals play a significant role in achieving positive outcomes in schools. Their leadership has been identified as one of the crucial factors affecting school outcomes, including student performance, although this is often overlooked in discussions about school and system enhancements. My observations have demonstrated that high-achieving schools thrive under principals who foster an environment centered on student

learning. These principals set high expectations and provide ample support for all students. One principal stated, "A cornerstone of our beliefs is that kids can learn if met at their instructional levels and given exactly what they need at that moment." Principals of these successful schools also encourage teachers to innovate and implement new strategies that facilitate personalized, student-focused learning. These strategies flourish in settings with a robust, trusting culture and high teacher engagement. As Brenda stated, "We can have every shiny program and curriculum, and it does not matter if the culture of the building and the climate are negative."

Principals exhibit positive behaviors in these schools and share responsibilities with staff. They facilitate opportunities for teachers to collaborate and offer constructive feedback. This feedback could come from an administrator, a coach, or a colleague. Ron said, "When it comes to our staff, it is understandable that your greatest resource may be just next door to you or down the hall." These leaders provide ample coaching and professional development opportunities for teachers. They often invite teachers to participate in leadership development and engage with the school community.

Goal 3: Embracing Diversity for Collaborative Leadership and Practice

Culturally responsive leaders regard collaboration as essential for nurturing an inclusive, effective learning environment. They stimulate collaboration across different spectrums: among students through fostering group work and peer learning to enrich learning with diverse perspectives; between teachers and students by implementing student-centered strategies that make students active partners in learning through integration of their cultural backgrounds; within the school staff by promoting open communication, shared decision making, and professional development centered on culturally responsive practices to create a unified, respectful team; and beyond the school boundaries by building strong community ties that

involve parents, community leaders, and local organizations to grasp the students' cultural

contexts and incorporate community resources in the schooling process. This collaborative ethos

empowers all stakeholders and enriches the learning milieu to effectively boost the school's

capacity to address its students' diverse needs. For example, Brenda conveyed her belief that

> Historically, various cultures have experienced extensive oppression. As a result, individuals from these systematically oppressed cultures often refuse to tolerate further oppression. A multitude of historical experiences and sentiments underpins this stance. However, for those from cultures, such as White people, who have predominantly experienced societal privileges, it can be challenging to understand these feelings of marginalization and the desire for change.

Stakeholders must work together to understand each other's foundational experiences so that

they can acknowledge the need for diverse perspectives.

Collaboration and Teamwork

School administrators are essential in fostering an inclusive, respectful, and mutual

learning environment. They prioritize collaboration and teamwork as they recognize the

collective wisdom and strength derived from diverse perspectives. Sam wisely asserted, "My

goal is to build your capacity to solve those problems independently." This reflects a

commitment to servant leadership, where leaders aim to develop the skills and knowledge of

those they lead. A focus on collaboration and teamwork often characterizes a culture of servant

leadership. Sam later shared, "Leaders have to invest in their people as individuals and then in

them as a collective. So, I had to get to know my team. What they wanted to accomplish in the

short and long term, who they are outside of work." Leaders can effectively facilitate their

development and achievement by understanding their team members' needs and goals. As Emily

stated:

> One aspect that I need to recalibrate is my allocation of time. I have been spending a significant amount of time on individual check-ins and conversations,

focusing on personal interactions, which has resulted in less time devoted to group activities such as data analysis, reflection, and planning.

The central elements in Emily's perspective revolve around restructuring her time management to balance personal interactions and group activities and foster a collaborative leadership environment. She believes in empowering her team with problem-solving tools, even if it means reallocating her time. This approach underscores the importance of personal connections. As another leader suggested, an effective strategy for fostering a collaborative environment is through shared objectives: "Create common goals. Honestly, one of the only ways to get people in this profession to work together is to have a shared goal and be clear about what that is to celebrate progress towards that."

In an inclusive learning environment, there is an emphasis on cultural representation and responsiveness. Dianna shared her approach:

I have been focusing on bringing books into the classrooms that feature characters who look like our students or characters who have disabilities so that these stories are things that they read all the time, not just at specific times.

By including diverse narratives in the curriculum, school leaders create an atmosphere where diversity is celebrated, and students feel represented and valued. Collaboration is powerful. It broadens the leadership beyond the school administration and includes teachers, parents, and community partners. This improves decision making, strengthens relationships, builds a strong school community, and addresses social issues. Moreover, it helps gather more support for public education and investments in community school initiatives. Collaboration helps identify and fix problems, fills gaps created by social inequality, and offers learning opportunities for the community. It also teaches students essential skills for the 21st century, like working with diverse people and solving problems together. Collaborative leadership is being increasingly recognized in many areas. As the world gains in complexity, leaders in the arena of education need different

viewpoints and expertise to effect improvements. By involving all stakeholders, schools are better prepared to face their challenges. Some fundamental principles identified by the leaders who participated in this study include involving principals, teachers, and superintendents in setting goals together, providing resources to build everyone's capabilities, setting aside regular times for collaboration, and ensuring school–community partnerships are diverse. The site administrator must share the responsibility of monitoring strategy and using data to drive change. Schools must establish systems-level collaborations to unite various agencies and align their work.

Tailoring Instruction and Supports

Culturally responsive school leaders construct an inclusive, dynamic educational environment rooted in trust, respect, and deep appreciation for cultural diversity through their commitment to cultural competence and relationship building. A significant component of their approach involves tailoring instruction and support to meet the unique needs of each learner. Understanding that a one-size-fits-all approach falls short in addressing diverse learners' needs, these leaders modify instructional practices and provide targeted supports that respect students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and learning styles. Chloe stated:

> I have understood that each teacher brings unique strengths and faces distinct challenges. To foster growth, I began to differentiate the support I provided each teacher, much like how they differentiated for their students. This tailored approach ensured every teacher felt acknowledged, empowered, and equipped to succeed in their specific context.

This includes utilizing culturally relevant teaching materials, embedding diverse perspectives into the curriculum, and implementing differentiated instructional strategies. Consequently, these leaders are cultivating an education system that appreciates and adapts to diversity, fostering an environment conducive to the success of every learner. When opposing views exist, these leaders

are sure to approach conflict with an equity lens and not engage in harmful rhetoric. Brenda

stated,

> Conflict should be productive at the end of the day. It is essential that when
> conflict arises and I am being vulnerable, mainly when I express a viewpoint that
> may be uncomfortable to others, it should serve a constructive purpose.

Constructive feedback and opposing views must be discussed respectfully and appropriately to

ensure a successful collaboration.

Data-Based Decision Making

The importance of data-driven decision making for school administrators cannot be

overstated. When applied appropriately, data can be a valuable resource for education leaders,

offering actionable insights into teacher performance and student progress. However, ineffective

data management can lead to overwhelming workloads and an obscure understanding of

instructional effectiveness, hindering sound decision-making processes. To circumvent these

challenges, it is essential to devise a continuous cycle of data utilization in all institutional

applications, including learning management systems. The process begins with setting student

learning goals informed by a review of current progress data to identify potential issues and

evaluate ongoing school improvement initiatives. Goals may pertain to various measurable

aspects important to the school community, such as academic achievement, student behavior,

attendance, family engagement, and technology usage.

Following goal setting, the focus shifts to delivering instruction and assessments with

data collection and analysis in mind. At this stage, the impact of any instructional modifications

resulting from data-driven decisions on learning outcomes can be evaluated. Concurrently,

individual student needs and the effectiveness of any interventions can be determined. Next,

student achievement data, encompassing various forms such as homework completion,

attendance, graded assignments, and test results, are collected and aggregated. This data should

be organized to support district goals and can be filtered to address progress toward specific

objectives. This leads to the analysis and sharing of data, which is crucial for evaluating the

impact of instructional changes and for identifying anomalies. After adequate analysis, the

findings should be shared among staff members to facilitate discussions on progress and future

strategies for improvement supported by concrete data. Tim shared his experience using this

process:

> After we had analyzed our students' performance data, we decided to present the
> findings to our entire staff. By laying out the data, we facilitated comprehensive
> discussions about our current progress and future strategies for improvement. This
> collective examination of concrete data resulted in shared understanding,
> collaborative solutions, and a unified commitment to our students' success.

This fosters a culture of data-driven leadership within the school. As a result, insights

gleaned from data analysis can inform actions, prompting the design and implementation of

effective strategies for boosting student learning outcomes. Additionally, data-driven decision

making is instrumental for resource allocation, professional development program promotion,

and keeping parents and stakeholders informed about school performance. Thus, using data to

guide decision making and leadership can significantly enhance student outcomes and drive

overall school improvement.

In education, school leaders are crucial influencers and play a significant role in shaping

the environment of learning and achievement. As expressed by Chloe"Data-driven decision

making is an important factor for school administrators. Data-savvy principals promote practices

that produce a culture of advantageous data use." With this emphasis on data, the traditional

responsibilities of school leadership are being expanded and redefined. Leaders in the education

sector are now expected to have proficiency in using different technologies for data analysis and

decision making. This underlines the role of the school principal as the leader of the school administration, who is in a position to set the tone for data-driven decision making. Chloe shared:

> We were facing challenges in improving literacy rates among our students. Instead of guessing the cause, we turned to data, examining student reading scores, class attendance, and even library book checkout frequencies. The data revealed a significant correlation between reading practice and improved literacy. As a result, we implemented a structured reading program, providing students with more opportunities to engage with books. This decision, driven by data, resulted in a marked improvement in literacy rates. It was a testament to the power of informed, data-based decision making in educational leadership.

Data-based decision making inspires change and motivates teachers to improve student outcomes. Using data also empowers school principals to address identified problems within a school and determine the cause instead of acting impulsively. Studies have shown that data-based decision making can increase achievement and student learning. Furthermore, data-driven decision making has proven essential in addressing the needs of students from underrepresented backgrounds. School leaders are better equipped to identify and address disparities in learning outcomes by using data effectively. Finally, data-driven leadership goes beyond decision making and extends to the implementation of policies. When teacher are "armed with data, school leaders can implement policies and guide teachers on how to serve students best." With the power of data, school leaders are well-positioned to guide their schools toward continuous improvement and academic success.

Conclusion

The significance of culturally proficient leaders in policy making related to the four pillars of community-based schooling is paramount. By acknowledging, respecting, and integrating the array of diverse cultural backgrounds within the school community, these leaders fundamentally shape the policies that foster an inclusive, collaborative, and respectful learning

environment. When considering the first pillar, integrated student support, culturally proficient leaders employ their understanding of diverse cultural contexts to shape inclusive policies and be mindful of these differences. They are instrumental in integrating support structures that ensure all students, regardless of their cultural background, have the resources to flourish academically and emotionally. This tailored approach provides policies that comprehensively cater to a diverse student body. The second pillar, expanded learning time and opportunities, sees culturally proficient leaders crafting policies that provide a broad spectrum of learning experiences. They do so with a keen awareness of the various cultural perspectives within the community, ensuring that extended learning opportunities are inclusive and representative of these cultures. This creates a richer, more comprehensive educational experience, promoting cultural exchange and mutual understanding.

Regarding family and community engagement, the third pillar, culturally proficient leaders, emphasize policies that stimulate active participation from all families and community members. Recognizing the importance of culturally sensitive communication and engagement strategies, the culturally proficient leader enacts policies that facilitate collaboration between school and home. This approach ensures that voices from all cultural backgrounds are respected and heard, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect within the community. In the context of the fourth pillar, collaborative leadership and practices, culturally proficient leaders play a crucial role in promoting an inclusive and diverse leadership environment. They shape policies that encourage broad participation and value and integrate the unique contributions of individuals of varying cultural backgrounds.

The efforts of culturally proficient leaders guarantee that leadership and decision-making processes are equitable, effectively making diverse cultural perspectives integral to these

processes. In essence, culturally proficient leaders form the backbone of policies that align with the four pillars of community-based schooling. Their profound understanding and respect for cultural diversity enable them to shape policies that cultivate a learning environment rooted in inclusivity, collaboration, and mutual respect. As a result, every community member is empowered to contribute to and benefit from this rich and diverse educational experience.

Chapter 5 DISCUSSION

Given the increasing racial and ethnic diversity experienced in the United States, educators need to integrate a knowledge of diverse cultures, families, and communities into curriculum development, classroom environments, and teaching strategies. This research explored the impact of culturally conscious administration on creating an inclusive school climate. By employing a conceptual framework for culturally responsive leadership, administrators could develop policies that address the opportunity gap between historically marginalized students and their White counterparts. Leadership humility, cultural humility, and cultural competence are pivotal in fostering equity and inclusion. Leadership humility involves an accurate self-assessment, and cultural humility and cultural competence enable leaders to engage in culturally responsive practices and self-reflection. Culturally responsive leaders are attuned to the diverse contexts in which they operate and consider the influence of the political climate on staff, students, families, and the organization.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study explored the relationship between school administrators' personal and professional experiences and their impact on leadership. The study focused on how culturally competent leadership promotes the application of culturally proficient practices; additionally, the study aimed to address the existing gap in the literature by investigating the methods and strategies that socially conscious district leaders employ in implementing culturally proficient policies within community-based schooling. The study presumed that students from historically marginalized communities would benefit from an environment conducive to cultural proficiency, leading to improved academic outcomes and reduced discipline issues. In light of these pressing concerns, this comprehensive study explored the efficacy of culturally proficient practices

adopted by district leaders in establishing community-based educational initiatives. Two research questions steered this investigation:

RQ. 1 To what extent was the cultural proficiency framework instrumental in assisting leaders in establishing community-based educational initiatives?

RQ. 2 What measures were adopted by administrators to navigate through challenges while implementing community-based educational initiatives?

Methodology

This study was designed to better understand the beliefs and practices of culturally responsive leadership. I used different data collection methods to obtain a detailed and validated analysis of the strategies of top-level and school leaders in community-focused education. We looked at how administrators use descriptive and reflective methods to make decisions that benefit historically disadvantaged student communities. I then compared these methods to gain an understanding of common and unique responses, which helped develop a strong coding system. Structural coding, a research-guided coding method, and its analytic counterpart, holistic coding, were used for analysis; this process provided a scale for data analysis, focusing on capturing participants' perspectives. The analysis involved a creative process of reasoning and theory building. Participants completed a self-assessment before their interview to link their experiences to the critical aspects of cultural proficiency. The self-assessments provided more profound insights into the participants' culturally responsive leadership journey.

The participants included district cabinet members, school administrators, and classified management who were crucial in developing community-based schooling initiatives. Their roles in shaping the strategic plan and executing the initiatives at different levels provided valuable input for the study. This research used a qualitative narrative study approach to investigate

shared patterns of values, behaviors, and beliefs; this provided additional insights into participants' experiences with little direction from the interviewer. We used a relational ethics approach due to the sensitive nature of the discussions, prioritizing relationships over directives. The study also examined participants' emotional connections to cultural proficiency and adaptive leadership when developing community schooling. The aim was to understand the collective impact within this group due to their emotional investment and unique leadership styles.

Conceptual Framework

The study's design and the instruments utilized were influenced by a conceptual framework developed by Lindsey (2008). This framework positions cultural proficiency as a mindset involving a paradigm shift from viewing others as problematic, to focusing on how best to collaborate with people who are different from oneself to ensure efficient practices. The conceptual framework utilized in the study featured four principal tools to aid cultural proficiency development. The first tool relates to the guiding principles of cultural proficiency, which enable individuals or organizations to identify their inherent values with diversity issues. The second tool, the cultural proficiency continuum, offers a specific language to express individuals' and organizations' unhealthy values and behaviors; this continuum was also instrumental in assessing the desired state of an individual. The third tool involves the five essential elements of cultural competence, which function as the benchmarks for nurturing healthy personal values and behaviors and establishing organizational policies and practices. Finally, the last tool focuses on recognizing the barriers to cultural proficiency, equipping individuals and their organizations with strategies to overcome any resistance to change. These tools work in tandem to foster cultural proficiency.

Limitations

The limitations of this study extended beyond my position within the school district. As acting educators, staff members, administrators, or principals in the target district, the participants were expected to respond genuinely to the interview questions or during the focus group. However, they may have felt obliged to answer questions in a specific manner due to their perceptions of their leadership role in the district. This could have led to omissions or additions in their responses that may not reflect their authentic experiences or beliefs. Another limitation was the ongoing, district-wide equity initiative, which influenced the responses to reflect current practices and policies rather than a comprehensive history of beliefs or practices. Additionally, the narrow geographical focus on a single school district might limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or types of districts, and there could be potential biases in participant selection as the participants were from the same district, possibly leading to skewed results. The qualitative nature of the study itself is also a limitation, as it relied heavily on subjective experiences rather than quantitative, measurable data. Furthermore, the study was conducted at a specific time, so temporal changes in the school environment or broader educational context have yet to be accounted for. To mitigate these limitations, I implemented measures such as ensuring confidentiality and allowing participants to decline questions or withdraw from the study without consequences. Honesty was encouraged by clarifying that the role of the principal investigator was to gather data to aid in advancing social-emotional learning and culturally responsive and sustaining teaching. Despite these efforts and the acknowledged limitations, the study carries significant implications for educational research, policy, and practice.

Significant Findings

This section presents the critical outcomes of this study and offers practice

recommendations. Table 10 details the connections between research questions and the major

themes that emerged from the data analysis. A discussion of each of the three related assertions

and their potential application in practice is also provided. This section underscores the value of

culturally responsive leadership and equips district leaders with practical strategies to implement

community schooling policies at their designated school site.

Table 10.

Research Questions, Major Themes, and Assertions

Research question	Major theme	Assertion
1	• Early childhood experience • Mentorship • Conscientious leadership	Culturally proficient leaders are deeply influenced by their early experiences. Their leadership is significantly impacted by the stewardship of influential mentors, who mold them into conscientious decision makers equipped to effectively navigate complex multicultural environments.
2	• Empathy and listening • Building authentic relationships • Continuous learning and growth	Culturally proficient leaders embody servant leadership qualities because their leadership style is rooted in ethics, empathy, and respect for the cultural diversity of their teams or communities.
2	• Collaboration and teamwork • Tailoring instruction and supports • Data-based iterative decision making	Culturally proficient leaders prioritize collaborative leadership because they understand and appreciate the wealth of insight derived from myriad perspectives and ideas.

Note. RQ1 = To what extent was the cultural proficiency framework instrumental in assisting leaders in establishing community-based educational initiatives? RQ2 = What measures were adopted by administrators to navigate through challenges while implementing community-based educational initiatives?

Three Assertions

The first assertion extracted from the research findings is that culturally proficient leaders are deeply influenced by their early experiences; moreover, their leadership is significantly impacted by the stewardship of influential mentors, who mold them into conscientious decision makers equipped to effectively navigate complex multicultural environments. Leaders who understand and adjust to different cultures often credit their early life experiences for this ability.

These experiences shape their outlook and attitude toward diversity, helping them to be understanding, open, and respectful toward other cultures. Key among these experiences is the influence of mentors who guide and help them make sound decisions. These mentors accelerate the leader's development, providing insights into how different cultures work. As a result, they become leaders who can easily navigate different cultural situations, able to resolve cultural differences and lead diverse teams to work toward shared goals. Mentors play a significant role in helping these leaders grow by sharing their knowledge and real-life experiences, which show the finer points of different cultures. Mentors also act as role models, showing the importance of understanding and including all cultures. They guide their mentees in situations that require sensitivity toward other cultures, helping them carefully handle these situations. In a mentor–mentee relationship, the mentor creates a safe space where the mentee can freely learn and freely discuss. This guidance from mentors equips leaders with the skills and knowledge they need to create productive and peaceful multicultural environments.

The second assertion extracted from the research findings is that culturally proficient leaders embody servant leadership qualities because their leadership style is rooted in ethics, empathy, and respect for the cultural diversity of their teams or communities. Servant leaders prioritize their team members' needs, development, and well-being above all else, similar to how culturally proficient leaders place high importance on acknowledging, respecting, and valuing cultural diversity and inclusivity. The leaders in this study understand that every individual brings unique experiences and perspectives shaped by their cultural background. Acknowledging and valuing these diverse viewpoints creates an environment where everyone senses they are heard, seen, and respected, leading to a more empowered, engaged, and productive team or community. Moreover, culturally proficient leaders, like servant leaders, are focused on fostering

a culture of learning and growth. They acknowledge that they, too, have much to learn from the diverse cultural experiences of their team members, thereby promoting a culture of mutual respect and continuous learning. The culturally proficient leader in this study embodies servant leadership as they create an inclusive and empowering environment that values diversity, promotes mutual respect, and facilitates personal and collective growth.

The third assertion extracted from the research findings is that leaders with cultural proficiency epitomize collaborative leadership because they understand and appreciate the wealth of insight derived from myriad perspectives and ideas. Collaborative leaders understand that the varied cultural backgrounds of their team members or community can lead to a wealth of creativity and innovation, which can only be fully harnessed through collaboration. Such leaders establish an environment where each person's voice is valued and heard, creating a sense of shared ownership and collective decision making. They encourage open dialogue, foster mutual respect, and promote the sharing of ideas from all team members, irrespective of their cultural or linguistic background. Leaders in a collaborative leadership model serve as facilitators rather than authoritarian figures. Culturally proficient leaders excel in this role, as they are adept at bridging cultural gaps, mediating cultural conflicts, and drawing upon the collective wisdom of their diverse teams to make informed decisions. Therefore, culturally proficient leaders drive successful collaborative leadership by emphasizing inclusivity, mutual respect, and shared decision making. They recognize that the strength of their leadership lies in the collective wisdom of their diverse team, and they actively work toward harnessing this potential to achieve their shared goals.

Assertions Conclusions

Integrated student support caters to the holistic needs of learners, recognizing that academic performance is intertwined with social, emotional, and physical well-being. These supports, therefore, are tailored with cultural sensitivities in mind, promoting inclusivity and overall student welfare. Active family and community engagement builds on the understanding that these groups significantly impact a student's education. By bridging the gap between home and school, leaders foster an environment that respects and incorporates diverse cultural practices, improving education relevance and student outcomes. Recognizing the need for varied learning experiences, culturally responsive leaders value enriched learning time and opportunities. These may include culturally relevant teaching methods and experiential learning programs that respect and build on students' cultural identities. Finally, collaborative leadership practices are vital as they instill a shared sense of responsibility. Leaders promote a culture where everyone's unique cultural perspectives are valued and contribute to a shared educational vision. Ultimately, culturally responsive leadership is a commitment to equity, inclusivity, and respect for cultural diversity. By emphasizing these platforms, leaders cultivate an educational environment that serves all students and validates their unique cultural identities and experiences.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Servant leadership bridges the gap between a school leader's honesty and humility, influencing their culturally responsive leadership outcomes and their capacity to develop community-based schooling initiatives and overcome challenges. The focus on humility, empathy, and perseverance in school leadership is crucial in creating an inclusive, effective, and transformative learning environment. These qualities offer a unique blend of interpersonal and

intrapersonal skills that significantly contribute to student success, staff satisfaction, and overall positive school culture. A school leader with humility acknowledges that they do not know everything and recognizes the value of learning from others. This openness fosters a culture of shared leadership and collaborative decision making. Humility in a school leader also encourages an environment where every stakeholder, from students and teachers to parents and support staff, feels valued for their insights and contributions. It results in a transparent and trusting community, as leaders who demonstrate humility are often transparent in their communication and decision-making processes. Humility plays a pivotal role in expanded learning time and opportunities. A humble leader is always open to learning and understands the importance of continuous growth and development. They recognize that every student learns differently, so they ensure that the school offers varied and enriched learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom to cater to diverse learning styles and interests.

Regarding integrated student support, humility and empathy are crucial traits. They allow school leaders to understand students' needs better and provide targeted resources and interventions. Leaders who embody empathy ensure that students' physical, emotional, and social needs are met, setting the stage for effective learning. Family and community engagement is greatly enhanced by leaders who exhibit humility and empathy. A humble leader values the input of parents and community members, understanding that they are essential partners in a child's education. They create an inclusive environment where parents and community members feel welcome to participate and contribute. Empathy enables leaders to communicate effectively with families, understand their concerns and aspirations, and work collaboratively toward shared goals.

Invisible Backpack

Creating space for students to share their experiences is imperative, as these personal narratives provide valuable insights into diverse worldviews. Leaders, in particular, are responsible for uplifting students' life experiences, acknowledging their unique journeys, and leveraging their perspectives. Upon reflection, Jasmine asserted her ideology:

> There are two things that have shaped me the most and I feel so strongly about. They believe that every kid should be visible on campus all day, every day, and everybody has the same rights. Also, being understanding and empathetic of the invisible backpack.

Drawing from this metaphor, Jasmine used a similar concept of the "invisible backpack" in her interview to delve into understanding childhood trauma and make an effort to illuminate a student's hidden burdens. Everyone carries an invisible backpack, even if unaware of its existence. These backpacks may hold histories of abuse, neglect, or traumatic events. In her interview, Jasmine spoke about the student experience. Some are filled with unseen poor self-esteem and confidence, and others carry the weight of peer pressure, bullying, harassment, and mistreatment. Certain backpacks bear the weight of perfectionism, often imposed by overzealous adults or self-inflicted. Others contain situational burdens such as stress, worry, or doubt. Some backpacks are so stuffed that there is no attempt to zip them closed, leading to mental and behavioral health issues in daily life and school settings. Even if this invisible burden is not immediately apparent, it is always present and heavy. The leaders must realize that the thoughts and emotions packed in these invisible backpacks shape how a person interacts with and responds to the world, making it challenging to simply "leave the backpack at the door." Instead, leaders can offer to help carry it, and culturally responsive leaders can listen attentively and empathize genuinely, even if living different experiences.

Through cultural practices and storytelling, children learn to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors within their cultural context. These early moral lessons and cultural values become internalized, significantly influencing individuals' moral development and decision-making processes. The participant interviews of this study made clear that early childhood experiences within a cultural context profoundly impact various aspects of a child's development, influencing identity formation, language and communication skills, socialization and interpersonal relationships, cognitive development, worldviews, cultural values, and moral development. Understanding the interplay between culture and early childhood experiences is essential in recognizing how they shape individuals' lives and identities. One's early educational experiences can significantly shape school leaders' abilities to be culturally proficient. The development of culturally proficient school leaders can be influenced considerably by early educational experiences, mainly through elements such as exposure to diversity, participation in an inclusive educational setting, cultivation of language and communication skills, intercultural experiences, and education in equity and social justice. The deputy superintendent who participated in this study confirmed this belief by sharing,

> When I think about it from my role as a leader, I think it is trying to value diversity of perspective and the fact that different people will come to the table with different ideas and the need to see that as a strength.

Her strategy of valuing various voices allows her to connect with other educators.

Advocacy and Social Justice

The participants leadership style evolves into a living testament to these principles, highlighting the profound impact of embracing and cherishing diversity in all its forms. In parallel, they demonstrate a strong commitment to advocacy and social justice, reflecting the essence of authentic servant leadership. They strive tirelessly to dismantle systemic barriers that

marginalize individuals from diverse backgrounds, showcasing their unwavering dedication to making the school community a bastion of equality and inclusion. These servant leaders are also committed advocates for educational equity. They are steadfast in their pursuit to ensure that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, have access to high-quality education and resources. They champion policies and practices that promote equity, inclusion, and social justice within the school environment and broader society. In blending their commitment to cultural proficiency with their quest for social justice, these administrators embody an empowering form of leadership. They create an atmosphere where the power of unity in diversity is celebrated, continuous growth is encouraged, and social justice is relentlessly pursued, crafting a school community that is inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all its members.

Future Research

The collaboration between schools and community-based organizations presents a promising avenue for future research. Investigating these partnerships' dynamics, best practices, challenges, and benefits is crucial. Studies could explore how these collaborations impact student outcomes, parental involvement, and community engagement. The role of these partnerships in providing additional resources, including after-school programs, mental health services, and cultural initiatives, could also be a significant focus. Moreover, future research could analyze how such collaborations contribute to equitable education and address social disparities, as a clearer understanding of these aspects would provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and community leaders and help identify strategies that enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of such collaborations. Culturally responsive school leaders create a connected educational ecosystem that embraces diversity and adapts to it and one that thrives on community collaboration. To further enrich this ecosystem, these leaders form partnerships with

community-based organizations; these collaborations serve as a vital conduit of additional resources, services, and support for students and families. Additionally, future research could further explore how culturally proficient leaders bridge the gap between the school and the broader community to ensure educational initiatives are relevant, responsive, and effective. Consequently, they fortify the educational ecosystem, making it inclusive, adaptive, and deeply embedded within the community.

Conclusion

The importance of culturally responsive leaders in shaping community schools cannot be overstated. These leaders are pivotal in driving the four pillars of community-based schools: integrated student support, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practices. Their deep understanding of diverse cultural contexts enables them to tailor these pillars to fit their local communities' specific needs, maximizing each program's effectiveness and creating an environment that resonates with all stakeholders. Leaders proficient in cross-cultural navigation are more capable of effectively engaging families and the community, fostering trust, understanding, and collaboration among all parties involved. Their awareness and recognition of cultural nuances enhance their planning and implementation processes, ensuring the community's needs and assets are accurately addressed. Culturally responsive leaders also understand the need for flexibility and continuous evaluation, making necessary adjustments in response to changing community contexts.

These leaders' commitment to inclusivity encourages broad participation in the needs assessment, design, planning, and implementation processes, further reinforcing the success of the community school strategy. By leveraging their cultural proficiency in making informed, evidence-based decisions, these leaders help foster a collaborative, collegial school culture that

reflects the community's diversity. They create an atmosphere where all students feel valued, respected, and understood, contributing to improved student outcomes across multiple domains, including achievement, attendance, behavior, relationships, and attitudes. Therefore, cultivating culturally responsive leadership is beneficial and essential for community schools' successful implementation and effectiveness. The driving force connects the community, parents, service providers, and staff, leading to a more harmonious, productive, and culturally vibrant educational environment.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Self-Assessment

	Assesses Cultures					
1	I am aware of my own culture and ethnicity	1	2	3	4	5
2	I am comfortable talking about my privilege and entitlements	1	2	3	4	5
3	I know the effects that my culture and ethnicity may have on the people in my work setting	1	2	3	4	5
4	I recognize microaggressions when they occur and how they affect individual and organizational culture	1	2	3	4	5
5	I recognize when current cultural norms do not serve well everyone in the organization	1	2	3	4	5
6	I see to learn about the cultures of this organization's clients	1	2	3	4	5
7	I anticipate how this organization's clients and employees will interact with conflict with and enhance one another	1	2	3	4	5
	Valuing Diversity					
8	I welcome a diverse group of clients and colleagues into the work setting	1	2	3	4	5
9	I recognize that diversity is more than gender, ethnicity	1	2	3	4	5

		1	2	3	4	5
	and gender orientation					
10	I learn from both the challenges and opportunities that diversity brings	1	2	3	4	5
11	I share my appreciation of diversity with my coworkers	1	2	3	4	5
12	I share my appreciation of diversity with other clients	1	2	3	4	5
13	I work to develop a learning community with the clients (internal or external) I serve	1	2	3	4	5
14	I teach the culture expectations of my organization or department to those who are new or who may be unfamiliar with the organization's culture	1	2	3	4	5
15	I proactively seek to interact with people whose backgrounds are different from mine	1	2	3	4	5
	Manages the Dynamics of Difference					
16	I recognize that conflict is a normal part of life	1	2	3	4	5
17	I work to develop skills to manage conflict and productive ways	1	2	3	4	5
18	I help my colleagues to understand that what appear to be clashes in personalities may in fact be conflicts in culture	1	2	3	4	5
19	I help the clients I serve to understand that what appear to be clashes in personalities may in fact be conflicts in	1	2	3	4	5

	personal or organizational culture					
20	I check myself to see if an assumption I am making about a person is based upon facts or upon stereotypes about a group	1	2	3	4	5
21	I accept that the more diverse our group becomes, the more we will change and grow	1	2	3	4	5
	Adapts Diversity					
22	I realize that once I embrace the Principles of Cultural Proficiency, I, too, must change	1	2	3	4	5
23	I am committed to the continuous learning that is necessary to deal with the issues caused by differences	1	2	3	4	5
24	I seek to enhance the substance and structure of the work I do so that it is informed by the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency	1	2	3	4	5
25	I recognize that I may need to share the resources or power that come from the unearned privileges I currently enjoy	1	2	3	4	5
26	I know how to learn about people and cultures unfamiliar to me without giving offense	1	2	3	4	5
	Institutionalized Cultural Knowledge					
27	I work to influence the	1	2	3	4	5

	culture of this organization so that its policies and practices are informed by the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency					
28	I speak up if I notice that a policy or practice unintentionally discriminates against or causes an unnecessary hardship for a particular group in this organization's community	1	2	3	4	5
29	I take advantage of teachable moments to share cultural knowledge or to learn from my colleagues	1	2	3	4	5
30	I advocate for the marginalized and voiceless in my school/district among my colleagues, the students, and their communities	1	2	3	4	5
31	I seek to create opportunities for my colleagues, managers, clients, and the communities we serve to learn about one another	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B: Semistructured Interview Protocol

Script before the interview:
> *I'd like to thank you once again for being willing to participate in the interview aspect of my study. As I have mentioned to you before, my study seeks to understand how one's lived experience shapes their leadership journey and influences the choices made. The aim of this research is to document your leadership journey. Our interview today will last approximately one hour. I will be asking you about your upbringing, your experience as a school leader, some of the barriers and challenges you have faced, and how you have persevered and strived to create a socially just and culturally relevant school community.*
> *[review aspects of the research overview form]*
>
> *You completed a consent form indicating that I have your permission (or not) to audio record our conversation. Are you okay with me recording (or not) our conversation today? ___Yes ___No*
> *If yes: Thank you! Please let me know if at any point you want me to turn off the recorder or keep something you said off the record.*
> *If not: Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our conversation.*
>
> *Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? [Discuss questions]*
> *If any questions (or other questions) arise at any point in this study, you can feel free to ask them at any time. I would be more than happy to answer your questions.*

Tell me about your leadership journey in education.

Essential Element: Assessing Cultural Knowledge
- What are the unwritten rules in your school and/or department you lead?
- How would you describe your own cultural experience from youth through the present?

Essential Element: Valuing Diversity
- How would you describe the diversity in your current professional setting?
- How do you react to the term "valuing diversity" as used in building leaders?

Essential Element: Managing the Dynamic of Difference
- How do you handle conflict? In the school and/or department? Among the adults?
- What skills do you possess to handle conflict?
- Describe a situation of cross-cultural conflict that may be based on historic distrust.

Essential Element: Adapting to Diversity
- How has your organization recently adapted to the needs of new members?
- How do you teach various stakeholders about the organization's need to adapt to cultures?
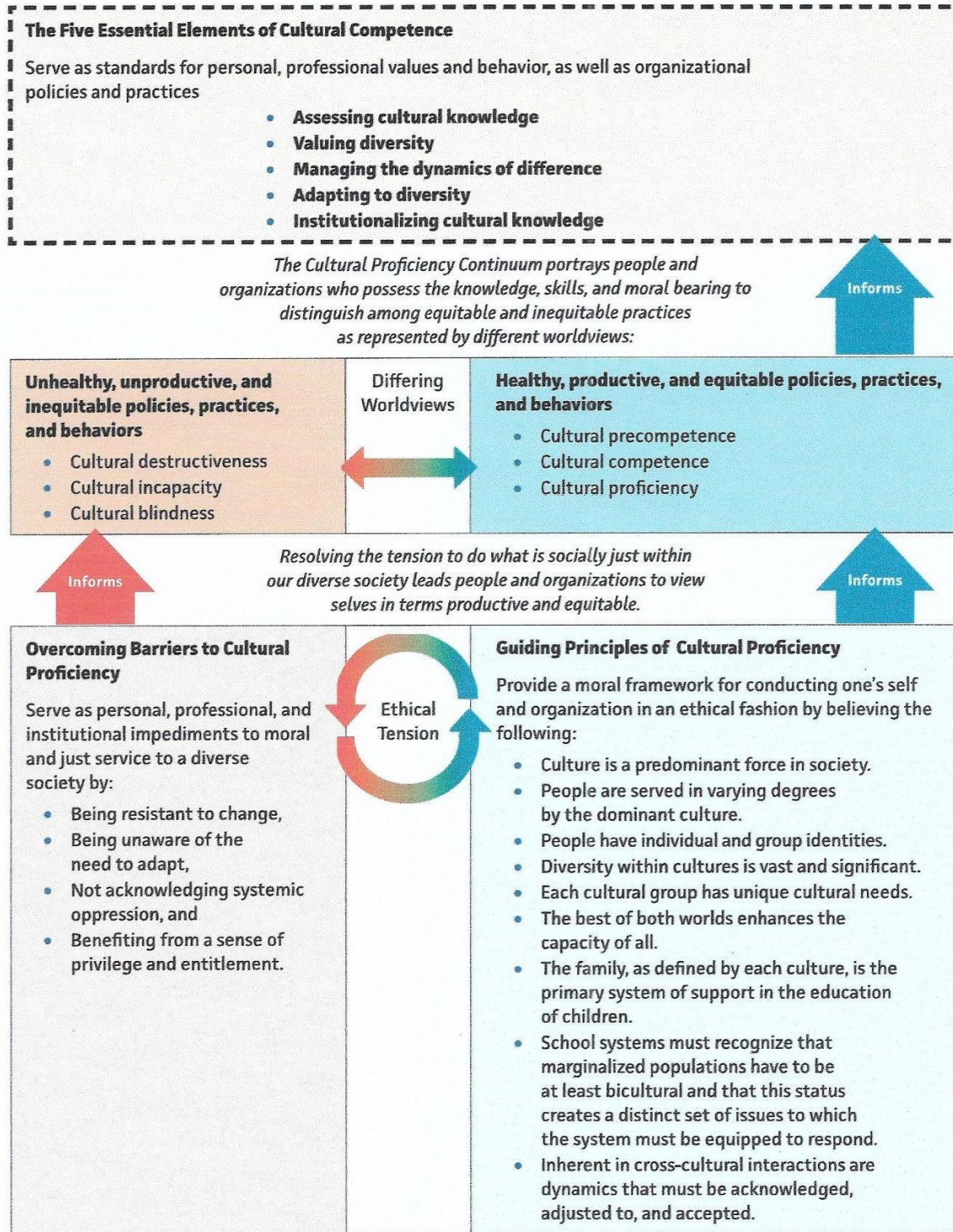
Essential Element: Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge
- What do you currently know about the cultural groups in your school/department?
- How does that cultural knowledge contribute to your decision-making?

Appendix C: Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practices

FIGURE 8.1 ● The Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practices

The Five Essential Elements of Cultural Competence

Serve as standards for personal, professional values and behavior, as well as organizational policies and practices

- **Assessing cultural knowledge**
- **Valuing diversity**
- **Managing the dynamics of difference**
- **Adapting to diversity**
- **Institutionalizing cultural knowledge**

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum portrays people and organizations who possess the knowledge, skills, and moral bearing to distinguish among equitable and inequitable practices as represented by different worldviews:

Informs

Unhealthy, unproductive, and inequitable policies, practices, and behaviors	Differing Worldviews	**Healthy, productive, and equitable policies, practices, and behaviors**
• Cultural destructiveness • Cultural incapacity • Cultural blindness		• Cultural precompetence • Cultural competence • Cultural proficiency

Informs

Resolving the tension to do what is socially just within our diverse society leads people and organizations to view selves in terms productive and equitable.

Informs

Overcoming Barriers to Cultural Proficiency

Serve as personal, professional, and institutional impediments to moral and just service to a diverse society by:

- Being resistant to change,
- Being unaware of the need to adapt,
- Not acknowledging systemic oppression, and
- Benefiting from a sense of privilege and entitlement.

Ethical Tension

Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency

Provide a moral framework for conducting one's self and organization in an ethical fashion by believing the following:

- Culture is a predominant force in society.
- People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.
- People have individual and group identities.
- Diversity within cultures is vast and significant.
- Each cultural group has unique cultural needs.
- The best of both worlds enhances the capacity of all.
- The family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support in the education of children.
- School systems must recognize that marginalized populations have to be at least bicultural and that this status creates a distinct set of issues to which the system must be equipped to respond.
- Inherent in cross-cultural interactions are dynamics that must be acknowledged, adjusted to, and accepted.

Source: Adapted from R. B. Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, and Terrell (2009, p. 60).

Appendix D: The Culturally Proficiency Continuum

THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY CONTINUUM: DEPICTING UNHEALTHY AND HEALTHY PRACTICES					
Cultural DESTRUCTIVENESS	**Cultural** INCAPACITY	**Cultural** BLINDNESS	**Cultural** PRECOMPETENCE	**Cultural** COMPETENCE	**Cultural** PROFICIENCY
COMPLIANCE-BASED TOLERANCE FOR DIVERSITY			TRANSFORMATION FOR EQUITY		
Cultural destructiveness: Seeking to eliminate references to the culture of "others" in all aspects of the school and in relationship with their communities.	**Cultural incapacity:** Trivializing "other" communities and seeking to make them appear to be wrong.	**Cultural blindness:** Pretending not to see or acknowledge the status and culture of marginalized communities and choosing to ignore the experiences of such groups within the school and community.	**Cultural precompetence:** Increasingly aware of what you and the school don't know about working with marginalized communities. It is at this key level of development that you and the school can move in a positive, constructive direction, or you can vacillate, stop, and possibly regress.	**Cultural competence:** Manifesting your personal values and behaviors and the school's policies and practices in a manner that is inclusive with marginalized cultures and communities that are new or different from you and the school.	**Cultural proficiency:** Advocating for lifelong learning in order to be increasingly effective in serving the educational needs of the cultural groups served by the school. Holding the vision that you and the school are instruments for creating a socially just democracy.

SOURCE: Adapted from Terrell & Lindsey, 2009.

Appendix E: Focus Group Protocol

Introduction Text

My name is Vanessa, and I will be the moderator for today's leadership focus group. This focus group aims to understand the rationale behind community-based schooling initiatives. You have been asked to participate because you are a district leader who has invested in serving the community through these initiatives. Your opinions and experiences are highly valued, and I know they will help us learn more about culturally proficient leadership related to community-based schooling. After the conclusion of the focus group, the information we discussed will be categorized into themes and topics before being shared anonymously with all participants. As the primary researcher, I will use the focus group information to help better understand how culturally proficient leaders lead community-based schooling initiatives. Your personal information will not be connected to the results of this focus group.

I am passing around a consent form and a non-disclosure form. By signing these forms, you agree to participate in this focus group and to keep our discussion confidential. If you feel uncomfortable signing these forms, you are free to leave at any time. Please take a moment to read them over.

Before we begin, I would like to review a few ground rules for the focus group. These are in place to ensure that all of you feel comfortable sharing your experiences and opinions.

Ground Rules:

1. *Confidentiality* – As per the non-disclosure form, please respect the confidentiality of your peers.

2. *One Speaker at a Time* – Only one person should speak at a time in order to make sure that we can all hear what everyone is saying.

3. *Use Respectful Language* – To facilitate an open discussion, please avoid any statements or words that may be offensive to other members of the group.

4. *Open Discussion* – This is a time for everyone to feel free to express their opinions and viewpoints. You will not be asked to agree on the topics discussed. There will be no right or wrong answers.

5. *Participation is Important* – It is important that everyone's voice is shared and heard in order to make this the most productive focus group possible. Please speak up if you have something to add to the conversation

Questions

1. To what extent does your cultural proficiency lens support leaders in developing community-based schooling initiatives?

2. What do the four pillars look like in action?
- Integrated student supports
- Expanded learning time and opportunities
- Family and community engagement
- Collaborative leadership and practice

3. How do you feel SEL supports can improve engagement and academic achievements?

4. From the 4 pillars of community schools, What are the barriers at your site/district that can be improved upon to achieve successful whole child development?

5. What out-of-school barriers impact your school community?

6. What current supports and resources do you have in place (that can be built upon) to increase family and community engagement?

7. How can you create opportunities for all stakeholders to share in decision-making?

Appendix F: Email Invitation

Dear Participant,

My name is Vanessa Ruiz. I am a student in the UCSD/CSUSM Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership. I am kindly requesting your assistance with a dissertation study that I am conducting titled: "Culturally Responsive School Leadership: Implementation for Sustainability." I intend to inquire about the personal experiences of school district leaders and how they utilize key components of their leadership journey to make school-wide decisions that impact staff, students and families. I will conduct individual semi-structured interviews and one focus group with district leaders who meet the following criteria:

1. Classified and/or Certificated Management
2. Identify as culturally diverse or from a historically marginalized community
3. A minimum of two years in a leadership role

All responses are confidential, and no real names will be used in the publication of my dissertation study. This study involves a 60-minute interview that will take place in a mutually convenient location. With participator consent, the interviews will be audio-recorded. Once the recording has been transcribed and verified, the audio recording will be discarded.

Additionally, you will have the right to end your participation in the study at any time, for any reason, up until January 2024. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you have provided will be removed.

If you are willing to participate, please fill out this interest form. I will contact you to provide more information and the next steps: As a token of gratitude, participants who complete an individual interview will be gifted a $20 Amazon gift card. I appreciate your support!

Thank you,

Ms. Vanessa Ruiz, M.Ed
Email: varuiz@ucsd.edu
Work Cell: 619-916-1974

California State University
SAN MARCOS

Appendix G: Consent Form to Participate in Research

Invitation to Participate

My name is Vanessa Ruiz, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at UC San Diego and CSU San Marcos. I am conducting a study about the lived experiences of culturally proficient school leaders. This study explores how socially just leaders' personal and professional experiences influence their leadership and how their leadership encourages culturally proficient practices. This is important because if a leader promotes and establishes the conditions for cultural proficiency, students from historically marginalized communities will benefit, and academic outcomes will increase, closing the opportunity gap. In addition, there will be indicators of success related to discipline with suspensions, expulsions, and academic proficiency. With the direction of culturally proficient leaders, fewer students will be marginalized and excluded from the general education environments, which will, in turn, contribute to a community of learners. You are invited to participate in this study because you have been identified as a culturally proficient district leader in a public school setting.

Key Information About this Research Study

The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether to be a part of this study. Information that is more detailed is listed later on in this form. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of district leaders who have played a critical role in creating and implementing community-based schooling initiatives. You will be asked to complete a brief self-assessment on cultural proficiency. You will then be invited to participate in a 60-minute one-on-one interview and 60-minute focus group. We expect that you will be in this research study for a total of 2 hours. The primary risk of participation is time, based on your ability to make yourself available for a 60-minute interview and 60-minute focus group. The main benefit is that your participation may contribute to the research in this field.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how socially just leaders' personal and professional experiences influence their leadership and how their leadership encourages culturally proficient practices and community-based schooling initiatives.

Number of Participants

If you agree to participate, you will be one of nine participants who will be participating in this research.

Procedures for this Study

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following:

- Read, sign and return this consent form, to the researcher via email at ruiz03@cougars.csusm.edu. Upon receipt of the signed consent form the researcher will contact you within 5 days to schedule a 60-minute interview.
- Interview: Interview will be scheduled at least two weeks in advance. The 60-minute interview will consist of you responding to approximately ten questions. Interviews may be conducted virtually or in-person. All interviews will be audio- and video-recorded.

- Participants will be allowed to review the interview transcripts for accuracy.
- Focus Group: Following the concussion of the individual interviews, participants will receive information regarding the date, time and location of the in-person focus group. The 60-minute focus group will consist of approximately seven questions.

Risks and Inconveniences
There are minimal risks in participating in the research. They include:
- Participants may be uncomfortable answering the survey or interview questions.
- The time participants spend participating in the study might be considered an inconvenience.
- There might be a risk of possible loss of confidentiality.
- Fear/anxiety related to contracting COVID-19 during face-to-face interviews.

Safeguards
To minimize these risks and inconveniences, the following measures will be taken:
- If a strong emotional reaction is evoked during the interview processes, you can ask the primary investigator to turn off the audio recorder and take a moment to recuperate or refuse to answer any question. If necessary, you may request to stop or withdraw from the research study all together without any adverse consequences. Participants may be directed to counseling or social support services.
  - California Mental Health Crisis Hotline: Dial 988
  - California Mental Health Resources: https://focus.senate.ca.gov/mentalhealth/suicide

- Interviews will be conducted in a location and format agreed upon by the interviewer and interviewee.
- Documents and recordings will be kept within a password-protected computer.
- Virtual interview options will be made available to participants.

Confidentiality
Your responses will be kept confidential. The primary investigator is working alone, thus limiting others from having access to data. Pseudonyms will be used to hide your identity as well as that of your institution of study.

The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name and other personal information will not be used. Documents and recordings will be kept within a password-protected computer with the primary investigator only having access to the documents. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Voluntary Participation
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty.

Benefits of Taking Part in the Study
There are no direct benefits to participation in this study, however, your participation will help

add to the academic literature surrounding the culturally proficient leadership and community-based schooling.

Payment or Incentive
You will receive payment for taking part in this study. The primary investigator understands the time commitment behind your participation in the research. You will receive compensation in the form of a $20-gift card at the end of the interview.

Contact Information
If you have questions about the study, please call me at (619) 916-1974 or e-mail me at ruiz03@cougars.csusm.edu. Or you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Booke Soles at bsoles@csusm.edu. You will be given a copy of this form for your records. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at irb@csusm.edu or (760) 750-4029.

Participant's Consent
By signing below, you are giving consent to participate in the study. Please check the option that applies to you before signing:

☐ I give permission for my interview to be audio and videotaped.
☐ I do not give permission for my interview to be audio and videotaped.

Name of the Participant: _____
Signature of the Participant: _____
Date: _____

Appendix H: Proposed Self-Assessment Instrument

Email subject line: Culturally Proficient Leadership Self-Assessment

Dear [name of Faculty Institute participant],

Thank you for your participation! As the research lead, I am conducting a study to determine how cultural proficiency impacts district leaders' decision-making. Part of this study includes a self-assessment. This is an opportunity for you to reflect on the cultural proficiency framework and how it influences your decisions as a school leader. Your reflection is incredibly important as it will help me better understand how a leader's journey influences their choices.

Your responses will be kept confidential and reported anonymously. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There will be no negative repercussions should you decline to participate. The self-assessment will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. If you would like to participate, please complete the self-assessment attached below.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

Vanessa Ruiz

varuiz@ucsd.edu

Appendix I: Faculty Institute the Participant Information Sheet

University of California, San Diego and California State University, San Marcos
Culturally Responsive School Leadership: Implementation for Sustainability Study

Dear Participant,

My name is Vanessa Ruiz, and I am a doctoral candidate in Education at California State University San Marcos. I am conducting a program narrative study to determine how leaders' lived experiences shape their decisions. The intended goal of this study is to understand better how a lens of cultural proficiency is used to implement community-based schooling initiatives. The purpose of this form is to inform you about the study.

Why am I being invited to take part in this study?

You are invited to participate in this study because you are an inaugural leader at Lemon Grove School District. Your participation will help with the future development of culturally proficient district leaders. As the project lead, I will use the findings from this study to improve pathways for culturally proficient leadership, specifically as it relates to community-based school initiatives.

What will I do if I agree to participate?

If you agree to participate in the study, you will complete a self-assessment, which will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes. At the end of the self-assessment, I will ask if you would like to participate in a follow-up interview. If you agree to be interviewed, then I will contact you to schedule a one-on-one interview. The interviews will be approximately 45 minutes to an hour and will be conducted in a format that the participant prefers. For example, Zoom, in-person, walking interviews, etc. The interviews will take place between January 2nd, 2023, and January 31, 2023. Following the one-on-one interview, the participant will be invited to participate in a leadership focus group to discuss community-based schooling initiatives. This focus group will take approximately 60 mins. The focus group will be embedded within one of our regularly scheduled district leadership team meetings in February 2023.

What happens if I say yes, but change my mind later?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate at any time, even after the study has started. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study, there will be no penalty, and you will be able to keep any incentives you have earned up to the point at which you withdraw.

What are the benefits to me of being in this study?

For the self-assessment, there may or may not be benefits to you beyond the personal reflection of experiences. Regardless, you will receive a $20 gift card for completing the interview and focus group.

What happens to the information collected for the study?

Your survey responses will be confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, but your name will not be used. Results will only be shared in aggregate form.

In addition, your interview data will be kept confidential, and available only to me for analysis purposes. I will use pseudonyms to minimize the risk of identification. Only I will listen

to and transcribe the information you provide. For any virtual interviews, the Zoom recording will be destroyed following the final analysis no later than December 31, 2023.

To minimize risks to the confidentiality, I will keep all notes and data files private and save them on a password-protected computer. Handwritten notes will be maintained in a locked office.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? Is there any risk to me by being in this study? If so, how will these risks be minimized?

There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study, including, but not limited to: Being uncomfortable answering the self-assessment or interview questions; considering the time spent participating in the study might be an inconvenience to minimize the risk of discomfort, I will share the interview and focus group transcription with you to confirm the accuracy of your statements. To minimize the inconvenience, I will strive to ensure that the interview and focus group stays within the allotted amount of time.

Who should I contact for questions?

If you have questions about the study, please call me at (619) 916-1974 or e-mail me at vruizquinonez@gmail.com. You may also direct questions about the study to Dr. Brooke Soles, Committee Chair (bsoles@csusm.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at irb@csusm.edu or (760) 750-4029.

PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUR RECORDS

Appendix J: Aspects of an Interview & Focus Group Protocol

Castillo-Montoya (2016)

Interview Protocol Structure	**Yes**	**No**
Beginning questions are factual in nature	Yes	No
Key questions are majority of the questions and are placed between beginning and ending questions	Yes	No
Questions at the end of interview protocol are reflective and provide participant an opportunity to share closing comments	Yes	No
A brief script throughout the interview protocol provides smooth transitions between topic areas	Yes	No
Interviewer closes with expressed gratitude and any intents to stay connected or follow up	Yes	No
Overall, interview is organized to promote conversational flow	Yes	No
Writing of Interview Questions & Statements	Yes	No
Questions/statements are free from spelling error(s)	Yes	No
Only one question is asked at a time	Yes	No
Questions are mostly open-ended	Yes	No
Questions are written in a non-judgmental manner	Yes	No
Length of Interview Protocol	Yes	No
All questions are needed	Yes	No
Questions/statements are concise	Yes	No
Comprehension	Yes	No
Questions/statements are devoid of academic language	Yes	No
Questions/statements are easy to understand	Yes	No